Originally written as a journal-warming present for savagezeppo

Fair warning...if you're not into Spike, Xander, and Angel getting nakkid, don't read. This one is pretty raw with a vamp!Xan who won't take "no" for an answer.

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

I don't own any of these guys and I don't make money off this. I'm just having some fun.

Trickster

by

Litgal

Part One
“Oh my god, Xander, you can’t be serious!” Willow howled with laughter as Xander stood in the doorway to Buffy’s house.

“I vant to suck your blood,” he replied in a thick accent as he smiled with his fake vampire teeth. The plastic irritated his mouth, but he needed the fangs for the effect to work. Even with the prices at the new shop, his costume options had been limited, so it was either cheap fangs and cheesy cape, or soldier boy. Tough call, but in the end the cape won him over.

“Is that Angel’s shirt?” Buffy was peering down at him, her squinchy face at odds with her elegant satin gown and tumbles of dark curly hair. As she walked down the stairs the layers of fabric whispered and rustled, not that Xander noticed—he was too busy noticing the way the dress pushed up her chest and pulled in her waist.

“Um,” he looked down at the red silk-covered self. “Sorta,” he admitted.

“I don’t even want to know,” Buffy laughed with a wave of a gloved hand. “I just want to get the kiddies hyped up on sugar and then get them back to the school, so I can still have part of my night off actually off.”
“Ve can do that,” Xander agreed in his best Transylvanian accent, gallantly offering her an arm. Buffy just laughed as the three of them walked out the door: the lady, the ghost, and the vampire.

~*~*~*~*~

The smell of demons slammed into Xander so suddenly that he slipped into game face and snarled at the tiny red horned demon that had a hold of his hand. The demon hissed back and pulled his hand free. Xander pushed his velvet cape back as he scanned the street; something was wrong. Why was he here? Where were his minions? And where were all the humans? The street was full of undersized demons darting between bushes and children so small that they were hardly even worth hunting. Xander wanted larger prey, more dangerous prey. Prey worthy of an ancient vampire like himself.

He strode down the dark street with his cape billowing behind him: dramatic, but sometimes it really was all about style. Well, style and killing. And he was ready for the kill as he scented the air. A thin woman dressed as his prey would have dressed a hundred years ago took
one look at him and fainted onto a manicured lawn. She wasn’t worthy.

“Xander!” a woman’s voice called, and he turned to see a luscious red-haired beauty rush toward him. Oh yes, she was worthy. Such a bold and wild woman would be worthy of feeling his passion, at least until her heart stopped beating under his fangs. He smiled silkily as she came skidding to a halt. “Oh my god,” she whispered, and Xander was about to make a comment about her poor choice of words when it occurred to him that she had no scent.

“What are you?” he demanded, his native accent still slightly evident in his deep voice. His arm shot out, but all he encountered was air as his hand passed through her body. Ghost. Xander snorted in disgust. He had no interest in a creature he could neither fuck nor drain. Seeking more interesting prey, he continued down the street.

“Xander!” The apparition tagged after him, but he did not even bother to acknowledge her; she was irrelevant. “It’s a spell, it has to be. Just hold on and I’ll get Giles to fix it, and god Xander, don’t eat anyone,” the ghost called out before fleeing, and Xander couldn’t contain a smile.
Of course he would eat someone...just as soon as he could find someone worthy of eating.

He closed his eyes and deeply scented the night air. Warm. Much warmer than home. And now he could feel the vibration of an active portal to hell somewhere near him. Ah, a Hellmouth. And one as powerful as any he had felt in seven hundred years, ever since that small mousy slayer had closed the one near his own beloved home. Xander snarled at even the memory and for the thousandth time, he wished he had done more to the girl than simply drain her. Alas, he had been but a youth, and youth causes foolishness. The Hellmouth made his bones sing with evil, and maybe it was time to leave memories of the old country behind, because he couldn’t remember feeling this good in centuries.

Xander turned his head as he caught the spoor of prey. Not human prey, but humans weren’t the only things worth hunting. In fact humans often weren’t worth hunting at all. But now a pack of vampires moved toward him. Fledges with the reek of humanity and their own graves still clinging to their demonic bodies: a good snack. And one smelled of enough years for him to no longer taste of humanity. With a small wicked smile, Xander wrapped his fingers around the sword concealed
beneath his cloak as he started down the street toward the evening’s first sport.

“Oi, it’s Angel’s puppy boy,” the oldest of the pack announced with a sneer as they approached one another. Such a strange creature he was, but beautiful in his own way as he moved with the easy grace of a killer and the swagger of youth. Here was their leader, striding at the front of the group. Xander considered playing with his food a bit first. He stood still and allowed the rest of the pack to surround him.

“So, where’s the slayer and her pet vampire?” the blond punk demanded. Such insolence. Xander would take his time to show this young one the error of his ways.

“I assure you, if I had found a slayer tonight, I would not still be hunting,” Xander said with a slight shrug. That stopped the blond. He tilted his head to one side in such an obvious gesture of confusion that Xander couldn’t resist laughing. Oh to be so young, to feel and show such strong emotions. To so foolishly betray one’s hand to an elder.

“What’s wrong with you, mate?”
“I haven’t given you permission to call me a mate, young one. Vatch your manners.” Xander laughed again as the eyebrows nearly lifted right off the young one’s face.

“Someone hit you upside the head then?” Xander watched as the blond’s nostrils flared, and then the face froze as he considered his mistake. Obviously, the young one had confused him with someone else and now he finally sensed the danger. Xander was tempted to laugh again at the frozen expression, but now the danger turned real as the young one would decide to either flee or order his pack to attack. It had been many years since Xander had faced so many and he held his arms loosely as he prepared for the game to begin.

“You’re a bloody vampire,” the young leader said in his thick English accent.

“For several centuries, igen. But you, not so long I think,” Xander confirmed. “If you had been around more than one or two centuries, you would know the danger of challenging me with your…minions.” Xander let the last word fall out of his mouth like a stone, the tone making his contempt for such fledges perfectly clear. One of those minions growled, obviously unhappy with the comment, and Xander had the teaching opportunity he
wanted. His sword arced clear of his cape and sliced off the head of the offending vamp and his nearest neighbor before any of the brainless pack could even react. And when they did react, Xander gave a sharp hiss of amusement as they scattered like dust into the wind, obviously in fear of becoming dust as had their comrades.

“Soddin’ traitors,” the blond one complained, but he stood his ground. Oh, this was turning out to be a good night after all.

“Your friends appear to have left you to my mercy.” Again with the over-dramatic presentation, but Xander had never been subtle. “Such a pity I have none.”

“Don’t suppose I need those wankers to take care of one challenger.”

“You claim this Hellmouth?” Xander demanded, truly surprised now. This one was young, and while he smelled of more strength than a typical youth, he was not what Xander had imagined for the Master of the Hellmouth.

“Yeah, wot of it?” The young one fell back a step as Xander stepped forward, and Xander had to admire how
the body slid into a defensive pose almost elegantly.

“You are very young for such a task. Surely you do not think you can hold the Hellmouth from me, do you?” Xander suddenly realized he wasn’t sure what he wanted. If the young one would only submit, Xander could imagine far more interesting games than mere killing. But he had learned the danger of keeping enemies within his house, so if the creature in front of him refused to submit, Xander would have to content himself with ripping out that long graceful neck.

“I figure I can take care of myself,” the young one snapped back, and oh yes, such interesting prey. Not quite a challenge, but certainly not a willingness to submit.

“And just who are you that you can take such good care of yourself at such a young age?”

“Name’s Spike.”

“I have never heard of you, but then I do not keep track of the younger lines. I am Xander sired by Nusa the Strigoi over 900 years ago. Nusa was the daughter of Dracul and was one of his favorite women, until she tried
to stake him and trapped him in his crypt for a century or so, but that is all past... ” Xander airily waved his hand to dismiss the antics of his own elders, even though he still certainly avoided Dracul.

The blond tilted his chin in a small gesture of defiance. “William the Bloody, turned by Drusilla who was the first child of Angelus,” he arrogantly announced. Ah, so the creature did have some sense of manners after all. Xander considered the young one again.

“And you use ‘Spike’ rather than your true name?” Really, Xander couldn’t understand that.

“Yeah.”

“William the Bloody promises pain and death and what more could a vampire want in a name?”

“Well it’s not my soddin’ name now. Now I’m Spike.” The blond snarled, and Xander controlled an urge to grab the young one and slam his head into the ground, but he remembered being young and caring passionately for things that didn’t matter. He controlled the urge to roll his eyes as he nodded and quickly changed the subject. Let the child have his silly name, Xander had other goals
in mind.

“Angelus.” Xander considered the name; most vampires had heard it, but only as a legend: a horror story fit for creatures of the dark. A vampire cursed with a soul, which was a story Xander had always believed to be made up by the Romany people. “Angelus, eldest of Darla, cursed with a soul?” Xander asked.

“Yeah, mate, that’d be him. Know him then, do you?” Spike narrowed his eyes as he waited for an answer, and Xander was briefly tempted to break open that head and fish around to find the thoughts within.

“I knew Darla, an ungrateful child who turned on her master. Loyalty seems to be a problem within the Aurelius line.”

“Bloody tell me about it,” Spike snorted in disgust, and Xander knew he had found a weakness, only the first of many he planned to find on his newest toy. Xander circled Spike and watched as the younger vampire’s shoulders twitched with an urge to turn but he stood unmoving as though unconcerned by the thought of attack.
“You know I’ll win this fight,” Xander said calmly. It wasn’t a question, and the young one knew it.

“Know you’ll try.” The challenge had finally been issued, and Spike whirled to face him as Xander leapt. He drove out with his right hand and ignored the young one’s attempts to dodge as he thrust forward with superior speed and strength. His hand closed around Spike’s delicate neck, and he kept his forward momentum going even as fingers clawed at his arm and Spike gnashed his fangs. He drove forward until he had the smaller vampire pinned against a tree, helpless and muttering curses. The boy would have been yelling those curses, but for Xander’s hand crushing his throat until only a soft whisper emerged.

With his free hand, Xander pulled his sword and all sound and movement stopped. Huge blue eyes stared, and the scent of fear threaded beneath that of anger. Xander could only imagine the terror of watching death approach, but even now the young one did not tilt his head and beg for mercy.

“And will you submit now, child?” Xander asked as he loosened his hold. He was prepared for any number of moves: falling to the ground in abject terror, pleading for
mercy, a last attempt to flee. He actually was slightly surprised when Spike chose to attack instead. Spike had lowered his gaze when the sword appeared, but now he threw his weight to the side, breaking free from Xander’s grasp and falling to the side even as he struck out hard with his feet. Spike’s body hit the ground, and Xander had to quickly dance to the side to avoid being taken to the ground himself by a child 800 years his junior. But Xander quickly switched to a reversed grasp on his sword’s hilt while Spike still lay on the ground. Even as Spike pulled his legs under him in order to regain his feet and try for another attack, Xander thrust the sword through Spike’s lower back on the right side, forcing Spike back down to the ground where Xander simply drove the sword through Spike’s body and into the ground below.

“Fucking wanker!” Spike cursed. Xander knelt in one smooth motion, reaching down to close his hand around the back of Spike’s neck. His other hand rested lightly on the pommel of the sword pinning his prey to the ground; he could feel the delightful struggles vibrating up through the blade as Spike panted in pain.

“Little one, this is your last chance. Do you submit?” Xander found himself hoping the beautiful boy would
yield since he had no wish to kill the creature, and it had been centuries since anyone had fascinated him enough for him to give up the kill.

“Not goin’ ta play bottom boy again, did the worthless bit for Angelus and soddin’ well not doin’ it again.” The voice was quiet but still amazingly full of defiance. Xander thought for a moment; one of the advantages of age was the patience to put aside the instinct the kill, even when the prey was bleeding and squirming so deliciously.

“Is that what you think you’d be? Vorthless?” Xander rocked back on his heels; in his world any vampire that did not behead you on sight was by that act showing his respect for your worth, but this little one had such strange beliefs. The hand that had rested on the sword reached down to gently stroke Spike’s side, and yes, after three hundred years of experiencing lust as no more than a need to fuck someone, Xander was rediscovering the type of lust that could only develop when one craved a particular partner. He could imagine that delicate and yet muscular body writhing under his own larger frame, bucking in pleasure or fighting in pain.

“I promise you that you have worth to me or you vould already be dust.” Xander tightened his grip on Spike’s
nape, keeping the young vampire’s face turned to the dust. “Of course, if you refuse to trust me, refuse to give yourself to me, then you will have no worth because you will be dust on my boots.”

“Trust?” Spike spit the word out as though it burned his tongue. Xander stood and Spike went silent again, no doubt expecting the end even as he looked up. Xander pulled out the sword and for one moment enjoyed the sight of his prey sprawled on the ground injured and helpless and waiting for the final blow as he smiled down with a grin full of fang.

“Trust me and I place great value on you, my spirited young one,” Xander assured him before sheathing his sword. Spike turned on one side and used his fingers to explore his ripped and bloody shirt.

“Bloody hell, that was my favorite shirt,” he complained, and Xander laughed. Spike twisted and checked the leather coat for damage but the sword had managed to miss it; of course, Xander also understood this was simply a delaying tactic, but one he was willing to indulge. There were no accusations or counterattacks, so Xander suspected that young Spike had just come as close to submitting as he could. Time for harsher lessons
later. Right now Xander had to reward the small steps. He held out his hand and Spike ignored it in favor of clambering heavily to his feet on his own, a hand still pressing his stomach where the sword had come out his front.

Unperturbed, Xander waved dismissively at the tattered garment. “And what would you have me do about that? Give you my own shirt off my back perhaps?” Xander suggested as he stepped forward. Most young vampires would now take this opportunity to run; most young vampires would have died. Spike stood his ground until they stood face to face, chest to chest, and Xander reached up to finger the damaged shirt and to rub the nipple below. Spike flickered into game face and then quickly back out of it, refusing to admit the power that simple gesture had over him, but Xander was a vampire, he knew what it felt like to know that a powerful creature desired you. And he could certainly smell the growing lust as Spike openly considered Xander’s own shirt, red silk flowing over the strong, wide chest of an ancient vampire.

“Hell no, looks like something Peaches would wear,” Spike almost snorted. Almost. “Except the cape, that’s too nancy boyish even for him.” Xander knew nothing of
nancy boys nor peaches, but he could recognize a disrespectful tone. He gave the nipple below his fingers a sharp twist.

“Mind your elders, boy,” he admonished, and Spike’s eyes darkened with lust or rebellion or both. Time for a lesson. Xander reached out and cupped the back of Spike’s head, easily overcoming Spike’s attempts to pull back in order to pull those soft lips to his in a bruising kiss. Pressing his parted lips firmly against those of his captured prey, he opened his mouth, fully expecting a fight, but Spike’s mouth opened easily, and Xander tilted his head slightly so that he could better savour the tastes of his delicious lover-to-be.

So many flavors: the tobacco and whiskey he had earlier consumed as well as the taste of blood still strong in his mouth; the faint taste of a woman, a lover whose scent and taste mingled with Spike’s own in faint wisps; the fear and the rebellion and quite frankly the need to submit...that was all there too. A minion needed no more of his master’s time than it took to give an order, but to make a childe, a companion to survive the centuries, that took care and effort. This one who was clearly worthy of surviving the centuries should still have had his maker to hide behind. He should not have been abandoned, left to
not only survive on his own but to hold the Hellmouth. Xander pulled back, resisting the urge to smile when Spike unconsciously leaned into him to prolong the kiss. Perhaps this pretty toy would prove even more amusing than he had hoped.

“So, will you submit and take your place of safety behind me, your place under me?” Xander’s hand slowly trailed down to the thick denim of Spike’s jeans, possessively cupping the crotch. The answering thrust certainly seemed promising enough. “Or will you fight and die?” Xander still held Spike in his arms from the kiss, and now he pressed his second hand to the wound in Spike’s back where the sword had entered him.

“But Dru…” And again with the refusing to either submit or to challenge. This was becoming tiresome. Xander snarled and curled his fingers hard into the wound, feeling Spike’s trapped body buck up against his with a gasp of pain.

“Enough, child. Either you are mine and you will trust me to do what I want, or I will turn you to dust right here.” Xander watched as Spike’s held tilted just slightly before he raised his head defiantly and looked straight at the vampire in whose grasp he stood.
“Won’t leave her helpless,” Spike snarled softly, and then Xander connected the name. Dru…Drusilla. The childe sought to protect his sire. Such a surprising little hellcat he had found this night. If he ever discovered who had magicked him to this place, he would surely offer them a great reward.

“I offer your sire either my protection or my permission to leave, whichever she prefers. However, I offer that only so long as you please me. If you turn to dust, I shall make sure your sire follows you to hell before sunrise.” Xander’s fingers still probed deep into the wound, but Spike stopped pulling away from the pain as he stilled. The threat to his sire forced his stillness where his own lust and pain and fear combined could not. Oh yes, one simply had to know where to apply pressure and the prey always responded.

Spike paused, and seemed to draw a small, unnecessary breath, “Dru sees…sees things in the future, possibilities. Bloody knows when the hunters are on our tails or when somethin’s comin’, good or bad.” Xander allowed a small encouraging smile to show on his face as Spike made a case for his sire’s life; obviously this one was not corrupted by Aurelius disloyalty. It was a good sign.
A better sign was that Spike had put his head down on Xander’s shoulder, his hands hanging by his side without trying to push away or claw his way free. Xander pulled his fingers out of the wound and brought the gore-covered fingers to his mouth where he began licking them clean even as he held Spike in place with his other hand. He could feel Spike’s body tremble from time to time, either from the loss of blood or from fear that his sire’s existence was still in danger. Either way, Xander enjoyed the helpless tremors and Spike’s scent, blooming with anger and anxiety. So perfect. Well, all but for the hair, which was held in stiff locks that irritated the skin of Xander’s neck as Spike pressed against him. That would have to change. He would feel his pet’s soft hair against his skin and under his hand.

“She vill not come to harm by me, and such a strega…such a vitch…would be a velcume addition to my court, which I seem to have misplaced. But I shall simply rebuild. Sadly, most of your minions are not acceptable.”

“Most of my minions are soddin’ morons,” Spike corrected him, and this time Xander laughed out loud as his free hand wandered down to explore the curve of Spike’s ass.
“Yes, my lovely little hellcat, I think they are.” Xander nuzzled toward Spike’s neck, and his young one submitted in a way much more significant than saying the words: he dropped his head to the side and exposed his neck. Xander growled with delight as he reached up and pushed the coat off Spike’s one shoulder before fistig the neck of the t-shirt his prey wore and casually ripping it down the front. And still Spike stood, his neck bared, and Xander paused to just admire the sight of the young one with the black fabric hanging in tatters, his long white neck exposed and smelling of fear still.

Such a perfect moment. If only there were the remains of a dozen humans at their feet still warm from the slaughter, he would call it a perfect night. But self-denial wasn’t Xander’s strong suit, so after few exultant seconds he plunged his fangs into that pale neck, feeling the body buck in his arms as he drank the blood of his chosen prey. He felt his own rising lust, which was spurred on by his young one’s moans of pleasure at being taken. He drank as he reached down and pressed Spike’s crotch, unsurprised at the hardness under his hand.

Spike was stronger than he expected, but then he’d had
to be without a true master to protect him. Xander reminded himself to watch this one; this was no fledge to be dismissed, but a strong youth verging on becoming a master in his own right. He pulled back as Spike started to weaken and leaned into Xander for support. Yes, Spike needed to learn that; he needed to learn to rely on his new master. Xander ripped his own wrist open and held it to Spike’s lips.

“Drink, my precious hellcat,” he whispered, and a tongue reached out and touched the running blood before the mouth clamped over his wrist and began sucking voraciously while Spike pressed his body to Xander’s own. Xander had expected to give his first punishment, but when the wound closed, his Spike simply licked the remaining drops from his skin without even attempting to open a wound himself. Xander reached out and grabbed Spike by the back of the neck as he pulled him in for another kiss as the reward for knowing his place and his limits.

“Oh god...oh god, oh god, oh god.” Xander pulled back with a snarl. He had not heard or smelled the approach of an enemy, but he quickly realized that it was only the ghost from earlier, babbling. “Oh Xander, what have you done?” she asked with her mouth making a shocked “O”.

“Perhaps your witchy sire knows a spell to rid one of a pesky ghost,” Xander suggested dryly as he slipped an arm around Spike’s waist and used his finger to trace the still red scar of his bite on Spike’s neck.

“Don’t you ignore me, or else you’ll...you’ll end up doing your trig homework by yourself Mr. ‘I just had to go to Halloween as a vampire’.”

“She been bothering you?” Spike sounded somehow confused, but Xander pulled his young one’s body into his, distracting him by pressing into the bite mark until Spike squirmed in pleasure.

“She’s dead...irrelevant.” Xander whispered as she came even closer. This close he could feel the small hairs on his arms react to her presence.

“Oh Spike, he bit you,” the ghost exclaimed. “It’s a spell, it’s not really him.”

“Think I figured that one out on my own, Red,” Spike commented with an almost human snort of amusement.

“Do you know this annoyance?” Xander demanded, and
Spike shrugged at the same time that the ghost made an unhappy noise.

“You are going to be so sorry when this whole spell thing is over, mister,” she insisted as she poked an ethereal finger at him. “And I am so getting Angel.” The ghost turned and ran down the street. Strange town.

“Answer me, little one. Do you know her?” Xander repeated, his tone a little darker than before.

“Yeah, she was one of the slayer’s little minions. Appears the slayer might be havin’ a problem with her followers all bein’ dead one way or another, which is probably why Dru sent me out to kill her tonight.”

“Your sire sent you to kill a slayer?” Xander considered his pet with new respect.

“Oi, taken out two slayers already.” There was a flash of justifiable pride in the young one’s voice. He paused, and finished more thoughtfully, “problem is, this one just keeps gettin’ help from her little band of do-gooders.” Well, that did explain the strength he tasted in Spike’s blood, and he would be even more powerful now with Xander’s own ancient blood flowing through him.
“Ve can deal with the slayer tomorrow. Tonight I vant to hunt and then to show you just how much value I place on your submission.” Xander didn’t miss the flinch on his Spike’s face at the word, but his young one would learn the rules and the joys of submission to his new master… after his new master found a meal. Xander planned on sharing a lot of blood with his Spike, to strengthen both his pet’s body and the bond of ownership.

He would make sure that Spike was strong enough to hunt at his side as they took down this new slayer. Xander salivated at the thought of that rich, nearly demonic blood that the slayers carried, and oh yes, it was time for the hunt.

Part Two

Xander raised his head from the bloody neck of the pirate who had jumped out from behind a large, metal garbage dumpster to attack him. The man’s blood had
been heavy and thick and rich with a diet that never knew hunger or even a meatless meal. So different from back home. The bloodless body, now pale beneath a layer of grime, fell to the ground as he stepped over to Spike who had chosen a gangster dressed in pinstripes, and this truly was a strange town, even by Hellmouth standards.

Xander watched as Spike dropped his own prey to the ground, and then his young one surprised him by stepping forward and seeking a kiss. Xander obliged, grabbing Spike’s jeans and pulling their bodies together so that he could feel young Spike’s erection pressing through the fabric and Spike could feel Xander’s cock, hard with bloodlust and good old fashioned sexual lust. Their mouths met, and Xander tasted Spike’s prey, blood just as rich but with the added flavor of alcohol, which gave the blood a zing his own prey had lacked. Xander pressed harder so that his fangs opened small wounds in Spike’s lips, vampire blood mixing with human blood as Xander started to rub his erection against Spike’s hip. An answering groan told him what he needed to know.

Xander pulled back and Spike stood there with blood trickling down the side of his mouth, his hair hopelessly disarrayed, and his eyes half closed. How funny, his
lovers didn’t usually have that sated expression until after Xander had finished with them. The coat was back on both shoulders partially hiding Spike’s newest scar, but his shirt still hung in tatters from his frame so that his clearly defined chest and stomach muscles appeared and disappeared as the fabric fluttered. Xander was two seconds away from pushing Spike up against a wall and fucking him, but the child’s comments about being worthless to Angelus and his refusal to speak his submission suggested that he had been poorly used. Xander needed to show Spike another side to submission if he planned on trusting the young one in his court.

“I vant a safe place to enjoy my beautiful hellcat in private. Where vould you suggest?” Xander asked, intentionally giving Spike both a choice and a chance to betray him. It was always best to test such things up front.

“Wot? Not goin’ ta do it against the dumpster?” Spike demanded, and his face transformed into that sneer that Xander had seen when the vampire first walked down the street toward him. No wonder the Aurelius line fell; how could a master have a court if he did not know how to inspire and manipulate loyalty?
Xander lowered his voice to a near whisper. “Is that what you vant? Do you vant me to need you so badly that I would press you up against the stone and rip your clothes from your body? Do you vant to feel the rough brick pressing into your face and hands as I drive my cock into you, owning you? Do you vant to know that you can drive 900 years of control out of me because I need to feel you under me?”

Xander showed his game face as he slowly walked forward, forcing Spike backwards over the body and past a mountain of cardboard boxes stacked next to the garbage. As he expected, the scent of lust only intensified. He pressed the length of his entire body onto the smaller vampire, trapping Spike between the immovable brick and his own body. He pressed so close that Spike could smell Xander’s lust and feel his hardened cock and know that he was truly wanted. The sneer melted off Spike’s face and a much more appropriate leer took its place.

“Got a place about two blocks from here, a warehouse not even the minions know about, unless you don’t want to wait,” Spike said in a tone a human might have described as casual, but Xander’s sharper hears could hear the slight breathiness, the slightly raised tone of
desperation and lust. Xander just smiled both at Spike’s intelligence in not trusting his minions and at his willingness to submit to Xander’s own preferences... that was as it should be.

“Lead away, my young hellcat,” Xander said as he dropped a quick kiss onto Spike’s neck, right over the scar. Spike shivered, still young enough to feel such human reactions and instincts. In some this humanity would be an annoyance capable of driving Xander to homicide, but in this strange beauty it was one more facet of delight. He had no way to hide his excitement, or any of his emotions. Xander stepped back, gesturing for Spike to lead the way. With a victor’s smile on his face, Xander followed his young one down the alley littered with large blue dumpsters and scraps of paper that danced in the breeze and gathered in the corners.

Xander looked around the abandoned warehouse and found any number of items that pleased him: chains hanging from the ceiling, coils of rope, knives and various tools laid out on a shelf, a number of tables and platforms including a large one with fairly clean blankets thrown over it. Of course he also saw things he did not like such as the wide open space with dozens of points of entry and windows near the angled ceiling. He preferred
to have something more substantial than darkened glass between him and the sun. A hunter could make survival very difficult by breaking those windows during the day, so Xander knew he had to find more secure quarters before the sun came up. Spike stopped in the middle of the furnished and dimly lit area and turned to face him.

“All the comforts of home,” Xander said pleasantly, unwilling to put his young one on the defensive at such a crucial time. “Now strip.” Xander watched Spike’s eyes go wide and dark, lust and wariness vying for dominance, and Xander respected both reactions. However his new pet needed to learn that the only dominance was Xander’s will. He strode forward so fast that Spike had not managed to retreat more than a couple of steps before Xander grabbed him by the back of his head.

“Bloody hell, can’t do it when you’re playin’ ‘grab the vampire’ with my head, can I?”

