

For 🍂fall_for_sx

Author: 🧑piratepurple, with Waide G. from Excessant, and, as always, my fabu beta, 🧑tsavoritegarnet.

Rating: Mature. Sex, a bit on the kinky side.

Warnings: **Temporary Character Death** drinking, mild kink, boysex, and bad friends, but they get better. Oh, and not-a-jerk Angel, well, mostly. :)

Notes: Waide G. had a 'thing.' He said he'd like to see his 'thing' grow, so he gave it to me. It became bigger than I ever imagined.

The title is a song by Nick Drake, which is quoted in the story, later.

Summary: Shared grief leads to a quest. Xander does the knight thing again, but this time, it's for Spike, of all people.

Disclaimer: I stuck hot pokers into Joss until he gave me the boys. No, really, I did. Okay I didn't, they're still his. But I'm a pirate, pilfering is kind of my thing. Oh, okay! I'll return them when I'm done, but they'll be a bit... dirty. Scratch that, I'll bathe ~~with~~ them before they go back. Mpanga was all my idea, though.

Time Has Told Me

by

Pirate Purple

Part One

She looked so pale. He held her hand, and watched little motes of energy float off of her like fireflies. She was dissolving. Effervescing, like soda or Alka-Seltzer. It was happening too fast, they'd never make it in time to save her. She hadn't spoken in days, just looked at him with tired eyes. Before that though, she had said it didn't hurt, except that she couldn't remember her mother, and then Buffy, then Spike, and finally Xander himself.

She faded, until there was nothing left but one tiny glowing piece of her. As it died away, he could finally hear her voice.

"Find me."

~*~*~*~*~

He slides three fingers of one hand over the bracelet on the opposite wrist, liking the sound.

The shiny beads don't make the noise; those patches of

the bracelet slide under his fingers as he assumes snake scales would. If the snakes he'd seen had ever been 'normal' and would allow gentle touch while their owner looked on, and not demonic and looking for a feed of human with one snap of gigantic jaws. The sound comes from the clouded beads, the purple ones like dark rain and the red like dusty rubies.

They sound like the swish of the African grasses as the winds part them, and he's transported back to standing in their tallness, dwarfed by the two-foot-above-head lines of vertical yellow which slash straight down into the earth by his feet; lightning strikes with the zag zigged out of them by a harsh godly hand. As the wind dies, he's cautioned by the man in front of him to stand still, because it may not be a lion that is watching them, but something else...

Even still, Xander likes the sound and will keep the rhythmic timing of his fingers over the beads when he feels the need, even though the bracelet is not African, not even close, and can never be returned to the one who gave it to him, even if he wanted to, which he doesn't.

The sound is a focus, a way to keep his thoughts from

jumbling out of control. A control he desperately needs to still the jumping of his heart as he rounds a bend in the meandering path and sees who has come to pay their respects.

Spike is crouching in front of the headstone, tracing Dawn's name over and over again. Xander steps up behind him and clears his throat. Spike doesn't stop what he's doing, but speaks to the headstone. "You put Niblet on the headstone. Why?"

" Buffy insisted. How did you know I made it? And why are you here, now, instead of when it was important?" Xander crosses his arms over his chest.

"I promised to protect her. 'Til the end of the world." Spike ignores the questions and drops to sit with his legs crossed, his forehead pressed against the cool stone.

"Yeah, and you weren't here. I guess that shows what your promises are worth." Xander hisses the last few words, anger making his jaw stiff and his skin hot.

A sob rips through Spike. "I would have been here. No one called. I would have come. I didn't know." His fingers find the word 'Niblet' on the stone and trace it. "I would

have come. I would have."

Guilt makes Xander's chest tight, and he draws in a hard breath. He touches the bracelet again, remembers how much Dawn loved the vampire sitting on her grave. "I'm sorry," he says. "You're right. I assumed someone would call you. Giles or Buffy. I didn't think -"

"You lot never do." It's a quiet voice, and there's no reprimand in it, just an ache that makes Xander's eyes sting.

Xander kneels beside Spike, placing a single white rose on top of the stone. "Where are you staying?"

Spike shrugs. "Not a whole lot of crypts in this part of the world. I got some dosh, though. Could rent a room."

"Wanna come crash in my apartment for old times' sake? I have an actual room-sized guest room with an actual bed in it." Xander grins. "We can pick you up some blood on the way." It isn't really enough of an apology, but he has to start somewhere.

"I'm long past needing charity from Scoobies," Spike replies acerbically, angrily wiping tears from his eyes.

“I have imported beer...” Xander singsongs, knowing the vampire will cave.

Spike gives him that look, eyebrow raised, skepticism written on every line of his face. “Since when do you share the good beer with *me*, mate?”

“Since I stopped being an asshole.” Xander stands, giving Spike a hand up after him. Xander grins again at the stunned look Spike gives him, but leads the way to the bus stop.

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Three in the morning sees them both lying on Xander’s living room floor. Spike is halfway through the second bottle of Jack, and between the two of them, they’ve slain a case of German lager, the name of which neither of them could pronounce. Tasty, though.

They talk about Sunnydale, Buffy, Anya, Los Angeles, Angel, and apocalypses in general. By mutual unspoken agreement, they avoid the subject of Dawn’s death until they are both plastered enough.

“So what happened? Bloody Angel didn’t give me any details.” Spike sounds sad rather than angry, and Xander isn’t sure how to feel about that.

“Dawnie was living here with me. She was studying several languages at Boston Language Institute, and teaching English as a second language. Translating stuff for the Council on the weekends.” Xander sighs, stroking the beads on the bracelet. “One day she started feeling tired. She started... coming apart. Little fireflies would float up off of her. She started forgetting things. People. Even me, in the end. Finally, she just faded away. I heard her voice, though, as the last little bit was floating away. She said, ‘Find me.’ By the time everyone got here, she was already gone. Giles thinks the voice was a hallucination under stress. They wouldn’t even help me research it, but I think there’s a way to bring her back. Giles says that the power source for the spell that made her human was either damaged or destroyed. Probably by someone seeking to use her as the Key again. He says that no one has the power to repair the spell.” A tear leaks from the corner of his eye. “I couldn’t stop it. They never should have left her with me.”

“Bollocks!” Spike tries to sit up, but ends up leaning over

Xander, supporting his weight with one hand. “You were prolly the bes’ thing to ‘ave ‘appened to Niblet since Joyce died,” he slurs. “You supported ‘er. Let ‘er figure out what she wanted to do.” He frowns deeply. “S’not your fault they wouldn’t bloody listen to you. Watcher thinks he has the monopoly on smarts. He’s a sodding fool.” He puts down the bottle and clumsily pats Xander’s arm. The bracelet catches Spike’s eye as Xander’s fingers slide over the beads, and he stares at it for a minute, and then looks up at the boy’s face. Their eyes lock for a long moment. Spike takes a deep breath, then another, like Xander did at his grandmother’s house when she was baking cookies. Xander can see small gold flecks in his blue sky eyes. Finally closing them, Spike leans down and places a relatively chaste, if whiskey-flavored, kiss on Xander’s lips.

Xander just lays there, shocked. He wants to say something, he really does, but the only words he can think of are *Please don’t stop!* and he’s not sure he’s quite ready to be that open with Spike, copious amounts of alcohol not withstanding. Still, it feels good to be touched, so Xander smiles when Spike pulls back, looking nervous.

Spike smiles back, tentatively. “I’m pissed and knackered.

Gonna kip for a while. We'll work on getting Niblet back in the morning."

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In the morning, Xander has a small freakout. Spike kissed him! Spike kissed him, and he had let him! Was he gay now? He thought about it for a minute. Seven of Nine, nekkid. Mmmm, yeah. Okay, then, Spike nekkid. Oh, hell yeah! So maybe bi. Xander thinks back to his days with Anya. You're supposed to buy things for people you want to interlock parts with. Does he want to interlock parts with *Spike*? Maybe. He'd like to find out, though. So, what do you do for someone you are maybe interested in? You buy them nice things, again, if his relationship with Anya is anything to go by. Spike doesn't like nice things. What *does* Spike like?

So, he sneaks out before checking on his houseguest, returning with coffee, donuts, and blood. He remembers how Spike likes his blood, but he doesn't have any Weetabix, so he puts a box of Cocoa Pebbles on the tray. Chocolate goes with anything. Carefully balancing the tray, he knocks on the guest room door twice, before opening it. He almost drops the tray when he finds the

room empty.

He sets the tray down on the floor, and picks up the piece of folded paper lying in the Spike-shaped depression on the bed. The handwriting makes Xander think of his grandmother. *Better not mention that to Spike.*

Xander –

Couldn't sleep. Couldn't stop thinking.

The demon

in Africa – the one I fought for my soul – She offered me

any wish at all. I'm betting she could bring Dawn back to

us. I called the airport, and there was a redeye flight to Gulu,

so I took it. Do me a favor and don't mention it to the Watcher

or the Slayer, yeah? If I make it, I'll come back and let you

black my eye for leaving without telling you.

*We have unfinished business, I think,
Spike*

~*~*~*~*~

“Xander, if Spike wants to rush headlong into suicide, quite frankly, there’s nothing I can do about it. Dawn is gone. You need to accept that. I’ve made you an appointment with a therapist associated with the council, in Cambridge...” Xander doesn’t listen to the address or directions Giles gives him, instead flipping the address book to the page with Angel’s numbers.

He doesn’t expect much help there, but he is pleasantly surprised. He nervously twists and strums the beads on the bracelet, as Angel books a flight for him, at his firm’s expense. “Uganda can be a little hard to navigate as a foreigner. I’m sending a contact I have there to meet you. His name is Mpanga. He’ll take you as close to the cave as he’s comfortable getting. You might have a few days walk.”

“I don’t know what to say, Angel.” Xander carefully avoids the nickname he had used to plague the vampire before. “Thank you.”

“Just... do your best to get him back undusted, okay? I’ve kind of gotten used to not being the only souled vampire in the world.”

“I’ll do my best,” Xander says sadly, hanging up and going to pack.

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He hadn’t thrown away any of his clothes from Africa. They were in the bottom drawer, smelling like sand, and wet earth, trees, and dry scrub, depending on where he had worn them last. He breathes in, holding a shirt to his face. Like the bracelet, these were a connection to Africa. He crouches before the drawer, running his fingers back and forth across the beads, shirt still in his other hand. Hosts of expressions battle for dominance, but his features finally settle on a profound sadness. He grabs the small pile of things and shoves them into a leather backpack that looks older than he does. He had traded a pair of button-fly Levis for it on his second day in Africa, when some bug had chewed its way into his duffle and infested most of his clothes. He had traveled the length and breadth of Africa with what fit in this pack.

He turns towards the closet and looks thoughtfully at it for a few moments, before opening it, and looking at the crate of weapons, before remembering that he was going to be taking a commercial flight. Looking longingly at a large hunting knife he had brought back from Somalia, he shuts the closet, and strides out of the apartment without looking back.

Part Two

Landing just outside of Gulu, nearly forty hours later, an exhausted Xander stumbles off the plane. Apparently, there had been bombing threats, so his plane had been grounded on a tiny landing strip in the desert somewhere for hours. He had had to reschedule his next flight, which meant waiting several more hours at the airport when he finally got there. There had been a problem with his visa, and he had been detained by customs. That had been cleared up, and he is finally here.

There is a scarred and very old man waiting for him. The scars across his cheek are pink stripes across a face whose darkness does nothing to dispel the smile lines written across it. Xander instantly feels comforted, and the man has yet to notice him. He looks a little lost in thought, the smile hidden behind lips that move, but don't part, as if he is silently reciting something. He turns and sees Xander, and the smile comes out of hiding, spreading across his face like the sun over the mountains. He holds up a sign that says, "Mr. Harris," and waves at Xander.

Xander holds out his hand, grinning. "Pleased to meet you, sir."

"Mr. Harris. Angelus told me you would come." The man shakes his hand a little more thoroughly than an American would, but Xander remembers this tendency, so he smiles.

"Mr. Harris is my father, sir. You can call me Xander." Fingers nervously rattling the beads against his wrist, Xander fidgets, uncomfortable being treated like a 'real adult,' even this late into his twenties.

"Then you must call me Mpanga." Mpanga's accent is a

little British, tinged with something older and richer. Xander notices that he has a gnarled stick that he carries like a cane, but sees nothing in the man's stride to indicate he needs one.

"You are abatonzi musajja." Xander observes.

Mpanga chuckles at Xander's misuse of the local language. "Yes, some people would call me a man of the gods." He waves his stick at Xander. "You see many things, omalaguzi. You will see the path to save your friend." His eyes twinkle, and he puts a small emphasis on the last word as he strides away.

Xander wants to ask what the old man just called him, and why he thinks Spike is his friend, and if he's implying that Spike is more than a friend, but Mpanga manages to stay just out of speaking range until they get into the jeep. It's hard to see the original color through all the mud and dust, and Xander concludes that it must be at least half as old as Mpanga himself. Xander takes a breath to start asking questions, but Mpanga starts the jeep with a roar, and floors the gas as he peels out of the parking lot. Xander's breath goes out in a whoosh as he hits the back of the seat, and then he's too busy hanging on to talk. He and Spike will have to stick around awhile if

they get out of this alive. Spike and Mpanga will most likely get along very well.

This impression bears out when it's Xander's turn to drive, and Mpanga claims Xander drives like his grandmother. Xander laughs and ignores him, which seems to delight Mpanga, which is different from Spike, who usually pouts.

Xander wonders when he started comparing everything to Spike.

