Sweet Memories

by

Kayla

Part One

With a sigh of relief, Xander tossed the last of his things into his beat-up car. Slamming the door shut, he walked back into his home of almost 20 years. Making his way into the living room, he stopped in front of his mother, who was currently absorbed in her soaps as she finished off yet another bottle of gin.

"Well, Mom, I'm outta here." He waited, getting only a grunt in response. "Yeah, um, it was...nice." Stuffing his hand into a pocket, he pulled out a sealed envelope, placing it on the table next to the drunken woman. "Mom? Anya is supposed to be by later tonight, give this to her, please?"
Glazed eyes turned to him, then looked at the envelope blankly.

"You know, Anya? Short, blonde, good looking? Just...give her that, ok?"

A wobbly nod was his answer.

Shrugging, Xander left the house, feeling lighthearted. Finally, free at last!

~*~*~*~*~

Not long after sunset, Spike slammed out of the Watcher's place, muttering under his breath.

"Bloody stupid git, what's the idea givin' the whelp my entire supply? Just 'cause his little fuck buddy is visitin' is no call to be treatin' me like this!" He kicked violently at a can as he strode briskly down the deserted sidewalk. *Damn! Hate havin' to depend on these humans for my dinner. S'not bloody fair!*

Not too much later, he arrived at the Harris residence. He stared at the front door. About to knock, he was slightly startled as it was flung open and a bedraggled head poked out. Bloodshot eyes looked him up and down,
lingering on his hair. Then a grimy hand appeared and shoved something against his chest. The head withdrew, and the door slammed shut.

Spike blinked. *What the hell was that...thing?* He shuddered. Looking down at the crumpled item in his hand, he turned it over. Blank. With a shrug, he ripped the envelope open, and a key dropped into his palm. He pulled out the enclosed note, reading it.

*Hey, babe!*

*Finally made it out of the basement!*

*Why don't you bring your gorgeous blonde self over to my new place? We can...celebrate. Here's the key, just come on in. 342 North Briary Way, Apt. #313  
Love and kisses*

Spike snickered. *Boy must have meant this for the demon chit. Aw, too bad. But, looks like I got myself an official invite!* He headed for the boy's new apartment, fangs tingling a bit with hunger. *Hope he's still got my blood!*

~*~*~*~*~
Xander grimaced as he tossed a stack of bloodbags into the back of his refrigerator. *Geez, why do I always end up having to feed the pet vamp?* He sighed, then turned to the rest of his things. Basic groceries were quickly unpacked and stored in the small kitchen.

Next, the bathroom stuff was put away, and Xander smiled as he laid out two toothbrushes next to the sink. On to the bedroom, where he unpacked his assortment of baggy shirts and pants, putting them away. Boxers in one drawer of the dresser, socks in another, shoes lined up on the floor. And of course, condoms and the assorted lubes that Anya preferred were neatly deposited in the bedside table. In the corner, he left a stack of boxes containing junk that he wanted to keep. Those could wait for later.

Out in the living room, he set up his TV and VCR, then unpacked his stereo. Plugging it in, he flicked it on, tuning in to a station playing soft music. Finally, he collapsed on the sofa, staring around his apartment. *My apartment. Wow, cool!*

He had been shocked when he'd checked the place out. Due to low rent charged, he'd figured the place would pretty much be a dump. But it was...nice. Not huge, but
way better than the basement. And for not too much more. Even better, he'd managed to save enough to be able to afford the place for a couple of months before he really had to worry about income.

*Good thing, too, considering I just got fired...again! But no way was I staying in that basement any more!* He smiled as he looked around his new place.

The bathroom wasn't too big, but it had a bathtub and shower. Small kitchen area, which wasn't really a problem considering he wasn't much of a cook. The living room was mid-sized -- just large enough for a couch, an easy chair, a coffee table, and the entertainment center for his TV and such. And damn, he was proud of that entertainment center! Who knew Goodwill had such nice stuff?

*And so what if the place wasn't exactly located in the greatest part of town? Not like it can be much worse than living with my oh-so-loving parents!* Sure, some of his neighbors looked a bit...iffy. But hey, live and let live, right?

A knock on his door made him look up. Visitors? Anya would have just come in, and none of the other Scoobies knew of his change of address yet. Curious, he went to the door, unlocking it and cracking it open. "Yes?"
A beaming, middle-aged woman stared at him, eyes glowing with humor. "Alexander Harris?"

"Um, yeah. Who are you?"

"Oh! I'm Mellie, I live three doors down, in number 307. Noticed you moving in today, thought I'd bring you some pie. Sort of a welcoming present." She kept on grinning.

Shrugging, Xander opened his door wider, accepting the pie that was thrust toward him. "Thanks. Oooh, apple! I love apple." He sniffed it appreciatively, mouth already starting to drool.

"Well, it's nice to have you here. We don't often get humans who want to live with us, you must be a very interesting person."

"Yeah, well I -- woah, wait a sec! Um, what exactly do you mean by 'us'?" Damn, I knew this was too good to be true!

"Oh, well you know. Us. Hmm, let's see." She looked thoughtful as she began to tick of the residents on her fingers. "There's a couple of Marqel demons, some V'Iorns, the occasional vampire, we even had a werewolf stay here for a while." She smiled in remembrance. "He was such a sweet boy. Dyed his hair the oddest colors, though."
Xander stood there openmouthed as Mellie continued to list the various non-human residents of his apartment building. When she paused for a breath, he managed to get a word in. "So, you know, just out of curiosity, what exactly are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm just your regular run-of-the-mill half-breed. My dad was human, and my mom was Kcsterk."

"Gesundheit."

Mellie chuckled brightly. "No, Kcsterk." Her features blurred, turning light blue. Soft, feathery tendrils replaced her hair, and her eyes became slit-pupiled, changing to a luminous violet color. Then she shifted back, once more looking completely human.

"Shit! Shitshitshit! Someone fucking tell me I am not living in an apartment surrounded by demons!" He blinked furiously, trying to rein in his shock.

Now-normal eyes peered at him in concern. "Are you ok? You look a little...pale." A tiny frown graced Mellie's face. "Oh, no one told you about any of this, did they? You thought we were all..." She trailed off, sadness flooding her features. "Oh dear, you're not...scared of us, are you? We demons need homes, too. And everyone here gets along so well, you don't have anything to worry
about. No one's going to pick on you because you're human."

Xander stared into that earnest face, unable to see anything fear-inspiring in it. "Um, no! I mean, you seem really great. It's just...I've kind of had some bad experiences with people of the non-human variety. You know, all wanting to kill me, rip my heart out, tear me to shreds. That sort of thing."

Mellie sniffed. "Bullies. You always run into that type, wherever you go. No need to judge the rest of us by those standards." She had a faintly superior look on her face.

"Yeah, right, I'll be sure not to do that."

"Well, good! Anyway, suppose I'll be off. You probably have plans what with the whole first night here and all."

Xander grinned sheepishly. "Um, kinda." He flushed slightly.

Giggling, Mellie grinned knowingly. "Let me guess...short, brunette, and gorgeous!"

"Blonde, actually, but yeah."
"Well, I'll just toddle on off, then. You have fun now, hear?" Winking, she turned and made the short trip back to her own apartment.

Shaking his head in bemusement, Xander went back into his own apartment, carrying the pie into the kitchen and placing it in the fridge. *Sweet lady. Kind of strange, but seems nice.*

He stretched, yawning. Wrinkling his nose in distaste as he caught a whiff of himself. *Ew. Probably should do something about that if I want some Anya lovin' tonight.* Whistling softly, he headed for the bathroom.

**Part Two**

Anya knocked on the front door, waiting impatiently. She frowned when no one answered. Moving to the side, she peered in a window. "Hello? Person waiting out here. You're supposed to answer the door when I knock."

Frustrated at the lack of response, she went around to the back of the house, knocking at the basement door
this time. "Xander? It's your girlfriend. I'm coming in now." She opened the door and went inside.

"You told me you had a surprise for me. What's the surprise?" At the bottom of the steps, she stared around the room in amazement. Gone! Everything was gone! Well, not everything, but all of Xander's things were conspicuously missing.

"Xander? Is this a game? I'm not finding it very fun. Can we stop playing now?" Still she received no answer. She searched the room, trying to find some clue as to what had happened.

Nothing. Not even a note. Tears welled up in her eyes. Oh my god...I've been dumped! That could be the only explanation as to why her boyfriend had vanished without a trace. He'd ditched her and moved on to greener pastures. And he didn't even have the balls to tell me to my face! Ooooh! Men...pigs! She stomped back up the stairs, wiping furiously at her eyes.

Well, I don't care. I don't! Who needs him anyway? I can find somebody else to give me orgasms. I wonder if Giles is doing anything...?

~*~*~*~*~
Spike stood outside Xander's apartment building, staring in mild disbelief. Wonder if the whelp knows what kind of place he's roomin' in? He snickered softly. Bet he'll just love gettin' to know his neighbors!

He went inside, making his way down the short hallway. The elevator was out of service, so he walked up the two flights of stairs. 313, 313, where the bloody hell is 313? A door opened and a short woman came out into the hall. Eyes on a book, she didn't notice Spike and crashed into him.

"Oh, dear! I'm so sorry!" She bent to pick up the book that had dropped, brushing herself off as she straightened. "Are you all right?"

"Yeah, fine. Hey, where's 313?"

"Two doors down, on your right, sweetie."

"Thanks, luv." Spike made his way to the door indicated, fishing out the key he'd confiscated and letting himself in.

Mellie watched with a small grin on her face. Well, well. Looks like young Alexander doesn't have quite the problem with non-humans as he makes out! And he was right...blonde and gorgeous!
Xander stepped out of the shower, wrapping a towel around his hips. Dripping, he left the bathroom, heading back to his bedroom. "Hey, Spike."

He stopped abruptly, whirling to face the smirking vampire. "Spike! What the hell are you doing here? And how'd you get in?"

"Came for my blood, didn't I? Wasn't gonna starve. And you invited me."

"What? I did not! I think I would remember inviting a vampire into my new apartment. Especially you."

"Did too. Got proof. You gonna keep drippin' on the floor like that? Might ruin the rug."

"I...you...what?" Xander blinked in confusion.

"The floor, pet. Of course, if you really enjoy standin' in front of me half-naked, feel free to continue." *Trust me pet, I don't mind. You're not half bad on the eyes.*

Xander looked down at his scantily clad form, then back up at Spike with a glare. "*You* wait here. *Don't* move." He turned and strode into his bedroom, slamming the door shut behind him.
Spike shrugged and began to walk around the apartment, exploring. Walking into the bathroom, he rolled his eyes at the neatly arranged things. *Aw, ain't that cute. Matching toothbrushes. Gag me.* He looked into the steam-covered mirror, noting the lack of even a blurred reflection.

With a snort, he reached out and began to write on the normally reflexive surface. Stepping back, he admired his handiwork. 'William the Bloody was here' was now proudly scrolled over the mirror.

*Oh, yeah, real threatenin' there, mate.* Scoffing at himself, he headed for the kitchen. Pulling the refrigerator open, he smiled when he spotted a stack of bloodbags. Pulling one out, he emptied it into a glass he'd pulled from a cupboard. A brief stint in the microwave, and he had a nice warm meal. *Well, as nice as pig's blood can get, anyway.*

Back in the living room, he sat on the sofa, propping his feet up on the coffee table as he drained his glass. Looking around, he spotted the remote control and used it to turn on the television. He was flipping through the stations when Xander emerged from the bedroom.
Xander glared at Spike. "I thought I told you to stay put!" He gestured meaningfully toward the mostly empty bloodstained glass on the coffee table.

"What? I was supposed to starve while I waited for you? Not bloody likely, mate." He leaned back, arms behind his head. "You know, this place ain't half bad. Could use a few bodies, maybe some cobwebs or something, but otherwise, not bad at all."

"Gee, thanks. I was hoping for your approval. I would hate for my apartment not to meet your exacting standards." He stomped his way across the room, looming over the seated vampire. "Now, how the hell did you manage to get in here? Without an invitation?"

Smirking, Spike pulled a folded piece of paper from one of his pockets. "See, handwritten by you, inviting me over."

Xander snatched the note. "Hey! Where'd you get this? This was for Anya!" Oh shit, Anya didn't get the note. I am so screwed!

"This really horrid looking bint shoved it at me when I showed up over at your place -- old place I guess I should say." Spike shuddered in remembrance. "Really seemed to like my hair, though."
Oh, god. Can my life get any worse? My mom thinks I'm dating him? "Spike," he started calmly. "She was supposed to give this to Anya. Not you. Absolutely not you. So, since we've cleared that up, why don't you go away now, while I try to find Anya and fix this."

Spike refused to budge. "Could've fooled me. Here," he pointed at the note, "says 'gorgeous blonde self' -- me obviously -- and here says 'come on in'. Ergo, you invited me, and I'm stayin'," he finished smugly.

Xander gritted his teeth. "You--" he stopped as he remembered something. "Spike, give it to me."

"What?"

"The key."

"What key?"

"The key that was in the envelope with this note!" He thrust a hand out. "Give it."

Spike sighed, then tossed a key at him. "You're no bloody fun at all, mate. Don't see what the fuss is about."

"The fuss, as you so lightly put it, is that I just moved here and haven't exactly told anyone yet. It was going to be a surprise. Anya was supposed to get the note so she'd be
the first to find out. You messed that up, and by now she's probably been to the basement, found that I've left without a trace, and jumped to some very incorrect conclusions. How's that for a fuss?" By the end of this, Xander was fairly yelling in frustration.


"Argh!" He tugged at his hair. Taking a deep breath, he went back into his room, grabbing his jacket, wallet and keys. Pulling the jacket on, he slipped the wallet into the back pocket of his pants, and the note and key he'd reclaimed from Spike inside one of the jacket pockets. Then he went back out to the living room, where he yanked Spike off the sofa, ignoring his protests. "Let's go, bleach-boy."

"I wasn't done with my dinner!"

Xander picked up the glass, stomping into the kitchen and emptying the remains into the sink. After rinsing out the glass, he turned around. "There. You're finished."

Spike pouted. "That was very rude."

Xander gaped at him. "You have got to be kidding! You...you break into my apartment, make yourself at home, and, let's not forget, completely ruin my chances of getting lucky anytime in the near future, and you're
talking about rude?" He struggled to remain in control, grabbing one of the vampire's arms and dragging him out of the apartment. "Not. One. More. Word!"

Spike snickered.

Xander stared at his car in dismay. *Ok, one flat I can deal with, but three? I'm cursed. That settles it, I'm totally cursed.*

"Looks like you need new ride, pet."

"I am not your pet. And my car runs fine, thank you. It may look like crap, but the engine is good."

"Yeah, well, obviously the tires weren't."

"Oh...shut up." With a weary sigh, Xander turned and walked across the street.

Spike caught up with him. "Where you off to?"

"Hello? Must find Anya, grovel. Car broke, must walk. Simple enough?"

Spike fell in beside him. "I'll just keep you company, then."

"Oh, goody. The thrills."
The two fell silent, briskly walking down the sidewalk. Casting a sidelong glance at his reluctant travelling companion, Spike silently and unobtrusively slipped a hand into Xander's jacket pocket, easily removing both the note and the key, once more storing them on his person. He assumed a nonchalant look as Xander glanced over at him.

"You're up to something. What are you up to?"

"What makes you say that?"

"Because you're trying to look innocent. It's not something you pull off well, and it kind of gives you away." He narrowed his eyes at Spike, staringsearchingly.

"I'm not up to anythin', mate. You're too paranoid."

"Yeah. Sure." He was about to continue when he saw Spikes eyes widen, appearing to be drawn toward something behind him. "There's something behind me, isn't there?"

Spike nodded mutely.

"Big? Nasty looking? Slimy, perhaps." More vigorous nodding. "Right. Well, why don't I take a look-see." He turned, yelling as he jumped back and clutched at Spike,
who didn't even bother to shake him off. "Spike? What the hell is that!?"

Part Three

"Well, judging from the glowing red eyes, four arms, numerous slimy tentacles growing from various parts of its body, and really bad temper, I'd have to say it's a Grun-thak demon." As he spoke, Spike backed slowly away.

"Uh-huh. Not nice guys, I'm assuming." He joined in the vampire's retreat, trying not to spook the monster that was glaring at them.

"No. Not really."

"Great. So...what do we do?"

"I dunno 'bout you, pet, but me?" Spike turned and began running.
"Right. Good plan." Very quickly, Xander caught up with the vampire. They pounded down the street, aware of the heavily breathing monster following them. Making a quick turn, they found themselves in a short alley facing a large brick wall. "Ok, so what now?"

"Truth?" He thought briefly, then shrugged. "We die probably. Don't worry, it only hurts the first time." Sighing, Spike turned to face their attacker.

"Yeah, easy for you to say. You've already done it once!" He yelped as the demon drew closer, snarling and muttering harshly.

"Um, better watch it, mate. They got some serious mojo, don't let him point at you."

"Great. Thanks." He dove to the side as the demon lifted a scaly hand in his direction. "Spike! Do something!"

"What exactly is it you'd like me to do? Ask it nicely to go play somewhere else?" He jumped away as a burly arm lashed out at him.

"You're the vampire! Hurt it! Make it dead!" Xander punched and kicked ineffectually as a grasping tentacle wound its way around his torso, pulling him closer to a snarling face full of extremely pointy teeth. "Ack, bad demon! Didn't your mother teach you to brush?" He
gagged at the stench that washed over him as a blast of warm breath hit.

"Well you're the Slayer's pet. Didn't she show you anythin' useful?" He punched a tentacle that had latched onto his leg. "Hey, while you're up close and personal like, go for its eyes!"

"Thanks," Xander grunted as his ribcage was squeezed tightly, "for the advice." He gasped for breath, then lashed out, managing to poke through one of the demon's eyeballs. He grimaced as he felt it pop around his finger, pulling back quickly. He was dropped, landing painfully on his butt, covering his ears at the high-pitch shriek that echoed in the alley.

"Hey, good job, mate!" Spike barely moved out of the way of the two arms that tried to catch hold of him. Listening to the creature's pain-filled hissing, he looked around for a weapon. "Hate to tell you, pet, but I think you made it mad."

"Oh goody. You mean it wasn't before?" He sighed, then launched himself back at the furious Grun-thak. Clinging to its back, he managed to get an arm around the demon's neck, attempting to strangle it.
"Um, this may not be the best time to mention it," Spike shouted as he dodged the writhing tentacles, "but Grun-thaki don't," he grabbed a tentacle, wrenching the demon forward, "breath through," grabbing a rusty bar from nearby, he punctured the appendage, "their mouths!"

Xander was tossed from the creature's back as it screeched in pain. He grunted when he came into contact with an unyielding wall. "Great. Thanks for telling me earlier!" A discarded piece of broken plywood became his next weapon of choice as he bashed a reaching arm. "Hey, watch where you point that thing, mister!"

Spike pulled the bar back, and quickly moved out of the way of the bright ichor that gushed from the wound. "Ooh, nasty that. You should get it seen to."

"So how," whack, "exactly," whack, whack, "do they breathe?" Whack, thunk, thud. Xander picked himself up off the ground, shaking his head to clear it before once more going after the many tentacles undulating around him. "And while you're at it, how do you kill this fucker!?" His pitch of his voice was raised in desperation.

"Gill type things. In their sides. And puncture its heart, only way to kill one."
"Great," Xander muttered, making his way closer to the demon's body. Yelling loudly, he threw himself at it, shoving the piece of wood through its chest.

The Grun-thak snarled, reaching down and grabbing Xander by the neck, flinging him away. It pulled the makeshift stake out of its body, tossing it aside.

"Didn't work! New plan!" He scrabbled back from a hand, doing his best to avoid it.

"Bloody hell," Spike sighed. "Its heart, moron, not its liver!"

"What? I did!" He grabbed onto a few tentacles of his own, trying to keep them from moving too much. He blanched as he heard the sibilant murmuring start up again.

Spike dropped his bar, snatching two tentacles and quickly tying them together. Picking up the bar again, he jumped at the demon. "Actually," he brought the bar down hard on an arm, the snap clearly audible, "you didn't. Its heart," a quick movement, and another arm was decommissioned, "is about...here!"

The Grun-thak continued muttering quickly as it struggled to free itself. It had almost finished when Spike shoved the iron bar through it's stomach. The demon's
eyes bulged out, and it made a grating, rattling sound, then toppled, unmoving. As the copse lay there, a wave of iridescent fog burst forth from it, enveloping its victorious foes.

When blue tendrils wrapped themselves around his ankles, Xander yelped. "Spike! What's happening?" He tried to brush them off, but they clung tenaciously.

"Dunno. I bet the mojo got buggered when we killed it!." "No, you think!?" He tried to back out of the alley, but his feet were held in place. "Spike, get this stuff off me! Ow!"

"Hey, I got enough problems to take care of!" Spike cursed as the same foggy tentacles clutched at him. He could feel something jolting his skin wherever it touched, like little pinpricks of energy.

Xander looked up, having just enough time to see a large plume surround Spike's head. Then, as he gasped in a breath, the mist invaded him, sending sparks of electricity shooting through his veins. Pain struck him, and the last thing he heard before darkness hit was Spike's howl of agony reverberating through the alley.

Then, all was quiet save for the soft hissing as the Grun-thak slowly melted, bright orange ichor puddling around
its corpse. Both men lay still as the sparkling mist slowly receded.

The brunette stirred, shaking his head. "Oh, man, what hit me?" Grunting, he pushed himself into an upright position. His hand slipped in something, and he lifted it up, peering through the dim light. "Eew." Grimacing, he wiped his hand on a clean patch of concrete.

At a moan, he looked around, seeing another figure sitting up. Making his way gingerly over to the blonde, he grasped a shoulder. "Hey, you all right?"

"Gah. My head feels like someone shoved a spike through it, and I've got the most vile taste in my mouth." Blue eyes blinked up into brown, and equal looks of confusion appeared on both faces. They both looked around the alley, noticing the rapidly spreading puddle of orange goo. They looked back at each other again.

Simultaneously, both men asked, "Who are you?"

Part Four
They stared blankly at each other, frowning. They opened their mouths at the same time, about to speak. Then the brunette held up a hand. "Me first."

The blonde nodded.

"Ok, who are you?"

The other man blinked a few times, a confused expression washing over him. "I...I dunno. I...can't remember."

"Oh, boy. That doesn't sound good. All right then, I'm--" he paused, thinking. "My name is..." He scratched his head. "Shit. What the hell is my name?"

The two stared at each other again. Finally, the brunette straightened, holding out a hand to the blonde. "Come on."

"Where we goin', mate?"

"Beats me. But anyplace has to be better than here." He cast a glance at a twitching green tentacle, which chose that moment to fizzle away into another orange mess. "And I so don't want to know what that was."

The blonde shuddered. "That's something I wouldn't mind forgetting, myself."
"Tell me about it." Glancing up and down the street, the two quickly made their way to a nearby bench. Seating themselves, they commenced staring once more.

"Um, no offence, but this is getting sort of weird. I mean, are we just gonna stare at each other all night?"

The blonde shrugged. "You got anything better to do?"

"Well, we should probably try to figure out who the hell we are."

"Ah. Any suggestions?"

The brunette shrugged, thinking. Then he brightened. "Empty your pockets."

"I -- what? Why?"

"Well, we must be carrying some sort of identification, right?"

"Sure. Unless we got mugged."

"Just...do it."

They each went through their clothes, pulling everything out of their pockets and laying them on the bench between them. With a crow of success, the brunette held up a wallet. "Jackpot!" He opened it, flipping through
until he found a driver's license. "Alexander Lavelle Harris." He looked up, dismayed. "Lavelle? God, my parents must've hated me!"

"So, you got a name. What about me? I didn't find a wallet or nothin' like that." He plucked through his things, pouting slightly.

"Well, what do you have?"

"Um, some smokes, a lighter, a bit of quid, a key, and this note." He held up the slip of paper.

"Does it say anything?"

"Hold up." He unfolded the paper, then read it. "Got an address -- 342 North Briary Way, Apt. #313. No signature, no name." He looked up. "Not much help."

The other man looked at the note. "I wouldn't say that. I mean, someone there obviously knows you, your girlfriend by the looks of things. She can help you figure everything out. You should head over."

"What about you?"

"Well, there's an address on my driver's license. I'll go there, see what I can find."
They sat for a few more minutes, replacing their things. Then the blonde looked up. "Hey, Alexander."

The other man wrinkled his nose. "I don't like that -- doesn't sound right."

"It's your name, innit?"

"Yeah. I dunno, maybe I go by something else...Alex most likely." He thought about that, turning it over in his mind. Then he nodded. "Yeah, that sounds better."

"Well, Alex then. We still have a problem. I mean, we got these addresses, but...where the hell are we now and how do we get to them?"

"Oh." He looked up and down the street. "We need to find a gas station or something. Someplace where we can buy a map. We can figure it out from there."

"Sounds good to me."

The two men traced lightly over the map of Sunnydale that was unfolded between them as they sat on the curb under a streetlight.

Alex pointed. "Ok, we're here. And about here," he pointed to a spot on the other side of town, "is the address on my license."
"Right. And the other address is 'round here." The blonde pointed to a spot about a half-mile from their current position. "Looks like I'm closer."

"Yeah." Alex sighed, looking discouraged.

"Hey, look. Why don't you come with me, and we'll see if you can crash there for the night. I don't fancy the thought of someone walking so far this time of night. 'Specially with nasties like that thing back there lurking about."

"You sure? I don't want to be any trouble."

"Well, yeah. I mean, we must be chums or something. We did wake up in that alley together."

"Right, with that hideous gunk everywhere."

"You know, I hate to break it to you, but your clothes have seen better days." He looked at his own attire. "So 'ave mine, for that matter."

"All right then, let's go. Maybe we can shower or something when we get to your girlfriend's."

"Right, then."

Part Five
The two men stood in the hall outside apartment #313, staring nervously at the door.

Alex glanced sideways at his companion. "Well? You've got the key, open it already."

"Maybe we should knock first." The blonde licked his lips, trying not to fidget.

"Oh, for--" Alex reached over and plucked the bit of metal from the other's hand, inserting it in the lock. A faint 'click' sounded, and he turned the doorknob, pushing the door open. He gave a half-grin to the blonde. "After you."

Swallowing hard, he stepped inside the dark apartment, fumbling along the wall for a light switch. He flicked it on, and the room brightened.

Alex scooted in behind him, closing the door firmly. He looked around. "Not bad. Anyone home?"

"Don't think so. I don't hear anyone." He prowled through the few rooms, confirming the absence of anyone else. "Looks like it's just us."
"Huh. That's strange." He noticed the answering machine that was placed on a small table flashing. Walking over to the other man, Alex gave him a nudge. "There's a message on the machine. Maybe it's for you."

The blonde chewed on his lip. After a moment's hesitation, he walked over and pressed the 'play' button.

"Alexander! It's Mellie down in 307. I noticed you going out earlier and thought I'd just leave a message so I didn't disturb...anything when you get back." There was a muffled giggle at this point. "Anyway, I wanted to let you know about Friday night. All the residents here like to have a kind of welcoming party for the new people, make them feel at home. That, or we just like an excuse to party! So, you're the guest of honor. We were planning on this Friday, about 9:00 in the evening. Is that good? Stop by and let me know." A brief pause, then in a hushed voice, "Oh, and I ran into your blonde. You're right, he is gorgeous!" Another giggle, then the message ended.

Both men were wide-eyed, gaping at each other.

Alex fiddled with his shirt. "Ok, I'm wigging here."

"Yeah, well, I think that bird made it bloody obvious that this is your apartment." He sounded a bit put out.
"You figure? So why did you have a key?"

"And why did that bird call me your blonde?" came the rejoinder.

More staring ensued, then they both raced for the bedroom. The room gave little indication of anything out of the ordinary. No obvious signs of any...prior interludes.

Alex tilted his head. "You don't think that we're...?" He trailed off, leaving the rest open for interpretation.

"Dunno. I don't feel...you know."

"I think maybe she got the wrong idea."

"Um..."

"What?"

"That doesn't explain this." He pulled out the by now rather crumpled note. "See?" He thought for a moment. "Hold up." A quick trip back to where the phone was, then some rummaging around in the drawers. Brandishing the pen and notepad he found there, he walked back over to Alex. Thrusting the utensils at him, he said, "Here. Write something."
Bemused, Alex complied. Then they compared handwriting.

Alex heaved a sigh. "Ok, so I wrote the note. And gave it to you, apparently, although it would have been helpful if I'd put your name on it. And I'm...flirting. Or making veiled suggestions, at any rate."

"So, I mean, we probably are..."

Alex swallowed, but forced the word out. "Gay."

The blonde nodded wisely. "Bent."

"Queer."

"Nancy-boys."

They were both grinning a bit at this point.

"Fags."

"Poofs."

Alex opened his mouth, paused, then chuckled weakly. "Sorry, all out here."

Grinning, the blonde went on, ticking them off on his fingers. "Arse bandits, pansies, sausage jockeys, shirtlifters, pillow biters, bum boys, --"
"All right! We've established that you have a much more extensive vocabulary than I do. Geez." He ran a hand through his hair. "You did leave one thing out though."

"What's that?"

"Together. Us. From all indications, anyway."

"Oh. That."

An uncomfortable silence descended as the two looked at everything except each other.

Finally Alex cleared his throat loudly. "Ok, if I live here, then I say we just put this on hold, clean up, then get some sleep. Maybe things will look better in the morning."

"Sounds good to me. You gonna shower first?"

Wrinkling his nose, Alex shook his head. "No offense, but you look worse off than I do."

The blonde shrugged, then made his way over to the bathroom. Before the door closed, Alex called after him, "I guess just put on something of mine when you're done, since most likely none of your stuff is here." The response was muffled, but affirmative.
Picking at his shirt again, Alex poked through the kitchen, looking for something to eat. Opening the fridge, he shoved some food aside. A deep ruby-colored object caught his eye, and he pulled out the package.

*Oh, dear god, tell me this isn't...* He stared in distaste at the packet of what appeared to be blood. *Do I even wanna know?*

Stunned, he let it drop onto the counter, sinking onto a stool and contemplating the possible meanings behind its presence.

A crash from the bathroom drew his attention, and he stood. Tapping on the door, he called, "You ok in there?" Not hearing anything, he cracked it open. "Hey? What's going on?"

"I think you better get in here, mate."

Worried at how upset the man sounded, he stepped into the small room. "Hey, what's wrong?"

Mutely, the towel-clad man pointed a finger at the fogged-up mirror.

Alex looked. He could barely make out the words scrawled on the surface. "William the Bloody? What's up with that?"
"S'not the point. Look."

Alex peered closely, then shook his head. "What? I don't see anything."

"Exactly. See, I got out of the shower, saw that little message, and went for a closer look. Watch." He swiped a hand over the mirror, rubbing a clear spot. He left his hand next to the glass. "See? No reflection."

Alex felt his jaw drop as he realized that the only person reflected was himself. His mind began to make a few subconscious connections. "No reflection. No reflection?"

"Don't look like. Something is really strange here, Alex."

"Geez, you're telling me, William."

"Who? William?"

"Duh." Alex indicated the smudged remains of the message on the mirror. "I'm not William, and as far as we know, you're the only other one who's been here."

"Huh. It's just...William. It sounds kind of poncey. Sort of familiar, but not like...me."

"Maybe you have a nickname. Like Willie."
"Um, somehow I think not."

"Will?"

A brief pause, then a decisive, "Wil."

"That's what I said."

"Now, you said 'Will', clearly with two 'l's. I said Wil. One 'l'."

Alex rolled his eyes. "Fine. Wil, then."

The newly dubbed Wil nodded, then turned back to the mirror. "I'm still not liking this part. You think the mirror's broken?"

"I...don't think mirrors actually break down like that. And besides, you think that's weird? Come here." He led the way over to the kitchen, pointing out the red baggie on the counter.

"What's that?"

"Best guess? I'd say its blood. Don't know whose, though."

"Blood." Wil frowned, studying the object. "Alex? Why do you have a bag of blood on your counter?"
Alex snorted and wrenched the refrigerator open, displaying the stack of similar bags lined up on a shelf. "Do you have any idea the major case of wiggins I got when I saw this?"

Wil carefully set the bag back down, going over to stand by Alex. "Maybe...maybe it's not really blood. I mean, maybe it's that fake stuff, or something."

"Why do I doubt that?"

Wil was about to reply when something tickled at his nose. Sniffing the air, he slowly rotated.

"Wil? What is it?"

"I dunno. There's something..." He cocked his head, then bent down over the trash bin. Reaching inside, he fished out a crumpled plastic baggie.

A baggie that still contained a few drops of drying, scarlet fluid.

Catching sight of it, Alex grimaced. "Ok, major ick factor here."

Wil said nothing, just sniffed the baggie. Something began to gnaw inside the pit of his belly, and he turned to Alex, holding the nearly empty packed out.
Alex gasped, eyed growing huge.

"Mate? You don't look so good."

Something clicked into place, and Alex edged back slightly. "I...may have figured something out. About the mirror, and the...blood."

"Well, spill."

Breath quickening and heart pounding, Alex gulped. "I...I think you're a vampire."

---

**Part Six**

Giles wrung his hands as Anya sobbed brokenly on the sofa in front of him. The ex-demon had dropped by unexpectedly a few hours before and done her best to kiss andgrope him. She'd then proceeded to fall apart when he'd fended off her advances and demanded an explanation for her behavior. Unsure of how to cope with it, he hurried to make a phone call to Willow, hoping she and Tara could come over and sort this out.
He squinted anxiously at the clock, then turned his attention back to the sofa. Hesitantly, he patted Anya's shoulder. "There, there." Another quick peek at the clock. *What the bloody hell is the holdup!* He heaved a sigh of relief when his door flew open, admitting the witches.

Willow and Tara gaped at the distraught woman. The redhead turned to Giles. "What's wrong? Did something happen?"

Giles shrugged helplessly. "I haven't the foggiest. She just showed up and started this. I've been unable to get anything coherent out of her."

Tara sat down beside Anya, tugging her sideways and wrapping her arms around her. She rocked gently, murmuring words of comfort.

After a few minutes of continued weeping, Anya calmed a bit, raising her head and sniffling loudly. Willow held out a wad of tissues, which she accepted gratefully, dabbing at her blotchy face.

Sitting next to Anya, Willow stroked her arm softly. "You wanna talk about it?"

Anya sniffled some more, then blew her nose. Her hands dropped into her lap as she looked down. Her breath
hitching, she began to speak in a scratchy voice. "I-I...Xander d-d-dumped me!" Her lower lip began to tremble as she shredded the tissues clutched in her hands.

Willows eyes widened. "But...why? I mean, he really likes you!"

Silent tears began to flow once more. "I...I don't know. He...he told me to come over tonight, that he had a...surprise for me." She wiped a hand over her cheek. "And I got there, and no one was there. All his s-s-stuff was gone from the basement. And he didn't even leave a n-n-note!" Harsh sobs ensued.

Willow started to get even more worried. "Gone? Everything?" She looked over at Giles, who was doing his best to pretend there wasn't an ex-demon breaking down in the middle of his living room. "Giles? Do you have any idea what this is about? Have you spoken with Xander lately?"

"Well, I-I saw him yesterday, and he did seem inordinately happy. Said something about the 'freedom of a new life', but wouldn't give specifics." His brow furrowed. "You don't suppose he's...skipped out?"

"Who's skipped out?"
Everyone turned to the doorway, where Buffy stood with Riley. "Was there a meeting tonight I forgot about?" Buffy frowned thoughtfully. "No, that's not it. And why is Anya crying?" She tugged her boyfriend inside, kicking the door shut behind him.

Anya turned her tear-stained face toward the newcomers, then slouched down miserably.

Giles went over to her and whispered, "Domestic strife. It appears that Xander has...vacated his basement and left no indications of his whereabouts."

Buffy blinked. "Um, you mean he's gone, and you don't know where he is?"

"I believe that's what I said, yes."

She rolled her eyes. "Why don't you ask his parents, I'm sure they could tell you."

"Um, well actually Buffy, you see--"

Buffy waved her hand, cutting Willow off. "Oh, I'll do it." She went over to the phone, putting it on speaker and dialing the number for Xander's house. After about seven rings, the line was picked up.

"What?" a gruff, masculine voice rasped out.
"Hello? I'm looking for Xander. I'm a friend of his."

"So? Think I care?"

"Could I talk to him. Please." She bit the words out.

"He don't live here no more. And good riddance."

Hands on hips, Buffy glared at the phone. Through gritted teeth, she hissed, "Well, could you tell me how I can get ahold of him?"

"How the fuck should I know? I finally got that pansy boy out of my house, why would I care where he is now?"

There was a derisive snort, then a click as he abruptly hung up.

Buffy snarled and turned the speaker off. She made her way over to the sofa, trying to look sympathetic. "Don't worry, Anya. We'll figure out what's going on, and get you and Xander back together."

~*~*~*~*~

"What the bleedin' hell do you mean, I'm a vampire!?!" Wil gaped at the brunette in blatant disbelief.
Alex kept inching away. "Well, you um, your eyes, they're kinda...all yellow. And your face...sort of bumpy. And...well, you...you've got...fangs." He reached into the drawer behind him, fumbling around and pulling out a wooden spoon. He stared at it a moment, then held it up threateningly.

The plastic bag fluttered to the floor as Wil reached a hand up to his face, running it hesitantly over the ridges on his brow, then lightly touching the tips of his fangs. "Holy Christ!" he yelped. Focusing on Alex, he finally noticed the other man's defensive posture. "What are you doing?"

"Um, defending myself?"

Wil stared at Alex's chosen weapon. "With a spoon?"

Alex shrugged. "It's wood, isn't it? Wood, vampires...bad combo."

"So what, you're gonna try to kill me?"

"Well, you are, you know, a vampire. Vampires are bad."

Wil's bottom lip trembled slightly. "You...you don't like me?"
Alex sighed, lowering the spoon a bit. "Ah, Wil. You seem like a great guy, but...hello? Vampire? Aren't you gonna try to, I dunno, suck my blood or something?"

Wil thought about that. "Can't say as I have any great desire to, no." He felt his face sort of...relax, and noticed Alex become a little less tense.

Once Wil's face had returned to looking human, Alex felt more comfortable. Then he narrowed his eyes. "You don't?"

"Um, not really."

Alex set the spoon down on the counter, then folded his arms over his chest. Head tilted to the side, he gave Wil a measuring glance. "Really?" A hand moved up to his neck, stroking the smooth skin. As his fingers danced along his jugular, he watched the other man. "You mean you have absolutely no desire to bite me? Drain me dry? Hold me down and make a meal out of me?"

As he watched Alex caress his neck, Wil's eyes dilated. He started panting lightly as he listened to those suggestive words pronounced in a husky voice. He shifted as his growing erection began to press uncomfortably at the rough towel covering it.
Alex felt a glimmer of triumph as he noticed the intense hunger that was directed at him. "Ha! See, I knew it!" He frowned as Wil shuffled, his gaze drifting down. He caught his breath at the bulge evident beneath the towel. His face flushed a fiery red, and his eyes snapped back up to meet brilliant blue ones.

"Sorry," Wil whispered, turning away in shame.

Mentally smacking himself, Alex was quick to move to Wil's side. "No, it's...it's ok. Um, I just...I didn't mean to...jeez, I'm so sorry!" He chewed his lip, worried.

Wil lifted a shoulder in a casual-seeming shrug.

"Don't be mad, please? It was just a bit of a shock to see you like that, I think I got carried away." Tentatively, he laid a hand on Wil's bare shoulder, rubbing gently.

Wil relaxed, turning around and looking up at Alex. "I would never hurt you, Alex. Never."

Alex smiled. "No sucking on me?" His eyes widened at Wil's groan. "Um, I mean, eating m--er..." He ran a hand through his hair, flustered. "Are there any ways of saying this without sounding suggestive?"

"Feasting on your blood until there's nothing left of you but a withered, desiccated corpse?"
"Uhhh, yeeeah. That'll work. So...no desiccated-corpse-making?"

"Nah. Well, not of you, anyway." Wil grinned at Alex's pensive look. "Joking." He stepped back from the other man, trying to regain his composure. "'Sides, looks like I stay pretty well fed with whatever kind of blood you got stocked in there." He pointed at the fridge, grimacing a little at the thought of drinking blood.

"Oh yeah, right. Ok, then."

They stood staring at each other, both feeling vaguely uncomfortable. Finally, Wil cleared his throat. "Ah, I should probably, um, get...dressed." He saw Alex's eyes flicker down, and another blush spread over the man's cheeks.

"Um, yeah. Good idea. I'll just...go take a shower. In the bathroom. Yeah." He turned and rushed to the bathroom, nearly tripping in his haste.

Wil looked down at the floor, noticing the discarded bag. He picked it up and returned it to the trash can, then went into Alex's bedroom. Rummaging through the closet, he pulled out a white t-shirt and a pair of black silk boxers. Pulling them on, he went back into the living
room, seating himself on the couch and leaning back, staring at the blank TV screen.

After about ten minutes, Alex came out of the bathroom, walking silently to the bedroom. When he reappeared, he too was clad in a t-shirt and boxers, although his were blue. He sat on the opposite end of the sofa, glancing over at Wil. "So, um, guess we should probably hit the sack now. Been a tough day...well, at least what I can remember."

"Yeah, good idea mate."

They sat there, unmoving.

"I...I guess I can sleep on the couch here. I just need a pillow, some blankets."

Alex frowned, examining the piece of furniture. "It's kind of small. It wouldn't be very comfortable."

Wil shrugged. "I'll manage."

Alex struggled with himself briefly, then stammered out, "You, uh, you could sleep with me." He flushed deeply. "I-I-I mean...shit, that didn't come out right." He groaned, covering his face with his hands. Voice muffled, he continued, "I meant, you could share the bed. It's a king,
so it's plenty big." He winced, but lifted his head determinedly.

"Well I...I mean, if you don't mind. Yeah, sure."

Nodding, Alex stood, leading the way back to the bedroom. Once they were both inside, he shut the door, then frowned. He pulled open a dresser drawer, then shut it, repeating this process until he emerged with a heavy blanket. Going over to the window, he draped the blanket over the curtain rod, arranging it to cover the window completely.

Will watched these strange antics. "What's that for?"

Alex tossed him a look that clearly stated his low opinion of the question. "You vampire? Sunlight bad. At least I think I remember that much. Unless you want to fry?"

"Oh. No, no frying. Um, thanks."

"Don't mention it." He picked up the pad of paper and the pen that had been left on the bed earlier. He tossed them to Wil. "Here, stick those in the bedside table there, would you?"

Wil grabbed the items, and pulled the indicated drawer open. Looking at the contents, he froze.
"Wil? What is it?" Alex went around to the other side of the bed, peering over Wil's shoulder. "Oh." He could feel his face heat up again as he stared at the jumbled assortment of lubes and condoms residing in the drawer. He swallowed hard, then reached out and briskly shut the drawer. "N-never mind." He plucked the pen and paper from the blonde's lax grip, dropping them on the top of the little table. Doing his best to act nonchalant, he threw back the covers and climbed into bed, scooting over to the far side. "Hit the light before you get in, would ya?"

Wil nodded, eyes still glued to the closed drawer.

"Will?"

His head twisted around, and he stared dumbly at the brunette who was snuggled down under the covers. "Huh?"

"Lights. Off. Makes the room dark, easier to sleep."

"Oh." Dazed, Wil walked over to the light switch, flipping it off. His eyes adjusted rapidly to the darkness, and he had no trouble getting back to the bed. Climbing in, he pulled the covers over him, turning on his side to face Alex. "Uh, night Alex."

"Night, Wil."
Part Seven

Alex yawned and rolled over in bed. He curled around the person beside him, throwing his arm over the cool, still chest.

His eyes flew open and he sat up, scrambling to turn on the lamp by the bed.

"Aaaahhh!" Oh god, dead person. Cold, non-breathing dead person in my bed!

Wil jerked as the yell pierced his sleep-muddled brain. "Huh?" He leaned up on an elbow, blinking fuzzily at the hyperventilating man sitting next to him, staring at him with disbelieving eyes. "Alex? What happened?"

Alex scooted to the far end of the bed. "Y-Y-You were...dead. All cold, and not breathing. Extremely corpsey." He squinted closely. "You're still not breathing!" he accused.
Wil looked down at himself, noticing for the first time that Alex was right about his lack of respiration. He thought about that, then shrugged. "Correct me if I'm wrong, mate, but don't vampires generally tend to be rather...non-living?"

Alex's jaw dropped as he gazed at the blonde. "Oh. Um, right. Sorry, forgot about that." His face reddened sheepishly. He cleared his throat nervously as he looked again at the blonde sprawled out in his bed, then tore his eyes away. "So...um, morning."

Wil tilted his head as a strange, spicy scent wafted past his nose. It made him...hungry. He shook his head to clear it, then threw the covers away, climbing out of bed. "You know, now I think about it, it'd prob'ly be a good idea if we figured out what this whole 'vampire' thing includes. Things I should avoid, and whatnot."

Alex nodded briskly. "Good idea. We can find a library or something, get some books." He hurried to the bedroom door.

"Pet? Daylight? Me? Don't wanna burn, y'know."

Alex paused. "Well, you know, we don't really know if the whole sunlight deal is true. I just thought it would be better to play it safe last night."
"Forgive me if I'm a bit hesitant about testing these things, would you?"

"Nonsense." Alex waved a hand dismissively. "We can just do some tiny experiments, nothing major."

Wil grimaced. He rubbed at his stomach as it gurgled unpleasantly. "Can it at least wait until after breakfast?"

Alex grinned. "S'pose so." He headed for the kitchen, making sure to close the drapes on the windows and turn on the lights instead. "I'm cooking. Whattaya want?"

Wil followed. "Gee, lemme think about that," he deadpanned.

"Oh. Right." He shuddered as he opened the fridge, plucking out one of the bloodbags and holding it between thumb and forefinger as he offered it to the blonde.

Wil took the bag, then watched Alex rattle around the kitchen, pulling out pans and scrounging through the food in the fridge. Bacon was set to sizzle, and eggs were cracked into a bowl to be mixed together with some shredded cheese. The concoction was dumped into the frying pan after the bacon was done, and within minutes, Alex had a mound of steaming, fluffy scrambled eggs.
He stared mournfully at his bag of blood, sighing heavily. *S'not bloody fair.* Wil trudged across the kitchen, opening cupboards until he found a mug, then tore open the bag and poured the contents into it. He looked at the thick, dark liquid, then tentatively stuck a finger into it. Wrinkling his nose, he lapped at the coated finger. *Bleh.* *Needs...* He stuck the mug in the microwave, then waited for it to heat.

Alex poured himself a glass of orange juice and took his things to the table. He seated himself next to Wil, watching in amusement as the other man sipped from his mug. "Good?"

"Hnn," came the noncommittal reply.

"I'll bet. Now me, I'll stick with these delicious eggs and crispy bacon, rounded off by a cold glass of citrusy goodness." He reached for his fork, yelping as it was snatched away from him. "Hey!"

Wil used the fork to spear some of the eggs, easily evading Alex's hovering hands that he used in a vain attempt to protect his breakfast. He popped them into his mouth. "Mmm. These're good."

"Gimme my fork back, you egg-stealing...vampire guy!"
"Aw, don't be like that, pet." Wil grinned. "Didn't anyone ever teach you to share?" He leaned over for another forkful of eggs, pausing a moment before dunking them into his mug of blood.

"Eew!" Alex watched disgustedly as Wil slurped the dripping eggs into his mouth. "That is about the grossest thing I've ever seen!"

Wil swallowed his mouthful, licking his lips. "Don't knock it 'til you tried it." He snagged another bit of egg, letting the fork hover over his mug. "You should, you know."

"What, try that? Are you nuts!?" He shook his head violently. "Huh-uh. No way."

"S'only fair, mate. Make you a deal. You want me participate in your little experiments, you gotta taste this." He dipped the fork, then held the blood-coated morsel out toward Alex.

Alex gulped as he stared in mild horror at the fork. "I--"

"Ah! Gotta try it."

Alex wavered, then looked into bright blue eyes that were sparkling with amusement and...challenge? He narrowed his own eyes, then leaned forward and scraped
the food off of the fork. Sitting back, he hastily chewed, stomach quailing slightly at the heavy metallic tang.

"So?"

Swallowing, Alex ran his tongue around the inside of his mouth. "Kind of salty. Actually, the taste seems sort of...familiar. Which is not a thing I want to examine right now."

Wil shrugged. "Makes sense if you think about it, though."

Alex arched an eyebrow before getting up to get himself another fork. Back at the table, he started shoveling his breakfast down. Mouth full, he mumbled, "Wha'y'mean?"

Fidgeting, Wil looked around the room, taking occasional sips from his mug. Then he sighed. "Well, you know. If we're...together. I mean, we probably snogged some, and I bet sometimes I'd just...eaten. So the taste wouldn't seem so strange."

"Snogged?"

The blonde drained his glass, moving away from the table to place it in the sink. "Yeah. You know? Swapped spit? Made out? Kissed?"
Alex nearly choked on his food and stopped chewing, blush rising to his cheeks once more. Coughing, he reached for his glass, chugging down about half of the drink. Then he wiped his mouth, obviously struggling for a casual attitude. "Um, yeah. That's...that's probably it." Not thinking about kissing him, not thinking about kissing him.

Wil sniffed the air delicately, once more detecting that tantalizing aroma. God, what is that. He shook his head, ignoring the shuddery feeling in his belly. A loud clatter caught his attention, and he turned to see Alex dumping his dishes into the sink. "Experiment time now, I s'pose?"

Wiping his hands on the cloth by the sink, Alex nodded. "Yeah. From what I can vaguely remember -- in a fuzzy, amnesiac sort of way -- vampires can be hurt by sunlight, garlic, crosses, holy water, and wood. We should probably test the sunlight thing first. No use keeping this place in the dark if we don't have to."

Wil blinked. "You...you mean you want me to stay here?"

"Um, duh? Where else are you gonna go? It's not like you know where you live, and apparently, you're my...significant other, so I'm not gonna toss you out. Of course you're staying here!"
The blonde smiled timidly. "Ok." He went to stand by the curtain in the living room, making sure to stay well away from the sliver of sunlight peeking through. "Well, let's do this then."

"Right." Alex stood next to him, watching as Wil extended a hand until the beam of light hit it. It immediately began to sizzle and smoke, and Wil pulled back with a sharp yelp.

"Ow! Bugger it all!" Pouting as he examined his slightly blistered hand, he used the other hand to whap Alex upside his head.

"Ouch! Hey, what'd you do that for?" Alex rubbed his head, glaring at the blonde, who returned his look unwaveringly.

"It bloody well hurt, you git! And this was your idea."