“You do as you’re told, child. I vant to see your form, and you will not hesitate to follow my orders.” Xander balanced his stern tone of voice with his gentle hands, one of which tenderly kneaded the back of Spike’s neck and the other of which slipped under the remains of his shirt to explore the taut muscles. Such fear here.
He stepped back and this time Spike moved, tossing his coat to one side before sitting down on the ground to pull off his boots. Xander smiled at the sight of his young one finding an excuse to sit at an elder’s feet. Dozens of tables and platform and chairs, and his newest toy chose to sit at his feet. He remembered the constant fear of youth, but he had been sitting at Nusa’s feet. Pleasing his sire was his only goal, but how many things did this one have to fear? Now all his precious hellcat had to do was please Xander, and Xander would take care of the rest.

Xander stepped forward, allowing his hand to fall on Spike’s head as the vampire pulled one boot off. Rather than try to escape the touch, Spike ignored him as he continued on his task, and Xander understood that too. The child was old enough that he couldn’t submit without feeling weak but still young enough to feel that urge to submit anyway. Xander simply allowed his hand to rest on Spike’s head, and the hair under his hand was prickly and coarse, much like his pet. Xander would change both his pet and his pet’s atrocious hair.

Xander stepped back as Spike stood and unbuttoned his jeans, allowing them to fall to the ground before stepping out of them, and now he stood naked and hard,
his wiry, muscular body exposed. Xander walked around viewing Spike from each side, the smooth buttocks, the well defined shoulders, the corded muscles of his chest and arms. On his third circle, Xander reached out and touched Spike’s backbone, and the young body gave a tremor before stilling again. How long had it been since Xander had taken such a young responsive lover?

“On your knees, little one,” Xander ordered in a soft whisper. He walked around to the front so that his naked and vulnerable cub would be kneeling at his feet while he still wore all his clothes. Psychologically he knew the power of being dressed while another waited naked and trembling for his touch.

“Oi, not little,” Spike complained but he did go to his knees. Xander stood over Spike for several minutes, watching as his pet looked at everything else: the concrete floor, the angled scaffolding in the dim recesses of the warehouse, a wooden chair a few feet away. Finally his pet looked up at him, and Xander allowed himself to smile possessively down. Spike took an unnecessary breath and looked away again. Small steps, Xander reminded himself as he walked over to a pile of chains and considered his options.
“Not little in any way that counts,” Xander agreed. “Perhaps I used the wrong word. I meant little as in young. You are very young, and yet your blood speaks of your power and strength.” He touched the leather of a coiled whip before picking it up. He discarded one length of chain for having links too heavy and unwieldy and he picked up a second length and a number of locks.

“You will sit at my feet and demons will tremble in fear of you. You will never again yield to anyone but me, but you will give yourself to me without hesitation: kill when I order, feed when I order, open yourself to me and beg for my cock when I order.” Xander turned around with his tools and Spike had gotten to his feet again.

“I’ll take Dru and bloody leave the Hellmouth, you won’t hear from us again.” Spike insisted, and yet his cock still stood hard and needy.

“What scares you most, child? Are you afraid of sitting at my feet or begging for my cock?” Xander walked slowly towards his prey, this was a game he knew well, and Spike would not escape him now.

“Won’t bloody beg for anythin’ mate,” Spike snarled as he backed up a step for each step Xander took. Spike’s
bare feet made soft slapping sounds against the concrete while Xander’s boots struck the concrete with sharp staccato sounds. Yes, Xander had everything perfect, and now his pet’s words had told him where to attack. His pet had revealed the weakness, and Xander knew how to apply the right pressure to bring his prey down.

“Oh, but you will, young one. You will beg for me to take you, to use you and fill you so that you know to whom you belong. You will kiss my cock and beg for me to drive into you as you writhe in pain and pleasure and feel such a need to come that you will promise me anything.” Xander insisted as he continued advancing slowly but steadily.

Xander effortlessly pinned the prey with nothing more than his penetrating eyes and his soft voice. “You will open yourself to me on your knees and feel your own cock harden at the thought of me forcing you down and covering your body with my own.” Xander continued to walk forward even as Spike retreated, and his shaking head was contradicted by the hardness of his cock. The scent of lust that now trailed from him so strongly as to overpower the scent of dust from the dim corners of the warehouse. Xander moved his wrist so that the chains he held rattled softly.
“Not bloody likely,” Spike whispered harshly.

“Oh, yes, young one. I have tasted you and I will not give up until I see you on your knees begging, your strength and your power and your beauty offered up to me as your master.” That caused Spike to miss a step so that Xander closed the distance.

“You have been used, taken, forced to beg those who do not see your power, igen...yes?” Xander corrected his unconscious use of his native word because he would not have his hellcat misunderstand him now. They stood chest to chest, Xander looking down into the blue eyes. Spike was still, but Xander sensed his struggle to suppress a shiver. And yes, he was still afraid, even in his growing lust.

“I don’t bloody beg anyone.” Spike shifted into game face just as his body took up a defensive pose, and Xander resisted smiling. The young were so predictable.

“Not anymore. But you vant to. You vant someone to value you, to take you and keep you. Your sire, you are loyal but she does not command you, keep you safely by her side.”
“Dru... Dru’s injured.” Spike no longer retreated but instead shifted into a more aggressive stance.

“And so you have no real sire, and you have no line or master to help you care for her. You have no one who values you enough to chain you and keep you, but instead you are tossed aside. The Aurelius line is full of fools if no one has seen your potential. I see that potential.” Xander dropped his voice so that it was low and soft as he made a earnest promise.

“I will chain you and you will submit to me, my precious hellcat—you no longer have a choice in that. If you care for your sire so much, then I will take the strega into my court and she shall have a place of honor, but do not make this harder for yourself.” Xander truly wished to stop talking and act, but he had to make sure his new pet understood his place, both his helplessness to change his fate and the fact that Xander did value him. He had made the mistake of allowing a young one to grow insecure once, and he had paid that price. He would not be forced to kill his newest pet.

“Won’t be chained, not by Angelus and not by you.” Spike nearly hissed, and again the young one’s fear of the
past tainted the present. Xander kept his voice low and soothing.

“By Angelus, no. He will never again own you, but you have submitted to me, and you will wear chains until you learn to kneel at my feet. I will not have you injured or lost in your foolishness, and I will not have you raising your hands against your master.”

Xander leapt forward and slammed his body into Spike’s smaller frame. Small, but certainly not weak. Xander flinched as a hunk of his hair was ripped from his head and fingernails trailed down his cheek, but such injuries were little more than foreplay as he felt his own cock harden to a point of pain. He grabbed the offending hands and struggled to flip Spike over onto his stomach.

Spike fought. He fought like the hellcat his master had named him, and yet Xander noticed that Spike’s cock hadn’t softened one bit and despite the struggle, the young one made no move to bite without permission. Xander forced his knee under one of Spike’s legs so that the long limb was forced into the air. Holding both wrists with one hand, he reached down, grabbed Spike’s leg, and used it as leverage to turn Spike onto his stomach.
Spike had no way to stop himself from being maneuvered, but Xander did learn a number of new words as he straddled Spike’s naked body and reached for the chains and locks he had brought. He considered fashioning a collar around Spike’s neck and chaining his hands behind his back and to the collar, but he wanted to be able to feed freely from his little hellcat. Instead he chained Spike’s hands behind his back with about six inches of chain between them. Then he stood and used the long trailing end of the chain to pull Spike to his knees while using a hand on his pet’s shoulder to prevent him from rising any farther.

Xander ignored the words that Spike continued to spit and hiss even as he looped the chain around Spike’s waist in order to keep those hands flat against his back. With Spike secured, Xander took a second to bend over and run his hand under the chain around Spike’s stomach, feeling his pet struggling for breath he didn’t need.

He could smell the panic, and so Xander knelt down in front of Spike and used the chain to pull his pet to him for a kiss. Spike snarled and snapped, and one of his fangs caught Xander’s lip so that Xander tasted his own blood. Spike instantly stilled as Xander reached up and
ran a finger over his wounded lip before licking it clean. Xander then did the same for the scratches on the side of his face while Spike watched with fearful yellowed eyes. Xander finished and stood. Almost instantly, the curses resumed.

“You will either be silent, or I will find a way to silence you,” Xander warned, and Spike stilled again. Xander walked away, leaving his chained and naked pet kneeling on the ground and smelling of such despair that Xander could barely contain his lust. At the shelf he pulled off a number of items before returning to Spike who had fallen silent even though Xander could feel those yellow eyes following him around the room.

“On your feet,” Xander ordered, and Spike struggled up, still obviously pulling against the chains with short jerky movements in his shoulders. “Hush little hellion,” Xander soothed him as he stepped close and used the waist chain to pull the helpless vampire into his embrace. Spike’s expression would have cowed lesser creatures, but Xander had always enjoyed the fight, and this one was worth the effort. When he stopped fighting both Xander and his own needs, he would be a child worthy of Xander, killer of slayers and child of Nusa.
With a happy sigh, he lowered his head to Spike’s neck and mouthed the scar from Spike’s submission, and Spike’s body began to press into him. “You’ve displeased me, fought me, used words to curse the name of your master. You know you must be punished.” Xander expected the promise of pain and punishment to excite his hellcat even more, but instead Spike’s cock began to soften for the first time since Xander had ordered Spike to strip.

“Not Dru... just not Dru,” Spike whispered, and Xander pulled back to find Spike wearing his human face. Human faces were so much harder to read and now Spike obviously tried to hide his expression, but Xander could clearly smell the sour stink of fear. He used the waist chain to pull Spike over to a low wood table, and the young vampire’s eyes stayed on the floor as he moved forward without complaint. This was not the type of submission Xander wanted. He growled, and Spike flinched without raising his eyes.

“What about your Dru?” Xander asked.

“Don’t stake her,” Spike almost whispered, and in those words Xander could hear Spike’s fear for his sire as well as his conviction that death approached.
“You think I will kill you.” Xander said as he sat on the table and pulled Spike between his legs.

“Just bloody get it over with,” Spike demanded, but the fire from earlier had gone and his voice was quiet despite his angry words. Xander found himself fighting with the urge to do exactly as Spike asked. He did not want a thing that wallowed in its own fear; he wanted his hellcat back.

“Why would I kill you?” he asked instead.

“I…” Spike looked up, and Xander saw confusion take the place of certainty. Why would his young one be so sure that the only punishment would be death? Xander had never feared Nusa except when his foolishness warranted fear. Spike had done nothing that deserved death, but then again, Spike had belonged to a clan where sanity was rarer than loyalty. Xander suddenly understood.

“Who tried to kill you?” Xander asked.

“Darla.”

“And you had submitted?”
“Yeah. Wanted ta stay with Dru; thought if I didn’t fight her she’d let me stay with my princess.” Xander suddenly understood his pet’s fears. He had submitted to his elders in order to stay with his sire, and his elders had tried to kill him. Normally Xander had no problem with killing those who disappointed, but to accept a young one’s submission and then fail to kill him when you were done? That was simply cruel.

“How old vere you?”

“Been turned thirty, thirty-five years earlier,” Spike nearly whispered. Xander curled his lip. If Darla had not wanted the child, she should never have accepted his submission, and if she had grown tired of him, she would have been kinder to have killed him rather than take one who had known a clan and turn him out like a minion.

Xander reached up and stroked the bare skin of his hellcat’s shoulder. Keeping his touches light, he let his questing fingers explore the curve of the bicep and down to the muscle of Spike’s forearm. He moved his hand to skim over his pet’s pale stomach, touching so softly that he could feel the small body hairs under his sensitive fingers.
Xander watched as Spike’s erection began to recover as Xander’s fingers moved up to touch a small nipple already tightening with lust. Spike gasped and pressed forward as Xander rolled the nipple between his finger and thumb. His pet’s responsiveness made Xander harden. Such strength it must have taken to claim the title of master at such an age, to care for himself and an ailing sire, to escape the murderous hand of Darla. Xander would have that strength unbroken and sitting at his feet yet.

“Darla is a fool,” Xander announced. He would have to get around to killing her later. “You are mine, and I will never release you. I promised you punishment, and you will be punished, but I will never destroy what is mine unless you turn on me,” Xander promised as he pushed Spike out from between his legs and to the side.

The child was obviously too confused for the whip, so instead Xander put a hand behind Spike’s neck and pulled so that Spike was forced to bend over his lap. Then Xander lifted him so that Spike’s upper body lay on the platform next to his master, his ass positioned on his master’s lap. Xander put one hand on the small of Spike’s back, holding him steady and feeling the muscles tighten
and relax. His other hand moved small circles on Spike’s buttocks, enjoying the smooth cool flesh that he was about to heat.

“You won’t raise your hand against me and you will do as you are told,” Xander informed Spike an instant before he raised his hand and brought his hand down so hard that his hellcat shouted a “bloody fucking hell,” before settling back down.

Part Three

“Again,” Xander commanded as he brought the crop down on the backs of Spike’s thighs.

“I serve you; I obey you,” Spike hissed as the crop came whistling down.

“Again.” Thwap!

“I serve you; I obey you.” Another line on the flesh.
“Again.” Thwap!

“I serve you; I obey you.” This time Xander brought down his bare hand to slap the thighs and then he stopped, running his hand over the heated skin and feeling the welts under his fingertips as his hand glided up the shivering thighs and over the pink ass. Spike’s chained hands clenched tightly, and Xander could tell his pet was struggling to hold back his orgasm. Xander unfastened his cloak and brought it around to arrange the soft velvet over the naked body draped so appealing on his lap.

“And I forgive you, my little one,” Xander said as he stroked his pet’s legs through the cape, knowing that the soft fabric running against that sensitive skin would make Spike struggle even harder. At his words, the tension drained from Spike’s form and he sagged, no longer even trying to keep his toes on the ground but trusting Xander to hold his weight. Smiling, Xander closed his own thighs around Spike’s erection, creating even more friction around that fully engorged cock. Xander was just as excited, but in 900 years, he’d learned the tricks of controlling his own impetuous nature. Nusa had seen to that.
“Not bloody little,” Spike snarled tensely, and Xander laughed softly. Someone had made his pet sensitive to such comments, and Xander decided to continue calling his pet ‘little one’ until Spike could hear it without reacting so defensively.

“No, you are not. You are strong and mouthy and full of the foolishness of youth,” Xander agreed, and Spike was left groaning when Xander tightened his thighs even more. Now that body squirmed with a need that had nothing to do with escaping pain. Really he had been quite surprised that Spike hadn’t come yet, but he had to remind himself that this young one had to grow up quickly.

“Of course you have less foolishness in you than I had at my age,” Xander admitted. “If I had tried to hold a Hellmouth at your age, I would have quickly fallen, and I did not take my first slayer until 200. Even at that, Nusa whipped me raw for not coming and telling her that a slayer had invaded our territory.” He paused, tenderly stroking the trembling body under the velvet cape. “I would not choose to have you at my feet if you were not so beautiful and strong.” Xander didn’t miss the small flinch when he mentioned Spike being at his feet, but at least he wasn’t fighting him. A hundred repetitions of ‘I
serve you; I obey you’ had a way of drilling a new reality into one’s head.

“So now you shall show your master how much you have learned,” Xander stood, and Spike all but fell to his knees as he slid off Xander’s lap and down to the cold ground. “I like this sight,” Xander murmured as he reached down for Spike’s head, both petting him and preventing him from getting off his knees. “But you have other duties right now,” Xander gestured for Spike to stand as he walked to a taller table with smooth varnished wood. He contained a victorious smile when Spike followed obediently.

“On your stomach,” Xander ordered, and he expected Spike to hesitate or complain or perhaps even fight. Instead his young one went quickly enough that one might call it willing. He bent over the table so that his cock hung off the edge and then, wonderfully, he spread his legs without even being ordered. Xander stood back and enjoyed the sight of his pet exposing himself, his heavy balls framing that hanging cock that made his pet so needy, and so compliant.

The pink was fading from Spike’s bare ass, but the welts stood out even in the dim light. And as Spike lay face
down on the table, his hands flexed open and closed in a way Xander found almost hypnotic. Spike wanted to act, to move, to do something, but yet he lay waiting, and Xander had never seen a more perfect sight than Spike’s marked backside framed by the heavy cock and the restless, chained hands.

“Impatient, pet?” Xander asked.

“Just bloody bugger me before my soddin’ cock falls off, ya wanker,” Spike snarked, and Xander had to laugh at such impudence even as he slapped a pink cheek hard enough to cause a yelp. “In nine centuries, I’ve yet to see one fall off,” he chuckled as he knelt down behind his pet and tied one ankle to a table leg using rope. He didn’t think Spike would fight him now, but he would not have his pet’s submission undone in a moment of panic. Checking that the bonds were not too tight, he tied a second ankle to a table leg.

Once the ropes secured him in place, Spike started reflexively moving against the bindings, unconsciously testing them. Xander knelt there after he had tied the last knot. He lay one hand against his pet’s thigh, feeling the muscle strain and relax. He slipped his second hand inside his pants, reveling in his own aching need as he
teased himself by rubbing along the slit. How many centuries had it been since he had so desired another? This hunger, this desire, it was intoxicating. Xander leaned his forehead against the back of Spike’s leg for a moment before pushing himself to his feet.

“To whom do you belong?” Xander asked as he let a cool fingertip trace the path of Spike’s backbone allowing his finger to glide over the chained hands when he reached the small of Spike’s back. Spike’s own fingers caught his and held them for just a fraction before releasing him, and Xander continued past the chained hands down to mere centimeters from his ultimate goal. So responsive.

“You,” Spike panted even as Xander licked a finger and explored the outside shape of the small pucker. Turned as a virgin no doubt.

“You know better than that,” Xander admonished as he slapped Spike on the inside of a thigh. Spike bucked his chest up and off the table with a groan even though his lower half was tied in place.

“To whom do you belong?”

“I belong to Xander sired by Nusa the Strigoi, killer of
“Who do you serve?”

“I serve you; I obey you.” Xander rewarded the answer by slipping his wet finger into the pucker, feeling inside for that small bump which could offer ever-increasing need and pressure, or release and pleasure. When he found it, he gently tickled his finger over the surface so that Spike again bucked up snarling with frustration.

“And what do you vant, my beautiful hellcat?” His tone like honey and thick with his native accent, Xander tickled the prostate again.

“Oh bloody hell, just fuck me,” Spike demanded in a quivering voice. Xander had heard that phrased more elegantly, but an invitation was an invitation. He quickly spit-slicked two fingers, driving them in and loosening Spike just enough to avoid major tearing. The young were so hungry when they bled, and he didn’t want to have to go hunt again tonight; tonight was for teaching his new child.
Gasping, Spike started squirming and flexing his hands into fists and quietly insisting, “Fuck me already ya soddin’ wanker, fuck me.” Xander pulled down his own pants and fisted his erection as he lined it up. Xander stopped and closed his eyes as he struggled for control that he hadn’t needed since his own sire’s death, because no one since had created such need in him. Now this rebellious little hellcat with his desperate whimpers and half-hearted struggles and impudent mouth made his cock ache with need, and he was determined to control himself. After all, he was a master of 900 years.

“You’re mine, my precious, and you’ll always be mine.” Xander drove forward, giving Spike no chance to adjust but instead creating heat as he forced his way into the minimally prepared channel. Spike hissed and growled and writhed helplessly as he tried to rub his own cock against the table. Xander used his strength to hold Spike’s hips still as the younger vampire adjusted to his master’s size.

“Mine,” Xander bent over and growled in Spike’s ear, “I decide if you have earned release, and I provide the release, little one. Only me.” The body under him shivered and stilled. Xander pulled back slowly, feeling
the skin of his cock drag against the sides of Spike’s channel until the pain and pleasure reached equal proportions for both of them. He thrust in a second time and his own precum and tiny tears releasing drops of blood provided just enough lubrication for his cock to slide in more smoothly. Xander’s demon rose up demanding the fast and brutal mating of demons, but Xander wanted to torture his toy more.

He pulled back slowly, resting his hands on the table on either side of Spike’s bound body.

“Bloody hell, fuck me already,” Spike demanded.

“Who do you serve?”

“I serve you; I obey you,” Spike instantly responded. Xander rewarded him by slamming back in hard enough to elicit a savage and happy growl.

“So if I want to enjoy your body slowly, feeling my cock surrounded by your trembling muscles as you beg for release I do not grant... if I want this, what do you say, my precious hellcat?”

“Yes, Master,” Spike hissed even as he tried his best to
wriggle invitingly and clamped down hard with his ass muscles. Xander shivered in delight. Oh yes, that was acceptable. Xander didn’t want a minion who mindlessly followed; a young hellion who obeyed and then tried to tempt his master was far more Xander’s style. But his young rebel would have to learn that Xander had enough control for both of them.

Ignoring his own need for a more active coupling, he pulled out of Spike as slowly as he could, feeling Spike’s thighs tremble as he tried to fight the bonds and push himself back onto his master’s cock. Xander laughed again, and honestly he couldn’t remember feeling this good since he had been tied face up on a table with Nusa riding him and forbidding him his own release.

This time Xander pushed in slowly as he put his hands on Spike’s chained arms, enjoying the feeling of his prey writhing beneath him. “You’re mine, my beautiful pet. Will you sit at my feet?”

“Yes,” Spike immediately answered. Xander noticed the ‘Master’ part had disappeared. Oh his little one was going to provide endless amusement.

“And will you kill when I order?”
“Bloody hell, yes.”

“And will you beg for my cock?” Xander started pulling out slowly enough to make his pet tremble.

“Yes, I’ll bloody beg for your cock, so fuck me already. Please. Please fuck me. Fuck me fuck me...” As if a floodgate had been opened, the demand disappeared and Spike begged. Xander had intended far more torture before he allowed either of them completion, but the fierce begging and struggling body shredded the last of his control as Xander released his own demon and did exactly that.

Pulling back out mid-thrust, he slammed into Spike’s body, slipping a hand around so that the force of this drive would push Spike’s cock forward into that tight grasp. Spike reared up from the table, and Xander caught his young lover around the front of his neck, pulling Spike nearly upright as he slammed in again and again, and now Spike was incoherent with need, using his small freedom of movement to press back to meet Xander’s heavy thrusts.

Xander tightened his grip around Spike’s neck, reminding
him who controlled his body as he whispered “come” in Spike’s ear right before burying his fangs in his pet’s neck. Spike roared out his orgasm and jerked madly against the rope and chains as Xander drank deeply... so deeply that for the second time that night Spike leaned against his new master for support.

Xander changed his grip so that he held Spike around the waist as he pulled out of the young one’s neck and ass. Oh to have someone so trusting as to lay with his neck exposed- Xander suppressed a shiver of pleasure. Spike sagged against him with his head tilted back and resting on Xander’s shoulder, bonelessly supple in his completion.

After several minutes of simply holding his new pet—his new lover—still slumped motionless in his embrace, Xander slowly lowered him back down to the table and stepped away to retrieve his cloak and adjust his clothing. He paused, drinking in the sight of his bound pet, ass still welted, come leaking down the insides of his thighs, softly rattling his chains as he murmured in sleepy contentment. Xander smelled that delicious aroma of lust and release, and realized he did not even need the slaughtered humans at his feet to make this moment perfect.
He walked up and ran a finger through the trickle of come before bringing it around to Spike’s mouth. “Taste your master,” Xander ordered softly, and the mouth obediently opened and Spike sucked on the finger that Xander presented, without even opening his eyes.

“Are you mine?” Xander asked curiously. With so little blood in him, Spike would probably not be able to form the coherent thoughts needed to lie. The system wasn’t foolproof, but with young vampires it generally worked.

“Yeah,” Spike agreed without even a hint of rebellion in his voice. Xander smiled triumphantly as he unfastened the silver button of his cuff and pushed up the sleeve.

“Drink, pet, you’ve earned your master’s blood.” Spike’s eyes flashed open at that, brilliant blue eyes that searched his face, and Xander wondered what the young one wanted to see, or perhaps if a question was what he feared seeing.

Xander waited patiently. Spike was his now and he could afford patience as his young one learned to trust him. Spike’s face shifted to his true form before he reached out and sank his teeth into Xander’s arm. Xander threw
back his head and felt his lust and cock respond to the feeling of having another feed directly from him. Why had he allowed one disastrous child to stop him from taking another, he wondered as he smelled Spike’s own lust rising.

“Enough, little one,” Xander said, and Spike immediately pulled out his teeth although he did continue licking the wound.

“Right, goin’ ta let me up then?” Spike asked salaciously with a wiggle of his body, and Xander heard the chains rattle under the cloak. So his little hellcat was ready for more? The young one was going to have to learn that he had to accept affection on his new Master’s terms.

“No, I rather enjoy the sight of you helpless and at my mercy,” Xander answered.

“Thought you didn’t have mercy?” Spike quickly replied, and Xander smoothed the hair away from his young one’s face.

“I don’t.”

“Good,” Spike said, with a ghost of a naughty little grin.
He closed his eyes again, head resting in Xander’s lap, body relaxing into his bonds. Such a perfect child, Xander thought as he sat on the table with his own cock starting to demand release again. Well, what was the point of vampire stamina if not to enjoy it?

Xander was considering how he wanted to use Spike’s body for the second round when he caught the smell. Another master trespassed on his territory. Really it was Spike’s territory, but what had belonged to his pet was now his. Xander slid off the table with a growl, and Spike stiffened.

“Xander?” a low voice rumbled from the shadows under the scaffolding. Xander moved off to the side, keeping his body between the unseen intruder and his pet. He would protect what was his: both his territory and his cherished pet.

Spike raised his head from the table and sighed. “Oi, like my bloody unlike couldn’t get any worse. Got great timin’ there, Peaches.” Xander narrowed his eyes as he prepared for the intruder’s attack.

“Who is out there, little one?” Xander demanded of his pet who still lay bound to the table, covered with only
the cloak.

“That’d be Peaches, otherwise known as the worthless sire of my sire, Angelus.”

Xander hissed dangerously. He would have killed Angelus anyway, but now that he had claimed his hellcat, he had a more personal reason to destroy a vampire who had harmed what was now his own.

“Shut up, Spike,” the voice commanded even as the shadowy figured advanced. “Xander, we need to talk.”

“Donut boy’s not home right now,” Spike answered.

“Shut up, Spike,” Angelus repeated as he now stepped out of the shadows, and Xander could see that the large vampire had not even switched into his demonic form, a mistake that would be his last.

Part Four

Angelus still had his hands up in some human gesture of surrender, but among vampires there was only one way to surrender, and putting up one’s hands certainly did not qualify.
“You will not use such a disrespectful tone when speaking to my companion and my chosen childe,” Xander said as he eased forward. Like a foolish youth, Angelus’ eyes went to the table, and at the word childe, he growled menacingly. Xander refrained from laughing at such pointless bravado.

“Oi, that’s bloody right, watch your tone, Peaches,” Spike added from his side of the room, and Angelus now turned to look more closely at Spike. His glance froze at the rope securing Spike’s legs to the table, and that was the moment Xander needed. He lunged forward expecting to close his hand around Angelus’ throat just as he had with his Spike, but Angelus was more prepared than Xander counted on. Angelus gracefully sidestepped the attack and spun to launch one of his own. A younger vampire would have gone sailing by, stumbling past and presenting his vulnerable back, but Xander was not a young vampire. He pulled back and braced into the blow so that when Angelus’ bulk hit him he literally tossed the larger vampire to the side.

Xander smiled wickedly at the sound of Angelus falling on one of the many platforms with a nasty crack. Before Angelus could scramble back to his feet, Xander threw a vicious kick, catching the fallen vampire on the side of
the head. Angelus went sprawling onto his back with his head making a sickening thump against the cold concrete floor as the body went limp. Xander went for the kill, leaping onto Angelus, but realized one second too late that his prey had once again deceived him.