They head east, towards the mountains of Kenya. Mpanga tells him of the Tokido region, on the Kenya border, as they take a somewhat roundabout route, avoiding military and rebel patrols. Xander tells Mpanga about his earlier travels through Africa. Mpanga sounds sad when he says, "Ah, omalaguzi, you were too busy looking for slayers to see Africa. You should see it again, when you've rescued your friend."

Xander can't really argue with that, but he comments, "I saw enough to know that it can be ugly and beautiful in the same breath," he replies, absently stroking silver beads with his middle three fingers.

Mpanga grunts his agreement with this statement, as they pass the bullet-riddled body of a man on the side of the road bordered by lush vegetation. “Perhaps you saw more than I thought.”

It’s about a week before they get to the point where Mpanga stops the car, but Xander’s not really sure. He’s been sleeping and eating at odd hours, and has lost track. “Follow the sun, Xander. Do not travel at night; find someplace to hide. The demon of the cave feeds on the life she finds in the darkness. I will wait for you here.” He hands Xander a stone. “When you need light, tell the stone. When you want darkness again, put the stone in your pocket. Do not use fire if you can help it.”

Xander doesn’t bother to ask why. He clasps Mpanga’s hand. Mpanga pulls him into a brief hug. “Remember to use your heart as well as your eye to see. It is your strength, and it is formidable, even against such a demon.” They clap each other on the shoulder, and Xander turns towards the foothills. His courage wavers for a moment, but like every time he has had to go to battle, he shrugs it off. He’s still terrified. He almost always is, ever since he met Buffy. But that’s never stopped him before. He straightens his shoulders and marches off into the mountains without looking back.

The second sundown sees Xander climbing the tallest tree he can find. He knows he's close. Even the insects are gone at this point. If Xander knows anything about Africa, he knows that anything less than teeming insect life is a sign there's something weird going on. The smaller trees look shriveled as well, only the tallest escaping, which is why Xander is going to spend the night far above the ground. Closer to the actual mountain, the land is completely barren, desert-like. He is lashing himself to the tree when he sees it. There's a glow, a sort of purpley-green light coming from a crevice in the rocks not far away. Xander considers trying to get there tonight. Mpanga probably didn't get to be an old man by being stupid, though, so Xander quells the impulse and tries to sleep.

He hasn't been walking long the next morning when he starts to see the paintings on the rocks he passes. He gathers some story as he goes, about the life of the people who had to flee when the demon came. He hopes they found someplace good to go. The signs become more and more gory as he gets closer to the crevice, and Xander's fingers caress the beads on his wrist anxiously. The bloody sigils stop suddenly about ten yards from the entrance. Apparently, whoever had been brave enough

to try and warn whoever came after hadn't wanted to get closer. Xander stops, too.

Sibilant laughter comes from the cave entrance.

"Omalaguzi, he calls you. You cannot see your own life's ending, how can you see anything else?"

"Where's Spike?" Xander demands. He hopes the trembling isn't noticeable.

The chuckle gets deeper, takes on a nasty edge. "He is here. He sees to my needs admirably since he failed the Trials." The demon purrs, and Xander's stomach turns.

"How do I know you're telling me the truth?"

"I have no reason to lie, sightless one. The old one's life is almost over. When he is gone, I will be free again. He has no son to take the magic from him. I have no need for you." The sneer attached to the last word would bother anyone who hadn't grown up with Xander's parents. Xander just shrugs, and the demon snorts in irritation.

"I'm sure Mpanga has a few good years left in him." Xander pointedly looks at the dead landscape around him. "I'm sure you'll get plenty hungry between now and

then.” He sits down, pulls a powerbar out of his pack, and chews slowly, showing every intention of merely waiting until then.

There’s a stony silence from the cave, but Xander can feel the eyes on him. He begins to hum off-key. He hears a snarl and the demon moves away from the entrance. A wide grin crosses Xander’s face as an idea comes to him. If there’s one thing he’s good at, it’s annoying demons. If she can’t be tempted, maybe there are other ways to get to her. He belts out, “This is the song that doesn’t end. Yes, it goes on and on, my friend…” in the whiniest, most nasal, most out-of-key voice he can.

He’s on his third repetition when the roar comes from the depths of the cave. **“ENOUGH!”**

He hides what wants to be a smirk behind an innocent look he stole from Spike. He obviously needs a better source of innocence, because the demon growls at him anyway. “What do you want?” She’s back in the doorway.

“I want Dawn and Spike, unharmed.” Xander frowns. “And no tricks, or I will spend the rest of my days doing my level best to make you insane.”

The demon snorts. "From those to whom much is granted, much is expected."

"I'm prepared to give you my life, if need be." Xander feels sad that he won't see Dawn or Spike again, but if they're okay, it's worth it. He thumbs the purple bead resting on his pulse point, and smiles sadly, thinking about how happy they'll be to see each other.

She snorts again. "What profit is there to me in your life?"

Xander thinks for a few moments. "You're trapped here, right?" He doesn't wait for an answer. "What if I could arrange to have you sent back to your home dimension?"

A bitter laugh twists its way out of the cave. "And just how do you propose to do that, sightless one? You have no magick in you, and the old man is too weak for such magicks."

"My best friend is a very powerful witch. I don't have much knowledge to judge with, but she brought Buffy back from the dead, almost destroyed the world, and called every potential to slayerhood using only her magic

and an axe. I'm pretty sure she can handle a dimensional portal for long enough for you to step through." Xander's almost positive this plan will work. Maybe he's not as dumb as he thinks he is.

"The White Witch? You keep interesting company, human." A thoughtful silence lasts longer than Xander expected. He waits.

"Give me your word, sightless one. Promise me a way home." She can't be crying, demons don't cry. Unless they're Spike.

Xander's heart clenches in sympathy anyway. He moves to the entrance. "I promise I will do everything in my power to get you home."

"You may enter and begin the Trials," she pronounces formally.

"Wait – what? Trials? I just promised you a way home!" Xander shouts indignantly.

"I can grant nothing to those who do not prove themselves worthy." A pained look crosses her face.

"Please, please be worthy," she whispers.

“I don’t understand.” Xander is honestly confused. “You obviously want to go home, so why can’t we just trade? I have something you want, you have something I want...”

“Power must be restrained. There are rules to my power that are older than this dimension. Otherwise my kind might become powerful enough to challenge the Great Powers, and throw all the universes out of alignment.” She sighs.

“I guess that makes sense. I’ll do my best to be worthy.” Xander sighs and straightens his shoulders, and allows his fingers one last pass over the beads. “Okay, I’m ready.”

“You may enter and begin the Trials,” she repeats, and Xander steps into the cave.

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Xander steps in, but the interior is no longer a cave. It’s his parents’ house. He winces as his father bellows out his name. “Yes, sir?” he says, stepping into the older man’s line of sight.

“Make your worthless ass useful, and get me another beer,” he says tossing an empty bottle at Xander’s head. It bounces off, and he fumbles to catch it, knowing there will be unpleasant consequences for him if it breaks. “What are you waiting for? A tip? I got one for you – shoot yourself. You’d be of more use as compost.”

“Yes, sir.” Xander mumbles, rubbing his forehead and going to fetch the requested beer. The kitchen is wrong, though. It’s the kitchen of the apartment he shared with Anya. As if the thought conjured her, she strides through the door and starts packing up the coffee pot.

“Hi, An,” he says, happy to see her even if he knows it’s not really her.

She just throws him a withering look. Confused, he follows her into the living room. “What’s up?”

“Don’t you ‘what’s up’ me, Alexander LaVelle Harris! You are the most inconsiderate, irresponsible... man-like... *MAN* ever!” He winces as her volume rises with every syllable. “I don’t know what I was thinking, being with you. All you’re good for is fetching Buffy’s doughnuts. You act more like a minion than a man! And I’m not going to wait around until you lose this job too, and we

get thrown out of the apartment. I'm certainly not going to live in that hole of a basement with you." She storms back into the kitchen. Xander hesitates, but follows, beads smooth under his fingers.

Into the Magic Box. Buffy hops the counter and makes a beeline for him, but the embryonic smile on his face dies when she looks disappointed. "Xan-derrr... I thought you were bringing doughnuts," she whines piteously.

"I'll run back out and get some," he offers.

"Great! I want one with sprinkles!" Buffy enthuses.

"Sure thing." He turns toward the door.

"Hey! Aren't you forgetting someone, Mister?" Willow looks up from the book she's reading to chastise him.

"Sorry Wills, How – "

"I want a mocha, no foam, okay?" She's already looking back at the book.

"are you..." he mumbles. "Yeah, sure. Be right back."

He steps out, into Giles' apartment. Giles, Buffy, and Willow are poring over a map. Willow points at something, and Xander leans over to look. Buffy shakes her head. "That alley is open at both ends. It'll run out the other side and be in the sewers before I can kill it."

"Why don't we split up, and cover both ends of the alley?" Xander offers.

"Shh! Xander, I'm thinking." Willow says. "If only there were some way to block the other end."

"Hrmm... We could split into groups, and enter the alley from both sides." Giles adjusts his glasses as he peers over Willow's shoulder. Xander sighs, rolls his eyes, and goes to the kitchen –

And he's back in the cave. The demon is there. She shakes her head. "Such a sad waste of potential. You have so much to offer, and they just don't see." She steps into his space, and speaks millimeters from his lips. "I could make them see. I could give you power, more power than the slayer or the witch. You could be a Champion. You could outshine all of those who have kept you in shadow," she purrs.

Xander steps back. “No,” he says, resolutely.

“Why?” is the petulant response.

“Because that’s not my job. My job is to be there when they need me. To comfort them when things are bad. To make a stupid joke when everyone’s tense. To see them as human and not just Champions, tools of the Powers.” He looks down at the beads catching the meager light. “Even if they never see me. They’re a formidable army without me. But I help make them a family. That’s what makes us strong. That’s why we win. That’s my job.”

“Excellent,” the demon grins. She makes a gesture, and the cave is gone again, and there’s a room with two doors. “The Key lies beyond a door. You must choose.” She gestures again, and he’s alone in the room.

Xander examines the doors. The first one is silver, and has a small plate, inscribed: “There is no Key to this Door.” The second is gold, and has a similar plate, also inscribed. It says: “Only one sign can ever be truth.”

His legs fold underneath him, and he sits cross-legged on what he knows is an illusion of ugly carpeting. *Crap! Puzzles. I should have called Willow. I’m going to screw*

this up and lose Dawnie! Sighing, he reminds himself that there are no superpowered friends here to bail him out. If Dawn is going to be rescued, Xander has to be the one to do it.

He stands, and goes to examine the doors again, taking a deep breath. “Well,” he mutters to himself, “if only the first one is true, that makes the second true by default, which can’t be right, because there’s only one of Dawn. So the second must be true, which means the first one is a lie.” He opens the silver door. It’s Dawn’s bedroom back in Boston. She’s asleep on the bed. He kneels beside the bed, tears flowing down his cheeks.

The demon leans against the doorframe. “She isn’t real. This is a vision of what will be, if you complete the trials and keep to your word. Do you wish to stop now? If you fail the other Trials, you will lose her.”

“I’m not leaving without Spike.” Xander stands up and squares his shoulders. “What now? If I have to fight something, can I have an axe?”

The demon chuckles, “Steel is not your primary weapon. Everyone is tested on their merits, sightless one.” She makes another gesture. He’s alone in a huge room full of

statues in different poses. It takes him another second or two before he realizes that they're all Spike.

“What am I supposed to do?” he calls out. There's no response. “Guess I'm on my own for this one.” He meanders around the room examining the statues closely. He stops at one in a pose so familiar, it makes his heart hurt. The one Xander privately thinks of as Spike's Big Bad stance. The statue is leaning to one side, as if against a doorframe, legs crossed at the shin, arms crossed loosely as well, and superior smirk firmly in place. A scar-creased eyebrow raised over it all, as if to say, “Yes, I'm the sexiest thing you'll ever see. What're you gonna do about it?”

Xander remembers clearly how it got progressively harder to summon up the irritation that would kill the urge to do *something* about it. Something he would most likely regret. Like kissing away the smirk, and replacing the mocking laughter that shone in those blue eyes with desire. Xander sighs deeply, and brushes the quirked scar with his fingertips. A three glows brightly on the statue's forehead. Xander blinks confusedly.

The statue crumbles to ash at his feet.

Horrified, Xander stumbles backwards, inadvertently brushing against another statue. He falls to his knees, sobbing as he sees the blazing two on its forehead. He closes his eyes against the tears, unable to watch the second statue disintegrate.

Oh, gods, he thinks, I am so useless. Zeppo Xander strikes again. I should have called Buffy. She wouldn't have screwed up. He conveniently forgets that the Scoobies had not believed his account of Dawn's death, and that Buffy would be unlikely to rescue Spike from anything, much less a suicidal wild goose chase.

One more chance. Xander knuckles the tears out of his eyes. *Get it under control, doughnut boy.* He closes his eyes. *Mpanga said to see with my heart. What the bloody hell does that mean?* A snort of laughter escapes him, as he is reminded of Spike yelling at things. Manchester United, Buffy, Giles, the DeSoto, the empty box of Weetabix. The irascible vampire's fluid mockney cursing had been the soundtrack to the latter part of Xander's teenage years. Apparently, it was viral, as all the Scoobies had picked up some part of it, much to Spike's disgust, and Giles' dismay. Xander grins in spite of himself, screwing his eyes shut tighter, as if that would hold the memories of a happier time.