"Well, would you have rather figured it out when you walked out for a breath of fresh air this afternoon?" He softened as he noticed how Wil was cradling his hand to his chest. "Is...Is it really that bad? Lemme see it." He took Wil's hand, turning it over and brushing his fingers across the pale skin.
Wil's eyes widened as he sucked in a breath, shivering at the whispery touches of warm flesh gliding over his. "I-I'm ok."

"You sure?" Alex reluctantly released the abnormally cool hand. He stepped back a pace, reaching up comb his fingers through his hair.

"Yeah. No problem. Just...let's not do that bit again, ok?"

"Right. No more sunlight. Sunlight bad."

"Look, not to ruin your fun or anything, but can we skip the rest, too?"

Alex snickered. "What, I can't try staking you?"

Wil's eyes dilated, unconsciously drifting down to the other man's crotch before he pulled them away.

Alex winced, biting his lip. "Fuck. I did it again, didn't I? Sorry. I...I don't mean to keep saying stuff like that, it just sort of pops out." He closed his eyes, groaning. Gritting his teeth, he forced himself to continue. "Look, forget I said any of that, all right? And we'll forgo any more potentially painful tests and just assume that all that stuff will hurt you."

"Sounds good."
They stood awkwardly, neither one sure what to do next. Then Wil rolled his eyes. "Oh, sod this. You wanna watch the telly?"

Relieved, Alex agreed. "Sure. But I get the remote."

Wil snatched it before Alex had a chance to, flipping on the TV and surfing through the stations.

"Hey! I called it first! And it's my apartment!"

"Yeah, well I'm the guest, so I get visitor's privileges." He clutched the remote to his chest, sticking his tongue out at the human.

"Ha! You're not a guest, you're my boyfriend, so hand it over!"

They both realized what he'd said, and stopped arguing, staring deep into each other's eyes.

"We can share," Wil offered softly.

Alex grinned shyly. "Ok."
Wil and Alex sat next to each other on the sofa as they watched cartoons, legs barely touching and hands occasionally brushing up against each other. They'd had a little chat -- full of blushes and stammering -- and decided that, no matter how close they'd been 'Before', they should probably take things slow now. It was obvious that there was an attraction between them, but neither wanted to rush into something unprepared. So they were...dating. While living together, sleeping together, and not having sex together...at least not yet.

Sex. There was another big blank for them both. Here they were, healthy adult males, and as far as they could remember, they were both virgins. Which, granted, wasn't really likely. But for all practical purposes...

So there they sat, almost-but-not-quite holding hands. Occasionally peeking at each other before turning back to the television. This went on for about an hour as they watched their program, carrying on trivial conversations during the commercials. Which wasn't exactly as easy as it sounded considering the state of their memories, but they managed.
At the end of the show, they both reached for the remote control, and their hands collided. Wil stared at the warm hand resting on his own, and lifted his head to look into Alex's dark eyes. His own widened at the veiled heat he found there, and he unconsciously licked his lips.

Alex drew in a quavering breath as he saw the pink tongue emerge to moisten full lips. He swallowed hard, then leaned marginally closer to the other man. *Just a kiss. That's slow. It's not like we're going to do anything else.*

Wil gasped softly as their faces inched closer together. He could feel warm puffs of breath caressing his cheeks, and that spicy, tantalizing scent was in the air again. His lips parted slightly.

A loud knocking on the door startled them, and they scrambled off the couch, jumping apart. They stood there, staring ruefully at one another, listening to the knocking continue.

Alex forced out a chuckle, wiping his palms on the front of his boxers. "I'll...I'll go get that."

As he went to the door, Wil watched closely, admiring the muscular curves of his back and how his boxer seemed to perfectly frame the round globes of his--
Bloody stop that! Groaning, he flopped back down on the sofa, pulling a small pillow into his lap and curling up around it.

Alex opened the door, taken aback by the cheerful, bubbly woman there. "Yeah?"

"Alexander! Good, I didn't wake you. I was hoping I could talk to you about the party Friday night. You did get my message, didn't you?" She slipped past Alex into the apartment, not seeming to notice his attire, and looked around curiously. Her eyes lit on the blonde huddled on the sofa. "Oh, your boyfriend is still here. I didn't...interrupt anything, did I?"

"Um, no, we were just, you know, watching some TV."

"Good. That would have been so horribly embarrassing." She bustled over to the sofa, extending a hand. "Hi, I'm Mellie, I live just down the hall from Alexander. We bumped into each other last night."

Wil took her hand, giving her a bashful smile. "I'm Wil."

"That's 'Wil', not 'Will'. Only one 'I'," Alex added with a roll of his eyes.

Mellie gave him a strange look. "Well, of course it is. I heard the distinction clearly." She beamed at Wil again.
"My, you are a handsome one, aren't you? Alexander certainly is a lucky young man." She made herself comfortable next to the vampire, leaving Alex to take the chair nearby. "You are coming to the party with Alexander Friday, aren't you?"

Wil shrugged. "I-I dunno. I guess, if Alex wants me to."

"Geez, what kind of idiotic this is that to say? Of course I want you with me! You're not leaving me alone with a bunch of strangers." He glanced at Mellie. "Um, no offense."

Mellie waved a hand. "Pish. None taken. Besides, you two make such a cute couple, it would be a shame to separate you even for one night." She slapped her hands, rubbing them together. "Now, you boys don't have to do anything, just show up. It'll be in the lounge room downstairs. We figured 9:00 would be a good time, since we have more than a few residents who prefer the night life, and Wil's not the only vampire who'll be coming. There's one living on the 5th floor, her name's Jenna and she's shy around strangers, but she does like a good party!" She narrowed her eyes. "Between us, I think she had a bad experience with the Slayer, and it really got to her."
Alex and Wil gaped at the woman. Shock clear on his face, Wil sputtered out, "V-v-vampire? I-I don't understand. How did you...?"

"Slayer?" Alex broke in. "What's a Slayer?"

Mellie blinked. "You don't know about the Slayer?"

Both men shook their heads.

"Oh dear." She frowned, then settled back into the sofa. "Didn't your Sire tell you?"

"My...Sire?" Wil looked at her in confusion.

"The...the vampire who turned you." She looked incredulous at the continued lack of comprehension on Wil's face. "Oh, my. This isn't good. Are you...are you a fledgling? I mean, if you're new, it's understandable, but..."

"I...I don't..." Wil slouched down, miserable.

Alex heaved a sigh, moving so he sat on the arm of the couch, gently rubbing Wil's shoulder. He gazed earnestly at Mellie. "See, it's just...something happened last night." He smiled as Wil snuggled back against him, shifting so the vampire's head practically rested in his lap. "There was this...thing. And we woke up in an alley, and
we....sorta...couldn't remember anything. So, see, we kinda don't actually know about Sires or Slayers or even vampires, really. I mean, we were able to figure some things out, stuff that was obvious, but the rest? Total blank.

Again Mellie blinked. Staring intently at them, she sensed that Alex was telling the truth. "Well. Dear me, that is a fix." She thought a moment, then asked, "What happened? What do you remember from yesterday?"

Wil glanced up, careful not to dislodge the hand that had begun to stroke the back of his neck. "Slime. Lots of disgusting orange slime."

"Yeah, and these wiggling tentacle things that kind of melted. And it smelled bad."

Mellie closed her eyes as she tried to think of what it could have been. "Tentacles and orange slime. You know, it sounds rather like you met up with a Grun-thak demon."

"A what?" both asked simultaneously.

"A Grun-thak demon. Nasty creatures, they like to eat internal organs." She shuddered. "Plus, they're magic users. Usually very powerful. It's amazing that you came out of an encounter with one of those intact."
"Well, not quite." Alex tapped his head.

"Hmm. I've never actually heard of this happening. There must have been a pretty powerful spell involved, especially if the effects have lasted after the death of the one who cast it." Her expression grew regretful. "I'm sorry, I don't really know how I can help. Magic isn't my thing. You might just have to wait until it wears off."

"But..." Wil glanced up at Alex anxiously before continuing. "What if it doesn't? What if we never remember?"

"I don't know. I guess you'll have to adjust."

Alex leaned down and hugged Wil encouragingly. "Hey, we'll manage. We've done pretty good so far."

"But there's so much we don't know about! Like this whole vampire thing, and--" he broke off, shooting Mellie an accusing glare. "How did you know I was a vampire?"

"Well, dear, it's one of those things my kind is sensitive to." She chuckled at the blank looks on their faces. "Oh, right, you forgot about that. How do I put this?" She scooted closer, taking hold of one of Alex's hands between her own. "Alexander -- or, Alex I guess you prefer -- currently, you are the only human in residence in this building. Now, don't get upset. We're friendly; not
like that demon who did this to you." She smiled gently. "I know it's a bit much to absorb, but I can introduce you to everyone tomorrow night at the party. I'm sure they'll love you."

"Um, right." Then Alex frowned again. "Ok, back up now. What was that you mentioned about a Slayer? Sound dangerous."

Mellie's nose wrinkled as she stood with a disgusted sniff. "The Slayer. Yes. Brief version, she's a human girl with special abilities who goes around killing vampires and other demons."

Wil gasped, bolting forward. "K-killing? Vampires?" He turned worried blue eyes on Alex, who slid down to pull him close.

"Oh, now don't you fret about it. We stick up for our own, she'll have to go through the lot of us to get to you." She patted Wil's cheek soothingly. "Now, I don't know much about vampire lore and all that, but I'm sure I can persuade Jenna to fill you in. In the meantime, it might be safer for the two of you to stay around the apartment complex. No telling what trouble you might run into and not remember how to handle."
All smiles once again, Mellie stood, leaning over to give both men a peck on the cheek. "Don't get all gloomy, now. Take it easy today and tomorrow, rest up for the party. Tomorrow night, 9:00. Just bring yourselves, we'll take care of everything else." She let herself out, looking back with a wink. "Have fun, boys!"

The door clicked shut, leaving Alex and Wil staring bemusedly. Then Wil cleared his throat. "I like her. She interestin', don't y'think?"

Alex laughed, nodding in agreement. "She's definitely unique. Very...motherly. In a wiggy sort of way."

"Hm." Wil settled back against Alex, who still had his arm draped loosely around the vampire's waist. He tilted his head up to look at the brunette. "Alex?"

"Yeah?" Alex turned his head, his nose brushing up against a soft cheek before he was captured by the startling blue gaze.

"Can I kiss you?"

**Part Nine**

"Do you think this is a good idea?" Willow nervously chewed her lip as she clutched Tara's hand with her own. "I mean, he's probably sleeping, or...something." She
glanced over at Buffy, not particularly wanting to go into
details about Xander's family.

The trio of girls stood outside the Harris residence, the
late afternoon sun shining brightly down on them. Birds
were singing merrily, and children could be heard
laughing in the background. Such a light-hearted, happy
scene. But it wasn't going to last.

Buffy narrowed her eyes grimly. "Well, then. I guess it's
time for his wake-up call." With a toss of her head, she
strode up the steps and rapped firmly on the door. Her
entire posture screamed irritated impatience as she
waited for a response.

Willow and Tara stood -- they weren't hiding, definitely
not hiding -- behind Buffy, wincing as loud footsteps
clopped their way ever closer. The door was flung open,
and a scruffy, unshaven man stuck his head out, glaring
at them through watery, bloodshot eyes.

"What!?” the man snarled, his angry expression slowly
replaced by a disgusting leer as he looked the girls up and
down. "Well, well, what can I do for you?” He lounged
against the doorframe, licking his lips as he continued to
gaze hungrily at them.
Unconsciously, the witches took a step back, cringing away from those eyes that seemed to crawl along their skin.

Buffy just crossed her arms over her chest, jaw clenched as she glared back, not even fighting the low growl in her throat. Eyes narrowed, she sneered at the disheveled man. "We...talked last night. About Xander? Where is he?"

There was a soft snort as Mr. Harris rolled his eyes. "Oh, yeah. I remember you." He stared hard at her, smirking as he lingered over the curves of her hips and her bare legs. "Mmm-mm! If I'da known you were so fine, maybe we coulda worked something out." He peered over her shoulder at the other two. "You ain't so bad either. Maybe we can all go inside, have us a nice little...discussion."

Buffy shuddered. "Um, eww? That has got to be the grossest thing I've ever heard. Look, we just want to know where Xander is, so just tell us, and we're out of here."

"Hmph. Your loss." He shrugged as he stepped back inside and began to close the door. "I don't know where the little shit is, and I don't really give a fuck. So go annoy someone else." The door slammed shut.
Buffy muttered under her breath as she led the other two away from the house. Shaking herself, she rubbed her hands over her arms. "Gah, I think I need a shower. That was a seriously creepy man."

Tara nodded in agreement, taking a deep breath as she continued to clutch at Willow's hand. "He w-was very...icky."

"Yeah. I never liked visiting Xander when he was home. He scared me." Willow held on tight to Tara, casting a last glance at the house her friend had lived in for so long. "I'm...kinda glad Xander finally moved out. I just wish we knew where he went!"

With a determined glint in her eyes, Buffy stated "We'll find him. Don't worry about that. I don't give up on my friends. Now...I need ice cream. That guy's attitude left a bad taste in my mouth. C'mon."

~*~*~*~*~

Alex swallowed hard as his breathing hitched, his eyes fixating on the other man's lips.

A faint hint of sadness flickered across Wil's face when he received no response. "Guess not, huh?" He tried to
move away, startled when strong arms gripped him by the waist and pulled him back.

Alex held Wil close to him, not letting him escape. Tugging lightly, he moved the blonde around so he could get a better angle, then bent his head. He stared into clear blue eyes that widened as he drew closer. His lips hovered over Wil's, then his tongue slipped out and passed gently across them.

Wil gasped as wet warmth brushed over his mouth. His eyes drifted closed, and he moaned softly when he felt Alex's lips settle lightly on his. The gentle nibbling that began caused him to hiss in frustration, and he twined his hands around Alex's neck to guide him closer, attempting to deepen the contact.

Alex complied, increasing the pressure and sucking Wil's lower lip into his mouth. He laved it thoroughly, then proceeded to thrust his tongue into the blonde's mouth.

Opening himself eagerly, Wil brought his own tongue into play. The two mobile digits danced over each other, tasting, licking, probing every recess of their joined mouths. Wil wiggled around, turning and straddling Alex's lap, never losing contact with the burning pressure of his lips. His hands gripped the brunette's shoulders, fistng into the fabric covering them. A loud groan
escaped him when he felt Alex's hands slide down to cover his ass, kneading firmly.

The sound broke through Alex's haze, and his eyes snapped open. With deep regret, he released the mounds of flesh that he'd just noticed were cupped in his hands. Cradling Wil's head instead, he pulled the vampire away, whimpering as lips clung to his briefly, and a tongue made a last, desperate attempt to engage his once more. Panting harshly, he managed to gasp out, "Wait, wait, slow! We said slow!"

"Fuck slow," Wil snarled, jerking his head out of its confines and darting back in for another searing kiss.

An all-too-brief kiss it turned out, as Alex twisted his own head away. "Wil, we decided--"

"To hell with what we decided!" Wil tried again, growling when Alex continued to elude his attempts to resume their previous activity.

"Do you really mean that?" came the soft query.

"Yes!" Wil pouted, then sighed, ceasing his efforts. He relaxed, pressing his forehead against Alex's. "No," he murmured, "but it feels so bloody good!"

"Yeah, tell me about it," Alex muttered ruefully.
They continued to cling to each other for a while, until Alex's breath eventually evened out. Finally, the brunette gave a weak laugh. Rubbing his hands down Wil's back, he said, "C'mon, why don't we watch some more tv? He nodded toward the show that had been playing unnoticed all the while.

Reluctantly, Wil loosened his grip on Alex's shirt, making as if to shift over to the other end of the couch.

"Hey! Who told you to go anywhere?" Smiling, Alex settled Wil back against his chest, arms draped lightly around his waist.

Wil grinned, managing to sneak in one last, soft kiss before turning to watch the television. "You know," he offered, relishing the feel of warm arms wrapped around him, "I'd say we pretty much established one thing today."

"Really? What's that?"

With a smirk, Wil shifted against the hardness digging into the small of his back. "You gotta admit, pet...we are definitely gay!"

~*~*~*~*~
"You sure 'bout this, luv?" Wil frowned worriedly as Alex pawed through his closet, discarding item after item in an untidy heap on the floor.

"Yeah, I've gotta do this." The response was muffled, only becoming clearer when Alex withdrew his head. As he continued to pick through his clothes, he went on. "I mean, I lived there. Probably for a while. Maybe even with my family. I have to find out what I can about then. And why the hell don't I have any decent clothes!?" He tore at his hair, glaring at the gaudy pile of shirts and pants he'd flung out behind him.

Wil snickered quietly as he too examined the variety of dubious styles and colors displayed. "I get the feeling you didn't have a whole lot of fashion sense, mate."

Alex glared over at him, then smirked. "Yeah, well, since you don't have any clothes, guess what you're gonna end up wearing?" He held up a fluorescent orange shirt, waving it meaningfully.

Wil blinked, wincing, then swore softly. Grimacing, he shoved in next to Alex, digging around in what was beginning to seem a futile search for something decent to wear. Eventually, though, they both managed to find
some plain-colored pants, and a couple of shirts that weren't quite so likely to blind anyone.

A few more minutes were spent back out in the living room, with Wil lounging on the couch and Alex nervously checking out the window. When it was dark enough, he stepped back, taking a deep breath and wiping suddenly damp hands on the front of his pants. "Sun's down now."

"Guess we should get going, then." Wil stood, map in hand, and walked over to Alex. "We don't have to do this, y'know."

Alex slipped an arm around Wil's waist, burying his face in the curve of the blonde's neck. "I know. But...I mean, I should at least try. Y-you don't have to come with me, though. If you don't want to."

Wil snorted, hugging Alex close. "Like I'm gonna let you go off by your lonesome. Who knows what kind of trouble you'd get into without me watchin' your back?" He stroked a hand through dark, silky hair, rumbling deep in his throat.

Smiling, Alex relaxed against the trim body. You're purring."

"Hm?" came the distracted response as Wil inhaled deeply, relishing the scent of the human in his arms.
Alex placed a hand on Wil's vibrating chest. "You're purring. I like it." He pressed closer in. "My big kitty cat."

Wil mock-glared at the top of Alex's head. "Kitty cat?" he asked with a curl of his lip.

"Mmm. Big kitty cat. Wild cat? A lion...or panther maybe." He kissed the soft, cool skin of Wil's neck, suppressing a chuckle as the purring got even louder. Then he heaved a sigh. "We should go."

They parted slowly, grinning shyly at each other. Hands clasped together, they left the apartment, locking it behind them.

---

**Part Ten**

Alex gulped as he looked up at the dark house. "You think anyone's home?"

Wil cocked his head, listening. "Yeah, I can hear two people inside." He glanced at Alex, who was now staring at him in surprise. "What?"
"You can hear them?"

"Um, yeah." Wil shrugged bashfully, scuffling his feet.

Alex grinned. "Cool." The grin slipped as he once more turned back to the house.

"We can still leave."

"No. I'm not backing out now." He shuddered briefly. "It's just -- this place makes me feel really uncomfortable."

"Want me to go knock? I can check things out, you can stay off to the side and watch."

Alex wavered, then nodded gratefully. "Thanks," he whispered, giving Wil's hand a last squeeze before letting it go and walking over to the corner of the house.

Wil straightened, marching up the steps and rapping loudly on the door. He waited, pasting on a smile when the door creaked open.

"Yeah?" A frizzy haired, exhausted looking woman peered out at him.

"Hi, I'm a friend of Alexander's, and I--"

"He don't live here no more."

"Um, yeah, I know, I was just--"
"Who's at the door, woman!?" The shout echoed through the house, then the woman was shoved aside, a scruffy man taking her place. "What do you want?"

Wil forced himself not to cringe under the derisive glare. "Yeah, I'm a friend of Alexander's, I was wondering--"

"Look, how many times I gotta go through this?" He took a menacing step forward, poking a finger into Wil's chest. "That useless bastard doesn't live here! And good riddance. He was the most worthless excuse for a child it was my misfortune to produce. So stop fucking annoying us about him!"

The door slammed shut, leaving Wil standing in shock. He looked over at Alex, biting his lip when he saw how the brunette was hugging himself, tears shining in his eyes. Wil growled, then raised a fist and banged on the door again.

"What!?" came the snarl when it was wrenched open again.

"Forgot somethin', mate." Wil drew his fist back, then let fly, clipping the man solidly under the chin and sending him crashing back to land unconscious on the floor inside the house. Wil glared at the still form, then wheeled around and hurried over to Alex. He pulled the human
close, gently stroking him until his agitated quivering stopped.

"He...he...they..." Alex stared at the still-open door, eyes wide with betrayal.

"Forget 'em, pet. Again. They ain't worth it." He pressed several kisses to Alex's face, licking at the wetness seeping from the dark eyes.

Alex clung to Wil, breath still hiccuping softly. Finally, he calmed, sighing when Wil pulled away slightly.

Wil brushed a hand down Alex's cheek. "C'mon, luv. Let's go home.

Alex stepped inside the apartment, immediately feeling a profound sense of relief. They stopped in the middle of the living room, staring through the open doorway to the bedroom at the hideously colored pile of clothing.

Wil cleared his throat. "Think we could do a spot of shopping?"

Alex wrinkled his nose. "Definitely. And then maybe a ritual burning afterwards." With a shudder, he crept over to the bedroom, gingerly closing the door. "What about money, though? I don't remember seeing much in either of our wallets." He tried not to lick his lips when Wil got
that cute little wrinkle between his eyebrows as he thought. *Oooh, wanna nibble that. lick, and suck, and...* He cut that off, not wanting to embarrass himself, and assumed an expression of nonchalance.

"You know, I think..." Wil walked over to the table where the phone was located, sifting through the drawer. "Yes!" He turned, flourishing what was obviously a checkbook. He tossed it to Alex, who caught it easily.

"Hey, cool. Hope I kept it balanced." He flipped it open, checking the balance. "Woah." He sat abruptly in a chair, gaping.

Wil leaned over his shoulder to get a better look. "Wow, you're rich!"

"Well, not rich, but certainly not bad off. A few thousand dollars might not last long, but we'll be ok for a little while. And we can afford a minor shopping spree, which is definitely of the good."

"W-we? But...it's your money," Wil stated quietly.

Alex frowned, turning and pulling Wil over the back of the chair so the vampire toppled into his lap. "Ours. We're in this as a team, got it? We share."
Wil laid his head on Alex's chest, listening to the steady 'thump, thump' of his heartbeat. "Got it." Then he lifted his eyes, opening them wide and adding a pout. "Shopping? Clothes?"

"Yeah, yeah. Up." They clambered to their feet and back out into the hallway, where they paused. "Um, where to?"

Wil shrugged helplessly. "I dunno. Ask Mellie."

Alex hesitated, then smiled in agreement. They moved down to her apartment, and Alex knocked lightly. The door opened, and cheerful eyes twinkled up at them. "Well, hello boys! Fancy you stopping by for a visit. Did you get a chance to eat some of that pie I dropped off yesterday?"

Alex nodded vigorously. "We wondered where it came from -- didn't think I'd made it! It was delicious."

"Oh, good. So...what can I do for you lovelies?"

Wil spoke up. "We need to do a bit of shopping, pick out some new clothes and whatnot. Any suggestions where would be good?"
Mellie tapped a finger against her chin. "Now that you mention it, I need a few things myself, and there's one of those 24-hour Wal-Marts not too far away. If you give me a couple of minutes to get myself together, I can give you a ride over."

"Sure, if it's not too much trouble or anything."

"Pish." Mellie waved her hand. "You boys just hold on, I'll be back in a jiff."

The door closed again, and Wil and Alex leaned back against the wall to wait.

Part Eleven

Mellie shooed the boys down the stairs, following sedately behind. Out in the parking garage, she led them toward a sporty looking car, unlocking the doors. "Well?"

Alex and Wil stared at the vehicle in semi-shock. It had been pretty much assumed that the middle-aged, practical lady would be driving something, well, practical.
They had not expected...this. It was...shiny. And red. And sporty enough to make any girl...or guy...positively swoon.

Chuckling softly, Mellie winked. "Not what you expected from little ol' me, hmm? Well, a girl's got to have a hobby. Come on, get in already."

Alex grinned, running a hand along the sleek lines of the car. He glanced over at Wil. "You want the front?"

Wil shook his head. "Back seat."

Frowning, Alex leaned over to peer in the back. "Not much room."

"I know." Wil looked Alex up and down, then licked his lips. "There's somethin' to be said for close quarters."

Alex stared at him wide-eyed, then blushed. Clearing his throat, he shrugged at Mellie, then scrambled into the back seat. Wil followed, squeezing in beside him.

Mellie just rolled her eyes and got in the driver's seat. She fastened her seat belt and started the engine, adjusting her rearview mirror so she could see the two behind her. "Now, don't you boys do anything that will ruin my interior, hear?" Then, flooring the gas pedal, she squealed out of the garage.
Wil was thoroughly enjoying Mellie's driving, especially when a sharp turn pressed him up against Alex. The other man didn't seem quite so happy, though. In fact, he looked a bit...green. *Uh-oh. Think this calls for a distraction.* Wil shifted even closer, turning Alex's face to him. "You ok?"

Alex swallowed, wincing as the car sped by a pedestrian, only inches away. "Um...yeah." His eyes locked onto pale blue ones that glittered in the scant light. He could feel a hand snaking down his back, pulling him sideways.

Wil tugged Alex closer, then nuzzled his heck, licking softly. With his lips, he could feel the human's pulse jump, and started sucking.

Alex let his head drop back against the seat, baring his neck for further exploration. The blonde took him up on the offer, and laid a path of damp kisses along the exposed flesh. After what seemed an eternity, Alex felt the barest whisper of touch against his lips, and opened his mouth eagerly. A slick tongue darted inside, and he reached up, hands locking into silky hair as he dragged the vampire into his lap.

The two continued to kiss and touch frantically, and amazingly enough, managed to keep their hands above
waist level. Of course, when Wil wiggled just so in Alex's lap...

A loud coughing finally broke through their haze, and they noticed vaguely that the car was no longer moving. Wil twisted around, coming face-to-face with an amused Mellie.

"Glad you had fun on the drive over. Hate to break it short, but we should get inside and start shopping. It may take awhile."

"Oh," Wil whispered, then looked back at Alex. He gave the flushed man a quick peck on the lips, pried his hands off warm skin, and crawled out of the back seat through the now-open door.

Alex frowned, quickly following after. He hesitated, then reached for Wil's hand as they all began walking toward the entrance.

Once inside, Mellie grabbed a cart. "I'm going to head over to the pharmacy section, then get some groceries. You boys get a cart a head for the men's clothing, I'll meet you there in a little bit." With that, she walked off briskly.

Alex let go of Wil's hand so he could get a shopping cart. The two walked slowly, staring around the store. Wil
pointed to the left. "Looks like clothes are over there, pet."

Alex nodded and pushed the cart down the aisle. They looked around at the assortment of clothes, deciding where to start. "Shoes and socks?" Alex asked.

Wil agreed, and dropped a few packs of plain white socks into the cart. In the shoe section, they each picked out a pair of serviceable sneakers, and Wil even managed to talk Alex into getting himself some black boots that were similar to his own. Then it was over to the underwear section, where they halted.

"I've got enough boxers of my own, but you look like you might be smaller, and mine probably aren't that comfortable. You should probably get some."

Wil shrugged agreeably. "Don't know what size I need, though."

"Oh." Alex thought a moment, then asked, "Well, what size were the ones you were wearing when we first changed last night?"

Wil looked away, embarrassed. "Wzntwry" he mumbled unintelligibly.

"Um, 'scuse me?"
Scuffling his feet, Wil repeated himself in a barely audible whisper. "I wasn't wearing any."

Alex felt his brain blank as the image of Wil walking around commando while wearing skin-tight jeans flashed in front of him. Taking a deep breath, he tried to calm himself, scolding his unruly imagination. *Although, if I'd known then, I'd have tried for a better look.* Giving himself a mental slap, he managed a nonchalant grin. "No biggie. You probably wear almost the same size as me." He scanned the rack of boxers, choosing a pair and handing them to Wil. "Here, try these."

Wil took them and headed for the dressing rooms. A few minutes later, he emerged, handing them back to Alex with a nod.

"Good. Now, pick out a few more pairs, and we can get down to the real shopping." He helped Wil sort through the different styles, hissing softly when his fingers slid over something soft and smooth. Pulling them out, he saw that he'd come upon the selection of silk boxers. The ones he was currently holding were a deep red color, and happened to be Wil's size. Grinning, he pawed through the rest, finding a jet-black pair, also in Wil's size, and a couple of deep blue and a black pair in his size. Spoils in hand, he turned and dumped them into the cart.
"Oooh, nice!"

Alex jerked his head up to see Mellie smiling wickedly as she inspected the contents of their cart. He blushed.

"Oh, don't be bashful, now. Where'd Wil get himself to?" She glanced around, beaming when she spotted the blonde. She waved the vampire over, taking the items in his hands and tossing them into their cart. "Come on, let's get to the good stuff!" She hustled them over to the stacks of jeans, eyeing them both critically before sniffing in satisfaction. In seconds, she'd extracted two pairs of jeans, both a faded black, and thrust them at the bemused men. "Shoo! Go try them on already!"

They obediently took the jeans and headed into separate dressing rooms, leaving Mellie to guard the carts.

Mellie folded her arms, waiting impatiently. After what she deemed an adequate amount of time, she called out, "Aren't you two ready yet?" She grinned at the muffled responses of 'Bloody hell!' and 'They're too small!' and responded forcefully, "Nonsense. Now get out here and let me see!"

Slowly, they stepped out of their respective rooms, halting as they caught sight of one another.

"Turn."
Numbly, they complied, then resumed gaping at each other's snugly clad forms, not even noticing Mellie's appreciative whistle. As one, they said, "You're getting those."

Mellie clapped her hands delightedly. "Of course you are. I am a mother, I'm an expert at picking out clothes. You two stay here, I'll get some more."

And so it went. Alex and Wil were shuffled in and out of the changing rooms, trying on everything that Mellie brought them. And she was good. She picked out styles and colors that looked stunning on them, occasionally throwing in something that fit so perfectly, they almost drooled at the sight of silk-clad chests, or curved butts encased in denim.

Hours later, they finally called a halt, changing back to their original clothes and sitting, exhausted, on the floor. Neither could believe the stack of clothes spilling from their cart, and groaned at the thought of lugging it all back up to their apartment.

Mellie chuckled, knowing what they were thinking. "Oh, come one! You two are young and strong...it should be a breeze!" She pulled them, groaning, to their feet.
Checkout took a while, and Alex was grateful that they'd managed not to wipe out his bank account. There was a sizeable dent in it, though. Still, when he thought of his closet with its soon-to-be-displaced wardrobe, he figured it was worth it.

Out in the parking lot, Wil stared dubiously at the small vehicle.

Mellie nudged him. "Have faith, dearie." Opening the trunk, she managed to arrange most of their purchases in the seemingly tiny space. The rest were loaded into the front passenger seat. Alex and Wil climbed into the back seat once again, where they simply lay tiredly in each other's arms, dozing lightly.

Smiling indulgently, Mellie drove carefully home, actually obeying all the traffic laws. Back at the apartment complex, she turned toward the back, melting at the almost innocent picture the two men made. Light and dark, snuggled close together. Reluctantly, she reached back to shake them awake.

She loaded them down with their many bags, then herded them upstairs. Snagging Alex's key from his pocket, she unlocked their apartment, escorting them inside. She held back a giggle when the bags cascaded to the floor, and the two men blinked sleepily. Mellie
managed to keep them from collapsing as well, guiding them into their bedroom and seating them on the bed.

Feeling very much like a mother all over again, she tugged off their shoes and socks, then tucked them in. With a kiss to their foreheads, she turned off the light and backed out of the room. A last glance showed them back in each other's embrace, sleeping deeply.

Still grinning widely, Mellie carefully skirted the mess in the living room and let herself out.

**Part Twelve**

Alex collapsed on the bed in relief. "Done. Finally." He stretched tired muscles, glad to have finished the monumental task of reorganizing the closet. There were now two garbage bags crammed full of rejected items, and his and Wil's new wardrobe was noticeably less...vivid.
Wil sat next to him, bouncing slightly. "Wow. Looks good." He scooted closer, grinning when Alex wrapped an arm around his waist and pulled him down.

Alex nipped an earlobe. "Yeah, it does, doesn't it?" His tongue swirled out, flicking over cool skin until it brushed against Wil's lips. He kissed the vampire softly, mouths barely touching as tongues ghosted over each other.

They cuddled for a while, until Alex noticed the time. Eyes wide, he sprang up from the bed, pulling Wil with him. "It's 8:15! C'mon, we have to get ready!"

Wil groaned as Alex immediately began to ransack their closet, destroying the neat arrangements of clothes. With a roll of his eyes, he moved behind Alex, kissing the nape of his neck. When the man paused and looked back at him, he tilted his head toward the door. "I'm gonna go shower, get cleaned up."

Alex nodded and went back to his task of choosing the perfect outfit for the party. He had just decided on a pair of pants that outlined his ass perfectly and a dark button-down shirt when he heard a soft noise. Turning, he gulped at the slightly damp, towel-clad man in front of him. He watched a bead of water slide down a smooth chest, catching briefly on an erect nipple. He gaped as the vampire moved to the dresser.
"Shower's free, luv."

Alex blinked. "Huh?" He shook his head to clear it, flushing darkly as he backed away. "Um, yeah." Turning, he fled to the bathroom.

Wil watched him go, smiling. His nose twitched as he once more detected the scent he'd come to associate with Alex being aroused. Humming happily, he made short work of picking out his own outfit. Towel discarded by the door, he was about to step into his boxers when the apartment was fairly flooded by the same scent as before.

Standing still, he listened closely, just barely hearing the sounds of flesh sliding over flesh through the pattering of the shower. He sunk shakily down on the bed as he realized that, at this very moment, Alex was touching himself. Remembering how he had awakened just a few hours before, cradled by the heat of Alex's body, he felt himself harden considerably.

Concentrating on the faint sounds from the bathroom, he closed a hand over his erection, stroking slowly. Closing his eyes, he imagined Alex in the shower, water cascading over his muscled body as he touched himself, one hand around his cock and the other playing over his chest, toying with hardened nipples. Wil stroked in time
to the rhythm he could tell Alex was using, moaning when he heard Alex whimper softly.

Lying back on the mattress, he spread his legs wider, matching his movements to what he pictured Alex doing. Breathy little grunts and moans escaped him as his fingers danced over the taut flesh of his cock, spreading the leaking fluid over it as he increased the speed of his stroking.

He pressed against the dripping head, rubbing it, then reached lower to capture his balls and roll them between slender fingers. He heard Alex's breath catch in a gasp, then a low moan of his name, could smell the human's seed sharp in the air.

Thrusting his hips up sharply, Wil shuddered, cum spurting out to coat his belly. Then he lay exhausted, panting for breath he didn't need. Lifting his hand, he smeared it over the mess on his stomach, bringing it to his face. Not even thinking about his actions, he sucked in each digit, cleaning the sticky fluid off his skin. He dimly heard the shower shut off, but it didn't really register. Busy cleaning himself off, he didn't become aware of another presence until a sharp gasp captured his attention.
Startled, the vampire looked up, meeting brown eyes huge with astonishment. He jerked upright, staring mortified at Alex.

Alex just gaped at the naked form sprawled on the bed. Granted, he'd just been jerking off to a mental image of that very thing, but to be met with the reality... And it wasn't too difficult to figure out what Wil had been doing, either, not from the smell in the room. Or the lingering traces of evidence on the blonde's hand and stomach and softened co--. Alex flushed deeply, reluctantly averting his eyes. "Um, s-sorry. I-I just--" He fell silent.

Wil was at a loss for words. He couldn't believe he'd just been caught like this by his boyfr-- Hey, wait a minute. Why is this a bad thing? Wil grinned, relaxing into a lewd display. He licked his lips, eyes lidded, and whispered huskily, "I heard you tossin' off in the shower, pet. Heard you say my name."

Gulping, Alex found his gaze drawn back to Wil, and his breath caught at how the blonde had assumed an inviting pose. "Wiil..." he groaned, taking a step forward before halting.

Wil shifted, drawing attention to his cock, which wasn't nearly as soft as it had been. "I thought about you when I
came, Alex. About touching you, tasting you." He dropped his eyes to stare at the tenting of Alex's towel.

By this time, Alex figured he had acquired a permanent red hue. Not to mention the perpetual hard-on. He closed his eyes, purposefully turning away from Wil once again. "Wil, w-we agreed..." He heard a loud sigh from the bed, then a rustling as the vampire got up and pulled on a pair of boxers. A soft touch on his back made him twist his head around.

Wil shuffled his feet, repentant look in his face as he timidly nibbled his lower lip. "I know," he whispered, "but you just looked so...and I only wanted to tease you a bit." He shrugged diffidently.

Alex felt like a complete heel for putting that anguished look on Wil's face, so he pulled the other man into a hug. A hug that ended rather quickly as bare chests met and hard cocks brushed against each other, sending a flash through each man that had them jumping away from each other in an attempt to control the surge of desire that bolted through them. Clearing his throat, Alex waved toward the clothes he'd picked out earlier. "I'm, uh, just gonna...get dressed."

Wil nodded, watching him intently, making no move to turn away. Alex blinked, then hesitantly let his towel
drop so he could pull on his own boxers. When he straightened, Wil was grinning cockily at him, eyes twinkling with a mixture of humor and desire. He smiled back somewhat bashfully, then finished dressing.

Wil too dressed, pulling on his tight jeans and sleeveless white t-shirt, adding an unbuttoned short-sleeve shirt over that. Done, he whistled admiringly at Alex, making noises of approval as he eyed the human, who obligingly struck a pose to show off his outfit. Laughing, they managed to pull on their shoes and make it out of the apartment without totally breaking down.

Wil and Alex practically clung to each other, amazed by the variety of species evident at the party, and not wanting to get separated from each other. That plan was ruined, though, when Mellie appeared with a pale-haired woman in tow.

"There you are! Boys, I'd like you to meet Jenna. Jenna, Alex and Wil." She nudged the woman forward. "Now, Wil needs you to explain a few vampire things to him, and I'm going to introduce Alex around." Matching actions with words, she took hold of Alex and led him away, ignoring his pleading looks back at Wil.

"But-but-but--"
"Nonsense, he'll be fine. Now don't dawdle, there's a lot of folks who want to meet you!"

As Mellie steered him past the buffet table, Alex managed to grab a few of the more edible looking snacks. He stuffed one in his mouth just as his self-appointed guide turned to him.

Mellie took one look at what he was eating, and a strange expression crossed her face. "Um, do you know what that is?"

Alex paused, hastily swallowing the delicious treat. "Do I want to?"

"Probably not."

"Well then, why don't we just let me keep on believing it was something very normal and innocent. It will be easier on everyone that way." Determinedly not thinking about what he might be consuming, he finished off the other bits of food he'd grabbed.

"Hmm." Mellie's mouth twitched into an almost-smile as she watched him polish off every crumb. She rolled her eyes, then scanned the nearby crowd, waving madly when she spotted a tall, sophisticated looking woman. "Oh, it's Sophia! Come on, Alex!"
Alex stared up at the woman, who had to be at least seven feet tall. "Um, hi."

Sophia smiled, making her entire face light up. "You must be Alex. My, my. You are a pretty one." She brushed a slim finger over his jaw. "I'm Sophia."

"H-hello, Sophia." Alex stuttered.

Laying an arm across his shoulders, Sophia glanced at Mellie. "I'm going to steal him away from you for a moment, darling. Don't worry, I won't hurt him!"

"I'll be back to collect him in a bit, then." Mellie shooed them off together, then went back to her mingling.

Leading Alex off into a semi-private corner, Sophia studied him intently. "So, Alex. Tell me. Are you working?"

Alex blinked. "Well, no, not at the moment."

"Ah. See, I have a few openings, and trust me, you'd be an absolutely divine addition. You could make a fortune."

"Wow. Cool. What...exactly would I be doing, though."

Sophia tapped her chin thoughtfully. "Well, starting off, you wouldn't get any of the more eclectic customers, not until you felt you were ready. Your contract would be for
three months, renewable if you like every three months after. And you'd only have to accept customers you feel comfortable with. You'd keep 60% of what you earn, and any extras are automatically yours."

Alex considered this explanation. "Um, sorry if I got this wrong, but...it sounds like you're offering to...to be my pimp."

"Well, yes. Essentially. Although I find that such a vulgar term. Everyone who works for me does so completely voluntarily, and only stays as long as he or she wants. I don't force them to work for me, merely give them the opportunity. Like I'm doing now."

"Oh. Well, you know, I'm really flattered and all, but--" He searched the room, then pointed with relief. "See that blonde vampire talking with Jenna? He's my b-boyfriend, and we're kinda...um, exclusive."

"Ah. Pity. He's quite the lovely one himself. Are you certain? You could work together, you'd have all the customers fighting for a moment of your time."

"I...don't think so. Um, thanks for the offer, though."

Sophia sighed. "Well, it was too much to hope for, I suppose. I must say, my customers did get a bit spoiled with that one boy who worked for me. Danny was a
werewolf, you know, small but very energetic. Everyone was sad to see him go. He was a favorite among the customers, and all the residents here loved him." She smiled, lifting a hand to show Alex the shimmering blue polish on her nails. "He recommended this color to me, you know. Said it would suit me much better than it did him." Another sad sigh. "We all miss him terribly."

"I'm sorry. He sounds like a great guy."

Mellie reappeared beside him. "So, you two have a nice chat?"

Alex blushed, but Sophia simply giggled and answered, "I'm afraid I've been turned down, darling. Such a loss."

With a superior sniff, Mellie responded, "Well, I told you that you wouldn't be able to pry Alex and Wil away from each other long enough to entertain anyone else." Then she smiled warmly. "They're in looooove," she whispered loudly, much to Alex's further embarrassment. Laughing, Mellie dragged him away again, and he waved at the disappearing Sophia. "Come, come, lot's more to meet."

**Part Thirteen**

Wil watched helplessly as Alex was dragged away by their insistent neighbor. Controlling the urge to sprint after them and drag him back, he shifted his gaze to the
lovely woman beside him. He gave her a half-grin. "Um, hey."

Jenna flicked a glance up at him through long, pale lashes. "Hi," she replied softly, then went back to an intense study of her feet.

Wil nodded, then started studying the room. Unsurprisingly, his eyes seemed drawn toward Alex, and he watched as the human was led over to a tall woman and engaged in a conversation that seemed to leave him rather disconcerted.

"That's Sophia," came a shy whisper, and he once more turned to look at Jenna.

"Yeah? Who's she? Not tryin' to hit on my Alex, is she?"

Smiling briefly, Jenna shook her head. "No. Probably trying to recruit him, though."

"Recruit?"

Brushing her hair behind her ears, Jenna finally looked at him straight on. Her brilliant, violet eyes startled Wil momentarily, but he quickly recovered. "Uh-huh. She's always on the lookout for new additions. She's, um, she's...a proprietor."
Wil blinked. "Proprietor? Y'mean a pimp?" He bristled, all set to go snatch his lover from the woman's evil clutches.

Jenna giggled, eyes sparkling merrily. "Not really. She just, um, arranges...dates. Between her clients and willing employees."

"Sounds like a mighty fancy way of saying' she's procuring johns for her herd of hustlers."

"Mmm, not really. I mean, everyone who works for her is willing, they pretty much call the shots on the 'dates', and no one has ever gotten hurt...except for once when Sophia went after a client who marked up one of her boys. People were finding pieces of that guy around town for weeks. Sophia is very protective."

"Huh." Wil brightened when he saw Alex point his way while shaking his head at the woman. He held still as she assessed him, giving her a cocky grin.

Again Jenna giggled as she watched the by-play. "Oh boy, now she's probably gonna try to get you both as a two-for-one deal."

"Yeah, well, she's gonna be out of luck, then," he growled, relieved when Mellie finally returned to lead Alex off in another direction. "So," he said, changing the
subject. "Mellie said you could tell me a few things. Y'know, about bein' a vampire an' all."

"I guess. Um, big stuff. Sun is bad, stay away from pointy bits of wood, losing your head will dust you. Fire is a big no-no too."

"Right. Pretty much got those figured out on my own." Wil grimaced as he was jostled by a passer-by. "C'mon, let's move out of the way." He led Jenna off to a less occupied area, snagging a couple of glasses of blood that were carried by on a tray. He handed one to the other vampire.

"Thanks." Jenna sipped gratefully, then asked, "So, what did you need to know about, then?"

Wil thought about it. "Well, what about this 'Sire' thing? What's that?"

"Ok. See, once a vampire is strong enough, he can sire either minions or childer. Minions are generally pretty dumb, they do the dirty work. Childer start out as fledglings, and are smarter and stronger, generally because they get a bigger dose of the sire's blood during the turning process. Plus, the vampire who sires them tends to sort of take the fledglings under his wing, so to
speak, but minions are pretty much left to fend for themselves."

Wil shrugged. "Sounds simple enough. What's all this about some Slayer girl, though?"

Jenna gasped. Her glass slipped through trembling fingers to shatter against the floor. Sorrow-filled eyes gazed blankly at Wil, and he stepped closer, concerned.

"Hey, you all right?"

Jenna backed away a step, shaking her head. Her chest rose and fell quickly as she took sharp breaths of air. Frowning, Wil hustled her away from the large gathering, searching until he found a deserted room. He pushed her down into a chair, patting her cheeks gently.

Blinking, Jenna slowly came back to awareness, looking around in confusion.

"What happened?" Wil asked, taking a seat beside her.

"I was..." Jenna rubbed at her nose, sniffling. "I was...remembering."

"Remembering what?"
Jenna didn't respond for long moments, then she visibly braced herself and began to speak. "Three years ago, I died. And then I woke up again."

*Jenna hung precariously from the tree branch, balancing carefully so she could reach out and tap gently on the window. "Leesha!" she hissed loudly.*

A moment later, the window slid open, and a dark-haired girl poked her head out. "Jenna!" she whispered loudly. "What are you doing here?"

Jenna grinned. "Come on! Today was my last day of school, and I want to party! I'm free at last!"

"Well, you might be free, but I still have classes. For another week. Mom'll kill me if she finds out I snuck out!"

"Well, don't tell her, silly!"

"Jenna!"

Jenna pouted. "Alicia," she whined, "Pleeeeease?" She attempted her best puppy dog look, which must have worked because Alicia disappeared from the window, returning after a minute and swinging herself out over the ledge.
"Back up so I can get out!" she admonished softly, and Jenna complied.

Quietly, the girls made their way to the base of the tree. Once on the ground, Jenna smiled happily, gently taking Alicia's hand in her own. "Thanks," she said gratefully. "The night just wouldn't be complete without you." Leaning in, she laid her lips over the other girl's, kissing her softly.

~*~*~*~*~

Hours later, they lay in a secluded glade, holding each other close as they recovered their breath. Jenna trailed her hand along damp, flushed skin that seemed to glow in the moonlight. "You're so beautiful, Leesha."

Alicia arched under the feathery touch. "Mmmm," she purred. "So are you. So bright, like sunlight."

"And you're so dark, night to my day."

"And we'll always be together?"

"Forever and ever."

There was silence as they held each other, basking in the afterglow of their lovemaking. Finally, Alicia spoke again.
"We should get dressed."

"Don't wanna." Jenna licked a bare shoulder, then kissed it.

Moaning, Alicia moved away. "If we start again, I'll never get home. And I do have class in the morning."

"You could skip."

"Jenn!"

Jenna sighed heavily, then sat up and gathered their clothes, sorting through and pulling out her own. She watched as Alicia dressed. "I can't wait until you graduate next year. Then we can go away from here, move in together. Not have to hide any more. From your parents or mine."

Alicia finished dressing, smiling at Jenna. "One more year. We can do it."

"Yeah," Jenna breathed, pulling her in for another kiss. "As long as we have each other."

Alicia snuck in a quick grope before smacking Jenna's still-bare ass. "Get dressed, you!"

Jenna gave Alicia a final kiss, then watched as her lover ascended the tree, sneaking back into her bedroom. With
a wave, she turned and left. Walking briskly, she made her way down the dimly lit street to her house, only a half-mile away. She had almost reached it when a strong hand latched onto her arm, yanking her off the sidewalk and into a dark alley.

She opened her mouth to scream, but another hand clamped down over it, blocking her cries. Staring in horror at the deformed face in front of her, she flinched back as the hand released her arm and reached up to stroke her throat. Jenna struggled, but somehow the hands held her pinned to the wall behind her.

"So pretty," crooned the voice, then a tongue appeared to lick over inhumanly sharp teeth. "It would be such a shame to kill you. Such a lovely little treat. I could keep you forever."

A muffled shriek sounded as thin lips grazed her neck, then teeth pierced her skin. Jenna's struggles became weaker and weaker as her vision dulled. Through a fog, she felt something pressed to her mouth, a salty taste flooding into her. Reflexively, she swallowed.

"That's it," coaxed the voice. "Drink deep and come back to me, pretty. Then I can have you for eternity."

Jenna shuddered as the dark encompassed her.
Alicia woke, blinking sleepily. The pounding on her door continued and, groaning, she stumbled out of bed and wrenched the door open. "Huh?" she asked incoherently as she rubbed at her eyes, squinting at her mother. "Wazzt?"

She came quickly awake at the look on her mother's face, a mixture of concern, anxiety and sadness. "What? What's wrong?"

"It's...your friend Jenna. She's..."

Alicia felt cold finger of dread wrap around her heart. "What. She's what?" she demanded.

"I'm so sorry, dear. She was killed last night. Her body was found early this morning, she's de--"

"No!" Alicia slapped her hands over her ears. "No! It's not true! You're lying!" Backing into her room, she slammed the door shut before collapsing onto her bed. "No," she whimpered, curling into a tight ball and rocking herself. "No. You promised, Jenna. You said forever. You promised!"
Crying brokenly, she huddled on her bed, tears drenching her pillow.

~*~*~*~*~

It had been a lovely funeral. Alicia couldn't help but keep thinking that over and over as she sat numbly by her lover's grave.

She'd gone through the day in a trance, ignoring all the well-meaning words of comfort directed her way. No one knew. Know one knew what Jenna had really been to her. Unable to stand the platitudes any longer, she'd finally left, returning to her house and locking herself in her room. Eventually, her mother quit trying to cajole her out, leaving her to grieve alone. And at sunset, she exited her room through the window, making her way across town to the freshly dug grave that was her love's final resting-place.

Alicia brushed a hand over the words engraved on the headstone. Two years. They'd had barely two glorious years together before being so cruelly separated. Tears streamed down her cheeks, and she sobbed harshly.
Jenna woke, gasping. Dark, so dark. She tried to sit up, but couldn't. Trapped!