Moving with the savage grace of a predator, Angel twisted out of the way and neatly aimed his stake for Xander’s heart, but Xander brought his arm down in a sweeping arc and deflected the blow. Of course, he still found himself retreating with a stake in his stomach as Angelus regained his feet, but better than a stake in the heart, Xander mused as he pulled out the offending wood. Ignoring the wound which was already healing, Xander twirled the stake in his fingers as he laughed confidently.

“You seem to have lost your weapon,” he pointed out, but Angelus simply circled with a low growl in his throat. Xander watched the larger vampire warily circle, shifting enough to keep his newly acquired stake poised for the kill. This one had patience and skill, but Xander was growing tired of the game. The fighting and the smell of blood had fired his lust. He needed to go back to his pet. He risked a glance that way, and his young hellcat had managed to stand, his legs spread and tied to the table
legs and his arms chained behind his back. Xander found himself both amused by and proud of the expression of concern on his pet’s face. Didn’t his pet trust him to take care of one abomination of a vampire?

Xander may have stolen a look at his beautiful hellion, but he had not taken his attention from the predator stalking him. Angelus obviously had missed that memo because the large vampire rushed him. Xander refrained from going for the heart. Xander danced back as Angelus hissed a Gaelic curse, but the more he fought this powerful creature whose moves included the control of a far older vampire, the more Xander suspected that killing such a beauty before enjoying him would be... unforgivable. Instead he feinted to the side and sunk the stake deep into Angelus’ thigh, pulling it out in a flash as he leapt back across the room.

“That is the vay one fights with a stake. One must never actually let go of the weapon,” Xander informed the snarling Angelus who now leaned heavily against an unstable wooden chair that creaked so that Xander could hear it from 12 feet away. Thigh wounds hurt; this Xander knew from experience. However, Angelus only snarled once before shaking his head and returning to human features.
“Xander, this isn’t you,” Angelus held up a hand, palm first, and Xander fell back in confusion. One minute he was battling a demon worthy of fighting, the next he faced a human who seemed to have lost all survival instincts and common sense. No wonder his little hellcat had so much trouble trusting himself or his new Master.

“But these are my hands, my arm, my legs. I fail to see what is not mine,” Xander commented sarcastically as he held his arms wide as though to display how each part of him was Xander. Angelus ignored the bait.

“You’re not a vampire, Xander. This is a spell, and Giles is going to fix it.”

“I am not the one who seems confused about who he is. About what he is,” Xander pointed out as the now human-faced Angelus walked towards him with that palm up gesture that no vampire would ever use.

“If the slayer’s dead little minion sent ya to protect the boy, it’s obvious ya aren’t needed, Peaches,” Spike snapped, and Xander realized that his pet was trying to draw Angelus’ attention, a dangerous move considering his helplessness in chains.
“She’s not dead,” Angelus snapped back.

Spike snorted. “She’s a soddin’ ghost, means she’s dead.”

“Hush, childe,” Xander chided softly. Angelus turned his attention back to Xander, which Xander considered good since his young one could not defend himself.

“Xander, think about it, until tonight you were human,” Angelus argued. At that, Xander truly laughed, and Angelus’ expression grew angry and pinched as he stood with one outstretched hand, and angled his body slightly. Still prepared for a fight, Xander realized.

“I haven’t been human since my sire turned me, to gain revenge against my father for siding with King István,” said Xander loftily. “That was a number of years ago since, as I recall, they were arguing over the new laws that condemned the pagans who worshipped the vampyra as gods.” That got a shocked look. Xander took a risk and turned his back to Angelus as though the vampire meant nothing. Mid turn, he suddenly spun around and attacked, grabbing that foolishly outstretched arm and pulling so that Angelus stumbled forward. Xander neatly slipped the stake between two
ribs, puncturing a lung and then retreating as Angelus hissed and slid back into game face.

Normally Xander would consider such a young master below him, but Angelus with his sudden shifts from deadly, confident predator to tentative peacemaker made him difficult to judge, and therefore difficult to defeat. Of course, Xander had no doubt that he would win, but he did start to consider which prize he wanted to claim, so he merely waited for Angelus’ next move, circling.

Angelus fought his way up to one knee, one hand pressed against the fresh wound in his side. His injured leg was clearly slowing him down... at least, so it appeared, but Xander wasn’t going to be tricked into attacking too soon. Not again. Instead he made his next circle wider. He had earlier abandoned a long chain and a whip when he had chosen to take his pet over his knee. Now he returned to that table. Never taking his eyes from his opponent, Xander draped the chain over his shoulder as he took the whip, letting the long tail drag in the dust on the ground. He smiled at the thought of what his Nusa would have done to him for abusing a good whip by dragging it on the concrete.
“Xander, we just need to wait for a while until Giles can undo the spell,” Angelus said reasonably. “This isn’t you.”

Xander looked down at him, raising his chin proudly. “I am Xander sired by Nusa the Strigoi, killer of knights. I have tasted the blood of five slayers and killed the royal dragon of the Shu-hi. My sire ruled her own Hellmouth, and now I claim this Hellmouth as my own, just as I claim Spike of the line Aurelius, childe of Drusilla as my own.” Xander spoke the words slowly, carefully so that Angelus would know who was about to force him to submit. On the last word, he struck out with the whip, aiming for the back of Angelus’ neck.

When Angelus grabbed the whip and tried to pull it from his hand, the trap closed. The chain which he had so carelessly draped over shoulder swung around and hit Angelus on the side of his neck hard enough to knock him off his feet with a grunt of surprise, and this time Xander struck.

He grabbed the arm from Angelus’ uninjured side and looped a length of chain around it even as Angelus struggled to pull himself free. Xander slipped a lock through the links and snapped it shut while keeping hold of the chain’s trailing end. He reached down to grab for
Angelus’ other hand, but the vampire again showed control beyond his years. Instead of panicking, Angelus threw himself backwards to land on that dilapidated chair, breaking it and providing himself with a new set of weapons: sharp, jagged, wooden weapons.

Xander wasn’t going to lose his advantage by getting in a fight in such close quarters. The oldest and wisest could sometimes get caught by a lucky strike with a stake, and Xander was too old and too wise to ignore that danger. However, Xander did not release the chain either. Angelus would be his. He darted back and used it as a leash, pulling the vampire off balance with unpredictable jerks that made Angelus move exactly where Xander dragged him. Angelus didn’t go easily; he snarled and counterattacked, swinging his makeshift stake dangerously close. One last quick dart backwards, and Xander stood below a draped chain. He reached up, lock in hand, and clicked the wrist leash to the chain dangling conveniently from a beam overhead, the padlock closing with a snick just in time for him to jump backwards and out of reach.

“Bloody hell,” Spike softly cursed, and Xander didn’t answer his pet. Now was the time for another type of fight all together.
Xander stepped back to consider his captive in the dim light of the warehouse. Angelus’ hand gripped his stake, his knuckles turning white. Xander wished for a moment that he had a way to winch up the chain, to watch Angelus pulled to his toes and struggling to keep his balance. Xander lightly palmed his erection through his pants as he considered the pleasure of watching such a sight, but it was not to be this night.

Instead, Angelus had enough chain to stand with his hands at his waist as he kept his defensive stance. He would be better off submitting, begging to be taken into the court of his elders, but Xander looked at those furious eyes that followed him and smelled the anger. No, this was not one who would submit, and if he did play at submission in order to save his neck, he would not submit for long. This was a toy to play with and discard. Here was a body that would move as gracefully under him as it had in their fight, and Xander knew exactly how to make that happen whether or not Angelus volunteered.

Xander walked over to the shelf and bent down to retrieve the dusty crossbow he had seen earlier. Weapon in hand, he walked back to the table where his pet stood.
He ran a hand across Spike’s back before he stooped to pick up the fallen cloak without saying a word. Talking was for those who needed to cover their fear or their incompetence: Xander had no such need.

He sat on the table and reached out for the back of Spike’s neck, pulling his pet back down into his lap as he once again draped the cloak over that bound and naked body. He would not expose his pet to Angelus’ gaze, even if his pet had exposed himself by allowing the cloak to drop. The silence fell heavy, and Xander understood the mute war between himself and Angelus. Angelus was trapped, unable to hide from the crossbow. Xander calmly waited to hear Angelus’ plea so that he could begin to understand how to put pressure on his new prey. Oh, Angelus would never replace his Spike, but he could be entertaining for a night or two before Xander tied him to a tree and left him for the sun.

Xander put the crossbow on the table next to his leg and softly stroked Spike’s cheek. His hellcat’s body was tense and rigid, his head still angled up and staring at Angelus. Xander put gentle pressure on Spike’s head, and Spike slowly lowered his head to Xander’s lap. Xander didn’t miss the low guttural snarl from Angelus, and that was one weakness with which to amuse himself. Xander
pulled the cloak down some so that Spike’s ass was covered but Angelus could watch Xander caress his pet’s back and shoulders. Oh yes, that was a weakness. Angelus pulled at the chain as though he could rip it from the ceiling.

“Xander, you’re going to hate yourself when the spell ends and you wake up,” Angelus snapped.

“No, Angelus, I will not,” Xander replied calmly, and there was another weakness exposed. Angelus assumed that anyone who so cherished Spike would be sorry later. Clearly the Aurelius master either blamed Spike for some great transgression, or perhaps blamed himself in some way. The second fit better with what he knew of Angelus’ curse. Besides, while Xander could imagine Spike harassing and annoying his elders to distraction, he could not imagine such a pet inspiring such hatred. He simply continued stroking the lovely back and watching Angelus’ increasingly desperate struggles.

“I go by Angel. You know that, Xander.” Xander didn’t even bother answering that one. The entire Aurelius line was obviously infected by insanity, not that he cared in the case of his pet. Right now, though, he had a cock hard with lust and two powerful young vampires with
whom to play. Spike either feared Angelus or feared disappointing Angelus. For his part, Angelus hated that someone else touched the fierce little hellcat, and yet had never managed to hold the younger vampire’s loyalty. How to make use of such information?

Xander picked up the crossbow and aimed it at Angel while still stroking Spike’s side. Yes, pointing the weapon one handed was rather arrogant and a tad flashy, but Xander had always been famous for being both. Sometimes it really was all about style.

“Toss the stake away, Angel,” Xander put a mocking emphasis on the name. Angel stared at him, silent and immobile for several minutes. Xander returned the stare, coldly willing to turn the pretty toy to dust, but certainly hoping he didn’t have to before enjoying full use of it. Finally, Angel tossed the piece of wood far out of reach. Xander visually checked for any other possible weapon, but the overhead chain was far enough from any table or platform or chair. Xander slid out from under Spike’s head and knelt down to untie the ropes.

“‘Bout time, losin’ circulation here,” Spike complained mildly. Xander reached out and pulled the cloak off before using the chain that bound Spike’s wrists to help
him stand. Spike’s cock bobbed comically despite his earlier release, and Xander could imagine the pleasure one would feel at seeing two masters fight over oneself. With a new game in mind, Xander guided Spike over towards Angel, keeping him just out of reach before stopping him.

“Spread your legs,” Xander ordered, and Spike obeyed after a quick glance at Angel. Both vampires needed this lesson. Xander moved up behind Spike, pressing his clothed body against Spike’s back, and Spike’s trapped hands moved for his belt. Clever fingers worked into the waistband of his pants, and Xander allowed his pet this subtle disobedience even as he reached around and ran a hand over his beauty’s side and stomach.

“To whom do you belong?” Xander asked loud enough for Angel to hear. Again, the momentary flash of something... fear perhaps or perhaps just a reluctance to allow his former master to see him obedient to another. Of course, Spike’s position was already quite clear as he stood with his legs spread and his erect cock displayed, leaning back into Xander’s embrace and allowing his new master to support much of his weight.

“I belong to Xander sired by Nusa the Strigoi, killer of
knights,” Spike answered. He began quietly, hesitating over the word “belong”, but by the end, Spike’s voice was not only strong but also defiant. Yes, let the young one defy his old master as he demonstrated loyalty to his new one. Xander rewarded his pet by running his fingernails across Spike’s stomach just hard enough to leave subtle trails of red on pale skin that made his pet shiver happily.

“Who do you serve?”

“I serve you; I obey you.” No hesitation at all that time. Xander reached around to caress the head of Spike’s cock, making the younger vampire moan and thrust while Angel snarled and pulled at the chain again.

“What is your line?”

“Turned by Drusilla granddaughter of Darla, favored childe of the Master of the Aurelius line; sired by Xander childe of Nusa the Strigoi, daughter of Dracula, Master of the Dracul line.” Xander sneered at Angel who had nearly dislocated his arm at that declaration. Angel thrashed and pulled at the chain so that the links rattled loudly and dust from the beam overhead drifted down. His pet would always have the blood of the Aurelius, but he
would accept Xander as sire and teacher. The demon within this soul-maddened vampire would have to learn to live with that loss.

“Spike, don’t ye play this game, boy.” Xander felt Spike’s back go stiff at the threat even though he continued to move into Xander’s hand as though the words meant nothing to him. Oh, so the Master of the Aurelius line cared. Xander would have wept at the sheer pathos of the situation: a sire who wished to sire, and a childe who wished to be a childe and neither willing to turn to each other. He would have wept, except for the fact that he couldn’t care less about the tiresome insanities of the Aurelius line. Angel’s incompetence meant that Spike was now and would always be his.

“If you truly have a soul, if you relinquish all claims to your vampire heritage, why do you care who Spike claims as sire?” Xander asked with feigned surprise. “You have given up on being a vampire, yes?” Angel’s only answer was a growl, but Xander didn’t expect an answer. He could smell the animal blood infecting Angel... blood that proved just how far Angel would go to deny his nature. However, he could also smell Angel’s steadily growing lust which proved no vampire could deny his true nature forever. Of course right now he could also smell Spike’s
nearing orgasm.

He pulled his hand back, and Spike nearly lost his balance trying to continue thrusting with his legs still spread and his arms chained behind him. Xander quickly wrapped an arm around Spike’s waist and pulled the smaller vampire back against him even as Angel went into game face. Xander then learned the depths of his hellcat’s sadism as Spike tilted his head to the side in clear submission, leaning his head back so that the front of his neck curved out. It was a gesture no vampire would make lightly, and Angel yanked the chain so hard that Xander could smell the blood from where he had stripped skin from his wrists. Even the smell of fresh vampire blood couldn’t mask the lust that bloomed in Angel’s scent when Spike submitted. If his pretty hellion wanted to help torture Angel, he could arrange that too.

“Go to the table,” Xander ordered as he returned to the shelves. He retrieved the equipment he needed and turned around to find Spike bent over the side of the table so that Angel had a perfect view of his ass. Not surprisingly, Angel couldn’t take his eyes from it. Xander chuckled softly at the childish antics. He walked to his pet and slapped him hard on his already-welted ass.
“Oi, watch the goods,” Spike complained loudly. Give the boy an audience, and that attitude really became quite entertaining, Xander realized. Xander didn’t respond as he unlocked first the chain around Spike’s waist and then the loops around each wrist. Spike pulled his wrists around to the front where he rubbed them, and Xander gestured at the table.

“Face up,” he said with the ropes from the shelf in hand. Spike gave him a dirty leer complete with a cocked eyebrow.

“Got a bit of a kink there, do ya?” Spike asked.

“I’m a vampire, little one. Ve all have kinks.” Xander replied as he tried to stifle the urge to laugh. Really the boy needed to learn to obey faster, but Xander couldn’t get upset when the delays were so amusing. Xander gave Spike a swift swat on the leg, and Spike hopped up so his butt was on the table before he swung his legs to the side and lay down.

Xander gave Angel an appraising look before walking to the end of the table and positioning Spike: legs wide open, butt about a third of the way down the table, arms stretched over his head. Xander spared a single touch
down the side of Spike’s rigid and tight cock which twitched with lust. Xander then quickly secured each of Spike’s limbs to a table leg using rope so that his pet would hold position. Spike pulled slightly against each of the restraints before relaxing.

Xander walked to the far side of the table so that he could stroke his pet’s vulnerable and helpless body as he watched Angel who still fought the chain. At least he fought the chain between bouts of standing perfectly still staring at Spike’s bound and aroused body.

Xander watched, fascinated as the cycle continued. Angel would stare for several seconds, the musk of vampire lust heavy from him, and then he would jerk his eyes away as though burned and stare somewhere else. Xander could imagine the pain his young one had suffered through such apparent rejection. To have a sire not want one, not desire one, not throw one down on the floor and use one... such cruelty. And while cruelty to a human or one’s enemies was to be admired, Xander did not understand how Angel could be cruel to one who had called him sire. The Aurelius line truly was flawed beyond saving.

“So, do you vant to hear the game?” he asked with a slow, sinful smile.
Part Five

Angel stood silent, a wary expression on his face as he backed up as far as the chain allowed. Oh yes, he was just now starting to realize how much trouble he was in, and Xander took a moment to enjoy the expression of trapped panic.

“I’m not in the mood for games,” Angel answered without looking directly at him. Right now Angel appeared to be fascinated with the ceiling.

“This one you will like. If you vin it, I keep you around for another day.” Xander allowed his hand to trail down his pet’s inside thigh making both of his captured prey groan. So Angel’s attention was not so distracted after all. “Of course, if you lose the game, I’ll pour holy water down your throat and watch you writhe in agony until the holy water travels to enough cells in your body for you to turn to dust.” Angel’s head snapped down and Angel stared at him, fear evident in his smell for the first time.
“Xander, you do not want to do this. Torture... torture is not something you want to remember.”

“Of course it is. I remember a villager who offended my Nusa; I tortured him until he begged me for mercy and offered to eat his own genitals,” Xander replied dismissively. “So, do you want to play or shall we move straight to the holy water?”

“Xander, please...” Xander cut off the plea with a single gesture of his hand.

“Play— holy water. Your choice.” Xander stared at Angel, wondering for the first time if Angel would truly chose final death over submission, but in the end, Angel’s eyes dropped to the floor.

“Play,” Angel softly said. Xander smiled benevolently as he left his pet and stood just outside of Angel’s reach.

“The game is easy. If Spike comes first, you win. If I come first, I win. If you come first, it’s a draw and we play again.” Xander explained the rules and then held up a short chain he had retrieved from a nearby table. “Hands behind your back,” he ordered with a smile.
Again Angel stood silent and stared as if waiting for Xander to change his mind, his face frozen into an expression of indifference that didn’t match the scent of panic and lust he sent into the still air of the warehouse.. Xander simply held up the chain and rattled it, and Angel finally turned around putting his hands behind his back. Xander quickly locked chains around Angel’s hands and then unlocked the original chain from the beam before leading Angel over to the table. Spike waited there with the most deliciously confused expression, eyes never leaving Xander’s face.

“Isn’t he beautiful?” Xander purred as he stopped Angel at the end of the table so that they could both admire his hellcat’s strong body laid out like an offering. “Strong, intelligent, graceful... sarcastic.” Xander could now smell the lust coming from Angel in waves, and he knew Spike could as well. Besides the obvious entertainment value, this game had two goals: Angel would have to face his guilt, and Spike would learn that he was worth wanting. Sometimes Xander amazed himself with his good ideas. However, Angel seemed less enthusiastic if the silence was any indication, and Spike’ erection was definitely lagging.
“Hmm, I think you’re starting at a disadvantage,” Xander said mildly as he unfastened Angel’s jeans and pulled them off. The underwear went next, and now Angel couldn’t pretend that he didn’t notice Spike’s beauty. Angel’s cock jutted out, fully erect, and with the exposure of the cock, the smell of Angel’s lust almost overpowered Xander.

Xander nudged Angel to move him forward, but the large vampire stood transfixed, cock twitching as his eyes roamed over Spike’s bound and naked form. Xander had thought that the contest would be between his pet’s release and his own, but now he considered that Angel might actually earn a draw. Of course, he wouldn’t mind repeating this particular game, so he could certainly accept that result.

Xander nudged Angel again, harder this time, and Angel rocked forward and then rocked back without losing focus on Spike or acknowledging the tacit command. “Move,” Xander finally ordered with a third push, and Angel stepped forward mechanically. Xander used chains to secure Angel’s feet to the table legs so that he stood with his legs open, exposed and vulnerable at the end of the table.
Like Spike earlier, Angel started to rub his erection against the edge of the table, and Xander brought Angel back to reality with a sharp slap on the ass. Instantly Angel froze, and Xander could smell a wave of shame replace the earlier lust. Strange vampire. Xander unlocked Angel’s wrists, and Angel’s hands just fell to his sides.

“Strip,” Xander ordered. He didn’t need Angel naked for this, but he didn’t want Angel dressed while his own pet was laid out without any clothes. Besides, the feel of Xander’s pants and silk shirt against Angel’s bare skin would remind him of his place, and Xander found himself mildly surprised when the order caused Angel to harden more.

Perhaps Spike wasn’t the only one to miss the games one’s elders inevitably played with one. Angel unbuttoned his shirt and dropped it to the ground behind him, and now Xander could see the strong body with which Angel had been blessed. He had heard of how this one had taken his name from a victim who described him as having the beauty of an angel, and Xander agreed. The vampire before him had the classic lines Xander had seen in the artwork of Italy, where five centuries ago artists would have paid to sculpt his body into stone.
Now that Angel stood naked with his legs chained open, Xander knew that he would have to move carefully to avoid winning this game. This was a vampire worth fucking, even if he was an abomination that needed to eventually be destroyed. It’s just that Xander found himself revising that date farther into the future with each second that he saw that strong, body chained and vulnerable. However, his pet needed convincing. Each time a wave of shame would flow from Angel, his own pet’s erection would wane.

Xander turned his attention to his young one, who lay with an expression of indifference directed at Angel, but Xander knew that Spike was far from indifferent. “To whom do you belong?” Xander demanded as he laid a hand on his pet’s tense arm. The muscles relaxed under his fingers, and Xander felt his cock react to such willing obedience.

“I belong to Xander sired by Nusa the Strigoi, killer of knights.” Spike looked at him with wide eyes that bordered on panic.

“And I give you the gift of your previous sire’s submission,” Xander said quietly as he now stared right
at Angel and stroked Spike’s forehead. Another trip to that shelf on which Spike had laid out so many toys. Xander smiled at the thought of the many weeks it would take him to make use of them all. This time, Xander selected a short chain that had heavy, thick iron manacles attached.

Angel now turned awkwardly to watch him, his legs open and vulnerable and his body twisted. Xander smugly held up the manacles as he returned to the table. He expected a fight, but Angel sighed heavily and held out his hands even as he rolled his eyes. Nevertheless, Xander felt the slight tremble in those arms. Almost sorry that Angel had not fought him, Xander quickly snapped the manacles on Angel’s wrists as the tall vampire silently watched.

Xander ran his hand down the length of Angel’s arm, stopping at the manacles before he took that connecting chain in hand, controlling Angel’s hands and controlling Angel as he stepped behind him and leaned in so that Angel was trapped between the table and Xander’s own bulk. At first, Xander could feel those muscles tense as though waiting for the attack, but Xander simply held the chain in one hand while allowing his free hand to explore whichever parts he could reach: a hip, a curving shoulder, a patch of curled coarse hair, a rippled
Eventually Angel’s muscles began to relax, and Xander stepped back as he went for the next toy. Yes, Angel wanted his freedom and was a master who would not submit for any length of time, but Xander could feel the threads of what had once been Angel’s need to submit to his own sire. He could sense the shadow of that need, and he could use it to manipulate Angel, even if he could never truly trust one who had been corrupted with a human soul.

Stopping at his pet’s side, Xander lowered his head to drop a kiss on his hellcat’s lips.

“My childe,” Xander whispered, and Spike’s body shivered in its bonds.

“Is someone goin’ ta soddin’ do something? Gettin’ bored here,” Spike complained, but at the same time he licked his lips and smiled with the tip of that tongue still visible. Xander groaned in desire, and Spike shifted into game face without moving that tongue. Oh yes, Xander was going to have to show a lot of restraint with two such perfect creatures naked and waiting to serve him.
Xander took a short length of chain and turned back to Angel, reaching up and caressing Angel’s neck before encircling it with the heavy chain. Angel refused to look at him, stonily focusing instead on the distant depths of the warehouse, but Xander was patient. He simply pulled up on the chain connecting the manacles, padlocking the center link from the manacles to the makeshift collar so that Angel’s hands were held awkwardly close to his head.

“So beautiful,” Xander said as he ran a hand down Angel’s broad back before stroking the inside of Spike’s thigh. When he found the wizard or witch who had brought him to his Hellmouth, Xander fully intended to reward that person for providing him with such treats. He backed away from the table so he could better enjoy the sight of the two bound and naked vampires.

“Angel, you may do anything you like to ensure Spike is the first to come and earn yourself my protection for the evening. Meanwhile, I will be amusing myself.” Xander stepped back and unzipped his own pants, allowing his erect cock to appear, startlingly pale against the black fabric. Xander thumbed the bead of precum at the slit, and smoothed it down the shaft. Angel looked over, eyes darting down to Xander’s erection, and when Angel
made eye contact again, Xander gave an evil little grin. So far, he was well on his way to winning.

Angel looked down at Spike with an inscrutable expression for several moments before he wordlessly bent over so that his body rested on the table between Spike’s legs, and his head lined up with Spike’s groin.

Spike hissed in pleasure when Angel’s tongue touched his cock, and Xander squeezed the base of his own cock to keep himself from ending the game as he watched Angel take his pet into his mouth. “Bloody hell, yes,” Spike gasped, and Xander squirmed at the sight of Angel’s cheeks puffing out as his mouth filled, sucking Spike’s cock down to the root.

Xander watched as Spike writhed to a chorus of “yes” and “hell, yes” and “fucking hell, yes.” Finally, Spike reared up against the ropes, mindlessly driving himself into his previous sire’s mouth. Now those chained hands came into play as Angel pushed Spike’s hips back down, holding him still as he pulled up so that only the head of Spike’s cock was in his mouth. Xander could only imagine what Angel was doing with his tongue to make Spike moan and thrash on the table even harder.
Xander took a step towards the table and Angel stopped with Spike’s cock still filling his mouth. Brown eyes turned toward Xander, glaring at him with the fire of lust and fury as Spike complained and threatened imminent death if someone didn’t get him off. After a brief moment, Angel started again, his lips stretched in an ‘O’ as he slid up and down on Spike’s erection, his large hands braced on Spike’s hips, his fingers spread out over Spike’s pale skin.

With Spike now so shudderingly close to coming, Xander stepped up behind Angel and without warning slid a finger inside that undefended entrance. Xander could feel Angel clench around his finger, but the vampire’s erection didn’t wane at all. Xander pulled out and tore a gash in his fingertip before he rubbed at the outside of that tight pucker and then plunged in again.

Oh he had not enjoyed a night like this for over a century. Xander added a second finger. Now Angel fought, his legs struggling to close against the invasion and his inner muscles spasmed and trembled, but Angel’s head continued bobbing in service to Spike. Xander spread the fingers and felt Angel’s muscles fight him.

“If you vant to avoid being ripped open, I suggest you
stop fighting,” Xander advised mildly, and Angel froze. Spike’s “Oi” of complaint caused Angel’s head to resume its rhythmic movement, but Xander’s fingers now moved much more easily. Oh yes, this might be a master independent of his own sire, but he still felt the thrill of being possessed. Xander could relate, he was 400 when his sire died at the hands of the traitor, and until the day she died, an order from her to strip and present himself never failed to excite him.

Xander reached around and gathered precum from Angel’s own erection to help ease the passage, and Angel thrust forward wildly at the touch. Angel nearly managed to earn a draw, and Xander vowed not to touch the vampire’s cock again until either he or his pet had finished.