“Oi! Over here!” Xander’s eyes fly open as he heard the familiar voice come from somewhere that wasn’t his memory. White room, white statues, grey piles of dust. Xander walks quickly in what he thought was the direction the voice had come from.

“Spike?” he calls, carefully stepping between a statue of Spike in a wheelchair, and one of him holding a huge axe just at the top of its swing. He listens carefully, but there is no sound other than his own breathing. “Damn it!”

Mentally backtracking, Xander thinks about Spike hiding Giles’ remote, getting hair bleach on Buffy’s favorite strappy sandals, stealing spell components from Willow, money or Twinkies from Xander. He remembers making sure he had a few dollars in his pocket before he came home, back in the basement days, so Spike would be able to buy his own cigarettes.

“Sodding, bloody, thrice-damned demons and their moronic Trials! Xander! Xander! Keep coming that way, you’re getting closer.” Xander opens his eyes and again walks carefully; picking the direction that feels right. Tucked in behind two other statues, one with something in its hand catches his eye. Holding his breath, Xander

steps cautiously behind the statues in his way.

Once he can breathe normally again, Xander stops to look what this statue is holding. It's a sketch on thick, yellowing paper. A man sits in a wingback chair, hair in loose waves around his face. He is holding an old-fashioned looking pen, and there is what looks like an ink stain on one perfectly chiseled cheekbone. There is no mistaking the face, but the man in the picture is very different from the Spike Xander knows. There is a suit jacket thrown casually over the top of the chair, and not-Spike is wearing a soft-looking button-down shirt that is mostly undone, and pants that look like they go with the jacket. He can't see not-Spike's eyes, which are looking down at a journal he holds in his hand, but Xander knows if he looked into them, he would see none of the hardness he sees in Spike's eyes.

Closing his eyes again, Xander concentrates on the Spike he knows. He remembers how damaged Spike was after refusing to tell Glory about Dawn. The smell of butane and cigarette smoke accompanies a memory of a shack, and lighting a cigarette. *"Have I mentioned today how much I don't like you?"* A bloody, bandaged hand takes the cigarette away from a foul, cruel, sarcastic, cutting, perfect mouth for just long enough to retort.

I did like you though. I liked you, and admired you, and respected you. You didn't even have a soul yet, and you still did more to help us, and to support Buffy, than Angel ever did. And then you went and got a soul on purpose. For Buffy. I realized you loved her every bit as much as I ever did. Maybe more. I started wanting to know you, then. But I was afraid to get closer. I never got the chance, anyway. You died to save us.

“We can hold meetings of the mutual admiration society later, pet. Touch me, already.” There’s a grin in the voice, though the statue doesn’t smile. The statue looks kind of sad, actually. Xander stoops a little, swallows, closes his eyes, and places a tiny kiss on the statue’s lips.

When he opens his eyes, the white room and all the statues are gone, and he’s pressing his lips to the real, flesh-and-stolen-blood Spike’s. Xander straightens, but doesn’t step away. Blue and brown eyes lock for several moments. A throat-clearing noise startles both of them, and they step apart quickly.

“He’s a bit noble for a vampire’s pet, but such a tasty morsel. You should claim him before other demons start getting ideas.” The demon chuckles when Spike pulls

Xander behind him and starts to growl at her frankly appraising look. Ignoring him, she locks eyes with Xander over Spike's shoulder. "You must make good on your promise, human. I wish to go home. You may have neither the vampire nor the Key until I have proof that you will make good on your word. You will need to bring the old man. I cannot go far from the cave unless he releases me."

Xander places two fingers on Spike's lips to halt the inevitable outburst. "I know what I agreed to. I just need to contact Willow."

The demon extends an arm toward the cave's entrance. "Go and do what you must. Your prizes will remain unharmed until you return. Be swift. I may get a better offer."

"You couldn't just conjure me up a SAT phone?"

"Do you want to change your wish?" The demon's teeth are like long needles in her mouth, thousands of them, shiny and slick with her saliva. Smiling is not an alien expression to her, but Xander thinks it should be.

"No. I'm going. I'll be back. No tricks." Xander squeezes

Spike's arm as he passes on his way outside. He hears the vampire murmur, but doesn't stop or look back.

Part Three

Xander runs all the way back to the camp he set up with Mpanga without stopping for more than water. It's long after moonrise when Xander makes it to the camp, but Mpanga is awake by the fire. The SAT phone is already sitting at his feet. Xander sits, well, more like falls, near Mpanga's feet. The old man helps him sit up, gives him some hot stew and cool water. Xander tries to push it away and reach for the phone, but Mpanga refuses to be dissuaded, so Xander eats. Mpanga raps him on the head with the knobby stick every time he starts to bolt his food, so he forces himself to chew. It's really good stew, but Xander knows better than to ask what's in it.

Finally, Mpanga lets him have the phone. Xander's fingers tremble as they dial Willow's number from memory. "Wills, it's Xander... Yeah, I need a favor. I have

a demon who would like to be sent back to her home dimension, and I kind of owe her a favor... Yes, I know I probably owe you a million favors by now... I wouldn't be calling you if it weren't important, Willow... I know you're busy... Look, I can't really explain, but I promise you'll understand when you get here... Yes... It can't wait that long Willow, I need you to transport yourself here... Okay. Yes. Okay. See you in a few." Xander doesn't get up, just flops back into the dust near the fire. In less than a minute, Mpanga lays a blanket over his sleeping form, and sits next to him to await the others.

About three-quarters of an hour later, there's a shimmering on the other side of the fire. Mpanga shakes Xander's shoulder gently, and he sits up immediately. "Thanks," he murmurs to the older man, who just pats his shin in a fatherly fashion as Xander knuckles his eyes, trying to come to full awareness. They both stand when the first person to step from the portal is not the expected Willow, but Angel, then Buffy, and finally Willow herself follows, just before the portal closes with a snapping sound.

Mpanga steps forward, hand extended. "Angelus!" he smiles. They two men grasp each other's arms just below the elbow. Angel actually returns the smile.

“The years have treated you well, my old friend,” Angel replies. The Scoobies all stare. Mpanga ignores them and bows to the women in the group.

“Angel told us what we’re here for, so let’s get going,” Buffy orders. Mpanga and Xander exchange a quizzical look. Buffy hefts an axe over her shoulder, and Xander knows he must have been out of it not to notice a blade that big. Buffy looks at Xander expectantly. “Xander, point. Buffy, slay. Get with the pointing.”

“Um, you’re not here to slay the demon, Buff. She and I made a deal, and that deal was that Willow would send her home.” Xander shoots a glance at Willow, who doesn’t look at all apologetic.

“Xander, it’s not a good use of resources to be doing favors for demons. Even with so many slayers, we really should conserve our resources for the important things.” Willow gives him a pitying look.

“Dawn’s not important?” Xander sighs, not wanting to explain about Spike, since they’re resistant already. He knows if he mentions Spike, they won’t hear another word he says.

“Dawn. Is. Dead.” Buffy enunciates very slowly.

“Begging your pardon, Slayer, but the Key cannot die.”
Mpanga shorts out the tirade Buffy is drawing breath for.

“Whatever. She’s a green ball of energy now, not my sister.”

Xander gasps at that last statement, and turns to fully face his two best friends. Anger glimmers in his eyes. “I see. Well, let’s talk about resources. I figure the Council owes me a rather large sum of money, since I didn’t get paid for rounding up slayers in Africa, plus all those years in Sunnydale. Room and board for a vampire and several potentials, wear and tear on more than one car, pain and suffering in my body, and let’s not forget mental anguish.” Xander folds his arms across his chest. “You can either do this, or I’ll have my lawyer present the Council with an itemized bill.”

“Xander – “ the girls breathe in shock. He holds up a hand to forestall their words.

“Mpanga, I need you to release the demon from the spell that binds her. Can you do that?” He doesn’t look at the

older man.

“Of course, omalaguzi. I will need to go to the cave.”
Mpanga comes to stand beside him, facing the girls.

Much to Xander’s surprise, Angel steps to his other side. At Buffy’s shocked look, he just says, “I don’t know what you came for, but I came to help Xander.”

Willow caves under the disapproval of the group across from her. “Xander, you don’t have to be like that. I’ll do what you need me to do, just lead the way.”

Xander feels a little bad about using Willow’s sensitivity to peer pressure against her, but it’s not as if he planned it that way. He’d feel much worse about losing Dawn and Spike. As they pile into the jeep, Xander wonders when ‘right’ become ‘less wrong than the other option.’

At Mpanga’s driving speed, they get there just before dawn. They set up Mpanga’s biggest tent to wait for the night. Willow’s spell requires moonlight, and the demon involved is nocturnal. Xander throws his pack into a corner, and uses it for a pillow, determined to get some rest. He sees Mpanga get ready to do the same. Angel shrugs, takes off his leather jacket, bunches it into a pile,

and follows suit.

The girls shoot them a look, but Buffy silently sits and begins sharpening her axe, and Willow begins to meditate in preparation for the spell. The soft sound of stone on metal and Willow's familiar chanting lulls Xander to sleep.

Xander wakes from a dream of thousands of crumbling statues of Spike, to Angel patting gently between his shoulder blades. Xander looks up at the vampire towering over him. "Moon's up," is all he says. Xander is immediately up and out of the tent. Willow is setting up a circle and chanting and Mpanga is taking apart a pile of rocks near the cave. Xander goes over to help, and the old man smiles at him. They roll away a particularly big one, and Mpanga makes a satisfied sound. He pulls a jar out of a little niche they have uncovered, and holds it up triumphantly.

"Is that it?" is the demon's sibilant hiss from the cave's opening. "That can of camel piss is what held me here all this time?"

Mpanga looks offended. "It's brandy, Omúkulú táyoná: omúto n'âyoná." (An elder never makes mistakes; it is

the younger who makes mistakes. – Ugandan proverb.)

The demon chuckles. “I’m older than you are, old man. Does that make me right in your eyes?”

Mpanga looks shocked, and then laughs. “I meant that I would not repeat the mistakes of my youth at this age, but perhaps that saying needs to be revised.” Man and demon grin at each other. Mpanga is unperturbed by the teeth that had given Xander the wiggins earlier.

Mpanga opens the jar and downs half the jar in a single gulp, then hands it to the demon, who looks at it suspiciously before drinking it. Draining it, she hands the jar back with a shrug. “That was not the most disgusting thing I’ve ever tasted.” At Mpanga’s wide grin, she continues, “It was very close, however.” Mpanga’s peals of laughter ring from the rocks all around them. Still chuckling, he holds out a hand to her in a gentlemanly fashion. She takes it, and he leads her to Willow’s circle. Buffy stands over Willow with an axe, looking fierce.

The demon turns to Xander, and with a now familiar gesture, Spike is standing with them. She fixes them both with a look. “I require a great deal of energy to power the spell to make the Key human again. Any power I take

from myself will dissipate once I leave this dimension. I have decided, that since you came to rescue her, I will use a piece of both your souls and bind it to her. The three of you will be bound. Your fates will entwine.” She gestures again, and Buffy and Willow freeze, mid-outburst. “I cannot take your souls, or any piece of them, against your will. You must agree.”

“I agree,” they say, almost in unison. Xander looks over at Spike, but he is looking back and forth between Angel and Buffy. Xander pushes down the hurt that flares at the expression on his face.

“Be as you have said.” She gestures again. Xander feels a burning in his chest, and gasps in pain when a sliver of light comes from his chest and floats toward the demon’s hand. It spins between him and Spike, meeting the light that comes from the vampire, and they swirl around each other. The light begins to take a humanoid shape, and suddenly, with a hiss and a pop, Dawn is standing between them.

She sways a bit on her feet, and Spike is at her elbow before Xander can even have the thought. She buries her head against his chest and cries.

Buffy and Willow are suddenly shouting again, but the demon growls at them and they silence quickly. "Now, witch. I have fulfilled my part of our pact. Send me home." Willow just nods, dumbstruck. She looks down at the book resting on her folded knees and begins to chant. There's a roar, and the air splits in two. The demon smiles toothily, and steps through the rift, and then both are gone.

Standing up, Willow dusts off her hands. Buffy is stroking Dawn's hair with an awed look on her face. She looks up at Spike with tears in her eyes. "You saved her," her voice wavers.

"Made a promise," Spike says without lifting his face from Dawn's head.

The shimmering starts again; Willow is staring hard at the air. "Train's leaving now, guys, let's go," she says, waving them through.

Buffy grabs Spike's arm and pushes him through the portal, following him through. For less than a second before he goes through, his eyes meet Xander's. "Coming, Xan, Angel?" Willow asks. Xander just shakes his head dumbly. Angel says, "I'll find my own way

home,” and she nods distractedly and walks swiftly through the portal. The shimmer stops.

“Can I get a ride back to Gulu, Mpanga?” Xander asks dully. He knows that in any contest between him and Buffy, he’ll always lose, so why does it hurt every time he gets proof? He stifles a sigh.

Angel puts a hand on his shoulder. “I was going to visit with Mpanga for a few days. If you want to stay, I’ll make sure you get home.” Xander nods and sits by the fire Mpanga is building.

Mpanga and Angel share a look. Mpanga puts his hand over his heart. Angel’s eyebrow goes up. Mpanga nods. Angel gives Xander a long, considering look and sits next to him. Mpanga pulls two bottles of Glenlivet out of the jeep, and sits with them. Xander is brooding so hard he doesn’t really notice that they’re passing a bottle among the three of them, much less that as the one in the middle, he’s drinking twice as much as Mpanga or Angel.