Frantic, she clawed at the lid to her cage. Fingers easily shredded through the satin covering, then ripped through the wood. Jagged chunks fell around her, and she paid no attention to the splinter that wormed their way under her nails. Finally, finally, the wood was out of her way. Fingers sunk into soft earth, and she dug her way up through the confining soil. Her gown caught on an edge of wood and, frustrated, she kicked it, breaking it off.

A hand burst through the ground, grasping convulsively at the night air. So close now. Jenna dragged herself up, emerging from the mound like a child being born. Spitting dirt from her mouth, she crouched on the small hill, panting. A low cry made her jerk her head up, and she met the astonished eyes of her lover.

Alicia had scrambled away as the grave had begun to tremble beneath her. She watched in disbelief as a pale hand shot forth from the ground, and a dirt-streaked woman crawled out. She gave a cry when she recognized Jenna, disbelief mingled with desperate hope surging
through her. "Jenna?" she gasped out, holding back a scream when her lover's beautiful violet eyes briefly flashed yellow.

Jenna shook herself, staring around in confusion. "I was...there was a man. In the alley. He..."

Squashing the momentary flash of fear that surfaced in her, Alicia darted forward and wrapped her arms around Jenna, pulling her in tightly and rocking. "Jenn. Oh my god, Jenn! You were...they said you were dead!" She pressed feverish kisses to the smudged face, laughing and crying breathlessly.

Jenna found herself caught up in the rhythm of her lover's heartbeat, the pulse of blood inside her veins like a siren call. She struggled to concentrate. "I don't...understand. What...what happened?"

"You're back! You promised you wouldn't leave, and you came back for me!"

"Not precisely," came the venomous, hissing voice behind them.

They whirled, Jenna flinching back from the man that some part of her recognized. "No..." she moaned.
"What? What is it? Who is he?" Alicia clutched Jenna to her, glaring at the intruder.

"Me? I am her master, her creator. I made her what she is. When I saw her last night, I knew she would be mine." He cackled at Alicia's look of outrage and denial. Then he turned his burning gaze upon Jenna. "Come to me, Childe. Come to your Sire and master."

"No," Jenna whispered shaking her head. "No, no, nononononono," she chanted, her voice growing louder with every repetition.

A look of pure fury crossed the man's face, and he stalked forward. He grabbed one of Jenna's arms, jerking her off the ground. "You will obey me, Childe!" he growled, belting her hard across the face.

Alicia's eyes narrowed at this violence toward her lover. Scanning the area, she covertly picked up one of the sharp hunks of wood that had been dragged out of the grave when Jenna had emerged. She crept after the man, who was even now dragging Jenna away. Leaping, she plunged the makeshift weapon into the man's back, and he spun about, glaring at the bloody piece of wood she'd retained.
"You little bitch," he snarled, casually flinging Jenna away from him. "I would have let you live, but now? Now you will pay for that." He jumped at her, tackling her to the ground.

Alicia struggled futilely as sharp teeth lowered themselves to her neck. Then the man pulled up with a jerk, twisting about to gaze in disbelief at his newly created childe.

Jenna stood, another chunk of wood clenched tight in her fist, glaring poisonously at him. "Don't. You. Touch her!" Again she struck, knocking him off the other girl. Simultaneously, both girls attacked him, plunging their weapons into his body over and over until, by chance, one strike managed to pierce his heart. He had one last second to stare in complete shock at his lovely Childe and her ferocious lover before he collapsed into dust.

The girls fell to the ground, clinging to each other once more.

"Wow. Pretty intense." Wil patted her hand in sympathy. "But you managed to dust him."

"It was luck. Pure and simple. We surprised him, caught him off guard."
"Still. Quite an accomplishment." He frowned at Jenna's still-trembling hands, leaving the room briefly and returning with another glass of blood.

Jenna sipped at it, slowly calming.

"So, what happened then?"

"Well, we managed to find someone who could explain just what the hell had happened to me. We were pretty shocked to find out that, yes, vampires were very real. So, I learned about what it meant to be one. I spent a while worrying that I might lose control and hurt Alicia, but that never happened. Like I said, childer, even the youngest fledglings, are stronger than minions, and don't have a burning need to kill indiscriminately."

"So you stayed together, then?"

Jenna nodded. "Yeah. Alicia refused to be afraid of what I was, she wouldn't leave me. But everyone we knew thought I was dead, and, well, I was. So I found myself someplace to stay during the day, and kept seeing her secretly, visiting her in the night when no one would know." She snorted wryly. "In other words, things were pretty much the same as before, except I no longer lived at home."

"How long did that last?"
"I managed to convince Alicia to finish school, even though she wanted to just run off with me right then. So that situation lasted for an entire year. After her graduation, we returned to our glade and made love again; and as we lay in the moonlight, she asked me to turn her."

~*~*~*~*~

"What!?" Jenna bolted upright.

Alicia watched her calmly, fingering the silver locket Jenna had given her for graduation. In it were two tiny pictures, one of each of them. "I said, I want you to turn me."

Scooting back, Jenna shook her head violently. "No. No. I can't. I won't."

Ignoring her protests, Alicia explained her reasoning. "Look, I'm human, you're a vampire. Ergo, I will eventually age and die, while you have the potential to live forever. So I want you to turn me, that way we'll never have to be alone. Like we promised each other. Together, forever."
"I...I..." Jenna swallowed, then stared her lover in the eye. "Leesha, are you sure? Absolutely positive?"

Alicia smiled. "Forever with you? No being all old and gray and wrinkly while you stay young and beautiful? Like I even have to think about that. So here's the plan; you turn me, we make mad passionate love in our glade one last time, and then we get the fuck out of this town." She tilted her head to the side, baring her neck.

Jenna kissed her soft skin. "I love you," she breathed before her fangs slipped gently into Alicia's flesh.

Alicia's eyes fluttered closed, and she raised her arms to embrace her lover. "Love you too, Jenn."

When she felt Alicia's pulse weaken, Jenna pulled back, biting open the vein in her wrist. She held it to her lover's mouth, relieved when the woman began to lap at the blood seeping from the wound. As they exchanged blood, both could feel themselves drawn closer together, forming a deep bond that they'd never dreamed could exist.

When it was finished, Jenna carefully dressed then lifted Alicia's still body, carrying her to the shelter she'd fashioned nearby. No sunlight penetrated this place, and
they would be safe during the long hours of the day until her Childe rose the next night.

~*~*~*~*~

The sun had finally set, and Jenna once more picked up the body of her lover, easing out of their shelter and back into the glade where she wanted Alicia to wake. She settled back, waiting.

An hour passed, then another. Then, finally, Alicia's body quivered, her eyes popped open, and she sat up, blinking. Her eyes lit on Jenna, and she smiled, lurching forward.

They kissed, melding themselves together. Then Alicia pulled back. "Jenn...inside me. So hungry, it's burning inside me. I need..."

Jenna lay back on the soft grass, grinning in understanding. "Come, love. Feed from me."

Laughing, Alicia pounced, kissing pale flesh before sinking her fangs in, feasting on her Sire's taste.

Jenna closed her eyes, moaning. She could feel herself being drawn into her lover, and her body tingled with
desire. She clasped her hands to Alicia's head, holding her in place.

Then, without warning, her hands were empty. She gasped, eyes opening to see a small blonde girl standing over her, smug grin on her face and sharpened stake held in her hand.

Horrified, Jenna looked down at her dust-covered chest. Her lover was gone, and all that remained was the sparkling locket which had been around her neck.

"Hey, don't worry, she's gone now," came the cheerful explanation. "She can't hurt you any more."

Jenna's fingers sifted through the dust to pluck up the locket. She raised shocked eyes again, shaking her head. As she stared, the young woman held a hand out to help her up, and she felt rage building in her chest. Her features shifted, and the girl jumped back, raising the stake again.

"Why?" Jenna questioned brokenly. "She...she never hurt you. Never hurt anyone."

The girl snorted. "She was a vamp. And so are you. And me...I'm the Slayer." She shrugged. "It's kind of in the job description for me to dust you."
Jenna blinked through the tears in her eyes. She sat frozen as the girl drew closer, almost welcoming the thought of that stake puncturing her chest and sending her to join her lover again.

"Buffy! You find it?"

The girl glanced behind her, and another girl, a redhead, crashed into the formerly serene glade, coming to a halt as she saw her friend standing over what was apparently a vampire.

"Willow, I'm kinda busy, you mind?" Buffy turned back to finish her job, looking around in confusion when she saw that the vampire had vanished.

Jenna ran. She ran hard, sobbing, pushing her way through the woods blindly as tree branches lashed at her. Perhaps if she ran far enough, fast enough, she would wake from this nightmare in which she was so terribly alone.

A root tripped her, and she went crashing to the ground. Rolling, she righted herself, bringing her clenched fist close to her face. She opened it, and Alicia's locket tumbled into her lap. In the palm of her hand lay the remnants of her lover's ashes.
With her other hand, she opened the locket, seeing the face of her beloved as it had been such a short time ago. Carefully, she poured the ashes from her shaking hand into the locket, then snapped it shut. Clutching it to her breast, she howled out her anguish into the uncaring night.

~*~*~*~*~

Jenna fingered the locket around her neck, openly weeping. She barely noticed Wil's whispered curses, or the arms that came around her shoulders to hug her close. She pressed her face into the offered chest, soaking it with her silent tears.

The door opened, and Alex stuck his head in, grinning. The grin slowly slid away as he saw Wil holding the other vampire in his arms. Something akin to jealousy flickered in him, until he noticed how Wil was shooting him a pleading glance as the woman in his arms shook with her sobs.

He knelt next to them, reaching out a comforting hand. "What is it? Is she ok?"
Wil hesitated, then gave Alex an abbreviated version of 
the tale Jenna had shared with him. Alex's eyes narrowed 
with anger, and he rubbed soothing circles on Jenna's 
back.

Between them, the two held her and rocked her, 
whispering gentle words in an effort to alleviate her 
obvious pain. Eventually, she pulled away from them, 
washing her swollen eyes.

Wil could almost feel the pain of loss that Jenna must 
have experienced. To have her childe and lover torn 
away from her like that... He snarled. "We should find 
the bitch an' kill her," he muttered.

Alex nodded. "Damn right."

Jenna shook her head frantically. "No! No, you have to 
stay away from her! She's the Slayer!" She gripped Wil's 
shirt convulsively. "She'll destroy everything you hold 
dear, everyone you love," she pleaded, flicking a glance 
at Alex. "She doesn't care who she hurts, she's a killer!"

Wil patted her hand awkwardly. "Shh, ok, ok. If you want 
us to stay away from her, we will. But if she comes after 
us on her own, she's fair game!"

Sighing with relief, Jenna released the blonde's shirt. 
"Thank you," she whispered.
They all sat in silence for a bit, then Jenna stood. Shaking herself resolutely, she held out her hands to the two men. "Come on, guys. The party's still going, and we should get back to it."

"You sure?" Alex asked. "You look like you should probably call it a night instead."

"No. I'm not going to let her ruin tonight for me." She pulled them up and strode from the room, determined to have some fun.

Part Fourteen

Alex yawned hugely as he and Wil stumbled back into their apartment. The party had lasted until the wee hours of the morning; in fact, sunrise wasn't too far off. They'd had a lot of fun after Jenna had forcibly dragged them back, insisting on partying it up. There had been dancing, with Alex glowering whenever Jenna whisked Wil away for a dance with her. The food was excellent,
even though Alex still didn't want to know what it was he was actually eating.

And the people...everyone seemed so friendly. Well, except for that one demon...a Fyarl was it? He'd hovered around Jenna protectively once they'd reappeared, snarling every so often. Jenna had seemed at ease with him, simply smiling at his antics. She'd confided to the two that the Fyarl, Arkten, had appointed himself to the position of bodyguard for her, and as she didn't really object, she'd managed to acquire an extremely protective companion to ward off any...unpleasantness.

Alex would have tried to make conversation with Arkten, but it seemed that the demon didn't exactly speak English, although he appeared to understand it well enough.

Mellie did make another appearance to check up on them, making sure they were feeling welcome and all. It had really been a great evening.

Now, though, Alex could practically feel sleep tugging at him, beckoning invitingly. Will wasn't much better off, glassy eyes blinking tiredly as he trailed in after Alex. It was all the two men could do to make their way to the bedroom, peel off their outer clothes, and creep under the covers.
Snuggling up against Alex's warmth, Wil sighed deeply. "Alex?"

"Mm-hmm?" Alex shifted so his head was propped up on Wil's shoulder.

"Y'think this Slayer chit'll find us? Me?"

Alex tightened his hold on Wil. "Doesn't matter," he stated firmly. "She won't get the chance to hurt you or anyone else here."

"Oh." Wil grinned stupidly. "'Kay."

Yawning, Alex burrowed in closer to Wil, breathing in the vampire's scent.

"Alex?"

"Hmmm?"

Wil turned his head and pressed a kiss into Alex's hair. "I like you, Alex. Really."

Alex smiled. "Like you too, Wil," he responded quietly, returning the kiss with one to the other man's collarbone.

"Ok, then."
There was a soft rustle of blankets as the two made themselves comfortable for the night. Then, nothing but the hushed whisper of Alex's breathing.

~*~*~*~*~

"So, what do you wanna do?"

Wil shrugged. "I dunno, pet. What do you wanna do?"

Alex glared. "Oh no, don't you even start that! I am so not getting into one of those conversations."

"Sorry," Wil mumbled unrepentantly, a smile fighting for appearance on his face.

"Good." Alex sat back on the sofa. He stretched his legs out, tilting his head back to stare at the ceiling. "So? What do you wanna do?"

"I dunno, what--" Wil shrieked with laughter as a sofa pillow was hurled at him, and he ducked. Grabbing one of the small pillows, he retaliated, whacking Alex firmly in the chest.

"Ok, that's it, you asked for it!" Alex vaulted over the back of the sofa, taking a pillow with him.
Wil hastily scooped up his pillow, waiting for Alex to reemerge. And waiting. And...waiting. He frowned, lowering his makeshift weapon slightly. He crept carefully around the sofa, ready to attack.

He blinked. Alex wasn't there. Eyes wide, he backed up a step. He frowned, concentrating his hearing, searching for some indication of his boyfriend's whereabouts. A scuff on the carpet behind him alerted him, and he whirled swiftly.

Too late.

Alex pounced, knocking Wil back onto the sofa, landing on top of him. Laughing, he fended off the halfhearted blows aimed at him. He wrestled Wil's pillow away, having to resort to a sneak attack of tickling the blonde man's ribs in order to make him lose his grip. Now with both pillows, Alex crouched over Wil victoriously. "Ha! Thought you could get away with it, huh? Well, it takes more cunning than that to put one over on me!" His eyes narrowed in contemplation, then he tossed the pillows aside. Waggling his fingers suggestively, he snickered when Wil let out a whimper and tried to squirm away.

"Oh, you are ticklish, aren't you. Well, well. Won't take much to break you, then." Then he darted in, fingers seeking out sensitive areas on pale flesh.
Wil gasped as Alex's fingers seemed to home on his every ticklish spot. Laughing weakly, he bucked up, trying to shove Alex off him. He must have surprised the man, because he did manage to dislodge him partially. Taking advantage of this turn of events, he shoved Alex off, toppling him to the floor. Leaping back up, he bent and easily hefted the man, carrying him over his shoulder into the bedroom. He tossed him onto the bed, grabbing up one of the larger pillows there. He was about to really let Alex have it when he saw how the brunette was staring at him.

He looked down at himself, not noticing anything out of the ordinary. "What?"

Alex licked his lips at he stared at Wil's lean body. "You were carrying me," he answered in a husky voice.

"Oh. Yeah." Wil thought about it, then grinned. "Pretty neat, huh?"

Alex growled under his breath, rolling over and crawling across the bed toward Wil. His eyes were dark, hungrily devouring the vampire.

Wil swallowed hard, letting the pillow drop unnoticed to the floor. "Alex?" he questioned weakly, voice almost squeaking on the name.
Alex reached up and yanked on Wil's arm, pulling the man down on top of him. Hand firmly fixed in pale blonde hair, he dragged Wil's head closer to his own, tongue darting out to drag across lips that remained sealed for one astonished second, then parted eagerly.

Wil suckled on Alex's tongue as it entered his mouth. After a moment, he pulled away from his boyfriend's clinging mouth, putting enough space between him so he could give the man an amused smirk. "So, you like it when I'm forceful, huh?" There was a rumble deep in his chest as he shoved Alex onto his back, pinning his arms up over his head. "I can work with that."

He bent, but before his lips touched Alex's, he stopped. He blew lightly across them, then, cocking his head, sat up and moved away from Alex, rising from the bed and standing there nonchalantly.

Alex gaped at him in disbelief. "What--?"

Wil made a show of stretching. "Well, y'know, you wanted to take it slow an' all." He shrugged casually. "Wouldn't want you to think I was tryin' to trick you into anything." He stood there innocently as Alex continued to blink up at him in consternation.
Alex was in a state of shock, mingled with disbelief. His jaw was hanging open as he continued to lie there unmoving. His eyes drifted over the blonde's seemingly relaxed stance, narrowing when they fell below the waist. He tossed his head, sitting up. "Right. Good thinking." He stood and walked past Wil, one hand brushing not-quite-accidentally over the prominent mound in the vampire's pants. He smirked to himself as he heard a muted groan.

That fleeting touch sent a shock of arousal surging through Wil, but he wasn't about to let Alex know that. Well, at least not more than was already obvious. He took a moment to calm himself, then strolled to the foot of the bed. "Glad you see it my way, then." He stooped and picked up the fallen pillow. Instead of replacing it on the bed, though, he quickly turned and walloped Alex over the head with it. As Alex swung around with a furious expression, Wil pitched the pillow aside and darted back out to the living room.

Alex shook his head bemusedly, then followed at a more sedate pace. He knew Wil would be expecting some form of retaliation, so he decided to bide his time.

Wil watched him warily as he approached the sofa, not relaxing one bit even as the man made himself
comfortable, feet propped up on the coffee table. As the minutes ticked by without a single movement, Wil gradually found himself unwinding.

Alex grinned. "So. Wanna go to a club or something later on?"

Wil studied him, looking for some sort of hidden meaning or threat in that question. Finding none, he shrugged. "Sounds good."

Alex nodded. "Cool." He reached for the remote, switching on the television.

---

Part Fifteen

"Aren't you done yet?" Wil tapped his foot impatiently. He'd been dressed and ready to go for the last 20 minutes, while Alex seemed to be taking his own sweet time. "Come on, mate! I didn't take this bleedin' long!"
"Yeah, well, some of us have reflections, you know!" Alex called from the bathroom. "We can make sure we look good."

Wil rolled his eyes. "How did I manage to get involved with someone so prissy?" he muttered to himself. "That's one thing I'd like to remember." In a louder voice he responded, "And some of us just know we look good, don't need to spend hours fancyin' ourselves up."

Alex laughed. "You just keep telling yourself that, Wil."

Finally, finally the door opened, and Alex deigned to emerge.

Wil's jaw dropped. *Where the hell did he get a pair of leather pants?!* Frozen, he stared dazedly at Alex. The pants were so tight it looked as if he'd been poured into them, the supple black material set off by the skin-tight blue shirt under which he could detect every ripple of Alex's muscles. Wil dragged his gaze up to Alex's face, feeling his fingers itching to run through the carefully styled hair that hung in soft waves.

Grinning, Alex walked -- hell, he prowled -- over to Wil, closing the vampire's mouth with a finger. "You like?" he whispered huskily.
Wil swallowed hard, nodding convulsively. He looked down at his own clothes, a pair of black jeans and a loose red shirt, suddenly feeling rather drab.

Alex noticed the forlorn expression that passed over Wil's face, and he tilted the blonde's head up. "Hey, you look gorgeous." He dropped a kiss on parted lips, tasting him briefly. Straightening, he smiled. "So. Let's go. Mellie suggested this one club, it's about six blocks away. With any luck, we won't run into anything...strange on the way."

"Yeah. Sure." Wil inhaled deeply, forcing himself to relax. He watched, fascinated, and Alex went to the door. He was totally mesmerized by the sinuous flexing of those curved buttocks. And when Alex turned back, he was suddenly confronted by a very obvious leather-covered bulge.

He tore his eyes away, deciding it would be best if he didn't walk behind Alex. Shaking himself, he joined his boyfriend at the door, tentatively taking Alex's hand in his own.

Alex held back a smirk at having caught the other man ogling him, instead giving Wil another kiss before pulling the door shut behind them.
"Alex, this is a gay club," Wil informed his boyfriend. He then took a closer look at the mixed clientele that was entering the building. "Make that a gay demon club."

"Duh. What better place is there for me to grope my vamp boyfriend in public?" He grinned at Wil's embarrassed look and paid the cover charge for them both, ignoring the suggestive wink the man collecting money sent his way. He held tight to Wil's hand as they made their way through the crowd of men. "You want a drink?" he shouted to Wil over the loud music.

Wil shook his head. "Not right now," he yelled back. Grinning, he pulled Alex to the dance floor. "C'mon, let's dance!"

Alex resisted for a moment, then gave in, not wanting to put up a fight since Wil seemed to be getting into the spirit of things. Within seconds, the two of them were moving smoothly to the beat of the music, brushing up against each other as they danced.

Eyes narrowing with mischief, Wil circled his arms around Alex's neck, moving in to nuzzle his neck as he inched the lower half of his body ever closer. He brushed his groin lightly against Alex's, grinning when the man groaned and clutched at him, hands roaming down his back to rest on the swell of his ass.
Alex successfully resisted the urge to sneak his hands inside Wil's pants, contenting himself with simply groping his firm cheeks through the barrier of cloth. He could feel Wil purring against him, hands playing gently with the hair at the nape of his neck, tongue darting out to lick across his neck, hand sliding over the small of his back to squeeze his ass--

Alex frowned, mentally counting. One hand kneading his neck, one hand wriggling through his hair, one hand fondling his butt. "Will?"

"Yeah," the blonde breathed, barely pausing in his licking.

"Your hands are around my neck, yes?"

"Mmm-hmmm."

"Then would you mind telling me who's copping a feel of my ass?"

Wil's eyes flew wide, and he ceased his torture of Alex's sensitive skin. He pulled away, leaning to peer around behind Alex. The man who'd started dancing there smiled cheerfully at Wil, not taking his hand off of Alex.

"Fuckin' wanker," Wil growled, wrenching himself out of Alex's grasp. He stalked around to the man, yanking the
offending arm away and twisting it brutally. "I suggest you keep your fuckin' hands to yourself, y' bloody pillock!" he hissed, feeling his face shift and change.

The man blanched, cringing away as he whimpered from the pain of bones grinding together. "I'm sorry!" he gasped out. "I-I-I didn't know!" His entire body trembled with fear. "P-Please..."

With a snarl, Wil shoved the man away, glaring as he watched him scramble off the floor, injured arm clutched to his chest. He then turned his stony glare to the audience the incident had drawn, daring anyone there to make an issue. As the noise level again grew and faces turned away from them, Wil moved back into Alex's arms.

Alex grinned, kissing the top of Wil's head. "My hero," he murmured. "I like it when you get all possessive," he added, grinding his body against his boyfriend's.

"Yeah?" Wil calmed, his features shifting back to their human guise. He brought Alex's head down for a proper kiss, using his tongue to stake a claim of the other man's mouth.

Alex surrendered himself eagerly, welcoming the cool, wet probe with his own tongue.
The two molded themselves together for endless moments, only breaking apart when the music changed its tempo from upbeat and lively to something slow and pulsing.

Wil grinned, backing an arm's length away from Alex, gyrating his hips seductively. Alex groaned, reaching out to grab hold of those hips and drag Wil back to him. But the vampire twisted out of his grasp, turning around before backing up and replacing Alex's hands.

Alex gasped as Wil's luscious ass pressed back against him, grinding against his steadily hardening cock. He dropped his head, nibbling at the pale neck before him, sliding one arm around Wil's waist to hold the other man as they continued to sway with the music.

Wil wiggled his hips, rubbing himself against the hard mound in Alex's pants. He whimpered as Alex's other hand slid up his chest to play idly with a stiffening nipple. Tilting his head back further, he turned it to capture Alex's lips with his own, once more introducing their tongues to each other.

They continued to dance for what seemed like hours, touching, teasing, kissing, groping. They were both painfully hard, and even knowing that they weren't going
any further anytime soon, they couldn't manage to keep their hands and mouths off each other.

Finally, though, they had to call a halt, both of them desperately in need of a drink. They left the floor, to the dismay of the other customers who had gathered to watch the erotic display. Making their way over to the bar, they took a couple of vacated stools.

Alex put his mouth to Wil's ear. "What do you want?" he asked.

"JD's fine, luv," Wil responded.

Alex nodded, turning to wave the rather harried-looking bartender over. After a few moments, the slim redhead made his way over to them.

"Yeah?" he asked.

"A Jack Daniels for him, and I'll have a Red Death."

This order earned him a blank look before the bartender hurried off. It was about five minutes later when they finally received their drinks.

"Sorry," the bartender apologized in a weary voice. "It's just, I don't normally work the bar, so I had no idea how to make what you ordered. Had to look it up."
Alex took a sip of his drink. "What happened?"

"Well, the regular guy quit a couple of days ago, so Frankie's had us dancers taking turns pulling shifts at the bar." He made a face. "I suck at it. But at least the customers are being pretty cool about the whole situation." He turned as another customer called for him, hurrying over to take yet another incomprehensible order.

"Huh." Alex watched him briefly, then tossed back the remainder of his drink. "Damn," he hissed through clenched teeth. He turned his head to look at Wil, holding back a groan as he saw the vampire calmly sipping at his drink. Bottle tilted up, lips wrapped firmly around the mouth. Throat working with each swallow, bottle tilted back down. Lips releasing the glass only to be replaced by a tongue that snaked out to circle the rim, capturing any stray drops. Lips twisting into a smug grin when Wil noticed the effect he was having on Alex...

Alex snapped his mouth shut with an audible 'click', glaring at Wil. "You will pay for that, you know," he informed the vampire casually. "Someday, when you least expect it..."

"What?" Wil assumed an innocent expression. "I was just havin' a drink!"
"Uh-huh. Sure you were. No ulterior motives with that little show at all."

Wil snickered. "None whatsoever."

Alex rolled his eyes, using the movement to tear them away from where they insisted on lingering on slim, pale fingers that slowly caressed the side of the bottle... He shook himself.

A crash drew his attention, and he looked over to where the dancer/bartender had managed to upset a stack of glasses. He grimaced sympathetically, watching as the man scrambled to sweep up the mess and continue to take orders. He stood, dropping a quick peck to Wil's cheek. "Don't go anywhere," he told him.

Without really even thinking about it, Alex moved behind the bar, calmly taking an order and expertly mixing the requested drink He continued in this fashion, placing any money he received carefully under the counter. Taking the latest order, he turned to mix it, only to come face-to-face with the other bartender, who stood smiling wryly at him.

"Do this often?"

"Geez, I'm sorry. It just...you looked like you could use some help, and...I'll just go now."
"No! Heaven forbid...don't let me run you off. Please, feel free to continue." He held out a hand. "I'm Jon."

Alex shook the proffered hand. "Jon. I'm Alex."

Jon beamed at him, dimples flashing. "Well, don't mind me. Carry on."

Alex grinned back, then went on with his impromptu bartending, quickly reestablishing his rhythm of taking orders and mixing and serving drinks. He even managed to sneak in another kiss with Wil, dragging the vampire over the bar for an extended liplock when he ordered another drink. This was met with cheers, whistles, and some rather hearty applause, much to the delight of the two participants.

Things continued like this for a bit, until a loud voice behind Alex made him jump.

"What do you think you're doing?"

Alex spun around, swallowing nervously as he was confronted by a hulking figure. One he tentatively assumed was human, although it was rather difficult to tell under all the hair.

"Um, I-I-I--"
"Do you work for me?"

"Well, no, I just--"

"You mean to tell me you're out here tending my bar, and you're not an employee? Jon!"

Jon came rushing forward. "Yeah, Frankie?"

Frankie stabbed a finger in Alex's direction. "You got this boy tending my bar?"

"Um, yeah?"

Frankie grunted, scratching hid beard thoughtfully. He peered intently at Alex.

Alex nibbled his lip, hoping to god that this behemoth of a man wasn't going to take offense with him.

"Why the hell aren't you an employee?" Frankie barked out.

"Um...b-because you never hired me?" Alex offered tentatively.

"A fucking inexcusable oversight on my part! Can you start regular tomorrow night? You'll get $12 an hour, plus tips."

"Oh, well I don't--"
"Alright, fine, $15 an hour, but only because you look to be a damned sight better at the job than the last miserable excuse for a bartender I hired."

"I..." Alex cast a glance back at Wil, who shrugged.

Frankie squinted. "That vampire. He your boyfriend or something?"

Alex blushed slightly, nodding.

"Hmph." Frankie brushed past Alex to stand imperiously in front of Wil. "Well, you look like a strong wind could knock you over, but your sort tend to be tough. I could use some extra muscle around here, bouncers are always needed when some of the boys start dancing and get the customers worked up. Interested?"

Wil shrugged. "Could be. What kinda dosh we lookin' at?"

"I can start you out same as your man over there, amount negotiable when I see how well you work out. No one can say I underpay my employees."

Wil exchanged a calculating glance with Alex, then nodded. "Fine then. You got us."
Frankie clapped his hands, rubbing them together delightedly. "Wonderful!" He turned back to Alex. "You can finish out the night at the bar, if you like. Then come in tomorrow around 5:00, we'll get the paperwork and whatnot all hashed out. The vampire can come in after sunset and we'll get him settled." He clapped Alex's back, nearly sending him sprawling to the floor. "Welcome to the Dark Phoenix!"

Bemused, Alex watched him go, then glanced back at Wil. The vampire smiled at him happily, giving him the thumbs-up, and he smiled back. Looked like their days of unemployment were over!

Part Sixteen

Alex woke slowly, stretching himself out on the bed. Sleepily, he reached over, frowning when he encountered only cold sheets. He sat up, looking around.

Rubbing the sleep from his eyes, he checked the time, not surprised to find it was almost noon. It had been a
late night, and they hadn't gotten home until almost 3:00 in the morning. They'd had barely enough energy for a few almost chaste kisses before succumbing to exhaustion, curling around each other like puppies as they slept.

Alex stumbled from the room, heading for the kitchen to procure some caffeine. An strong hand headed him off, leading him over to a table that held steaming waffles topped with butter and syrup, a dish of fresh strawberries, and a glass of ice-cold milk. Mumbling his heartfelt thanks, Alex proceeded to practically inhale the food. By the end of the meal, he had achieved full consciousness, and he gave Wil an abashed grin. "Sorry about the zombie act," he apologized.

Wil grinned, shrugging in response. "S'ok. I woke up earlier, thought I'd fix you some breakfast. Good?"

Alex wiped his mouth, licking the crumbs and sticky syrup off his fingers. "Very. You made these?" He looked dumbfounded at Wil's nod. "I didn't even know we owned a waffle iron."

Laughing, Wil replied, "We don't. I borrowed it from Mellie; she gave me the recipe for the waffles, too."
"That woman is an absolute saint." Alex managed to refrain from licking the plate, but it was a close call. "Remind me to let you cook any time."

Wil smiled bashfully and gave him a quick kiss on the cheek. "Go wash up. I thought we could have a quiet day before we start work tonight."

"Yeah, good idea." Alex put his dishes in the sink, then headed for the bathroom. After a quick shower and change of clothes, he went back in the living room, where he found Wil lying on the couch, reading. With a soft laugh, he made himself comfortable in the chair, hands reaching for a pencil and mostly blank sheet of paper on the coffee table. Eyeing the blonde vampire, he hesitantly began to apply pencil to paper.

This continued for a while, the 'scritch-scritch' of pencil on paper breaking the comfortable quiet of the room.

Eventually, Wil glanced up, curious. "What are you doing?"

Alex flushed, hastily covering the paper. "Um...nothing."

Wil raised an eyebrow. "Alex," he said in a coaxing tone. "Show me?"
Alex hesitated, but couldn't say no to the blatant look of pleading on Wil's face. With a sigh, he handed the paper over, waiting for the laughter that would soon follow.

Wil gaped at the picture. "You...drew me?"

Alex shrugged, embarrassed. "Ok, I know it's not that good, but I was just...doodling, and--"

"You drew me." Wil gazed up at him, eyes shining.

Mouth snapping shut, Alex fidgeted slightly under that adoring look.

Wil smiled and pulled him close, kissing him. "I love it," he breathed. "Promise me you'll draw more?"

"Oh, well I..." He melted. "Yeah. Sure. Of course I will."

"Good." Wil stroked the paper, that devastating smile still playing about his lips.

Desperate to change the subject, Alex cleared his throat. "So...what are you reading."

"Hmm?" Wil looked up at him, questioning.

"The book? What is it."

"Oh." Wil reclaimed his seat after carefully placing the drawing on the table so it wouldn't get crumpled. "It's,
um, it's a book Jenna loaned me." Now it was the vampire's turn to look embarrassed. "It's kind of...cute. I guess."

"What's it called?"

"Solo's Journey," Wil admitted.

"What? Why are you acting like that? Is it porn or something?" Alex snuggled up beside Wil, trying to sneak a glance at the book.

"No! It's...it's about, well, cats."

Alex looked doubtful. "Cats?"

Defensive now, Wil narrowed his eyes. "Yes, cats. Y'know, four legs, tail, furry, they meow and purr a lot?"

Alex whacked him on the leg. "I know what a cat is, dummy! Why are you reading about them?"

"'Cause I want to. Sod off." Pouting, Wil huddled away from Alex, shooting the human an icy glare.

"Wil..." Alex sighed, stroking Wil's leg gently. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to insult you." Will just sniffed, and Alex bit his lip, feeling somewhat ashamed. Then he brightened. "Is it good?"
"Yeah," Wil muttered shortly, eyes firmly fixed on the book.

Alex wiggled closer, slipping his arm around Wil's waist as he lay his head down on the vampire's chest. "Read to me?"

Wil hesitated.

"Please? You've got such a sexy voice."

With a sigh, Wil relaxed, an arm coming up to hold Alex to him. In a quiet voice, he turned the pages back and slowly began to read. "Even in his...sleep, d-deep within the hid...hidden thickets, Solo could sense that som...something was wrong." Wil squirmed, bringing the book closer to his face as he squinted at the small print. "As he r-roused himself to the surface of...wakeful...wakefulness--"

"Wil?"

Jaw clenched, Wil set the book aside. "Yeah?" he asked shortly.

Concerned, Alex stroked a sharp cheekbone. "Is there something wrong with your eyes?"
Wil turned his face away, but the insistent fingers tilted it back. He heaved another sigh. "It's just... I can see fine when I'm all 'rrrr', y'know? But like this... things are kinda fuzzy up close."

"Maybe you should get some reading glasses."

Wil snorted. "Yeah, an' look like a bleedin ponce! No thanks!"

"Well, you know, you'd only have to wear them here. No one else would see you in them. And then you'd be able to read without straining your eyes."

"I... I'll think about it, ok?"

"Sure." Alex laid his head back down. "If it's easier, why don't you change and read to me? I still want to hear your voice."

Rolling his eyes, Wil let his vampire features settle into place. With his sight now sharp and clear, he picked up the book and started again. "Even in his sleep, deep within..."

~*~*~*~*~

Frankie glanced up at the knock on his office door. "Ah,
you’re here! Excellent." Hefting his bulk upright, he led Alex on a quick tour of the establishment.

Alex took everything in eagerly and quickly. He blushed as a few of the dancers who'd come in early greeted him with fervent hugs and murmured thanks. It seemed as though the temporary bar help was ecstatic over being replaced.

"Now, I'd like you to come in around 6:30 or so to start gettin' things ready for the evening crowd. Bar opens at 7:30 precisely, closes at 1:00 in the morning. You get two half-hour breaks, and no drinking on the job. What you do on your own time, though, is your business. I don't care if you mingle with the customers or other employees, but by the looks of your boyfriend, I'd say that's pretty much the last thing on your mind."

Frankie shot him an appreciative leer. "You know, it sure as hell ain't gonna hurt business none havin' a coupla pretty boys like you working here. Ought to draw as good a crowd as my dancers do." He eyed Alex speculatively. "Hey, you ever think about--"

"No." He shook his head decisively. "Way no. No offense."
"Eh. Too bad. You look like you could put on a mean show." He shrugged though. "Anyway, I just have a few papers for you to sign, I'll need your boyfriend to sign his too when he gets in. Payday is every Tuesday, any tips you make are yours. No uniform, but try to dress...sexy. Draws the customers in."

"Dress sexy. Right."

"Good. Now, closing. All you have to do is wipe down the bar, put everything there away. Make sure it's clean. Usually the bouncers and other muscle take care of cleaning the rest of the place. Cash out the till, turn the money in to me. You'll almost always be out of here by 2:00. Shipments come in on the first Saturday of the month, I'll need you in early that day, noon will be fine. Place is closed on Sundays, give everyone a break before starting the next week. If you need a night off for some reason, try to let me know a couple of days in advance."

Alex nodded, absorbing all this. He signed the papers that were handed to him, filling in the requisite information needed.

"Great. Well then, familiarize yourself with the bar, get things ready to go. And Alex? Good luck!" Frankie gave him a wide grin, then lumbered back to his office.
Alex glanced out the window, calculating the time until sundown, and how long it would take for Wil to arrive. Then he shook himself and began to get the bar set up.

He didn't realize how much time had passed when he felt a tap on his shoulder. He turned to find Jon sitting on the top of the counter, legs swinging.

"Oh man, you came back! Thank all the gods that ever existed!" Leaping down, he pulled Alex into a hug. "Man, you are a total lifesaver. Never leave. Promise me you won't go away and leave me with this evil job again."

"Um..." Alex patted Jon's back awkwardly. "Sure. Need money, not planning on going any time soon."

"Good. Great. God, I love you!" He threw his arms around Alex again, kissing his cheek.

A warning growl sounded from behind them, and Jon pulled back, glancing at the newcomer. He quickly yanked his hands away. "Not groping, just thanking! I so don't poach on someone else's territory." He walked over to Wil, who continued to glower at him. "Oh, give it a rest, sugar. You're the only thing that boy sees. Be good to him, yeah?" He kissed Wil's cheek as well, then bounced off to the dressing rooms.
Wil stalked over to Alex, grabbing his head for a claiming kiss, sucking on plush lips until they were swollen, marking the other man as his. "Gonna have to slap a 'Do not touch' sticker on your ass, looks like."

Alex laughed. "But then what would you do, Wil?"

Wil smirked. "I'm a rebel. I rarely do what I'm told."

"Mmmm." Alex stole another kiss while Wil freely groped his ass. "I think I like bad boys." He gasped at the sharp pinch. "Then again, maybe it's just you."

"Damn right, mate." He petted those curved cheeks again, then paused thoughtfully. "How about 'Property of Wil'?"

Part Seventeen

The passage of days and nights had developed into a pattern for the tentative lovers. Work in the late evenings into early morning, then home to hang out for a while eating, watching movies, or reading. Going to bed around sunrise, and waking in the afternoon with a few hours to kill before heading to work again.
Neither minded the seemingly odd hours. Wil was more comfortable since he was able to be out and about at night, and Alex just enjoyed being with Wil. Plus, the neighborhood sported quiet a few all-night places as a concession to the mixed clientele, so getting groceries, renting videos, or performing any other errands wasn't a hardship for them.

And their Sundays off had been designated 'date night'. Last Sunday, they'd gone to a movie, choosing seats in the back row and holding hands through the picture. Wil had even pushed up the armrest between them so he could get that much closer to Alex. A few stolen kisses in the darkened theater had made the outing perfect.

Now another Sunday had come. They'd just finished breakfast and were relaxing on the sofa in what had become a familiar scenario. Alex was snuggled close to Wil as the vampire read aloud to him from whatever the book of the day was.

Alex watched Wil's face as he read, smiling. He'd managed to convince the blonde to purchase a pair of reading glasses by the simple expedient of dragging him to the display at Wal-Mart and waiting until he picked one out. The fact that seeing his boyfriend's wide blue eyes peeking up at him from behind the wire rims made
him break out in a sweat as his groin tingled may have influenced said boyfriend's decision. Slightly.

Wil pushed his glasses back up on his nose as he read, then dropped the hand back down on Alex's head. Fingers played gently with the slightly curled locks of hair, mussing them deliciously. He could feel every breath that Alex took, the warm puffs of air drifting through the thin material of his shirt. It was...comforting.

A soft knocking at the door broke the mood, and Alex peeled himself away from Wil with a sigh. He walked over to the door, opening it. "Hey, Mellie!" he greeted the woman with a grin. "How's life?" He stepped back to allow her inside.

Mellie smiled back. "Oh, just peachy." She entered, pulling a young woman in behind her. "Hello, Wil," she chirped at the vampire who had risen to join the group. "Those spectacles make you look even cuter than usual." Wil laughed. "I don't think you're the only one with that opinion, pet," he replied, nodding in Alex's direction.

"Oh boys, I just wanted you to meet someone." She gestured to her companion. "This is my daughter, Dana. Dana, Wil and Alex."
Everyone exchanged hellos, and the next few minutes were spent in pleasant conversation. Then Mellie cleared her throat, and the others quieted. "Boys, Dana here dabbles in magic, and I'm proud to say that she's quite exceptional at it."

Dana blushed. "Well, my blood has a lot to do with that. I'm 1/4 Kcsterk, and Kcsterki females tend to have a lot of talent for working magic. Mum's just one of the exceptions."

Mellie patted her hand. "Nonsense. You'd be just as good if you were a full-blooded human." She gave her daughter a quick hug, then turned her attention back to Alex and Wil. "Anyway, we were talking this morning when Dana came to visit, and she mentioned finding an old memory spell. I thought of you two right off, and when I explained what had happened with the Grun-thak demon, she offered to work the spell on you. If you want her to, that is."

The boys stared at their visitors blankly, mouths agape. Then Alex shook himself. "Um, would you excuse us?" At their nods, he tugged Wil into the kitchen. Biting his lip, he asked in a low voice, "You want to do this?"

Wil shrugged. "Dunno, pet. Don't like the thought of more magic, but...if it helps..."
"Yeah."

Wil plucked at the hem of his shirt. "Will you...?"

Alex waited a moment, but nothing else was forthcoming. "What is it?" he encouraged.

"I just...I..." Wil sighed, then asked softly, "Will we still be together? When we remember?"

Pulling the vampire into a fierce hug, Alex murmured in his ear, "I like you, Wil. A lot. Remembering...Before...it's not going to change how we are now. I won't let it!"

"Oh. Ok." Wil smiled and tilted his face up for a brief kiss, which Alex gave him gladly. "I say we go for it then."

"Damn right."

~*~*~*~*~

Mellie accompanied her daughter on the quest for the supplies needed for the spell. Dana had agreed to perform it that evening, as neither Alex nor Wil wanted to waste any time once they'd decided to go for it.

It was nearing dusk when they finally had everything they needed, including a copy of the spell itself. It wasn't that
things were difficult to find, but Dana was quite picky about the quality and freshness of each component. Eventually, though, even she was satisfied, and the two women set off on the walk back to the apartment complex.

They chatted amiably as they went, occasionally making a brief pause for a bit of window-shopping. And Mellie couldn't help but dash into a candy store that sported a large, chocolate castle in the window, stating that 'the boys are sure to be famished, and they do so love their sweets!'

Dana just laughed and waved her on, used to her mother's behavior when she found someone new to coddle. Of course, that didn't stop her from holding out her free hand for a piece of the fudge that Mellie had bought.

They were only a few blocks from their destination when Mellie froze in her tracks, clutching at Dana's arm to halt her as well.

Dana frowned. "What's wrong?" she asked, worried.

Mellie jerked her head toward the slight figure just up the street.
Confused, Dana watched as the young woman accosted each passerby, shoving a piece of paper in front of them and questioning them intently. It was apparent that she was growing more and more frustrated at each headshake she received in response. Something seemed familiar about her...

Dana's eyes widened. "Isn't that the--?"

"Yes! What could she be doing here?"

"Grilling random strangers, by the looks of things. Does she really think anyone around her will tell her anything?"

"Hush now," Mellie hissed out the side of her mouth. "Let me handle this." Then she shook herself and plastered on a beaming smile just as the Slayer made her way over to them.

"Hi." Buffy gave them a weary grin as she flipped a strand of hair out of her face. "I was looking for a friend of mine, have you seen him?" The paper appeared again, and Mellie took it, examining it carefully.

She cocked her head, wondering why Alex seemed so sad in the photograph. Raising her eyes, she peered earnestly at Buffy and answered, "Oh my, no, he doesn't seem familiar in the least. Is he a good friend of yours?" Not
letting Buffy get a word in edgewise, she heaved a beleaguered sigh and continued. "Oh, it's such a shame when you lose track of friends like that. Then again, young people these days are always getting it into their heads to go gallivanting off to who knows where at the drop of a hat. Never a thought for anyone who might worry about them and wonder where they've gone to." She shook her head, making 'tsking' sounds. "Why, in my day, children were brought up right. None of this 'finding yourself' nonsense. No, they learned the importance of family. Now, it's all just 'me me me'!" Mellie shrugged. "Then again, that's just this old biddy's opinion, and I'm sure you haven't much care for that. Would you like a piece of fudge?"

Buffy had followed this rambling dialogue with a dazed look, nodding and shaking her head at what seemed appropriate intervals. Blankly, she accepted the proffered sweet, then looked down at her hand as if wondering where it came from. Blinking, she glanced back up. "Um, so...you haven't seen him then?"

"No dearie. He's quite a handsome fellow, though. Is he your beau?"
Buffy wrinkled her nose. "Ew, no! He just a friend. He...went missing a few weeks ago, and we've all been trying to find out what happened."

"Well, I'm terribly sorry that I couldn't be more helpful."

"That's ok, it's not your fault. Thanks anyway." Buffy took back the picture, gave them a wave, and went on her way.

Dana waited until the Slayer was out of earshot before she spoke. "What do you suppose she wanted with Alex?"

Mellie frowned, her forehead wrinkled. "I have no idea," she replied, "but it certainly can't be good. The Slayer's 'friend' just happens to be our Alex, whose boyfriend just happens to be a vampire, and both of whom just happen to have been injured in a way that made them conveniently forget anything they might have known about the situation."

Dana gasped. "You don't suppose she had something to do with their injury, do you?"

"I don't know. But something isn't adding up, and I can tell you that she's going to have to go through a lot of people if she wants to get at either Alex or Wil. And even
the Slayer might have a tough time tangling with Sophie!"

"Now that fight I'd like to see!" Dana giggled. She sobered quickly, though. "Are you going to tell Alex that the Slayer is looking for him?"

Mellie thought for a moment, then shook her head. "No, I don't want to worry either of them. I think we should do the spell first, the Slayer can be dealt with once the boys can remember exactly what happened."

"If you're sure," Dana replied doubtfully.

"Positive."

~*~*~*~*~

"Total bust."

Willow slumped down in her chair at this news. "You sure you tried everywhere?"

Buffy nodded. "Hoofed it all over town, not even one person has seen him recently."

Both girls looked expectantly at the door as Riley entered. "Anything?" they asked in unison.
"Depends." He gave Buffy a quick kiss. "Drove around, didn't find any sign of his car. Then I got the idea to see if it had been impounded."

"And?"

He grinned. "Three days after he went missing, it was towed in. Had a bunch of flats, quite a few parking tickets, but was in decent shape otherwise." His face turned grim. "No idea where it was picked up, though. Seems they 'misplaced' the paperwork."

"So basically another dead end." Buffy kicked the wall, denting it noticeably.

"Well, I mean, at least we know he didn't leave town. Right?" Willow blinked up at them hopefully, clutching Tara's hand with her own.

"U-unless he took the bus, or train, or...something." Tara shrugged apologetically at her girlfriend. "Sorry," she whispered, wishing she could wipe away the desolate expression.

"It's not your fault," Willow whispered back, giving her a tearful smile. "It's just...what if something bad happened to him! He would never have left without saying something to me. I can't stand this not knowing!"
Just then, Giles returned, and he wearily tosses his jacket over the back of a chair.

Buffy perked up, almost bouncing. "Get anything out of the bleached menace? You didn't pay him, did you? It's so much easier on the bank account when you just beat the information out of him."

Giles removed his glasses and rubbed at his eyes. "Yes, well, I imagine it certainly would be more fun, but actually I did neither."

"What? You mean he just spilled? Why don't I believe that?"

"It's more bad news, isn't it?" Willow sighed resignedly. "I can take it. What'd he say?"

"Well, due to the fact that Spike's crypt was, shall we say, rather devoid of any vampire inhabitants, I'm afraid I was unable to retrieve any information for you at all."

"He wasn't there?" Buffy growled in frustration.

Giles shook his head. "It didn't even appear as if he'd been there any time recently. There were cobwebs and dust covering everything...more so than usual, that is."
"How typical. Wouldn't you just know he'd move and forget to leave his forwarding address?" Buffy rolled her eyes and snorted. "Well, good riddance. Who needs the chipped freak anyway?"

"Don't say that!" Willow cried out. "What if...what if he knows something and we can't ever find him? Or...what if he did something to Xander!"

Buffy's eyes narrowed. "Well now. That would put a whole new spin on things." She crossed her arms over her chest. "Ok, this thing has gotten way out of hand. We need help."

"What do you mean?" Tara asked quietly.

"We should hire a private investigator. One who can help us find Xander, and take care of Spike if it comes to that." Buffy grinned. "I think we should call Angel."

Part Eighteen
"This isn't gonna hurt, is it?" Alex warily perused the transformed living room.

Dana frowned slightly, her brow wrinkling. "Not much. Well, not after the first few hours. And I'm sure that blood coming out of the ears is perfectly normal." She glanced up at Alex, who had inched his way behind the sofa and was staring at her in wide-eyed horror. She giggled.

Wil glared at her as he pried Alex's fingers off his shoulder. "That wasn't funny, pet."

"Oh, sure it was! Lighten up!" Dana rolled her eyes, then went back to her task of placing the candles in their proper positions.

Alex stuck his tongue out at her before jumping over the back of the sofa to land almost on top of Wil. "Save me!" he pleaded pathetically as he burrowed his head against the vampire's chest.

Wil snorted.

Alex blinked up at him through tearful eyes. "But I'm scared...comfort me!" His lower lip poked out as he pouted.
"Yeah? An' what kind of comfortin' are you lookin' for?" Wil pressed Alex close to him as he ran a thumb over the protruding lip.

Alex smiled, kissing the finger. "What kind do you think?" he asked flirtatiously.

With a growl, Wil tugged Alex's face up and proceeded to kiss the human breathless.

Mellie sighed. "Boys." When that got no response, she barked out more sharply, "Boys!"

They jumped, turning dazed eyes to her. Alex flushed and cleared his throat. "Yes?" His voice was husky with restrained passion.

Mellie shook her head fondly. "Plenty of opportunity for that later," she admonished good-naturedly. "Everything is set up here. It's time."