Xander took his own erection in hand and slowly pressed up against Angel, moving slowly so that the silk of his shirt slid against the bare skin of Angel’s back. He had to press just to get the head to pop in, and then Xander stopped. Yes, sometimes the lack of pain was the greatest torture, so he pushed in slowly while Angel now started gurgling moans of his own. That sent Spike into an even fiercer series of struggles. When he felt his balls press up against Angel’s ass, he braced himself on Angel’s
prone back. He pulled out and thrust in again in one swift, brutal motion that elicited an excited growl from Angel which Xander answered with a deeper growl of his own.

Angel was now the one who fought against the restraints, the movements of his head losing their pattern as his own body demanded release. Spike didn’t seem to mind. Xander thrust in again, and pushed himself up against Angel’s larger frame as he reached around to pinch a nipple. Angel now squirmed as his head moved faster and his moans grew loud enough that they might have rivaled Spike’s own had Angel not been gagged with Spike’s cock.

Xander promised himself that he would assemble his court before destroying Angel because he wished to put another in his own place so that he could watch. He imagined Angel’s eyes closed in ecstasy as his lips stretched around Spike’s cock, and he nearly lost control of his own orgasm. Really, he didn’t know how his pet was managing to control himself for so long.

His own precum and Angel’s blood slicked the passage so that he could thrust easily, angling his thrusts so that Angel groaned and squirmed with each thrust. Angel’s
own cock hung neglected and hard as he served others. He drove into Angel’s body over and over as he reached up to pull fingernails down Angel’s back hard enough to draw a thin line of blood to the surface.

Xander was about to forget his plan in favor of enjoying a well-earned orgasm when he smelled Spike’s release and heard his pet growl his completion. Xander thrust in one last time before dropping his weight onto Angel’s back and sinking his fangs into Angel’s neck. He drank deeply as his orgasm spilled out into Angel. Never one to torture a fellow vampire more than necessary for his own pleasure, he reached around and closed his fist around Angel’s erection and Angel lost no time in fucking the fist until his own orgasm ripped through him a second later. The three lay together on the table and Xander knew bliss.

Xander slowly pulled out of Angel’s neck, allowing his weight to rest on Angel’s back as he licked the wound closed. He pulled his hand up to his mouth and tasted Angel as he lay on that large body, enjoying the sated feeling from having fed and fucked for the second time.

He would have to find a more secure lair soon because he wanted to play just one more game before curling up
to sleep the day out between his new child and his chained slave. From the smells below him, he didn’t think he would have any complaints about the plan. Eventually, he stood and closed his pants as he walked to the side of the table.

He considered the table with pleasure. Spike lay with his eyes closed and his body limp with satisfaction. Angel lay with his cheek against Spike’s thigh, his brown eyes watching Xander with a weary sadness, and Xander smiled as he reached over to touch that thick brown hair.

“I guess you von that game,” Xander said, and Angel just closed his eyes. Again, the smell of shame flared, and Xander could see his pet tense. Given time he would teach Angel not to feel shame for his own needs and, more importantly, he would show Spike that he was desirable.

One of Angel’s hands rested in a fist by Spike’s cock, and Xander put his own hand over it, slowly uncurling it so that Angel’s open hand rested on the tender skin of Spike’s inner thigh.

“It’s who ve are,” Xander whispered before he turned to go get... get what? Where were the little sugar-hyped rug
rats Snyder had stuck him with? Xander felt a moment of utter panic as two sets of memories suddenly collided.

Part Six

Oh shit, to hell with the children, he had to have dreamed it. One very long 900 year dream, and when he turned around he was going to find an empty warehouse. Or possibly a warehouse full of vampires who wanted to kill him, and actually that might be of the good.

Xander turned around to see Angel and Spike exactly where he remembered leaving them... or rather right where he remembered the being that had been walking around in his skin leaving them. And oh shit. Xander felt his cock rise at the sight of the two vampires chained together and waiting for him to do something. A pair of brown eyes opened slowly.

“Xander?” Angel asked, and if he didn’t know better, Xander would have sworn he heard concern and
uncertainty in that voice which had always seemed to know everything.

“Oh shit.” Xander said after spitting out a pair of plastic vampire teeth. Naked vampires. Sexy naked vampires. He looked everywhere except at the two naked, sexy bodies in front of him. Not looking at that, nope. Not at all.

“Bloody hell,” a voice tiredly swore, and Xander felt a pull toward that voice—he shouldn’t let Spike feel such despair, but then hey, vampire... he was supposed to hate vampires. He \textit{did} hate vampires, and why didn’t that sound convincing? Xander shook his head as though he could shake the new memories out.

“Xander, are you alright?” Xander snorted at that question. Angel was asking if his rapist was alright. Oh shit. He was; he was a rapist. Sure he’d tried with Buffy, but he hadn’t actually hurt her, and what did it say about him that every time he went and got possessed he got all pervy? And again with the so not going there.

“Xander, it was a spell. You need to get the keys for the locks.” Xander looked up, and Angel still lay with his head against Spike’s thigh, and Spike’s hands had closed into tight fists. Xander searched Spike’s expression, but the
younger vampire stared off in the opposite direction with a face frozen in a sneer.

“Try talkin’ slower, Peaches, boy’s a bit slow.” Spike finally said even as he looked off into the darkness. Xander opened his mouth, a reprimand automatically coming to his lips, but then he closed it again. He had no right to reprimand Spike. He shouldn’t even be in the same room with Spike without Buffy to hide behind. So why did he care so damn much that Spike would say such a thing?

“Shut up, Spike,” Angel ordered, but even Xander could tell that Angel lost some authority while naked, chained, and lying on top of Spike while smelling of Spike’s come. And that should not be a sexy thought. The sight of a drop of Spike’s come on Angel's chin should not be sexy because he was not gay! Not gay and not attracted to sexy, naked, tied up vampires. Looking at the evidence of his guilt, Xander felt a desire to just run right out of the building, but he had never run when things got hard before and he wasn’t going to start now.

“Keys… right,” he said quietly as he went to the shelf where he had stacked each key carefully. Taking them all he walked toward the table and stopped at the sight of
Angel’s still vulnerable ass with Xander’s come trickling down his exposed thighs. Angel’s struggles had shifted the chains on his legs so that he couldn’t stand, and Xander was not noticing how that looked with the thick metal links pressing into pale flesh. His cock was not reacting to the sight of two such powerful creatures bound and helpless because he had defeated them, chained them, and claimed them. And oh god, he was so gay.

Shit, things had been so simple a few minutes ago, but now Xander bent down near the locks. The smell of musk was stronger here, and Xander’s eyes noticed the shimmer of liquid on the floor under the table. Angel’s come, he realized.

He remembered the feeling of Angel writhing under him as Spike growled his pleasure, and Xander snapped open the two locks before he could do something he would regret. Well, something else he would regret because he had plenty of the regret worthy now without running his hands down those strong limbs. He unwound the chains so that Angel could struggle to his feet without wrapping his fingers around Angel’s neck in order to control the vampire’s movements, and why did he feel such a strong desire to do both?
“Oi, watch your hands, ya wanker,” Spike complained from the table as Angel struggled up, and then Xander handed Angel two keys, one to the padlock around his neck and one to the manacles. The sight of Spike’s slender wrists encircled with rope made him want things Xander Lavelle Harris just simply did not want. No wanting here. He just needed to get that message to his quickly hardening cock.

“Xander, wait outside,” Angel ordered, and Xander could hear the sounds of metal grinding on metal as Angel freed himself. Yesterday he would have listened to that order, he would have complained and griped and tattled to Buffy about Angel ordering him around, but he would have listened and obeyed. Now Xander felt his face flush and his temper rise at Angel’s temerity for trying to order him around.

Of course, Xander didn’t even process the meaning of Angel’s words until he heard the table groan. He looked over to see Spike putting every fiber of muscle into breaking the ropes that held him. His arm muscles stood out in sharp curves and his eyes pressed closed so tightly that wrinkles appeared at the corners. In a flash Xander knew what Angel planned; after all, they were vampires
and in the world of vampires there were winners and losers, and the losers died. Spike had trusted the wrong person; Spike was helpless, and Xander should want an evil vampire turned to dust. He was a Scoobie, which meant he should say, “Yes, Angel” and wait by the door as Angel did what he always did, clean up the evil that was too much for children’s eyes.

“No,” Xander all but snarled. He was no child.

“Xander,” Angel turned toward him with a low guttural tone of warning.

“Not a chance,” Xander snarled as he stepped forward. Angel still stood naked, and Xander watched with a feral grin as he realized the advantage his own clothed state gave him.

“Fine, I’ll do it with you here.” Angel turned to pick up a shard of wood from the floor and Xander glanced at Spike who lay spread eagled like a sacrificial victim, his eyes closed and his lips pressed into a thin line. Rather than beg or offer to submit or promise to leave town, Spike lay there silent, and Xander couldn’t do it. More importantly, he couldn’t allow Angel to do it.
Angel turned back around with a stake in hand, but Xander had already grabbed a piece of that broken chair as he put himself between Angel and Spike for the second time.

“Xander, move.” Angel lowered his brow in an expression of determination that should have sent Xander running. Instead Xander gripped his broken wood hard enough that he could feel the sharp edge digging into his palm.

“Not a chance. You want to dust him, you can just cut him free and give him a fighting chance.” Xander spoke in a low, strong voice that he could barely even recognize as his own as he faced down a master vampire.

“Xander,” and again with the dark tones of warning.

“It takes a pretty damn weak vamp to dust someone like this. It’s not like you tied him up; in fact, you’ve been pretty pathetically bad at stopping Spike at all.” Xander snapped back, verbally striking out at Angelus’ weak spot. Angel’s eyes flashed yellow, and then an expression of sad calmness overtook his features.

“Xander, this is not the time.”
“Yes, Angel, it is,” Xander dropped his own voice in challenge. “I’m not going to let you kill him after I tied him up for you.” Xander stepped backwards and started working the ropes around Spike’s hand. For one moment, Xander caught Spike’s eye and the surprise on that face made him momentarily freeze. Spike hadn’t expected to be protected; he had expected Angel to stake him as Xander stood by, and Xander felt his heart tighten in pain. He broke eye contact as he turned his attention back to the knots that Spike had pulled tight and to Angel who stood glowering.

“Yeah, not right ta kill someone who’s all helpless,” Spike finally added snarkily.

Angel snapped, “Shut up, Spike,” at the same time Xander commented, “You’re not helping here.”

“Wanker,” Spike replied, and Xander wasn’t even sure who that was directed toward. The last bit of the knot came free and Xander glanced down as Spike shook his hand to get rid of the rope still dangling from his wrist. Xander reached out and grabbed the trailing ends, and Spike froze, staring at Xander, and Xander’s eyes felt suddenly warm as he saw the open pain.
Before he could say anything, Spike had snatched his hand away with a hiss, and Xander was left with rope burn along the length of his palm. Xander then stepped away from the table as Spike worked the other knots himself. Unwilling to see that pain again, Xander turned his back and concentrated on protecting Spike from Angel who had an expression of disbelief, which looked pretty much like every other expression Angel had except for the mouth that actually hung open.

Xander continued to stare Angel down as he listened to Spike shuffle around behind him. It gave him lots of time to consider just how stupid he was for turning his back to Spike with all the broken wood on the floor, but he wouldn’t even blame Spike if he found a piece of wood suddenly sticking out of his back. He really did have it coming because he understood just how much he had damaged Spike with the forced submission and the promises that Xander was now unable to keep. He understood in the way that only a vampire could understand.

“Bloody loons in this town. Soon as Dru’s alright, you can have your soddin’ Hellmouth back, and I hope it swallows both of you.” Spike snarled his anger, but the pain hadn’t disappeared from his face totally. Xander listened to
Spike’s boots echo across the concrete, the steps growing increasingly distant and speeding up as Spike ran for an exit. Which left just one horrifyingly horrible problem. Xander kept looking at Angel, and finally the older vampire sighed as he started walking towards Xander. Xander backed up quickly, but Angel simply stopped near the table to retrieve his clothes.

Angel had finished putting on his pants and was buttoning his shirt when he suddenly looked up.

“Is that my shirt?” Angel asked. Xander almost laughed out loud. Not what he really thought they’d discuss, but as he looked down at the red silk with fancy silver buttons, he realized it was.

“Yeah.”

“How’d... never mind,” Angel said with a tired sigh and Xander moved closer to sit on the edge of the table as Angel knelt down to put on his shoes. When Angel finished, he moved to sit on the table beside Xander, and that wasn’t awkward at all... no desire to flee in horror, Xander mused as he tried to figure out what to say because the silence was getting creepy.
“Um, I’m not really sure what to say here other than this big awkward silence is really just... awkward. Well that, and I am really sorry. Really, really sorry. Completely humiliated, mortified, and sorry.” Xander stared at his shoes.

“Xander,” Angel interrupted. “It’s okay.”

“I don’t know how you could call that alright. That was as far from alright as... oh shit. I ate Larry.”

“You remember?”

“I remember 900 years of torturing and killing and really kinda liking it.” Xander thought back over the centuries of murder and pervy sex and sitting at his Nusa’s feet and battle with the smell of blood heavy in his nose, and he really needed to stop before he made an indecent proposal to his friend’s boyfriend. And oh shit, Angel had vamp smell. Since he knew Angel would have already smelled him, Xander just reached down and adjusted his pants which had grown suddenly tight.

“Oh,” Angel’s toneless answer revealed nothing, and Xander looked over at that stony face. He never had been good at reading human faces, but he now realized
that Angel was the one person in the universe who did understand how that felt.

“Sucks, huh?” he asked, and Angel looked over at him in surprise.

“Yeah,” Angel agreed. Xander sat there silently. He knew that he hadn’t actually done the things he remembered, but Angel had. When Angel remembered torture, he was remembering his past and not some spell induced hallucination.

“Does it get... ‘easier’ is really sounding like a bad word to use here, but I don’t know, less vivid? ‘Cause I can do without the Technicolor memory of human organs.”

“Not for me.” Angel said quietly. Xander couldn’t even come up with an answer for that, so he just sat silently next to Angel without even baiting the vampire.

“Are we bonding?” Angel asked after a long silence as they sat in the dark surrounded by the remains of what, in vampire terms, had been a wonderful evening.

“God I hope not,” Xander answered, but without much enthusiasm for his traditional Angel bashing. The world
looked so different with nine hundred years of experience whispering new truths in his ear. The evil and soulless Spike needed him, a concept that he was planning on repressing, possibly with large amounts of illegally obtained alcohol. The souled Angel actually had a reason to brood, and he was never going to admit that one out loud. Giles and the Watchers had no clue about what really drove a vampire, and he wasn’t about to explain. If he was lucky, the memories would fade with the magic.

“Would you have killed me?” Angel finally asked.

“Fuck, yeah,” Xander replied quietly. He knew what Angel really needed to know; Angel needed to know who had forced him to submit—it was a vampire thing. “I was Xander childe of Nusa, one seriously bad-ass vamp who thought you were this abomination that someone needed to put down, but just not until after a whole lot of kinky sex.” Xander froze. “And I did not just say that last bit. You imagined it... you must be suffering blood loss.” Angel laughed softly while Xander froze again as he remembered why Angel was suffering blood loss.

“I figured that part out already.” Angel said with amusement.
“And I am so going to hell for that part.” Xander fell silent, and with Angel being his usual chatty self, the sounds of the wind against the corrugated metal roof dominated the night.

“It wasn’t really you, Xander.”

“It feels like it was me.” Xander admitted. He didn’t know why he needed Angel to understand how real the memories were for him, but he did.

“You were just being a vampire and following your instincts,” Angel amended himself.

“Spike is going to kill me,” Xander finally said even though he knew that Spike would never hurt him, at least not unless it was a good kinda hurt or the kind of hurt that led to Xander developing a serious allergy to the sun. Actually, the one Xander worried about killing him was sitting right next to him, but he wasn’t about to say that.

“I think Spike is going to try to forget this ever happened,” Angel said, and Xander knew the statement was true of more than just Spike.
“Not gonna happen.” Xander replied knowingly.

“No.” Angel agreed. Xander waited for something that told him how to handle the situation, but even his new memories couldn’t come up with an effective way of dealing with this particular mess.

“So, what are we going to te...” Xander cut his words short when Angel jumped off the table and started for the doorway.

“Absolutely nothing,” Angel said as he strode toward one of the many exits.

“I can live with that,” Xander agreed as he looked around one last time. The chains still draped down from the ceiling, one single length where Xander had chained Angel hanging lower than the others. Chains and ropes littered the various tables, and the crossbow sat on a low chair near the wooden shards of the chair Angel had crushed and then used as a weapon. He couldn’t see the scaffolding and the ceiling beams with his human eyes, but he looked to where he knew they were, where he’d seen them before and now he could see only grey darkness. And even his human nose could smell the lust,
the heavy musky scent of release; the scent must have been overpowering for Angel.

Xander looked around one more time, comparing this empty shell of a building where he had claimed and lost Spike to the deep cavern where he had laid his Nusa’s ashes: the same grey darkness, the same echoing sounds, the same feeling of loss and emptiness. Turning his back, he followed Angel out of the building.

The End

Janus' Shadow

Part One

"Angel?" Xander said softly into the phone. He really didn't need the others overhearing this conversation, so he kept his voice soft and trusted vamp hearing to carry his words.
"Xander? What's wrong?"

"What? I have to have a reason to call you and tell you that your hair looks ridiculous on a man of 250?" Xander almost heard Angel rolling his eyes over the phone.

"What's wrong?" Angel asked more firmly after a long silence with only the sound of static on the line. Xander smiled at his own ability to outwait Angel. Of course, the events of the day quickly wiped the smile from his face. Not even mind games with Angel could soften the blow he'd felt at seeing Spike, starving, pale and begging the slayer for help.

"It's Spike. He's been..." Xander struggled with a word that would explain his horror at what had been done to Spike. Yeah, he didn't want Spike out eating the population, but this was Spike, his Spike, the vampire with whom he shared a very strange history that only Angel understood. A strange history that Ethan's chaos spell had permanently tangled beyond recognition.

"Xander? Do you need me up there?" Angel asked, and Xander took a deep breath. No, Angel up here right now would be a very bad thing with Spike doing the whole
"worthless me" act. Xander took a deep breath and tangled the curling beige cord around his finger as he tried to sort his thoughts from... well, his thoughts. Okay, that didn't sound mentally unstable... not at all. However, his vampire memories, imposed on him by that spell, suggested that Spike couldn't handle being seen as weak in Angel's eyes.

"You'd better not. We've got a government group doing some weird stuff up here," Xander finally answered. "They caught Spike and operated on him." Xander heard Angel's hiss over the phone, and he could imagine the expression on Angel's face. Even though Angel felt guilty as hell about his past with Spike, he couldn't quite let go of his desire for the younger vampire. Maybe the others didn't see that, but then the others didn't have quite the same relationship with the vampires that he did.

"Is he..."

"He can't hunt. He can't hurt people." Xander took a deep breath to try and hold off the anger rising in his stomach. "Hell, he can't protect himself from a two year old with a butter knife." Xander lashed out and punched Giles' wall hard enough that his knuckles throbbed with pain. At least this pain gave him something to focus on
other than his own guilt. If he hadn't taken Spike, forced him to submit and then left him, if he hadn't caused Dru to leave Spike, if he hadn't done all that, maybe Dru and Spike would still be off somewhere safe instead of Giles chaining Spike in the bathroom.

Today looked liked one of those days where he wished the spell hadn't ended and he still had that cold confidence he'd gained from being a vampire. Or maybe he just should have died that day in the mansion. Xander battled his emotions back into his repression box and tried to concentrate on the here and now. Angel was obviously having problems of his own because the other end of the phone had gone silent.

"Maybe I should come up," Angel offered quietly.

"No." Xander quickly replied. "Spike doesn't need to deal with sire issues right now," Xander pointed out without acknowledging his own sire issues with Spike. "I just need to know who in town carries human blood... someone other than Willie because that little rat will sell anyone out to Buffy, including me."

"You're protecting him," Angel said warily. Not a question exactly, but Xander could still hear Angel
question his sanity. "What about Buffy?"

"Spike came to Buffy, asked her for sanctuary, and Buffy won't stake him while he's helpless." Xander didn't have to tell Angel how much it ripped into him to see Spike looking for someone else's protection while Xander stood there helpless.

"Buffy's protecting him?" Angel's tone rose in shock.

"I'm not sure protecting him is the right description." Xander considered Buffy's reaction, evaluating them using his own 900 years worth of memories. "It's more like she resents someone else poaching on her private territory. Spike is her prey, and she'll keep him safe until he's strong enough to be worth hunting." Xander smiled at the memory of the villagers in Nusa's territory. They had quickly learned how to hide any strength in order to avoid her interest. Hell, his too. Of course those were false memories planted by Ethan's spell, but they felt just as real now as they had years ago when the spell had first been cast. Actually, they felt more real now than they had since the spell broke.

"And what about the past? Can you forgive him for what he did?" Angel asked quietly.
Xander thought back to that dark day when he had been dragged to Angelus' lair. Not even Giles knew about those six hours, and Xander had no intention of telling. Hell, he didn't even plan on giving Angel the full story because he didn't need to deal with Angelus being even more hacked off if the soulless bastard ever showed up again.

"I don't have to forgive him. He's a vampire, so he does vampirey things." Xander phrased his answer to once again give Angel the reassurance he needed that Xander didn't blame him either, and Xander didn't. After all, he had attacked, captured, and raped both masters of the Aurelius line long before that day, even if it was technically a spell's fault.

"Cooper on 6th and Park." Angel said, and Xander quickly jotted it down on his palm. "They don't normally sell to humans," Angel warned him.

"Call him for me and tell him that if he doesn't sell me blood, I will set his business on fire and decapitate him and his entire staff as they run for safety," Xander said before dropping the phone onto the receiver. He didn't need to hear Angel's answer since he already knew that Angel would lecture him on not letting his vampire
memories control him and then do as Xander asked. Xander could do without the first, and he needed Angel to do the second immediately. Spike was thin and frail.

Xander punched the wall again just as Willow walked in the door to Giles' kitchen, jumping when Xander's fist thumped loudly against the cheap pine wood the apartment used as trim, leaving a faint knuckle sized dent.

"Xander?" she asked quietly, and Xander looked at his childhood friend's wide and worried eyes. "Is this Spike thing freaking you out what with the whole kissage incident?" she asked. Xander struggled to contain a dark laugh. Kissage. Kissage was the least of his worries, but on that Halloween night years ago, she had seen the kiss he had shared with Spike, and nothing more. Thank god for that. Xander shivered in horror at the thought that the spell could have made him kill his best friend given the chance. Thank god he didn't have that chance because that was more guilt than he could have carried.

Willow came over and put a sympathetic hand on his forearm. "Yeah, it's kinda freaky knowing there's a vampire in the house, but you know Buffy wouldn't let him hurt you, right?" Willow asked in such a serious tone
that Xander felt that dark, hysterical laughter bubbling up inside.

"I have some chores I need to run," Xander said as he pulled his arm back away from Willow and started for the door.

"Xander?"

"Hey where you running off to?" Buffy called as Xander bolted through the living room while trying to look like he wasn't hurrying.

"Got work," he offered over his shoulder as he kept his hand clenched over the words written on his palm. He pulled the door open without even making eye contact with Buffy, and as he stood in the open doorway, he made a quick prayer for Buffy and Giles to have patience because he knew how far Spike could push things when the young vampire was frightened. Entirely too far, and the slayer's patience was not exactly long.

Xander pulled the door shut behind him, ignoring Willow's attempts to cover for his rude exit, but then Buffy had been accusing him of being rude ever since that Halloween. That's just what happened when two
people who were each used to being in charge tried occupying the same space. Three really... Giles wasn't exactly the type to sit back and take orders. But at least Giles had learned to step carefully around Xander unlike Buffy who still, years later, tried to treat him like the insecure submissive boy she'd first met when she came to Sunnydale.

Xander flinched slightly when he left the shade of the courtyard, and oh yeah, vampire memories were way too close to the surface today. Considering he was about to go into a part of town that catered to more demons than humans, maybe that was of the good.

After parking his car a reasonably safe distance away, Xander strode purposefully down the suburban streets as he tried to sink into that way of thinking that had been so normal when the spell had locked him into the body of a vampire. Spike was injured, damaged, weak. He should either be destroyed or brought back to health so he could devour his enemies, and that was too deep into vampire thinking, Xander realized, but he just couldn't escape the thought that Spike had a fucking right to eat the Initiative soldiers. He could feel his own need for revenge making his nonexistent fangs itch.
Xander's mood hadn't improved by the time he stopped in front of the brick building, one corner of which advertised dollar shots with a neon sign only half-lit and which made a high pitched whining noise. Pushing through dirty glass doors, Xander found himself faced with a Vebight demon--green chin horns pushed out aggressively. Xander dropped his hand to the small of his back where he carried a razor sharp weapon in a thin sheath. The demon clicked and wheezed a threat in his own language.

"You can't exactly call me a normal human though, so I don't really care about your policy," Xander countered. "I assume Angel called." He looked around at the dim interior which looked like any number of other dives he'd been in: beer stained wood floor, scuffed bar, that wood paneling that had been popular for a few days in the seventies and yet still managed to line the walls of every bar in Sunnydale.

Another set of clicks, these faster, and a wheezing cough answered him as a demon head tilted, the horns even more aggressively thrust forward.

"Don't necessarily disagree with you on that one, but it doesn't change the fact that I'm here to buy blood,"
Xander answered without exactly looking at the Vebight. He watched it out of the corner of his eye and kept focused on the whole room rather than a single opponent.

This time the demon brought his head down, tucking his chin in toward his chest as he narrowed his eyes and hissed his answer. In one fluid motion, Xander popped the snap on his knife's sheath, pulled the ten inches of steel free, and swung the blade in a graceful arc. The Vebight fell back, his hand clutching his stomach where a thick yellow fluid leaked onto his shirt, and the smell of Vebight blood floated into the air.

"Okay, that's just disgusting. I really wish I had remembered how much you guys stink before I cut you. But that's okay because as I remember it, the stink stops when your heart stops." Xander stepped forward and the Vebight fell back into a defensive pose. Xander swept the room with his gaze, checking for ambushes or obstacles that might trip him up before dropping into an equally aggressive posture.

"No. Not fighting. Not fighting in my shop." A much smaller demon stepped out from behind a doorway, and Xander straightened slightly although he kept his knife up
and ready. The G'ranth demon could have passed for a
dwarf, or was that midget, or maybe person of small
stature...Xander shook his head at his ability to
remember a dozen demon languages that he technically
hadn't ever learned in the first place and still forget
common manners that Willow nagged him about every
day. He was sure there was some great meaning in that
little twist of his brain, but he was too busy to follow it
up right now.

"If you want to avoid fighting, you'll sell me the blood. If
not, the threat about burning you out, well it wasn't a
threat since I'll actually do it--burn you out that is."
Xander bit his tongue at that classic bit of Xander babble.
Right, when trying to intimidate the natives, use fewer
words because the G'ranth was looking less intimidated
than confused.

"You were primal?" the small man-demon asked as he
walked behind the bar. Obviously the floor back there
was higher because the demon was suddenly at eye level
waving the bouncer away. The Vebight widened his nose
holes and snorted unhappily, but he shuffled away
without showing Xander his vulnerable backside. Xander
walked around a couple of abandoned tables and leaned
on the bar without taking a seat.
"Yeah," he answered carefully. Primals weren't the most popular of demon species, and he now watched two Pyleans come out of the bathroom. Both of them avoided Xander's gaze, but that didn't mean that Xander trusted them, so he leaned one hip into the counter and kept his eyes on the barkeep and the two customers as he cleaned his knife with a rag he pulled from his pocket. You never left demon gore on a good knife, and this was an exceptional knife.