Angel waits until Xander has had a few slugs to start the conversation. “You didn’t come here just for Dawn, did you?” he asks quietly.

“No.” Xander’s cheeks are flushed, but Angel can smell the misery under the alcohol.

“Want to tell me about it?”

Xander rolls his head around on his neck and looks at Angel. “Why?”

“Because I know him, and I know Buffy, and I know you, and I’m listening.” Angel reaches for the infinite patience he’d seen Gunn use with Wesley when the Watcher had been drunk. Before.

“Yeah,” Xander muses on that for a few, his arms resting on his knees, and his head hanging down between them. “He kissed me first, you know.” He lifts his head and stares into the fire for a minute. “Why’d he do that if he wanted Buffy? Isn’t he supposed to be all good and not evil head gamey guy anymore?”

Angel thinks about his answer for several minutes. “I don’t think Spike was trying to hurt you. Sometimes Buffy is like... a force of nature. Spike is attracted to that.”

Xander looks at Angel a minute. “Yeah, she went off with

Spike and just left you here, huh?"

Angel nods with a sad smile. "Yes, she did. But she and I have been over for a long time."

"Still sucks." Xander lies back in the dust and watches the stars spin.

"A little," Angel admits. "Buffy and Spike are over, too, you know."

Xander snorts. "Oh yeah, it looks like it, too."

Mpanga shakes his head. "The eyes they turn to each other are those of obligation, not passion."

Angel nods at that. "And Buffy isn't the same as she was when they were together. Spike needs a certain amount of... dominance in his lovers."

"Dominance?" Xander asks muzzily. He's not asleep, but the tired is starting to pull him down. Gotta be jet lag catching up with him.

Angel full-on grins at him. "We can talk about it some more tomorrow."

“Angel?”

“Yes?”

“I'm glad you're here. I know neither of us ever thought I'd say that. It's good to see you smiling. I know things kind of sucked for you for a while, there. It makes it easier to save the world when you feel like there's something worth saving it for.”

Angel smiles again, but Xander's eyes have fallen shut and he doesn't see. “Yeah, it does.”

It's quiet for a while, then Mpanga starts to sing in a language Xander doesn't recognize. Angel hums along, but doesn't sing. Xander falls asleep to those sounds and the noise of an African night.

Part Four

Spike let himself in to his efficiency flat. One room, bathroom down the hall. *Ah, the glamour of working for Angel Investigations.* He was back in Los Angeles after spending a little less than a month in Rome with Buffy. Bit had gone back to school after the first week. In her absence, he and Buffy had had a hard time coming up

with things to talk about. She didn't need him like she had back in Sunnyhell, and he wasn't in love with her anymore. Every time he brought up leaving, though, she would find a reason for him to stay. He still cares about her, love or not, so he stayed until he overheard a phone conversation between Buffy and someone she was apparently dating. She didn't want the bloke to come by the flat, because Spike was there. He left that night, leaving a short note with a promise to call. He hadn't called.

Not that Spike is exactly swimming in playmates just now. Every time he even thinks about touching someone that way, it always comes back to Xander. Xander is the only person who had ever bothered to rescue him, and he's done it twice now. Spike walks to the desk that doubles as a kitchen table and takes a frame from the open second drawer. He had stolen the picture from Angel, tearing Cordelia, Buffy and Willow from the right side of the picture, and putting Xander by himself in a frame. He looks at it for a long moment before standing it on the desk, and grabbing the bottle of Jack from beside it. He falls back into the chair, throwing a leg over the arm. Lifting the bottle to Xander's picture, he takes a healthy swig. The bottle against his lips will never make him forget the press of Xander's, no matter how hard he

wishes for it. Demon bint is probably having a good chuckle, wherever she is. He lifts the bottle to her invisible presence and drinks again, more deeply this time.

Steps in the hallway draw his attention to the door. A card slips underneath, with a post-it note attached. Leaning over to pick it up, Spike reads:

Tomorrow 9:00pm Hollywood Inn Express

The card is the key to room 237. Stumbling out of the chair, Spike throws open the door, hoping to see who had left it, but they are gone. Swearing, he slams the door and throws himself back into the chair, which creaks loudly in complaint. Staring at the key and note, he absently picks the bottle **back up**, taking two or three big swallows.

Spike goes to Angel to borrow a car as soon as the sun goes down the next night. “Don’t you have your own car?” Angel wants to know.

“You made me give it back to Wolfram and Hart, remember?” Spike pouts.

“Well, I have an appointment to clear out a nest of fugurth demons in some old woman’s basement. Come help me and I’ll drop you off after.”

Spike opens his mouth to argue and then closes it again, strangely reluctant to mention the note to Angel. If it’s something good, Angel’ll want it. If it’s something bad, Angel will kill it and take all the credit. Fugurth demons it was, then.

“Why did you want to be dropped off here?” Angel wants to know, as Spike stumbles out of the car at precisely nine that night.

“Got a ‘ppointment.” Spike’s lip is swollen where Angel had ‘accidentally’ clocked him with the flat of a broadsword. He is covered in small cuts and fugurth bites.

“Do you want me to wait?”

“Don’t need a sodding nanny, Angel. Bugger off.” Spike doesn’t see the smirk aimed at his back as he limps toward the neon-lit motel. He flips a two-fingered salute over his shoulder as Angel cranks a Flogging Molly cover

of *Kiss My Irish Ass*. If the wanker weren't so bloody Irish, his taste in music might become tolerable in a few centuries.

The room is around the back of the motel. Spike can hear a heartbeat on the other side of the door. There is a little light coming from under the curtains. Spike knocks. There is no answer. He turns the knob, and is only mildly surprised when the door opens.

If Spike's heart had been beating, it would have stopped. Xander is sitting against the headboard of the king-sized bed, reading. His shirt is hung over the back of the chair by the bed, and the top button of his jeans is undone. The jeans are snug, and look very worn, a tear across one knee. Spike's mouth waters instantly, and then goes dry as Xander stands and stalks over to Spike, until there is less than an inch between them. His eyes are blank, and his posture is all predator as he reaches behind Spike to swing the door shut. Xander smells of Africa, musky animal and green. Spike tries picturing mad George attending court naked and rampant, but he is getting hard anyway. Spike considers the possibility he might be mad himself. *I should really say something about now.*

Before he can, Xander speaks. "I think you owe me an

apology,” he says quietly, soft, humid breath against Spike’s lips. Spike’s knees feel weak. He has been attracted to Xander before, but had assumed that he’d be the one making the first move. His eyes flicker down to Xander’s lips and back up again. He doesn’t quite know whether he is glad to be wrong or not.

“Do I, now?” he smirks, running his hands over the warm, bare skin of Xander’s chest. *When in doubt, bluff.*

He frowns when his hands are caught and held away. “Yessss.” Xander hisses, squeezing Spike’s wrists until the bones grind together.

The slight edge of pain takes all the starch out of Spike’s legs. He folds to his knees at Xander’s feet, his hands still held tightly above his head. He presses his forehead against a strong thigh, and murmurs, “Sorry.”

Both his wrists are transferred to one hand, and his head is pulled back roughly by the hair. The gaze aimed down at him is steely, but Spike can smell anxiety. This isn’t a grudge fuck, then. Xander was staking a claim. Bloody bugging hell. The boy has barely touched him, and he is seconds away from coming. Not only is Spike going to let this happen, he wants it. Wants it badly enough that it

makes him nervous.

A low growl brings his attention back to where it should be. "I'm sorry," he says more clearly. He leans back so Xander is supporting most of his weight from his hands, and tilts his hips upward, offering. "Can I make it up to you?" Spike is tempted to turn the offer into a coy gesture, but resists, keeping his gaze straightforward.

He is more tempted to sigh in relief when the ice in the brown eyes melts, heating until there is fire. Spike's skin prickles and burns. Xander releases his hands, and Spike brings them immediately to the small of his back, hard-learned lessons from decades ago making the action automatic. He begins to breathe, long, slow breaths, trying to bring himself under control. Xander holds his head for a moment more, and Spike's eyes are locked on the brown ones above him. "Try," is all Xander says, releasing his head, but not his eyes.

Spike runs his hands up Xander's thighs, knees to hips. Straightening up a little on his knees, he pulls his gaze away to kiss the spot just above the navel in front of him. He can't stop himself from glancing up to gauge Xander's reaction. *Ponce*. The expression on Xander's face is unreadable, but he strokes Spike's hair gently. Spike

forcibly resists the urge to press his head into the comforting hand, cursing himself for needing reassurance. He starts to pull away, going back to what he was doing, but the hand in his hair stops him. He looks up again.

“I’m not Angelus, and I’m not Buffy,” the voice is still quiet, and the eyes are sad. Spike starts to say that of course he knows that, when a warm hand cradles his face, a calloused thumb brushing his cheekbone. Just like that, he *knows*, knows exactly what Xander is trying to tell him, trying to show him. A tear runs down his cheek despite his best efforts to keep it back, but there’s a thumb to brush it away before he can be embarrassed by it. He tilts his head slightly, resting it on the hand supporting it.

A long moment passes like that. It’s not a perfect moment. The trust between them is still in the planning stages, and they are both afraid of being hurt. Both of their thoughts wander into the future and try to weigh the pain that might be found there against what they are feeling here and now.

Doomed to an eternity as a sodding girl. Time to put an end to the bloody picture moment. Spike leans forward

and licks a long stripe up Xander's zipper, thanking whatever gods heap blessings on vampires that the overly sappy moment doesn't seem to have dulled Xander's interest any. Xander's hand clutches Spike's head convulsively, and Spike encourages him by moaning open-mouthed over the swelling he finds his face pressed against. Xander hisses and presses harder. Spike sucks on the denim-covered bulge until they both start to tremble, then pulls back and undoes the button and zipper so slowly that Xander starts growling. Spike grins up at him, mischievously.

"Go ahead and tease. I'll just make you pay later." Xander's voice is low and throaty. Spike whimpers, a shudder flows up from the base of his spine, and he grips himself, trying to stave off the orgasm, but it's too late. He's been teetering on the edge since he landed on his knees. Xander just chuckles. "I don't recall giving you permission for that. You'll have to pay for that, too." He lets his jeans fall to his feet and kicks them to the side. He's not wearing anything underneath. "Strip."

Finally. Spike immediately pulls his shirt over his head, and then stands to take off his jeans. He almost nicks himself with the zipper when Xander leans forward and takes Spike's nipple between his teeth. The denim falls to

the floor. He gasps and yanks Xander closer. He yelps at the resulting sharp smack on his backside.

Xander ignores his pout, and points to the bed. "On your back, hands above your head."

Just like that, Spike starts to get hard again. Kicking the pants aside, he leaps for the bed, flips in midair, and lands in the directed position with a cocky grin and a bounce. Xander just rolls his eyes and opens the drawer in the bedside table. He pulls a piece of red silk cloth out, and ties Spike's hands. "I'll have to get Giles to lend me his manacles," he grins. Spike knows that should probably repulse him, but instead, he starts to ache from being hard. Xander casts a significant look at the growing slick spot on his belly. He drags a finger through it and holds it to Spike's lips. He eagerly fellates Xander's finger, moaning when it is pulled slowly away. Xander turns and pulls a few more things out of the drawer, standing so Spike can't see.

When he turns, it's to snap a leather ring around the base of Spike's cock. Spike groans, partially from the warmth of Xander's hands on him, and partially because it's been awhile since he's let anyone rule him like this, and it makes everything so much *more*. He's aware of

every inch of his skin as Xander straddles him, and they are again up close. "I'm going to kiss you now, okay?" Xander says, and Spike almost grins at the incongruousness of the request, considering his position, but Xander's face is serious so he nods, instead.

The kiss goes on and on. Spike shivers every time Xander's tongue brushes his bottom lip. He's burning where Xander's skin is against his, and cool from the air conditioning everywhere else. Spike loses the battle to be still as Xander kisses down the line of his jaw, and by the time his lips brush the sensitive spot behind Spike's ear, the vampire is actively writhing. The thrashing turns to shaking when Xander sucks on Drusilla's mark. Spike starts to gasp, fighting for breath he doesn't need. Xander lifts his head to whisper, "Someday, if you're a very, very good vampire, and I think you deserve it, I'll put my mark on you. You'll belong to me."

Spike grits his teeth, knowing it's too soon for the word that's trying to escape. Over a century of emotional fortification, and this man had burned through it in less than an hour. He arches up, his body going rigid as Xander's teeth break the skin just above his nipple. Xander's hands hold his waist, supporting him, and then slide down his back and arse, laying him down gently.

Spike gives a wordless cry as Xander's fingers slip between his cheeks, and then the words come tumbling out. "Please, please, please..." he chants, not sure if he's asking for more or less.

"Tell me what you need." Xander's hands have become soothing, rubbing from mid thigh to hip, but even that is sending jolts directly to Spike's groin.

Spike's beyond stopping himself, now. "Yours, anything, anything..." he trails off into mindless keening when Xander's thumbs find the hollows of his hips.

"That's not a decision you get to make while naked. You will be fully clothed, unrestrained and not otherwise distracted. I want you to be fully aware of what you are giving to me and I want you to do it of your own free will." A slick finger is stroking Spike's pucker. He starts trembling again. "I am going to fuck you now, though." Another thunderstruck cry as two slick fingers enter him. "And you'll belong to me, at least a little bit, while I'm doing that."