"Oh." Alex reluctantly pulled away from Wil, running a hand through his hair. "Right. Guess we should, uh, do...that."

Wil grabbed his hand. "We...we don't have t'do it, luv."
Alex shook his head. "No, I want to." He brushed Wil's cheek gently. "I wanna remember everything about you that I can."

Wil turned his face toward the caressing hand, giving it a soft kiss. "Let's do it, then."

Alex pulled him up, leading him over to the circle of tall white candles.

"I need you to sit in the center. Face each other and hold hands. Make sure to keep the brazier between you." Dana waited until they were in position, then nodded to her mother. Mellie flicked the light switch off, plunging the room into darkness.

Wil held tightly to Alex, and both turned to face the flicker of light that appeared.

Dana slowly lit each candle, until a ring of light surrounded the boys. Carefully, she stepped inside the circle and used a long match to light the contents of the brazier. Almost immediately, wisps of sweetly scented smoke began to curl up around the seated figures.

In a whispered tone, Dana began the chant.
"Mnemosyne, we beseech you.

These, your children, have need of your power.

Daughter of Heaven and Earth,

Child of Uranus and Gaea,

Bestow upon us your aid."

Reaching in the hand-sewn, silk pouch, Dana removed a mixture of herbs and petals, scattering them over first Wil, then Alex.

"As you gave birth to the Muses,

So do we ask your loins to grant rebirth to these two.

Gift them with your grace,

Bless them with your power,

Bring forth in them that which was sundered."
She parted their clasped hands, depositing a small handful of the mixture in them before closing them together once more.

"Heal the minds which were broken,

Restore the memories which were stolen.

Grant unto these supplicants your gift of Memory.

Renew in them the knowledge they have lost.

Make them whole once again."

Dana pulled a small vial of oil from her pocket, unstoppering it and dabbing a drop on each of the boy's foreheads.
"This we ask.

This we plea.

And as we ask,

So let it be."

The remaining oil was poured into the brazier, and a bright blue flame shot up. Alex and Wil both flinched back, but didn't let go of each other. A gasp escaped the vampire as all the candles were abruptly extinguished, and a brisk breeze swirled through the room.

Then, the wind ceased, and there was silence.

~*~*~*~*~

"Are you sure?"

Buffy rolled her eyes as she spoke into the phone. "Angel, this is Spike we're talking about. How could he not have something to do with this?"

"Buffy, I--" Angel sighed. "May I speak with Giles?"
Buffy pouted, but handed the phone over to her watcher.

Giles handled the phone distastefully, obviously not wanting to speak with Angel. But for Xander's sake, he was willing to make the effort. "Yes?"

"Giles, could you just tell me what you know for certain? Without the speculation?"

Giles took a deep breath. "Well, it seems Xander simply disappeared several weeks ago. He left behind no note, only an empty basement, a distraught girlfriend, and indifferent parents. We've neither seen nor heard anything from him, although we do know his car was impounded. Also, it seems that Spike has gone missing as well, apparently around the same time. At least, the last day he was seen was when Anya discovered Xander had left the basement. However, we don't know for certain that the two disappearances are related."

Angel groaned. "But with Spike's history, you're assuming the worst."

"Quite."

There was a bit of muted conversation as Angel spoke with his associates, then came back onto the line. "Look, we don't have any cases going at the moment, so I can be
there sometime tonight." A screech as heard in the background, and Angel amended his statement with a sigh. "We'll be there."

"Wonderful," Giles muttered, then thrust the phone back at Buffy.

"Angel? So, you're coming? Great, we'll fill you in on all the details when you arrive. Bye!" She hung up the phone and beamed at everyone. "This is great. We'll sic Angel on Spike, and have Xander back in no time. Who's up for a latte?"

~*~*~*~*~

Alex and Wil sat on the couch, holding hands. They watched as Dana poured the bits of mixture they'd held into the silk bag, then sewed it shut.

"I don't feel any different," Alex complained. "And I still can't remember anything."

"Don't worry," Dana told him calmly. "It'll come back slowly. Otherwise, your brain would get too swamped with information and overload. But it will come back to you."
"Everything?"

Dana nodded. "Every last little detail. Hope there was nothing you'd repressed during your childhood." She grinned, handing over the pouch. "Now, tie this to your headboard. Keep it there until your memories are back to normal."

Wil took the proffered item. "So, how slow is slow? Are we talking months here?"

"Oh no! A few days, a week or two at the most. You'll be as good as new in no time."

Mellie finished putting everything away, and gave the boys a hug. "Now, we'll just be heading back to my place. You two get a good night's sleep and come visit tomorrow before you head to work. Let us know how it's going." Smiling, she hurried Dana out of the apartment.

Wil snuggled up against Alex. "You sure we did the right thing?"

"Yeah. We'll be ok. You and me...we belong together."

"You think?"

Alex kissed him. "Definitely."
"Hmmm." Wil stroked along Alex's chest. "So, think we should...go to bed early?"

Alex didn't even pause to think about it, he simply stood and led the way to the bedroom. The two of them undressed to their boxers. Wil tied the pouch to the head of the bed, then Alex shut off the lights. It was early for them to be sleeping, but it was past dark, and the day's excitement had tired them out.

They cuddled up together under the covers, exchanging long, lazy kisses. Hands that stroked along bare flesh soon slowed and stilled, and the boys fell into a deep slumber.

*Ander gritted his teeth in pain as he dragged himself upright. He looked up at the steep hill he'd managed to stumble down, knowing he wouldn't be able to make it back up. Not with his leg hurting like it did.*

*Almost fearfully, he examined the leg. He could tell it was bruised, and there was a liberal amount of blood visible, but he could only hope that the bone hadn't given. He remembered the last hunter who'd ruined his leg that way; the man had been reduced to relying on his mate to scrounge enough food for them. He hadn't lasted through the harsh winter, and the woman he'd left behind had*
promptly been joined with another unmated hunter.

Ander had no mate to provide him with even a cursory amount of care, and any hunter who was going to be a liability to the clan was expected to...remove himself. After all, who would want to be mated with a crippled man unable to provide for those in his care?

Grunting, he tried to lever himself up the hill, giving it up when the pain overwhelmed him. He fell back, panting harshly. He closed his eyes, shivering as the sun began to set and coldness descended.

Knowing that to fall prey to the sleep of cold was to invite eternal slumber, Ander struggled to gather together any nearby kindling. However, he gave a low cry of frustration when he discovered his flint pouch had vanished, lost in the fall that had injured his leg.

He huddled into a ball, hoping another hunter from his clan would find him soon.

A twig snapped, and Ander forced himself to wakefulness. He held his breath, listening closely, but was unable to detect any signs that one of the larger predators in the region had found him. Sill, he reached for
his broken spear, taking hold of the sharp end.

There was another cracking of wood, then a man emerged from the underbrush, approaching warily. Ander bared his teeth, raising his bit of spear menacingly.

The man stopped, crouching low to the ground. He glanced around and, seeing no one else nearby and nothing to indicate that there even *was* anyone else around, he crept forward.

Ander snarled weakly. This man was unknown to him; not of his clan, and therefore a potential enemy. There was much competition between clans for food during this time of little rains and scarce game. It was even rumored that some clans had taken to eating their own dead.

The stranger came close, examining the pile of wood that would have been a fire. He peered closely at Ander, noting the immobile leg that was encrusted with blood. He cocked his head.

Ander's hand began to tremble as he held the spear, and his breath was coming harsher. He didn't think he could stay awake for much longer. It was so cold, and he was so tired...
There was a spark, and another, then a tiny flame appeared. The stranger bent over the new ember, blowing on it gently until it flared up and consumed the tinder, soon growing to a tiny, welcome blaze. He snuck another peek at Ander, then scooted closer. He touched his hand to his chest. "Illam," he said softly.

Ander jerked back, narrowing his eyes in suspicion. He stared at the fire, then back at the man...Illam. The man didn't appear to be a threat, and Ander knew he'd be unable to defend himself at the moment even if Illam should prove to be an enemy. He sighed. "Ander."

Illam flashed him a wide grin. He crawled over to Ander and, after pulling out a bladder of water, gently began to clean the wound on Ander's leg.

Ander watched in the flickering light, grateful that the injury proved to be small and not as serious as he'd feared. He grunted his thanks, inching his way closer to the small warmth that the fire provided.

Illam frowned as he watch Ander shiver. Swiftly, he unrolled the pack he'd carried in, shaking out a fur-lined skin. He draped it over Ander.
Ander fingered the soft skin, then looked back at Illam. He blinked, then lifted the edge. Another wide grin met this action, and Illam scooted up behind him, spooning against his back. A hand brushed his hair away from his ear, and a voice whispered, "Sleep."

Enclosed by the warmth of the skin and the other man, Ander slept

Alex sat up with a gasp, his arms coming up to gather around Wil, who had also started awake. They stared at each other incredulously, somehow knowing that they'd shared the same dream.

"What the hell was that?!!"

Part Nineteen

They gaped at each other wildly for a few seconds, then Alex closed his eyes briefly, struggling for control. "Ok,
calm down. It was just a dream, right? Dreams are normal."

Wil scooted closer to him. "Yeah, but, the same one? At the same time? And what was with the jungle thing?"

"I don't think that was a jungle," Alex corrected with a grin. "Jungles are warmer than that."

"It was still weird," Wil retorted with a slight pout.

"It was a fluke. That's all. Let' just...go back to sleep."

"You sure?"

Alex pulled Wil to him, hugging the vampire close. He kissed the top of his head softly. "What else could it be?"

Wil sighed. "'Kay then." He yawned and let his eyes drift shut.

*Al tied his horse up to the hitching post outside the tavern, then walked down the dusty streets of the small town toward the mercantile. He was short on supplies, but flush with...newly appropriated wealth. He figured he could make a quick stop someplace where he most likely wouldn't be recognized, load up on the necessary goods, then hole up somewhere until things cooled down a bit.*
He moved through the cluttered aisles of the shop, methodically picking out food, clothing and ammunition. Quickly, eyes kept downcast, he paid for his things, then strolled casually back outside. Al figured he could stop for a quick drink before heading out of town, and his mouth began to water at the thought of getting himself a few pints of decent whisky.

A commotion across the street momentarily drew his attention. It was just enough time for him to miss seeing the other person walking his direction. The young man, also focusing on the scene across the street, plowed right into him, sending Al's supplies tumbling to the dirt.

Al cursed under his breath as he bent to retrieve them.

"Oh dear, I'm terribly sorry. I didn't see you. Are you all right? Let me help with that." Slim, uncalloused hands began to scoop up Al's things, making a neat pile of them.

"Yeah, sure, no problem. I'm fine. Thanks." He buried his annoyance and looked up. His breath caught. Something...something about the earnest, blue-eyed boy tugged at his heart, sparking a pang of recognition in him. But he'd never met this youth before, he was certain
of that. Irritated with himself now, he shook off the feeling. Grabbing back his things, he stood and started to walk briskly away.

"Sir? Um, Sir?"

Al stopped with a sigh, waiting for the young man to jog up to him. "Yeah?"

"You, um, you...dropped this as well." He held out a small leather pouch that clinked loudly as the coins inside shifted around.

"Oh. Thanks." Al juggled his armful of supplies until he could take the pouch, making sure to tuck it securely away. "I'm...rather surprised you returned it. Most wouldn't have."

"But that would be frightfully dishonest," the boy replied. A grin broke out on his face. "It wouldn't do for the mayor's son to be caught doing anything remotely unsavory," he told Al with a sparkle in his eyes.

"Ah." Al studied him for a moment, then made as if to continue on his way.
"Can I buy you a drink or something? To make up for running you down like that? Oh, I'm Willard, by the way."

Al sighed, then shrugged. "Sure, why not. And it's Al."

Willard smiled again and strolled next to Al as they headed for the saloon. "We don't get a lot of stranger coming through here," he told Al conversationally. "Still, the sheriff has been sending his deputies on extra patrols ever since that...incident up at Broken Ridge last week. Have you heard about that?"

Al bit back a groan. "I...may have," he responded, his jaw clenched.

"Oh, everyone's been talking about it," Willard continued excitedly. "They say it was an entire gang of outlaws, and they stole every last penny in the entire town! Why, they even--"

"Well, well. What have we here?"

Al froze at the sound of several guns being cocked. Very slowly, he turned around, groaning inwardly at the sight that met his eyes.
"Sheriff Creed!" Willard turned his cheerful grin on the foreboding man and his deputies. "Why, I was just mentioning to Al here that--" He broke off, eyes wide as he saw the guns leveled at his companion. "Sheriff Creed?"

"Back away, Willard. No need to concern yourself here."

Willard's eyes flickered between the lawmen and Al. "I-I don't understand..."

The sheriff dismissed him, glaring at Al. "So...Albert Wilcox. We meet again. I assume you remember me?"

Al glared back just as strongly, giving the man a tight nod. "Creed. Or the Angel of Death, as you were so fondly known among...my sort."

A predatory grin lit up Creed's face. "And I just hate it when scum like you try to avoid your proper fate."

Willard stood stunned, unable to move. "A-Albert Wilcox?" he breathed in horror. "But you...you...oh dear god..."

"Now, you just come along quietly, Wilcox, and we'll
Al cocked his head. "You know, I'd *really* love to, but I just *hate* doing things the easy way." In a lightening move, he flung his armload at the sheriff, distracting him for the crucial second he needed to make his move. One hand went for his gun, drawing it smoothly, while the other reached out to drag Willard in front of him. He calmly pressed the barrel of the gun to Willard's head. "Now," he said evenly, "I do believe Willard here mentioned something about being the mayor's son? Well, I don't suppose the good mayor would take too kindly to having his child's brains splattered all over this street, now would he?"

Creed snarled in annoyance, and his own weapon wavered slightly.

Chuckling bitterly, Al began to back up, pulling his captive with him. He positioned himself with his back against the wall of the saloon so no one could sneak up behind him. "Why don't you have one of your deputies be a gentleman and fetch my horse for me?" His finger tightened on the trigger, warning Creed not to try anything stupid.
Reluctantly, Creed motioned for one of his men to go for the animal. Once it had been brought back, Al nudged Willard into taking the reigns.

"Now, I want all of you to walk very calmly into the saloon there and have yourselves a drink. Because if I see you coming after me, then..." he rubbed the gun down Willard’s neck.

Teeth gritted with fury, Creed nonetheless complied, walking stiffly around the building and leading his men inside.

Quickly, Al holstered his gun and tossed the boy up into the saddle. He swung up behind him and dug his spurs into the horse's flanks. "Now, you behave yourself, and everything will turn our ok for you," Al murmured in Willard's ear as they raced out of town.

"Damn it." Al glared half-heartedly at his horse. The poor animal was limping pitifully, having picked up a stone that wedged itself into the fleshy part of a hoof. There was no way the nag would be able to carry the both of them any further, even if he could manage to pry the offending object out.
Eyes narrowed, Al whirled around, pulling his gun and cocking it. "I wouldn’t do that," he warned.

Willard halted, one foot still in the air from his attempt to make an escape.

"Get over here." He tapped his foot impatiently, waiting for the boy to do as he was told.

Scowling, Willard trudged back toward his captor. "What?" he muttered sullenly.

Al unbuckled the saddlebags, tossing them toward him. He snorted in amusement as Willard staggered under their weight. "We have a bit of walking to do," he informed the boy. "Best get started." He motioned for Willard to start moving, following him with weapon still drawn.

It was only a couple of hours before they came upon a small, rundown shack. Although he didn't like having to stop, he'd started to form blisters that he knew would need to be taken care of. Besides, the boy looked ready to keel over if he didn't get a rest.

Al ushered Willard into the welcome shade of the
building, Almost immediately, Willard dropped the saddlebags with a groan. His knees buckled, and he collapsed to the floor. Al eyed his unmoving form for a moment, then sat and removed his boots. He rummaged through the bags, retrieving some ointment and bandages, which he used to doctor his blisters. Boots on once more, he dug out his canteen and took a deep swallow of the warm water inside. He again glanced at Willard, who was sprawled out on the floor, panting. He chuckled.

With a groan, Willard rolled over and sat up, grunting painfully. "It's not funny," he rasped out.

Al rolled his eyes. Wordlessly, he offered his canteen to the boy, who took it and drank, a look of bliss covering his face. Without asking, he tugged off Willard’s boots, causing the young man to start in surprise.

"What--?"

Ignoring any protests, Al slathered more of the ointment on the raw, blistered skin of Willard's heels.

Willard watched as Al sealed stored the container of medicine. "Why did you do that?" he questioned.
"Why not? Feels better now, don't it?"

Willard's face twisted into a grimace of anger and hurt. "Why would you care? You're...you're just a thief and a murderer! Everyone in the territory has heard about the things you've done, Albert Wilcox! And you kidnapped me, and dragged me halfway to the next county, and now I'm supposed to be grateful to you?"

Al glared. He snatched his canteen back and, while putting it away, removed a length of rope from his bags.

Willard gasped and tried to stand, but his tired muscles protested, and he crumpled again. He whimpered as he was callously manhandled against the wall, his hands and feet bound securely.

Satisfied, Al reclined a few feet away. He saw the boy's mouth open again, and spoke first. "One more word, and I'll cut your tongue out." He ignored the twinge of conscience that informed him he'd do no such thing.

Not doubting the outlaw would do as he threatened, Willard shut his mouth with an audible click. Glowering at the smirking man, he shifted awkwardly, trying to find a
reasonably comfortable position.

Al tuned out the soft rustling, falling into a light doze.

It wasn't much later when his eyes snapped open and he bolted upright. "Shit." He crawled over to Willard, covering the boy's mouth with his hand. He listened with growing dread to the noises outside.

"We know you're in there, Wilcox!" Creed's voice bellowed. "Where's the boy?"

Willard bit down on Al's hand, managing to free his mouth long enough to yell out a quickly smothered cry for help.

"Give it up, Wilcox! There's only one way out of that building, and we're here waiting for you!"

Al cursed as he realized that Creed was right. He hadn't even checked for another exit, and that oversight was about to cost him. He let go of Willard and crept to the door, opening it a crack.

He ducked, and the bullet that had been fired splintered the wood just inches above his head. Taking a chance, Al
returned fire, but his gun was quickly emptied of rounds. There was a lull in the gunshots from outside, and Creed spoke up again.

"You're out of ammo, aren't you? We found the stuff you bought and left behind. A man like you ought to know better than that." His voice was thick with amusement. "You just come out of there real slowly, and we can settle this without any bloodshed."

Mentally, Al weighed his chances of getting out of this encounter alive. But he knew Creed; after all, there was a reason the man had been given the nickname 'Angel of Death'. Besides, he was wanted 'Dead or Alive', and Creed would be able to collect the bounty either way.

Things didn't look too bright for him.

He sighed heavily. Well, no one had ever said this was an easy way to make a living. He did have a hostage to use for leverage, though, so perhaps all wasn't lost quite yet.

Of course, with his luck, Creed wouldn't care and would simply shoot the boy himself, then blame the murder on him. Actually, that was a real possibility, especially since there were no witnesses other than Creed's posse of
'deputies'.

He glanced over at the trembling boy huddled in the corner of the small shack. Something inside him twisted at the thought of him dying. "Aw, fuck it," he muttered, then crossed the room.

Willard cringed and squeezed his eyes shut when Al pulled a knife out. He prayed silently, knowing he was about to die. Then he felt a tugging at his wrists, and peeled his eyes open again.

Al quickly cut through the ropes that bound Willard, and the boy stared at him in complete shock.

"A-are you going to...to k-kill me?"

Al snorted. "Nah kid. It'd be a crime in itself to mess up a pretty face like yours. Besides, I may be a murderer, but I ain't never killed children. That's more Creed's style than mine."

Willard scooted himself farther away from Al, flushing with anger. "I'm not a child!" he snapped.

"No," Al mused, "I don't suppose you are." He shook his
head. Quickly, he checked his weapon again, hoping insanely that more bullets had miraculously appeared in the chamber. No such luck, though. He eyed the door.

"W-what are you going to do then?" Willard asked timidly, confused by this bewildering reversal of behavior.

Al shrugged. "Go out there and make the best of it." He grinned crookedly. "It's what I do."

Willard flicked a glance toward the door, knowing that outside waited several of the best sharpshooters in the county. "If you go out there, you'll die," he whispered, wondering why that notion upset him.

Again Al shrugged. "Everyone dies sooner or later. Nothing a man can do if his number's up." He steeled himself. "Well, guess this is goodbye, then." He tipped his hat at the boy.

"A-Al?" Willard timidly crept across the floor toward him.

"Yeah?"

"I...I don't think you're a bad sort. Not really."
Hardly knowing what came over himself, Al knelt in front of Willard. He gently cupped a soft cheek, inhaling sharply as long eyelashes fluttered against his fingers. "You have yourself a good life, kid," he said gruffly. Before he could reconsider, he pulled Willard to him and pressed a fierce, passionate kiss to his lips, tongue darting briefly inside as the boy's lush mouth opened in astonishment. Then, he stood abruptly, turning his back on the wide-eyed boy and striding out the door.

Willard sat, stunned, his lips tingling. His breath came in whimpering little pants, and he raised a hand to touch lips that felt hot and swollen.

The sound of multiple gunshots snapped him from his reverie and, with an anguished cry, he jumped up and stumbled from the building.

It was quiet now, and clouds of dust were settling in the stillness. Willard let out a soft cry when he spotted the bloody, shot-riddled body on the ground. He jumped as a hand settled on his shoulder.

"You all right?"

Willard shook Creed's hand off him, and he stepped
numbly to where Al lay. He dropped to his knees, startled to hear a gurgling breath come from Al. "Al?"

Al's eyes flickered open briefly, and he offered up a tortured smile. Gasping out the words, he spoke haltingly, "You make...a...much...p-pretier..." He coughed up a lungful of blood, then continued, "A-Angel of...Death that C-Creed...ever did." A shaking hand rose and ghosted lightly over Willard's lips, then fell limply back to the ground. Al gave one last, shuddering breath.

Willard felt the tears well up in his eyes. "Al?" he whispered quietly. He sniffled when he got no reply, then gasped as something wrenched inside him. It felt like his very heart had been ripped out. Without knowing why, Willard began to weep.

"Al..." Wil woke, a horrified scream stuck in his throat. He frantically fumbled for the light, then rolled over to face an equally horrified Alex. "Oh god," he whimpered, running his hands desperately over Alex, searching for any trace of injury.

"I'm ok, I'm ok," Alex panted.

Wil gave a sob of relief and pressed his face to Alex's chest. "You were...god, you were..."
"Shhh, I know. It's over now." He clutched the Wil to him, seriously rattled but still trying to offer comfort to his lover.

"Something's wrong, Alex. Something's really, really wrong. An' I don't like it!" He pulled away from Alex, glaring at him fiercely. "And if you ever do something that bloody stupid, I’ll damned well kill you myself!"

"I won't leave you, Wil. I promise."

"Yeah. Well, you better not." He sniffled. "What are we gonna do, luv? What...what's happening to us?"

"It's got to have something to so with that spell." Alex ran his hands through his hair nervously, then sighed. "That or we're going crazy." He clambered out of bed, tugging Wil after him. "C'mon, we're going to see Mellie and Dana now."

Part Twenty
At the knocking on his door, Giles yawned and clambered to his feet. He peered through the peephole, then opened the door, stifling another yawn as the obnoxiously wide-awake group of people filed in. "Excuse the...state of affairs," Giles said as he waved a hand at the people in various states of wakefulness around the room.

It was obvious that everyone had been there for a while. Pizza boxes were stacked in a corner, and the coffee table and surrounding floor were littered with pretzels and other snacks.

Tara and Willow were huddled in a large chair, going through a stack of book on automatic. Their eyes were glazed enough to prove that they really weren't reading much at all. They blinked and gave the four newcomers tired smiles when they finally noticed the intrusion.

Buffy had stopped her mechanical pacing, and was staring at Angel wistfully.

"Buffy," Angel greeted her quietly.

Buffy nodded jerkily. "Angel. It's...good to see you."

Angel shifted awkwardly. "So, where's...um...” He waved a hand.
Buffy gave him a tiny grin. "Riley had to get back to his place. He, um, has some stuff he needs to get done."

"He wanted to avoid me, huh?"

"Pretty much, yeah. Sorry."

"I'll live. Or...not, as the case may be." He cleared his throat and changed the subject. "So, what were you all doing before we came in?"

"Honestly? Sleeping. Or trying to."

"Sorry about the time," Angel apologized. "We got here as quickly as we could." He gave Cordelia a pointed stare.

"What!? I had to pack!"

Wesley rolled his eyes, sharing a long-suffering look with Gunn, who was trying hard not to start laughing out loud at Cordelia's tone of righteous indignation.

"Hey, you plan on dragging me back to this town, you better believe I'm gonna pack the essentials!"

"You didn't actually have to come," Angel reminded her.

Cordelia snorted indelicately. "Look, I may be a little self-centered, but I want to help Xander as much as the rest of you."
Buffy stared at her strangely. "And why is that? I mean, it's not as if you actually like him."

With a frown, Cordelia struggled to explain. "He's...he's...he's Xander!" Glaring petulantly at Buffy, she sat down stiffly on the sofa.

"Look guys, all this...discussion is really fascinating, it is, but...hello? That's not why we're here!" Willow glared around the room, daring anyone to argue.

Angel nodded. "She's right."

"Very well." Wesley moved to the center of the room. "Why don't you tell us what you know so far?"

"Short version?" Buffy took up residence in an empty chair. "Anya went to Xander's, found him and all his stuff gone. His dad, who is seriously creepy by the way, has no clue where he is. His car was abandoned and impounded, but we have no way of knowing where it was picked up. We've spent the last couple of days showing his picture around town, but so far, no one is talking. And, Spike also seems to have mysteriously vanished." As she ticked each point off on her fingers, her expression grew more and more worried.

Willow raised her hand. "Oh! Tara and I stopped by Xander's work, and it turns out he was fired just before
his disappearance." Her face crumpled as she sniffled softly, and Tara patted her arm, trying to provide some comfort.

Wesley looked around, noting the lack of a certain individual. "Where is Anya, anyway? One would think she'd be quite eager to retrieve Xander."

"Don't know, really. She told us she was going to leave town for a few days, try to get over any impulses for vengeance she might have." Willow frowned slightly. "She thinks Xander did this because he wanted to break up with her, but he would never just...go away. Not without telling anyone!"

Angel spoke again. "You're certain Spike has something to do with this?"

Buffy gave him a look. "Doesn't he always?"

Angel conceded the point. "Usually, yes." He sighed heavily. "All right, then. If you've had no luck finding Xander, let's focus on locating Spike instead."

"Ok, see, how are we planning on doing that exactly?" Gunn asked as he sat on the arm of the sofa next to Cordelia.
Angel shrugged. "He's got to eat, which means he must be getting blood from somewhere. So, we check out all the sources, find out where he's buying from."

Gunn nodded. "Sounds like a plan. Of course, it might speed things up a little if someone could...give us some inside information." He tapped his head and winked at Cordelia.

Cordelia glared back. "It's not like I can control it! Trust me, if I could, I'd make sure they were a lot more helpful, and a lot less painful!"

Gunn held up his hands. "Woah! Back off, I was just joking! Geez."

Giles stepped in, hoping to stave off the bloodshed that Cordelia's flashing eyes promised. "It's almost sunrise now, and most of us have been up the majority of the night. Perhaps we should all get some sleep and start fresh in the evening. We can reconvene here and decide what to do."

~*~*~*~*~

"Oh dear."
"'Oh dear'? What do you mean, 'Oh dear'? 'Oh dear' is not good. Alex, tell me she didn't just say 'Oh dear'.'

Obligingly, Alex responded, "She didn't just say 'Oh dear'."

Wil groaned and slumped down onto the floor. "You're a pathetic liar, Alex. Shit. This sucks!" He glared at Dana. "I thought you were s'posed to be this great and powerful witchy type person. How could you screw this up?" He was shaking slightly now. "So what, we're just gonna go bonkers or something?

Dana gasped. "Oh, no! Of course not! I mean, the spell did work...really! It's just...um..."

Alex waited while she searched for the words. "Well? Spit it out!"

"Ok, so, you remember how I said that Kcsterki females are usually pretty powerful magically? Well, um, see...I kinda..." She chuckled nervously.

"You...what?" Alex glared at her coldly. "If Wil gets hurt because of something you neglected to tell us..." He left that sentence hanging threateningly.
"Alex! I'll thank you not to take that tone of voice with my daughter!" Mellie hovered protectively over Dana, hands on hips as she matched Alex glare for glare.

Alex wilted. "I'm sorry, Mellie," he said as he gathered Wil to him. "I just...I can't stand the thought of something happening to him. To us."

Dana cleared her throat and inched forward. "Look, nothing bad is happening. I just...sometimes have these little...burps with my magic. And things end up with a little extra...oomph."

"Oomph?" Wil blinked at her hopefully. "So, we're not goin' nutters?"

"Not at all! The spell was just a bit more powerful than I originally intended, and now it looks like you getting...all your memories back. All of them." She made sure to emphasize that point.

"What, exactly, do you mean by that?"

Dana settled into an overstuffed chair and wiggled around until she was comfortable. "Everything. You...I dunno, I guess you could call them soul memories...they're all coming back to you."
Alex pondered this. "So were talking, like, reincarnation and stuff?"

Dana nodded enthusiastically. "Yes! Those dreams you shared...they're memories of previous lives, other incarnations that your souls, your...spirit essences...have taken on since they existed."

"That's...a lot of memories."

Wil was back to looking worried. "Are you sure our brains aren't gonna explode or something? 'Cause that's a lot of stuff that's gonna try to cram itself back in."

"Well, most of it will probably fade, just like normal memories. I mean, I certainly don't remember, say, learning to walk or talk. It's natural, really, otherwise we all probably would go insane."

Alex shuddered. "Somehow, that wasn't quite as reassuring as I'm sure you intended it to be."

"Oh. Sorry."

Wil picked at a stray thread in the carpet. "So, we have no choice, huh? Can't just get back the normal memories, we gotta take everything."
"Well, not exactly." Dana played with a lock of her hair. "You could get rid of the bundle I left with you. Without that to sustain the spell, your dream memories should stop."

"But then we'd never remember, right?"

"No. Probably not."

"So, it's all or nothing." Alex nodded. With a sigh, he stood and pulled Wil to his feet. "Look, we just...I mean, you know, thanks. For trying. Even if it turned out different then we thought it would."

Mellie sighed sadly. "So, you boys are going to call it quits with the spell?"

Alex shrugged, glancing at Wil. "Dunno. We'll have to talk about it."

"Of course. Sensible of you." Mellie walked them to the door. "Well, good luck with whatever you decide."

"Thanks Mellie." The boys hugged her. "And thanks again, Dana."

When the door closed, Wil practically dragged Alex down the hallway and back into their apartment. Once inside,
he slammed the door shut, locking it securely. Then he turned and eyed Alex.

Alex gulped. "Um...Wil? Why are you looking at me like that?"

Wil growled low in his throat. "I thought I'd lost you, Alex. That dream...memory...whatever. It was...real. And I thought. You. Were. Dead!"

Alex rushed forward and enfolded Wil in his arms. "It's ok, Wil. I'm here, I'm alive. We're ok, both of us."

Wil shuddered, then relaxed against him. "I need you, Alex," he confessed softly. "Please...I just...I need you."

Alex pulled back a little, examining his lover. He nodded. "Yeah," he breathed. "Let's...ummm..." He jerked his head toward the bedroom.

Wil eagerly tugged Alex into the bedroom, then shoved him down on the bed. He crawled up over him, bending down to kiss him forcefully.

Alex groaned into Wil' mouth, arching his body up to press his burgeoning erection against the similarly hardening mound in Wil's pants. He pulled his mouth away briefly and gasped out, "Clothes!" then resumed
the kiss, dueling with Wil's tongue as the other man plundered his mouth.

Wil squirmed out of his pants, never removing his lips from Alex's. Not wanting them to part for even the briefest moment, he settled for simply tearing off his shirt. Alex's was next, and he moaned as he pressed against heated flesh.

Reluctantly, Alex removed his hands from where they had wandered on Wil's body. He frantically shoved at his own pants, shoving them down his legs and then kicking them off into the corner. Clad only in boxers, the two writhed against each other, rolling across the surface of the bed.

Wil was in heaven. He was finally getting to touch and taste his fill of Alex, and he was rapidly becoming addicted to the tangy, slightly sweet taste of his skin, the way it felt gliding hotly against him. He kissed his way down Alex's chest, smiling when his lover groaned sharply at the light contact to his nipples. Quickly, Wil bent to taste this new bit of his lover.

Alex whimpered as a cool tongue played over his aching nipples. Teeth nibble softly, making him arch his back in pleasure. He tugged at Wil's head, pulling the vampire up and once more engaging him in a wet, heated kiss.
Wil thrust down on Alex. "Please..." he groaned. "Alex...I...” He thrust again, grinding himself into Alex's heat and hardness.

"Will...yes!" They continued like that for a bit until, frustrated, Alex pushed Wil away from him. He sat up and quickly peeled his boxers off, leaving himself bare to Wil's hungry gaze.

Wil devoured the sight of his naked lover. He too skimmed out of his boxers, then crept back into contact with Alex. Hesitantly, he reached out and stroked Alex's cock.

With a strangled shout, Alex fell back against the bed. He stared wide-eyed at Wil as his lover concentrated on touching him. Cool, exploratory fingers danced down his length, then back up again to circle the leaking head. "Wil!"

Wil was delighted with this part of his lover. There was no way he was going back to the previous policy of 'hardly ever look, and rarely touch' that had been established. They had been going slow enough up until today, and now it was time to have fun!

Alex dimly realized he should be doing something for Wil other than lay there passively. Not that there was
anything wrong with it, but some reciprocal action would probably be appreciated. He reached up and pulled Wil on top of him.

Wil lost his hold on Alex's cock, and pouted briefly. The pout immediately turned into a satisfied moan when his own aching hardness slid over sweat-slick skin to nestle in next to Alex's. He stared in shock at Alex for a moment, then thrust experimentally.

Alex gasped and clutched at Wil, meeting his lover's wondering gaze as their cocks bumped each other. He rotated his hips, almost whimpering as he stroked against Wil's wiry bush of pubic hair. The sensation was maddening, but so very good, and he did it again. Evidently, Wil was liking this too, as he set up his own rhythm.

Soon, the two were grinding against each other in concert, and the room filled with low, husky moans and whispered endearments. The bed began to squeak softly as their movements sped up.

Alex spread his legs further apart, and Wil settled in between them. This pushed their cocks even closer and tighter together, and they each gave a broken cry of delight. Alex watched in amazement as Wil's blue eyes flickered with golden fire. Then, those eyes fluttered
shut, and lips were once more descending to meet his. He let his own eyes close and wrapped his arms tight around Wil as they continued to thrust frantically together.

Suddenly, Wil stiffened. He released Alex's mouth and flung his head back. He howled Alex's name as he shuddered, cumming in violent pulses against his writhing lover.

Alex felt the wetness spurt up between them. He gasped and dragged Wil's head back down. The vampire hung onto him lovingly as he kept grinding desperately against him.

Wil laid a series of soft kisses on Alex's face and neck. He was nearly limp with pleasure, but continued to make tiny circular movements with his hips, coaxing Alex on. He reached between their sticky bodies and just barely scratched over the head of Alex's cock with his fingertip.

That simple touch was enough for Alex, and he cried out loudly, clutching Wil tight as he shuddered and came. Then, the room was quiet but for Alex's ragged panting.

It seemed like ages that they lay there, with Wil sprawled out contentedly on top of Alex. Their only movement was the gentle stroking of hands along quivering,
sensitive skin. Then, Wil mumbled something that sounded suspiciously like "...you were gone."

Alex sighed. "I'm here, Wil," he whispered. "I'm not going anywhere."

Wil kissed him possessively. "Promise me. Promise you won't leave me like that. I...I couldn't stand it."

"Shhh. I promise." He stroked Wil's back. "We're gonna stick, you know," he said with quiet humor.

"Don't care. Stay." Will snuggled in even closer against Alex.

Securely entwined, the two lovers drifted off into a light doze.

**Part Twenty-One**

*Alice shivered as she crossed the room, rushes crackling under her bare feet. She dove onto the bed and quickly pulled the linens up to her chin. "Hurry up, Bella! I'm cold!"

Isabella rolled her eyes, but made short work of putting on her dressing gown. She snuffed out the candles in the room, then joined her sister in bed. The two girls lay*
comfortably together, sighing happily as their bodies slowly warmed.

Giggling softly, Alice pulled the coverings over her head. With a smile, Isabella ducked under as well. "Guess what?" Alice asked in a whisper.

"What?"

"Father says I have a suitor."

Isabella made noises of appropriate awe. "Who is it?"

"I'm not sure, but I overheard Father telling Mother that if things go well, I might be married by summer. Oh Bella, isn't it ever so exciting? I'll finally get to leave this musty, draughty old castle." Alice sighed dreamily. "I'm sure he'll be handsome, and charming, and absolutely wonderful!"

"Oh, I hope so." Isabella sniffled almost inaudibly.

"Bella? What is it? Why are you crying?"

"I don't want you to go, Alice," Isabella confessed. "If you get married and go away, I'll never see you again!"

Alice pulled her sister into a fierce hug. "Of course you'll see me, silly. Why, maybe my suitor will have a brother or cousin who's looking for a wife too, and then we can both get married and still be together."
"Really?"

"Well, why not? We've always been together." Isabella's voice was determined. "We were born together, and grew up together, and I'm sure that someday we'll even die together."

"You promise?"

"Of course I promise. We're twins. That means we were meant to be together forever. Never, ever parted"

Isabella smiled and gave Alice a gentle kiss on the cheek. "I love you, Alice."

"Love you too, Isabella."

Alex opened his eyes to smothering darkness. His hands clawed out, pulling the clinging material away from his face. Beside him, Wil sat up with a distressed sound and began patting himself. After a reassuring glance down at his own body -- masculine, thank whomever -- he sat up as well, reaching out for Wil.

"I was a girl!" Wil exclaimed with something akin to horror. He turned on the lamp and twisted around to stare at Alex. "You were a girl!"
Alex shuddered. "I know. It was just another dream...memory. Whatever. We're still us."

"Yeah." Wil heaved a sigh of relief. Then he snickered.

"What?"

"You were such a girl!" He clasped his hands over his heart and feigned swooning. "'Oh, he'll be so handsome, and charming, and come sweep me off my feet!' Bloody hell, what would you have done if he'd been an old, balding, toothless git?"

Alex glared. "Easy. I'd have tricked you into trading places with me. You always fell for stuff like that."

"I never! Besides, you were the one who got blamed for nicking Mother's embroidery needles when I was the one who lost them. Shows you who's dumber."

Alex's jaw dropped. "I knew that was you! Mother made me stand in the solar for hours and recite Bible pasages because of that. You little bastard!" He yanked a pillow off the bed and whacked Wil over the head with it.

"Ow! Oh, like you never made me take the fall for your stuff. Leave off!" He rolled to the side, misjudging the distance and crashing to the floor.
Alex dropped his pillow. "Wil? Are you ok?" He leaned over the edge of the bed to find Wil rubbing his hip with a grimace. He grinned. "I like you like that."

Wil glared up at him. "What, wounded? Pillock."

"No. Naked. And on the floor."

Wil flushed.

Alex watched, groaning, as the faint tinge of color crept up Wil's entire body. Licking his lips, he reached down and hauled Wil back up onto the bed.

Wil blinked as he abruptly found himself sprawled halfway on top of Alex. Then, he flushed even harder. "Um..." He swallowed, his eyes darting around.

"What, bashful now? Little late for that, isn't it?" Alex smiled as he ran his fingers through Wil's tousled hair.

"S'pose so." Wil settled against Alex, listening to the soft thumping of his heartbeat.

"You realize what we were doing, don't you?"

Wil snorted. "I may not remember having sex, but yeah, I do think that what we did qualifies."
Alex's body shook as he laughed silently. "No, you idiot! Not that! The...just now. We were acting like that dream about us was real."

Wil thought about that. "Well, it was, wasn't it? Maybe a long time ago, but it did happen."

"Yeah, but we were being...almost comfortable with it. Like it was no big deal."

"Oh." Wil tilted his head to look at the innocuous little bundle that still hung from the headboard. "So...you think we should keep it? Let our memories come back?"

With a sigh, Alex hugged Wil close. "Can it hurt? I mean, we can always take it down later if we change our minds."

"Yeah."

They lay quietly for a while, neither wanting to disturb this newfound intimacy. Then Alex gave a grunt and shifted away from Wil, scratching his stomach with a frown. He grimaced at the flaky bits of dried fluids that came off. "I need a shower," he told Wil curtly.

"Hmmm." Wil let a hand play over his own stomach. "So do I."
"I call it first!" Alex wiggled away from Wil and out of bed.

"Alex?" Wil grinned lecherously at Alex's body as the other man turned to stare at him inquiringly. "Wouldn't you rather share?"

Alex gulped. "Oh, hell yeah."

~*~*~*~*~

The door to the Magic Box jingled open, and the missing member of the merged groups entered, still smoking faintly.

Giles looked up. "Ah, you got the message, then."

"Yeah, Cordy left a note." Angel flashed a small grin over at Cordelia, who waggled her pen at him before turning her attention back to the book in front of her. "Why did we decide to meet here, anyway?"

"Well, more room for one," Buffy piped up. "And there's all these useful books, too." She thumped her book, sending a small cloud of dust up.

Gunn moved to stand behind Willow as she tapped the keys on her laptop. "Whatcha got?"
"Well, Tara and I compiled a list of all the butchers, hospitals, clinics, basically any place someone could get a supply of blood from. We have a map...Tara, where's the map?"

Tara dug into her bag and pulled out a map, unfolding it and spreading it out over the table. "The, um, the dots are all the places we came up with. The colors represent the type of place it is."

Giles came over to look. "Good work. We can divide them all up by sections, and everyone can take a section to check out. Excellent idea, girls."

Just then, Riley emerged from the back room. He paused, glaring hard at Angel, who met his stare evenly. Scowling, Riley moved across the room and sat next to Buffy, pointedly draping his arm over her shoulders.

Angel suppressed a growl at the proprietary action. He forced himself to look away, although the tenseness in his body gave away the fact that he was still extremely aware of every move Riley made.

Buffy glanced back and forth between the two. "Oookay..." She shook her head and stood. "Look, gimme a section now, Riley and me will head out and see what we
can find." She got their assignment and led Riley outside, sidestepping Angel with an apologetic look.

When they had gone, Angel sat and let his head thump down on the table.

"Oh, get over it. Move on already." Cordelia rolled her eyes in disgust "Can't you just--"

"Hey, guys? No fighting, ok? Please?" Willow gave everyone a pleading look, waiting until everyone nodded in agreement. "Good. So, let's assign the rest of these places." She pointed at the map.

Tara waited until everyone had gotten their own copy of the map and left the shop before turning to Willow. "You know, I'm kinda worried about Anya, too. I hope she's doing ok."

Willow patted her hand reassuringly. "I'm sure she's fine. She'll be back soon to help us look for Xander. She loves him."

"I thought you didn't like her much?"

Willow shrugged. "She might not be on my 'Favoritest People' list, but...he's happy with her. I only want him to be happy."
Tara leaned over and gave Willow a short kiss. "You're a good friend, Willow. Xander's lucky to have you."

~*~*~*~*~

Anya paid the cab driver, then strolled into the dingy, poorly-lit bar that was located on the outskirts of Sunnydale. It didn't really have a name; it was just a place where people -- and non-people -- went to unwind.

Anya really needed to unwind. And even more, she really needed to repress the whole coming-on-to-Giles thing that she'd done.

She shuddered at the memory. Who knew that being dumped would mess with your mind that badly? Determined to get past that incident, she sat down at the bar. "Gimme a beer," she told the bartender curtly.

When the drink came, she drained it quickly. "Men suck," she muttered darkly.

"Yeah, tell me about it."

Anya looked at the woman who seated herself in the stool next to her. She studied her closely. "You're a vampire," she said matter-of-factly.
"No, I'm not!" The blonde woman pouted. "Ok, well, yes I am." She shrugged.

"Ok." Anya held out her hand. "Don’t bite me, and I won't stake you. I'm Anya."

A slim, well-manicured hand grasped hers. "Harmony."

~*~*~*~*~

"Ow!" Alex cursed loudly as he jammed his elbow painfully against one of the knobs.

Wil winced in sympathy and shifted around. Unfortunately, he set a foot down on the bar of soap that had fallen earlier. With a high-pitched shriek, he clutched at Alex as he fell, dragging them both to the floor of the shower stall.

With pained groans, the two carefully untangled their limbs. "This...maybe wasn't such a great idea," Alex panted as they finally managed to get upright again.

"No," Wil ground out in determination. "It bloody well is a good idea! We just...need a bit of practice, that's all."

"No offense, but I think we're more liable to kill each other off if we try this again."
Wil pouted. "But I like this idea! I mean, in theory, anyway. You an' me, all wet an' slippery. What's not to like?"

Alex grinned and carefully leaned forward to kiss Wil. "I could do without these new bruises," he whispered.

"I think we're clean enough." Wil scrambled out of the crowded stall, yanking Alex after him. "I should kiss those better, y'know."

"Oooh, now that idea I like! We can--shit!" He pulled away from Wil.

Wil blinked in consternation. "We can what?"

"What time is it? Oh god, work! We're late!" Alex snatched up a towel and started drying his hair off as he raced for the bedroom. "Hurry up and get dressed, Wil!" he called back.

Wil sighed as he trailed dejectedly after his lover. "Bloody hell."
Part Twenty-Two

Frankie glanced up as Alex and Wil scrambled through the door, grinning at him sheepishly. "You're late," he said tonelessly.

Alex brushed his hands on his pants awkwardly. "Yeah, sorry boss. There was this...and then the...well, we slept late...and the shower thing...” He broke off, blushing faintly.

"Uh-huh." Frankie considered them closely, noting their nervous shuffling and the way their hands kept brushing together as if they were itching to hold on tight. He shrugged. "No harm. Just don't let it happen often."

"Right. Thanks, Frankie." Alex directed a relieved smile at his boss, then turned back to Wil. "So..."

Wil grinned at him, eyes shining with happiness. He pulled Alex's head toward him and gave him a less-than-chaste kiss. "Meet ya on our first break, pet."

"Mmm. Ok." Alex snuck another kiss, then made his way over to the bar to start setting up.

Frankie reached out and tapped Wil's arm as he sauntered by. When the vampire turned to him with an inquiring look, he asked, "Shower thing?" He held back a
grin as Wil turned a few shades pinker than normal. "Is that a blush, Wil? I never figured vamps could blush."

Wil turned even redder. "Sod off," he muttered half-heartedly, even as a rueful grin tugged at his lips.

Frankie shook his head in amusement. "Go on, get to work," he said, jerking his thumb toward the back room. He snickered quietly as Wil walked away.

~*~*~*~*~

"H2O. Umm, and a screwdriver for my friend."

Alex nodded pulled a bottle of vodka off the shelf behind the bar. He had just started to mix the drinks when something across the room caught his eye. He frowned when he finally picked out what had drawn his attention. One of the dancers, Jon by the flash of red hair, was being rather rudely tugged through the crowd by a bulky -- and rather slimy-looking -- demon. On closer inspection, Alex could see that Jon's back was tense with anger, and that he was pulling back against his captor's insistent grip.
Worried now, he scanned the club until he managed to locate Wil. Catching his boyfriend's eye, he indicated the possible spot of trouble brewing.

Wil looked over, got an idea of what was happening, and nodded sharply at Alex. He pushed his way through the crowd with an air of authority, quickly crossing to stand in the path of the behemoth who was manhandling Jon.

Jon yanked his arm again, trying to get free. "Look, man," he said harshly. "I don't know what your deal is, but I am not going anywhere with you! Let me go!"

The demon spun around and growled at him. "Just want a private little party with the dancer boy. See what kind of...moves you got."

"Hey, I'm a dancer. Dan-ker. You want a private dance, you talk with the boss. But that's all you get. A dance." Jon's face was red with anger as he continued to struggle.

The demon leered, leaning in close. "I bet I can make you change your mind. How much will it take?"

His green eyes flashing with suppressed rage, Jon hissed out, "This ain't that kind of joint, man. Try the Dragon down the street." Again he jerked his arm back,
blanching as the demon's grip tightened, making the bones of his wrist grind together.

The demon reeled Jon in, wrapping his other arm around him and stroking down his back and over his ass. "But I want you, pretty boy."

Jon flinched, twisting his head to the side as the demon moved in to kiss him.

"Excuse me, is there a problem here...mate?"

Still clutching Jon, the demon whirled around to face a cruelly smirking Wil. He snarled. "Out of the way, vampire. The boy and I have places to go."

Wil cocked an eyebrow. He looked the demon up and down, sneering. "Don't look to me like 'the boy' wants to go anywhere with the likes of you. So...I'm thinking you need to cart your slimy ass right out of here, and leave the dancer alone."

The demon narrowed its eyes. "Who's gonna make me? You?" He snorted in disbelief as he looked the comparatively small vampire over. With a roll of his eyes, he shifted Jon around and, with a slobbering lick to the side of the dancer's face, once more started for the door.
Wil growled deep in his throat, his eyes flashing golden with fury over being so casually dismissed. Everyone within a few feet of the vampire drew back in fear at the palpable aura of violence that he exuded. Without warning, he pounced, landing on the demon's back. He reached around and clawed at the demon's eyes.

Startled and in pain, the demon finally lost his grip on Jon, who stumbled to the floor and used his newfound freedom to scuttle backwards. The dancer watched wide-eyed as Wil viciously attacked the demon.

With almost graceful movements, Wil struck. His actions were practically a blur as he led the demon in a deadly dance. Each blow he landed coaxed a delighted laugh from him, and the demon became increasingly frustrated and confused by his inability to lay a hand on the vampire.

So far, the bloodshed was at a minimum. With the exception of the initial attack that had torn long gashes in the demon's face, Wil had contented himself with merely pounding ferociously on the demon every chance he got, leaving a battlefield of bruises. He knew he had to end it soon, though. Frankie really didn't like fighting inside his club.
In a lightning fast move, Wil twisted around behind the demon, snatched up one of the heavy hickory chairs, and bashed his opponent across the head.

The demon gasped, blinking stupidly for a moment. Then, his eyes rolled up, and he toppled over.

Wil glared down at the unconscious demon, then carefully set the chair back down. He touched the undamaged piece of furniture admiringly. "That's some pretty strong wood," he commented, impressed.

At that, a soft snicker was heard. In seconds, the snicker had spread through the onlookers and become a rippling laughter. With a triumphant grin, Wil motioned for a couple of other bouncers to come and drag the demon out of the club.

That taken care of, he quickly moved over toward Jon, crouching beside him. "You ok?"