"You were vampire?" The two Pyleans looked over in obvious surprise at the barkeep's words, and Xander gazed back at them until they both realized they were staring and looked away quickly.

"Yeah, didn't work out for me, so I gave it up." Xander replied calmly even though he could feel his heart start to speed up. He needed to get the blood and get back to Spike before he fucked this up by sticking his foot in his mouth ala Xander Harris classic babble. He found his ability to channel his inner vampire was limited by his nervousness which brought out the Zeppo in him. He briefly wondered what would happen if he did get turned now because with Xander childe of Nusa memories and the hyena memories and the Zeppo memories he was
really kinda running on the sharp edge of sanity now. Add another demon to the mix and he might end up talking to dolls and stars with Dru. His knife was clean, but he continued to slide the cloth over the smooth surface both as an excuse to keep the knife out and as an excuse for the nervous movement his hands demanded.

"Strange, strange, strange human," the barkeep finally concluded.

"Yeah, well my claim on humanity has been slipping for a while. So, either give me the blood or you won't have any bar left to serve customers." Xander calmly looked up at the small demon and pursed his lips in an expression he'd blatantly stolen from Spike. The expression promised imminent disemboweling and bloodshed… he hoped. The G'ranth replied with a series of hisses and clicks that imitated the bouncer's noises earlier.

"Yeah, yeah. Been called that by bigger bastards than you. So pack a cooler full and quote a price," Xander answered without any emotion.

"$300. Full cooler. Best price."

"Bullshit. Willy would sell me a full cooler for $100--he'd
just make another $100 selling me out to the slayer. I'll give you the $200 that Willy would have made off me."

"Stealing. Cheating. Taking advantage of me to be small," growled the G'ranth demon.

"No one cheats a G'ranth," Xander replied dryly. "$200 and I'll do one free translating job. Nothing over three pages... six if it's Inglish or Phen'ra hieroglyphs."

"You reading Phen'ra?" Xander smiled as the G'ranth body language shifted. The crossed arms and lowered brows became a comfortable lean forward against the bar and a crooked grin. Xander could practically hear the gear in the G'ranth's brain start calculating possible profit.

"You heard of Xan Nusa who does translating down at Uick's place?" he asked. The G'ranth simply cocked his head. "That's me," Xander finished as he finally put his knife back into its sheath under his shirt. "You supply the blood and a little privacy, and I could do a few jobs here at a reasonable rate." Xander didn't add that the demon could skim some profit off the top; that went without saying.
"Angel not say," the G'ranth complained mildly.

"Angel not know," Xander said back. The G'ranth smiled slowly, its eyes starting to gleam in the low light of the bar.

"You good almost human."

"I take that as a compliment. I'll also take my cooler of blood please," Xander said as he vowed to shut up now. He could feel the bubbles of Zeppohood fizzing up like a shaken soda: a desire to hum a little tune at the Pyleans, a flash of Wizard of Oz humor watching the G'ranth demon hurry to collect supplies, even a slight desire to giggle, in a manly way of course, at the thought that he had intimidated a Vebight demon. Oh yeah, time to just not talk. Play Oz, be cool, keep the mouth shut.

Soon enough the barkeep had returned with a blue camping cooler full of ice and blood, and Xander slapped $200 down on the bar. He would have happily paid the $300 just to keep Buffy from knowing that he was buying human blood, but not arguing with a G'ranth was just asking people to take him for a fool.

"I call you at Uick's?" the little demon asked as he picked
up and counted the $20 bills.

"Better not. Uick is a little... short tempered. Call my cell," Xander pulled a tattered card out of his pocket and slid it across the bar. Green embossed letters offered the translation services of Xan Nusa and a single phone number.

"Good business," the G'ranth clicked happily. "I be Cooper."

"Well, Cooper," Xander said as he reached over and took the handle of the blue plastic container. "It will be good business as long as no one knows about it, but if anyone finds out about any of our dealings, it will be very, very bad business." Xander took one last look around the bar, but no one met his gaze. Turning his back on the room in a clear sign of his contempt for their fighting skills, Xander walked back out into the sunshine. They didn't need to know that the whole time he walked toward his car he had a need to either pee his pants or run like hell. Nope. As long as he kept channeling equal parts Oz cool and vampire aggression he could pull this off.

Xander put the cooler on the backseat of his '82 Ford Grenada with its square nose and two tone blue paint job. Buffy and Willow loved to make fun of his lady, but
the upgraded engine would run long after their trendy cars died and the dark windows made him feel secure even if he wasn't technically flammable any more. With the easy part taken care of, now he just had to go talk Giles into believing that he should be the one to take care of their bloodsucking guest.

Part Two

In the end, Xander dropped the blood off at his apartment first. He could afford another $200 for more blood, but he didn't really think he could play cool-guy in Cooper's place again. His hands sweated so much that the wheel of his car slid through his palms on every turn. And yeah, that didn't seem very safe.

Guiding his car to the curb in front of Giles' building, Xander sat with the setting sun shining weakly through the darkened window of his driver's side door, wondering what the hell he was doing. Part of him wanted to start the engine with its particular low rumbling drone and drive away. He couldn't be what
Spike needed, and trying and failing to fill that role might get him killed. Could... no... *would* get him killed. Killed and vamped. And really, after one round of eating people, he really didn't want to go for round two. Another part of him just wanted to feel those strong muscles under his hands, that body full of coiled energy bending to his will, and oh god he was screwy in the head.

Memories of feeding, knowing that his new claimed childe hunted at his side, rose to the surface. The joy of that night had dulled the edge of pain from the betrayal of his own first childe, but then he didn't really have a first childe because he wasn't really a vampire, only the watchers diaries he'd read did speak of Nusa, his sire, and Jalon, his ungrateful and mutinous childe. He'd even read references to Nusa's elusive favored, and Xander put his forehead on the steering wheel and he tried to gather thoughts which scattered like sand caught in a dust devil—whipped around in every rising circles.

Right, thinking had never been his strong suit, so he needed to simply act. Yep, just call him Xan the acting without thinking man. No matter how hard his heart beat or how badly his palms sweated, he couldn't let Spike stay chained in that bathtub. With a new resolve, Xander pushed open the door and stepped out into the failing
sun of evening, the streetlight flickering to life just as he slammed his door.

With more confidence in his step than his heart, Xander strode up the walk and rapped cheerfully on the closed door. It only took a second for Giles to open it, looking at him with an expression that came close to concern.

"Xander? Willow said you needed to go to work. The girls have gone to patrol the east side."

"Yeah, well Jamie burned his hand on the fryers and so they called me with the panicking, but business was non-existant, and they sent me home," Xander lied. His job with Hotdog on a Stick had lasted about as long as any other job he'd taken to cover up for his real source of income, which meant not very.

"Yes, well, I do hope he's all right," Giles muttered as he turned back toward the living room. A large book lay open on the coffee table, the familiar black leather and yellowing pages could have been any number of volumes, but Xander recognized the angular, tilting hieroglyphs that ran down the page: a Guel'tec text on vampire anatomy. Xander felt a sharp stab of fear that Giles might want to confirm one or two of the books more outrageous claims. He looked back at the man still standing by the open door and instantly regretted
thought. Giles might stake a vamp, but he didn't torture them, unlike some humans in Sunnydale.

"Researching the next apocalypsy goodness?" Xander asked as he walked in the room and dropped into the armchair. After closing the door, Giles picked up a postcard from his desk and started fidgeting with it in a way that suggested that the man wanted to take off his glasses and polish them.

"No, I'm researching what they might have done to him."

"They have a section on sadistic humans playing mad scientist in there?" Xander asked, nodding toward the open text, and Giles looked sharply up at him.

"Not as such, no," Giles admitted and then he dropped the postcard back to the desk and came around to the couch, sitting carefully. "Xander, I am aware that this puts you in a difficult situation. Please have the respect to just tell me what you want rather than attempting to manipulate me."

Xander had been carefully investigating the pepperoni stain by the one foot of the couch, but at those words, he focused all his attention on Giles. "I'm so not trying to manipulate you," he immediately assured the man. "It's more like, I don't know how to say what I want to say,
which may not really be what I want-want, but more like
what I, you know, need-want. But the whole beating
around the bush thing is far less with the manipulating
than just with the awkward."

"Spoken like a true American," Giles sighed softly, and
now the glasses did come off. "Need? What do you need,
Xander?"

"I need the key, G-man." Xander held his hand out
toward Giles.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea, especially given your
respective... histories," Giles answered, and the very fact
that he had ignored the hated nickname told Xander just
how upset Giles was in his own repressed, English way.
As expected, he attacked the glasses with a white
handkerchief.

"Our history means that I understand him. I can deal with
him far more effectively than you could," Xander pointed
out. Giles looked up sharply.

"And the fact that you had a Transylvanian accent when
you said that... should I be worried?" Giles demanded
sharply, and Xander flinched. Yeah, great, the Zeppo-
stupidity did pop up at the absolute worst times. He couldn't believe that he had slipped that badly. He could only shrug.

"You know the memories are still part of me. And yes, Spike brings them up a little more. I'm not a vampire, and I'm not planning on doing the whole Benedict Arnold thing," he promised softly as he glanced toward the bathroom. How much could Spike hear, and how much did the vampire believe? Xander truly wouldn't let Spike touch one of his friends, so he meant the whole not-going-traitor promise, except that Buffy and Giles and even Willow would probably consider him a traitor for even fantasizing about hot soldier blood running down a cold sidewalk, rivers of red parting for pebbles set in concrete and filling the cracks with the brackish, coppery scent of life. Xander shook his head to try and clear his mind of that thought.

"Xander, I never," Giles paused, and Xander could practically see the man gathering his thoughts. "I know how loyal you are, and I don't for one second doubt that. I do worry that your vampire memories exert too much influence over your decisions. I worry that Spike could take advantage of that." Giles' words did give Xander pause for thought. After all, Giles had no idea what had
happened at Angelus' mansion that day, what they had done to him. He didn't know what Xander had done to Angel and Spike when he was under the influence of the spell. Hell, if Giles knew one quarter of the history Xander shared with Spike and Angel, the watcher would either chain Xander up or stake the two vampires. Probably both.

"I know how to handle Spike," Xander promised. Giles looked at him for a long time before reaching into his pocket.

"Be careful," Giles said as he handed over a small silver key.

"Aren't I always?" Xander grinned playfully, and the look of despair on Giles' face made him laugh out loud. "I'll be careful, Dad," Xander added. Giles just made a hrumphing grunt and took his cup into the kitchen.

Xander hurried into the bathroom with the key, and he opened the door to find Spike staring at him with a mask of complete indifference. The expression broke Xander's heart more than anything else could because he knew how strongly Spike felt things. He knew how Spike's emotions normally flickered right under the surface of his
skin. The devilish delight and playful cruelty that usually animated Spike's features had made Xander love him, or at least feel the sort of possessive desire that passed for love among vampires. Instead the emotionless face with the black eyeliner looked truly dead.

"So, we're on patrol tonight on the west side tonight," Xander said as he reached out for the chains looped around Spike's arms. Giles claimed to have fed Spike earlier, but when Xander's hand closed around Spike's wrist, he could feel cold flesh. Vampires were room temperature unless they were hungry--seriously hungry. He turned the key in the lock before Spike found his voice.

"Bloody... not really up to a fight. Can't hurt a soddin' thing, remember?" Spike snarled angrily, and Xander allowed his own vampiric nature to surface as he closed his hand around Spike's neck and slammed the vampire's head into the tile. Spike flashed into game face and raised his lip in challenge as he reached up and grabbed Xander's wrist. Xander knew how the chip worked. He'd had a client who had escaped with one. Or got turned loose as a guinea pig with one, he was never quite sure which. Now he just had to reassert his relationship with Spike. That and he had to make Spike feel like a hunter
again because this pale creature without any spark of life was not his Spike.

Strong, pale fingers dug into the flesh of his wrist, and Xander grimaced in pain. He could see Spike's eyes narrow as he fought the agony inflicted by the chip. Despite the torture, Spike continued to squeeze, and now Xander could smell the metallic scent of his own blood as he stared into Spike's yellowed eyes.

Xander flinched as the fingers tightened incrementally, but this was a battle he couldn't afford to lose. At Xander's flinch, Spike let go and howled as he gripped his own head in a vain effort to soothe the pain. His hands clutched at his short spikes of hair, pulling at them and pounding the ceramic tub as his body twisted, the chains unlocked but still looped around him so that the metal struck the ceramic tub with small chiming noises.

Xander stood and looked down at the writhing figure still draped in chains. Part of him sneered in disgust that Spike could let himself be leashed by humans. Another part railed against someone causing Spike pain, someone other than himself anyway. Yet another part wanted to run away in fear because Spike was still an actual vampire and Xander had no doubts about how wrong
this could go. The part that won, however, was the part of him that wanted to comfort the childe who had submitted to him. No matter how hard he tried to tell himself that Spike's submission didn't count what with the whole spell thing, Xander still felt like a sire. He felt like a sire who had failed once and who refused to fail again. Okay, counting Jalon he'd failed twice, but he really didn't want to fail for a third time.

Sitting down on the cold edge of the bathtub, Xander stroked Spike's stiff hair as he held out his bloody wrist.

"Drink, childe," he said softly. He hadn't intended to use that endearment. He was human, and as such had no role in the vampire hierarchy. He couldn't claim the title of sire. He was weak, just as weak as when Angelus had him dragged back to the mansion in order to repay the humiliation of that Halloween night. But just when he thought Spike would reject the offer of blood and the title that Xander had linked to it, lips closed around the wound.

Xander groaned as Spike sucked enthusiastically. It felt a little like pulling a scab, like scratching a poison ivy rash, like stretching a sore muscle. He felt as if having blood in his body was some itching torment, and Spike's sucking
scratched that itch. Oh, the pain was there, making him suck air into his lungs noisily, but the pleasure of feeling his blood pulled slowly from his body more than made that worth it.

The wound was small, and Xander could feel two pins barely prick the surface of his skin, and then the pleasure and pain doubled. Xander couldn't even describe the feeling, but it left him humping into nothing. He remembered Nusa draining him, the absolute pleasure of sinking into the darkness of death even as he orgasmed. Maybe it was that thought that made Xander aware of the fact that he was becoming lightheaded.

"Stop," Xander ordered and for a half second, Xander thought he had misjudged. He thought that Giles had been right and he had gone completely insane when he allowed Spike's fangs anywhere near him. He thought wrong because Spike pulled his fangs out after just a second and then licked at the wound before settling back in the tub.

Looking down, Xander traced the spreading red and purple hickey with a finger. Two tiny fang punctures and three nasty, crescent-shaped fingernail marks decorated the inside of the bruise. Okay, no more feeding the vamp
with the wrist, Xander realized as he looked at the ugly
discoloration.

"So, this goin' to be your revenge? Keeping me in the
bathtub? Takin' me out to play sire?" Spike's expression
had disappeared under that mask of indifference again,
and Xander stood and turned his back as he went over to
the sink to run cold water over his arm. He doubted that
he could keep it from looking like a vampire chew-toy,
but at least it gave him something to do.

"I don't know what the hell we're doing, Spike."

"Right, same as always then."

"Enough," Xander practically yelled as he turned around.
Spike had stood so that the chains now lay in the bottom
of the tub at his feet, but at Xander's yell, the vampire
flinched back and pressed himself to the tile. Xander
raised a lip to sneer at the gesture before it occurred to
him that Spike had no defenses against a human, and he
had no way to judge Xander's intentions.

Xander turned back to the sink and found himself
surprised to see his own reflection: dark, unruly curls, a
slightly paler than normal complexion, dark eyes. He
struggled to find the words that would make Spike understand what he could and could not offer to the young vampire. At 120, the childe should still be safely behind a sire, the greatest risk to his unlife being that same sire that protected him.

"Spike, I look at you and I still see my little one, my hellcat, the childe I claimed," Xander admitted to the mirror. "I look at you and I want you so bad I can't see straight, and I hate myself because I can't be the sire who claimed you. You are so damn strong, but you need a sire. You shouldn't have to do this alone and every damn sire you've had has failed you. I want to beat myself black and blue for being one more person to do that to you."

Xander let the words fall from him without even thinking about what he was admitting. He turned around and stepped forward and let his warm hand wrap around the back of Spike's neck where he gently squeezed and soothed tight muscles.

"When Angelus brought me to the mansion, I would have endured all that and more if it had earned you a place at Angelus' side again. I would have given up anything to fix what I had damaged." Xander watched as his words slowly eroded Spike's indifference until he could see the fear and uncertainty etched in those beautiful features.
"Not bloody likely. Soddin' arsewipe had slipped 'round the twist, so I sure as hell didn't want to play childe to that bastard." Xander pulled, but Spike refused to be coaxed out of the bathtub. Instead Xander stepped up into the tub himself so they were face to face.

"You're so damn strong. How the hell did you even escape the government?" Xander didn't offer sympathy. He knew Spike couldn't put up with sympathy.

"Bloody stupid humans. Thought I was one of their fledges, thought I couldn't resist drugged blood."

"But you have far too much control to fall for that," Xander added, and now Spike let himself be pulled forward just a fraction so that his head hovered near Xander's shoulder. "Did you kill any of them?" Xander asked as he reached up with his second hand to feel the ridges under Spike's brow.

"One. Thought they'd tazered me it hurt so bloody much, but I had to get out of there."

"So damn strong. Hunger can't rule you; pain doesn't stop you. My hellcat," Xander practically whispered, and
he knew his pride colored every word. Spike's head rested on Xander's shoulder now.

"Not soddin' strong at all. Bloody humans have leashed me. Can't even fucking feed."

"Ve'll vork on that," Xander immediately promised, and then he realized what he'd said. "Not that feeding is good," he suddenly stammered, pausing as he felt panic jumbling his thoughts together. "Killing is definitely off the approved list because killing humans is, well, wrong. Major wrong. Wrongage of epic proportions," Xander knew he was babbling, and he bit his tongue hard enough to stop himself. He could feel Spike shake slightly, and he held that trembling body even tighter.

"Bloody hell, you're as loony as Dru," Spike finally said, and Xander realized from the amused tone that the trembling was not a reaction to the fear but rather laughter. He pulled back, and Spike was laughing so hard that a single tear had escaped the side of his eye.

"Hey, no laughing," Xander complained.

"Oi, you listen to yourself and try not to laugh."
"I listen to myself all the time."

"Doubt that. You're slipping back and forth between those two personalities of yours like some sort of metonym."

"Yeah, well I'm still the boss of you," Xander pointed out. That made Spike stop and look at him seriously.

"Are you?" The tone of Spike's words made Xander stop and think through the situation.

"Yeah. Before, well not before when I was a vamp before, but before when we were in the mansion, I couldn't be what you needed." Xander stopped as he tried to explain it. He'd knelt on the floor naked knowing he was going to die. Of course, he'd been wrong, but at that moment when he'd been pulled in front of Angelus, he hadn't doubted that he saw death in the insane vampire's yellow eyes. "You needed a hunting partner, and I couldn't be that. I thought Dru could be," Xander admitted.

"She left me for a bloody chaos demon," Spike shrugged, but at least this time he didn't try to hide the pain. Xander had listened to Buffy's stories of Spike's rage
when the vamp had returned in search of a love spell. He'd smiled and nodded at Buffy's imitations, but Angel's eyes had remained somber, and Xander had gone home and cried over the fact that the demon had come back to town without hunting him down. And how sick was that?

"She really is insane. Those things are gross," Xander answered, and Spike made an amused snort.

"You're not kiddin'. They're downright disgusting. So, you're planning on sticking around this time?"

"Both times, you were the one who left," Xander pointed out.

"Both times, you didn't bloody stop me," Spike countered.

"I will this time. You can't hunt, which means you need to find another way to feed, and I'm the one who's going to provide the blood until we can figure out how to get that chip out."

"And then?" Spike's guarded tone instantly revealed the vampire's fears, and Xander couldn't blame him.
"And then you're still going to be mine," Xander replied.

"Vampire can't belong to a human, mate. You know that. I get this chip out, and you won't have the strength to keep me by your side. Makes me wonder if you're going to really work all that hard at getting the chip out."

"I will get the chip out because you are my hellcat. We'll work the rest out later."

"I could solve the problem. I think the little experiment with your wrist proved that." Spike purred and leaned close again, nuzzling Xander's neck. Xander allowed his eyes to fall closed as a talented tongue ran from his collarbone up to his ear where dull teeth nibbled at the ear lobe. "I could turn you and have you as my childe. Wouldn't bloody bollocks it up like a certain broody vamp we both know." The words were whispered in a low rumbling voice, and Xander groaned as a hand slipped under the waistband of his jeans to find a hard cock.

Spike pushed, and Xander let himself be turned so that Spike pressed up against his back, a cool hand reaching up under his shirt and fingers splaying across his stomach. "You remember being turned, the perfect joy in
that second when your heart beats for the last time, the feeling of your orgasm and your death merging like nothing before and nothing after. Let me give you that again," Spike whispered roughly.

Xander reached under his shirt and put his own warm hand over Spike's. He did remember. He remembered the feeling of belonging to someone and knowing that he was safe within his sire's protection. He had been Nusa's prized possession, jealously guarded and defended and owned in a way that made all other relationships in his life seem like faint outlines and meaningless encounters. But he'd grown past that and now he needed to do the possessing. No one could take the place of his Nusa, not even his hellcat.

Xander tried to wrestle his attention out of his hard and throbbing cock so he could explain it to Spike without seeming to reject the young vampire. His eyes drifted open. "Giles!" he yelped.

"I had," Giles stood at the doorway to the bathroom and cleared his throat, "worried that you were having problems with the," Giles coughed softly, "the chains. You had been in here rather a long time."
"You're soddin' interrupting, Watcher," Spike snarled, and Xander landed his elbow in Spike's side; however, the vampire kept snarling and feeling Xander up at the same time.

"Spike, stop," Xander ordered, but the strong arms around him held him in place while the hand that had explored the contours of his stomach started drifting southward. Xander opened his eyes in horror about the same time that Giles' mouth fell open. When Giles started reaching behind him, Xander knew he had to make a move or watch Giles stake his hellcat.

Xander reached down and dug his thumb into a nerve on Spike's wrist. Trying to escape the pain, Spike shook his wrist and pulled it away from Xander, giving Xander room to twist slightly in Spike's embrace. Xander aimed his hardest punch at Spike's sternum, where the two halves of the ribcage met in the front. He tilted his fist slightly so that he hit the sternum dead on with one knuckle. Xander grimaced in pain with Spike. Now openly snarling, Spike grabbed for his hands, and Xander knew he had neither the speed nor strength to avoid being caught. Instead, he let Spike catch him and then pulled back hard enough that his wrist made a popping sound and Xander gasped in pain. Spike dropped like a stone
clutching his head.

Not surprisingly, Giles stood next to the bathtub with a stake, which Xander snatched from the older man. When Spike finally got control enough to open his eyes, Xander crouched over him with a stake pressed against Spike's chest. The vampire froze.

"So, are ve clear who is in charge of whom?" Xander asked calmly, and even he could hear the accent. Spike looked up for several seconds, and Xander wondered if he could dust the vampire even if he had to. In the end, Spike dropped his gaze.

"Yeah, mate," he offered.

"Good. So we're going on patrol at Grove cemetery." Xander stood and handed Giles his stake.

"I'm not sure that's such a good idea," Giles said in a tone that made it clear that he knew it was an absolutely horrible idea.

"We'll be fine, G-man."

"First, define 'fine.' Second, please do not call me that
"Um, fine means that if you don't ask, you won't notice anything that might drive you to drink, and you know the nickname is all in love, G-man."

"Xander," Giles said, the one word carrying tones of frustration and worry and paternal concern. Xander smiled. Giles was the one person whose paternal tones didn't annoy him. His own father had learned the hard way that Xander would not tolerate manipulation or abuse--not even verbal abuse.

"Giles, I'm going to be a lot less on edge having him around than I am thinking about him in your bathtub."

"Bloody hell, not goin' to let him tell you what to do, are ya?" Spike demanded, and Xander could hear the confusion under that obnoxious aggression. If Giles could order Xander around, and Xander could order Spike around, that put the young vampire directly under Giles in the hierarchy. Xander could see how that would be a problem. However, he wasn't a vampire and Giles wasn't a vampire and Spike was going to have to do some adapting.
"I hardly think offering advice is ordering," Giles pointed out.

"No, but your advice has been heard and we're still going hunting, G-man," Xander quickly answered because Giles and Spike talking to each other was not ever going to be of the good.

"Patrolling," Giles said quietly.

"What?" Xander asked in confusion as he replayed the last part of the conversation in his mind.

"I assume you are taking Spike patrolling since hunting has some rather unfortunate connotations. Before you leave, there's two days worth of blood in the refrigerator, and I would expect a visit from Buffy tomorrow. She will not be pleased."

Xander blushed as he realized his slip.

"Uh, yeah, patrolling," he corrected himself. "Spike probably needs to drink the blood before we leave, but I have more at home, and on that whole Buffy visiting thing, that might not be the best idea." Xander ducked his head and tried his best 'help me' expression on Giles.

"She will eventually figure out that you've moved out of your parents' home." Xander must have given Giles a
surprised look because the older man rolled his eyes. "Really, did you expect me to believe your ridiculous stories forever?" Then Giles turned to Spike, his face hardening into an expression that reminded Xander that the man had at one point been more likely to summon evil than fight it.

"And if you harm him or turn him, you will beg for a stake before I am through with you," he promised darkly. Spike leaned back against the tiled wall looking indifferent, but Xander could see the small muscle twitches that showed his distress. Considering he was trapped in a small room with two people who he couldn't fight, both of whom had threatened to turn him to dust, Xander couldn't blame the vamp. In fact, Spike's ability to hide that fear made him smile with pride. However, he needed to get Spike fed and back to fighting if he wanted to save his hellcat from dangers just as real as the slayer or the Initiative or a cranky watcher.

"If you've finished with all the threats, maybe we should get going," Xander suggested, carefully keeping his accent all California boy.

"Yes, well, do be careful," Giles said, pinning him with a look that made it clear Giles still thought his plan was stupid. Xander didn't bother disagreeing since a big part
agreed with Giles. After all, he'd seen his own arm, and Giles hadn't yet spotted the carefully hidden wound that showed just how dangerous Spike could still be.

"You know me, Giles. Always careful," he answered as he scooted past Giles out into the apartment. Behind him both Giles and Spike made small disbelieving sounds, but at least Spike followed. Now he just needed a plan because he was running on instinct, and at least half his instincts belonged to a vampire—an angry vampire who wanted revenge for his claimed childe.

Part Three

"Not much use out here, am I then?" Spike asked as he walked through the gates of Grove cemetery behind Xander.

"Oh, I don't know. I'm betting on a least a few fledges we can use for punching bags. With the Initiative running around, it seems like every vamp with a decade under his belt is trying to get a couple dozen fledges around him."
Yeah, like having huge clumps of vamps makes them less conspicuous. Morons."

"So, we're going to find some fledges so I can watch ya get turned by someone else?" Spike's voice sounded more angry than anything, and Xander looked over at his arch enemy/favorite childe.

"Well, I'm hoping that if a fledge gets past the bad jokes and holy water and stake that you might, I don't know, rescue the guy who has the human blood in his refrigerator." Xander pulled out his lime green water gun and started looking down the neat aisles of gravestones.

"If you're counting on that, better start uncounting what with the chip." Spike tapped his head.