Spike would really like to say please again. He would like to beg and plead and cry, and use every pretty word he'd ever learned as a poet, as large, calloused fingers

carefully open him. He can't seem to get enough breath to form words, and when Xander positions himself, sliding in unhurriedly, he is reduced to whimpers. He arches his hips, but Xander grips him tightly and holds him still.

When Xander is fully seated, he leans over and kisses Spike slowly and with painstaking care. He begins to thrust, slowly, angling so Spike's prostate gets almost constant pressure. His hands are everywhere, it seems, and Spike's skin is continually tingling in anticipation of the next touch. He starts to squeeze Xander on every thrust, and eventually the boy loses the tight control he's using to torture Spike. He lifts Spike's hips, and the vampire wraps his legs around. Slow and torturous becomes hard and fast, and Xander reaches down and unsnaps the leather ring. Spike's orgasm is white-hot flame that consumes him so utterly, he doesn't even have time to cry out before the world goes white.

Spike awakens in the wee hours. There's a soft rushing noise coming from behind him, and Xander is singing softly.

*"Time has told me
You're a rare rare find"*

*A troubled cure
For a troubled mind.*

*And time has told me
Not to ask for more
Someday our ocean
Will find its shore.*

*So I'll leave the ways that are making me be
What I really don't want to be
Leave the ways that are making me love
What I really don't want to love."*

He's staring at the ceiling when Spike rolls over to look at him, and running his fingers over the bracelet on his wrist. Spike finds it interesting that Xander manages to make it somewhat masculine. It hadn't looked that way on Dawn. Spike remembers the girl they bought it from. She had introduced herself as Free, which Spike had mentally sniped probably meant 'free demon chow,' as she was a street kid. She explained that she was trying to get some money together before she moved on. Spike had pulled a handful of bills out of his pocket, and pressed them into her hand, telling her to find someplace

safe to sleep and a ride out of town. She had insisted on giving them something, taking the bracelet from her own wrist and sliding it onto Dawn's. Spike had been very hungry until he found a Shyajah demon to kill, about ten days later, who had two hundred dollars in his pocket. "That sounds like dry grass in the wind," he says softly.

"Didn't mean to wake you." Xander stops moving, but his fingers stay on the beads. He doesn't look at Spike. "I'm going back to Boston tonight."

"Ah," Spike replies noncommittally, trying to puzzle out whether the statement is an invitation or a dismissal. They're both silent for several minutes. Neither of them can come up with a good excuse for leaving the motel room at a quarter to four in the morning. Finally, Spike breaks the silence. "You think you could make me yours a few more times between now and then?" *Love's bitch, every sodding time.* He rubs his fingers over the place where Xander had bitten him, now as smooth as the day he was turned.

Xander finally looks at him. "I think maybe I was wrong to start that."

"The bloody hell you say!" Spike sits up to glare down at

Xander. "I don't go around giving it up to every bloke who claims I owe him an apology, you know." He throws off the scratchy sheet covering him, and starts to get out of the bed, but Xander's hand on his arm makes him pause. "What?"

"Hear me out?" Xander releases his arm, but again, holds his eyes.

Spike tears his gaze away, gets his pants from under the chair, puts them on and sits in the chair. "I'm listening."

"Are you? You look like you're in one of those moods where whatever I say will bounce right off you." Xander sighs.

Spike has an angry retort for that, but it dies on his tongue, because Xander is right. He is silently amazed at how fast the defenses went back up, given how he felt just a few hours ago. He replays the things Xander said to him then in his head. He doesn't think he imagined the amazingly strong connection. Maybe he can fix whatever Xander thinks is wrong. "Point taken. I'm ready now."

"I'm going to die in forty or fifty years, if not sooner." Xander holds up a hand to stop the denials he knows are

coming. "If I mark you, make you mine, and you meet someone after I'm gone, you might regret it. I don't want you to ever feel that way about us. But I also don't know if I can handle the whole you and Buffy thing without permanent, tangible proof." Xander sits up and leans back against the headboard. "I know that's a hugely unreasonable thing to ask, at this point. Diving off the deep end. It's way too soon to ask for that kind of commitment." He turns, putting his feet on the floor, and faces Spike. "I know how I feel. I know what I need. That may not be what's best for you. I wouldn't want to hurt you on purpose, but I'm mortal. I can't stop that."

Spike tries to feel impending disaster. He knows this could be the biggest mistake he's ever made. But when he thinks about who Xander *is*, and the things that have happened since he met Xander... the chip, Buffy, the soul, Dawn... The more all those things start to feel like a dress rehearsal for what he knows he's about to do. He stands, letting the unbuttoned jeans fall to his feet. Stepping out of them, he stands in front of Xander until the man looks up. Capturing his gaze and holding it, Spike kneels at Xander's feet, slowly and deliberately. Just that simple act makes him hard. "I trust you." Crossing his wrists, he offers them to Xander.

Xander doesn't answer, doesn't move, barely breathes for nearly ten minutes. Spike tells himself that this reaction is shock, and not rejection. He steels himself to wait as long as it takes. Xander is trying to find something in his eyes, and Spike tries to fill them with all the trust and certainty he feels. Xander holds his wrists gently between the palms of calloused carpenter's hands. "Are you sure?" Spike breathes a sigh of relief and nods. "Say it again," Xander orders, very quietly.

"I trust you."

"You were so supposed to be clothed when we had this conversation." Xander shakes his head, laughing.

"I was clothed when it started." Spike grins. "Besides, you like me naked."

"Keep teasing. I'll burn all your clothes, and you'll have to be naked all the time, like Ferengi women." Xander kisses him on the forehead. It feels like a benediction. "Go shower, I need to make some calls. Use the things you find on the shelf above the toilet." Spike glances down at his erection and quirks an eyebrow at Xander. Xander smiles, nearly as menacing as the demon from the cave. "I really wouldn't if I were you. If I remember correctly, I

already owe you two punishments.” The grin gets wider and more evil at the pulse of precome that spills down the side of Spike’s cock. “Go.”

Part Five

Spike goes. He leaves the bathroom door ajar, and turns to examine the contents of the shelf. The groan that results is loud enough to cause chuckling on the other side of the door. There’s the sandalwood soap, lemon shampoo, and mega-strength conditioner that Spike prefers. Next to them is a bottle of lube and a black silicone plug. It’s not huge, but it’s big enough that Spike knows getting it in his arse without coming is going to take a minor miracle. He showers quickly, knowing that extended touching is probably a bad idea. He knows Xander will expect him to be clean when he takes the plug out, so he’s thorough, though it leaves him trembling. The towels must be Xander’s because they’re huge and soft. Spike dries extra carefully, before realizing he’s just delaying the inevitable. He carefully avoids his

prostate, slicking himself with two fingers. He's as brief as he can be, but he's seriously considering either giving up and dealing with the consequences, or going to beg Xander for the ring he wore last night. He knows Xander is still uncertain, though, so he very much wants to be perfect. *Bloody ponce.* He shrugs. *If the blouse fits...* He pours some lube on the plug.

He's bent over, his eyes screwed shut tightly and breathing heavily as the last bit slides in, so he doesn't hear Xander's hum of pleasure from the doorway. There's a small puddle of precome on the tiled floor between his spread legs, which gets added to when the angle changes as he stands up. Xander slides up behind him and puts his arms around Spike's hips to snap the ring on. Spike moans.

Xander puts his arms around Spike, who moans again as Xander's hardness presses against the base of the plug. "We have an appointment. Get dressed." Spike wants to laugh at the absurdity of the idea that he can go anywhere like this. Xander kisses the back of his neck, drops some clothes on the closed toilet seat, and leaves. The jeans are his usual black, but the tee is blue. No underwear.

When he finally manages to get the jeans zipped without catching himself in the zipper, he goes to find Xander. Xander is on the phone, changing his flight and buying another ticket. Spike smiles a small smile, but Xander sees it anyway and pulls him over by the belt loops to rub circles on his back. Spike strokes Xander's hair tentatively at first, relaxing when Xander smiles up at him. Xander thanks the ticket agent and hangs up, looking mischievously at Spike. "We have about an hour to kill. I think we should get one of your punishments out of the way."

Spike's eyes get wide. He's pretty sure he's going to enjoy whatever Xander is up to, which is a problem, because it really feels like his dick might fly off like the cork on a champagne bottle at this point. Xander seems to have inferred this thought process. "Say it," he orders.

"I trust you," Spike murmurs, but Xander accepts it. He unzips Spike's jeans carefully, and pulls them down to his knees.

"C'mere," he says, spreading his legs and pulling Spike down over his knees.

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck. Fuck! One of Xander's big, warm hands

is covering half his arse, and the other is firmly in the small of his back. Spike knows he's going to come the first time Xander's hand comes down hard. The last person to make him come this way was Angelus, who took great delight in humiliating him by doing it in front of the girls whenever the fancy took him. He trusts Xander, really, he does, but he's not ready to be this vulnerable. He knows there have been cracks in the Big Bad persona for years now, but he's not ready to go without it. "Xander... please, don't."

"Why not, Spike?" Xander's question is gentle, almost as if he expected this.

"I can't do this. Please." He closes his eyes, waiting for the laughter he knows is coming.

Spike is still hard, and isn't struggling to get up, though, so they continue to sit like that as Xander asks, "Do you want to stop being mine?"

"No... no. Just... not this, please. Please, Xander." Spike is breathing again, though he's trying to stifle it against Xander's leg.

"I want to know why, first." Xander rubs Spike's back, but

doesn't back down.

"Angelus..." he whispers. His muscles tighten. He's expecting anger and not laughter this time.

"Haven't we already been over the fact that I'm not your sire?" There's no anger in Xander's voice, just gentle understanding.

"Yes?" Spike sounds uncertain. Xander waits. Spike thinks for a few minutes, and then it clicks. "You know." He sounds defeated.

"I know," Xander confirms. He spent ten days discussing Spike with Angel, with the occasional insight from Mpanga. He's pretty sure that if there's something he doesn't know, Angel doesn't either. "But I'm not Angelus. I'm not going to find it funny that you can come from being spanked; I'm going to find it very, very hot. In fact, there's a very good chance that I won't be able to resist fucking you."

Spike moans, but Xander doesn't move until he arches, pushing up against the hand that rests on him. Rubbing gently, Xander asks, "Are you sure?"

“I trust you.” Spike feels a flash of heat just from the words, which is only intensified the first time Xander smacks him. He’s so lost in the sensation that it gets to the point where he doesn’t think he’ll be able to sit comfortably for at least an hour before he remembers something important. “Xander... the ring. Please, let me come, please!”

Xander chuckles, and unsnaps the ring with one hand without stopping the regular pace of his hand on Spike’s arse. Spike opens his mouth to scream, but all the air in his lungs just goes whooshing out. He just lies there, limp, after. He knows he should get up, that lying here with his bum in the air is not putting any patches on the Big Bad persona he was clinging to a few minutes ago, but he’s too fuck-drunk to care at the mo’, ta much. Xander leans back in the chair and strokes his back, from the nape of his neck to the curve of his arse, in long, slow strokes. Spike hums contentedly. When he feels like he can do so without just flopping onto the floor, he slides to his knees between Xander’s spread thighs.

He rubs the inside of Xander’s thighs, glancing from the bulge in his jeans to the hungry look on his face. *In for a penny, might as well be in for a pound.* “Xander, can I taste you?” Not quite as bold as he wants to be, but it is

enough. Xander nods and lifts his hips, and Spike unzips the jeans and slides them down and off. Xander moans as Spike slides cool lips down his length in one long, smooth stroke. Xander fights the urge to arch into the cool suction, but Spike encourages him, guiding his hips in an up-and-down motion. Soon Xander's hands are in Spike's hair, holding his head while he thrusts, and Spike's hips are twitching as he fights the urge to rub himself against Xander's leg.

Xander comes with a stifled, "Fuck!" Spike swallows and licks Xander clean. His head is tilted up with a hand on his chin, and Xander runs a thumb across Spike's swollen lips. "Do you like it when I fuck your mouth?"

Spike nods, looking down. Somehow, his inner Victorian is horrified at the matter of fact filthiness of admitting such a thing out loud. It's a different thing to say things in the moment.

"I want to hear you say you like it when I fuck your mouth." Xander murmurs into his ear, and he shivers. "I want you to look me in the eye and tell me how much it turns you on when I use your body for my pleasure."

Spike groans, knowing he's already lost, when the phone

rings. “What?!” Xander snaps into the phone. “Oh, sorry. Yeah, we’ll be right there.” Xander hangs up, throwing the phone a filthy look. “Saved by the bell this time.” He fixes Spike with a speculative look. “I won’t forget, though. I’m going to make you describe, in detail, everything you’ve ever wanted someone to do to you.” Spike shudders and nods. “If you belong to me, all of you belongs to me. Even your fantasies. Especially those. Still want to be mine?”

Spike takes Xander’s face between his hands and kisses him, slowly and softly, but thoroughly. “I want to be yours. I trust you with all of me, even my fantasies. I like it when you fuck my mouth. It makes me nearly frantic with need when you use my body for your pleasure. I *am* yours.” Spike shoves his inner Victorian into the closet.

“Oh, baby,” Xander groans, leaning his forehead against Spike’s. “That deserves a reward. You think of something good while we’re out, okay? Let’s go now, though. The sooner we do this, the sooner we get back.” They shove themselves back into their pants quickly.