Jon chuckled. "Better than that guy. Thanks." He pushed himself off the floor and to his feet, hand cradled gingerly in front of him. He was still very pale though, and his eyes were bright with pain. Noticing this, Spike gently led him back to the bar and seated him.

Alex ignored the next drink order, instead hurrying over to Wil and Jon. "You go, Wil," he said quietly, pride
obvious in his tone. Then he looked at Jon. "Did he hurt you?"

Jon shrugged, holding out his arm. The wrist was visibly swollen, and already starting to darken with bruises. He breathed in sharply when Wil reached out to run his fingers lightly along the tender flesh.

"Nothing's broken," Wil said with relief. "Not even sprained, I don't think. Gonna be damn sore for a bit, though."

Jon groaned, frowning miserably at his injured wrist. "I can't dance like this," he complained. "I've still got one more set to do tonight. It's the last one of the night; the other guys have already pretty much bailed, so I've got no one to cover for me. Shit, Frankie's gonna be pissed."

"Pissed about what?" Frankie came up beside Alex, who moved out of his way so he could better see his dancer. The man scowled. "Is that what the fuss I heard was about?" He gestured at Jon.

Wil nodded. "Some demon, not a regular I don't think, tried to get a little insistent. I...convinced him he'd have better luck somewhere else."

"Frankie, I didn't do anything to encourage him," Jon said in a wavering voice. "I just tried to get away. And he did
"this," he wiggled his arm a bit, wincing, "and now there's no way I can do my last set!"

"Calm down, Jon," Frankie told him. "I know it's not your fault. We get someone like that every once in a while." He sighed heavily. "Don't know what I'm gonna do about a replacement for the night, though. Alvin just left a minute ago, and he was the only other dancer still here."

"Bummer. That's gotta suck." Alex shot Frankie a sympathetic look, then blinked as his boss stared at him measuringly. His eyes widened. "Oh no. No. Not happening. No freaking way." He started to back away, hands held up defensively in front of himself.

"Now Alex, you don't want to disappoint me, do you? Why, Jon here has tended the bar when he's had to; it's only fair you should fill in for him in his hour of need." Frankie gazed at the bartender levelly, and Alex cringed.

"I don't want to!" Alex threw Jon a panicked look. "Jon, you're good to go, right? You don't need me. Right?" He kept shaking his head. "I can't dance...I wouldn't know what to do!"

"I think he's right," Jon spoke up. He gave Frankie an apologetic shrug. "Alex is cute and all, but I don't know if he'd have what it takes to look good on stage."
Alex nodded frantically. "Yeah! Hey!" He glowered at Jon, not sure if he was being insulted.

"Now Wil on the other hand," Jon continued. "Frankie, did you see him move? He was like...liquid sex. It was almost beautiful watching him go at that other guy. I mean, for other than the obvious reason." He treated Wil to an appraising look. "Oh yeah, I definitely think you could do it. You'd have the crowd begging for more."

Wil stood there, taken aback by this odd turn of events. "You...want me to dance? On stage?" He glanced over to the platform where the dancers performed. "In front of everybody?"

"That's the general idea," Frankie said drolly.

"I don't..." Flustered, Wil looked to Alex for help. Alex just shrugged, leaving the decision up to him. Wil took a deep breath. "Ok," he agreed softly. "I mean...sure. Why not?"

Frankie beamed. "That's the spirit! Jon, take him back to the dressing room, find him a costume. There's about 20 minutes before he'll have to go on. And get some ice on your wrist." Satisfied that catastrophe had been averted for the evening, Frankie headed back to his office.
Jon clapped his hands excitedly, then almost whimpered as he jarred his injury. He shook it off, though. "Babe, I am gonna make you look fine. So, how naked do you wanna get on stage?"

"N-naked?" Wil squeaked. He tried to resist as Jon ushered him toward the dressing room. "Can I change my mind now? Alex!"

---

**Part Twenty-Three**

"Look miss, I just want to know if you've been missing any shipments of blood! It's not a difficult request!" Giles glared at the receptionist, who seemed remarkably unperturbed by his outburst.

"All medical information of any nature is kept strictly confidential," she informed his frostily.

Giles threw his hands up and spun around, walking back to where the witches were watching him.
"No good?" Willow bit her lip when Giles shook her head. Then, her face brightened. She whispered something to Tara, who nodded excitedly.

"What? What is it?"

Almost bouncing now, Willow answered, "I think I can -- we can get the information we need. If you can distract the ice queen, I'm pretty sure Tara and I can use our...special talents to search the computer database. They should have records of everything, including an inventory listing."

"Are you sure?" At their nods, Giles steeled himself. "Well then, let's have another go." Giles used his fingers to comb his hair back, then walked calmly back to the desk.

"Yes?" the receptionist asked coldly, her eyes hard.

Giles smiled. "I'm terribly sorry, ma'am," he said smoothly. "I've had a rough day, and I was taking my frustration out on you. I do beg your pardon. And I can certainly understand your position in this matter. In fact, I must commend you for your stalwart stand in assuring the well-being of this clinic and its patients."

While Giles continued to ply the unsuspecting receptionist with compliments, Willow grabbed Tara's
hand and sidled up to the desk, staring intently at the computer monitor. The screen flickered wildly, then data began scrolling across in at an unbelievable speed.

In less than a minute, the witches broke off with a low cry, slumping slightly. Before the receptionist could voice any suspicions about their behavior, Giles deftly snatched her hand and gave it a kiss, then quickly gathered up his young charges and led them out of the building.

Once outside, Tara leaned against a wall to catch her breath, and Willow rested against her.

Giles watched them expectantly. "Anything?"

Wearily, Willow shook her head. "We found the information we were looking for, but...no luck. Wherever Spike's been scrounging up dinner, it hasn't been here."

"Damn." With a deep sigh, Giles pulled out his map and crossed off another dot.

~*~*~*~*~

"Hello? Hello! Anybody in there?" Cordelia pressed her face against the glass while she banged loudly on the door.
"I do believe they're closed." Wesley pointed to the small sign in the window that stated the hours of business.

"9:00? It's not 9:00! Hey, butcher man! You have customers!"

Wesley gently grabbed her hand before she could start pounding on the defenseless door again. "It's almost midnight, Cordy," he said reasonably. "We'll have to try back when they open in the morning."

"But I--"

"Cordelia."

Cordelia let out a shaky sigh. 'I know," she said in a soft voice. "But...what if tomorrow's too late? What if something happens to Xander tonight, and it's all our fault, because we couldn't get into some stupid, closed butcher shop!"

"Cordelia, calm down. Nothing is going to happen."

On a small, almost childlike voice, Cordelia asked, "How do you know?"

Wesley took hold of her shoulders, turning her to face him. "Because there are many people who care about
him that are looking for him. People like you, who won't let anything stand in their way."

"Yeah?" She gave him a tremulous smile. "You think?"

"I most certainly do." He brushed her cheek lightly with the back of his hand.

"Oh. Ok." She stared at Wesley for a moment. "Um, you're not going to try that kissing thing with me again, are you?"

Wesley chuckled as he drew his hands back. "No, I think we've managed to fail spectacularly with that already."

"All right." She gave the door, which had remained obstinately shut, a final glare, suppressing the urge to kick it. "So, back to the Magic Box?"

~*~*~*~*~

Gunn peered down the dark alley dubiously. "Hey Angel, where are we? This isn't on the map, is it?" He squinted at the map, holding it close to his face so he could see in the dim light.
"No, it's not," Angel replied curtly. He stood still for a moment before shaking himself and striding toward a partially concealed doorway.

Gunn sighed. He folded up the map and hurried after the vampire. "Why are we here then?" he hissed when he caught up to him.

A muscle in Angel's jaw jumped as he gritted his teeth. "Spike might have...visited here."

Gunn continued to stare at him. "And?" he prompted after a moment.

Not meeting Gunn's eyes, Angel answered, "It's a...feeding spot."

"What, where vamps jump their victims? I thought he couldn't do that?"

"Not...exactly."

Gunn was getting a bit annoyed with Angel's evasion. "Look, just spill it already!"

Haltingly, Angel told him. "Some humans...crave what a vampire can give them. Enough that they'll willingly sell themselves for it."
Blinking in confusion, Gunn shook his head. "What, vamps are that good in bed? And I did *not* just ask you that."

"Not sex. Blood." He looked at the building. "They'll allow, even pay vampires to bite them. Feed on them."

"That's...really sick, man." A thought struck him. "You think this Spike guy might have been using them to get his meals?" At Angel's reluctant nod, he asked quietly, "Did you ever do that? Is that how you know about this place?"

Angel looked genuinely shocked. "No! I wouldn't...I never..." He tried to calm himself. "These places aren't exactly a secret. Not from vampires. Almost all of us know about them; news about them tends to spread."

"Ok." Gunn nodded. "So, let's raid this joint."

~*~*~*~*~

"Oooh, look who we get!" Buffy pointed excitedly at the map. 

Riley looked over her shoulder. "Willie's? We already tried him, didn't we?"
"Well...sure. But we were asking about Xander that time. This time, we get to squeeze him for stuff on Spike." A feral grin appeared on her face.

Riley smiled and kissed her cheek. "You're so cute when you get that bloodthirsty gleam in your eye," he teased.

Buffy laughed softly, tilting her head so she could get a kiss on the lips. "Well, you're cute all the time," she retorted. "Although, when you do that thing with your--"

"Buffy!" Riley's voice was shocked, but his eyes glinted with humor. "You're a naughty girl," he growled playfully.

"Am I?"

"Oh yes. You know what that means, don't you?"

"Ooooh." Buffy wriggled against him, then pulled away. "After we see Willie," she admonished.

Riley sighed. "Right."

~*~*~*~*~

"...and I got there, and all his stuff was just gone! He didn't even have the guts to break up with me properly, he just left!" Anya sniffled miserably.
Harmony patted her arm in commiseration. "I'm telling you, men are the worst. I mean, look at me! I was so good to him; I fixed his place up, took care of him, and what does he do? He tried to kill me! Shoved a big ol' pointy piece of wood through my chest!" She thumped the top of the bar, making the empty shot glasses rattle. "And if that wasn't bad enough, he had the nerve to come back acting all manly like I was just going to jump at the chance to be with him again, and then he does nothing but go on about the damn Slayer!"

"See, when I was in the vengeance business, I would have never let a man get away with that! And what is it with people always going for Buffy? I don't know what Xander ever saw in her. I'm much prettier."

Harmony choked on her drink. "Xander? Xander Harris? You dated Xander Harris?" She started giggling uncontrollably.

Anya glared at her drinking companion. "I'll have you know Xander is a Viking in the sack! And he's got all these rippling muscles from construction work, and...and...well, like you could do better! Who were you dating?"

Harmony looked away, shrugging. "Spike," she said wistfully. "My little blondie-bear." Now it was her turn to start sniffling.
"Spike? The vampire with the terminal case of peroxide abuse? That Spike? You dated him?" Anya snorted, then started snickering.

"Shut up!" Harmony shoved Anya, almost tipping her off her stool. "You dated Xander!"

"Well, he's gone now, isn't he?" Anya snarled angrily.

"Yeah." Sighing, Harmony stared into her empty glass, then called for another drink. "I...I went to see Spike last night," she admitted quietly.

"Oh. Not go well?"

"He was...he was gone. The whole crypt was all dark, and smelly, and there were cobwebs and mildew everywhere." She pouted. "The jerk."

"Spike's gone, too? Huh, that's strange. Both him and Xander disappearing like that." She straightened, her eyes growing large. "You don't think...?"

"What?" Harmony's forehead wrinkled.

"Maybe...they're together?"

"Yeah? So, what if they are?" She continued to frown, then gasped suddenly. "You mean together? Like...together?"
"Like...together. Leaving us poor, mistreated girls behind so they can have naked, sweaty orgasms with each other."

The two women stared at each other, unblinking, as those images ran through their heads.

After a silent minute, Anya swallowed. "I need something stronger to drink," she choked out.

Harmony nodded frantically. "Yeah."

~*~*~*~*~

Alex brushed his hair away from his face, wondering idly if he should get it cut. It was starting to get a little long, but Wil seemed to enjoy running his fingers through it so much. Alex smiled.

"Here, let me get these. You go...take a break." Frankie reached for the bottles Alex was holding.

"Huh?" Alex looked at the bottles, then at his boss. "Oh, no, I'm fine. I already had my breaks for the night."

Jon seated himself at the bar, ice pack held carefully to his wrist. "Listen to the man, Alex. Just take a break like a good boy." He smirked. "You're gonna need it. Trust me."
"No, really, I'm fine, I--" Alex broke off as the stage lights dimmed and throbbing, sensual music began to play. His mouth dropped open as Wil came out on stage.

Frankie chuckled and grabbed the bottles as they slipped from Alex's loosened grasp. "Go. Get." He shooed the dumbstruck bartender away.

In a daze, Alex moved from the bar, pushing his way to the edge of the stage. He stared at Wil in awe as the vampire began to sway his hips, unable to believe what his boyfriend was wearing.

A harem boy. Wil was dressed as a harem boy.

A small vest with sheer sleeves covered his chest. Barely. It was laced up the front so it left an inch-wide patch of bare flesh, and it covered about half of his torso, ending a few inches above his stomach.

The pants were also sheer, but they were open at the sides, allowing tantalizing glimpses of more smooth, pale skin. Apparently, the flimsy material was held in place only by thin strips of cloth tied around the ankles and lower hips. And underneath the material, the...naughty parts were obscured by what was possibly the smallest excuse for underclothes Alex had ever seen.
The entire outfit was in shades of blue, complementing Wil's eyes, which were heavily rimmed with kohl. The darker than usual shade of his lips hinted at the possible application of lip-gloss. Somehow, the makeup served to accentuate Wil's sharp cheekbones, making him seem almost fragile.

As if all this weren't enough, Jon must have decided to heighten the effect with jewelry. Around Wil's neck was a delicate silver choker, dangling with small chains, to which were affixed tiny blue stones. A matching chain circled his waist, with a large blue stone centered directly over Wil's navel. With every slight movement Wil made, the chains swayed hypnotically, bouncing against his skin.

Alex was drooling. He knew he was drooling, but quite frankly, he didn't care. His head moved with every graceful motion Wil made, following each twist and bend with hungry eyes.

And Wil saw him. His face lit up with a seductive smile, and he began to unlace his vest. He watched Alex with a heavy-lidded gaze, tongue slipping out to moisten his lips. He didn't even notice the rest of the screaming, cheering crowd gathered around the stage, begging him
to come closer so they could touch. He danced solely for his lover.

As the laces that had held Wil's vest together dropped to the floor, Alex's eyes remained glued to Wil's chest. He couldn't help but gasp when he caught a glimpse of the glinting bits of metal that adorned Wil's nipples. He was sure he must be seeing things.

Then Wil knelt, head thrown back in simulated ecstasy as he slowly peeled the vest away and let it slide down his arms.

Alex's attention was totally riveted by Wil's tiny nipples, which were indeed sporting rings of silver and blue to match the rest of his jewelry.

Wil could smell Alex's arousal. The scent sharpened considerably when he began to play his hands over his chest, circling his bejeweled nipples. With a moan of matching lust, Wil dropped forward and began to crawl across the stage towards Alex.

Alex began to pant harshly as Wil drew closer. His eyes were dilated hugely, and his fingers tightly gripped the edge of the stage. Then, Wil was directly in front of him.

Wil growled softly at Alex, then darted forward and licked him across the mouth. He moved away before the
man could grab hold of his head, kneeling up again. He inched forward, swiveling his hips teasingly just in front of Alex, and again began to touch his upper body.

Alex wanted to touch. That was all he could think of. He wanted to reach out and stroke that smooth, silky, compact body that was on display for him. And then he wanted to toss Wil over his shoulder, carry him back to their apartment, and thoroughly ravish him until they were both exhausted.

He stretched out an arm to follow through with that train of thought, but it was rudely blocked by another grasping hand.

Snarling, Alex knocked the hand away from its target, turning to snarl threateningly at the one who had dared try and touch Wil. The offending individual gaped at him in astonishment, then backed away hastily. Just to make sure, Alex fixed the other people gathered nearby with a deadly glare, the promise of a painful, bloody end written clearly on his face.

The noise of the crowd died slightly, and many trembling hands were drawn back from the stage. Satisfied, Alex fixed his attention once more on Wil, who had continued with his dance during the brief interruption.
The only difference was, now he was on his back, legs drawn up towards his butt, hips thrusting shallowly. Wil fingered the sides of his pants, plucking at the laces that held the ankle cuffs in place.

Alex watched breathlessly as slim fingers deftly untied the laces. The material they had held in place slipped away, pooling on the floor as they revealed his well-formed legs. He almost whimpered when Wil tugged at the laces that secured the pants around his hips.

Wil was totally absorbed in his dance, if it could still be called that at this point. His mind was replaying images of the night before, making him shudder with arousal. He pulled open the last laces on his pants and, arching his back off the stage, shoved the material away from himself.

Alex could feel his heart stop, then restart, pounding wildly in his chest. Wil, his Wil, was laying there, practically naked, adorned only by bits of jewelry and a tiny, shimmering scrap of cloth. And he was still thrusting, shamelessly displaying his body to Alex's avid gaze.

With a low cry, Alex surged up onto the stage, covering Wil's body with his own as he crouched over the vampire. Blue eyes snapped open, piercing him with the
intensity of their gaze. Groaning, Alex lowered his head and sealed his mouth to Wil's.

Wil wrapped his arms and legs around Alex, jerking the man down on top of him. Their hips were grinding together as they devoured each other, careless of anything around them.

Finally, the whistles and catcalls broke through the haze of Alex's thoughts, and he released Wil's lips, much to the other man's dismay. Alex shook his head. "Get dressed," he said firmly, his voice strained and husky.

"Hmm?" Wil blinked up at his lover, not understanding.

"Get off the stage, and go get dressed." Alex kissed him again, briefly. "Then, I'm going to close the bar and let Frankie kick everyone out. And then, I'm going to take you home and spend the next few hours with you in bed. Not sleeping."

"Oh." Wil grinned. "Ok." He wriggled, groping around for the bits of his costume.

Alex clenched his jaw shut, closed his eyes, and pulled back. He watched as Wil scrambled for scattered pieces of material, hurrying off the stage with them.
Then, he very calmly stood, brushed himself off, and jumped down off the stage. When he reached the bar, he came face to face with the very smug looking Jon.

"You know, I've had that costume for ages, and it never did fit me. And blue's not one of my best colors, anyway. I just knew it would look stunning on Wil, though. And of course--"

"Jon."

"Um, yes?"

Alex grabbed Jon by the shoulders and pulled him close, kissing his forehead. "I really, really like you, Jon."

"Oh." Jon grinned. "Cool. You owe me, huh?"

"You will never know how much."

"Eh, I'll take a rain check." Chuckling under his breath, Jon walked back to the dressing room to collect his things.

Alex stepped behind the bar, reflexively taking the towel Frankie handed him.

"Not bad, huh? Boy's got talent."
"Hmmm." Alex smiled dreamily as he began to mechanically wash down the countertops.

Frankie let out a bellowing laugh and smacked Alex on the back good-naturedly. "Guess somebody's gonna get lucky tonight."

Recovering from the blow, Alex looked at Frankie very seriously. "Not tonight. Every night. Every moment we're together."

Frankie sighed happily. "Ah, young love. It's a wonderful thing." He went back to his office, leaving Alex to finish up at the bar.

Alex's mind drifted once more to Wil's performance, and he finished up his shift on automatic, a blissful, faraway look in his eyes and a dopey smile on his face.

Part Twenty-Four

Somehow, Alex managed to sedately follow Wil back to their apartment. Calmly, he closed the door behind them
and locked it securely. Taking a deep breath, he turned around to find Wil giving him a shy grin, clutching a small duffel bag to his side.

Alex frowned. "Wil? When did you get a duffel bag?"

Wil blinked and stared at the bag as if he'd just noticed that he had it. "Oh. Um...Jon gave it to me."

"Uh-huh. Why?"

Wil peered up at Alex through lowered lashes, his grin turning just a touch seductive. "To bring my costume home in."

Alex swallowed hard. "Your...costume?" he rasped out, proud that he kept his voice from squeaking.

Wil nodded and unzipped the bag, pulling out a bit of silky blue material. "He said I might as well hang onto it."

"Oh god..." Alex started panting, his eyes riveted on that scrap of cloth. He shook himself, then moved swiftly forward. In seconds, he had Wil crushed to his chest while he kissed him, not stopping until he had to gasp for air.
"I guess...you think that's a good thing?" Wil looped his arms around Alex's neck, kissing a line over his jaw and down his neck.

"Oh, hell yeah." He held Wil to him, running his hands up and down his back.

"Mmmm." Wil hummed happily, then pulled back. "Why don't you go wash up, and I'll go to the bedroom and get undressed."

Alex pouted. "I'd rather watch you get undressed," he said, leering.

Wil rolled his eyes and gave Alex a push towards the bathroom. "Do as you're told," he whispered mischievously, his eyes twinkling. "Good boys get rewards."

"Rewards?" Grinning now, Alex gave Wil a last kiss and grope before heading to the bathroom.

In what was possibly record speed, Alex had his teeth brushed, his hands washed, and even managed to get that black smudge off his face. Who knew bartending could be such dirty work? Whistling softly, he walked quickly to the bedroom, stepping into the dimly lit area.

"Gaaahhh..."
Wil grinned at Alex from the bed as he played idly with the ring attached to one of his nipples. "Like?"

Confronted with Wil lying on top of their sheets, clad once again in nothing more than that shimmering, skimpy underwear and a pair of nipple rings, Alex nodded frantically. Then he pounced.

Wil's delighted laugh was cut off when Alex sealed their lips together once more. Moaning, he squirmed, trying to peel off Alex's shirt.

With a gasp, Alex pulled back and yanked the shirt off over his head, tossing it across the room. He bent again, hands gliding along Wil's sides.

Wil arched his back, hissing softly when Alex's fingers ghosted over his adorned nipples. "Aleeex..." A breathy cry was pulled from his throat.

Alex licked down Wil's chest, pausing at the rings. "Are these...?" He tugged gently at one. After an initial bit of resistance, it slid off into his hand. "Oh." Alex sounded almost disappointed at finding out that Wil hadn't gotten spur-of-the-moment nipple piercings. With a shrug, he decided to make the best of it, and bent his head to soothe the pinched flesh.
Wil began to pant lightly as he held Alex's head to his chest. A warm, wet tongue tickled around the sensitive nubs of his nipples, and blunt teeth caught the tender flesh in soft nibbles. Grunting, Wil spread his legs, allowing Alex to settle between them so he could better continue his ministrations.

Abandoning the tempting nipples for the moment, Alex licked a path down to Wil's navel, dipping his tongue into the tiny indentation. He wriggled down further, until he was confronted by the tiny triangle of cloth that barely covered Wil's erection. The material was stretched and bulging almost obscenely, hidden parts almost begging to be freed.

Alex hesitated only a second before grasping the elastic at Wil's hips and pulling the bit of clothing down. Slowly, almost reverently, he bent each of Wil's legs up so he could remove the underwear totally. Then, he just stared.

Wil felt totally exposed, on his back, legs drawn up, with Alex lying so still between his thighs. "Alex?"

Alex shook his head, drawing in a harsh breath. "You're so beautiful, Wil. Everything about you, so pale and soft and...precious."
"Oh god..." Wil felt a lurching in his chest, a pricking of tears in his eyes. He blinked rapidly to clear them. "I don't..." He reached a hand down to caress Alex's cheek.

Alex smiled, turned his face to kiss the palm of Wil's hand, then leaned down.

Wil let out a shocked cry at the tentative lick across the head of his cock. "Alex!"

Alex tilted his head, considering the flavor, then licked again. Evidently deciding that he could handle the salty, slightly bitter taste, he started to lick more purposefully, laving Wil's cock from base to tip.

Wil tried to hold perfectly still, not wanting to jostle Alex and perhaps dissuade him from what he seemed determined to do. He couldn't help the shallow thrusting of his hips, however, and when Alex finally settled his mouth over just the head and sucked gently, he bucked upwards.

That was more than Alex had prepared himself for, and he gagged, choking on the flesh that tried to force itself down his throat. He pulled away, coughing.

Mortified, Wil sat up, clutching at Alex's shoulders. "Alex, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to--"
Alex covered Wil's lips with a finger, smiling. "I know." He removed the finger and replaced it with a kiss. "Now, lay down again. I wasn't finished."

Wil licked his lips, picking up a hint of his own flavor. He nodded, and lay down, body tense.

Alex sighed. This wasn't turning out quite like he'd thought it would. He wasn't going to give up now, though. He bent his head again, then pulled up short at Wil's voice.

"You should finish getting undressed."

Alex frowned. "Now? I was going to--"

"If you undress now, we could..." Wil paused, and Alex could just about hear his blush when he continued. "I mean, maybe we could...y'know...at the same time?"

Alex froze, his mind blanking at that thought. "Gahhah." He lurched upright, pulling ineffectually at the fly of his pants. There was a chuckle, then a smaller pair of hands pushed his aside and undid the fastenings. Alex nodded his thanks, then shifted around, kicking the offending garment off. He turned back to Wil. "Ummm..."

Wil cocked his head in thought. He let his eyes wander over Alex's body, humming in appreciation at Alex's
obvious arousal. He lay on his side, facing Alex. "You could...with your head down that way?"

"Right. That works." Alex lay on his side, facing towards Wil's feet. Once more, he was treated to an up-close view of Wil's leaking cock. He touched it softly, then began to lick it again.

Following suit, Wil stroked Alex's cock a few times before working up the nerve to lap at it with his tongue. The wet touches on his own erection spurred him on, and he soon became bolder in his licking, until he had started a tentative suction on the dripping head.

They were both being careful not to thrust too forcefully, aware that neither of them was exactly skilled at this as yet. At least, not that they knew of. Better safe than sorry, though, and so they spent long minutes learning each other, tasting, teasing, testing their limits.

It was when Alex started playing with Wil's balls, rolling them in their sack and applying the tiniest bit of pressure, that Wil lost it. His body stiffened, and he gasped out, "Alex! I..."

Eyes wide, Alex moved his head away, breathing a gust of air across Wil's saliva-slick cock. He watched, fascinated, as it shuddered and twitched, then spurted a long stream
of semen up over Wil's quivering stomach. He stroked
Wil's thigh until the shuddering stopped, then pressed a
gentle kiss to the softening organ.

He'd almost forgotten about himself until Wil gathered
himself together enough to resume his own sucking.
Alex's let his head fall back, groaning loudly as then
suction became more powerful.

Wil was determined to make Alex feel as good as he had,
and worked his mouth wider until he was able to take in
the top half of Alex's cock. He swirled his tongue around
the head, then pulled away, letting his teeth scrape ever
so lightly along the tightly drawn skin.

Alex let out a low shriek and convulsed. He pressed his
face to Wil's thighs as he shook with his orgasm,
twitching at the feeling of Wil's tongue lapping the
underside of his cock.

Wil could feel Alex's seed trickle down his chest, and he
grinned. He let Alex rest for a moment, then tickled his
side.

Alex squeaked. "Wil!"

"Turn around so I can kiss you, git," he prodded
affectionately, wrapping his arms around Alex when the
other man did as he was instructed.
"Was that good? I mean, I liked it, and I assume you liked it, because...well, you know. But...was it good?"

Wil kissed Alex before he could start babbling even more. "Loved it, pet." He snuggled in closer. "Love you."

"Mmm." Alex sighed in relief. "Good. Love you too." He shifted. "We're gonna stick again."

"Good."

~*~*~*~*~

Willow scowled and kicked half-heartedly at the leg of the coffee table. "Didn't anyone find out anything useful?" All she received in response were a few shrugs and mumbled apologies, and she sniffled. "It's not fair."

"Well," Giles said, trying to inject a note of optimism, "Buffy and Riley have yet to report back. Perhaps they managed to gather some information. And if not...well, we'll just try again. And keep trying until something does turn up." He nodded decisively.

"Thanks, Giles," Willow said softly. "I just wish it didn't take so darn long!"
"Well, we--" Cordelia was cut of mid-sentence as the door was opened and Buffy strode in with Riley, grinning and giving them the thumbs up.

"You found something? You did! You found something!" Willow hugged Tara, squealing excitedly.

"Woah, chill a little, Wills." Buffy gave her friend a tolerant grin. "Yep, we found something." She frowned a little. "Ok, maybe not the best something, and lord only knows how useful it'll be, but...we still found something! Which is way better than we've been doing!"

"Argh! Spill! Tell me!" Willow bounced in front of Buffy eagerly, and it was fairly obvious that she was barely restraining herself from shaking the other girl.

Buffy rolled her eyes and made her way to the couch, were she settled herself with a yawn. "Ok, so we hit Willie's again, and managed to wring...um, I mean, we asked him if he knew anything about blood supplies and who buys it and stuff. He took a little convincing, but finally told us that there's this hush-hush delivery of blood every couple of weeks, and it has one major buyer. He figures a lot of vamps probably go through this supplier for their stores, and that would be our best bet for finding Spike."
Willow nodded. "Makes sense. So, who is it?"

"That's where the non-usefulness thing comes in. The only thing Willie would say is that I should, and I quote, 'Take it up with Sophie. I ain't gonna get on her bad side by ratting her people out.' And then he just clammed up."

"Sophie." Giles shook his head thoughtfully. "The name doesn't ring any bells for me. Anyone else?" There were headshakes and noises of negation all around. Giles sighed. "Well, it's still more than we've had to go on before now. We should get some rest and reconvene here in the evening. Willow, you and Tara try and find anything on your computer about this Sophie person. I'll look through my books here."

"I'll stay and help," Wesley offered, with Cordelia adding her support.

"I'm going home. I miss my bed, we've been separated too long." Buffy yawned again, and stood, stretching until her back cracked.

"Me too," Riley added.

Angel watched with hooded eyes as Buffy and Riley left, trying to force the tension from his shoulders. "I'm going back to the hotel," he said quietly.
"Sounds like a plan." Gunn clapped his hands together. "Sleep is one of my favorite pastimes."

Already leafing through a stack of books, Giles waved distractedly as everyone except Wesley and Cordelia left.

Cordelia looked around at all the shelves of books, and sighed. "Xander better appreciate this," she muttered. "I feel like I'm back in high school."

snap!

Lel yelped at the sharp noise, leaping into the air and spinning around. The scent of blood struck him, and he loped back through the underbrush. He slowed down, dropping to his haunches and creeping closer to the acrid, metallic tang that almost overpowered the scent of his mate.

The distressed whimpering finally pulled him from his cover, and he slunk out into the open, eyes and ears working to detect any intruders.

There was only his mate, limping towards him, hind leg tucked close to his body. Lel growled deep in his throat, bypassing his mate to nose at the strange creature that had attacked him. He batted it with a paw, springing back as it clattered loudly.
His mate yipped softly from behind him, and he left off his suspicious examination of the hard, toothy thing. He padded over to his mate, snuffling his silver fur. Coming to the injured limb, he licked carefully.

His mate growled at him, jerking the leg away. Lel watched closely as his mate gently set the foot back on the ground, testing his weight with a few limping steps. Satisfied that the injury wasn't too bad, Lel followed his mate back to their den.

Lel waited for his mate to settle down, circling carefully before curling up with his tail tucked around him. He dropped down onto his belly and squirmed close, lapping along his mate's muzzle. His mate nipped back playfully, then lay his head down, panting.

Yawning, Lel moved around behind his mate, cradling the smaller body with his own. He lay his head down on the thick fur around his mate's neck, snorting contentedly.

Lel and his mate dropped into a welcoming sleep.

Alex's eyes flew wide, and he froze, realizing he was humping against Wil's leg.

Wil shifted beside him. "Why'd you stop?" he asked in a sleepy voice.
"That was just...weird. And kind of ick. And I'm going to pretend I didn't just dream that." Alex shivered a bit.

Wil laughed. "Well, don't let a little thing like that keep you from enjoying yourself now."

Alex smacked him playfully. "Oh, come on! You can't tell me that didn't give you even the mildest case of the wiggins! We weren't even human!"

Wil rolled Alex onto his back, straddling him. "Prat. I don't care what kind of body you were in, I'd still wanna shag you blind."

Alex blinked. "Yeah?" He smirked.

Growling, Wil bent and nipped at his ear. "Damn right." He nipped again, then nuzzled into Alex's neck.

Alex hummed and tilted his head back, baring his throat to Wil's lips.

Wil growled again, then pressed his mouth to the tender column of flesh, sucking at the pulse point. He bit down a little, sucking harder.

Alex clutched at Wil as the pressure on his neck grew. He gasped out soft endearments, twisting his head to the side to give Wil better access.
Wil felt something fierce roll up within him, swamping him with its intensity. All he knew was the scent of his lover, and the seductive thumping of Alex's heartbeat. His growl grew louder, and something...changed.

With a desperate cry, Wil wrenched himself away, covering his face in horror.

Confused by his lover's abrupt withdrawal, Alex reached for Wil.

"Don't touch me!" Wil sprang off the bed, backing towards the door. "Stay away!"

Alex froze in shock. His breath caught as he stared into Wil's hungry, golden gaze, and his eyes were wide in disbelief and confusion as he saw the ridges that had formed on Wil's delicate features.

With a strangled cry, Wil flung the door open and rushed out of the room.

**Part Twenty-Five**

"So, when did he say he was going to be back in town?" Mellie passed a tray of cookies to Sophia before taking a sip from her tea.
"Thank you, dear." Sophia nibbled at a cookie before replying, "Daniel told me he'd drop by the day after tomorrow. He didn't mention how long he'd be around this time, but I'm hoping I'll be able to convince him to stay for a while." She sighed wistfully. "I do miss that boy something dreadful. He's just so...refreshing!"

Mellie nodded. "But he does have that streak of flightiness, haring off all over creation in search of the elusive 'answers'. Still, it's understandable, I suppose. He's not exactly had the easiest life, you know."

"Oh yes. The poor dear. He just needs to come back home where he belongs. I'd take proper care of him."

"Mmm, yes, I imagine you would." Mellie's eyes twinkled merrily.

Sophia grinned back and opened her mouth to retort. A frantic pounding on the door interrupted her, though, and she held her tongue as Mellie got up.

"My, who in the world could that be?" Mellie shot Sophia an apologetic glance as she made her way to the door. She opened it, then stepped back in surprise as a barely dressed Alex stumbled inside. "Alex? Whatever is the matter?"
Alex clutched at Mellie despairingly. "Wil. Is he here? Have you seen him? I can't...I have to find him!"

Mellie frowned. "Why, no. He hasn't been by here. Why, what's happened?"

Alex shook his head, backing away from her. "No, I have to find him. It's...it's daytime, he wouldn't have gone outside, would he? Oh god, I don't know where he is, Mellie. It's wrong, something's wrong, I have to find him!"

Concerned, Sophia stood and approached the distraught young man. "What is it, Alex?" she asked in a gentle tone. "What's wrong?"

"I don't..." Trembling, Alex collapsed to the floor. He leaned into Mellie's arms as they wrapped around him, rocking. In a tiny, almost childlike voice, he said, "I don't know. Mellie, he ran! Everything was so nice, and we were...and then he just changed. He was all vampy, and the he just ran. I have to find him. What if he's hurt? God, what if he ran outside, and he's all burned, and hurting, and, and, and..." He gasped for air, his eyes wild with terror.

"Hush, now." Sophia knelt next to him, stroking his back to calm him down. "You'll be no good to him in this
condition. Take a deep breath. That's it. Everything will be fine."

"But--"

Mellie's head jerked as her phone started to ring. She made no move to answer it, and after a few more rings, the answering machine picked up.

"Mellie? Are you there? Um, ok. It's, um, Jenna. I just...well, Wil's here, and he's really upset, and I was going to call Alex but he won't let me, so I called you instead. I don't know--"

Swiftly, Mellie picked herself up off the floor and grabbed the receiver. "Jenna? You said Wil's there?" With her other hand, she fended off Alex's determined scrabbling for the phone.

"Uh-huh. I see. Oh, wait a second, dear. I'm going to put you on the speaker, all right?" She pressed the button, then hung up the receiver.

From over Mellie's shoulder, Alex shouted toward the phone, "Wil? Are you there? Talk to me! Is he there, Jenna?"
"Yeah, he's, um...hold on a sec." There was a muffled noise and a few clicks as Jenna switched over to her speakerphone.

Very faintly, Wil's voice could be heard. "No. I can't...tell him to stay away. I won't hurt him!"

"Wil! Wil, talk to me. Damn it, I'm coming up there." He turned with every intention of going to Jenna's apartment and retrieving his boyfriend, even if he had to carry the stubborn vampire out to do so. He was stopped only by Wil's sad, miserable voice.

"Alex? Please...don't. I'll hurt you. I don't want to hurt you. I couldn't...I couldn't bear it if I..."

Alex's face crumpled. He allowed Sophia to lead him to the couch, where he sat as close to the phone as he could get. "Wil," he whispered brokenly, "you wouldn't hurt me, I know you wouldn't. Please, just...come back home, ok? I...I need you there."

Wil growled in frustration. "I would hurt you! You don't know what was happening, what I was going to do! I wanted--" He broke off with a strangled cry.

Confused, Jenna asked, "Why do you think that, Wil? I can't imagine you ever hurting Alex. Everyone in the
whole building knows how much you two love each other."

Wil let out a bitter laugh. "I'd think you of all people would understand. You know what we are! We...we're freaks! Bloodsucking, murderous freaks! How can we even be capable of love?"

The sound of a hand striking flesh seemed loud in the silence that followed that impassioned statement.

"How dare you?" Jenna hissed. "How dare you?" Her voice was thick with unshed tears. "I loved Alicia with all my heart, dead or alive. She was...she was my everything. And you tell me I'm not capable of love? That what we had wasn't real?"

"Jenna, I--"

"No. No. I won't stand here and listen to you say things like that. I am not a monster, Wil. You are not a monster. We may not be human any more, but damn it, we can still feel! We can be happy, and sad, and hurt, and-and in love. Being a vampire doesn't take that away. Everyone...everything is capable of love! And don't you ever say otherwise!" Jenna was so upset by this time that she was panting harshly, on the verge of bursting into tears. In almost a whisper, she finished, "I would give
anything to be with Alicia again. Wil, don't screw this up. Don't throw away what you and Alex have just because you're afraid he might get hurt. That's a chance we all take when we fall in love."

There was a moment of heavy quiet, then Wil said, "You don't get it. I'm not afraid he'll get hurt. I'm afraid I'll hurt him. Me! I can't do that!"

Alex let out a groan of frustration. "Why do you keep saying that? You won't hurt me, I know it!"

"Sweetie, let me talk to him, ok?" Sophia nudged Alex away from the phone. "Wil? It's Sophia, you remember me, don't you?"

"Yeah," Wil grumbled. His voice hardened. "Keep your bloody claws off my Alex, you hear?"

Sophia chuckled softly. "If you insist. Wil, can I ask you a question?"

There was a pause, then, "S'pose so."

"What happened that made you think you'd hurt Alex here? From what I've seen of you two, I find it very difficult to imagine you causing him any pain."
A distant thumping sound came over the line, as if someone was rhythmically kicking a piece of furniture. Finally, Wil responded, "We were...I was kissing him, y'know? An'...I started sucking on his neck, nibbling just a bit."

Alex flushed and reached up to cover the faint mark on his neck.

"Um, I just...my teeth were there, and I could hear his pulse, an' I wanted...I wanted to bite. And I could feel something happening to me, and then I had fangs, an'...an' I knew if I didn't get away, I'd...bite him. Hurt him." Wil almost choked on the words, but forced them out, "Kill him."

Alex turned pale from shock. "No," he breathed. In a firmer voice, "No. You wouldn't do that. Never. I don't believe it!"

Wil snarled. "You daft git! How the bloody hell can you--"

"Oh...my...god." Jenna snorted softly, then started to giggle.

"What is so funny?" Alex demanded angrily.

"I'm...I'm sorry, it's just...I think I understand now."
"Understand what?"

Jenna calmed herself. "Wil," she asked patiently, "how did you feel? When you wanted to bite Alex, tell me what you felt."

Wil didn't see how that mattered, but humored her request. Thinking back, he struggled to put into words the emotions that were running through him at the time. "I felt..." He sighed loudly. "I dunno...possessive? Protective? Um...completed?" Another sigh. "That doesn't make sense. If I felt like that, why'd I try an' hurt him?"

"You didn't try and hurt me, Wil! Jenna, he didn't--"

"Alex, would you stop--"

"Both of you, shut up!"

Stunned, they obeyed, waiting to see what she had to say.

"Wil, Alex is right, you didn't try to hurt him." She held up a hand to forestall any further protests. "Trust me on this one, Wil, I've been there. What you felt wasn't a desire to...well, to kill prey, it was a desire to claim your mate. To mark him as yours. To...to marry him."
Alex gasped. "M-marry?"

"Mmm. That's basically what it amounts to. If Wil had bitten you then, while you were...um...you know...well, it would have left sort of an imprint, a-a signature. You would have had a visible sign that a vampire had claimed you as his mate, his...consort. And very few people have the guts to mess with a vampire's consort."

"Of course." Mellie smacked her forehead. "How silly of me. We should have known something like this would happen and prepared the two of you. It's not like we haven't all seen bonded vampire/human couples before."

"Y-you have?" Alex stared at her and Sophia.

"Well, it's not exactly common, but it's certainly not unheard of," Sophia told him.

"I wouldn't have killed him?" Wil's voice was pleading, begging for affirmation.

"No, dummy," Jenna said affectionately. "You would have wed him. And he would have been yours. Forever."

"Oh."
Sophia heaved an aggravated sigh. "Well, what are you waiting for, you silly vampire. Get down here and make an honest man of Alex. Or I might just snatch him up while you're not looking."

There were rustling noises, then a door slammed. "Oh, thank you," Jenna breathed. "You boys have fun making up. I'm going back to bed. It's not even noon yet!"

"Sleep well. And thank you." Mellie smiled and hung up the phone.

Alex stood hastily. "Um, I have to..." he waved his hand toward the door.

"Of course you do. Shoo!"

With a grateful smile, Alex opened the door and backed out. When the door closed, he turned and leaned against it, staring intently down the hall. A moment later, the door to the stairwell opened, and Wil timidly poked his head out.

"Hi." Alex folded his arms over his bare chest, watching the vampire nervously.

Wil crept a little closer. "Hi." He shuffled his feet as he walked slowly, coming to a halt inches away from Alex.
lex held out a hand, sighing in relief when Wil took it. He squeezed it, then leaned forward. "I love you, y'know. Even if you are a dummy," he whispered, then kissed him.

The tension drained from Wil, and he kissed back eagerly. "Love you," he mumbled when their lips parted. "An' I'm not a dummy!"

"Oh yeah?" Alex let go of his hand and started walking backwards toward their apartment. "I'm still not an 'honest man'. Maybe I should go back and talk with Sophia. I think she has a few openings..." He trailed off at the look on Wil's face. Grinning, he turned and darted back into their apartment.

With a matching smile, Wil raced after him, growling playfully.

Part Twenty-Six

Anya groaned and flopped over onto her side. She smacked her lips, grimacing at the cottony, sour taste in
her mouth. Not even close to being ready to get up, she burrowed her way back under the covers. One of her legs brushed against something soft and cool, and she pressed closer.

"Ugh. Who was playin' hockey with my eyeballs?"

Anya froze as the cool thing she was curled against began to move, limbs tangling with hers.

"Oh god, tell me I didn't pick up some loser freak at that bar." The covers were pulled back, and Harmony gaped at her rather frazzled looking bed companion.

"Um, hi?" Anya waggled her fingers at the vampire.

Harmony's brow furrowed. "Hey, aren't you--?" She smacked her forehead, then yelped and rubbed it tenderly. "Anya, right? Xander's girlfriend?"

"Ex-girlfriend," Anya clarified. She sat up gingerly, and the sheets pooled around her bare form.

Harmony stared at her, then looked down at her own unclad body. "Oh no. Way no."

Anya cleared her throat. "Um, did we...?" She waved a hand between them.
Sniffing delicately at the bed, Harmony nodded. "Smells like. Huh. Well, that's new."

"Damn it." Anya lurched from the bed and hobbled across the cold stone floor.

"What? It wasn't that bad...was it?" Harmony frowned, trying to piece together her hazy, scattered memories of the previous night.

"That's just it; I don't remember!" She growled in frustration. "I mean, that's my luck, isn't it? My first experience with lesbian sex, and I don't even remember it! It's not fair!" Hands on hips, Anya glared at the vampire who was still sprawled indolently on the messy bed.

"Oh." Harmony eyed Anya's heaving chest and let her eyes wander down across a trim belly to the swell of thighs and... "Um, we could always give it another go." She licked her lips.

Anya blinked. Oddly enough, her headache seemed to have become much less debilitating. Slowly, she studied Harmony's lush curves, noting the slim hand that had slid through golden curls and started a steady stroking. She nodded curtly. "Good idea."
Back in the sanctuary of their apartment, Alex and Wil settled next to each other on the couch, hands linked together. After a moment, Alex chuckled softly and peered up at Wil. "So...wanna get hitched?"

Wil gave him a tremulous grin and squeezed his hand. "Think I pretty much killed the mood for now, pet," he answered with quiet regret.

"Oh." Alex tried to hide his disappointment. "Well, how about some breakfast, then?"

Wil blinked at the change of subject. "Um, ok." He let Alex help him up, and they made their way into the kitchen.

While Wil busied himself scrubbing out the pans they'd never gotten around to washing the day before, Alex scrounged through the refrigerator. "Wil? We're out of milk. Did you use the last?"

Wil rolled his eyes. "I'm not much of a milk person, Alex. You finished up the last yesterday when you just had to have a glass of chocolate milk before we left for work."
"Oh yeah." Alex sighed. "I suppose I should go pick some up."

"How's the blood supply?"

Alex shifted a few things around. "Um, down to two packets. I can swing by Sophia's, see if she has any good stuff in."

"Ta. Here, let me make you a bagel to eat while you're out." Wil leaned over and kissed his cheek. "Wouldn't do to have you withering away from lack of proper food. You want cream cheese on it?"

"Oooh, yeah." Alex grabbed the container of cream cheese from the fridge and opened it. Shuddering, he held it at arms length as he walked to the trashcan. "On second thought, make that butter."

"What's wrong?"

"In case you ever wondered, cream cheese is not supposed to be green and fuzzy."

~*~*~*~*~

"This is ridiculous." Cordelia slammed her book shut. "How are we supposed to find out anything about this
Sophie person if we don't even know what kind of demon we're looking for? Or if she even is a demon? Or if she even is a she?" She glared at the book as if to force it to give up its secrets.

"Well, we can't very well just give up, now can we?" Giles leveled his best authoritarian look at her, and she sighed and opened the book again.

In Cordelia's opinion, the day of researching had not gone well. Leafing through Giles' collection of books was like looking for a specific needle in a haystack-sized pile of other needles. She glanced around the room. "What's holding up Willow and her girlfriend? Weren't they supposed to be surfing the net to find stuff?" She wrinkled her nose. "On second thought, I don't really want to know what's holding them up."

Gunn looked up from his book with a wide grin. "I do!"

"Shut up, Gunn," chorused Cordelia and Wesley, and even Angel spared him a withering look.

Giles sighed. "I'm sure they--" The bell above the door jingled, interrupting him. Tara and Willow walked in, flushed and smiling.
"Bad mental images. Bad mental images." Cordelia thumped her temples repeatedly, refusing to look at the witches.

Willow blinked in confusion. "Did we miss something?"

"Ah, no," Giles answered quickly. "Did the two of you find anything?"

"Um, maybe?" Willow held up a small printout. "We looked through all the city records we could find, but nothing turned up. Then, we tried newspapers, magazines, stuff like that." She handed the paper to Giles.

"Interesting," he murmured as he scanned the article.

"What? What is it?" Cordelia waited impatiently for a response.

"Well, we didn't find any referenced to 'Sophie', but we did manage to turn up an article about the mysterious death and dismemberment of a prominent businessman." She reached around Giles and pointed. "See? One of the people questioned was a, um...Madame called Sophia."

Cordelia scowled. "Madame?"
"Proprietress," Wesley clarified.

"Pimp," Gunn offered, then wilted under the glares he received. "What?"

"What else does it say about her," Angel asked.

"Nothing. That's it. Well, it does mention that she was living in East End at the time."

"East End." Angel shook his head. "The demon side of town. It won't be easy to find her there."

"Excuse me?" Buffy stared at him, eyes narrowed. "The 'demon side of town'? As opposed to over here where we live blessedly demon-free?" She snorted. "I was over there not too long ago asking about Xander, and I didn't notice anything strange."

Angel stared at her in disbelief. "Buffy," he explained calmly, "just about everyone who lives there is non-human. Most of them look normal, but they're demons. And they're a very close-knit group."

Buffy gaped. "You're serious, aren't you?" At Angel's nod, she whirled to glare at Giles. "And why didn't I ever know about this? Aren't you supposed to tell me these crucial bits of information?"
Giles spluttered, trying to form a response, but Buffy had already turned away.

"But..." Buffy looked confused. "All of them? Demons?"

"The majority."

"But...she was so nice. And she gave me fudge!"

~*~*~*~*~

"Well, that was...interesting."

Wil glared at Alex, smacking him on the chest. "Shut up," he muttered.

"What?" Alex grinned. "It was! You practically have a cult following now, 'harem boy'." He leered at his boyfriend.

"Shut up!"

Laughing, Alex pulled Wil to him and spun him around the room in a brief dance. Wil resisted only briefly before giving in with a small chuckle.

Breathless, Alex led Wil into their bedroom and tumbled him onto the bed. He lay beside him and wrapped his arms around him. "I know you were a big hit filling in for
Jon last night," he said, "but I don't think you should dance any more."

Wil frowned. "Why not? Liked it, didn't you?"

"That's the point!" Alex groaned. "I almost stripped you bare and-and humped you onstage! And everyone wanted to touch you." He shuddered. "They can't touch you, Wil. They can't."

"Git." Wil snorted in amusement, then grabbed one of Alex's wandering hands and kissed it. "Think I want them touching me? Undressin' me with their eyes like they did tonight?" He growled. "Don't know how Jon stands it."

"Well, for one, Jon isn't half as hot as you are." He kissed Wil's nose. "Then again, at least his hair is natural."

"Hey!" Wil shoved at Alex's chest, glaring.

"Mmm, I love the way you look, though." Alex nuzzled the sensitive spot behind Wil's ear. "Your roots are really showing, now," he commented offhandedly.

Eyes wide, Wil reached up and pulled at his hair in horror. "It looks that bad?" he asked.

Alex cocked his head. He shivered. "Looks damn sexy," he growled. "Dark at the roots, turns blonde, then almost
white at the tips. Just a bit of a curl..." He growled again, then nibbled on Wil's earlobe.