"Ah, but I know something you don't know," Xander sing-songed before catching a glimpse of Spike's mortified expression. "And I'm thinking the sing-song isn't working here. But the part I know that you don't know is the part where you can kill demons even if you can't pinch an old woman without a migraine. Which really, can I say I'm grateful because those guys are looking cranky." Xander nodded toward a group of four fledges walking toward them, arms arrogantly swinging and game faces on.
"I hope you're bloody right or this is going ta be a short fight," Spike said as he rolled his head from one side to the other, stretching with cat-like motions.

"Oh, I'm right," Xander said even though he suddenly worried that the way the chip affected Vinji might not be exactly the same as a vampire. Either way, he didn't have time to shout a warning because Spike leapt forward, a sharp fist striking out at the lead vamp. Xander immediately knew that the Initiative used a one size fits all chip because Spike danced back with such joy that Xander couldn't help but laugh out loud.

"Think you can take the Big Bad, do ya?" Spike asked as the other three rushed at him. Xander leaned on a granite marker as Spike danced right before doing a neat reverse spin that made his coat billow out and sent a red-haired punk boy slamming into a tree.

Spike dusted two quickly, snapping one neck and staking the other with a branch he ripped from a tree. Then he amused himself with the two remaining vampires, trading kicks and punches with a gleeful violence that made Xander think of Nusa on those days when she would find some hunter or slayer seeking her. Killing villagers provided food, but hunting the hunters gave her joy. Vamp number three disintegrated into ash and now
number four started looking nervous, and Xander had to
wonder at the fledge's stupidity because Xander had
known from Spike's first punch that these four didn't
have the experience or years to compete.

So, when the skanky vamp with the greasy hair and Spike
both froze mid fight, their bodies locked into a stillness
that only the dead could manage, Xander felt the hairs
on his arms stand up.

"Soldier boys," Spike hissed.

"Oh fuck," the other vamp added, and then Spike drove
the broken branch through the vamp's chest so that the
shocked face turned to ash. Spike's eyes focused on the
brick wall behind Xander, and Xander didn't even wait to
see the enemy coming over the wall, he just started
running, dodging around headstones and digging in his
jeans for the keys to his Grenada at the same time.

Pulling the keys out, Xander scrambled around to the far
side of his blue lady and shoved the key into the lock
with far more force than necessary, and then flinched at
the sound of breaking glass as Spike found his own way
into the car. Xander slid in and started the engine,
throwing her into gear just as a soldier appeared in the
beam of his headlights.
The figure wore fatigues and a mask as it clutched one seriously big ass gun, and Xander didn't even try to steer around him. Luckily for the soldier, trained reflexes sent him rolling to the side just in time to avoid becoming a grisly hood ornament. Xander gritted his teeth and steered his lady around a turn as he both thanked god that the man had gotten out of the way and wished that he had hit him.

Yeah, killing was of the bad, but Xander decided that some humans deserved to belong in the "evil" category. Spike's body curled in a fetal position on the floor of the passenger side convinced him of that. Well, actually the petite Vinji woman with the skin stripped from her back convinced him of that, but Spike's terror wasn't making him feel any more charitable. While he was all for killing the dimension-conquering flesh-eating demons, and he could even understand Buffy's enthusiasm which occasionally led to a few mistakes, this genocide and torture approach made Xander want to feed a few of them to the Scourge.

He took several looping detours before heading for his apartment. Not even the Initiative would follow them into this neighborhood at night, and Xander pulled his car into the dark shell of an old factory, Spike had casually brushed the broken glass off the seat and perched
himself with one boot up on the dash and a cigarette in his right hand where he could easily flick the ash out the window. He remained silent, following Xander around to the front of the building with numbered doors and open stairs to the second and third floors.

Xander fished for his keys again as he headed for his apartment. Even though Spike hadn't said a word, Xander could read the tension in every twitch of Spike's shoulder when he spotted a human on the street and every deep draw on the cigarette that made the red-ember end glow in the dark. He'd proven to Spike that he could still fight, but he'd also reminded him that he had no defenses against humans. Xander hated it. But at least now they were safely home.

"Spike, come in," Xander offered as he opened the door to his apartment, flicking on a light as he walked in. Spike tossed his cigarette onto the sidewalk and stepped over the threshold.

"Well this is... it's bloody white trash, pet," Spike commented the minute he stepped in. Xander looked around the small room where the couch, a second-hand coffee table, the Barcalounger, a worn T.V. stand and the fake tree Buffy gave him filled the entire living room. A tiny island with a two burner cooktop and a single
barstool divided the space from the kitchen which included a half-size refrigerator with eight inches of counter separating it from a kitchen sink that doubled as the bathroom sink.

"Very white trash," Xander had to agree as he tossed his jacket down on the chipped coffee table and headed straight for the kitchen. Or at least the end of the room that pretended to be a kitchen. From there he had to push open a vinyl folding like his grandmother had in the old R.V. she had driven across the country, parking in Walmart parking lots on her last great voyage. She made it as far as Black Duck, Minnesota before dropping dead in the house wares aisle of the chain store.

"Coming?" he asked Spike.

"Wot? You inviting me in for a shower?" Spike rolled his shoulders, and with the coat gone, his tight t-shirt showed every inch of flexing muscle as his backbone followed in a serpentine movement that made his hips slowly twist. As the fear of humans retreated in that unique way vampires had of living in the now and forgetting the past, Spike reclaimed some of his lost confidence. In return, Xander's cock jumped up and did a jig at the invitation in that motion, in the raised eyebrow, in the taut lips and sharp cheekbones. Spike blew air out
through his nose and then took an intentionally deep breath, closing his eyes as his face rippled with demonic ridges. Xander could imagine what Spike smelled, and his reaction made Xander ache even more.

"I'm inviting you into my real place, but if you vant to stay here and play these games..." Xander shrugged as he reached over and flushed the toilet, slipping around to the shower before the pipes could fill again. Stepping into the ancient stall with sixties green tile that had grown in popularity only because most people in the sixties were too stoned to know the difference, Xander threw his shoulder into the back wall, and an entire section popped back six inches.

"Bloody hell," Spike had been leaning indolently against the framed door opening with his best 'come hither' look, but now he stepped forward and Xander reached for his keys, turning a gold one in the lock and then pushing the recessed section of wall back revealing a doorway.

"The locks are all mechanical. The tile section is held in place by water pressure, so unless you release that pressure by either flushing the toilet or running the shower, the section is solid. When you come in, let the
door fall closed, and the section of wall will set back in place," Xander explained.

He walked into his real apartment, and considered the space with a new eye now that he had shared this inner lair with his first guest. How funny that Spike and not Buffy or Giles or Angel or even Willow would be the first to see this. While not a palace, his real apartment had four times more floor space arranged into four open living areas.

A huge bed with a modern steel four-poster stood angled against a far corner with a rack of weapons behind it. Casting his eyes in a counter-clockwise circle, he next considered his small but state of the art kitchen with stainless steel and a granite-topped island. His living room contained only a low black couch and big screen television flanked by a built-in book case that contained his movies and game systems and stereo, and the fourth corner was his library, a very Gileseque desk in oak surrounded by shelves of heavy volumes. The bookcases against the wall extended all the way to the ceiling, but the ones in front of the desk stood only four feet high. And every section angled toward the center with corner shelving against the support beams so that no one could lay in ambush.
After what happened to Nusa, Xander found himself rather wary of ambushes and lairs. Which really... not much with the making sense since technically that hadn't been him standing behind his sire while he watched her turn to dust. Fifteen hundred years of vicious wisdom and jealous love and cold rage turned into dust to be trampled beneath the feet of her sisters.

"Hell, what is it with you Drac vamps? Bloody nesters havin' to have some nancyish lair."

"Drac vamps?" Xander turned to Spike just in time to see him let go of the door, watching in fascination as it first slammed shut and then slid forward so that the tile on the other side hid the opening.

"Yeah, knew Dracula, or rather him and me locked horns a bit. But this reminds me of him."

"Don't suggest I am anything like him," Xander immediately snarled, stepping up and slamming his forearm into Spike's chest, and sending the vampire reeling back into the heavy oak bookshelves with a crack of skull against wood. Xander stood there, his rage and loss and frustration roaring through his veins until he finally turned and stormed across the empty center of the room, his boots echoing across the stone tile floor.
"Right, what the hell's that about then?" Dropping the keys on the kitchen island, Xander put his hand on the cold granite and tried to catch his breath. He couldn't let memories that he hadn't lived command him.

"I'm sorry," he offered, pulling open the refrigerator and searching for a soda. He wanted something more, but he found that when he needed a drink, he needed to stay away from drink. Nusa's childe ran near the surface when he drank, and even Willy had asked him to take his drinking else where after a small accident involving two froctor demons, a vamp and a dozen or so bar stools.

"It's worse than keepin' up with Dru's emotions."

"Don't start vith me," Xander snarled as he turned around

"Right then, you're back to playing sire."

"I'm not playing at anything."

"Are you sure 'bout that? Not playing with me, then?" Spike stepped forward, and Xander retreated around the kitchen island.

"Enough," Xander finally said as he stopped on the far side of the island, and Spike stepped right up into his personal space, pressing his own chest to Xander's as he
ran a tongue along the inside of his lower lip. Xander gasped as he felt lust burn through him, making his face flush as he cock hardened.

"You sure 'bout that?" Spike asked, strong fingers reaching up and closing around Xander's upper arms until Xander narrowed his eyes as the dull ache began to grow. "You sure this is enough?" Spike leaned forward and whispered the words in Xander's ear as he pushed his groin forward. Xander could feel needs that he had forced into some repressed corner surface, feelings he had shoved in with the knowledge that Angel was hot and the memory of Larry's blood in his mouth and the fear that he liked raping the two Aurelius vamps. Oh yeah, that closet door creaked slowly open.

"You don't vant to go there," Xander said as he tried to pull back. He didn't have the strength to force Spike to let go, but he flinched as his arms began to throb with the lack of circulation.

"Maybe I do," Spike answered, his own eyes narrowing in pain. "You remember what it felt like, pet? You remember feeling me filling you up, making you squirm and cry for more as your skin grew hot? Remember that day?" Spike's voice took on a low, cultured whisper which sounded more Giles than Spike with the sexiness,
and Xander really didn't want to think about how Giles-
voice came to sound sexy.

"I remember we both did what we had to if we wanted
to avoid the whole world endy thing," Xander countered,
remembering all too well the feeling of being held down
by a force strong enough to break him in half, a force
that had wrung screams of pleasure out of him as sharp
teeth scored hieroglyphs in his skin while first fingers and
then a cock had pushed into him.

"Maybe you brought me here for an encore," Spike
suggested. Strong hands slid down his arms and moved
to his hips, holding him tightly. Xander remembered the
reasons why he had submitted on that day, first to
Spike's lust and then to Angelus' rape, but those reasons
ended with Angelus' little trip to hell. And now Spike
couldn't break him in half.

Xander slammed into the granite countertop, crushing
Spike's hand and doing enough damage to himself that
he yelped in pain because, yeah, that hurt. It obviously
hurt Spike more because he let go of Xander and fell to
one knee as he cradled his head and cursed colorfully.
Using Spike's blinding pain as a distraction, Xander took a
couple of steps toward one of the three weapons racks
hanging in his bedroom corner and grabbed a manacle
and chain. Coming back to the kitchen area, he snapped the heavy metal in place even as Spike still cradled his head in his hands, rocking gently.

Xander held the chain and looked down at the injured creature in front of him. He could feel a twitching need to stake Spike, to punish him for submitting to humans, and yet he felt a need to hold him and feel him submitting more. Yeah, he had issues. Xander wondered briefly if any local therapists treated almost humans with more holes in their brains that actual working brain cells.

"Come on, up you go," Xander got an arm under Spike's arms and lifted without letting go of his new chain leash.

"I can bloody well stand," Spike snarled in full game face as he jerked back away. Xander quickly wrapped the hanging chain around his fist so that Spike couldn't pull free without seriously hurting him... and therefore seriously hurting himself. "You little--" Spike hissed through fangs as he shook his hand as though he could shake off a locked manacle.

"You are the one who woke these memories," Xander said as he pulled on the chain. Spike stood immovable. "You reminded me that of all the rules and lore, there is only one that really matters," Xander commented as he considered his damaged wrist, the one that Spike had fed
from at Giles' house. Spike had accepted his blood along with the title of child, and now Xander just had to find a way to enforce that. In the bright light of his kitchen, the bruises and puncture marks blended into a form of modern art.

"Oh, what's that, mate?" Spike resisted the pull of the chain, but he didn't try and step back. Instead he stood with his head warily cocked, obviously not willing to either submit or fight and have the chip go off again.

"The rule that says one may act however one wishes as long as one is able to defend oneself." Xander took the thumb of the hand tangled with the chain and pressed a thumbnail into his damaged wrist. Almost immediately, blood rose to the surface in a thin line.

"And you think you can get away with playin' sire? Not bloody likely. Soon as I get this chip out--"

"Vhat? You'll attack me? I'm well aware of a vampire's need for revenge having survived Angelus' version of it. However, plenty of spells would tame that blood lust of yours when it comes to me. There's a nice little Doegean thrall spell I translated last year that would ensure that you behaved yourself.
"You wouldn't." Spike raised his lip, showing the sharpened front teeth in their full glory.

"I vould," Xander answered. "I don't have strength to defeat you any more, but I have other assets." Xander considered the thin trail of blood now running the length of his forearm. Bringing his arm up, he licked the blood from his own skin while watching Spike's expression shift. The younger vampire wanted the blood, needed it. Xander continued to trace the meandering trickle up the arm, licking slowly. Finally he reached the source and closed his mouth around the wound, not sucking but still enjoying the expression of pain and lust and hunger on Spike's face.

"Soddin' little shit," Spike finally cursed.

"I have access to human blood--not just my own, but enough to keep you fed and strong. I can get you permission to hunt and feel your opponents' bones snap beneath your hands. I can help you find someone with the knowledge to deal with that chip. I can use that chip to manipulate you and force you to submit. And I can set a spell around you that will bind you to me forever. Your submission is not a question because I can force you to submit and you cannot defend yourself." Xander could feel a twinge of guilt over the last statement, not so
much with the saying it as with the taking advantage of it; however, he knew he needed Spike's submission as much as Spike needed to truly submit. Without a sire or a mate, he would be alone, and solitary vampires simply did not exist.

"I can get those things from the English git," Spike countered. "That's why I bloody went there."

"You went there because you could not find me," Xander answered confidently. "And Giles will never give you human blood or even understand your need to either dominate or submit. He will not give you what you need, but I will."

Spike stood silent, defiant, unmoving. Xander reached to the limit of the chain and grabbed for the kitchen phone, hitting the speaker phone button before speed dialing L.A.

"Angel Investigations."

"Cordy!" Xander said in his most non-threatening, enthusiastic voice.

"Xander? Hey, what's up?"
"Need to talk to Angel," Xander answered without pointing out that he asked for the same thing every time he called and she should be able to guess by this time.

"Hold on a sec." Xander eyed his cold soda sitting on the far side of the kitchen by the refrigerator and tried to decide if he had enough chain to get there. Probably not.

"Xander?" Angel's voice came over the phone sounding slightly tinny. "Is everything okay?"

"Other than my ungrateful childe being a pain in my ass, everything's fine," Xander answered cheerfully. He actually felt fairly cheerful because Spike's resolve was already starting to crumble at the sound of his grandsire's voice. The childe was too young, too injured, and too scared to be alone, and Xander just had to get him to admit to it.

"Spike? Is he--?"

"He's fine, standing right here in fact. I just need you to get me a dose of sire's blood. The soldiers cut his head open and with the chip sending a few thousand volts through his brain on a regular basis, I don't want any more damage done." Xander asked casually and without further arguments even though asking a vampire for his own blood ranked right up there with asking a Da'halia
for his horn or asking a human for his finger. Not lethal, but certainly a rather large request.

"Xander, I--" Angel sounded like he would protest, and then stuttered to a stop. "I'll send you up a few pints with Cordelia," he finally answered. Xander wondered whether the change came from Angel's unwillingness to fight with the man he had raped or Angelus' desire not to lose one more Master of the already endangered Aurelius line. He even wondered whether Angel understood how his own compliance affected Spike. Angel, the current head of the Aurelius line had submitted to a human in a very intimate way, and now Spike's stiff body curved and softened.

"But you have to pay Cordelia for the trip," Angel added, his voice sounding grouchy enough to make it clear he didn't like the demand. And really Xander found that even more helpful. Angel didn't want to give in to Xander's request, but he did. Now the grandsire had paved a trail for Spike to follow.

"Not a problem," Xander assured him. He often translated for trade items, and he kept some of the more exotic jewelry for just such an occasion. Xander reached over to hit the speaker phone button and cut off the call
without any further courtesies and then he found much more slack in the chain.

"You want some blood?" he asked.

"Yeah." Spike didn't fight the chain when Xander walked to the refrigerator and opened the wide side. In a drawer, the human blood he'd bought lay in packs. He grabbed two packs, and then he hesitated. If he handed them over with directions to the mugs and microwave, Spike would gain some independence, but Xander had to admit that he didn't want that right now. He wanted his hellcat looking to him for food and protection, and he could no longer provide food by hunting with Spike.

He closed his eyes against the memory of Larry's heart slowing and finally stumbling to a stop in his embrace as he drank the warm, fresh blood. He even remembered appreciating the taste of a human on such a rich diet since the blood itself carried the heavy taste of cream with all the fats in it. Yeah, Larry had been a schmuck, but he often wondered who the boy would have become if Xander hadn't eaten him on that horrible night. Maybe he would have grown out of his bully phase and become a doctor or a civil-rights lawyer or a world famous actor. Okay, he had a better chance of growing up to be a
drunken waste of space like Xander's own father, but
Xander had stolen those other possibilities.

"You planning on givin' me that or just standing with your
head in the refrigerator all night?" Spike's demand
brought him out of his memories.

"Mind your betters," Xander commented as he slid the
blood drawer closed and kicked the refrigerator door
shut.

"Yeah, right," Spike snorted. Xander stopped with his
hand half way to the cupboard with the cups.

"Excuse me?" Xander could feel every nerve and muscle
in his body tighten at the challenge. Spike had been
bouncing slightly, his eyes on the blood. Now he stilled,
and yellow eyes moved up to Xander's face. Even with
the animal blood at Giles' house, Xander could see the
almost painful need for a quantity of fresh human blood.
A part of him flinched away from that pain, wanted to
take it away. Human sympathy rose at the sight of that
raw need. Another part of him whispered that Spike
needed someone who would be firm. He wanted to let
go of the authority that sat so poorly on young shoulders,
but he couldn't without knowing that Xander could
handle it.
"Wot?" Spike demanded arrogantly as though he didn't know why Xander would be upset.

"You vill acknowledge your betters."

Spike didn't answer, but the yellow eyes searched the room without making any move to apologize. Xander felt a desire to beat the attitude out of his hell cat rise up to challenge his human sympathy. He compromised.

Detouring to the sink, Xander grabbed a knife out of a drawer and stabbed the plastic skin. Blood spurted across the silver surface of the sink, creating a fan-shaped pattern and filling the air with the metallic scent that both revolted and attracted Xander. Spike took a step forward, his eyebrows going up as he watched the bag drain into the metal basin, collecting around the drain before sliding out of sight in the pipe.

"Bloody fucking hell."

"I have 900 years of memories, I have the blood, I have the obedience of your sire. You'd better think about who is your better, hellcat of mine," Xander said softly as he lifted a corner of the plastic and let the last of the human blood dribble out. Shaking the packet a bit, he used his toe to open the door to the garbage and dropped it in before turning on the water.
"I... bloody hell, the fucking universe hates me," Spike groaned as he leaned his back into the island as he watched with yellow eyes.

Xander left the second bag sitting on the counter as he stepped close this time, Spike's body remaining slumped as Xander now pressed in, trapping the vampire between his body, which Spike couldn't strike out against without triggering the chip and the unyielding granite.

Even though Ethan's spell had provided the details, he could still remember what it felt like to have his first childe at his side: the devotion, the power, the adoration and the fear. Now Xander pushed his body into Spike even harder, allowing his hands to travel up the strong, corded arms until his fingers explored under the edge of the sleeves. Just like on that night years earlier, Spike couldn't bring himself to say the words, and so he dropped his head to the side, the curve of his neck lengthening until Xander could feel a triumphant growl echo through his mind even if his body could no longer form one.

Xander dropped a kiss onto that exposed neck while he tightened his hands into Spike's arms, feeling the links dig into his palm on the hand that held the chain. Without warning, he sunk dull human teeth into that pale flesh,
feeling the skin yield even as the stretched muscle resisted his bite. With his own body pressed to Spike, he could feel a tremor run the length of Spike's body and then he released the bite and kissed the reddened skin, licking a few drops of blood that oozed from a line where his lower teeth had broken the skin.

"My beautiful hellcat. I vill get that chip out of your head," Xander promised.

"Right, and then?" Spike didn't move his head, his neck still stretched submissively before Xander.

"Um, we'll figure it out then? But you know random killing is so totally off the menu," Xander admitted without stepping back. "But there's always much killing of blood-sucking demons and drinking of bagged blood to look forward to."

"Bollocks, I'm bloody cursed with barmy sires," Spike snorted. Xander would have taken offense except that he had accepted his own fragile hold on sanity a long time ago. Besides, he'd take getting called barmy if it meant that Spike finally accepted him as sire again, and as that lithe body slowly relaxed, Xander moved his arms to encircle Spike.
"You must have done something horrible in a previous life," Xander agreed.

"Horrible thing is that I never got around to doing anythin' horrible," Spike disagreed, but now hands found Xander's waist.

"Let's get you fed, childe," Xander said as he turned and grabbed the second bag. This time he pulled a mug out of the cupboard and poured the thick red liquid into it before turning around and putting it in the microwave inset into the kitchen island under the cook top. Finally he dropped the chain and let the heavy links swing as the mechanical whirr of the microwave continued.

"I'm going to go use the bathroom," he explained as he headed toward the corner where a wall behind the television cut into the room at a 45 degree angle, hiding a small, triangular bathroom. He needed to get himself away from Spike before he threw the vamp over the counter while the blood cooled and spoiled. He needed to remind Spike that submitting had its pleasures.
Xander came out of the bathroom and considered the sight of Spike standing near the kitchen island, his fingers curled around the empty cup on the counter and his shoulders slumped. Xander thought back to being a young vampire, the need to fight, the need to know that the person who held your fate was strong enough to hold it. He sometimes dreamed of Nusa's arms around him, her nails carving his flesh, and really that shouldn't be such a naughty-dirty memory.

As he watched Spike shift, the chain on his wrist clattering against the marble, Xander wondered if he could do this. Hell, he wondered if he had a right to. Angel could fight Spike into submission, but Xander couldn't do that. The sad truth was that he couldn't keep Spike from taking the blood from the refrigerator the vampire now eyed, and he couldn't stop Spike from picking up the phone and calling some demon to come over and snap Xander's neck.

Xander took a deep breath as the prey part of his brain babbled about life expectancies and big bad predators with big sexy teeth. And yet, that voice that called Spike childe whispered about how much Xander had failed his favorite one. He had sent Spike to the slayer when
Angelus tried to end the world, and that had caused Dru to turn on her own childe. He had raped Angel so that when the soul got ripped out, Angelus turned his anger against both his rapist and Spike who had seen it happen.

Oh yeah, as a sire he had done more to screw Spike up in one night than Angelus and Dru had managed in a lifetime. Sometimes Xander felt like that night had just taught him new ways to be the Zeppo of the group. Standing by the archway to the bathroom, Xander watched as Spike's eyes left the refrigerator and explored the bedroom corner: grey Egyptian cotton sheets with burgundy and green bedding tossed about messily and weapons racks with an impressive array of ironwork, silver daggers, and chains and against the wall, a half dozen century old books stacked within reach of the bed. Willow wouldn't know the man who had chosen those, but Xander hoped that Spike would.

Spike's eyes finally left the bedroom and went to the library. Even though Xander couldn't read the titles, he knew that Spike's demon vision would allow him to see the various tomes from across the room. As Spike looked, a small frown would cross his brow from time to time, and Xander could imagine which of his titles would cause the most concern. The Libri Adnihiló would raise Giles' eyebrows as would the Vérbosszú. He wondered which
titles gave Spike that vertical wrinkle between his eyes that made him look worried.

As Spike's eyes traveled to the living room area, Xander found himself the subject of careful study. He leaned against the side of the arch and looked back. If he were still the vampire he'd been that night, he would know exactly how to turn Spike's closed suspicion to obedience: He'd challenge the childe, let him get some fight out, then throw him over the nearest surface and pound him until the rebellion turned to respect and obedience.

"My beautiful hellcat," Xander finally whispered as Spike stood leaning on the counter looking defensive.

"Right, so what now?" Spike's clipped words spoke more of fear than words could, and Xander pushed off and started walking toward his beautiful hellcat.

"You vant to fight, you need to fight," Xander said thoughtfully, and Spike's body tensed. "I remember being a century young."

"Yeah, but that wasn't real, now was it?" Spike challenged him. "Truth is ya only have about... what... eighteen years? Not even out of diapers then."
"Who is to say what is real," Xander shrugged. "I remember a millennium of life as a vampire, you remember a mere century."

"Yeah, but I actually lived that century," Spike pointed out.

"Nusa existed, Jalon existed, Nusa's elusive childe existed. I've read volumes of chaos magic, and whether I lived those years in the blink of an eye, or whether I inherited the memories of a demon now turned to dust whose soul resides in hell... who knows." Xander continued moving in, carefully closing the distance as Spike held his ground and glared back.

"Demons don't have souls, mate," Spike disagreed.

"Then how is it that the demon can be resurrected after the body is destroyed? When the minions tried to kill Giles and the others to return the Master, what were they trying to return to those old bones if not the demon's soul?"

"But I thought," Spike cocked his head in confusion.

"Angel?" Xander asked, amused at how Spike's expression still mimicked humanity he no longer possessed.
"Yeah. We've both seen what happens when that bloody soul comes out of him, and I have to say he's a right bastard when that thing comes out."

"Yes, remove the human soul from the demon, and you have only the demon left, but the demon with its instincts and memories and all that it has learned... what is all that if not a soul?" Xander stopped and considered for a moment. "True, not a good soul, but then we are demons."

"We?" Spike's eyes snapped up from where they had been investigating the lines in the marble. Yellow flickered through the blue, and Xander flinched at his own stupidity. He hadn't intended to go there, at least not yet.

"You know, we in the imperial sense, like when queens and kings say 'we' to mean 'me,' not that I mean me; I mean you," Xander broke off as he watched the disbelief and amusement in Spike's eyes. He crossed his arms and glared.

"Right then, I can see I don't have to worry 'bout you lyin' to me," Spike said with a twisted smile, and Xander could feel the heat in his skin as he blushed. He really was normally much better with the lying, not that lying was good. "So, what do ya mean by 'we'?" Spike repeated.
Xander sighed as he considered trying another lie, but he figured Spike already knew his deep, dark secret what with the threats. Hell after tonight, Giles probably had it figured out too. He took a deep breath. "I have a human soul, but I also have nine hundred years of vampire memories and instincts. I have a part of me that is still a vampire because it learned how to be a vampire." Xander shrugged helplessly since he really hadn't figured it out completely himself. "I'm the other side of Angel's curse. He is a vampire cursed with a human soul, and I'm a human cursed with a vampire's soul."

Spike stood silently and suspiciously next to the kitchen island, and this really wasn't going the way Xander had planned it. Not that he had actually done much planning. He was more with the acting now and trying to cover his ass later.

"I know what you need," Xander said as he closed the last bit of distance so that he could reach out and touch Spike, lay the palm of his hand on Spike's cheek and watch as Spike tilted into the gesture.