When Xander opens the door, Spike suddenly sees that careful consideration went into picking this place. It’s full daylight outside, but the building itself throws a deep

shadow halfway out into the lot. Angel is pulled up close to the building. Xander holds the front seat forward so Spike can get in the back. Spike balks. Xander just looks at him. *"Still want to be mine?"* hangs unsaid between them. Spike climbs in, and Xander puts his hand between Spike's head and the frame, protecting him. Sitting, Spike grabs Xander's hand before he can move it away, and places a kiss in the palm. Xander caresses his cheek before he sits down. Apology and acceptance without words, and Spike realizes that this is protecting him, too, not giving Angel an opportunity to comment. He has no doubt that Angel knows. His sire obviously told Xander some interesting things to cause such a change in his behavior. He suddenly knows that as long as Xander lives, Angel will never humiliate him again. No one will. He allows himself to bask in that feeling, shoving aside the thought that 'as long as Xander lives' is a finite time.

He toys with the idea of seeing how far he can goad Angel before his sire does something that makes Xander squish him like a bug. The thought makes him smile, and that's all the satisfaction he needs right now. He leans his head back, closes his eyes, and enjoys the slightly squirmy feeling he's getting when the bumps in the road jolt the plug. He's hard, but it's not urgent at the moment, though he's sure that Xander could easily make

it urgent with no more than a raised eyebrow at this point. He knows he should be wary, but honestly, when has he ever held back when he was in love? The words haven't been said yet, but if Spike is honest with himself, he knows it's only a matter of time. In the rare moment that he's less than completely terrified, he can admit that that time is more likely to be measured in minutes and hours than days and weeks.

Ironically, knowing he could back out even now, and Xander would accept it makes him feel less safe. He wants Xander to tell him that if he leaves Xander will hunt him down and drag him back kicking and screaming. Chain him; fuck him over and over, until he's so high on endorphins he can't stand, much less walk away. That even if he's a complete prat, he has no choice but to let Xander love him. It's particularly ridiculous because he's as likely to walk away as he is to turn into shrubbery.

Spike dozes on and off while they drive. The car stops sooner than he expects and he opens his eyes. They're at the Hyperion. He's suddenly much less relaxed. He wants to start demanding information, but then Angel will know how nervous he is. Xander takes his hand when he steps out of the car, squeezing gently.

He relaxes a little when Xander doesn't let go. The lobby is only slightly brighter than the underground parking, but Spike can see someone on the couch. "Ah, you've arrived." Spike pulls Xander behind him as the being slithers toward them.

Angel strides forward, hand extended. "Reverend Dark, it was good of you to come on such short notice."

Xander puts his arms around Spike and holds him. The 'Reverend Dark' comes closer, and Spike can see that his bottom half is that of a huge snake, but the top part looks human, olive skin under a mop of black curls. He looks at Angel and snorts. "Angelus, you know that shit is just for the tourists." He has an interesting accent that Spike can't place. He turns to Spike and Xander and holds out his hand. "My name is Sosipolis, but my friends call me Sosi. I set up my rig in one of the cleaner rooms upstairs. We should talk a little first, I think, though."

Spike extends his hand. " 'M Spike. Good to meet you."

They shake, and Sosi says, "You must be Xander," over Spike's shoulder.

"Yup. The one and only." Ignoring a muttered thankful

comment from Angel, he continues, “I thought you should be the one to explain, since you probably understand the process better than I do.” Spike forces himself to relax. He really hates not knowing what’s going on.

“Why don’t you come upstairs with me, Spike. We’ll call down for Xander once we’ve talked.” Sosi holds out a hand.

Spike throws Xander a panicked look as he feels the arms around his waist withdrawn, and he is given a gentle shove forward. “I’ll be right next to the phone, I promise,” Xander says, and prods him forward again.

Spike nods shortly, visibly pulling the tattered mantle of ‘Big Bad’ back around him, though he lets Sosi squeeze his shoulder reassuringly. “Stairs aren’t really my thing,” says his guide, as he allows himself to be led to the ancient-but-somehow-still-functional elevator. Sosi is talking, but Spike doesn’t hear him, his eyes fixed on Xander as the doors close.

Angel turns to Xander, who is watching the lights over the elevators doors go up number by number. “So, it worked, huh?”

Xander nods without looking away. "I didn't really give him a choice." He shakes his head, and finally looks over at Angel. "I'm not sure this is right. Are you sure I'm not just using him? I'm not so good at commitment, remember Anya?"

Angel puts a hand on Xander's shoulder. "You did the right thing, with Anya. I believe you were right to think the two of you would have been bad for each other. You were too young, and she was too newly human. But you're older now. If you're really not sure you should go upstairs and stop this before it goes any further, because if you hurt my boy, I'll eviscerate you myself." A flash of gold crosses Angel's eyes as Xander meets them.

"He's not your boy anymore!" Xander insists hotly, and then looks down and blushes at what he's said.

"Exactly what I wanted to hear you say," Angel grins.

"I know you still have feelings for him," Xander states, apropos of apparently nothing.

Angel knows better. "I can't love him the way he needs to be loved. Angelus was never capable of it, and me..."

Angel fades out for a minute. “I didn’t have to leave him or Dru. Especially him, though.” He straightens, clearing his throat, “But I did. And he really needs someone he *knows* isn’t going to do that. Have you told him what Sosi found?”

“No,” Xander squirms a bit, “I was afraid to. Sosi said he’d explain.”

“You know he’s going to have to hear it from you before he believes it, right?”

“Yeah.” Xander looks back at the elevator. “I know.”

Angel disappears for a minute, returning from his office with a two-liter of root beer and a box of Twinkies. “So...” he grins at Xander, “show me how this ‘comfort food’ thing works.”

Xander can’t help grinning back, and relaxes a notch. “You’re the best father-in-law ever!”

Angel grimaces. “I’ll keep you in Twinkies for the rest of your life if you promise never to call me that again.”

Part Six

*The last part. 🧑🏻‍🔬 **tabaqui** has already infected me with another bunny for this 'verse, though.*

Spike is sitting in a chair in the room Sosi has temporarily claimed. Sosi is still talking, but Spike's mind is elsewhere. He startles a bit when a bottle of Jack thumps down beside him.

“Do I actually have your attention now?” Sosi smirks at him. Spike nods, finally noticing his surroundings. As he looks around the room, he notices a huge snake on the bed. Okay, it's not as big as Sosi, but it's a cobra, and it's bigger than it should be, Spike thinks, and jumps in front of Sosi, who chuckles, and sits him back down. “That's Eosimias, my bond-mate.” Turning to the bed he says, “Simi, how are we supposed to have a conversation? I'm pretty sure Spike isn't fluent in Nageesh.”

Spike *knows* shape-changers exist, but he's never actually watched one change before. The huge black snake becomes a naked, mahogany-skinned, young man with eyes a deep chocolate color, like Xander's. "Bugger me," Spike says quietly.

Simi laughs. "I'm not sure Xander would appreciate it if I did that." He looks thoughtful a minute, and amends the comment, "Then again, he just might. We should ask him." He grins mischievously.

"Kay." Spike says, a little more flummoxed than he wants to be.

Sosi smacks the younger man on his thigh. "Stop distracting him. We need to explain about the bond."

Simi looks unrepentant. "If I keep distracting him, will you do that again?" He blinks up at Sosi coquettishly.

Spike can't help but grin at Sosi's sigh. It reminds him of the early days when he'd aggravate Xander just to have his attention. Back in Sunnydale, in that horrible basement where he'd had no idea how happy he was. Afterwards, at Wolfram and Hart, it had been Xander's quirky sense of humor he'd missed. The acid banter

between the two of them that didn't stop them from watching Godzilla marathons or playing hours of pool on Xander's rare nights off had been what Spike had clung to as he felt everything he was shifting out from under him. It hadn't been until much later, waiting for Xander to return to the cave a little over a month ago, that he had realized it.

Simi nudges Sosi, and grins, "See how he looks when he thinks about Xander? This will be a good bond."

Sosi nods. "There are some things we need to discuss, first." At Spike's nervous look, Sosi waves his hands. "It's not bad, but this is different than bonds between vampires. You shouldn't go into things blind, you know." The ophidian man fixed him with a serious look. "I'm a demi-god. I was worshipped in ancient Greece, along with my mother Eleutho. I don't know who my father was, but it was rumored, back then, that he has something to do with why bad things happen to people who break oaths that are taken in my name." He pauses and waits for Spike to nod that he understands, then goes on. "When Greece fell, and people stopped leaving offerings at my temple, I began to take people's oaths in return for sustenance, food, shelter, what have you. I traveled the world for several centuries. I found myself in

India, in the 1800's. In my country, it didn't really matter what gender your lover was, and men who dressed as women were usually holy,"

Simi interrupted, "It was that way in India once, too."

Sosi nodded. "Yes but European influence changed that by the time I saw your country, love." He paused to pet the raven-black hair that leaned against his ribs.

"Eosimias' mother was a hajira, a holy prostitute, and blessed by her gods. In spite of the fact that she had been born a man, she gave birth to Simi."

"How?" Spike interrupted, fascinated.

Simi answered him. "We don't know. Perhaps a god was one of her clients. She was famed for her skill in the city where I was born. That didn't stop them from stoning her to death."

"I'm sorry," Spike thought of a horrible night in Prague with Drusilla.

Sosi petted his lover's head and continued the story.

"They tried to kill Simi, as well, when he reached puberty and began to manifest his ancestry. But I happened

along.”

Simi smiles up at the other man. “He saved me.”

Sosi snorts. “And how did you repay me? Spending the next five years doing your utmost to drive me insane!”

Simi smiles at Spike conspiratorially. “I wanted him, but he thought I was too young.”

“You *were* too young.”

Simi makes a horrible face at his lover. “I was old enough to know what I wanted.”

Sosi sighs with the air of a man who has had the same argument many times before. “Regardless, sanctifying the love between men became of special interest to me soon after. We spent some years in Europe – “

“He made me go to *boarding school!*” Simi interrupts again.

“If you don’t stop interrupting, I’ll make you wish you were back there.” Sosi says, calmly.

“Yes, sir.” Simi doesn’t look worried, though.

“How long have you been together?” Spike says, while he can get a word in edgewise.

“Let’s see,” Simi says. “I was at the boarding school for about two years, so that would make it 1887, I think? Then I went to Cambridge for four years so I came back in about 1892. I learned to be persuasive while I was away.” Simi grins widely.

“Don’t.” Sosi says, sternly.

Simi sticks his tongue out at Sosi. “He was sleeping in a chair when I got home. I woke him up.” He leers at Spike.

“Simi!”

“I didn’t!” Simi replies. He turns to Spike. “Did I?”

“Um, no?” Spike replies, completely confused, and not certain what he’s agreeing to.

Sosi just shakes his head. “As I was saying. When I make a bond, it’s different than the ones between vampires. Your bonds with Angelus and Drusilla were broken when

they left you, yes?”

Spike nods, not liking where this is going.

“Bonds that I create are not so easily broken. An oath taken in my name is particularly binding. Bad things tend to happen to those oathbreakers.”

Spike shakes his head. “I don’t want anything bad to ever happen to Xander because of me.” He leaves unsaid the fact that he’s going to be working off a karmic debt for what he’s already put Xander through, possibly for the rest of his unnaturally long life.

Simi laughs. “The two of you are perfectly matched. Xander said the same thing about you the first time he talked to Sosi. You’re missing the point, though. Xander knows your history, especially with Drusilla. By willingly submitting to the bond, he’s showing you how much he’s willing to do to prove to you that he won’t leave you. If you do the same, you’ll be telling him that he’s the primary object of your affections, and you won’t leave him either.” He doesn’t mention Buffy specifically, but her presence hangs heavy in the air.

“Simi has a PhD in psychology,” Sosi replies to Spike’s

somewhat stunned look. “He works as a relationship counselor.”

“You’d be amazed at how many vampires I get as clients. Eternity is hard on a relationship.”

Spike grunts an agreement, lost in thought for several moments. “So what’s the catch?”

“Well, ordinarily, the bond is broken when one of you dies. Because you, Xander, and Dawn are sharing a destiny now, it changes things a little.” Sosi explains carefully.

“I knew it. Sodding magick.”

“Hear Sosi out, Spike. I have a feeling that you will be okay with this.” Simi crosses the room and sits in the chair next to Spike’s, placing a warm hand on his shoulder.

“The bad news is, if one of you dies, you all die. The good news – “

“There is no sodding good news! How do I undo it?” Spike is up and pacing now. He’d been hoping some

demon would rip his head off before Niblet and Xander died. “You know what I do, right? Saving the world has already killed me once. I nearly died in an alley when Angel tried to save the bloody world. This isn’t safe for them!”

“You can’t undo it Spike, anymore than you could undo your soul, even though you desperately wanted to.” Simi leans back in the chair, away from Spike’s wild gesticulating.

Spike sits down suddenly, on the bed. “Shite.”

Sosi sits next to him. “Can I finish now?” He waits for Spike to nod before he continues. “The good news is that none of you will die of old age or illness. Because your destinies are entwined, they are effectively as immortal as you are. Maybe not as indestructible, though. A car accident or a bad fall that wouldn’t kill you might give them terminal injuries.”

“Then again, they might not. But it’s not like we’re going to test it.” Simi adds.

Spike laughs. And laughs. And laughs. He’s finding it hard to stop. This is much too good to be true.

Sosi looks worried, but Simi just grins back at him. They wait patiently for him to calm down.

“No, really. What’s the catch?” He says when he can form words again.

“Well, like I said, eternity is hard on relationships. You may decide in ten, or a hundred, or two hundred years that you want to move on. I’ve heard that it’s possible, but the parties involved were pretty miserable without each other. You’re not looking at a few more decades with Xander, at this point.” Simi points out.