Wil gasped. "Oh...oh, yeah..."

Releasing the bit of flesh with a slurping sound, Alex propped himself up on an elbow. "Wil? You wanna...you know, try that marking thing again?"

"I..." Wil toyed with the buttons on his shirt. "I s'pose we can try," he said softly.

"Ok," came Alex's equally soft response.

With trembling fingers, Wil reached over and pulled Alex's shirt off. He stared for a moment at the other man's chest, letting his gaze slowly move up to his exposed neck. He swallowed.

Alex arched his back and let out a tiny whimper when cool lips descended and began caressing his throat. Then teeth began to nibble, and he bit back a gasp.

Wil licked and nibbled at the salty skin, sucking at times until faint marks arose. Alex tasted delicious, and Wil never wanted to stop running his tongue over his boyfriend's quivering flesh.
Alex writhed under Wil for long minutes. A strangled cry escaped him when Wil finally pulled away.

"It's not working," Wil informed him dejectedly.

"Hmm?" Alex shook his head to clear it. "Oh. No biting?"

Wil shook his head.

"Well...that's ok. We can still cuddle." Again, Alex felt a slight sting of disappointment, but he knew how much Wil had been freaked by it happening the first time. He wasn't going to rush the vampire. It happened once, it was sure to happen again. Eventually. He hoped.

"Mmmmm, an' kiss?" Wil wiggled out of his own shirt, then spooned his body up beside Alex's.

"Kissing is of the good. And licking too. I like licking." To prove his point, Alex licked the sharp line of Wil's cheekbone.

"Oh yeah, I like licking."

"All over licking is a good thing, too." Alex snickered and licked the bridge of Wil's nose.

"A-All over?" Wil squeaked out.

"All over."
A cough wracked Velius' body, and he huddled deeper into the small cave, trying desperately to conserve some warmth. The tiny fire he'd managed to produce wasn't doing much to heat the area, but it was better than nothing. Barely.

Alone. Gods, it was so quiet. The sound of the blizzard outside should have been deafening, but all Velius could hear were his own raspy breaths and thumping heartbeat.

He'd had a feeling about this campaign. Something in him knew things would go wrong. Who needed an oracle to give tidings of impending doom? He'd been able to figure it out just fine for himself.

Velius let out a bitter laugh. Just his luck, though. Here he'd only come on this campaign to keep an eye on his younger brother, and what happens? He ended up being the one separated from the others, forced to hole up in this wretched crevice, sick and slowly freezing to death.

A twig snapped, the sharp sound echoing loudly through the enclosed space. Shivering, Velius stared wildly into the swirling whiteness outside. Something was coming.
A dark, bundled shape loomed in the opening. Velius gripped his short sword tightly, uncertain who -- or what -- would be about in weather like this.

The figure moved inside, shaking itself. A limb came up, pushing back the hood covering its face.

"By the gods, it's cold out there!"

Velius gaped, his sword slipping from nerveless fingers. "Aecus? How did you--? What are you doing here?"

Aecus grinned at his brother. "You thought I'd let you slip away from me that easily?"

Velius shook his head. "You fool," he muttered.

Offended, Aecus retorted, "Fool? Who's the one who got trapped in the middle of nowhere in the worst snowstorm I've ever seen?"

"Both of us, now!" Velius glared. "Why didn't you stay with the others? You were safe!"

"Yes, well, you're welcome." Aecus crept across the uneven floor and settled next to his brother. "Gods, you're cold. Here." He removed his coat and draped it over the two of them.
Against his will, Velius relaxed as his brother's body heat and the insulation of the coat warmed him slightly. "Thanks," he said softly. Another cough shook him, but it wasn't as severe as the previous one.

"You would have done it for me too, you know." Aecus moved his arm around Velius, pulling the other man closer.

"Of course I would have. That's what older brothers do." He twisted his head and tried to give Aecus another glare, but it was rather half-hearted. He sighed. "You do know we're both going to die now, right?"

Aecus shrugged. "Probably," he admitted softly. Then, in a lighter tone, "Well, at least the good senator doesn't have to worry about having someone to follow in his footsteps; he still has Primus and Quintus just waiting to fill his sandals."

"Don't talk about father that way," Velius admonished. "You know he cares for us."

"Ah, of course." In a mutter, he continued, "As much as the man can care about two sons who went against his wishes and became common soldiers."

"Stop it."
"Sorry Velius."

They huddled together in silence, shivering as the cold seemed to grow more intense.

"Do you really think we're going to die?"

Velius sighed. "Most likely. The snow isn't letting up, and we haven't got much fuel for the fire. Chances are, we'll freeze before too long."

"Oh." Aecus drew in a deep breath. "I love you, Velius."

Velius smiled. "I know. I love you as well, Aecus."

"Velius..." Aecus set cold fingers on his brother's face, turning it towards him. "I really...love you." Before he could change his mind, he pressed his lips to Velius'.

Velius held himself rigid. Then, with a low groan, he reached up a hand and brushed it along Aecus' face, moving back to tangle in his hair. "Ah, Aecus," he sighed. He returned the kiss with another, then pulled Aecus' head down to his chest, stroking his hair gently. "I love you too, Aecus," he murmured, staring again into the unforgiving wall of snow outside. "I love you, too."
Part Twenty-Seven

Wil woke curled up against Alex, and he smiled. Slowly, he stretched his limbs out and sat up. He pulled the covers down, then just lay there and stared at Alex. Everything about this man was beautiful. His perfectly muscled chest and arms, that little indentation at the base of his collarbone, that lock of hair that constantly fell in front of his eyes.

His eyes. Oh, those were the best of all, the way they sparkled when he laughed, and the little crinkles at the corners when he squinted. The look of love and wonder in them whenever he saw Wil. They way the turned almost black with passion when Wil kissed him. And the way they sought him out in the dim light when Alex was still muddled from sleep...

"Wil?"

With a smile, Wil leaned over and kissed Alex. "Afternoon, luv," he said quietly.

Alex grinned at him sleepily. "S'dark. Can' see."
Wil laughed and reached over to turn on the bedside lamp. "Better?"

Blinking to clear the spots from his eyes, Alex nodded. "Mmm, I can look at you now," he said appreciatively. Moving lazily, he pulled Wil back towards him, nibbling on his lower lip when it came into range.

Wil groaned as Alex's tongue teased against his lips without ever slipping inside. When Alex pulled back, Wil stared at him heavy-lidded. "You taste delicious," he said, eyes sparkling with pleasure.

Alex gave him a nervous grin. "Wil? Do you think you...I mean...would you..." Alex paused and cleared his throat. "Do you want to...you know...do it?"

Wil stared at him blankly. "'Do it'? Do what?" He watched in fascination as Alex's face turned bright red.

"You know. Uh...f-fucking? You, um, d-do me?"

A strangled noise escaped Wil, and he bolted upright. "Y-you mean...with the...and the...?"

Alex nodded. "I mean, we don't have to, if you don't want to. It was...I was just thinking, I might...want you to?"
"Oh." Wil stared at him in awe. "You'd let me...do that? You want me to?"

"Well, yeah. Sure." Alex blushed again. "I, um, like the thought of you touching me...there."

Wil whimpered. "O-ok," he whispered. "If-if you want."

Alex let out a relieved sigh. "Yeah," he said with a tender smile. "I want."

"Right." With shaking hands, Wil stripped out of his sweatpants, then reached to tug off Alex's. "Do you...um...how should we...?"

Alex rolled onto his stomach and tucked his knees up under him. "Will...will that work?"

Wil snapped his mouth shut, wiped the drool off his chin, and hastily said, "Yeah. It's...it's fine." He took in a lungful of air to steady himself, then crawled up behind Alex. He crouched over him, a hand on his back. "You're sure?"

Alex snorted. "I'm sure." He twisted his head so he could see Wil out of the corner of his eyes. "I want this. I want you."

Wil closed his eyes briefly. Bending forward, he began to kiss the back of Alex's neck, moving down until he was
licking right between his shoulder-blades, making him squirm.

"Wil!"

Grinning, Wil stroked a hand over Alex's ass, probing hesitantly between his cheeks until his fingers brushed over the tight ring of muscle. He groaned softly, lining the head of his cock up to the tiny opening.

Alex hummed happily as the first tentative thrust skittered along the sensitive nerves. He arched his back a bit.

Growling, Wil tried again, gasping at the intense heat the gripped his erection when the head popped in.

Alex gasped as well, then turned his face and bit into his arm. He hadn't thought it would hurt like this. It burned, like a thousand needles pricking inside him, and he couldn't help tensing. Another thrust sent a searing pain up his spine, and he was unable to completely muffle his agonized cry.

Wil froze. "A-Alex?" He swallowed hard, shuddering at the vice-like grip around his cock. "Are...are you ok?"

Alex panted hard, trying to still his shaking. "I'm fine," he gasped out, squeezing his eyes shut.
Wil frowned. He moved slightly, and his eyes widened at Alex's whimper. He was positive it wasn't a good whimper, either. "Alex?" He pulled back a bit, and a new scent teased at his nose. So very familiar...

"Oh god." With a low cry of horror, Wil wrenched himself away. Stunned, he stared at the trickle of blood that followed his exit. He shook his head and stretched out a trembling hand. "A-Alex, I...oh god, you're bleeding." He snatched the hand back and scuttled away, almost falling off the end of the bed.

Biting back another cry of pain, Alex forced himself to roll over. He reached out a hand imploringly. "Wil, don't...don't leave. Please, don't run again."

Wil's face crumpled in despair, but he reluctantly crept back to Alex. "I hurt you," he muttered, grief-stricken. "I'm so sorry, Alex, I didn't mean...I never wanted to...oh god." He curled up next to Alex, head on his chest. "Please, I'm sorry, I'm sorry Alex," he chanted, fighting to hold back tears.

Alex wrapped himself around Wil, wincing at the stab of pain from his nether regions. "Wil, it's ok. I know you didn't mean to hurt me. It's not that bad, really. I'll be ok."
"I shouldn't be allowed to touch you," Wil mumbled. "I should--"

"Wil, listen to me." Alex tilted Wil's face up so he could stare him in the eyes. "Look, something went wrong. We screwed up. It's my fault as much as it is yours, ok? I shouldn't have asked you to do this when we weren't ready yet. Don't go all broody on me; we'll figure this out. We probably just need practice or something."

Wil said nothing, just continued to clutch at Alex.

Alex sighed, then forced a smile. "You know what else we need practice doing? That showering together thing. Remember? I think we should give that another try."

Wil sniffled. "I'll probably just hurt you again," he answered despondently.

"Won't know until we try it!" Alex retorted brightly. He sat up, winced again, then jerked Wil up as well. "Come on!"

~*~*~*~*~

Alex walked into the club, staring around the deserted interior. "Hello? Frankie?"
Frankie walked out of his office. "Alex? You're early."

"Yeah, um...I had some things to do. Wil's gonna be in later."

Frankie nodded, then went back to his office.

Quickly, Alex walked towards the back, hesitating when he came to the dressing room. He took a steadying breath, then pushed inside.

The three men inside paused their conversation and turned to stare at him curiously.

"Hey." Alex blushed. "Um, Jon? Can I talk to you for a sec?"

The redhead nodded and walked over, waving at his companions to go back to their conversation without him. "What's up? Where's your sexier half?" He grinned.

"I...kinda wanted to talk to you about that. Sorta. Is there, um, someplace private we can go?"

Jon studied the tense young man. "You're not going to make a pass at me, are you?"

"What? No!"
Jon snorted. "Ok, crush a guys dreams." He chuckled as he led Alex to a small room down the hall. He ushered the other man inside. "So, what's the scoop?"

Alex looked around the mostly bare room, then pulled out a chair and sat at the table. "I-I wanted to talk to you. It's...it's about...uh, sex."

"Sex." Jon blinked. He turned, locked the door, then walked over and sat on the edge of the table. "Shoot."

Alex's face turned pink. "Well, see, Wil and I, we tried...that is, we wanted to...oh man." He steeled himself, then blurted it out. "We tried to have sex."

"Tried?" He leaned forward, eyes twinkling.

"It didn't work too well," Alex mumbled, not meeting Jon's steady gaze.

"How exactly did it not work?"

"It...it hurt. And...there was some blood."

"Ok. Um, what can I say, it does hurt a little sometimes. Wouldn't think Wil would mind the blood, though, being a vampire and all."

"No, see...he freaked! And it hurt a lot! Like, talking agony, here!"
Jon arched an eyebrow skeptically. "Oh, come on. It couldn't have been that bad. I mean, it's not like he just tried to shove himself in dry."

Alex groaned and covered his face.

"You...you're..." Jon sat there for a moment, taken aback. "You're kidding. He did?"

Face still hidden, Alex nodded.

"Damn. That's...geez. Even I would think twice about doing that, and I'm certainly not a blushing virgin here." Jon shook his head.

Alex dropped his hands and glared. "Well, what were we supposed to do? It's not like we came with instruction manuals!"

Jon chuckled. "You want instructions?" He thought about it, then nodded sharply. "Ok, just make sure Wil doesn't come kill me when he finds out you talked to me about this." He settled back into a chair of his own, making himself comfortable. "Well, first off, anal sex can be one big party, but it's definitely BYOL."

Alex blinked in confusion. "Huh?"
Jon sighed good-naturedly. "Bring you own lube. Nature didn't exactly equip us to take something the size of a cock up our asses on a regular basis.

A picture flashed in Alex's mind of Wil opening the nightstand that first night, unearthing a jumble of lubes and condoms. He could almost smack himself. "Um. Ok. Lube. Got it." He stared fixedly at the far wall, not really having the guts to look Jon in the face. "What about...condoms?"

"General rule, always use 'em. I dunno, though. You won't have to worry about STDs or anything since vampires are technically dead and can't carry or transmit diseases. Might want to use them to avoid any...er messes, though."

"Messes?" He snuck a glance at Jon, who gave him an amused grin. Light dawned. "Oh!" His face heated so much, Alex was surprised his eyeballs didn't melt out of their sockets. And that imagery was enough to distract him, giving Jon the opportunity to continue Alex's impromptu sex education.

Jon found himself starting to enjoy this lecture, as well as Alex's reactions. "The key is relaxation. No matter how much you prep your partner, if he's not relaxed, it's not gonna work."
"Relaxation." Alex considered that. "Ok, I can see how that's a good thing."

"Uh-huh." Jon snorted. "Also, there's no such thing as too much lube. If you're not sure, add more. Now, you're probably going to want to start with just a finger. Once you can move that in and out pretty easily, you can try for two. When you can get two inside, the real stretching starts. Just keep scissoring your fingers apart gently to loosen the muscles. Some people also use rimming to help with this."

This got Alex's full attention, and he stared at Jon quizzically. "Rimming?"

"Tongue, Alex. You use your tongue instead of fingers."

"Oh. Oh!" Alex blushed fiercely and let his head drop onto the table with a thud. "You do realize that after this I will never be able to look at you again, don't you?"

Jon laughed loudly. "Whatever. Anyway, however you start, you'll probably want to work up to three fingers. Keep adding lube if you need to, and be gentle." He paused and eyed Alex speculatively. "How big are you?"

"Excuse me?" Alex squeaked.

"Your dick, Alex. How big is it?"
"That's...that's kind of private, man." Oh look, there was the nice wall again.

Jon sighed. "Look, I'm just trying to help here. If you're bigger than average, you're going to need to be extra careful, maybe even try and get four fingers inside him before you try anything else. And if you're...not so large, you could maybe be able to get away with just a little stretching later on."

He laughed at the expression on Alex's face, and continued. "Position. Let's see. Spoons would be your best choice. It tends to make for slower lovemaking, and the penetration isn't quite so deep. Not a bad idea for the first time. Not that there's anything wrong with hot, hard, sweaty sex..." He licked his lips, eyes taking on a far off look. Then he shook himself. "For something like this, though, you're going to want something slower and gentler. First times are special, man, no sense in rushing things. Plus, it's really easy to cuddle in that position. And it takes a lot of strain off the other guy because he doesn't have to support your weight. And you don't have to worry about crushing him."

"That's...that's good." He almost wished he'd thought to bring something to take notes, but figured it would be
hard to write while staring at the wall like he seemed intent on doing.

"Hey." Jon reached over and tapped Alex's arm, waiting until the other man looked at him. "Don't be embarrassed, man. I wish I'd had the guts to talk to someone about this stuff before I started. You guys will be fine. Just take it slow. Don't rush things. And if either one of you is uncomfortable, take a break. It's not like you have a time limit or something."

Alex sighed and gave him a shaky grin. "I know. Thanks. It's just...I feel like we should have been able to figure this out for ourselves."

"No prob. That's what buds are for. Besides, now you're somewhat better informed, the two of you should be able to have a grand old time." Jon leered.

Alex blushed again, but smiled. "Really, thanks. But, um, don't take it personally when I avoid you for the next couple of years, ok?"

Jon laughed. "Who, me?"

~*~*~*~*~*~
"No."

Alex sighed as Wil turned over. He reached across the space between them, letting his hand settle on Wil's hip. "Wil, come on. It'll be better this time. We just skipped a few steps, is all."

Wil rolled back over and glared at Alex. "I hurt you. An' I'm bloody well not gonna try it again!"

"But..." Alex looked away, jaw clenching. "Ok, fine," he said in a quivery voice. "I just...I really want to share that with you, Wil."

"Uh-huh." Wil studied his bedmate. "You still sore?"

Alex twitched at the question. "A little," he admitted.

"And you want to try that again? Are you insane?" He sighed at the look of utter desolation that covered Alex's face. "Fine. Ok? Fine. But I'm not gonna hurt you again." He kicked off his pants and rolled onto his stomach. "You do me, then."

Alex stared. He hadn't actually considered it this way. "Wil?"
"Look, if it goes wrong, at least I heal up faster. An'..." He sighed. "I dunno, I kinda wanna know what's it's like, too. So long as it ain't too awful."

Alex closed his eyes, fighting back the surge of arousal that had overtaken him. "I can...I can do that," he managed to say. Sitting up, he yanked off his clothes and fumbled for the drawer to the nightstand, wrenching it open and spilling most of its contents onto the floor. He scooped up one of the unopened tubes of lubricant, then turned back over to Wil. "Um, could you...just a little..." He used a hand on Wil's hip to guide the vampire onto his side, then scooted up behind him.

Wil tensed a little as he felt Alex's warmth along his back. He struggled to remain calm.

Alex wanted to get Wil relaxed before he started, so he began petting and licking along his back. "I love how you taste," he said. He gently kneaded bunched up muscles, smoothing out the knots of tension. "I love touching you, and kissing you, and running my tongue across your skin."

Wil moaned and felt his entire body loosen. He pressed back, bending his head forward so Alex could get at the spot on the nape of his neck.
Alex grinned and went after it, nibbling and nipping, then soothing the tormented flesh with tiny licks. He moved a hand down, pushing at the back of Wil's thigh until his upper leg was bent up against his stomach. He sucked on Wil's earlobe as he struggled to open the tube, losing the cap somewhere in the tangle of sheets.

Wil sighed as a slippery fingertip rubbed against his opening. It wasn't so bad, felt kind of nice, actually. He wiggled his hips as the finger continued to play around the wrinkled ring of flesh, never pressing inside. The light touches were hardly enough to be satisfying, and were driving him up the wall.

Alex took a deep breath, then pressed his finger cautiously inside.

Wil still. He squeezed his muscled around the intruder experimentally. That was...odd. But...not bad. He pushed back.

Relieved at Wil's smooth acceptance, Alex pushed his finger in deeper, moving slowly and carefully until it was in as far as it could go. Gently, he slid it back out.


Alex gave a breathless laugh. He squirted more lube on his finger, then replaced it, rocking it gently in and out.
He listened to Wil's tiny moans and grunts of pleasure, glad he was doing this right. Again, he removed his finger, ignoring Wil's protests so he could apply more lube to it and its neighboring finger.

Wil felt more than the one finger seeking entrance this time. He stilled, then pushed back questioningly. The fingers slipped inside a little, and Wil hissed at the slight burn that accompanied the intrusion.

"Is this ok?" Alex asked anxiously.

"Hang on." He lay still for about a dozen of Alex's heartbeats, then relaxed again. "Ok," he whispered.

Ever so slowly, Alex let his fingers burrow deeper inside of Wil's tight opening. He imagined that cool, slick tightness around his cock, then firmly banished that thought before he could lose it.

Wil couldn't believe this was working. There was the smallest moment of discomfort when Alex started to scissor his fingers apart, but he soon became accustomed to the stretching sensation. Only a slight twinge of pain accompanied the addition of a third finger, and Wil was surprised to find himself thrusting back, almost desperate to get the fingers inside him every time they withdrew.
Finally, Alex removed his fingers from the snug, but no longer impossibly tight hole. He squirted out another healthy amount of lube and rubbed it over his cock, then he slid his arm around Wil's waist. "I'm gonna try, now. You ready?"

Wil moaned and nodded, wanting to experience that full, tingling feeling the fingers had given him again.

Alex held his breath and let his cock nudge up against Wil's ass. Ears attuned to any sounds of discomfort Wil might produce, he made a small thrust forward, and the tip of his cock slipped inside.

Wil gasped, his eyes flying wide. That was...big. Bigger than the fingers. He let the sensation wash over him, then wiggled his hips. "Ahhhh..." He couldn't help the drawn-out groan than escaped his lips when Alex's cock began to slide into him.

Alex's groan matched Wil's. He was amazed at how smoothly this was going, how simple it had turned out to be once he knew what to do. He halted his advance, fighting to catch his breath. Oh, he couldn't wait for Wil to do this to him. This time, with the lube.

Wil felt so full. So...complete. He felt the brush of wiry pubic hairs against his ass, and realized that Alex was as
deep as he could get in this position. It was...heaven. He smiled, reaching down to squeeze Alex's hand. "Move," he coaxed softly.

With a laugh that almost sounded like a sob, Alex did as he was bid. He rocked his hips back the smallest amount, then thrust forward again. Judging by Wil's whimper and moan, this was a good thing. Alex did it again.

Wil grunted softly each time Alex pushed into him. He was being invaded, taken over, consumed from the inside. He loved it. With a sigh of utter enjoyment, Wil arched his back a little.

Alex did his best to keep the tempo slow and steady, not wanting to hurt Wil in his eagerness. Then, Wil let out a high-pitched yell, and he went still, heart pounding in fear. "Wil?"

Eyes wide, Wil stared at the pretty sparkling lights that had appeared. "Again," he groaned. "Do it again!"

Alex frowned, but complied. Again, an almost feminine shriek sounded. Shaken, Alex once more forced himself to stillness. "Wil, what's wrong?"

"Wrong? You stopped! Bloody keep moving!" Wil jerked himself forward, then back, shuddering as that...something inside him was prodded again.
"It doesn't hurt?" He was still unsure, but Wil seemed intent on continuing, and didn't seem to be in any discomfort.

"Feels...bloody fantastic. Move, would you!" He wanted that again, wanted that spot stroked.

Alex thrust tentatively, feeling his cock scrape past a tiny lump inside of Wil. He pulled back, then tried nudging the spot repeatedly.

Wil spasmed helplessly as what felt like sparks of lightening danced up and down his spine. This was better than orgasming...almost. He convulsed as Alex decided to try rocking harder, which of course drove his cock even more forcefully against that wonderful, amazing, fanfuckingtastic spot that Wil was really wishing he'd discovered much earlier.

More confident now, Alex resumed his slow, steady pace, putting just a tad more force behind his thrusts. He was really enjoying the way Wil shivered and twitched whenever he hit that nub of flesh, and made sure to do it often. He pressed feverish kisses to Wil's damp shoulders. Then, Wil's cock bumped against his hand, and he grinned.
Wil yelped as the warm hand enclosed his erection. Head shaking with the intensity of what he was feeling, Wil jerked himself back and forth between Alex's cock and his hand. "Oh god...oh...Alex, I..." Gasping, he stopped moving, and a low, keening cry rose in his throat.

When Wil became still, Alex gave one last thrust, then just held on in wonder as Wil jerked and shook, spurting sticky fluid out over his hand. The rippling sensation around his cock was unbelievable, and he kissed the side of Wil's neck fervently as the vampire continued to whimper and writhe.

It was the most amazingly intense orgasm Wil was certain he had ever experienced, and it seemed to last for hours. When it finally ended, and he was wracked by only a few lingering, minor convulsions, Wil swallowed to moisten his throat. "That was...real good, pet," he said hoarsely.

"Glad to hear it," Alex responded equally hoarsely. "Um, can I...?" He made a tentative thrust.

Wil realized that Alex was still hard inside him, and he smiled. "Go ahead," he whispered, "but don't get too disappointed if I just lay here and catch my breath."
Alex laughed a little. "You don't breathe," he retorted, then started thrusting again.

"Mmmm." Wil stretched a little, enjoying the easy movements inside him, shivering a little whenever Alex brushed over that exquisitely sensitive spot. After a few minutes of this, an evil thought came to his mind and he clamped down, squeezing the muscles of his ass as tight as he could.

Alex grunted loudly. "Ah!" Wil did it again, and again, and Alex couldn't stop it. He buried himself as deep as he would go and came, clutching Wil close to him as he shuddered his way through orgasm.

Wil sucked in a breath at the warmth that seemed to gush into him. As Alex relaxed against him, he once more twined their hands together. "Like that, huh?"

"You...are truly...evil," Alex panted.

"Uh-huh. In a good way though, right?" He let out a hiss as Alex slipped out of him, clenching his cheeks against the empty feeling he was left with. With a sigh, he wiggled around to his other side facing Alex. He kissed the other man's chin. "I really did like it, pet. Lots."

"Yeah?" Alex returned the kiss. "Me too." He yawned.
Wil waited until he was done yawning, then pressed a tender kiss to his lips. "Can we do it again when we wake up?"

Alex yawned again, nodding sleepily. "Lots an' lots," he murmured. "I get a turn, too."

With happy, satisfied sighs, they soon drifted off into a contented sleep.

---

**Part Twenty-Eight**

*X'an deftly plucked the little octopus from its hiding place. With a swift movement, he partially crushed its head with a rock. The creature spasmed a few times, then died. *X'an* swam with his catch to a large flat rock that was mostly concealed by gently waving fronds of seaweed and ferns. He settled himself on the rock, tail curled beside him. With a sharp claw, he plucked an eyeball from the octopus and chewed on it thoughtfully.*
He felt odd. The pod was in its usual yearly frenzy, and things wouldn't settle down until one of the males finally caught and mated with the matriarch. And B'fi wasn't making the chase easy.

He didn't see what all the fuss was about, personally. B'fi was nice and all, but why such a commotion just because she was in season? X'an shook his head, confused. He nibbled on a tentacle, grinning as a small school of bright silver fish zipped by him. They were safe for the moment; the octopus was enough to slake his hunger.

Sensing movement in the weeds behind him, X'an jerked around. His eyes scanned the covering of plants, trying to pick out what had alerted him.

There. A flash of red. X'an tensed. With a flick of his powerful tail, he launched himself off of the rock, streaming with the fluid grace of a predator through the weeds. This section of the ocean floor was practically a jungle, overgrown with a lush abundance of plantlife. Colorful anemones waved gently at his passing, and he slipped through an opening in the coral.

He pulled up short, fins fluttering to hold him in place. "Hello?"
The smaller male, obviously not one of X'an's pod, bared his teeth, chittering threateningly. His tail moved stiffly, sending him back a few lengths.

X'an's eyes widened at the long, thin scratches that wound their way across the stranger's chest. They crossed over his gills, and disappeared into the bright red of his tail. "Are you...are you all right?"

The merman glared at him, shaking his head to send a cloud of his black hair covering his body. "Go 'way," he rasped out.

"I'm not going to hurt you," X'an said softly, drifting closer to the skittish male. He halted when the spines along the merman's flanks lifted in warning. Then he looked closer. Several of the spines appeared to be damaged, shorter than normal and not tapering to their usual dangerous points. Like they had been broken. "What happened?"

The red and black male gave a high pitched, keening cry that made X'an wince and back away a bit. This only steadied his resolve, though. Determinedly, he began to move in again. This time, he noticed how the other merman's eyes followed the movements of his hand. He looked, realizing that he still held the octopus.
Tentatively, he held it out. "Are you hungry? I don't mind sharing."

The male twitched, his mouth dropping open a bit to taste the water. With halting, jerky movements, he drew closer to X'an, drawn by the promise of food.

X'an tore off a tentacle and held it out, watching in bemusement as the smaller male snatched it and began to gnaw at it desperately, gulping it down in only a few bites. "More?"

A hesitant nod met this query, and X'an held out another tentacle. "What's your name?" he asked as he watched the second tentacle disappear as quickly as the first.

Cool blue eyes studied him carefully as the last bite was swallowed. "S'ke," he answered after a long moment, then held out a somewhat shaky hand.

X'an grinned. He handed over the rest of the octopus, then drifted to the seabed. "I'm X'an," he said. "Why don't I find us something more to eat? And then I want to hear all about where you come from and why you're here."

Still eating hurriedly, S'ke watched the blue-green male swim away, already stalking the unlucky lobster that had scuttled by.
"Danny! Welcome home!" Grinning widely, Sophia enveloped the smaller man in a tight hug, almost making his bones creak in protest.

"It's good to be back," came the breathless response.

Sophia finally released, then gave him a critical once-over. "Blue streaks? Daniel, streaks are so passe. Now, maybe if you had done just the tips blue instead..." She fingered his dyed hair musingly.

"Sophia, you'd be perfectly happy if I shaved my head bald, admit it."

"Oh, no! The hair must stay, Daniel. But, maybe something lighter next time?" She ushered him into the elevator. "Come now, we have so much to catch up on!" She beamed to the other passenger in the elevator. "Mellie, you remember Danny, don't you?"

Mellie smiled and patted his hand fondly. "Of course I do. I may be getting up in years, but I'm not senile." She too looked him over. "My dear boy, you need to eat more! You're positively scrawny!"

"Well, if your pie is anywhere near as good as it used to be, I'm sure that won't last long."
"Oh, isn't he a dear?" She pulled him into a quick hug. "Do drop by and visit me when you get settled. My daughter Dana is visiting too, and I'm sure the two of you will get along famously!" The elevator jerked to a stop and dinged. "Well, here's my floor." Mellie hugged the bemused young man again, pecking his forehead in a motherly manner. "Don't be a stranger!"

As her friend stepped into the hallway, Sophia called out, "Mellie, don't forget to call with that recipe you promised me yesterday!"

"Oh yes. I'll get that for you right away." She waved, then turned to walk to her apartment. "Wil, Alex. For heaven's sake, you'll wrinkle the laundry if you keep that up! Put the basket down before you start making out in the hallway." Giggling softly, she stepped into her apartment.

Daniel Osborne cocked his head and frowned as the metal panels of the elevator closed, blocking his view of the two strangely familiar men who were still ardently kissing.

~*~*~*~*~

Alex finally managed to fumble their door open, and he
about fell inside, pulling Wil and their basket of laundry in with him. He laughed breathlessly when the laundry went tumbling to the floor and they followed close after. "Wil!" he panted out, trying to nudge the door shut with his foot. "Door!"

Wil growled and kicked the door, closing it with a loud bang. Then he went back to nibbling the inside part of Alex's wrist, something he'd discovered drove the other man wild.

Alex squeaked, watching wide-eyed as Wil worked his tongue up the tender skin of his arm until he was sucking at the bend of his elbow. He let out a low cry, his body jerking with pleasure. "Wil...please. I want..." He spread his legs apart.

Wil stilled, pulling back and looking at Alex seriously. "You sure you wanna try that again, luv?"

Without hesitation, Alex nodded. "You won't hurt me. Please, Wil. I need you."

Taking a deep, steadying breath, Wil nodded. "Right then. Best get into the bedroom." He smirked. "The floor inside the doorway can wait to be christened until we get more...practiced." He stood and pulled Alex up, shoving him in the direction of the bedroom.
Alex stumbled across the room, eyes crossed in remembrance of the practicing for the shared shower experience. Dear lord, how would he survive? His knees bumped into something, and he stared with glazed eyes at the bed, which was still somewhat soiled from their sexual explorations upon wakening. He knew they'd forgotten something when taking the laundry down...

"Less clothes would probably be best." Wil chuckled as Alex stared at him blankly, then began to undress.

"Right. Right!" Alex bobbed his head eagerly, stripping quickly out of his clothes. Once naked, he spread himself out on the bed.

Wil stared in wonder at the man who was so easily and fearlessly offering himself to him. What had he ever done to deserve him? He shook of those musings and crawled onto the bed. Remembering the lube this time, he grabbed the tube off the nightstand, quirking an eyebrow at its half-empty state. Looks like they might have to start investing in the economy-sized tubes.

Alex tried to turn onto his stomach, but a hand on his hip stopped him. "Wil?"
Wil licked his lips as he touched Alex's body. "Like you like this, pet," he said in a husky voice. He let his finger travel lightly across Alex's swelling cock.

"Oh." Alex wiggled, slightly embarrassed by the frank, admiring gaze that was being directed at him. "Um...do something?"

The soft, pleading words broke through Wil's reverie, and he nodded. "Yeah. Just...you're so bloody gorgeous." He laughed weakly at himself. With fumbling hands, he squirted some lube from the open tube, wondering absently if they would ever find the cap to the blasted thing. Not that looked like it would last long anyway...

Alex frowned, then bent his knees up towards his chest, holding them there. He felt somewhat exposed in this position, but it was worth it to see Wil's eyes darken with desire.

Wil tried to ignore the way his hands shook as he reached slippery fingers towards Alex, trying to prepare his lover as carefully and gently as he had been prepared.

Alex fought the urge to tense in remembrance of the pain he'd felt previously. He was glad he had when the finger slid painlessly into him, wiggling around as if seeking something.
Wil knew it had to be there. He wasn't exactly sure what 'it' was, but reason stated that if he could be driven out of his skull with pleasure by having a certain spot inside him stimulated, then Alex would surely posses a similar spot.

Alex barely had a chance to remember that nub of flesh he'd discovered inside of Wil the night before when Wil found his. He gave a very unmanly shriek, his back arching up off the bed as his eyes opened wide in disbelief. That's what it felt like??? There was no way he was going to survive this!

More sure of himself, Wil played with the spot he'd found, prodding just around it until Alex was keening helplessly, then letting the tip of his finger scrape over it. Feeling daring, he tried for two fingers, applying more lube to help ease the way. It was more of a stretch, but he did it, turning Alex's startled gasp into a moan of pleasure by burrowing in to rub over that fleshy protrusion.

Alex tried to open himself more, pulling his legs higher up. "Wil...please!"

Wil shook the beads of sweat off his face, adding more lube and a third finger, carefully stretching the tight muscle, feeling it slowly yield to his advances. He stared,
fixated on the sight of his fingers disappearing into Alex's body. He trembled, unable to wait much longer. "You...you ready?"

"God yes!" Alex squeezed on the fingers inside him, then cried out as they left. Cool hands coaxed his fingers from their death-grip on his legs, and he blinked in confusion.

Wil smiled gently as he lay down next to Alex, turning the other man towards him and lifting a leg over his hip.

Alex quickly got the idea, and he let his leg curl around behind Wil's. He couldn't help thrusting forward as their cocks bumped together.

Wil hissed. "Keep that up, and you might not get what you were asking for."

Alex pouted at him, but stopped thrusting. For the moment.

Wil kissed him, then awkwardly moved his arm around so he could squeeze out more lube. He reached down and rubbed it over his aching erection, then hitched Alex's leg higher up on his waist. "Breathe, Alex," he whispered, then aligned himself and pushed forward.

Alex groaned as he felt himself stretching even wider. He gasped in a deep breath of air, staring into Wil's eyes as
he felt his lover sliding slowly into him. "Oh...god..." He quivered helplessly when Wil shoved in that last little bit.

"Good?" By god, he hoped so, because he didn't want to know what would happen to him if he stopped now.

Alex gave him a jerky nod, then squeezed his eyes shut so he could concentrate on the fullness inside him. "Wil...so much...god, you fill me." Blindly, he started to press kisses against whatever part of Wil was closest to his mouth. "More...give me more," he breathed.

At those words, Wil bucked, causing Alex to yelp in pleasure. His hands stroked down Alex's back to cover his ass, dipping down to brush against where they were joined. Alex seemed to like this a great deal, if his whimpering and increased sucking on Wil's neck were any indication.

When Wil started to move gently, rocking back and forth inside him, Alex thought he'd pass out from the sheer intensity of what he was feeling. He had to find out more about that spot Wil kept rubbing over, because it was definitely a happy, happy thing. Oh yes, very happy. He robbed his cock against Wil's stomach as the vampire sped up a little, pulling out almost all the way before plunging back inside.
Wil dragged a hand up to Alex's head, latching onto his hair and gently but insistently pulling his head back. He kissed Alex's nose, then his chin, then his mouth, inviting his tongue out to play. He pulled back from the kiss, not really wanting to end it, but wanting...needing something more.

Alex squirmed as Wil nibbled at his neck. Remembering what Wil had done last night, he squeezed down around Wil's cock, enjoying the growl that escaped his lover's throat. He felt something odd against his skin, and reached up a shaking hand to touch Wil's face. The hard ridges that met his questing fingers made his eyes fly wide open. "Yes...Wil, yes..."

That was all Wil needed, and he gently bit down on the curve where Alex's neck and shoulder met, feeling his fangs carefully slice through flesh. And then it hit him. The scent, the taste, the texture. He could taste Alex's arousal in the blood that filled his mouth, and it was better than anything he could have dreamed. It was rushing through his veins, filling him with the very essence of Alex. Of his lover. His mate. His.

Alex panted harshly, shivering with desperate need as Wil suckled. Vaguely, he wondered why it didn't hurt, but
Wil chose that moment to start thrusting harder, and all thought was driven from his mind.

Wil withdrew his fangs and felt his face settle back into its human features. He hummed contentedly as he licked up the few drops of blood that welled from the punctures. He felt strong, whole. He crushed Alex to him as he thrust even more vigorously.

Alex cried out as his cock was trapped between their bodies, sliding along sweat-slicked skin. He shuddered, burying his face against Wil's neck and biting down as he came, spilling his release between them.

When Alex bit him, Wil was slightly shocked. Then the convulsions of Alex's orgasm shook his body, milking his cock almost painfully in its tight sheath. With a strangled moan, Wil buried himself as deep as he could and let go of his control, cumming inside of his mate.

Alex snuggled close to Wil as his breathing started to slow. "You did it," he said in a soft, awed voice. "You bit me."

Wil looked at the marks that were already starting to close. "I did," he whispered back. He grinned. "You're mine now. Forever."
"Forever and always." Alex kissed his lover, his husband. "My Wil."

~*~*~*~*~

Wil sighed. "I don't see what was wrong with the first three shirts. We're gonna be late to work again if you keep this up." He grinned fondly as he watched Alex try on yet another shirt, tug at the neckline, then frown and pull it off.

Alex spotted a dark blue shirt in the corner of the closet. He pulled it out and slipped it on. "Yes! Perfect." He turned to give Wil a heated smile. "I couldn't wear the others 'cause they didn't show of this." He fingered the twin marks left from Wil's claiming of him. "Gotta let everyone see that I'm a properly married man now, y'know." His eyes twinkled.

"Oh." Wil grabbed him and hauled him in for a kiss. He licked his way down to the mark, placing a gentle kiss on it. "Mmmm, all mine, you are."

"Damn right." Alex forced himself to pull away from Wil, and he swatted the vampire's ass. "Come on, we can still make it on time if we hurry."
They left the apartment, pausing only long enough to lock the door behind them. They had made it to the lobby and were almost out the door when a voice hailed them.

"Alex! Wil! Over here!"

They turned to see Sophia waving at them from across the lobby, accompanied by a rather confused-looking young man. "Have to make it quick, Pet," Wil said as they changed direction. "Don't want Frankie gettin' testy about us being late to work too much."

"Sure. We'll just say 'hi' and then get going."

Sophia smiled as they approached. "Oh good, I caught you. I wanted to introduce you to Danny, he's that werewolf I mentioned at the party back when you two first moved in."

"Right." Alex held out a hand. "The one with the handy nail polish tips." He nodded. "Hey there."

Ozrowned slightly as he shook Xander's -- Alex's? -- hand. "Nice to...meet you?" His eyes darted between him and Wil, who he was absolutely positive was really Spike. He wondered why they were acting like they'd never met. Not that he was best buddies with Spike or anything, but they did know each other. And why was
Xander holding Spike's hand? "So...what's up with you guys?"

"Oh!" Sophia nearly squealed in delight as she noticed Alex's mark. "You did it! Congratulations! Oh, wait until Mellie hears." She sniffed softly. "Weddings always make me cry. I'm so happy for you two!" She hugged them, giving them an appraising look as she held them close. "Are you sure you boys don't want to--"

"No!"

Sophia sighed and rolled her eyes. "Oh, we could have made a fortune together. Pity." She stepped back. "Well, at least I still have Daniel. He's always willing to lend a hand, aren't you Danny?"

"Um, yeah. Sure thing." Oz sniffed discreetly, picking up the subtle, mingled scent of blood and sex coming from Xander and Spike. Combined with that mark, he'd be willing to bet they were mated. He wondered what Willow and Buffy thought about that.

"Hey, we were just heading to work. Kinda running late." Wil gave Sophia an apologetic grin.

"Oh, of course! Don't let me hold you up. Shoo. You can visit with Danny later."
"Cool. Catch you later, Danny!" Alex nodded at the young man, wondering absently why he kept giving him and Wil those strange looks, and why he seemed almost...familiar? He shrugged it off as he and Wil left the building, hand in hand, walking so close their legs brushed with every step.

~*~*~*~*~

"Woo, you go Alex!" Jon clapped him on the back, waggling his eyebrows as he leaned in to examine the marks that were just visible above the neckline of his shirt.

Alex flushed a little, looked from Jon to Wil and back to Jon, then turned an even brighter red.

Jon laughed. "So, did our little chat help? Judging by your no longer single state, I'd say you got really lucky." He leered at Alex, who was beet-red by this time.

Wil gave Alex a curious look. "Talk? What talk?"

Alex chuckled nervously. "We were just discussing, um, stocks! And, um...investment stuff. Really boring, actually, you don't want to hear about it." He tried to tug Wil away from Jon, but the vampire resisted.
"No, it sounds interesting." He turned an interested gaze upon Jon. "Any good tips?"

Jon started to snicker uncontrollably. "You could...you could...say that!" he gasped out.

Wil cocked his head, frowning. "I don't get it. What's so bleedin' funny?"

"Oh look! Frankie wants us! Come on, Wil." Grateful for the distraction, Alex managed to drag Wil away from Jon. Jon, who was going to die soon. Alex would be nice and make it painless, since he did give Wil that harem outfit, and the talk, mortifying though it was at the time, did lead to Alex getting royally laid. But he was still going to die. It was just a matter of time.

When the reached Frankie, he grabbed their shoulders and gave them a hardy shake, beaming from ear to ear. "It's not every day one of my employees gets hitched," he said jovially. "Congratulations, you two." A slightly worried expression crossed his face. "You weren't planning on some sort of extended honeymoon, were you?"

Wil blinked. "Can't say as we were."

Relieved, Frankie smiled again. "Good, good! Well, I suppose I can see to giving you a day or two off, let Jon
tend the bar while his wrist finishes mending." He ignored the minor protest Jon set up when he overhead that. "As for tonight...” Eyes gleaming devilishly, Frankie leapt nimbly up onto the bar, the very action at odds with his size. But it did serve to draw the attention of the patrons that had started to trickle in.

"May I have your attention please!" Frankie bellowed.

Wil got a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach, and he groaned, burying his face in Alex's shoulder.

"I would like to make an announcement!" Frankie pointed at Wil and Alex, who were trying desperately to blend into the wall behind them. "You remember the dancing harem boy, also known affectionately at your friendly vampire bouncer? Well, seems he went and tied the knot with our bartender!"

At the resounding cheers and catcalls that sounded, Alex added Frankie to his mental hit list. He clutched at Wil, giving the crowd a wave and a sickly grin.

"Aren't they cute, folks?" More cheers and whistles sounded, and someone started clapping madly. Soon, the entire population of the club was applauding them loudly.
Wil lifted his head and snarled when some idiot had the nerve to yell out "Speech!" This was met with laughter, and then the chant started. "Kiss! Kiss! Kiss! Kiss!"

Wil rolled his eyes and shook his head. Then, he grabbed Alex and bent him back, dipping the man low as he planted a loud, smacking kiss on his lips.

There were more cheers, but the noise started to die down as the kiss went on...and on...and on. Finally, there was silence as the crowd watched, slightly awed.

Frankie jumped down off the bar. "All right you two, break it up! No sex in the club, you hear?" He glared at the crowd as they booed that decision, and they melted back, chagrined.

Frankie smiled at the newlyweds indulgently as they finally parted. "Drinks half price for everyone tonight!" he shouted, and the ecstatic cheers started once again.

Part Twenty-Nine

"Argh!"

Every eye in the room stared in bemusement at the still-quivering pencil that was now stuck at least an inch into
the wall. The eyes all turned to regard the redhead witch who was glaring at the pencil as if it were the perpetrator of all the world's troubles.

"Woah, Wills, tetchy much?" Buffy cocked her head as she looked at the pencil again. "I'm gonna have to watch out, you could start giving this Slayer a run for her money." She offered Willow a tentative grin.

Willow snorted, but she did flush a bit. She stared around at the others sheepishly. "Sorry, guys. I'm just...this is just really frustrating, you know?" She sighed and leaned against Tara, who started to stroke her hair soothingly.

"Yeah, tell me about it!" Cordelia crossed her arms in annoyance. "You would not believe the kinds of looks I was getting today! And not the good 'Wow, she's really hot!' kind of looks, either. More like 'Ew, who let that filthy animal in here?' looks. What is up with that?"

"They know you're not one of them," Angel said softly.

"It probably doesn't help that they know who you are," Wesley gestured at Buffy, "and that most of the rest of us are associated with you. I can't imagine they'd be very forthcoming with the Slayer. You know...considering..." he trailed off meaningfully.
"It's not just that," Buffy said. "Every time I mentioned the name 'Sophie' I either got a strange look and something along the lines of 'I know nothing', or a really evil glare and a message to mind my own business." She gave a little pout as she sat on the edge of the table. "I didn't even meet any nice fudge-bearing types of demony people, either."

"So they're covering?" Gunn rolled his eyes. "Figures. Kinda like no one ever wants to finger the big drug dealers and such. Too afraid of getting offed."

"They didn't seem afraid, though." Giles took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. With a sigh, he continued, "It was more like...like they were protecting someone."

"So what, you think this Sophie chick is respected or something? Some sort of head demon?" He shook his head and whistled softly. "Could make her tough to find. And even tougher to get to."

"Yes, thank you, I believe we managed to establish that today," Giles snapped. He had the grace to look embarrassed when Wesley gave him a rather lengthy stare. "Ah, forgive me," he apologized quietly. "It's just...I have this awful headache building, and..." he trailed off with a shrug.
"Boy, do I ever know how that feels!" Cordelia reached under the table for her purse. She rummaged through it for a moment, then pulled out bottle of pills. Smiling fondly at the bottle, she held it out toward Giles. "Want one?"

"Er, no. But thank you. I'll just go fix myself a hot cup of tea." He ignored the muted retching sounds from Buffy that followed that statement.

As Giles left the room, the phone began to ring. Since he was closest to it, Wesley reached over and picked it up. "Hello? Er, this is the Magic Box. May I help you?" There was a pause. "No, this is Wesley Wyndam-Price speaking. Shall I get him for you?" Another pause. "Certainly. Just a moment." He lowered the phone. "Does anyone here know a gentleman by the name of Oz?"

~*~*~*~*~

"This is so cool." Alex was practically skipping down the sidewalk he was so excited. "Can you believe he gave us the rest of the night off? It's not even midnight yet!"
Wil grinned as he watched his elated boyfriend bounce along. "Don't forget about the mini-vacation either, luv," he reminded him.

"I know!" Alex grabbed Wil and spun him around, kissing his face repeatedly. "Three whole days, all to ourselves!" He waggled his eyebrows suggestively. "Whatever shall we do with the time?"

Blinking innocently, Wil answered, "We could learn how to knit, I s'pose." He snickered at Alex's expression.

Alex whacked him lightly on the arm.

"Ouch! Bully." Wil pouted and sniffled softly, but the effect was ruined by the glint of humor in his eyes.

Alex just leered at him. "Do you have any idea how adorable you look when you do that?" he asked in a voice thick with arousal.

"Yeah?" Wil pouted more.

"Hell yeah." Alex grabbed him and pressed him up against the door to the shop they were passing, kissing him fiercely.
Loud cheering and whistles broke them from their embrace, and Alex blushed. "Damn it," he muttered. "Is everyone watching us tonight?"

Wil laughed as he pulled away, bowing to the small group of people that had gathered to watch them. "You gotta admit, pet," he murmured, "we probably look bloody delicious. Can't exactly blame 'em, y'know."

Alex just sighed and rolled his eyes. "Whatever." He gave the people who were slowly starting to disperse a sickly grin and a wave. Through clenched teeth, he muttered to Wil, "Let's lose the audience and get back home so I can screw you through the mattress."

Wil groaned and licked his lips. "Right," he rasped out. "Only if I get to return the favor, though."

"Deal." Alex grabbed his hand and started to walk more quickly down the sidewalk, so when Wil stopped abruptly, he almost managed to jerk them both to the pavement. He gave his boyfriend a frustrated glare. "What? Home, remember?"

"Yeah, um, I just gotta stop in here for a sec, ok?" He cocked his head towards the shop they had almost passed. "I'm supposed to pick something up. Wait here?"
Alex wondered why Wil was acting so evasive, but tried to hide his curiosity. "Sure," he replied as he released the vampire's hand. "Don't be long, though."

Wil smiled brightly at him, then darted inside the shop. He was gone for just a couple of minutes before reappearing with a nondescript package wrapped in brown paper.

"What's that?" Alex asked as he stared at the package.

Wil refused to meet his gaze. "Just...something. I'll show you later, all right?"

"Oh. Sure, I mean, that's fine. It's your stuff and everything. Not my business." Alex felt inexplicably wounded by Wil's refusal to tell him what was going on, but didn't want to make a fuss about it. Especially not in public. "So, home?"

Wil tucked the package under one arm and looped the other one around Alex's waist. "Home," he agreed.

~*~*~*~*~

Buffy gave a happy screech and ran over, yanking the phone away from Wesley. "Oz? Oz, is it really you? Oh
my god, I can't believe it's you!" She looked over at the others. "Guys, its Oz!"

Willow was sitting on the edge of her chair, wanting to leap up and run to the phone. But she restrained herself, and glanced at Tara.

Tara smiled softly. "Go on," she said. "He's your friend, too."

Willow smiled, kissed her girlfriend, then got up and hurried over to Buffy.