"You still smell like a soddin' human. If ya just let me turn ya--"

"No," Xander all but snarled. Spike pulled back, his eyes turning yellow in frustration. "I vill not be your childe."
And as much as you might not mean to demand your rights as sire, the instincts are there. When one has a childe who is too powerful, the results are not enviable," Xander snapped, his thoughts going to Jalon, but he forced his mind back to other matters as he reached out and grabbed the dangling chain.

"You need to fight, yes?" Xander asked as he moved forward until he pushed Spike back around the island, chest to chest. Spike didn't argue, but he didn't move voluntarily until forced by Xander's steady pursuit.

"Yeah, mate. Feel like a right git letting the talkin' happy meal order me around," Spike whispered the confession, glancing out of the side of his eye as he obviously expected an attack, but Xander had guessed as much. Instead he just wrapped the chain around his hand and continued to advance.

"But I am also your sire, childe. You submitted to me, and you will honor that submission or I will turn you to dust rather than turn you out alone." Xander hadn't expected to say those exact words since he wasn't actually big on the idea of staking Spike, but the vampire's body relaxed a little at the threat/promise.

Xander allowed his vampire memories to surface as he thought of what Dru had done. If she had tried to kill
Spike, he could have fought his way free and earned his independence, but instead she had turned her back leaving him in a limbo. He couldn't fight free of someone who didn't want him, but without the fight, he couldn't break those bonds of allegiance that bound him to her. Just like with Angelus, Spike's instincts left him caught between being a childe of the line and breaking away to be a master of his own line. Aurelius vampires were fools.

"So, if you need to fight, let's give you something to fight, yes?" Xander asked as he closed the distance to the bed so that the back of Spike's knees pressed up against the mattress. Before giving Spike a chance to fully process that, he locked the one manacle to one of the four metal poles that stood at a corner of the bed.

"Bloody hell," Spike swore and pulled at the end, but the locking clasp at the end of the manacle held tight and Spike was chained. Xander watched as Spike's fist curled shut, and he could imagine the need to strike out even though Spike had just submitted, even though the chip would punish Spike. Xander stepped back out of range rather than test such a young one's patience.

"So," Xander pulled another manacle off the metal rack hanging next to his bed, "you will either lie down and
offer me your other wrist, or I will amuse myself by giving you reason to be sorry." Xander waited to see how Spike would react. If he truly wanted to fight, the triangular weapons' rack formed by the angle of the bed in the corner offered plenty of interesting choices. Of course, Spike could make it easy by submitting, but Xander didn't think that would happen.

Sure enough, Spike stood by the side of the bed in game face yanking at his chained wrist as he snarled. Oh the emotions of youth. Xander walked to a corner shelf, dropping the manacle and picking up a decorative bottle with a heavy glass stopper.

"Last chance, my hellcat," Xander warned mildly.

"Soddin'... I bloody well can't," he snapped, and Xander understood that. Spike didn't truly believe Xander could make him submit, and without that, he couldn't submit on his own. Removing the heavy stopper, Xander placed it on the oak shelf as he poured the liquid out into his palm. Without any further warning, he flung his hand toward Spike, and listened as the holy water droplets hissed on Spike's skin and wisps of smoke drifted into the air.

"Fucking--" Spike stopped complaining as he grabbed a pillow and ripped off the pillow case to rub at his burned
skin. Xander watched while Spike rubbed at his arms, timing his next throw so that an arc of water hit from Spike's shoulder, across his arm and then down onto his jeans.

Spike's answering growl came a half second before he threw himself forward and half across the bed before the chained wrist stopped him short of attacking Xander. Filling his palm again, Xander watched as Spike tried to retreat, shielding his face as Xander threw the next handful so that now the shirt and the back of Spike's neck took the brunt of the attack.

"You know how to stop this, my beautiful hellcat. Obey or you will suffer." Xander wanted to run for the bathroom and grab fresh water to wash away the red welts that now appears on Spike's skin. He wanted to apologize and promise to never do it again. Unfortunately, doing that would only make Spike feel weak, and if Xander did that, Spike would have only one way to regain his confidence. Then Giles would feel a need to torture Spike, and Buffy would do the guilt thing about not staking Spike and Willow would cry big Willow type tears over his body, and really that was a little too much drama for his stomach. So despite the way that the smell of burning flesh made him nauseous, he didn't show his disgust as he considered his next move.
He'd expected Spike to go for the weapons now, but instead Spike pulled a manacle from off one of the weapon racks hanging on the wall on either side of the bed and flung the heavy thing at Xander with all his strength. Xander dodged to the side as the chain hit the shelf and glass tinkled down as a number of small bottles broke open.

The smell of cedar rose from one of the broken potions, and Xander sighed at the lost hours of work.

"You're starting to annoy me childe," Xander said as he threw a larger handful of water, careful to keep the drops from landing on the bed.

"I'll do more than annoy ya," Spike snarled and with one leap, he cleared the bed and grabbed at Xander. Dancing backward, Xander found himself crunching over glass, ignoring the sharp pain when a piece pierced the bottom of his shoe. Spike's fingernails scratched down one arm and then closed, claw-like, around Xander's wrist.

The attack left Spike stretched between the chained wrist and the hand that held Xander. When Spike started pulling, Xander bent down and grabbed a manacle before snapping it shut around Spike's wrist. Spike snarled and whipped Xander onto the bed so fast that Xander lost his breath when he hit the mattress. Before he could get up,
Spike had thrown himself on top, and Xander found himself face down on his own bed and comfortably trapped.

"Spike," Xander said in his best threatening tone, and obviously it wasn't threatening enough because Spike simply started nuzzling at his neck. Xander limply waited as Spike's tongue teased his neck and then the vampire started gently sucking. When Xander first felt the twin pricks of sharp teeth, he waited for the chip to fire. And waited. And waited. Xander felt the first sensual pull of blood from his veins, and you really couldn't count on American technology any more.

Since the chip seemed to need some help, Xander bucked up as hard as he could. Spike's teeth, which had slid in so easily, now ripped skin and muscle as Xander fought. The pain made him yelp, and Spike screamed before rolling off him. Xander pushed himself up, and grabbed the trailing chain left lying against the pillow as Spike curled in a ball holding his head.

A moment had Spike's second hand securely chained, and now Spike could only stare up, yellow eyes dull with pain. Xander didn't say anything as he moved down to untie Spike's heavy boots, pulling them off as Spike lay silent and unmoving. However the tightness of the
muscles as Xander removed the jeans spoke of silent rebellion and not submission.

Spike needed something words couldn't provide, and Xander could feel his own vampire instincts slide around his defenses like smoke flowing through the cracks around a closed door. Xander walked away from the bed, going to the low book case that sat on the edge of his office area. Closing his hand around a silver knife that sat on top of the piece, he scanned his books for the one he wanted. Finally he found it so high on a shelf that he had to use the lower shelves as a sort of ladder to grab the thin, cracking leather of the cover: Je Paegripelz Fornaielse—The Pleasure of Capture. With the knife still in hand, Xander carefully turned brittle pages as he walked silently back to the bed.

Glancing up, he could see Spike's yellow eyes following him. Xander absentmindedly swept broken shards of glass to the floor before setting the fragile book on the shelf Spike had attacked with the flying manacle, and Xander was so not cleaning up that mess. Eyeing Spike's shirt, Xander walked around to the far side of the bed without the broken glass and sat on the edge of the bed where he could slip the knife under the fabric.
With a loud ripping sound, Xander neatly shredded the t-shirt and pulled the fabric away so that Spike now lay naked, and Xander remembered this chiseled perfection. Moving onto the bed and straddling Spike's hips, Xander brought the knife up so that the cool flat blade lay against one of Spike's nipples.

"You have punishment coming, little one, yes?" he whispered as he tilted the edge slightly and carefully scraped the edge over the skin just hard enough to make the flesh redden. The knife bumped over the puckered nipple, nicking the edge so that a drop of blood appeared. Xander bent down and licked the offering, sucking to get a bit more blood as he felt Spike's cock harden in response before he sat up again.

"First, you have insulted me. You put yourself in an indefensible position because you wanted to be captured. You will not insult me by assuming that I need your assistance." Xander didn't miss the small flinch in Spike's body. He had guessed right. Bringing the knife up to the skin just below Spike's left nipple, Xander flicked his wrist and a small "c" shaped cut appeared. He quickly reversed the knife and carved a second backwards "c" that crossed the first. Blood welled in the curve of the cut, a bulb of red rising until gravity pulled it down across Spike's chest in a trail of red.
After allowing the trail to weave drunkenly down Spike's trembling body for a second, Xander used the edge of the blade to catch the drop, scraping up Spike's chest and leaving a wide path of red as he followed the blood back up to the original wound, catching the blood on the knife. Without taking his eyes from Spike, Xander brought the knife up and carefully licked the blood from the silver surface.

"Second, you have lied to me. You drop your head in submission that you do not feel, and you fight those to whom you owe allegiance." Xander brought the knife to a spot an inch below the first mark. With quick motions, he created a lop-sided "x" below his first mark. Again, he watched the blood pool and then fall before scraping Spike's body clean. When he finished licking the knife clean this time, he felt Spike buck up under him, a hard cock pressing into him from below.

"Not yet, my hellcat. You must take your punishment first," Xander warned Spike, and Spike's yellow eyes narrowed in challenge, but then he couldn't really do much else except tighten his grip on the chains that tethered him to the bed. "Third, you have spoken to me disrespectfully. You will accept my decisions in front of others even as I grant you permission to challenge me in
private." Xander's cut this time resembled a check mark with a curving hat.

"I never..." Spike protested, but Xander pressed the knife to Spike's chest in warning, and he closed his mouth without finishing.

"You forced me to threaten you in front of Giles. You will not do that again," Xander reminded him, scraping a little harder across the skin this time to ensure that Spike understood, and the pale skin turned bright red.

Spike hissed in pain, but his cock also twitched, the head swelling out from the foreskin. Xander considered his handiwork before bringing the knife down again to a point just below the third mark. "Fourth, you have doubted me." This time Xander cut deeper, a straight "I" with a crooked line through it: the runic symbol for need. The deeper cut made blood run from the wound, and Xander scraped up, forcing the blood back up onto Spike's stomach where it pooled around his belly button.

"And, of course, your worst sin." Xander eyed the carved chest and took a deep breath before the next bit. "You allowed yourself to be captured and you allowed yourself to be forced into submission by food." Xander put the knife at the center point between the two nipples as he drew the knife down to the belly button. This time he
didn't try and catch the rivulets of blood that sprang up from the quarter-inch deep cut.

"I won't submit to food," Spike snarled, snapping his fangs and he bucked up in the air, and Xander braced himself for the fight.

"No, you will not," Xander agreed. "You will never be so foolish or impetuous again because I will not allow it, childe."

"Not your bloody childe," Spike snarled.

"Yes, you are. You are my childe or you will be dust." Xander braced himself on Spike's chest as Spike snarled and bucked up, pulling against the manacles until red appeared around the edge of the iron.

"I'd rather be dust," Spike growled, but Xander didn't believe that for a moment. Spike's hard cock still proved his childe's true needs, but Spike had to submit or the spell would never work.

"Do you submit to Angel?" Xander asked carefully.

"Bloody hell no."

"Because you do not yield to the human soul that dominates your sire," Xander said confidently. "Look at
me, childe," Xander ordered, using the flat of the blade against the vampire's cheek to force Spike's head toward him. "Look at me," Xander ordered again, and yellow eyes finally locked onto him. "Look at me, look at this room. The human soul does not dominate. I am human, but I am just as much vampire, and you are my childe. You will submit or I will turn you to dust. The vampire soul in this body will turn you to dust even though the human part of me would release you and have mercy."

Xander watched as Spike's eyes searched him, and then the tension broke. Beneath him, Spike's body relaxed, and the eyes that searched him slowly turned blue.

"Bloody hell, ya really are both, aren't ya?"

"I am," Xander admitted for the first time. He and Angel had spent many nights sitting in the park or on headstones discussing that night, either of those nights, and he had never said the words even if he suspected that Angel knew. Never before had he admitted to the second set of beliefs and values that constantly whispered in his mind. "And you will not forget it again," Xander finished as he brought the knife to his own thumb before cutting a "v" shape in the pad.

"Vo vos audite meus lacuna , vo vos memor meus lacuna , vo vos pareo meus lacuna," Xander chanted as he
brought his bleeding thumb down over Spike's sternum, his blood and Spike's mixing. "You will not fight me again, my hellcat. I am the sire and I will remain so until one of us ceases to exist."

Despite Spike's early complaint about Xander's threat to use magic, Xander could feel the vampire relaxing even more. The bonds were tight, and his hellcat could relax knowing that the time for fighting had ended.

"My hellcat," Xander whispered appreciatively as he trailed a finger through the cooling blood, using it to create swirls and darts across the unmarked right side of Spike's chest before he lowered his weight onto his trapped hellcat and claimed his mouth. Spike trembled, but remained otherwise still as Xander explored curves and angles with his hands while tasting his young one, sucking at a fang until he could feel Spike quiver.

"So, ground rules, yes?" Xander panted out as he pulled back, his own balls aching with a supreme need to finish this little ritual. Well, unless he came in his pants, which was becoming more and more of a possibility. And wouldn't that just be embarrassing.

"Let's have 'em, then," Spike said, but Xander could hear the worry under the tone of indifference.
"I like you as you are, impetuous and fiery, but you will not challenge me in front of the others," Xander said, and then he moved his attack to Spike's shoulder, nipping a small piece of skin, which made Spike tilt his head to one side and thrust up into Xander's body.

"You will not submit to other humans, though. You stay near me and let me deal with them," Xander amended that as he considered just how pushy Willow and Buffy could be. He had years of deflecting them, and he didn't feel like watching Spike lowered by their demands.

"Right, no submitting to the happy meals," Spike said, and Xander had to smile at his hellcat's attempt to find the boundary.

"You are a vampire, and I will not ask you to change," Xander said as he pushed up and looked into Spike's eyes. "You are William the Bloody, terror of Europe and China. You are the Slayer of Slayers. You are a vampire strong enough to claim the title of Master at a mere century, and I will not take any of that from you. You are a Master in your own right, but you are also mine. I claimed you, I hold your allegiance, my magic binds you to me," Xander emphasized this by pressing his thumb to the first rune he'd carved. "And can I say ew?" Xander suddenly complained as he looked at his favorite blue
shirt. The subtle strip of dark blue on darker blue disappeared under the abstract brown pattern formed by Spike's blood.

"Right, so is making fun of you on or off the menu?" Spike asked, and Xander looked down at the amusement in Spike's eyes. For the first time, Xander could see his hellcat, no fears or doubts or pain—just the devilish amusement he'd first seen on that night when Spike had thought he'd caught the weak member of the Scoobie gang alone on Halloween night.

"It depends on how much you want to be punished," Xander answered with a laugh as he stripped out of the shirt, throwing it on the floor before attacking his own belt, struggling with it as he felt his own cock and balls throb with need, a need matched by Spike's own as he lay with his cock hard and a single drop of precum glistening on his stomach.

"Oi, figure I can take anything you dish out," Spike said, and Xander laughed again at the challenge of it as he scooted to the side of the bed and wiggled out of his jeans.

"Oh you do, do you?" Xander asked. "We'll see about that." Xander stood by the side of the bed and considered the body laid out before him. Spike writhed
invitingly, and Xander ran a finger up the inside of one chained arm as he considered his possibilities. He knew what he wanted to do, but he had to gather his nerve a bit since technically he hadn't done this before, and even counting vampire memories, he'd never done this willingly.

Sitting on the edge of the bed, Xander leaned over and took Spike's cock in his mouth, holding the base while he gently sucked the end. The results were spectacular. Spike reared up off the bed, and Xander could feel the cock thickening even more in his hand, and really that was of the weird. Xander sucked harder, using his tongue to play with the foreskin, and then he could feel the stiffening and contracting that announced the coming orgasm.

Xander pulled back, letting go and watching as Spike dropped to the bed with a breathy "fuck."

"Well that was fun," Xander said as he watched Spike glare at him. He went over to the second bookshelf, the one Spike hadn't wreaked, and considered his options. Picking up a silver container, he went back to the bed.

"Sadistic bastard," Spike complained when Xander gave that hard cock a flick with his finger, but then the hardness did suggest that Spike didn't really mind.
"Legs open," Xander ordered as he tipped the container and oil dribbled out a small hole. Spike opened his legs wide, and Xander started by rubbing a little oil into the balls before trailing back to that vulnerable entrance. Spike hissed in pleasure and frustration as Xander worked, and Xander just waited with a knowing smile as he felt the tingles start on the hand he had used to apply the oil.

Xander had one finger up in Spike before he started twisting and pulling at the shackles.

"Bloody hell, what the..."

"It has nettle extract," Xander admitted, "gives a bit of a tingle." He waggled his eyebrows at Spike, and Spike opened his mouth to answer. However, when Xander blew across the oiled balls, the words disappeared under a strangled cry as Spike dug his heels into the bed and pushed up into the air.

"Fucking hell," Spike cursed, and Xander slipped a second finger in, teasing even further by just barely brushing the prostate.

"So, are you going to apologize for making fun of me?" Xander asked playfully as he scissored his fingers open.
"Wot? I never—" his words disappeared under another strangled cry as Xander blew across the skin again.

"Oh, I guess you're right. You just asked if you could," Xander admitted. "Well, now you know what the punishment would be for making fun of me." Somehow he didn't think it would work as a deterrent. Spike panted, and Xander watched the chest rise and fall in a way that made Spike look strangely human. Normally vampires only breathed when they needed the air to make the vocal cords work, but Spike did so as a nervous habit, his humanity still clinging to him, and Xander guessed he should be grateful since he was kind of stuck in the middle himself.

Unable to tease Spike or himself any more, Xander knelt between Spike's legs and pulled them up to expose the entrance. Lining up carefully, he thrust in without any caution, trusting the prep work and a vampire's need for a little pain with the pleasure. The movement crushed his own cock hard enough to bring tears to his eyes and force his own orgasm back as he adjusted, and this had been a lot easier when he'd been a vamp himself.

"Bloody hell, I'm fine, move your bloody arse," Spike cursed in his own brand of begging and Xander pulled back, feeling the artificial heat of the nettle-infused oil
and the tightness of Spike's passage. Thrusting in so hard that skin slapped against skin, Xander felt his own orgasm crash through him without warning, and yeah he had definitely liked the vampire control a whole lot better because coming after two thrusts was such a teenage boy thing to do, but Xander couldn't deny biology.

Giving a few short thrusts into that warm, tight channel, Xander collapsed onto Spike, panting in need. Xander could feel Spike's cock twitch under him.

"Not finished here, pet," Spike pointed out in a brittle voice.

"Hardly my problem," Xander muttered as he gathered his brain cells back together. "Besides, I did say I would show you the punishment for making fun of me," Xander pointed out as he carefully pulled out of Spike, his cock aching in that tight embrace.

"Bloody hell, you wouldn't," Spike said, blue eyes going yellow again.

"I'm your sire, I bloody well would," Xander pointed out. Despite the little niggle of guilt that suggested a couple of well placed strokes would do the job, Xander stood up and pulled his belt out of the pile of clothes. Wrapping it
around Spike's legs twice, he tightened the buckle and considered the bound body in the middle of his bloody bed.

"I have to get new sheets and meet Cordelia and go put a bandage on my foot. You wait here," Xander said with a playful slap to Spike's hip. Spike glared daggers, but Xander didn't miss how his cock twitched.

"I'll be back to take care of you, so until then, you can lay there and think about all the ways to make up for running out on me twice, childe of mine," Xander said as he walked away. Now that he'd mentioned it, his foot really did hurt, and he headed to the bathroom to check out the damage. Spike would just have to learn, like all good childer, he had to wait until the sire got around to him.

**Part Five**

Xander scooted back a bit, trying to avoid the broken spring on the old sofa sleeper as he watched the small television he kept in the outer apartment. Not that it was an apartment—more like a large closet with a refrigerator at one end. If he honestly had to live in a
dump like this, he would set fire to it just for the pleasure of watching it burn.

Sitting in the flickering light of the television, Xander suddenly wondered what the hell he was doing. He... what? Loved? Desired? Lusted after? Felt possessive about Spike? Oh god, Xander let his head fall back against the couch and stared at the yellowing ceiling. Okay. He felt something for an evil creature, and did that make him evil? Xander knew he had evil in his heart and had since the hyena and the vampire, maybe even before that, but he couldn't avoid thinking that hanging out with the bleached evil was making him feel a little more evil than normal.

But hanging out with a vampire again, hunting, having a clan... not that he needed a clan. Nope, not the Xan man. He just needed friends, like Willow and Buffy, only ones that saw him as a fighter and who enjoyed the feeling of a sharp sword slicing through flesh and didn't complain about demon goo on shoes or go all weird when Xander laughed in the face of danger. He liked laughing in the face of danger.

Xander shot a glance toward the bathroom door as he shifted again and then really just wished Cordy would just show up because he was starting to get a headache.
He wasn't thinky-boy, as evidenced by the fact that he had obviously started something he couldn't handle.

Unfortunately, Cordelia Chase didn't live by anyone's expectations or preferences, so he sat and stared at some bad science fiction movie, the plot of which seemed to be to get as many earth women out of their clothes as possible.

Xander had watched nearly an hour of women with spandex shirts that bounced with every step, and he still hadn't figured out any plot by the time a pounding at the door interrupted him. Sighing, he escaped the grip of the butt-poking couch and peered through the peep hole. In this neighborhood, you could never be too cautious, but only Cordy stood there with an expression that suggested she hadn't enjoyed the trip.

Pulling the door open, he plastered on his best smile. "Cordy!" he cheerfully welcomed her as he stepped back. He'd expected various Cordy-insults aimed at his pathetic, small apartment, but she just looked around and made a small disgusted sniff before getting to the point.

"So, where's the Bleached Menace?" Cordy demanded, a blue cooler over one arm and a small designer bag over the other. Trust Cordy to look like a million dollars even
while living off a vamp who grew up when five dollars a week could make a man a nice living. Xander guessed that Cordy was probably in the middle of breaking Angel of that belief.

"Out," he answered shortly.

"Ah-huh. Right. You just let him go wandering around town?" She didn't bother hiding her disdain or her disbelief.

"He's chipped; he can't hurt anyone," Xander pointed out, working to control his frustration at her challenging tone of voice.

"Exactly, and you just let the helpless vampire go wandering around with the soldier boys out there hunting?" Cordy put the cooler on the tiny island that barely had enough room for one placemat and turned to glare at him with her hands on her hips.

"It's not like he's a prisoner," Xander snapped, and the minute he did, he regretted it as Cordy's eyes turned to stone. Xander crossed his arms over his chest and tried to ignore the rising discomfort. Okay, now he knew why Angel complained about her. Of course, he kinda already knew she had a nearly magical ability to make anyone she looked at like a bug actually feel like a bug, and
considering she was a Hellmouth-raised princess, there just might be magic involved.

Xander dropped his gaze and suddenly he felt a familiar self-hate at the fact that he was backing down to Cordy because she was just a human, but then he was just a human, and Xander closed his eyes and took a deep breath as he tried to gather his quickly scattering thoughts.

"I don't care what you two have going on, but you'd better leave Angel out of it. Every time you call he spends the next week pounding some poor punching bag or some poor demon or in one memorable case, one poor wall. Of course then he gets guilty and buys me things for acting like an ass, but I can get him to do that without your help, thank you very much." Cordelia stopped, and Xander looked at her with an open mouth.

"Um, okay?" he stuttered an answer, not sure how to handle a Cordelia who sounded strangely protective of Angel. A nagging part of him resented a human's claim on a master vampire, but then he was sort of pot and kettlish on that score.

"So, where's Spike?" she asked again, the anger gone in a blink as she examined the room, which was strange since there really wasn't much to examine.
"He's not here. I don't have him shoved in the closet if that's what you're worried about," Xander said as he watched Cordy's eyes focus on the closet doors. Xander rolled his eyes and went to load the blood from the cooler into the small, dirty refrigerator with the motor that made a high-pitched whine when he kept the door open too long.

"Uh huh," Cordelia went over to the closet and slid open the doors. One stuck and she swore softly as she tried to wrestle it back onto the track. "So, where are you living these days?"

Xander nearly dropped the blood. "Hey, what you see is what you get," he answered after an awkward moment of juggling a squishy bag of blood while holding the refrigerator door open with his hip.

"Right. So, where's that comic book you raved about for days when Buffy touched it?"

"I don't know what you mean," Xander said as his heart started beating faster. The comic in question was hanging in an airtight display in his real living room along with several others he'd bought over the years.

"Considering that thing said 10 cents on the cover, I don't see why you got so cranky about Buffy tossing it, but I
definitely remember your face turning a beautiful shade of white. I also remember that you used to have some surprisingly not disgusting clothing in your closet. This thing is full of flannel and geekwear." Cordelia waved a dismissive hand at the closet and then sat on the arm of the couch, which was actually the most comfortable part of the thing.

"I, um," Xander struggled to come up with an answer. "When did you see my closet?" Xander went for distraction, but from the amused look of disbelief, he did it poorly.

"Senior year, that day we all came over right before we blew up the school. I sure as hell wasn't checking out you, so I had to look at something," Cordelia shrugged. "But enough about you, Angel promised you were providing payment for this little side trip."

Xander finished stacking the blood and happily followed Cordelia onto the new topic. "Hey, not sure this is real, but I found it in one of the vampire lairs we raided last year. Xander opened a kitchen drawer and pulled out the red and gold bauble. He traded a good solid week on a translation of a family lineage for a demon that smelled like moldy bread to get the piece. Now he offered it to Cordelia. He'd been planning on offering a smaller blue
bracelet, but desperate times called for desperate measures, and Cordy's sharp vision was making him pretty damn desperate.

"Oh, Xander," Cordelia breathed reverently as she stood up and flipped on the kitchen light to see the pendant better. "This is real ruby," she fingered the stone that hung from the gold chain, and Xander smiled at the expression of awe. Now if she just forgot the rest of the conversation, it would all be worth it.

"Hey, count on demon lairs to be full of the good stuff. Or is that dragon lairs that have the treasure?" Xander went to go sit on the couch, but he found himself in a tight hug. Before he had a chance to return the embrace, Cordelia had let him go and practically pushed him toward the couch.

"I should probably have it cleaned to make sure I don't get cooties," Cordelia sniffed.

"You know, as much as you abuse me, why didn't we ever get together?" Xander asked with a wink.

"Because I'm top dog, and I don't plan on sharing that spot with someone with equal parts bossiness and dorkitude," Cordelia answered in a voice so matter-of-fact that Xander had to gather his thoughts for a second.
"I'm hurt," he finally complained as she fastened the gold and ruby necklace so that the stone lay on her bare skin, winking at him in red flashes.

"Whatever. Just do me a favor and leave Angel out of this because he goes and does the whole brooding thing whenever you two talk."

"Hey, so not my fault."

"So don't care," Cordelia shot back with an exaggerated shrug and a small smile. "Just so don't call any more."

"Right, like I want to talk to Deadboy,"

"If you need to talk..." Cordelia's voice grew suddenly serious, and Xander saw a flash of the true Cordy, the one who stayed with Angel because she had just as much loyalty and selflessness in her as anyone he'd ever known. Someone who delighted in verbally torturing others as she hid that more compassionate side, and he could appreciate her flare for torture too.

"I'm okay, Cordy," he answered just as seriously.

"'Okay' might be a strong word for it. I'd say more like not a complete dork," Cordelia sniped back, mask firmly in place, and Xander smiled.
"A complete dork who just gave you jewelry, so I think I've bought myself some insult free time this evening."