Spike starts laughing again, but it’s much shorter this time. “That’s the only catch? Really?”

“As far as we can tell.” Sosi replies.

“I told you you’d be okay with it.” Simi adds smugly.

“I need to talk to Xander.” Spike says, suddenly.

“Go ahead and call down. Sosi and I will go keep Angel company.” Simi leers at Spike again, and Spike has to wonder if the shifter can read his mind.

Sosi allows himself to be dragged out of the room by a still-naked Simi. Spike absently wonders if Sosi has made the same threats about clothes as Xander, as he dials the lobby.

“I’ll be right up,” Xander says, when he picks up the phone, and immediately hangs up.

Spike fidgets with a cigarette while he waits. He doesn’t light it. He sits with his back to the door. *Watched pot never boils.*

Xander knocks before he comes in, and sits down beside Spike, carefully not touching him. Spike knows Xander is trying to respect his space, and not influence his decision with their physical connection, and for some reason, this makes him irrationally irritable. He knows it’s unreasonable though, so he doesn’t do anything but light the cigarette. “Spent my entire mortal life as a poet, and still can’t manage to find the words when it’s important.”

Xander nods. “I’ve never really been good with the verbalizing, either.”

They spend a long five minutes saying nothing. Spike

stubs out the butt of his cigarette. Spike looks over at Xander, who has a thousand-yard stare directed at the carpet. He knows Xander went through a lot of trouble, and probably a bit of expense to come to L.A. and get him. "Why did you come get me?"

Xander looks up. "Spike, do you remember how messed up you were the last time you tangled with that demon? I couldn't let you face that alone. Not after everything you've done." Xander's arm tenses and relaxes, and Spike knows Xander wants to touch him.

"I meant here. I walked off with Buffy. I haven't been as good to you since I met you, as you have been to me just since we woke up."

"You need someone to be good to you. I'm good at that. I want to be the one who's good to you." Xander looks back down at the carpet.

"Who's good to you, Xan?" Spike wants to know.

Xander just shrugs. "Lots of people."

Spike shifts closer and buries his face in Xander's shaggy hair. "Let me be the one who's good to *you*." He gently

turns Xander's face towards himself, and kisses him.

Xander smiles a goofy smile when his lips are released. "Kay."

"Enough of this poofy nattering, then." Spike flops backwards on the bed, pulling Xander down on top of him. "I wanna shag."

Xander just laughs and pulls his shirt over his head.

~*~*~*~*~

Dawn met them at Logan, bouncing with barely contained maniacal glee. She threw herself at Spike the minute he walked through the security checkpoint. After hugging the unlife out of him, she pulled back and said, "If you ever, ever disappear again, I will hunt you down and make you listen to Xander's CDs on repeat for a hundred and six years."

"A hundred and six? Isn't that a bit harsh, Niblet?" Spike has an arm around her and they're walking toward the baggage claim, but he hasn't relinquished Xander's hand, either.

“Well, his taste in music has actually improved since Sunnydale. It’s not quite the hellish punishment it once was.” Dawn winks at Xander.

Xander sniffs haughtily at them. “Just because the two of you are uncultured, doesn’t mean I have to be.”

“Pet, there is something seriously wrong with your definition of culture.” Spike practically cackles.

Xander bumps him gently with his shoulder. “You like me, even if I’m a Philistine.”

Spike just grins back, but Dawn is squealing in a register only dogs can appreciate, “You two are so *cute*!! I knew you would be! Didn’t I tell you, Xander?”

“You did.” Xander grins.

Dawn drives a Prius. Spike gawks. “Niblet, don’t these things cost a fortune?”

She giggles. “My translation fees are exorbitant. I speak at least three demon languages and one human that no one else on this continent is fluent in.”

“Good on you, Bit.” Xander decides he really likes Spike’s ‘proud uncle’ face. Then they start grunting at each other in what Xander thinks might be Fyarl, so he gets in the back seat and naps on the way home.

He wakes up when the car stops. Dawn is telling Spike, “Yeah Xander has actually picked up quite a bit of the languages as I study them. He’s really good at a lot of the African ones, which he came back with, but he also speaks a couple of demonic languages that are similar. I can’t pronounce a lot of what he can say. It all sounds like clicks to me.”

Xander says, “I love you both, but why aren’t we home?” in Letherian, to illustrate her point.

“We’re going out for dinner. I don’t wanna cook.” Dawn says.

“Well, cooking is very not my thing, so out for dinner it is.” Xander yawns and stretches. “Where are we going?”

“Don’t worry, I made plans.” Dawn turns left, onto Newbury Street.

“Famous last words, if I ever heard them.” Xander retorts.

They actually stop at Xander’s favorite Vietnamese restaurant. The hostess leads them into the banquet room. Buffy, Willow, Giles, Angel, Sossie and Simi are all sitting at the huge table.

“Plans?” Xander raises an eyebrow at Dawn.

“The plan is for those berks over there to apologize. The rest of us are just here to be immoral support.” Spike sits down next to Simi, and pulls Xander into the chair on the other side. Dawn pointedly sits between Xander and Buffy, shooting her sister a look.

“So, uh, apologizing? Why?” Xander’s confused. He hates not knowing what’s going on.

“Well, it has been brought to our attention that we’ve been taking you for granted.” Giles begins.

“And we haven’t been listening. You told us what Dawnie said right before she... left, and we didn’t believe you.” Willow adds.

“Spike told us what he saw in the cave. About your trials. He told us what you said to the demon about family. You’re right. You’re our heart, and we forgot that, and we’re sorry. We’re going to do better, starting now. When you can take a vacation, we’ll all go, wherever you want. Spend some quality bonding time.” Buffy concludes.

“I’ll only go if Spike and Dawn are invited too.” Xander says, quietly.

“We know about the bond, Xan. We’re a little surprised, but if you’re happy, we’re all good.” Buffy speaks to Xander, but she’s looking right at Spike, who nods.

The food starts coming before Xander can reply. Xander is willing to bet that Dawn and Spike had a hand in bullying everyone so that all the dishes on the table are something he likes. He feels his eyes well up, but he blinks them away. Spike notices anyway.

“You okay?” He leans into Xander.

“Yeah. This is just... You didn’t have to do this.”

“You need someone to be good to you. I’m good at that. I

want to be the one who's good to you." Spike quotes and kisses his temple.

Xander leans back into Spike. Simi passes them some chili noodles, which are Xander's absolute favorite. "Thanks," he grins at Simi. He looks around the table and sighs contentedly. This was family. His family. He puts his arm around Spike, and lets his fingers wander under the collar of the ubiquitous tee, brushing the symbol under Spike's left collarbone. He feels a tingle in the matching one under his right.

This was something to fight for.

The End

The Punishment

NC-17 Pairing: Spike/Xander, Spike/m

Summary: "I really wouldn't if I were you. If I remember correctly, I already owe you two punishments." One happened in the original fic, but what about the other?

Categories and Warnings: Plot-What-Plot, Sub/Dom BDSM

Rating: Nearly 3,000 words of NC17 PWP, baby! Consider this an apology for the earlier excessive schmoop. :)

Warnings: PORN, Kink, Dominance and Submission

Notes: Unbetaed, so let me know where I've screwed up.

E.T.A. This happens shortly after Time Has Told Me. [Act 6] and nearly a year before The Trial

Spike wakes up at about two in the afternoon, alone. He is disoriented for several moments, when he reaches beside the bed and the bottle of Jack isn't there. He opens his eyes. *Boston. Xander. Mmmm, Xander.* He spreads his legs, and is about to 'take himself in hand,' when something falls off the bed. He rolls to the edge of the bed to see what it is. There is a paper bag with a note stapled to it. He grabs it and sits back against the headboard.

Spike - Happy Friday. Dawn flew out to Rome to visit Buffy. Since we'll have the apartment to ourselves, I thought it would be a good time to work on your second punishment. You are not allowed to come after you read this. I will be home at five. Before then, I expect you to change the sheets. Use ones we can throw away. There

are several things in the bag. Use them. I expect you to be kneeling by the door, waiting for me, when I get home.

Love you,

X.

A long, low groan escapes Spike's lips as he slumps back. *Why didn't I finish wanking before I read that?* He looks at the bag. *I should go back to sleep, and set the alarm for four, and not look in that bag. Whatever is in that bag is only going to make my situation worse.* He resolutely puts the bag on the bedside table and sets the alarm. He turns his back on bag and clock and closes his eyes. Images of being arse-up over Xander's knees run in a loop. He moans and opens his eyes. He turns over to look at the clock. 2:17. Bloody hell, there is no sodding way he can wait until five. The bag becomes the focus of his vision. He wonders if there's a ring inside. The thought makes his cock throb. He closes his eyes again, trying to think of football, or Latin, or anything but the thrice-damned bag and what Xander is going to do to him when he gets home. Unless of course, there's a way to get Xander home sooner.

Spike jumps out of bed and begins stripping it at top speed. Once it's remade he grabs the bag and speeds to

the bathroom. In the bag are the same plug and ring they'd been using in L.A. as well as a strange brown bottle marked 'lube,' ankle and wrist restraints made of butter-soft leather, and a silk thong. The lube has a slightly spicy smell, and both it and the restraints have an aura of magic. Spike decides to put the ring on first.

The restraints fit him perfectly, and Spike has to wonder when Xander had them made. They feel good around his wrists and ankles. He opens the lube and sniffs it. It makes him sneeze. He raises an eyebrow at it, but pours some on his fingers and starts to slick himself. It's a few seconds before he feels it. It's *hot*. He whimpers, and starts to work the plug in. When it's almost in, the tingling starts. His inner walls start to contract around the plug, rhythmically. Spike lets out a strangled gasp, and finally cries out as he pushes the plug in to the hilt. He looks at the scrap of blue cloth that's the last thing in the bag. He tries to pull the silk on quickly, but the caress of it on his oversensitive cock makes him shiver, anyway.

He tosses the bag to one side, and grabs the cordless phone, going to kneel by the door. "Hey Spike, what's up?" Xander answers the phone.

"Xanderrrrrr!" Spike purrs. He's not really capable of

normal conversation at the mo'.

Xander makes a pleased humming sound. There's the sound of a door shutting. "I see you've gotten your instructions."

"Mmmm' yessss. I'm ready. You should come home."
Spike moans into the phone.

"Spike, baby, I have a meeting in five. I can't come home until after."

Spike looks at the clock. 3:25. His sharp intake of breath breaks in the middle. "Please, master. I need"

Xander lets out a small 'ooph' sound. They hadn't yet used that word in their play, which had been mostly circumscribed by Dawn's presence. Discarding several options, he grins, as an idea forms. "Okay, baby. Listen. Unlock the door and get back into position. Simi will be there in a few minutes. Do what he says, but you are not allowed to come, understand?"

"Yes, Xander." How it's supposed to be any better to have naked snake-boy here is beyond Spike's comprehension, but he trusts Xander.

"Good. I love you. I'll be home as soon as I can." Xander hangs up.

Spike unlocks the door, and kneels back down. The front of the thong is soaked through, and he can't seem to keep his hips still, making small thrusts into the air. The burning and tingling are driving him to desperation. By the time Simi opens the door he is moaning continuously.

Simi immediately shrugs out of his coat and shirt, and drops the soft-looking linen pants he's wearing. Belatedly shutting the door, he kneels with Spike, pulling the vampire's pale body to his slender, dark one, and kissing him deeply. Spike reaches out for him, and Simi pulls back. "Stay in position until I tell you otherwise." Spike moans and returns his hands to the small of his back. Slight hands cup Spike's ass and grind his silk-covered erection against Simi's unencumbered one. Simi's mouth is warm, almost hot, but his skin is a little chilled from being outside. He trails his mouth from Spike's lips, down his throat, and over his chest, before he pulls back.

Simi stands. "Get up, and go lay face down on the bed. Take the thong off. Put two pillows under your hips, and spread your legs as wide as you can." Spike moans, but

goes to obey. He is compliant as Simi clips his arms and legs to the bed, and slips a blindfold over his eyes. His hips start to jerk when Simi tugs on the plug, and he moans at the sharp slap on his thigh. "If you can't be still, I'll leave it there, and leave you to suffer. Do you want that?"

Spike shakes his head against the pillow, not trusting his voice. Simi again begins to pull on the plug, and Spike bites through his lip in an effort to be still. Once it is out, the burning seems to double, but two of Simi's slender fingers breach him quickly, covered in something cool and soothing. Relief floods through him, and he moans. Simi doesn't stop, but in a few minutes Spike realizes that his fingers are too small to reach everywhere. "Simi, please"

"Hrmmm?" Simi replies, scissoring his fingers.

"Fuck me." Spike croaks, barely able to form words.

There are several moments of silence, but Simi's fingers don't stop. "You do remember that you don't have permission to come, yes?"

Spike nods, "Don't care. Please."

Simi does not wait to be asked a third time. The first slide brings such a rush of relief that Spike almost comes, even with the ring. Simi stills, laying his head on Spike's shoulder blade. "Is that good?"

"Yes." Spike replies. He doesn't realize he's lost track of time until the alarm goes off.

Simi slaps it off. "We must get you ready for Xander's return," he says unclipping Spike from the bed. He removes the blindfold and the restraints, leading Spike to the bathroom. He flips on the shower, and when it has heated, he steps in, pulling Spike after him. "Reach up and put your hands on the wall." Spike complies, and Simi kicks his legs open and begins to wash him, inside and out. When he squeaks Simi washes himself quickly, and begins to pull Spike from the shower.