"So, where are you? Are you coming back soon? Really?" Buffy evaded Willow's grabbing hands, jumping up to stand on the counter.

Giles chose that moment to return, and he almost dropped his cup of tea. "Buffy!" He glared at his Slayer. "I'll thank you not to stand on my counters!"

Buffy just rolled her eyes. "Giles, it's Oz!"

Across the room, Cordelia snorted indelicately. "Gee, wonder who's on the phone?" she muttered sarcastically.

Gunn just looked confused. "Who's Oz?"
"Buffy! Let me talk to him!" Willow jumped up onto the counter next to Buffy, still trying to snatch the phone away.

"Will the both of you settle down!" Giles sighed heavily and went over to the phone receiver, studying it intently before decisively pressing a button.

"...figured it was time to stop by and visit some old friends. Hang out some." Oz's voice sounded loudly from the speaker.

Willow stuck her tongue out at Buffy, then carefully jumped off the counter. "Oz?" She bent over the speaker. "Can you hear me? It's Willow."

There was a pause, then, "Hey Wills. How's the girlfriend?"

Willow smiled over at Tara. "She's doing good. We're doing good. What about you? You need a place to stay or anything?"

Buffy tossed the phone aside and sat on the counter, hovering over Willow. "How long are you gonna be around this time, Oz?" she asked.
Even Giles felt compelled to join in. "Are you in town already? Do feel free to stop by when you get a chance. We've...the girls have missed you."

"Yeah, I just got back today. Staying with some people I know, so don't worry about me. Hey Giles, how's the store thing going?"

"Rather well, actually. You see, I--"

Buffy cut him off. "Oh, hey, we got a sort of situation goin' on here, Oz. Think you could maybe help?"

"Guess so. What's up?"

"It's Xander!" Willow shouted. Buffy clapped her hands over her ears and glared at her. "Oh, sorry. I mean, it's Xander," she repeated in an exaggerated whisper.

"Yeah, I wanted to ask you guys about that. What's up with him and Spike? They kind of had the whole oblivious thing going on earlier. Pretty...distracted. Something I should know?"

There was absolute silence in the Magic Box for about five seconds. Giles broke it by clearing his throat. "Oz? Do you mean to say you have seen both Spike and Xander?"

"Well...yeah. Is that bad?"
Willow clutched at the phone, her mouth hovering over the speaker. "Where? When? Where? How'd he look? Is he ok? Where is he? Oz, talk to me!"

Giles firmly removed the speaker from her grasp, setting it down on the counter again. "Oz," he explained calmly, "Xander has been missing for quite some time. We've been searching everywhere for him, Angel even brought his people from LA to help. Are you quite sure it was him you saw?"

The roomful of people was now all clustered around the phone, waiting intently for an answer. They clearly heard Oz taking a deep breath.

"You...don't know? About him and...Spike?"

Buffy growled in frustration. "No! That's why we're asking you! Did Spike do something to him? I swear, I'm gonna stake that bleached freak! Where did you see them, Oz?"

There was yet another long, silent pauses on Oz's part. Finally, he said, "I...think I made a mistake."

"A mistake? You mean it wasn't Xander?"

"Um, I...I gotta go now. I'll...stop by sometime, ok?"
"Oz, don't you dare hang up that--!" There was a click, and a few moments later, a dial tone sounded.

"He saw them," Willow whispered. "He's ok. Xander's ok!"

"Don't get too excited yet, Wills," Buffy cautioned. "He also said Spike was with him, and who knows what that could mean?"

~*~*~*~*~

Oz set the phone down and stared around the mostly bare apartment. "Well...damn." He sighed and reached for the phone again.

"Sophia? Yeah, it's Oz. No, I didn't change my mind about working tomorrow night. Look, about those guys earlier...which apartment did you say they were in?"

~*~*~*~*~

Wil stepped inside the apartment and flicked on the light switch. "Want something to eat?" He moved towards the kitchen.
"Sure," he replied, a little confused. Alex couldn't figure out why Wil had gone all nervous again. He knew it wasn't about the sex that they were planning on having; those issues had been dealt with quite thoroughly, thank you. The only thing he could figure is that it had something to do with the package that Wil had now set down on the table as he began to rummage through the cupboards. He sighed quietly, hoping nothing bad was going on. "I'm just...gonna go clean up a little," he said as he headed for the bathroom.

Wil nodded distractedly as he pulled a box of cereal from one of the shelves. He poured out two bowls of cereal and set them on the counter, getting out a couple of spoons as well. From the refrigerator, he removed a packet of blood and emptied it over one of the bowls. Then he searched for the milk, sighing when he realized it had gotten shoved to the back again. He bent to try and extract it without making a mess of the other groceries.

Alex came out of the bathroom, wiping his hands on his pants. His eyes lit on the bowls. "Ooh, Fruity Pebbles!" He picked up one of the bowls and grabbed a spoon, digging in to the sweet, crunchy cereal.
Wil stood quickly and whirled around, milk jug held firmly in hand. He watched with a mixture of horror and amusement as Alex realized what he'd done.

Alex stopped chewing, rolling the cereal around in his mouth. His eyes widened dramatically, and he swallowed the mouthful down, almost choking on it. He looked at the bowl of cereal in betrayal, scooping the colorful bits aside so he could see the thick red liquid they were soaking in. "Wil?" He slowly set the bowl back down on the counter. "Please tell me that's not what I think it is."

"Um..." Wil hesitantly placed the jug of milk next to the other bowl. "That was...my bowl, Alex."

"Right." Alex took a deep breath. "That is a very bad thing to do to cereal, Wil. It's just...wrong!"

Wil glared. "Well, I didn't tell you to eat it, y'know!" he retorted.

"Yeah, I know. Just...gimme a minute to repress here, ok?" Alex closed his eyes, slowly counted to twenty, and then opened them. "Ok. I can handle this." He eyed the bloody cereal, using a finger to push the bowl towards Wil. Then, he drenched the other bowl of cereal in milk. Nice, safe, white, non-bloody milk.
Wil watched for a moment to make sure Alex wasn't going to decide to get sick all over their mostly clean kitchen. When the other man flashed him a somewhat weak grin and kept eating, he shrugged and started in on his own cereal.

Alex managed to finish his meal and keep it down. Actually, the 'vampire cereal' hadn't really been that bad. A surprise, yes. But it was more of an 'ick, that was unexpected' surprise than an 'oh my god, I'm gonna puke that was so disgusting' surprise. The taste of the blood, although very strong, still had that edge of familiarity that Alex noticed from the first morning when Wil had gotten him to eat the blood-dipped eggs. And it still wasn't something he wanted to dwell on for very long.

When Wil finished his own cereal, he took the empty bowls to the sink and rinsed them out. Then, before he could lose his nerve, he went over to the sofa and reached under it, pulling out a notebook. He took the notebook over to the table, where the brown package still waited. He picked up that as well and returned to Alex's side.

Alex had watched all this, his curiosity growing rapidly. He was nearly vibrating in place when Wil held the items out to him.
Wil took a steadying breath, then handed Alex the package he'd picked up at the shop earlier, along with the medium-sized notebook. "Open that first," he instructed, pointing at the package.

"A present?" Alex stared at the package, mentally castigating himself for being upset over Wil's earlier secrecy. He gave Wil a wobbly grin, suddenly catching the vampire's nervousness. "You got me a present?" With shaky fingers, he fumbled at the edges of the paper, tearing them away from the thin metal box. He blinked, running his fingers over the smooth surface. "Wil?"

"I saw you lookin' at 'em a couple times when we walked by, an' you're always doodling pictures on scrap paper an' in margins, so I figured..." He shrugged. "You, um, you like 'em?"

Alex reverently lifted the lid of the drawing kit, staring in awe at the wide assortment of pencils, chalks, charcoals, graphites and erasers. "Wil," he choked out, "it's...they're beautiful." He stroked a finger along the smooth pencils.

Wil smiled, relieved that Alex seemed to like the present. "I figured if you could draw an' all, you should have the proper stuff." He nodded at the notebook. "Got you some paper, too." He stuffed his hands inside the pockets of his jeans, nervously waiting for Alex to open it.
Alex gently set aside the container and flipped through the notebook, already imagining filling the pristine pages with various sketches of Wil. A loose piece of paper fluttered out, and he caught it reflexively. Unfolding it, he began to read.

_I watch you in your sleep, you know._

_In the dark, I listen to your heartbeat,_

_And I see your chest rise and fall with each breath._

_Your skin calls to me, begging for my caress,_

_So I touch you gently, careful not to wake you._

_My fingers drift along of their own accord._

_Over your chest, and your nipples crinkle up at their passing._

_Up your neck, where I can feel my mark, our binding._
Higher up, running through the tangled mess of your hair,
Then tracing over your thick eyebrows.

Did you know you sometimes drool in your sleep?

When I reach out to touch it, your mouth opens.

I can't help myself; my fingers slip inside.

You're so hot and wet, and you start to suck.

I think of you doing that to other parts of me,

And I curl up against you as your tongue bathes my fingers.

I have to touch you, be close to you.

If I could, I'd crawl inside you and never come out.
To surround you, or be surrounded by you;

It's all I ever seem to want anymore.

You're mine now, as much as I'm yours.

I can't imagine what it would be like without you.

All I can remember is being with you.

We're always together, it seems, whatever life we recall.

I don't know about fate, or destiny, or higher powers.

All I know is we were meant to be together.

We must have been.

We're incomplete without each other.
Vampire, human, animal; whatever we are, we are one.

We are bound together, through love and blood.

All the books and movies say that vampires are evil.

If I am evil, then you are my sin; you've stolen away my heart.

I love you.

Wil

Eyes wide, Alex looked up at Wil. "Wil? I...it's..."

Wil looked at the floor, scuffing his feet. "I know it's not real good," he said with false bravado. "Not real poetry or anything. Doesn't even rhyme, and the meter's shot. An' it--" He stopped abruptly as Alex grabbed his shoulders.

"I love you, Wil," Alex growled softly, then kissed him.
Wil groaned and wound his arms around Alex. "Love you," he gasped when his lips were finally freed.

Alex smiled as he held Wil, nuzzling his hair. "You really watch me sleep?" he asked curiously.

Shrugging, Wil muttered, "Well, yeah. Sometimes. Just, y'know, when I wake up early or somethin'."

"You like watching me, huh?" Alex's eyes took on an aroused light. "You think you wanna watch me do...other things?"

Wil stepped back and considered Alex carefully. "Other things, huh?" he mused. Then, grinning wickedly, he pounced on Alex, tumbling him onto the floor. He had just grabbed the collar of Alex's shirt, intent on ripping the material off, when a loud knocking on their door distracted him.

Part Thirty
Oz took a step back as the door in front of him was yanked open and a rather large, glowering figure eyed him darkly. He cleared his throat. "Um, hey."

Alex blinked. "Daniel, right? What's up?" He craned his head to see into the hallway behind the smaller man. "Is everything ok with Sophia?"

"Hmm? Oh, yeah, she's fine. Look, I kinda have a...confession to make." Oz took a half-step forward. "Can I...?" He gestured toward the apartment.

Alex almost refused, but something was niggling at the back of his brain, prompting him to step aside and invite the other man in. Holding back a sigh, Alex did so, closing the door behind him.

"Alex? Who was -- oh." Wil eyed their visitor. "Is something wrong?"

Alex shrugged. "He's here to confess," he told his lover.

Wil raised an eyebrow curiously. "Why? You're not a priest or something...are you?"

"No! I mean...I don't think so. I don't feel like a priest." Alex frowned.
Oz glanced between them, his confusion becoming ever more evident on his face. "Excuse me, but...what are you guys talking about?"

"Huh?" Wil studied Oz. "Well? What are you confessing to? Alex and I were about to...um, go to bed."

Alex coughed loudly and smoothed down the front of his shirt.

Taking no notice of the implications of that statement, Oz nodded. He ran a hand through his hair, deciding to just spit it out. "Ok, I kind of called Giles' shop, and the gang was all there. I didn't know you were trying to keep this," he waved a hand at them, "a secret. So I sort of, accidentally, spilled the beans about having seen you. Buffy sounded kinda pissed, and I think she might come looking soon." Having covered the highlights, he waited for their response.

Wil and Alex exchanged blank looks, then Alex asked, "Um, who's Buffy?"

Oz blinked, taken aback. "Who's Buffy?" he parroted. "Buffy. You know, short blonde girl, wields a mean stake, you used to have a crush on her. Buffy."
Wil gaped at Alex. "You had a crush on a girl named Buffy?" He asked in disbelief. "No wonder you ended up a pouf!"

Alex absently shot him a bird, ignoring the lecherous look Wil gave him in response. He shook his head at Oz. "Not ringing any bells here."

Oz closed his eyes, counted to twenty, then opened them again. "You are Alexander Lavelle Harris, aren't you?" he asked. "And that's William the Bloody, yes?"

Alex frowned, but nodded. "How did you know that?"

"Don't you remember me? Oz? Dated Willow for a while?" Oz stared, waiting for the light to dawn. He was disappointed.

"You dated a tree?" Wil cocked his head, considering the mechanics of that. "Don't think it's something I'd try," he finally said with a grimace.

Oz fumbled for a seat, dropping into it without his usual grace. "What's going on here? You don't have any idea what I'm talking about, do you?"

In unison, the two shook their heads. "Sorry," Alex said quietly. "We...” He looked over at Wil, and at the vampire's nod, continued. "We sort of had an accident a
few weeks back. Ran into a nasty demon. Our memories
got wiped. We've been working on getting them back,
but not everything's there yet."

"Shit," Oz breathed. "Well that...sucks."

A thought struck Alex. "So, you know us? I mean, you can
tell us about...us?" His face lit up with excitement, and he
reached out and grabbed hold of Wil's hand.

Oz stared at their entwined hands. "I obviously don't
know as much as I thought I did," he muttered. He
opened his mouth to say more, but was interrupted by a
jaw-popping yawn.

Alex hid the pang of disappointment he felt. "You're
tired?"

Shrugging nonchalantly, Oz replied, "Been driving pretty
much nonstop for about a week. Still need to catch up on
some sleep."

"Well, I mean, we'd love to talk to you, y'know, ask some
questions and stuff. But...if you're too tired..."

Oz thought about it. "This is kind of heavy," he finally said
in a quiet voice. "I'm pretty bombed, and I don't know if
I'll handle it without seriously messing with things that
shouldn't be messed with. Maybe it should wait until morning."

Aware of his lover's disappointment over the decision, Wil patted Alex's arm consolingly. "That'll be fine, mate," he told Oz. "It can keep. We've managed for a while now, another few hours won't matter in the long run."

Oz nodded, took a deep breath, and stood. "Right. Um, I'll pick something up for breakfast, ok? Least I can do."

"Sure, sounds great." Alex walked him to the door.

"Oh, hey, congratulations on the claiming," Oz added as he walked into the hallway. "And sorry for interrupting...you know." He offered them a half-grin.

"No problem. See ya." Alex watched as Oz walked away. He desperately wanted to run after him, haul him back to the sofa, and pry every detail out of him that he could get. But Wil was right. It would keep until morning.

"Alex," Wil purred in a husky voice.

Oz was forgotten in the surge of lust that blossomed once more in Alex's groin. Shakily, he turned and shut the door, bolting it closed. "Yes, Wil?" he asked in as steady a voice as he could manage.
Wil bent a finger, beckoning him closer, and Alex came as if being pulled by a string. Looping his arms around the human's neck, Wil licked his mark, then breathed, "Race you t'bed." With that, he let go and bounded towards the bedroom.

Alex stared blankly for a split second, then a wide grin stretched across his face as he shot off after Wil. Damn, but his husband knew how to distract him! And Alex was ever willing to let him.

They were a perfect match.

"Come on, 'Liam, let's just go. None of these people are worth our time." Alastair tried to pull his friend from where he was ensconced in a corner chair, hoping to be able to leave this dull party.

William resisted. "I can't, 'Tair. You know she's here tonight! I have to see her!" He sighed dreamily and whispered, "Cecily." He didn't see the anguished look that came over Alastair's face at the mention of her name.

Alastair struggled to maintain his composure, no matter how desperately he wished to haul William upright and inform him quite frankly of his feelings for him. He heart was wounded a little more each time William made mention of Cecily, and he knew deep down that William
would only be hurt by his infatuation with her. If only the daft man could see what, or rather who, was right under his nose, waiting patiently. Suppressing an exasperated groan, Alastair smiled at his friend. "I'm going to get some punch. Would you like some?"

Shaking his head, William wrote a brief sentence on the parchment in his lap. "No," he answered distractedly, "You go. I'll be fine here."

His smile turned a bit melancholy, and Alastair reached out and brushed an errant lock of hair out of William's face. "I'll be back in a bit," he said. He didn't bother waiting for a response, knowing that William was once more immersed in his own little world.

When Alastair left, William continued to sit in the rather uncomfortable chair, staring at the piece of paper in his lap. With a sigh of frustration, he scratched out another word.

"Luminous," he uttered quietly, then shook his head. "Oh no, no, no, no. Irr-irradiant...is better." He gnawed on the end of his pen. Footsteps approached, and he looked up.

"Care for an hors d'oeuvre, sir?"
He ignored the tray that was held out. "Oh, uh, quickly. I'm the very spirit of vexation. What's another word for gleaming?"

The server gave him an odd look, so he tried to explain. "It's a perfectly perfect word as words go, but the bother is, nothing rhymes, you see?" The man nodded and backed away quickly. "Hmm." William dismissed the man from his mind, once more engrossed in his quandary.

The figure coming down the stairs caught his attention, and he smiled softly. "Cecily," he breathed, his eyes lighting up with pleasure. Suddenly inspired, he began to scribble down a few more words. Then, taking a deep breath, he stood and walked across the room.

He came up behind the group gathered around Cecily, starting slightly when one of the gentlemen addressed him.

"Ah, William! Favor us with your opinion. What do you make of this rash of disappearances sweeping through our town? Animals, or thieves?" Lord Huntington gave him a condescending smile.

Blushing slightly, William moved around to where he could get a better view of Cecily. "I prefer not to think of such dark, ugly business at all," he answered, chin held
high. "That's what the police are for." He glanced at Cecily out of the corner of his eye, gauging her reaction.

Cecily shifted uncomfortably under his gaze, looking away a bit distastefully.

William didn't notice, continuing, "I prefer...placing my energies into creating things of beauty." He lifted the piece of paper he held as an example.

"I see. Well, don't withhold, William." The other man walked over and deftly plucked the paper way.

From across the room, Alastair watched with dread as Lord Huntington read aloud William's impromptu bit of poetry, to the great amusement of those listening. His hands clenched into fists as titters of laughter spread through the crowd, and dismay filled him as he saw William's face tighten with embarrassment before he snatched his poem back and hurried after his lady love, who had fled the scene. Even from where he stood, he could hear the parting barb that wounded him almost as badly as he could see William was wounded.

"Have you heard? They call him William the Bloody because of his bloody awful poetry!" One of the young women announced loudly.
Eyes darkening with fury, Alastair prepared to stalk over and wipe those smug looks off of their faces. When he say William disappear into a side room, though, he changed his mind and followed his friend instead.

He reached to doorway, and hovered outside, unabashedly listening.

"I love you, Cecily." It took every bit of courage he possessed for William to say those words aloud.

"Please, stop!" Cecily turned away from him, her face burning in mortification.

"I...I know I'm a bad poet. But I'm a good man. All I ask is that...that y-you t-try to see me--"

Cecily faced him again, resolved. "I do see you. That's the problem. You're nothing to me, William," she informed him bluntly, then stood. Looking down at the stricken man, she finished, "You're beneath me." With that, she turned and walked away.

Alastair could hardly believe his ears. He stood, frozen in shock, as Cecily swept out of the room past him. Shaking himself peered around the corner, wincing at the look of utter desolation that was on William’s face. A deep anger filled him, and he hurried after Cecily, grabbing hold of her arm and spinning her around forcefully.
Cecily gasped, staring at him in shock. "Unhand me!" she demanded.

Alastair just glared at her. "You little bitch," he hissed out, barely believing that he was speaking to a lady this way. His mother would be so disappointed in him. Nevertheless, he had to tell this woman what he thought of her. "How dare you callously stomp on his feelings like that? For god's sake, he loves you!" He tried not to show how much it pained him to say that.

"Is that supposed to make me happy?" she snapped back. "To have the 'love' of that fool?" She wrenched her arm away, sneering at Alastair. "If you admire him so much," she said scathingly, "Why don't you let him court you? It would be doing me a favor, I assure you!" Then, with a haughty sniff, she twirled around and marched purposefully away.

Alastair let his hand drop to his side, his mouth twisting into a pained grimace. "If only he would do so," he whispered bitterly. "At least then his affections would be returned." With a heavy sigh, he turned and made his way back to William.

Finding the room empty, Alastair felt a brief moment of panic. He quickly got a grip on his emotions, figuring that William had decided to return home. He was determined
not to allow his friend to remain alone after this crushing blow to his heart, and he hurried from the party, walking quickly down the street.

The lurching figure in the distance wasn't hard to spot, and Alastair broke into a fast walk hoping to catch up to William quickly. He frowned when the other man turned into a side street, but followed him unhesitatingly. Upon entering the small stable, he blinked to allow his eyes adjust to the dimmer light. "'Liam?' he called out softly.

There was a soft snuffle. "Go 'way," came the muffled response.

Alastair ignored that and crept around the corner. His heart twisted within his chest when he saw William huddled on a stack of hay, tattered papers clutched to his chest. He walked over and seated himself next to his friend. "Fancy meeting you here," he whispered with a tiny laugh.

William peered over at him with tear-filled eyes. "Sh-sh-she said th-that I w-w-was--" a choked off sob cut him off mid-sentence.

"I know," Alastair admitted. "I heard." Carefully, he put an arm around William's shoulder and tugged gently, drawing the other man to his chest.
William leaned against him, grateful for the support. "I just want her to l-love me," he said in a grief-stricken voice. "Am I really that...pathetic?"

"No." Alastair's grip on William tightened. "No!" he repeated more adamantly. He tilted William's face up. "I could never lo-- be friends with anyone pathetic," he told him firmly. "You are a very special man, and someday, you'll find just the right person to be with, someone who will love you like you deserve." He blinked back his own tears, willing his voice not to break. "Until then...well, you'll always have me." He tried to make that sound more uplifting than wistful, but wasn't sure if he succeeded.

William gave a weak chuckle. "Yes, I suppose I do," he answered. He pulled away a little. "Thank you for being my friend, 'Tair," he said before leaning forward and lightly kissing Alastair's cheek. Then he sat back and turned away. "I'd like to be alone for a little while. If you don't mind."

Alastair reached up and let his hand settle over the burning skin of his cheek. "N-no, not at all," he stammered. He swallowed around the lump in his throat and stood. "I'll just...I'll wait outside."

"All right."
Inhaling deeply, Alastair left the stable, his steps only faltering the slightest bit. Once outside, he leaned against the wall and let out a shuddering breath. His fingers still strayed over the spot on his cheek where he was positive he could feel the imprint of Williams' lips. He knew it was an innocent action on William's part, but he couldn't help imagining that it had gone further. His eyes drifted shut as he was overwhelmed by the mental image of William pressing that sweet kiss to his mouth instead, perhaps darting his tongue out between those lush lips of his and licking softly.

"Well, well, looks like someone’s enjoying the evening."

Alastair's eyes flew open, and he gaped at the man looming in front of him, arm draped casually around a petite blonde woman. He coughed, clearing his throat as he straightened and tugged his coat down, willing his arousal away. "I beg your pardon?"

"We don't have time to play, Angelus," the blonde woman spoke up crossly. "Where did that demented spawn of yours get to?"

Angelus flicked his eyes towards the stable, and Alastair whirled around, fearing that something might have happened to William. He tried to rush back inside, but a
strong grip on his shoulder nearly crushed the bone, and he bit back a cry.

"I do believe she found her new playtoy," Angelus commented in an amused tone, cocking his head as if he were listening. "Shall we join her, Darla?"

Darla nodded regally and swept past Angelus. "Bring the boy," she ordered. "He can at least provide us with a meal before we collect Drusilla.

Alastair struggled futilely against the astonishingly strong man, but was unable to keep from being dragged into the stable. The sight that met his eyes made him gasp in horror. "No!"

Darla laughed as Angelus easily restrained Alastair, keeping him from rushing to William's side. It was too late, anyway. As they watched, clouded eyes focused briefly on Angelus' struggling captive before drifting closed.

Drusilla smiled sweetly as she lifted her bloodied mouth away from William's neck, at the same time removing her equally bloody wrist from his mouth.

"Damn it!" Angelus roared. "When I said playmate, I didn't mean that bumbling idiot!"
Drusilla cocked her head. "But Daddy," she crooned, "the stars sang such pretty songs about blood and screams. I killed the burning fish, and now my precious will grow up to be a splendidly wicked tiger." She rocked gently, fingering William's hair as she hummed tunelessly. Then her eyes hardened as she stared at Alastair. "You'll take him away from me," she growled. "You always take him away. Clouding his brain with buzzing flies, biting and stinging until he cries for you." She wailed loudly. "He's mine! You can't take him away now!

"You're insane," Alastair whispered, his eyes still fixated on William's limp form. "William," he whimpered softly, his body sagging as it sunk in that his friend -- his love -- was dead. A lone tear trickled down his cheek.

"Well, isn't that just precious," Angelus muttered sarcastically. He glared at Drusilla. "You I will deal with later. For now..." His face rippled and transformed. "It's snack time." With a snarl, he struck.

Alastair barely felt the teeth entering his jugular. His vision was filled with William, and he almost eagerly accepted the darkness than rose around him. He'd be with William again soon...
Wil sat up with a gasp. "Oh god!" He panted harshly, not even feeling Alex's hands rubbing soothingly up and down his back.

"It's ok," Alex whispered. "I'm here, you're here. Everything's fine." He snorted softly. "I am gettin a little tired of dying all the time, though."

"It's not funny!" Wil twisted around and clutched Alex's shoulders. "I could feel something leaving me...and something else filling up the space. It was..." He shuddered. "And you. I saw you. When I...when I died. You were the last thing I saw." He collapsed into Alex's arms. "I remember, the last thing I thought was that I wished I'd told you I loved you."

"God, Wil." Alex held his lover tightly. "I knew. I knew you loved me. I'll always know, even if you never say it." He stiffened as he thought of something else. "Wil? That was you in the dream."

Wil pulled back, staring at Alex in confusion. "Course it was me, you git. It's always me."

"No, I mean...it was you. You looked like you; like you do now. Well, except for the hair. But it was you."

Wil drew in a shocked breath. "We're getting close, aren't we?" he asked in a subdued voice.
"I think so. I mean, if that was when you got turned, then..."

"We should finish remembering soon."

"Yeah." Alex pulled Wil back to him. "I love you," he said fiercely. "No matter what, ok?"

Wil smiled. "I know. You too."

They kissed each other tenderly, then lay back down. Arms wrapped around each other, they passed the rest of the night and early morning dozing lightly, secure in their love for each other, but not wanting to invite any more revelations that night.

~*~*~*~*~

"Got it! Yes!" Willow bounced excitedly in her seat as the others crowded around her.

Giles peered at the information on the screen. "How did you manage to locate this?" he asked curiously.

Willow shrugged, ducking her head to hide the faint blush. "Well, I kinda happened to stumble into the database for the phone company, and I ran a trace on all the incoming calls to the magic shop. Once I found the
number Oz called from, all I had to do was search for the address connected to it and...voila!"

Giles cleared his throat. "Is that...legal?"

"Ummm, not...strictly speaking."

"Ah. I see. Well then, perhaps you shouldn't tell me any more."

Willow beamed at him. "Ok."

Cordelia patted Willow on the shoulder. "Wow, you're a pretty good hacker," she complimented, drawing several odd looks. "What? I can say something nice, can't I? Sheesh!" She rolled her eyes and stalked across the room.

"So, what's the plan?" Gunn asked.

Buffy looked up from where she was copying down the address. "Plan? Find Oz, convince him to tell us where Xander and Spike are."

"We going now?"

"Damn right!" Willow stood, back stiff with determination. Glancing at Angel, she wilted slightly. "Oh, daylight. Um..."
Angel shook his head. "No, you guys go. Just let us know what you find out."

"Us? Who else isn't coming?"

"Much as I would like to join you, I do need to stay and run the store," Giles said.

"Oh. Well, sure, I mean, I guess. Anyone else?" No one else spoke up, and Buffy nodded. "Ok then. Let's get going.

~*~*~*~*~

"I think this is it." A hand raised to shade her eyes, Willow squinted at the tall apartment building. "Um...I don't know what room he's in," she admitted in a defeated voice.

"So? Maybe they have a listing or something. If not, we'll check 'em all." Buffy strode forward, and the others all hurried after her. Once inside the lobby, they split up, looking for something that might list the names of the inhabitants of the different apartments. They ignored all the strange looks that were being sent their way, and quickly met up again in the center of the lobby.
"Anything?" Buffy sighed as everyone shook their heads. "Fine. Guess we do this the hard way."

Willow gasped. "Maybe not. Look!" She pointed to the figure entering the elevator.

"Oz. Bingo." Buffy grinned. "Come on!" She sprinted for the elevator, growling in frustration when it shut before she was even close. Hands on hips, she pressed the 'up' button, then tapped her foot impatiently as she watched the light crawl up the series of numbers before stopping on the '3'. "Gotcha," she muttered as the elevator made its way back down.

When the doors opened, the group piled in, and Buffy poked the button for the third floor.

"Come on, come on!" Willow said impatiently as she waited for the elevator to reach their destination. Finally, after an endlessly long minute, the doors slid open again. Willow shoved her way out, almost tripping over Buffy in her haste. "Oz?" she called.

Oz spun around, hand dropping away from the door it had been knocking on. "Willow?" His eyes widened fractionally at the crowd that emerged behind Willow. "Buffy," he greeted casually. "Cordelia." A deep breath, then, "Tara," he said softly. He frowned, thinking, then
added, "Wesley." He quirked an eyebrow at the unknown man. "Sorry, don't know who you are."

"Charles Gunn. Nice to meet you."

Oz nodded. "I'm sure. What are you doing here?" he asked Willow.

"Looking for you! Well, really, we're looking for -- Xander!"

Oz held back a groan as he turned again to see Alex standing in the doorway, frowning at the multitude of people in the hall.

Part Thirty-One

Alex frowned at the strangers filling the hallway, wondering absently how so many people managed to fit there without standing on each other. He glanced over at Oz. "Daniel? Something going on I should know about?"
Oz bit back a frustrated groan. "Probably," he replied shortly, rubbing a hand over his eyes.

Willow missed the brief exchange, and she hurled herself forward, grabbing Alex tightly around the waist. "Xander! I thought you were hurt or dead or turned or eaten or something awful!" she babbled almost tearfully. "I can't believe you just vanished like that and didn't tell me, and your dad was really mean when we asked about you, and did you know Anya thinks you dumped her and--"

"Wills!" Oz barked sharply, halting her stream of words mid-flow.

Willow blinked, noticing how stiff her friend was holding himself. "Am I crowding? I'm crowding. Sorry, I just missed you so much!" Reluctantly, she let go of him, turning her attention to Oz. "And you!"

"Excuse me," Alex tried to interject.

Oblivious, Willow kept talking. "How could you! You heard how worried and upset we were, and you didn't tell us anything! I don't--"

"Excuse me," Alex repeated a bit more forcefully.

Startled, Willow paused.
"Thank you," Alex said with just a touch of sarcasm. He crossed his arms over his chest and raised an eyebrow. "Don't tell me -- they followed you home?" he asked Oz wryly.

"Something like that, it looks like."

"Are they the ones you were going to tell us about over breakfast?"

Oz held up the bag of doughnuts in his hand. "Yep."

Alex nodded. "Thought we might need visual aids?"

Oz just snorted softly in response.

Buffy stepped forward, coming to stand next to Willow. "Are we missing something?" she asked in an exasperated tone. "Did we all fall down the rabbit hole when I wasn't looking? Xander, what is going on here?"

"The name is Alex, and as for what's going on, I'd like to know that myself. Is there a reason you people are interrupting our breakfast?"

"What?" Buffy looked confused as she glanced between Oz and Alex. "Xander, what are you--"
"Hey, what's the holdup? I'm starved here." Wil opened the door wider and stood just beside Alex. "Who are your friends, Daniel?" he asked as he surveyed the hall.

"Spike!" Willow stepped forward, hands on hips, glaring intently at the vampire. "You better not have hurt Xander, you...you...undead creep!"

Wil frowned at the redhead. "I'm sorry, do I know you?" he asked.

By now, the utter confusion in the hallway was almost palpable. Gunn, who had been watching the proceedings curiously, leaned over to Wesley. "Are you sure they got the right guys?" he whispered.

"They certainly look like Xander and Spike. But their behavior does seem to be rather atypical," Wesley whispered back.

"Maybe they've been brainwashed."

"Highly unlikely, but it is a possible explanation."

"Ahem." Cordelia cleared her throat, interrupting the quiet conversation. "Do you guys mind? We're trying to rescue a friend here."

"Sorry, Cordy," they chorused.
With a final admonishing glare at the two, Cordelia turned back and pushed her way past Willow and Buffy. "Xander Harris," she began in a stern voice, "do you know what I've been through? I almost started biting my nails again! You are so lucky I didn't, mister, and don't you ever do anything like this again, do you understand me?" She glared, but sniffed softly, ruining the effect.

Alex leaned away from her. "Hey, no offense miss, but who the hell are all you people?"

There was a moment of stunned silence, then everyone started talking loudly all at once. As the noise level grew, Alex winced and pressed the backs of his hands against his eyes, groaning.

Wil frowned and pulled him close, stroking his hair softly. Turning his head, he caught Oz's eye and nodded towards the uninvited horde of people.

Oz nodded and cleared his throat. "Hey! People! Shut the fuck up!"

Again there was absolute silence as everyone gaped at the normally soft-spoken werewolf. The silence held only until Cordelia noticed her ex-boyfriend snuggled up against the bloodthirsty vampire.
"Oh. My. God. Why didn't anyone tell me that Xander and Spike were together?" Her mouth hung open as she watched the two holding each other close, petting and exchanging whispers.

Buffy scowled. "They're not!" she protested. "Stop that, you guys! Xander, you hate him, and he can't stand you either. Why are you acting all lovey dovey?"

"I-I think they're kind of cute," Tara ventured, blushing when everyone looked at her. "Well, they are!" she said defensively.

Alex spoke up again. "Look, I don't know what's going on here, and frankly, I'd just like to eat breakfast, have a nice, sane chat with Daniel, and then shag my boyfriend silly. So, if you don't mind... He gave them a pointed look, then turned and pulled Wil back into the apartment. "Come in once you get rid of them," he called to Oz over his shoulder. The door clicked shut.

Willow's eyes narrowed dangerously, and the witnesses to the pencil incident cowered back a step. Oz, though, simply returned her stare placidly.

"I think you guys should leave," he said.

"I think you should tell us what's going on!" Willow responded angrily.
"You want the abbreviated version? Fine. Spike and Xander lost their memories and have no idea who you are. I'm trying to help them, and to be honest, having you here is probably not a good thing at the moment."

"We're Xander's friends. We want to help him too. Is that so wrong?"

Oz sighed. "Look, I know you want to help. But things are...weird right now."

"Yeah, you're telling me," Cordelia muttered. "Spike and Xander?" She shuddered, although a speculative gleam snuck its way into her eyes.

"Well, why can't they remember," Buffy asked. "Maybe Giles can figure something out. And why do they think they're d-dating?" She couldn't help stumbling slightly over the word.

"If you let me go in there and talk to them, I'll probably find out a lot more than I know now."

"But--"

"Willow." Buffy spoke softly, but the tone was enough to make Willow back down. "Do you think you can help?" she asked Oz.
"I'll do what I can."

"When can we talk to Xander?"

Oz thought about it. "How about I fill them in on what's what today, and we let them have a little time to soak it in. I'll see if I can get them to meet you all tomorrow night. The Bronze?"

Buffy nodded. "Ok. But promise you'll call if things don't go well? We really are worried about Xander."

Oz nodded. "And what about Spike? Are you worried about him, too?"

Buffy grimaced. "Spike is...perhaps not as annoying as he used to be. As long as he hasn't hurt Xander, I won't be forced to stake him." She smiled and glanced at Willow. "Or beat him to death with a shovel," she added.

"Ok. Well then." Oz gave them a small wave, then turned and slipped inside the apartment.

"What, that's it?" Willow glared at Buffy. "Buff, I don't--"

"Willow, chill out. Xander's alive, isn't he? And Oz is taking care of things. We'll see them tomorrow night, ok?"

"But--"
"Ok?"

"Fine," Willow growled, frowning crossly. She softened a bit, though, when Tara reached out and grabbed hold of her hand.

Buffy nodded then strode back to the elevator.

"What, that's it? No action?" Gunn heaved a sigh of disappointment as he got back into the cramped elevator with the others.

~*~*~*~*~

Wil sat on the sofa next to Alex, rubbing his back in slow, soothing circles. "It's ok," he whispered, leaning his head against Alex's shoulder.

Alex sighed heavily. "What if they're right," he asked despondently. "What if we really hate each other? What if this," he waved his hand to encompass the entire apartment, "is all wrong?"

Anger clouded Wil's face. "Well I don't give a bloody damn!" he exclaimed harshly. "Why would you believe them, anyway? We don't even know them! And that one blonde girl made me feel...itchy." He shuddered.
Alex turned to his mate, worried. "Are you ok? What was it?"

"I dunno, pet. There was just something off about her." He shrugged. "I was probably just imagining it."

"Huh." Alex wasn't so sure of that, but he was willing to let the subject drop. Which still left them with the original topic of conversation. "Still, what if--"

"No." Wil glared at him, eyes flashing.

"Wil, we have to think about--"

"No!" He yanked Alex close, snarling softly. "I love you, you pillock. And don't you ever think I don't!" He pressed his lips to Alex's, crushing their mouths together.

"Hey guys, I...am I interrupting something?"

Alex was flushed when Wil finally let go of him. "N-no," he managed to stammer. "We're good." He shook off his daze and twisted around so he could lean into Wil's embrace. Looking expectantly at Oz, he added, "Have a seat, man. And spill. What was with the show out there?

~~*~~*~~*~
"Can you believe all that?"

Alex and Wil sat on their bed, trying to wrap their mind around everything Oz had told them.

"How can we be friends with a Slayer?" Alex asked with a distasteful look. "Jenna will flip if she finds that out!"

"So, we don't say nothing," Wil said decisively.

"Yeah." Alex fiddled with the edge of the sheet. "What do you think Daniel meant about that government chip he was talking about?" he asked after a moment.

"Dunno, pet. I don't feel like there's anything wrong with me. Do you think I've been acting strangely?"

Alex rolled his eyes. "Compared to what?"

Wil snickered. "Yeah, s'pose so." He sighed and lay back. "This is just...too much."

Alex stretched out next to him and laid his head on Wil's chest. "I know," he said quietly. "But maybe things will look different once we remember everything."

"I guess. So what, you wanna go back to sleep now? See if the rest comes back?"
Alex smirked as he eyed Wil's smooth, pale body. "Not...just yet." He kissed Wil, one hand already picking at the buttons on his shirt.

Wil laughed. "God, I love you, Alex."

"Mmmm. Less talk, more nakedness."

Spike looked over as a familiar figure hauled a struggling boy into the room. He grinned wickedly. "Angelus!"

Angelus jerked Xander close, an arm around his neck holding him in place. "Spike!" he called back gleefully. "I'll be damned!" Spike could hardly believe it was him. He hadn't seen Angelus for decades, and to find him here in Sunnydale was quite the surprise. He tossed his pole aside and greeted Angelus with an embrace, taking the chance to scent the delicious looking boy.

Angelus pulled away. "I taught you to always guard your perimeter. Tsk, tsk, tsk. You should have someone out there," he chided lightly.

"I did," Spike responded carelessly. "I'm surrounded by idiots. What's new with you?"

"Everything."

"Yeah? Come up against this Slayer yet?"
Angelus gave a slight nod. "She's cute. Not too bright, though. Gave the puppy dog 'I'm all tortured' act. Keeps her off my back when I feed!" He laughed.

Spike laughed as well. "People still fall for that Anne Rice routine? What a world!"

Xander glared up at his captor. "I knew you were lying," he said petulantly. He flinched when Angelus squeezed his neck sharply. "Undead liar guy," he added in a mutter.

Angelus sighed and grabbed the back of Xander's shirt, holding him with his neck exposed. "Wanna bite before we kill her?" he offered Spike.

A frisson of fear swept through Xander as he pictured Angelus' mouth hovering over his neck. The oddest sense of déjà vu swept over him. He heard the two vampires talking, but he was too distracted trying not to start whimpering from fear that he didn't really catch what they were saying. He was just wondering if he should try an escape attempt when a flash of movement informed him that Spike was drawing closer.

~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~

Lev and Illi raced through the downpour, laughingly seeking shelter beneath the large leaf of a banana tree. They alighted on a thin branch, panting gently.
Illi shivered a bit and shook his wings. "I told you we wouldn't make it back before it started!" he told his companion in a superior tone of voice.

Lev rolled his eyes as he dried off his own transparent wings. "You were having just as much fun as I was," he retorted. "Don't blame this on me!"

The branch shook a bit as a beetle scurried past. Once it had steadied again, Illi sat and let his legs dangle over the edge. "You know how cross Sarai gets with us when we're out too late."


"She might not be if you didn't get us in so much trouble."

"Me?" Lev glared at Illi. "Well, I like that! It's all my fault now, huh?"

Illi snorted with laughter and reached out to tickle Lev between his wings. "Of course, silly. I'm the good, sweet, innocent little sprite who was led astray by your wicked ways." He let out a high-pitched, tinkling giggle.

Lev eyed him skeptically. "Riiight." He leaned out and caught a raindrop, flinging it at the unsuspecting Illi, who
spluttered and glared at him reproachfully. "What can I say?" he asked with amusement. "I'm wicked!"

~~~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~~~

"Xander!" Willow called out, just as Spike grabbed Xander from behind.

"I need to borrow the little girl," Spike said somewhat drunkenly as he choked Xander, who was struggling futilely in his arms. "You don't mind, do you?"

Xander kicked against the wall, shoving himself and Spike across the room. They slammed against a metal shelf, but Spike barely seemed to notice, tossing Xander aside casually. He tried to get up, but Spike's fist in his face convinced him otherwise, and he was back on the floor.

"Xander!" Furious at her friend being hurt, Willow picked up a microscope and launched herself at Spike.

Spike stopped her easily. "Threatening me? That's not nice. We're all gonna be very best friends." He grabbed the microscope away.

Again Xander rose, but this time Spike was a little more violent in his protestations. Whirling around, he bashed Xander across the face with the microscope.
Xander crashed to the floor once more, promptly losing consciousness.

~~~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~

Wallace gasped in a breath of fresh air as the covering over his face was jerked away. Dazed, he didn't see his captors leave, but knew they were gone when the sound of his heartbeat was the only thing he could hear. He squinted in the faint light, trying to make out where he was. A hiss of pain escaped him as he accidentally tugged against the tight bonds securing his hands behind his back.

As his eyes adjusted, Wallace frowned. The room was round, and the walls seemed to be nothing more than hides stretched out over a frame of wooden poles. What in the--?

The flap of the door lifted, illuminating the figure of man who quickly ducked inside. There was a spark, and a lamp flared, lighting the teepee. Wallace nearly gasped at the foreboding sight of the Indian brave who glared at him with dark, furious eyes. Unable to help himself, he cringed back when a hand reached out towards him.

That didn't deter the man, and Wallace trembled as the hand cupped his chin almost gently. "Please," he
whispered tremulously, "where's my Pa? I want to go home."


Wallace twisted away. "Take me back to my Pa right now!" he demanded loudly, his voice breaking.

Alchise scowled and grabbed Wallace, clapping his hand over his mouth. "White boy want cry? Alchise make white boy cry," he growled threateningly.

Eyes huge with fear, Wallace shook his head furiously. There was controlled strength in the hands that gripped him, and he had no desire to have that strength turned against him.

Alchise grunted in acceptance and moved away. His prize had spirit, and once the boy had learned his new place in the world, Alchise had no doubt that he would prove to be a suitable replacement for his murdered wife.

~~~~~*flash*~~~~~
Spike glared at the chair. "Don't see why I have to be tied up," he said, voice laced with irritation.

Xander sighed. "It's just while I'm sleeping." He finished tightening the knots in the ropes, then reached over to switch of one of the lamps.

"Like I'd bite you anyway," Spike said as he watched Xander climbing into bed.

Xander glanced over his shoulder and rolled his eyes. "Oh, you would."

"Not bloody likely!"

The other lamp was turned off, and the room darkened considerably. "I happen to be very bitable pal," he said firmly. "I'm moist and delicious."

Sarcasm was obvious in Spike's tone when he answered, "Alright, yeah fine. You're a nummy treat."

Xander closed his eyes, enjoying the tiny thrill of victory. "And don't you forget it," he said, finger pointing directly at the restrained vampire.

Spike watched him try to sleep, resolutely squashing the strange fluttering in his stomach. Something about this scene seemed entirely too familiar.
Elias winced as his knees hit the unyielding stone floor. He heard the guards shuffle from the room, and he timidly peeked up through the thick fringe of his hair. He gasped inaudibly when he met the deep blue eyes of his new master. Shocked, and not a little terrified, Elias glanced away, hoping he hadn't already managed to offend this man. Rumor had it that, despite his youth, Wenamun was not a master to trifle with.

A soft rustle of cloth made his ears prick to attention, but his eyes remained fixed on the floor. Abruptly, sandal-clad feet planted themselves directly in his line of sight. An insistent finger lifted his chin up, and Elias fought not to cringe away from the piercing gaze that seemed to lance through him.

"Very pretty," mused Wenamun as he looked over his new acquisition. "You are untouched I am told." A small smile flickered over his face. "I believe I shall enjoy...breaking you in."

Elias' eyes widened at the implications of this statement, uttered so casually in that clear, sweet voice. He shivered as something seemed to grip his heart, and he was nearly lost in the cool, possessive gaze of his master.
Xander picked himself up off the ground, shaking his head to clear it before once more going after the many tentacles undulating around him. "And while you're at it, how do you kill this fucker!?" The pitch of his voice was raised in desperation.

"Gill type things. In their sides. And puncture its heart, only way to kill one."

"Great," Xander muttered, making his way closer to the demon's body. Yelling loudly, he threw himself at it, shoving the piece of wood through its chest.

The Grun-thak snarled, reaching down and grabbing Xander by the neck, flinging him away. It pulled the makeshift stake out of its body, tossing it aside.

"Didn't work! New plan!" He scrabbled back from a hand, doing his best to avoid it.

"Bloody hell," Spike sighed. "Its heart, moron, not its liver!"

"What? I did!" He grabbed onto a few tentacles of his own, trying to keep them from moving too much. He blanched as he heard the sibilant murmuring start up again.
Spike dropped his bar, snatching two tentacles and quickly tying them together. Picking up the bar again, he jumped at the demon. "Actually," he brought the bar down hard on an arm, the snap clearly audible, "you didn't. Its heart," a quick movement, and another arm was decommissioned, "is about...here!"

The Grun-thak continued muttering quickly as it struggled to free itself. It had almost finished when Spike shoved the iron bar through its stomach. The demon's eyes bulged out, and it made a grating, rattling sound, then toppled, unmoving. As the copse lay there, a wave of iridescent fog burst forth from it, enveloping its victorious foes.

~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~

"Sorry, Xan, but the bleached wonder is yours tonight. No way am I taking him patrolling with me..."

~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~

"Bloody hell, twit! Watch what you're..."

~~~~~~*flash*~~~~~~

"Spike, would you just give it..."
Dark eyes fluttered open, staring into sleepy blue ones. "Mmm, mornin', Spike," he slurred out.

"Xander," Spike responded with a nod and a yawn.

The two men froze, gaping at each other in the dim light.

The silence was broken by two voices breathing out simultaneously, "Holy fuck!"

**Part Thirty-Two**

The two stared at each other incredulously for a long moment. The heavy silence was finally broken when Xander yelped and flushed, hastily yanking the blanket up to cover his bared body. "Spike!" he squeaked, his eyes darting around the room in search of an escape.

Spike narrowed his eyes at the other man's discomfort. "Xander," he growled softly. Something flashed in his eyes, and he reached out to his bedmate.

Again, Xander made a noise of protest and lurched away, falling off the side of the bed in his haste to escaped the touch. Quickly, he scrambled to his feet, clutching the blanket around him. When he realized that absconding with his makeshift robe had served to leave Spike naked on the bed, he spun around. "Um, Spike, this is...I mean, we...you...oh shit, I..."
Spike frowned and cocked his head as he listened to Xander's broken attempt at speech. "Pet," he said in a quiet voice, "What--"

"Oh god, don't say that."

Now Spike was confused. "Say what?"

"You can't...you can't call me that, Wi--Spike. It's not...don't you get it? This is all...none of it is--"

Spike snarled, cutting Xander off. "Yes, it is. This is real Xander. Alex."

"No!" Xander whirled around. His gaze flickered briefly over Spike's pale, lean body before fixing resolutely on his face. "I can't...I..." He shook his head, trembling. "I can't do this, W-Spike," he whispered in a miserable voice. "I just...can't." He stumbled across the room and grabbed a set of clothes, then rushed across the apartment to the bathroom.

Still naked, Spike followed him. He tried to push back the flare of pain that burst up when Xander slammed the door in his face. Hands balled into fists, he glared for a moment, then tried the knob. Locked.

"Xander! Open the door, you bloody pillock!" He banged on the door with a fist. He was about to give into the
urge to wrench the door off its hinges and cart Xander back to the bedroom when the door finally opened.

Xander, now dressed, avoided Spike's accusing glare. He walked past the vampire towards the front door.

Spike leaped after him, shoving him up against the door and jerking him around to face him. "Where do you think you're going?" he questioned furiously.

"Out," Xander whispered. "I can't...I have to go out, Spike." He swallowed hard as he stared down at the slim fingers that were clenched in the fabric of his shirt.

"You're not walking away from this, Alex! I won't let you!"

Xander's face twisted and he pushed Spike back. "Stop calling me that!" he cried out, holding up trembling hands to ward off the vampire. "Just...I have to go!"

Spike's expression grew cold. "You think you can just leave? Put all this behind you? Ignore everything that happened between us?" Jaw clenched, he backed away, shaking his head. "It won't work. Xander...Alex. Don't you get it? This is real. How can you deny it? Us?" He took a deep, tremulous breath as he turned to stare at the covered window, idly examining the sliver of sunlight that seeped in around the edges.
In a voice so soft Spike almost didn't hear it, Xander said, "I'm sorry."

Too late, Spike whirled around only to find the door already closed. Frozen in his place, he listened in disbelief to the sound of Xander's hurried footsteps fading down the hallway.

A jagged pain ripped through Spike's chest. Bending over slightly, he clutched the back of the sofa, one hand held over his heart as he gasped desperately for air, fighting the awful burning in his eyes.

~*~*~*~*~

Ignoring the elevator, Xander sprinted down the stairwell, almost colliding with Oz. He never noticed, though, and determinedly made his way to the ground floor and across the lobby, drawing in a sobbing breath of air when he finally made it outside. He squinted down the bright streets, shading eyes that had grown accustomed to later hours and dimmer light.

He shook himself, then jammed his hands in his pockets and strode down the sidewalk, not slowing his pace until he was standing in front of the local liquor store. He
checked to make sure he'd remembered his wallet, then squared his shoulders and went inside.

"Hey, you ok?" Oz watched in confusion as Xander barreled past him without giving him a backward glance. Frowning, he continued up the stairs, hesitating at the third floor. With a last look down to where Xander had made his hasty exit, Oz put his own plans on hold and left the stairwell.

He made his way down to Spike and Xander's apartment, knocking lightly on the door that had been left slightly ajar. There was no answer, and he had just made up his mind to forget it and go back to his place when something inside the apartment shattered, and a keening howl of fury rose up.

Steeling himself, Oz pushed the door open and stepped inside.

Ducking, he barely missed being bludgeoned by the glass pitcher that was hurled at his head. He flinched when it flew past him out into the hallway and smashed into the
far wall, a dent in the plaster testifying to the force with which it had been thrown.

"Um, Wil?"

Bitter, almost hysterical laughter met this, and suddenly Oz found himself dangling in midair, a hand wrapped around his throat and glittering yellow eyes flashing inches from his own.

"Haven't you heard? It's not Wil any more. The name's Spike." With that, the vampire let Oz drop to the floor.

Coughing, Oz rubbed his neck, already imagining the interesting bruises he'd take from this encounter. Oh well, in for a penny, in for a pound. "I take it you guys remembered everything?"

An expression of almost unbearable despair crossed Spike's face before he twisted his mouth into a sneer. "What clued you in, mongrel?" he snarled. Hands shaking, he spun around and picked up an ashtray, flinging it across the room where it hit a picture on the wall, shattering the glass. The picture swung crookedly for a moment, then it too went crashing to the floor.

Oz winced. "So, I guess it didn't go too well, huh?"
Spike stood frozen, staring at the spray of glass shards that littered the carpet. "He left me," he whispered so quietly that Oz almost missed it. Then, with a guttural cry, Spike picked up the end table by the sofa and smashed it against the floor, not even noticing when splinters of the wood flew off and lodged into his skin.

Oz took a deep breath, watching in horror as the naked, blood-flecked vampire continued to wreak havoc on the apartment. Not knowing what to do, he backed slowly away, stumbling out into the hallway.

A door opened behind him, and Mellie stepped out, blinking sleepily as she patted at the curlers in her hair. "Daniel? My word, what is all that racket?"

"They remembered," Oz said softly. "And Xander...Alex left."

"Oh dear." Mellie straightened and brushed her hands over her bathrobe. "Well, I can see it's up to us to fix this." Her eyes flickered briefly as a series of crashes punctuated her words. "Daniel, be a dear and see if you can't fetch Alex back here. I'll just go have a few word with Wil."

"But--"

"Don't argue with me. Just go."
Oz blinked. "Um, ok." He cast a last look at apartment where Spike was systematically destroying anything even remotely breakable. "Just...be careful, ok?"

"Of course dear. Now shoo." Mellie watched him hurry away, then shook herself and turned to deal with the enraged vampire. She gave a small sigh of sadness, wondering how much more these two would have to go through to find their happiness together.

~*~*~*~*~

Oz found himself deeply thankful for the enhanced senses that being a werewolf had left him with. He was able to follow Xander's trail easily, although he had to hold back a groan of frustration when he finally found the other man sitting on a bench and clutching desperately to a rather large, half-empty bottle of whiskey.

Stifling his disappointment of Xander's reaction to the situation, he sat down next to him. "Hey Xander," he said in a subdued voice.
Xander just shrugged and lifted the bottle, swirling the contents around, gazing at it as if it held all the answers. Or as if he wished it did.

"You wanna talk about it?"

Xander let out a choked of sob and tilted the bottle.

Oz watched as a thin stream of fluid trickled from the bottle to splash down on the pavement below, where it followed an already marked path towards the curb and into the gutter. Oz felt something inside him loosen in relief as he realized that Xander hadn't been drinking the whiskey he'd bought, but instead seemed intent on pouring it out on the ground. "Xander?"

"I...I really loved him, you know?" Xander finally said hoarsely.

"What, like past tense?"

Xander hitched a shoulder and kept pouring the whiskey out.

"So wait, let me get this straight. Yesterday you loved him, and today you don't? Because of some memories that finally came back?"
"I can't...it's all different now." Xander shook his head. "What happened with us wasn't...it shouldn't...it wasn't real."

Oz's eyes narrowed, and a hand darted out to yank at Xander's collar. Harshly, he poked at the mark there. Spike's mark. "That is real, Xander. You knew he was a vampire, you let him in, you loved him, you married him. It doesn't just go away now that you remember who you are."

"But--"

"I'm not done yet!" Oz snapped, shocking Xander into silence. "Think about it, Xander. Were you any different during this whole 'lapse of judgement' thing? Did your personality change at all?"

"Well, sort of. I mean, not really, but...I guess I was more myself. Because I didn't have anything to hold me back."

"So what makes you think it was any different for Spike?"

"But he's evil!" Xander blurted out. "He's tried to kill me! And Willow, and the others!"

"And maybe, just maybe, this was a chance for him to let you see what he's really like. Without all the bluster and
posing that comes with maintaining the image of a big, bad, master vampire."

"I..." Xander flushed and looked away.

Oz sighed. "You still love him, don't you?"

At the words, Xander shuddered a bit. Then the bottle dropped to the ground as he cradled his head. "Yes," he murmured tremulously.

"See? That didn't change when you remembered. Do you think it changed for him? Because I know he loved you, or else you wouldn't have these." His fingers brushed over the mark again.

Xander sniffled softly. "But how can I go back there?" he asked in a dejected voice.

Oz stood and pulled Xander up, brushing him off. "You turn around and walk. Swallow your pride and for once in your life actually talk about what you're going through. With Spike."

Xander stood, undecided.

"He's hurting, Xander. Just as much as you are."

Xander bit his lip and looked vaguely ashamed, as if it had just now crossed his mind that this wasn't exactly
easy for Spike either. "Ok," he said. He looked back at Oz. "Come with?" he asked plaintively.

Oz nodded and walked with Xander back to his apartment.

~*~*~*~*~

"Would you bloody fucking well just sod off!"

"Not until you calm down and actually listen to what I'm saying." Mellie crossed her arms over her chest, tapping her foot impatiently as she fixed the vampire with a disapproving glare.

"What are you, my bleedin' mum? I'm. Not. Interested!" Spike glared petulantly back at her, then slouched down further into his seat.

"It's all really quite simple, William," Mellie explained patiently. "Do you want him?"

Spike turned his face away, muttering.

"Do you love him?"

He flinched.
Mellie sighed. "Is he still yours?"

Spike exploded out of his chair. "Yes! Yes, all right? He's mine," he hissed vehemently. "I took him, an' marked him, and he damn well belongs to me!" He started pacing the room, not even wincing when he stepped on sharp bits of glass and wood.

"Well then, are you just going to throw a tantrum and let him leave? Or are you going to do something about it?"

Spike paused and, hands trembling, asked in a broken voice, "But how do I make him stay?"

"Oh sweetie, I--" She broke off at the loud gasp from behind them and turned.

Xander blanched as he took in the state of the apartment, as well as the condition of the vampire who had destroyed it. "What the hell...?"

Oz darted a look at Mellie. In a brief moment of silent communication, they both came to the same conclusion. While Spike and Xander were still too bewildered to resist, they forcibly dragged them into the bedroom then slammed the door shut. Mellie's face screwed up in thought, then she muttered a few words, smiling in satisfaction as the door shuddered with the impact of a furious vampire, but held easily.
"Spell?"

"Hmm." Mellie nodded. "Fortification. Makes the door and walls as strong as steel. I also jammed the lock so the door won't open. I'm a bit out of practice, though, so it won't hold for long."

"Well, let's hope it's long enough."

---

Spike and Xander sat at opposite ends of the bed, avoiding looking at each other. After about an hour of trying futilely to escape the room, they'd determined to simply ignore one another. Almost another hour of complete silence had passed, though, and Xander couldn't take it any more. "I can't believe you trashed our apartment," he muttered.

Spike snarled. "Oh, it's our apartment, is it? An' here I thought I was just an intruder taking advantage of your delicate state!"

Xander flushed. "Hey, that's not fair!" he retorted heatedly, "What was I supposed to do when I wake up and find myself married to a vampire?"
Spike launched himself across the bad, pinning Xander down. "That's right!" he yelled, "We are married. And you can't just make all this go away now that you're having second thoughts!"

"Second thoughts?" Xander shouted back. "Who's having second thoughts? I never even got to have first thoughts about all this!"

"Oh sure! An' that wasn't you writhing under me, beggin' me to bite you and make you mine!" Spike's eyes flashed.

Xander's breath caught and he gave an involuntary wriggle. Then he tried to push Spike off of him. "That's not the point! Look, just because I love you doesn't make all our problems go away! I mean, we can't just expect everything to be like it was before we remembered. And, oh god, Buffy and Willow know about this. And shit, what about Anya? What am I supposed to do...Spike? Why...um...why are you looking at me like that?" He shivered under the intense gaze that Spike was fixing him with. He flushed again when the vampire's tongue darted out to wet his lips. "S-Spike?"

"You love me?"

"I...um, what? Huh?"
Spike touched Xander's cheek gently, stroking his finger over the rough stubble. "You said...'just because I love you'," he reminded him.

"Oh." Xander stared up at Spike wide-eyed. He shifted uncomfortably. "Well...I...I..."


Xander's gasped and moaned. "God, Spike, I..." He panted as the tongue worked it's way over his face to his ear, teasing at the sensitive skin there. "I..." His earlobe was sucked into a cool mouth and nibbled. "I..." Teeth nipped softly at the patch of flesh behind his ear. "...yes..."

Spike froze and pulled back. "Yes?" he questioned, trying to keep the desperation out of his voice.

Xander studied the vampire hovering over him, wondering why he didn't feel even the slightest bit of fear over being nibbled on. Quite the opposite, in fact, as all his blood seemed to have rushed to the lower part of his anatomy. Noticing the hesitant look on Spike's face as he awaited confirmation, he dragged in a deep breath. "Yeah," he admitted. "I don't know how, or why, but I
just…” He frowned, lifting his hand from where it was stroking over Spike's side, wondering why it felt sticky.

Spike blinked, momentarily disoriented as he found himself shoved off of Xander and flipped over to lay flat on the bed. "What the--?"

"Oh god, Wil. You're bleeding! Does it hurt? Are you ok?" With shaking hands, Xander yanked off his shirt and started dabbing at the wounds, sighing in relief when most of them proved to be already healed. A few, though, still had splinters of wood stuck in them, and Xander dashed to the dresser, scrambling to find the tweezers.

For the first time, Spike noticed that he had managed to injure himself during his rampage. There were little pinpricks of pain from where the splinters had taken up residence, but nothing major. "Alex, I'm ok. It's just a little bit of--fuck!"

"Sorry. Shit, what did you do to yourself?" Xander squinted and worked another splinter free. "Christ, can't leave you alone for five minutes, can I?" He mumbled under his breath as he searched Spike's body for more injuries. Spike's...body. Spike's very...naked...body.
Spike arched up as the hands examining him suddenly started to caress, petting along his rapidly sensitizing skin.

Mesmerized, Xander watched his hands slide over the smooth, pale skin of Spike's deliciously naked body. "God, Wil," he breathed reverently as he touched the lean, muscled body that belonged to him. Him, damn it! "Mine," he whispered and he bent and ran his tongue over the tiny streaks of blood on Spike's chest, licking a path up to a peaked nipple.

"Alex!" Spike gasped, hands flying up to hold Xander's head in place.

"Mine." Xander turned his attention to the other nipple, biting down on it with gentle pressure. "Mine," he growled again when he released the tortured bit of flesh and nibbled his way up Spike's neck. "Mine." He captured Spike's lips with his own, shoving his tongue inside and reclaiming the territory.

Spike slid his hands down Xander's back, scrabbling at the pants that hindered his progress. With a bit of twisting, and some help on Xander's part, the pants were soon shoved down, tangling in the shoes that Neither had remembered Xander was wearing. It didn't matter. It was enough.
The two bodies twined together on the bed, limbs moving sensuously against each other. Pale and tanned, dark and light, wrapped together as if they were never to be parted.

Neither one could last long. As they rubbed against each other, reveling in the touch of flesh, loud noises of need and desire filled the room, and both men were soon panting heavily with heightened passion.

Spike tensed and pulled Xander's head back far enough that he could meet lust-dazed eyes with his own. He thrust his hips up as he stroked his other hand over Xander's ass. "Mine!" he snarled as he came, eyes locked with his lover's.

Xander gasped when he felt Spike's release against his stomach. He stared down into Spike's eyes, blue ringed with gold, and lost himself.

"Will!" Body quaking, Xander came against Spike, holding himself rigid for endless seconds before collapsing onto his lover.

Spike purred as he held Xander to him, stroking and petting his sweaty, shivering body. "Mine," he repeated.

"Yeah," Xander murmured in reply.
They lay there for a while, calming. Eventually, Spike began to tongue Xander's hairline, pressing sweet kisses along his face and head.

Xander smiled and snuggled in closer, glad that Spike never complained about his weight on him after sex. "Spike?"

"Hmmm?"

"I'm sorry for leaving."

Spike sighed, pressing Xander impossibly closer. "S'ok, luv."

"No it's not." He pushed himself up a bit. "If I ever try something like that again, just club me over the head, drag me back, and shag my brains out, ok?"

Spike grinned lasciviously. "Deal." He yanked Xander's head down for a scorching kiss. "Now, where were we?" he asked playfully and he pushed his renewing erection up against Xander's hip.

~*~*~*~*~

Oz and Mellie did their best to straighten up the apartment as they waited. When the banging on the
walls had stooped and utter silence had fallen, they gave each other hopeful looks. Nervously, they waited.

After a while, voices rose in anger, but neither could make out what was being said. Then, there was silence again.

"You don't think they killed each other, do you?" Oz asked tentatively.

"I hope not," Mellie muttered, then smiled brightly. "I'm sure everything will work out fine, Daniel. Just wait and see."

Oz snorted. "Right."

There were muffled noises, and then a yelped curse. After a few more minutes, loud groans could be heard. These went on for quite some time, until a loud cry rang through the apartment.

"Wil!"

Relaxing, Oz and Mellie traded relieved looks. "Well," Mellie said as she casually made her way to the door. "I think that's our cue to go."

"I'm right behind you."
They left the apartment, closing the door on the couple who seemed to be engaged in some rather intense...making up.

Part Thirty-Three

"Oh god, do we really have to go?" Xander fiddled nervously with the hem of his shirt as he watched Spike finish dressing.

Spike wriggled into a tight-fitting mesh top. "Don't have to do anything, pet," he replied. "Could always just stay here an' shag for a few more hours." He leered at his lover.

Xander fought down a blush. "Spike! Don't make me think about that right before seeing the girls! Oh, geez!" He covered his face and shuddered, turning his back on the tempting vampire. "Don't jump the vamp, Xander," he muttered to himself.

Spike snickered softly at that. Softly, he moved in behind Xander and slid an arm around his waist, pressing a kiss
to the nape of his neck. "Seriously, Xan. We don't have to go. Not like we have to answer to them or something."

Xander actually gave the idea a bit of thought before shaking his head. "No, they're our friends Spike. They deserve an explanation."

"Our friends?" Spike lifted an eyebrow.

Xander rolled his eyes and turned in Spike's arms, kissing him on the nose. "Fine, be that way. My friends, your bitter enemies."

"Right. Just remember that." He gave a low growl and nipped playfully at Xander's chin. "So, what's the plan then? Wanna blow it off?"

"No, no, I'm good. I'm fine. It's just...ok, I'm nervous as hell. It's going to be so weird to be around them again, which is not something I ever thought I'd say. And how am I supposed to explain to them that I'm gay? I mean, they probably won't be shocked about you, but me? It's not like I've ever been with a guy before. Ok, I may have thought about it on occasion, but that was just normal and perfectly healthy curiosity! I never did anything!"

Spike quirked an eyebrow at him. "What, and I have?" he asked with a touch of indignation.
Xander blinked. "I...what?"

Narrowing his eyes, Spike attempted to look confident, although for some reason he simply appeared nervous. "Not like I'd ever been with a bloke before either," he muttered.

Xander abruptly sat down, a gust of air whooshing out his lungs. "Oh," he said softly. "I...oh. Well, it's just...I...I just always thought...I mean, you and Angel..."

Spike stared at him incredulously. "Angel?" he barked out. "You thought me and Angel were--" A look of utter horror crossed his face. "That is just sick, luv," he growled, shuddering. "Besides, the ponce always hated me back then, and the feeling was quite mutual I can assure you!" He gave another shudder. "Me an' Angel," he mumbled, cringing at the mere thought.

"Oh." Xander had the grace to look embarrassed for his assumption. "So...never? I mean, you're over a century old, you never...you know...tried anything with another guy?"

Spike shrugged. "I was with Dru," he explained shortly. "Yeah but...oh."
Spike cocked his head, studying the flustered human curiously. "I don't cheat, pet," he said quietly.

"So...just Dru, huh?" Xander let out a nervous laugh. "Wow, most women would kill for a guy that faithful." Xander mulled over this new information for a bit. "But weren't you and Harmony..." he trailed off.

"We shagged for a bit. It was after I'd finally called it quits with Dru. Never was anything serious, though. Why's it matter?"

"Oh, it's just kind of strange, is all. I mean, my boyfriend is a hundred years older than me, and we've slept with the same number of people."

"Yeah?" Spike frowned at the thought of anyone else touching his mate. "You and Willow...?"

"What?! No! Not that we might not have if...but no!" He sighed. "It was...um, Faith."

"What, the rogue Slayer? Damn, you've got balls, Xander!" Spike managed to look somewhat impressed.

"Yeah, well, it was more of a one night stand thing. Actually, it wasn't even that. More like 'wham, bam, thank you Xan, here's your clothes, have a nice life.' She wasn't real big on commitment." He rubbed at his throat.
"Besides, the thrill of it wore off after she tried to choke me to death."

Spike's face darkened. "I'll kill her," he snarled, fists clenching. "I'll hunt her down and rip her guts out. Wrap her entrails up in bows, an' peel her flesh off!"

"Hey! Woah! Chill with the dismemberment stuff! And--hey Spike? Why isn't your chip going off?"

"Huh?" Spike frowned and looked down at his fisted hands, then back up at Xander.

"You know, when you have naughty, human-hurting thoughts and--oh shit," Xander breathed. "You punched him. You punched my father. That first night when we...oh fuck."

Spike staggered, then sat down weakly next to Xander. "An'...I never had any problems when I got a bit rough with humans at the club."

They stared at each other blankly for a few minutes trying to process this discovery. After a bit, Xander cleared his throat nervously. "So...I guess this means your chip's fried, huh?"
"L-looks like." Spike's eyes filled with trepidation. "So...this change things? You wanna...call it quits or somethin'?"

"No!" Xander jumped up and began pacing nervously. "Of course not. I mean, it's not like you're planning on having me for dinner or something." He paused and eyed Spike warily. "Um, you're...not, are you?"

A speculative gleam grew in Spike's eye as he stood, licking his lips and prowling towards Xander. "Actually, luv," he growled in a voice thick with lust, "that's exactly what I was planning." He caught Xander in his arms and began to nibble at his earlobe while a hand snaked down the back of his pants.

"Eep! Spike!" Xander tried not to melt as Spike's cool tongue laved a path down his neck. "We can't...we have to...oh god..."

Spike grinned, then pinched Xander's ass sharply.

"Ack!" Xander jumped back, one hand clutching his ass as he glared at the vampire. "You...you..."

"Come on, luv, gotta get going, don't we?"

"You are so going to pay for that. One of these days, when you least expect it, you will pay."
Spike leered. "Looking forward to it."

Xander stared at him, eyes narrowed, for a few more seconds. "Right." He looked around, apprehension once more clouding his expression. "So...I guess we should go. Oh. You promise not to hurt any of them, right?"


"Ok. Yeah. Well...let's do it."

~*~*~*~*~

Willow bounced nervously on her stool, twisting around to get a better look at the entrance to the club. "They're not here yet. Why aren't they here yet?"

"I'm sure they're on their way, sweetie," Tara said quietly, gently patting Willow's knee.

"But what if something happened to them? What if they got attacked and Xander is lying in some alley all beat up and hurt and bleeding and--"

"Willow. Do calm down. Inducing a panic attack is in no way going to help the situation."
Willow blinked at Giles, then nodded. "Right. No panicking. I can do that. I'm not panicking. I am so totally not thinking about Xander being pounded to a pulp and--"

"Willow!" Giles leveled a long, quelling look at the redhead, causing her to shrink back in her seat, blushing slightly.

Cordelia returned with a drink and sat in one of the vacant chairs around the table. "They're not here yet? Hey, you don't think something happened to them, do you? You know Xander, he's practically a walking--"

"Cordelia!"

She glared at Giles. "Rude much? Geez, what's your problem?"

Before Giles could answer, Wesley and Gunn returned, each setting down a tray of sodas on the table.

"We miss anything?" Gunn asked, then looked somewhat baffled at the icy silence that met his query. "O...kay."

After a moment, Wesley cleared his throat. "Well then. Has anyone seen Angel?"
Cordelia rolled her eyes. "He and Buffy are 'talking'," she made little air quotes with her fingers. "Prepare for full brood mode upon return."

Wesley frowned. "Do you think that's wise? Perhaps it's best if they simply continue to remain somewhat...distant from each other. After all, their former, er, relationship was at best a foolhardy endeavor and Buffy--"

"--is standing right behind you."

Wesley whirled around, only to be met by the combined glares of Slayer and vampire.

"Are we interrupting?" Angel asked in a sardonic tone.

"Er, n-no, that is to say, we, uh..."

"Wes, man, give it up before you end up eating the other foot." Gunn clapped him on his back, nearly knocking him from his seat.

"Hmmm." Buffy glared at Wesley for a moment longer, then turned her attention to the others. She frowned. "Xander's not here yet? Huh. Hope he's managed to stay out of trouble on the way over."
Giles let his head drop to the table, but resisted the urge to thump it repeatedly on the hard surface.

"Giles? You ok? Guys, what's wrong with Giles?"

"I don't--"

"Hey."

At the soft greeting, every head swiveled to get a glimpse of the newcomer.

"Oz!" Buffy squealed and grabbed the werewolf, lifting him from the floor and squeezing him tight in a potentially bone-crushing hug. At his gasp for air, she blushed and set him down, brushing him off. "Sorry. Kinda forgot to do that last time, though."

Unable to restrain herself, Willow bounced out of her seat. "Where's Xander?"

Oz looked over his shoulder, frowning. "That's funny," he said, "they were right behind me just a minute ago."

Just then, Spike and Xander appeared, Xander looking somewhat flushed and out of breath while Spike merely looked smug. Both, though, were sporting lips that were looking rather bruised and kiss-swollen.
Xander resisted the urge to cover his mouth, knowing that would only draw even more attention. "Um, hey guys. What's up?"

Buffy stepped forward tentatively. "Xander. Are you, um..." she tapped the side of her head.

Xander grinned weakly. "Memories intact and brain functioning as normally as ever," he reported.

"Good. That's...good." She cast a questioning look at Spike. "So..."

Steely-eyed, Spike stepped forward and pointedly took hold of Xander's hand. "Gotta problem, Slayer?" he growled.

Xander chuckled weakly and squeezed Spike's hand as hard as he could. "Spike," he said quietly through gritted, "we agreed you would play nice."

Spike snorted. "There's no bloodshed, is there?"

Buffy glowered at the vampire. "That remains to be seen."

"So, you guys are shacking up, huh? I never figured you for the gay scene, Xander. How's that working out for
you?" Cordelia looked around at all the eyes trained on her. "What?"

"Oh, very tactful. Way to ease into the subject," Buffy snapped.

"Xander?"

Xander turned his head to see Willow, all bounce and excitement gone, watching him with a hesitant look. He released Spike's hand and opened his arms, smiling softly. "Hey, Wills. Missed you."

With a stifled sob, Willow threw herself forward. "Oh, I'm so glad you're ok. I was really worried about you," she whispered in a choking voice.

Xander's voice wasn't exactly steady either as he answered, "You know me. Nothing can keep the Xan-man down." He felt a cool, steadying hand on his shoulder and looked back at Spike gratefully.

Willow pulled away, wiping at her face. She gave a quavering smile. "I hate it when I cry. I get blotchy."

Tara stepped forward and wrapped an arm around Willow's waist. "You look beautiful, sweetie," she assured her.
"Right, now, enough of the waterworks. Gonna make me heave." Spike made to shove his way past the group and find a seat at the table, Xander in tow, but a strong grip on his arm stopped him. He glared up at Angel. "Bloody hell. Lemme go you wanker," he snarled.

"Spike, what do you think you're doing?"

"Well, I was gonna sit down and have a few drinks, maybe get in a snog or two with my mate."

"Your ma... Spike, you didn't."

Spike tensed. "I bloody well did. Now sod off!"

"Let him go."

The shock of hearing Xander actually growl at him made Angel release the other vampire. "Xander," he tried to reason, "You don't realize--"

"Yes. I do." Without another word, he nudged Spike toward the table, leaving Angel staring after them speechless.

Spike sat and pulled Xander into his lap. "Xan," he purred in his ear, "that was just lovely. Makes me wanna do naughty things to you." He nibbled an earlobe, then licked.
"Oh." Xander's eyes fluttered almost shut and he melted back against Spike.

Gunn cleared his throat pointedly. "So," he said in an overly loud voice, "lovely weather we've been having lately."

Cordelia rolled her eyes. "Shut up, Gunn. Tell me, boys, how long have you been doing the wacky?"

The question filtered through Xander's lust-fogged brain, and he pulled away from Spike, spluttering.

"Cordelia!"

"Geez Wesley, get a life. I'm sure I'm not the only one here who thinks that these two going at it would make for a damn nice mental image."

Buffy giggled. "Y'know, she's right. That, um, that is kinda hot," she admitted as she avidly watched Spike's hand sneaking past the waistline on Xander's pants.

Xander let out a squeak and jumped up. "Spike!" He batted the vampire's hands away. "Not in front of--umph...mmmm." He couldn't resist as Spike pulled him back down and kissed him firmly.

"Woah."
"Amen, sister." Cordelia fanned herself.

Willow watched, somewhat worried. "But--"

"Willow." Tara covered her mouth. "Look at them. Look at their auras. Can't you see?" She let her hand drop.

Willow's eyes widened and a breathy exclamation escaped her. "Oh. That's...they're...ohhhh."

"Yeah." Tara smiled brightly at the couple. "Isn't it sweet?"

Spike finally let Xander up for air, and he panted heavily. "Wow."

Spike chuckled. "I second that."

"So I guess you two are really together, then?"

Xander jumped as Buffy's voice intruded on their lust, and he finally tore his eyes away from Spike long enough to look at her. "Yeah. Um...we...we're gonna try and make it work." He bit his lip nervously. "You're...not mad, are you?" he asked, ignoring Spike's growl.

Buffy sighed. "I can't say I'm not worried. Neither of you have exactly the best track record. But..." She looked at the two, unable to deny the deep feelings they obviously had for each other. "It's your decision, Xander," she said
firmly. "And you're my friend. Whatever happens, that won't change. So if you and," her nose wrinkled, "Spike want to...date...well, I guess I can support you." Her eyes narrowed. "As long as he doesn't do anything too annoying and force me to stake him."

"Hey, no one allowed to stake my vamp but me."

"Bloody hell," Giles groaned, "I need a drink." He stood and made for the bar.

Xander blinked and turned red. "I just said that out loud, didn't I?" He groaned and shook his head. "Thanks, Buffy," he said softly. "That means a lot to me."

Buffy shrugged. "Hey, what are friends for?" She pulled him out of Spike's lap and hugged him. "It's good to have you back."

"This is getting too mushy for me," Cordelia announced. "Xander, welcome back, yadda yadda, I want to dance. You," she pointed at Oz, who had almost managed to sneak away unnoticed, "dance with me."

Oz quirked an eyebrow. "Well, since you ask so nicely..." his voice trailed off as Cordelia practically dragged him to the dance floor.
"Ahem." Willow waited until all eyes were on her. "If the two of you are serious about this, then I believe I have a duty to fulfill."

"Wha--!" Spike yelped as Willow yanked him off his chair. "Christ, you're strong for such a little chit. Hey!"

"If you'll excuse me, I have to talk to a vamp about a shovel." Willow kept a firm grip on Spike as she began to drag him away..

"Shovel? What shovel? Red, where are you taking me? Xan? Xan! Stop bloody snickering and call off the witch!"

"I gotta catch this." With a wide smirk, Buffy moved to follow the two, then paused. "Oh, Xander?"

Trying to calm his laughter, Xander turned his attention to Buffy. "Yeah?"

"I spoke with Anya earlier. She...she couldn't make it tonight, but she said to tell you she was planning on dropping by to visit you two tomorrow."

Xander blanched, all amusement gone. "Oh," he said weakly. "That's...great." He smiled wanly as Buffy walked away, wondering how he was going to break it to his boyfriend that his possibly vengeancy ex-girlfriend was going to be visiting the happy couple.
"Would you...like to dance?"

Shaking himself, Xander turned toward Tara. "Huh?"

Tara smiled at him. "Our d-dates seem to be occupied, so...wanna dance?"

"Oh. Right. Um, sure." Trying to avoid the thought of his ex-girlfriend for a few more hours, Xander smiled brightly and led Tara toward the crowd of dancers.

Angel glowered at his remaining employees and the entire room in general, then turned and stalked away.

Wesley and Gunn stared after him, then turned to look at the dancing couples. Simultaneously, they looked at each other and shook their heads.

"Huh-uh." "No way."

They both reached for one of the many abandoned sodas.

~*~*~*~*

Xander's leg jerked spasmodically at the knocking on the door. He glanced at Spike, worry evident.
Spike tried not to look as upset as his lover when he shrugged with seeming nonchalance. "Better answer that, pet," he said quietly.

Drawing a deep, steadying breath, Xander got up and walked to the door, opening it with only the smallest bit of hesitation. "Hello, Anya," he greeted their visitor, then moved aside to allow her entrance.

"Xander," Anya responded softly. She stepped through the doorway and looked around. "This is...nice," she said after a moment.

"Thanks. We like it. Spike and me, I mean. Which is good since we live here. Both of us. And you know this already so I'll quit babbling now."

The corner of Anya's lip twitched up a little. "Breathe, Xander," she told him.

"Right. Um, have a seat. You want a drink or anything?" When Anya shook her head, Xander hesitantly moved back to sit next to Spike.

Anya seated herself and stared intently at the two for long minutes. "So," she finally said, breaking the uncomfortable silence. "You're going to be gay with Spike now?"
Xander choked, which resulted in Spike glaring at Anya while he rubbed Xander's back. After a minute of arching into the caress, Xander waved him off.

"I mean, it's perfectly understandable. Spike is rather nice-looking, and he does have a great body, not to mention a very fine ass. It's actually quite arousing picturing the two of you having orgasms together." She studied the two men earnestly, determined to put on a brave face for this. Besides, she had other options too, didn't she? Maybe she could stop by Harmony's place, and they could...commiserate again.

Face flushed bright red, Xander managed to meet Anya's eyes. "I'm sorry, An. I never meant for you to get hurt. But--" He shrugged and picked up one of Spike's hands with his own, smiling gently at the vampire.

"Well, I suppose it's for the best, really," Anya said with only a trace of wistfulness. "Besides, I think I might want to explore this thing with Harmony a little more. You know, even after all my years of being a vengeance demon and wreaking untold pain and destruction on men, I'd never actually considered turning to another woman for orgasms. It was an enlightening experience, I must say."
This time it was Spike's turn to start choking. "Harm? You mean...you and Harm?"

Anya nodded excitedly. "And there's this thing she does with her tongue that just..." She shivered dramatically in remembrance.

"Yeah, tell me about it," Spike muttered, then glared at Xander when he was whacked across the shoulder.

"Well that's...that's great, An," Xander said weakly, doing his best not to think about what Harmony might have been doing with her tongue. Then again, maybe he should see about getting some pointers from her from the way Spike and Anya were reacting. Clearing his throat, he finally asked the question that had been plaguing him. "Um, Anya? Are you by any chance going to get all...vengeancy on me? I mean, I'd totally understand it if you felt a need to, but I'm really hoping to avoid it if at all possible."

Anya took a deep breath and looked Xander squarely in the eyes. "Xander," she started without a trace of her usual brusque manner, "I haven't been a human girl for very long, and I know that most people probably think I don't get half of what goes on." She smiled sadly. "I may be blunt, and outspoken, and...ok, kind of self-centered.
But...I also know what's in your eyes when you look at Spike."

"Any, I--"

"Please, let me finish." She took another breath. "We were good together, Xander. And there will always be a part of me that still loves you. But even after only being around you two for just this short time, I can tell that you love Spike. When you look at him, there's something in your eyes that I never saw when we were together." She smiled sadly. "I had a piece of your heart, Xander, but Spike...it's like you guys have a piece of each other's souls. And even if I might on occasion entertain thoughts of making your penis break out in oozing pustules, I care about you enough not to want to ruin what you and Spike have together." She sniffled softly.

Xander was at a loss for words. He couldn't deny the way he felt, and he didn't want to hurt Anya any more than she already had been. Biting his lip and doing his best to ignore the comment about the pustules, he just tried to offer a bit of comfort to Anya, leaning over and stroking her arm gently.

Anya shook herself and stood. "Well," she said briskly, "this is all just silly anyway, I mean, it's not like Spike even has a soul. And I hate getting all weepy, so I'm just
going to go now." Nodding decisively, she wiped her face and strode to the door. Her hand was on the doorknob when she paused. Turning, she gave Xander a naughty, if somewhat wobbly, grin. "You think, maybe just once more for old time's sake?"

Spike growled and jumped out of his chair.

Xander just sighed and shook his head. "Sorry, Anya."

"Oh. Ok, well, just a suggestion." She shrugged and opened the door. Just before it closed, she poked her head back in. "If Spike feels left out, we could always do a threesome, I--"

"Anya!"

Anya rolled her eyes. "Prudes." The door shut with a soft click.

Spike relaxed, stalking over to the couch and straddling Xander's lap. "You're mine!" he hissed, eyes flashing.

Xander chuckled. "You hear me arguing?"

The door opened again. "You know, I could probably talk Harmony into joining--"

"Anya!"
"So." Xander kicked out of his clothes, then flopped down on the bed and stared up at the ceiling. "This was definitely an...interesting day."

Spike undressed and collapsed next to him, snorting. "Got that right, pet. Can we not do it again?"

"Fine by me." Xander wriggled close to Spike and draped an arm around his waist. "Mmmm, you smell good," he said quietly as he nuzzled the vampire's neck. His tongue slipped out and licked a broad strip across the pale skin, and Spike shivered.

"Y-yeah? You like, huh?"

"Mmmmm-hmmmmm." Xander continued to lick, punctuating his progress down Spike's chest with delicate little nips and nibbles.

Spike arched up into the tantalizing sensations. "Luv!" he gasped out when Xander's tongue dipped into his naval. He writhed helplessly under the wicked onslaught of that talented tongue, clutching at Xander's hair to hold him close.
A faint smile played about Xander's lips as his vampire squirmed under him. He licked again at the tiny indentation, then pressed a sucking kiss to Spike's belly that left a momentary red welt. He burrowed in closer, arms wrapped around Spike as he licked again, the movement of his tongue getting slower and slower...

Spike stilled, blinking down at his mate in consternation. "Xan? Um, luv?" A soft snore was the only answer he received. Spike huffed out a heavy sigh and let his head thump back down on the pillow. "Bollocks," he whispered. He grimaced at the painful state of his erection, but reached out to turn off the lamp, careful not to jostle Xander.

"Night Xander." Spike stroked Xander's hair gently and, after more than a few uncomfortable minutes, joined his mate in slumber.

~*~*~*~

Xander yawned and stretched, pulling his armful of cool, snuggly vampire closer.

"Mmm, Xnlv," Spike slurred out sleepily and he wrapped himself around Xander.
Xander grinned, wriggled into a better position, sliding his erection along the crease of Spikes thigh. "Spiiiiike," he sing-songed playfully. "Wakey, wakey!"

"Hmm? Timeizzit?" Spike yawned and pressed closer, licking his mark on Xander's neck.

Xander arched his neck and thrust against Spike's groin. "Oh, Spike...again. Do that again."

Blue eyes opened and blinked, then darkened with lust. "Xanderrrrr," Spike growled as his own arousal stirred, "you were a naughty boy last night."

"Naughty? Oh! I...mmmmm...what'd I do?"

"Didn't do more like. You fell asleep, luv. Left me all hard and aching for you."

Xander nibbled on Spike's chin. "Mmmm, bad Xan. Make it up to you."

"Yeah." Spike thrust harder against Xander. "Make it...Fuck! Just like that!"

Their legs tangled together as their pace increased, hands roaming and lips melding as the two lazily sought completion. Wake-up sex was always the best, the
pleasure starting slow and gentle, gradually mounting until neither one could take anymore.

Almost in unison, the two shuddered in orgasm, their movements eventually slowing as they continued to pet and stroke each other lovingly.

Xander sighed happily. "Love that," he admitted quietly.

"Love you," Spike retorted.

Xander beamed. "Love you, too." They kissed again, tongues twining in sated pleasure.

The persistent knocking on the door brought them both back to reality. Xander struggled to sit up, and frowned. "Were we expecting company?"

Spike shrugged. "If it's a salesman, can I eat him?" When Xander glared, he affected an innocent look. "Just a little nibble?"

Xander sighed in capitulation. "Only if you promise not to drain him," he answered in exasperation, then ruined the effect by laughing.

"Git." Spike whapped him with a pillow.
When the knocking continued, Xander groaned and clambered out of bed, digging in the closet for a robe. "All right, I'm coming!" he yelled.

Spike snickered, hand rubbing over his belly. "Bit late for that, luv," he said wickedly.

Xander pretended he hadn't heard and walked to the door. He opened it just a bit. "Buffy?" opening the door further, he peered out. "What's wrong? Is everything ok?"

"No, everything's fine. Um, can I come in?"

"Yeah, sure." Xander held the door open for her, closing it once she had entered. "So what bring you here, then?"

"Yes, well..." she pause as she eyed Xander closely. "Am I interrupting? Were you and Spike...um..."

Xander belted his robe more securely. "No! We just...woke up. You're not interrupting anything, really."

"Oh. You sure? Um, good then." Buffy cleared her throat. "Xander, after the two of you left last night, it came to our attention that you had left a little something out about your relationship with Spike."

Xander blinked. "I...you...what?"
"Angel was good enough to fill us in, and I'm here for confirmation." Hands on hips, she fixed Xander with a stern glare. "Are you and Spike married?"

Xander choked. "I--"

"'Cause Angel seems to think that you guys did this whole vampire mating ritual thing, which would technically make you married. So, is he right?" She tapped her foot, waiting impatiently for Xander's response.

"Um, well, you see, it's like this...we--"

"Yeah." Spike lounged with barely hidden tension against the bedroom doorway. "We're 'married'. Something you want to say about that?"

Buffy shrugged. "No, just making sure. Never exactly pictured either of you as married men, occasional messed up Willow-spell notwithstanding, but whatever floats your boat. I just wanted to make sure."

"Um...why?"

Buffy grinned at Xander. "So we could celebrate the occasion, of course." She strode to the door and flung it open again.
Xander and Spike gawked in disbelief as the Scooby gang, followed closely by the L.A. team, entered the apartment, bearing armfuls of food, presents and decorations.

"Congratulations, Xander!" Willow squealed as she flung confetti at him.

"Um...thanks?" He watched with a bit of trepidation as Angel cornered his lover, hoping there wouldn't be any blood spilled on the nice clean carpet.

"Of course, I'm a little miffed that you didn't invite me to the wedding, but I guess I can forgive you since you didn't even remember I existed at the time."

"Um, Willow? I...don't think it was quite like you're thinking. It was sort of a...private affair."

"Oh? Oh!" She turned almost as red as her hair. "Well. Ok then. Right." She looked around. "So, where should we set up the food?"

Xander smiled at her unabated enthusiasm, realizing how much he'd missed it during his time away from the group. Not that he'd trade in what he had now. He smiled across the room at Spike, who was too intent on his discussion with Angel to notice.
"I swear, you poncy bugger, if you do anything to try and screw this up, I will rip your--"

"Spike. I get it. All right?" He glanced over at Xander, who was doing his best to hover while standing on the other side of the room. "Ok, so I don't get the whole mated-to-Xander-Harris thing, but...I get it. You love him." A rare smile appeared. "Congratulations."

Spike shrugged and scuffed his feet, not meeting Angel's gaze. "Yeah, well..." A goofy grin spread over his face. "He's somethin', ain't he?"

Angel smothered a cough. "Er...yes. Something." In an obvious move to change the subject, he asked, "Have you been eating well? You look...better."

"Yeah, well, Sophia, she's this real top notch kinda gal, she hooks us vamps up with some good stuff. You ask me, I think she's got a bit of a mothering streak gone wild, but who am I to pass up decent blood?"

"Um, hey, everyone still in one piece here?"

Spike jumped and spun around to see Willow smiling cheerfully and offering up a plate of cookies.

"Snack?"
Spike took one carefully, keeping one eye warily on Willow in case she got any more shovel-related ideas. "I'm...gonna go check on Xan."

"Angel? Cookie?" She frowned and looked over to where he was staring. At Riley. Who had his arm around Buffy as they talked intently. "Riiight. No cookie. I'll be going now." She quickly made her way over to the object of Angel's intense scrutiny. "Cookie?" she asked in a chirpy voice.

Riley took one with a nod. After Willow had gone, he resumed his conversation with Buffy. "All I'm saying is that this is really not a good idea. I mean, Xander? With Spike? He's a hostile! Chip or no chip, he's still capable of doing something really evil."

"So is everyone," Xander spoke up from behind them. "You know, that's one thing that's really sunk in since I've lived here. Demon doesn't necessarily equal evil, and souls don't necessarily equal good. Life isn't that simple."

Riley winced slightly at the remonstration.

Xander added, "Oh, and you might want to reconsider your stance on 'hostiles' considering you're currently standing in an entire building full of them. And if I'm not mistaken, that's some of them now.
"Alex!" Mellie bustled in through the still-open door, Dana in tow. "We heard the commotion and thought we'd pop over. What's the occasion?"

"Hey Mellie," Xander grinned and hugged her. "Sort of an impromptu wedding/congratulations party that my friends decided to throw. You're welcome to stay."

"Don't mind if I do. Dana, go call Sophia. I'm sure she'll want to know about this, and she can invite a few others, too." She gave Xander a smacking kiss on his cheek. "We'll make this an all-out celebration!"

Buffy finally managed to recover her speech. "You...you're the fudge lady!" she blurted out.

Mellie laughed delightedly. "Such an interesting young woman. Come, you and I simply have to talk!" Ignoring any protests, she ushered Buffy away, chattering constantly.

Riley watched them go in confusion. "What just happened?" he asked plaintively.

Xander laughed and gave him a hearty slap on the back. "Welcome to my life, Riley. Leave your sanity at the door and jump on in." He continued to laugh as Riley wandered away.
"Xander, may I speak with you please?"

Sobering quickly, Xander nodded and followed Giles down the hallway. "What's up? And why are we in my bathroom?"

Giles closed the door and stared at Xander intently, causing him to fidget uncomfortably. Finally, Giles spoke, "Do you know what you've gotten yourself into?" he asked in a calm voice.

Xander took a deep breath. "Yeah." He reconsidered. "Ok, maybe not totally, but that's par for the course for me, right?" He chuckled weakly.

"Xander, I'm serious. Spike has never been exactly...stable. Even for a vampire. Do you really have any idea what being his...his mate means?"

Xander straightened. "Look, Giles. Maybe things didn't happen how any of us planned. But I think they turned out better than I could have imagined. I know Spike. Better than you could ever possibly imagine I do. And what we have, what we will have...I want it. I..." He smiled. "I love him, Giles. More than I ever thought I could love anyone."

"I see." Giles studied him for a moment more.
"Are...you disappointed in me?" Xander asked hesitantly.

Giles sighed. "On the contrary, Xander. I don't believe I've ever been prouder of you than I am right now." He smiled and brushed Xander's hair out of his face. "You've...grown into a fine man," he said in a husky voice.

Xander grinned in relief and clutched Giles in a fierce hug. "Thanks," he choked out. "That...means a lot to me."

"Yes. Well." After a moment, Giles finally pulled away and brushed off his jacket. "We should get back to your party." He turned and opened the door, only to run into a glaring Spike.

"Somethin' going on I should know about?" Spike asked with a growl, glaring at Giles.

Giles rolled his eyes. "Oh for...we were doing absolutely nothing untoward, Spike. Now be a good vampire and give your mate a kiss. And having said that, I believe I need a very strong drink." He quickly left the two alone.

Spike shrugged and did as he was told, pressing Xander up against the wall as his kissed him deeply. When they finally parted, Spike smirked. "Got some more guests, pet. We should be good host and go greet them."
Xander glared. "You are an evil, evil man," he panted.

"Yup." Spike nipped him playfully, then dragged him back to the living room. "Hey look, it's Sophia. And is that Jon with her?"

"Wil! Alex!" Jon waved at them, striding over quickly. "Nice place you guys have."

"Yeah, we like it. How's the wrist?"

"Oh, practically good as new. I'll be back on stage tomorrow night, thank heaven. I tell you, bar tending is not my thing. I'll leave that to Alex." He smiled brightly at Xander, who still seemed to be having trouble meeting his eyes. "So," he continued, "how's the newly wedded couple doing? Having any...problems?" He winked.

"Shut. Up." Xander gritted out, face red.

Spike frowned. "Xander, what is up with you? You've been acting strange with Jon ever since we..." He paused, thinking. "Wait a sec..."

"Oh! Look! Oz is here! With Jenna! I'm going to go say hi!" He hurried away.

"Xander? Xander!" Spike rushed after him, leaving Jon standing alone.
"Was it something I said?" Jon shrugged and looked around the crowded room. He licked his lips when he spotted the most absolutely delicious man standing all by himself against the wall. Being the polite and attentive soul he was, he quickly made his way over.

"Well, hello there handsome," he purred in a throaty voice. "Haven't seen you around before."

"I-I beg your pardon?" Wesley stuttered. "Are you speaking to me?"

Jon reached out and trailed a finger suggestively over Wesley's shirt collar. "You're the only utterly gorgeous man I see standing here," he responded.

"Oh. Er...I..." He flushed as the finger dipped briefly under his collar.

Jon leaned forward. "My name's Jon," he breathed into the other man's ear.

"W-W-Wesley," he managed to stammer out.

"Mmmm." Jon flicked his tongue out and licked at the tempting bit of flesh in front of him. "Wesley. Sounds positively...scrumptious." He licked again. "Would you like to go...get a drink? I work at this bar close by. We can...get to know each other a little better."
Wesley gasped, his knees buckling as Jon's tongue flickered in hand out of his ear. "I...um...I..." He glanced around the room desperately.

"Please?" Jon added a touch of a whimper to his voice as he let his hand trail down and brush over Wesley's crotch.

Wesley squeaked. It took him several seconds to pull himself together enough to respond. "A-a-all r-right." He moaned when Jon smiled and gave him a brief yet passionate kiss.

"Lovely," Jon murmured. "Shall we?" He pulled away and turned, leading the still-dazed man to the door. "Loved the party, Alex," he called on his way out. "We'll have to do it again sometime!"

Xander watched them go wide-eyed. "Spike? Did Jon just leave with Wesley?"

"Looked like. Someone's gettin' lucky tonight." He leered at Xander. "Maybe more than one someone."

~*~*~*~*~
As the last guest left, Xander collapsed on the sofa. "Remind me never to do that again."

Spike sat next to him, pulling him close. "That bad?"

With a sigh, Xander shook his head. "Nah. At least everyone managed to keep from killing anyone else. Zero death toll is always a plus." He snickered. "I still can't believe Jon hooked up with Wesley. Wesley!"

"Eh, always knew he was a bit of a poof. What do you think about Jenna?"

"And Oz? Dunno. Could be good I guess. At least he managed to get her here with Buffy around and all."

"Yeah, for a minute I thought she was gonna make a dive for the door when she saw the Slayer," Spike snorted. He softened. "She's a brave girl, I'll give her that."

"Gotta wonder about Oz, though. Dates Willow, Willow ends up with Tara. Jenna was with Alicia, and now her and Oz are giving it a go. Do lesbians have a weak spot for werewolves or something?"

Spike whacked his arm. "Prat," he said fondly.
Xander stuck his tongue out, then he frowned. "Do you think we should have mentioned something about your chip before they left?"

They looked at each other for a moment, then said in unison, "Nah!"

Spike chuckled and pulled Xander into his arms. "The place is a mess, pet."

"Hmmm." Xander snuggled closer to Spike. "Clean up tomorrow?"

"Gotta go back to work tomorrow night," Spike reminded him.

Xander groaned. "Geez, I'd forgotten."

"We...we don't have to," Spike ventured. "I got a bit of cash stored away, should keep us for a bit.

Xander shook his head. "Nah, I don't want to do that to Frankie. Besides...I kinda like working there." He gave Spike a wolfish grin. "Especially when you dance," he growled.

Spike let out a bark of laughter. "You...are insatiable," he gasped out as Xander nibbled at his neck.

"You like me like that," came the retort.
"I like you any way I can get you," Spike admitted.

Xander pulled back and smiled. "Love you, Spike."

"Love you too."

"Forever?"

Spike smiled at Xander lovingly as he cupped his cheek. "Always. My soul will love yours for eternity."

Xander blinked away the tears in his eyes. "Good," he stated firmly, "because my soul has got it bad for yours."

"I remember," Spike whispered, then gave Xander the softest, sweetest kiss he could remember getting. Ever.

The End

Well. That was some trip. I have no idea how many readers stuck with me through this, but I thank each and every one of you for not giving up on me, especially during my major bouts of writer's block. I also would like to thank every single person who sent me feedback and encouragement, and especially the ones who pointed out inconsistencies that had slipped by me.
I will tell you now, there will not be a sequel to this. I like the way I've left things, and I'm not going to mess with it.

Thanks for holding out until the (bitter) end!