"Just a mo'. Are *you* allowed to come?" Spike gestures to the reddened cock that is painting Simi's belly with precome.

Simi blushes. "Well, yes, but it didn't seem"

Spike pushes Simi back against the wall with a feral grin.

"I'm sure we'll arrange a way for you to return the favor, someday." He kneels, and sucks the shifter all the way in. Simi starts to keen as Spike guides his hips, until he is thrusting on his own. It takes only a few thrusts until Spike's mouth is filled with Simi's oddly cumin-like flavor. He licks his lips.

Simi pulls him up and kisses him deeply. "Xander is an incredibly lucky man," is murmured against his lips. Simi reluctantly pulls away and flips the shower off. "Dry off, and then bend over with your legs spread and grab the tub. I'll be right back." He pads into the bedroom. Spike is bent over when he comes back and turns the sink on. He starts to turn around. "Eyes forward." Simi says, before Spike has a chance to see anything.

Simi rubs something slick across his pucker before breaching him. This time he feels the burn moments before he smells the distinctive spicy odor. "Fu-uck," he groans, and Simi giggles. The fingers are removed but three return. The burning intensifies. Again the fingers disappear. Only two come back, but this time Simi rubs the concoction into his prostate, which he continues to massage until Spike's knees give out. Simi shoves him forward until his arse is in the air, and begins working a plug into him. A *much* bigger plug. He has to work it in

and out, with frequent lube reapplications, each of which intensifies the burning. "I ""gasp- am so-gasp- going to-pant pant- get you ""gasp- for this!"

In reply, Simi nips him sharply on the arse, and pulls him up. Spike turns to him in game face. Simi just grins unrepentantly. "That's what I was counting on. C'mon. Xander's on his way." He grabs Spike by the hand and pulls him into the bedroom. He quickly puts the restraints back on. Instead of leading him to kneel by the door, though Simi clips his legs to the end of the bed, facing it. Before Spike can ask, he's pulled a length of chain out from under the bed and hangs it over a hook in the ceiling. Anticipating Spike's question, Simi says, "Xander put it in while you were in Rome, so Sosi could show him some things." He quickly hooks Spike's wrists to the chain, high enough up so that it stretches him. Spike glances at the clock. 4:40. Simi slips the blindfold over his eyes again. A slick hand pumps his cock until his hips are thrusting up into it. "I wouldn't want you to forget about me while you're waiting." As the heat starts, there's a quick peck on Spike's lips and the bedroom door shuts.

He doesn't have time to even think a murderous thought. The throb and burn that is centered in his ass and cock

starts to spread. Soon every inch of him is on fire. There's a roaring sound in his ears. He has no idea how much time passes before Xander's lips press between his shoulder blades. The blindfold comes off. Xander kneels on the end of the bed in front of him. "Hi." He smiles ferally at Spike's whimper. His hands ghost over Spike's skin until Spike is shuddering. "Tried to get me to come home early, did you?"

Spike whimpers, and nods. Lying will only get him more punishment. He lets out a soft cry as Xander's wandering hands find his nipples and rub them. There's a pinch, and Spike looks down to see a clip. Its mate soon follows. "Please"

"Nuh-uh," says Xander, lying back to survey his work. Spike notices for the first time that Xander is naked. He fists his cock slowly, his eyes glazed with lust, legs spread wide. "You're so beautiful when you're like this. So completely mine. I'm just going to lay back here and enjoy it for a while."

Spike moans brokenly. "I want to touch you, Xan."

Xander goes on like he didn't hear. "You know, Spike," his hands wander between his legs, stoking his perineum.

"I'm kind of a virgin. I mean, there've been fingers in there, mine and Anya's, but I've never been *fucked* before." He reaches over and pulls the normal lube from the bedside table and slicks his fingers, reaching back down to stroke slickly over his pucker. Spike echoes his moan. "I haven't decided though" he gasps as a finger slips inside, "whether I'm going to let you give that to me" a moan this time, as he adds a second finger, "or if I'm going to *take* it from you." He adds a third finger, and his hips arch up, impaling himself further.

"Xander, Master, anything, please!" Spike is incoherent at this point.

Xander stops. He gets up and crawls slinkily to the end of the bed. "Anything?" He pulls the clips off, slowly, and sucks on each nipple in turn. "Say it again."

"Anything, master. I'm yours." Spike goes limp in the restraints.

Xander gets off the bed and goes to unclip Spike. He removes the restraints, and with some difficulty, the plug. "Go shower. Get that stuff off you. Be quick."

He's never been quite so grateful for vampire speed. He

steps out of the bathroom, still dripping, to find Xander on the bed. He sits up and shifts, motioning for Spike to lie down. He slicks Spike and then straddles him. "Hold on to the headboard, and don't move unless I tell you." Spike whimpers and does as he's told. Xander slides down, and Spike growls as just the head of his cock slides inside Xander's heat. Xander works himself up and down, sliding a bit further down each time. "So full" he moans as he's finally fully seated. Spike is breathing heavily, fighting off game face in the effort not to disobey. Xander opens his eyes and looks down. Touching Spike's rippling forehead, he simply says, "Show me." There's a crunching sound, and Xander is face to face with the demon. "Beautiful." He begins to rise and fall, and Spike moans, the bedframe creaking under the strain of his grip.

"Xander" Spike is breathless, but he manages to murmur.

Xander slows and then stops. "Flip us." At Spike's confused look, he says it again, "Flip us. You on top, now." Spike just nods dumbly and again does as he's told, moaning as he reseats himself. He holds himself rigid to stop himself from thrusting. Xander strokes his back softly. "You're so good for me, baby. You wanna fuck

me?" He grins at the whimper that accompanies Spike's nod. "I'm gonna take the ring off, because I want you to come with me, but not until I do, okay?" Spike nods again, moaning as Xander grips him tightly before unsnapping the ring. Tossing it to the side, he waits for Spike's nod before slowly letting go. "Start slow." Xander thrusts up against Spike. Spike groans and thrusts back. They go slowly and torturously, until Spike starts to tremble. "Baby, in a second, we're gonna speed up," Xander moans as Spike thrusts particularly hard at that. "I want you to bring your head down here," he pulls Spike down to his neck. Spike moans and his fangs elongate. Xander's pulse is close to his lips, and he mouths the place where it throbs and moans again. "Mmmm' I want you to bite me, but not until we're coming." Spike freezes. Xander starts stroking his back again. Spike resumes gently thrusting. "Tell me."

"I trust you." It comes out as a whisper, and Spike shivers.

"So good' Now fuck me."

Spike couldn't disobey if he tried, at this point. His hands are gripping Xander's hips hard enough to leave bruises he knows he'll be punished for later, but he's too far

gone to care. He carefully angles so that Xander's prostate is hit every stroke. Xander's nails rake up his back, and he loses all control. Howling, hips snapping, he feels the orgasm ignite at the base of his spine, and it feels like he's pumping liquid fire out of his cock. Xander's channel starts spasming around him, and his head is pulled back down so that the pulse point is beneath his lips. The taste of Xander floods his mouth, replete with lust, happiness, and love. He only takes a sip before licking the wound closed. With a shudder, he starts to pull away, but Xander won't let go. "Don't want to suffocate you."

"You won't." Spike gives in and settles himself on top of Xander. They're quiet for a few moments. "Is it always that good?"

"With you, yeah."

"So you didn't enjoy your time with Simi?" Xander asks coyly.

"Hardly said that." Spike replies with a snort.

Xander grins. "You know, I'm going to go to L.A. next week to help Angel move. And Sosi has business in Nepal

that Simi can't attend. You and he will be all alone."

"Oh?" Spike can't help but sound interested.

"Mmmhmm. Sosi was wondering, in light of Simi coming here today to help you, if you'd perform the same services for him while Sosi is gone."

Spike grins. "Yeah, I think I can manage that."

Xander hums happily. "I thought so."

"Xan?"

"Yeah?"

"Know where I can get a case of that stuff in the brown bottle?"

The End

The Trial

"You may enter, and begin the Trials." Gesture, disappear. Spike feels a weird sense of dj vu. Well, of course he does, he's done this before. He looks around for a demon, or flesh-eating beetles. He doesn't see any, so he steps a little further into the gloom. Suddenly a long table is in front of him. The light changes, and he can see who is sitting behind it.

Cecily, Angelus, Dru, Buffy, and Xander.

A cold feeling of dread settles into Spike's stomach. *When in doubt, bluff.* " '~llo, all. Didn't expect to see any of you here." He raises an eyebrow questioningly.

"You're on trial, boy." Angelus states. Drusilla giggles.

"Am I? What are the charges?" Spike doesn't like where this is going.

"Oh, my Spike. Always looking for the effulgent ones, only to have them shine on others." Drusilla strokes Miss Edith's hair.

"What she means is that you must prove to each of us why we should have loved you." Cecily sniffs haughtily.

Spike hasn't felt this sick since the first time he tried to feed after the soul. His stomach churns, and he tastes bile he doesn't think he actually has in the back of his throat. "Oh," is all he can say.

They all look at him expectantly for several minutes. Buffy breaks the silence. "Look, some of you may have eternity to sit in this cave, but I don't. Get on with it, Spike."

"For you, I let Glory nearly dust me. I went and got a soul. Then, I died for your cause." Spike's voice is rough. Buffy nods, and disappears.

Angelus clears his throat. Spike looks over at him. "I became a monster for you. I killed a slayer so you would look at me. I took care of Dru so you could traipse around after Darla." Angelus nods as well, and disappears.

"Don't keep me waiting, William." Cecily demands.

"I was a good man when you knew me, and I loved you. Your only reason for not wanting me was that I was unfashionable with your friends." There's no hostility in Spike's voice, which surprises even him. Cecily snaps open her fan, and also disappears.

Dru is dancing Miss Edith around on the table. She looks up at Spike. "Spike, you don't have to tell me. I was your golden apple. But you were not the prince for me." She fades away.

"Oh, I can't wait to hear what you have to say to me, fangless." Xander crosses his arms over his chest.

Spike looks at the dirt near his feet. "There isn't anything I can say, is there?"

Xander and the table fade into the blackness. The demon chuckles behind him. "You must now pay off your debt, vampire." She puts a taloned hand over his chest, and a fiery pain is the last thing he feels.

"Spike, baby, wake up. You're dreaming. It's just a dream, baby, just a dream." Xander's warm arms are around him. "C'mon, Spike. Come back to me."

"Sorry," he croaks out, his voice as rough as if he'd been screaming.

Xander makes a disbelieving noise. "Like either of us has nightmares because we want to." He kisses Spike's

temple. "I love you."

"Do you?" Spike murmurs under his breath.

Xander wrestles him around until his head is on Xander's chest. "That dream again, huh?" He strokes Spike's hair. Fingers finding the mark under Spike's collarbone he traces it. "Well, you're stuck with me. I love you, and I'm not going anywhere."

Spike glances at the clock. "You're getting up in forty-five minutes, and going to work an hour after that," he says, dully.

"That's not what I meant, and you know it." Xander tugs on a curl. "Also, you're wrong. I'm not going anywhere today."

"I don't want you to lose your job because I'm an insecure tosser." Spike starts to pull away.

Xander refuses to let go. Spike could leave the bed if he wanted to, but Xander's not about to let him think he's okay with that. "I quit my job."

"Oh," again, it's the only thing he can say.

After a few minutes of silence, Xander continues.

"Xander, how are you going to keep me in the extravagant style to which I've become accustomed?" He mimics Spike's accent badly on purpose, going for a laugh. Nada. Not even a derisive smirk. "Well, Spike, I'm glad you asked. You see, Angel has agreed to help me start my own custom carpentry business, so I can work while you're out with him, and our schedules will sync up a little more."

"I thought you liked your job." Spike replies, almost quietly enough for Xander to miss.

"I like construction, that's true. But I like carpentry as well, and if the business takes off and I can hire a few people, it might even bring in more money than site supervisor does. None of that is the important part, though." He tilts Spike's face up, and looks into his eyes. "You're the important part. We're forever, remember?"

Spike sighs and presses his forehead against Xander's. "I'm trying."

"Well, we'll give it a century or so to sink in, and then see how we're doing." Xander grins because Spike actually laughs at that. "I love you, and that's not going to

change. Tell me."

Spike pulls back to look Xander in the eyes. "I trust you."

Xander kisses him. "Good. Wanna go back to sleep?"

"Be right back, gonna put the music on." Spike slides out of bed.

"Good idea." Xander yawns, and takes a sip of water from the cup beside the bed. He almost chokes on it when he hears the strains of a familiar song. "I didn't mean for you to hear that yet," he says to Spike as the vampire slides back under the comforter.

"You didn't tell me you could play guitar."

"Well, up until recently, I couldn't. Turns out Sosi's pretty good at it. He's been teaching me." Xander explains.

"Why didn't you want me to hear it?" Spike looks at Xander's chest, avoiding his eye, but at this point, Xander knows exactly what wounded look will be there.

"Spike, what's next Friday?" Xander asks.

"If you think I've forgotten our anniversary, you prat "" he starts angrily. His face clears suddenly. "Oh." *Ever the poet, William* "You didn't forget either, pet, yeah?"

"No," is all Xander says.

"All this for me?" Spike is starting to feel a bit awkward. "I didn't do that much for you."

"Baby, every day I wake up in your arms is a gift." Xander kisses the corner of Spike's mouth, and then his chin. "You're so good to me."

Spike doesn't want to feel reassured; it just sets him up for a bigger fall later. But he can't help but relax.

"I love you."

"I know," Xander replies.

The End