"As if. You're just lucky I have some real work, other than playing go between for you and McBroody pants." Cordelia leaned forward and gave him a quick peck on the cheek before she turned around and headed for the door, waving her hand over her shoulder in a farewell.

Xander watched her breeze out of his apartment. Right. Time to deal with Spike. Chipped Spike. Not that he wanted Spike dechipped. Okay, maybe a little want in there. Xander sighed as he closed and locked the door. Spike needed Angel's blood, and he needed a brain transplant, but at least he could fix one problem.

Walking into the inner apartment, Xander avoided looking at the corner with the tied-up vampire as he focused on the west wall. His prized comics hung in sealed containers that protected them from dust or grease or inconsiderate slayers. The one with Robin crashing through a paper hoop to appear for the very first time had a place of honor on the top row with the first comic book to feature Cat Woman and the one with Superman joining Batman and the one where Spiderman had to fight the Chameleon.
"Give me your word that you won't do anything I wouldn't do," Xander said, still facing the wall.

" Seems like I'm not sure what that means," Spike's voice sounded calm, but Xander could imagine how the childe felt. He'd pledged himself to a sire who just might have lost his marbles. Then again, this should be familiar territory for Spike. Xander turned around and found himself mesmerized by the sight of that perfect body spread out in front of him, still tied to the bed by his wrists with his ankles wrapped in leather.

"Promise me that you won't do anything I might find morally of the bad. No killing nuns or eating babies."

Spike's head tilted to one side as he held his head up at an awkward angle that left him looking down the length of his body.

"Right then, those the only terms?"

Xander thought quickly. "No doing harm to anyone who doesn't, you know, completely deserve it. And at least try to avoid doing harm even when someone does deserve it," Xander amended himself. Spike stared at him silently. "And no doing stuff that could hurt someone even if the chip lets you do it, so no trying to make Buffy starve herself to death by calling her fat. In fact, no calling Buffy
fat at all because she so isn't, but if she doesn't stop dieting... and I think I'm going to stop now." Xander felt his face heat as he realized he had just blown through all his cool points. But at least he wasn't the one tied up. Xander wandered across the middle of the room, biting his lower lip and considering the perfect body laid out before him.

"So, you want me to be some bloody boy scout?" Spike asked, scorn clear in his voice.

"No!" Xander instantly replied before the rest of his brain started complaining about Spike tone of voice.

"Then wot?" Spike's accent thickened and his face froze into a cold expression, one that others might call anger, but Xander thought probably held more fear.

Xander sighed as he tried to get this right. The words he spoke now meant too much for him to fuck this up. "Promise me that while you will still be snarky and bitchy and just as—" Xander struggled for a word, "as puerile as ever, you won't actually cause permanent or substantial harm to anyone if you can avoid it."

He looked into Spike's eyes as he reached the side of the bed. Reaching out, he trailed one finger up the captive leg, feeling the smooth, cool skin ripple in response.
"Promise me that you won't make me sorry for getting that chip out for good. Promise me that you won't do something to confirm Giles' belief that I'm in total self-destructive mode here." Xander now focused on that hard cock as he allowed his fingers to brush the edge of the surrounding hair, his fingertips exploring the curve of a hip and the dip of a bellybutton as Spike hissed an unnecessary breath. "Promise me," Xander finished. He splayed his fingers out against Spike's strong thigh and looked into bright blue eyes.

Spike considered him for several minutes, and Xander knew that Spike knew that his words would matter.

"You askin' me ta go crawling around your mates?" he finally asked.

"No! Um, I'm thinking I don't want them to see you crawl. I don't intend on anyone seeing you crawl," Xander's fingers tightened until they created furrows in the flesh and he had to intentionally loosen his grip.

"So, if I have the chip out and some soldier boy is tryin' to take me?" Spike let his question trail off.

Taking a deep breath, Xander sat on the bed and stroked a patch of skin as he watched Spike struggle to not twist and whine in need. "I'm not big on the thinkiness. I've
always been more on the act now and figure out how to cover my tracks later. Hell, even as a vampire I drove Nusa insane with the whole taking on a slayer by myself trick, which I managed to do over and over and over again despite skin-flaying whippings, and thinking was not really a big part of the package."

Xander remembered that part of his history with equal parts pride and self-loathing. He just really hoped that part was all imagination, the overcompensating of a Zeppo who had a slayer always telling him to go home despite the fact he had fought at Angel's side any number of times. He hoped the memory of killing five slayers was his own sick and twisted imagination and not chaos magic making the impossible possible.

"Anyway, I've decided I'm going to stop with the thinking and go with acting first, covering of ass later," Xander admitted.

"Right then. What the bloody hell does that mean?" Spike asked, but the tone carried more amusement than anything else. Well, maybe less amusement than frustration, but Xander was chalking that one up to the slow, tender stokes he now made up and down the shaft of Spike's cock, a tenderness more torture than any whip.
"Means that I would want you to kill as few soldiers as possible," Xander answered, "and no torture, definitely no torture," he amended himself after remembering Angel's story of Spike's last visit.

"Deal," Spike offered. "My word on it, and while I'm an evil, murderous bastard, I do keep my word."

"Oh yes, you will," Xander agreed as the magic made the air flare with a subtle heat before it shimmered and settled into Spike's skin.

"So, the only thing definitely off the menu is torture; torture's my job," Xander added as he swirled a thumb around the head of Spike's cock and then took his hand away altogether as Spike made an awkward attempt to thrust up.

"After all," Xander said with a smile, "I'm sire, and that makes this body mine," Xander pointed out as he ran a fingernail up the underside of that engorged cock. Spike slid into gameface and snarled. Xander only pulled back again, and this time aimed a snapping finger at the head, tweaking it hard enough to elicit a growl from Spike.

"Mine," Xander said cheerfully as he flicked the head of Spike's cock a second time. "Mine," Xander reached down and jerked a single hair out of Spike's balls. Spike
hissed, snake-like and low. "Mine," Xander said as he trailed a tickling finger around the head of the cock so that frustration shone out of Spike like rays of sunshine.

"In fact, you're all mine, and I'm never letting you go again," Xander said as he yanked off his shirt and lay down next to the bound body. "You're my deadly pet, and you'll never escape me," Xander reached over and took a small brownish nipple in his teeth and nipped sharply before sucking.

Spike groaned, and his self-control snapped as he started twisting so that the metal frame of the bed creaked. Xander ignored the struggles and continued to alternate sharp nips that caused bucking desperation and sucking that led to a needier twisting motion.

"All mine, and I can do whatever I feel like with you," Xander pointed out. "I can leave you tied here forever and slam into you a dozen times a day until you're worn out and used up and lay here limp from pleasure and pain."

"No bloody way you can wear me out, mate," Spike snapped back, and Xander recognized the challenge. He laughed slowly and quietly, little more than a chuckle.
"Maybe I'll just fill you up then, stuff the world's largest dildo up your ass and seal it in so that every time you move you remember that your body is mine. Maybe I'll mark you so that every time you look at yourself you remember that I'm never going to let you off this invisible leash you're going to wear for the rest of your unlife." Xander dug a fingernail into one of the faint rune scars hard enough to make a crescent-shaped cut. Xander had a dozen more small tortures planned, but Spike's body stiffened and arched as he came all over his own stomach.

Xander looked up at Spike's face, both eyebrows raised in question and wishing he could figure out the one eyebrow trick.

"Don't bloody say it; it's been too damn long. Besides, it's not like you lasted either," Spike complained.

Xander didn't say anything, but he did laugh as he settled back down onto the bed, thinking that he really needed new sheets. Seriously needed new sheets. However, tomorrow would have to be soon enough.

"Plannin' on untying me?" Spike asked as he yanked the wrist shackles, making the chains rattle.
"Nope," Xander answered as he tucked a pillow between Spike's head and arm so that he could lay his head next to his childe's. Clapping twice, Xander made the apartment lights turn off as he hummed the tune of "Clap on, clap off."

Part Six

Morning came entirely too soon for Xander, or afternoon anyway since he found late hours suited both his sidekick-to-the-slayer and his translator-to-the-demons personas. As he struggled out of sleep, he found himself remarkably unbothered by the whole giving-Spike-permission-to-kill thing even though he knew Giles and Willow would put him through a depossession spell while Buffy yelled at him. He was just going to have to live with not telling them. Ever. Never ever.

While Spike still slept, Xander went to the outer apartment to get some of the sire's blood to help Spike heal up. Despite the human blood he'd had yesterday and the night's sleep, the vampire's color still suggested poor feeding. And despite the agreement, Xander could
still practically feel Spike fighting to not fight. Xander wasn't about to let Spike near anyone until he was physically ready and not struggling with their relationship. Putting the blood into his real refrigerator until Spike woke, he started his 'morning' routine.

"Soddin' bored now," a voice complained when Xander had all his concentration on tracking down the possible verb conjugation forms for an Amphisbaena dialect.

"Gah!" Xander dropped the pen he was using and clutched the edge of his desk.

"What the?" Spike's voice sounded concerned for only a second before he started laughing.

"Laugh it up," Xander groused, "I'm trying to do work here, and you startled me."

"Right, scared of the dark too?" Spike's voice carried none of the venom of his words but even so, Xander felt a flare of anger that his own childe would so disrespect him. Xander pushed himself half out of his chair. Before he could even stand, Spike's eyes dropped down to the floor. Fury drained from Xander as he realized that for Spike, this probably counted as obedience. Besides, he didn't want to pull his hellcat's claws.
"At least I'm not stupid enough to piss off the person with the keys to the chains and the access to the sire's blood," Xander pointed out, and he went ahead and stood up, a smirk on his own face. Spike's eyes darted back up, and Xander remembered being on the other side of this dominance ritual.

He remembered racing through the park, Buffy distracted by the need to pound Giles' location out of someone, scabby-faced minions stalking them, being human and getting dragged to Angelus. He remembered being forced to his knees while Angelus ruffled his hair with deceptively gentle fingers and described how he would torture Xander, not that he had time to do most of it. He remembered being shoved in a room with Spike, expecting that the younger vampire would want revenge. He remembered making those same darting glances as he tried to figure out how far he could push the crippled vampire... or rather the not-crippled but faking it vampire.

Spike's eyes darted up and found something that encouraged him to keep eye contact. "Oi, not fair," he complained in a thick accent.

"Oh yeah, and you expect me to be fair?" Xander turned his back to the rather satisfying sight of a chained Spike
in his bed and fished two blood packets out of the refrigerator.

"Yeah, well you're a human, the slayer's white knight even. You were ready to die under Angelus in order to give her time to save the world," Spike's voice had an unusual seriousness, and Xander remembered that night, what he'd done to keep Angelus busy while Spike went to Buffy for help.

"And you turned against your line to save the world right beside her," Xander pointed out as he heated the blood.

"They weren't my line by then, were they?" Spike answered just as quickly. Xander looked up at the seriousness in Spike's face, their gazes locking for a good minute until the microwave beeped to a stop. Retrieving the giant yellow mug with "Thinking of you" on the outside and "naked" on the inside hidden by the blood, Xander headed over to the bed.

"They aren't worthy of you," Xander said as he put the cup down on the triangle-shaped shelf between the last kitchen cupboard and the bedroom area. "They're deficient," Xander added when he considered the ploys Angelus had fallen for. He never would have fallen for the doe-eyed "please don't rape me again, you're just too manly and big" trap.
"Not like my plans have been goin' well lately," Spike pointed out, and Xander stopped, key half-way to the manacle as he looked down at his vampire.

"Yeah, well considering Buffy's taken out the Master and his minions and Angelus and Order of Teraka and Bazor-momma and the Judge and how long are you going to let me keep going on because the blood's getting cold," Xander said as he unlocked the chains.

"Well, when you put it like that, I'm in good company," Spike smirked as he sat up, cracking his back before reaching out for Angel's blood.

"Of course, no one else had a chance to take down Buffy, and you had her dead to rights twice and couldn’t finish her off because you were doing the whole bragging bit. You really need to work on that," Xander finished. Spike didn't answer, and Xander had no idea if that was some silent acceptance of the criticism or enjoyment of sire's blood. He put the chains away without continuing with the lecture since he didn't really have room to throw many stones.

"So, ya plannin' on telling me what your handiwork means?" Spike finally asked, looking down at the small runes carved along the left side of his chest.
"You mean these?" Xander asked, reaching over and tracing fingers down the pale skin. The runes remained, small flat scars that would remain as long as the spell. "Just a little blood magic," Xander shrugged dismissively. "Don't you trust me?"

"Let ya carve 'em, didn't I?"

"You didn't have much of a choice," Xander pointed out as he carried the now empty mug to the kitchen where he put it on the counter.

"Details," Spike dismissed that with a wave, "so what exactly did you carve in there?"

Xander returned to the bed and looked down at the strong, lean body and at the runes carved into it. He considered whether or not he really wanted to confess. Reaching out, he ran his finger over Spike's cool skin, feeling the edge of the scar that formed the first rune, the double-sided cup.

"It invokes Janus." Rubbing the skin a little harder, he felt the heat of friction as his finger traced the nearly invisible scar. "He's the god of beginnings and endings and new starts. Ethan used his image to summon the original spell, so it seemed right to ask him back."
"Can't say I'm in favor of any god watchin' me—demon here," Spike objected, and Xander shrugged.

"Little late to object now," he pointed out. He moved his finger down to the second mark, the 'x'. "The Roman god Orcus might be more your kind of god. He's the god of oaths, and he punishes anyone who breaks an oath, like someone who would refuse to obey after submitting." Xander looked at Spike with a serious expression, and allowed the silence to say all the things he didn't want to have to say out loud, all the consequences for breaking an oath once you were brought to that god's attention. The threats that lay in that figure that Xander had carved in flesh, Xander couldn't bring himself to say, and illogic, thy name is Xander.

"Bloody hell, that's taking things a mite bit far," Spike said, his eyebrows lowering in concern as he looked at the mark.

"Ah, but he is also a vengeance god who will give blood retribution for those who are wronged," Xander then pointed out. Spike's eyes snapped to him, and Xander stared back steadily. Spike's expression slowly turned from one of outrage to satisfaction.

"The third mark," Xander fingered the checkmark, "is Furrina, the Roman goddess of darkness who makes
things clear. When those who hunt in the dark pay homage to the goddess, their luck will improve." Spike's face took on a definite smug edge.

"The last one," Xander fingered the "I" mark. "It's the Celtic symbol for need, but it's also the symbol for the goddess Adeona." Xander stopped there.

"And what's she do?" Spike asked quietly.

"She guides lost children home," Xander answered. He looked up, and Spike stared at him with open shock. For several seconds, they remained frozen, Spike sitting on the edge of the bed clutching a mug, and Xander allowing his hands to explore the carved spell, fingertips brushing off flakes of dried blood.

"Not exactly a demonic spell there, luv," Spike finally said, the accent mutated into something that sounded like Giles and BBC news and that soap opera he could never understand.

"I'm not a demon, Spike. You demon; me human." Xander shrugged. "Of course, I think I might be a morally challenged human because this spell means you have to obey me or suffer the anger of some pretty big gods, and I'm fairly sure than enslaving people is on the not-so-much side of morality."
"What? No lightening? No Hellmouth opening and flinging me to hell if I disobey?" Spike asked, blue eyes both amused and challenging.

"Don't even say that!" Xander reached out and slapped a hand over Spike's mouth.

"I think having four powerful beings pissed at you and giving you the worst luck in all creation is bad enough. Around here that might even be enough to open the Hellmouth." Xander pulled his hand back and clapped it over his own mouth. Spike gave a quick bark of laughter before he settled for smirking so broadly that his cheekbones became sharp cliffs.

"Hey, this is the Hellmouth. And I totally didn't mean that, so takebacks," Xander said as he glared at Spike.

"Right, because the evil gathering around the Hellmouth allows for takebacks," Spike said.

"Yeah, well if you aren't careful, you're going to find yourself with the kind of luck where a car kicks up a rock and breaks your front window when you're driving in daylight or you trip over a shoelace in the middle of kicking the ass of some demon or the slayer is seriously PMS'ing on the day you insult her new jeans," Xander warned in a more serious tone.
"Bloody hell, you wouldn't."

"I already did, my Hellcat. Break your vord to submit to me, and Orcus will demand revenge and Furrina will find you anywhere you hide. You're mine." Xander watched Spike's body shiver, that cock, which had started hardening when Xander traced the runes, hardened even more now.

"Wait a soddin' minute. If this means I can't ever lie..." Spike let a growl carry the bulk of his threat.

"Nope, just your word to me that you would submit, so at this point, doing anything that would be considered refusing to submit would be bad of the unlife-ending variety," Xander confirmed.

"Effin' mojo," Spike snapped.

"Yeah, but now that I know you aren't going to try eating the innocent of Sunnydale, we can concentrate on getting that chip out of your head. Well, that and other stuff of the you submitting variety." Xander trailed his fingertips up and circled the back of Spike's head, pulling the vampire up. He could feel a moment's hesitation before Spike followed the unspoken command and stood.
"Someone needs a reminder lesson in submission," Xander commented calmly, a thousand lesson plans running through his head, many of them making his stomach roll uncomfortably even as his cock hardened, and he was a sick, sick boy.

"Don't bloody need lessons. Could do with some shaggin' though," Spike suggested with a shimmy of his body. Spike's naked body pressing into him reminded him that his childe needed this; his childe needed to know that Xander's Zeppo parts wouldn't stop him from being a sire. Xander hesitated, his hand on Spike's ass pulling him close as the realization struck him. God. He really was dumb. After Angel and the soul and the no more with the sire stuff and the whole Yoda betrayer screaming, he really should have figured this one out about three exits back.

"You will take whatever lessons I chose to teach, my Hellcat," Xander corrected him, suddenly understanding what he had to do in order to prove himself. He slapped Spike's ass hard enough to make the sound echo in the room. Against his neck, bone shifted, and Xander could feel vampire ridges pushing into his skin. Well, he could feel them until Spike started slowly sucking at his neck, giving him an old fashioned hickey like Amy had... at least until she'd gone and rat-tat-tooied herself, and Xander
shivered as he realized that all of his potential and actual lovers had been some attempt to get back this feeling: Amy with her magical powers, Faith with her slayer powers, a blissfully short-lived crush on Cordy with her emasculating powers. He missed the feeling that he was petting a tiger that could turn and rip his hand off if he wasn't careful.

Now he knew what he wanted. He wanted to own and control a body where power ran below the skin. He wanted to throw himself against a lover strong enough to survive it. He had this raw need to mark and possess and demand and dominate. Xander lowered his mouth to Spike's neck and placed a gentle kiss on the smooth skin before he bit down with all his might, the sharp taste of metal like when he'd chewed aluminum foil making his jaw muscle feel almost a shivery cold as saliva rushed into his mouth.

Spike's whole body jerked, and Xander slapped a hip awkwardly, unable to get a good angle. "Face the bed," Xander ordered.

"Like facin' you more," Spike retaliated with a hand down the front of Xander's pants, fingers finding the sensitive cock's head.
"Childe," Xander did a fair imitation of a growl as he twisted as hard as he could on Spike's exposed nipple.

"Oi, that hurts," Spike howled as he backed away, rubbing the offended skin.

"I said face the bed. Stand at the end, and face it," Xander crossed his arms and allowed himself a very un-Xanderish smile, or rather a very vampire-Xanderish smile. Spike hesitated, but then turned and took the two steps to the end of the bed, facing it so that he was standing between the two iron poles that stood at the foot of the bed. Xander took his time as he walked around to the second rack and chose items. Spike watched carefully, but Xander ignored him as he picked up one item after another, fingering them carefully. Some he put back on the various racks, others he laid out on the messy sheets.

"Chain your ankles," Xander ordered as he tossed two manacles at Spike. Each had a wide iron cuff for a limb and then a small one that would fit perfectly around the iron pole. Spike caught them as they bounced off his chest, and Xander could see the need to submit warring with instincts that still told Spike to eat the human. Xander stood with his arms crossed, waiting. This could
only end one way, but every second Spike hesitated would bring more punishment.

Spike finally took the chains, and locked them around his ankles before spreading his legs wide in order to chain himself to the poles.

"My hellcat," Xander whispered, walking around behind Spike and pressing himself into Spike, the childe's reward for obedience.

"Bloody neutered hellcat."

"Don't look neutered to me," Xander remarked as he slipped a hand around and cupped Spike's heavy balls. He rubbed the skin, feeling the curly hairs bristling against his fingers as Spike hissed his pleasure and dropped his head back onto Xander's shoulder. The sight of that neck arched out in submission left Xander's legs so unsteady and trembling that he just felt like he'd just outrun a troop of zombies the entire length of Sunnydale.

"Soddin' hell yeah," Spike breathed out.

"Plenty more like that, but first you have a debt to pay to your sire, yes?" Xander commented as he pulled back. Spike tried to push himself back into that retreating body until he nearly lost his balance. Unable to reach either
pole to steady himself, he ended up bending over to brace himself on the bed.

"Such a lovely offer. I'll have to make sure to chain you more often, pretty one," Xander commented as the position gave him clear access to everything since Spike's legs remained chained open. Spike started pushing himself back up, but Xander reached out and ran the back of one knuckle over the skin behind Spike's balls and up to the puckered entrance. Xander circled the ridge, and Spike sighed and lowered his top half back down onto the bed. "So pretty and so submissive. You know I'm master, and your demon will learn," Xander promised.

He slid a finger inside Spike, the skin dry and warm with friction as he pushed in. Spike wiggled a little, going up onto his toes before he settled back down and pushed himself down the last inch or so until Xander's finger reached all the way up inside, the knuckles of his other fingers pressing into Spike's tender skin.

"Someone went to his grave a virgin," Xander chuckled as he felt the muscular ring tighten around even one finger.

"Not exactly one now, am I?" Spike answered, his words muffled by the bed as he lay with his head and chest against the mattress, his ass pushed high by the angle.
"No, my hellcat, you are most certainly not," Xander agreed as he bent his finger, finding the lumpy, slightly harder spot where the prostate pressed into the colon. He wiggled his finger over it, watching as Spike jerked, his leg muscles cording and straining against the chains.

"Bloody hell, bugger me already. Can't take this rot," Spike cursed as he grabbed fistful of dirty sheets. If Xander hadn't already written off the sheets as a complete loss, the sound of tearing fabric might have annoyed him.

"That is the point, childe. You will take what I give you. More than that, you will beg me. You won't beg me to end the teasing, you will beg me to fill you, to remind you of your place, you will beg for the right to suck my cock and sit at my feet." Xander could feel that body shiver even as Spike pushed himself partially up, Xander's hand on his back keeping him bent over even though Xander could feel the tightness increase around his finger.

"So you can turn me into a pet?" Spike snarled.

"So I can make you my childe as I promised I would. You will sit at my feet and terrify nations of demons," Xander promised, draping his own body over Spike's back. "Isn't that what I promised you? I value your strength enough to chain you and keep you. I will make you strong again,
and when we face..." Xander hesitated as the thought of that crossed his mind. He took a deep breath and ordered himself to stop thinking of all sorts of nasty, tricky, pus-filled and demonic possibilities down that path.

"When we face the solution to the chip problem, you will be my hellcat: no doubts, no hesitation, no rebellion." With each word, Xander pressed into Spike's prostate, feeling the body fight him even as Spike reached back desperately, grabbing his jeans and hanging on with one hand despite the awkward angle.

"Not goin' to be tossed aside again," Spike muttered as he let his second arm collapse so they both fell to the bed, Xander on top with a finger still up Spike's ass.

"Betray me, and I'll stake you myself," Xander promised seriously. "Show me the loyalty you have thrown away on fools, and you will sit at my feet as long as I sat at Nusa's." Xander pulled his finger out so quickly that he could feel the friction burn the skin and Spike growled lowly. "Annoy me, and I'll just torture you," Xander finished.

Spike didn't comment as Xander locked a manacle around each wrist; he simply watched with yellow eyes. Stepping up onto the bed, Xander took the right wrist
manacle and pulled it up until Spike stood at the end of the bed again. Looping the leading chain through a hoop at the top of the pole, Xander used a simple clip to keep the chain as tight as possible. Xander repeated that on the second arm before hopping down. When he walked to behind Spike, he could see that the wrist chains were tight enough to leave Spike the choice between standing on his tip toes or letting all his weight dangle from his wrists. Soon enough both would become uncomfortable.

"Do you have any begging for me?" Xander asked as he trailed a finger down Spike's tight back. Spike shifted his feet as much as he could, which wasn't much, and remained silent. "You doubt I have the will," Xander guessed.

"Bloody hell, ya already went with the effin' mojo, think you've proved ya still are a bastard."

"Oh, but you think I don't know what you need. You need to know that I'm a ruthless bastard who will do what I have to do to get my way. It's our way, is it not?" Xander pointed out as he walked around to the bed. "You need to know that I want you enough to torture you into staying in your place. I made a mistake in that warehouse when I untied you, but to be honest, I hadn't had time to
figure out exactly how the two parts of myself fit together yet. I understand much better now."

"Oh yeah?"

"Oh definitely. Now I know that the correct response would have been to leave Angel chained up as I took you again and again, whipping your skin red until you pledged your allegiance and actually meant it. I have your obedience, but now I will force your allegiance."

"But you didn't do that, now did you. Little late to change history now."

"If Ethan's spell has taught me anything, it has taught me that it is never too late to change history," Xander pointed out with a laugh. He gathered a number of cool iron spheres from the bed, old-fashioned things with the marks of long-dead blacksmith's hammers forcing the iron into a ball shape. The globes rolled around in Xander's hand, three or four fitting in his palm. "I made a mistake, and now I'm fixing it. However, you have sinned, childe. Tell me your sins," Xander said as he walked over to a shelf and picked up the oil from the previous night. He carefully poured it into his palm with the iron orbs.

"You asked me to take you," Spike snapped, his voice now defensive.
"Oh, my hellcat, you didn't sin that night. You acted with far more control than I ever expected from such a young one. Barely a century and you gave up the chance to tear into a hot, virgin body. Such control. Such beautiful and deadly control," Xander corrected him as he came around to Spike's back, picking one oily ball from his hand and slowly working it into Spike's unguarded entrance. "That was one wrong guess, so shall we try again?" Xander asked, his finger slowly pushing the iron ball deeper into Spike's body as Spike writhed.

"Not good at guessing games, so why don't you just tell me," Spike snarled, but Xander could see the vampire's hips move in a short and jerky thrusting motion, the chains rattling as Spike pulled on them in frustrated need. The childe wanted to thrust, or be thrust into. Xander might not be able to bring himself to strip the skin from Spike's back the way Nusa had done to him after finding out about his first duel with a slayer, but that only meant he had to be more creative in his punishment.

"Refusing to guess is an incorrect answer," Xander said sadly as he took a second heavy ball and slowly worked it into Spike body. "Try again and you at least have a chance of being right. Think carefully, childe."
This time, Spike remained silent.

"Silence is also an incorrect answer. You will answer me when I ask you a question," Xander said as he worked the third iron sphere into Spike's body. "You will hold those or I will punish you beyond these little games," Xander warned before he pulled his fingers all the way out and left Spike to struggle to hold the balls in with his legs spread wide. As Xander walked around to the bed to retrieve more iron, he didn't miss the heavy cock, fully erect and starting to turn a dull red color. Spike might fight, but he seem to enjoy the fight.

"So, I ask again. What sins do you have to confess?" Xander repeated the oil treatment before he returned to Spike's backside. The oil made the heavy balls go in easier, but they also meant that Spike had to tighten his muscles more firmly in order to keep the balls from dropping out again. He slowly turned the metal sphere in his palm to make sure it had as much oil as possible.

"I killed people?" Spike asked, his voice confused as he cocked his head to one side.

"I am starting to think you want to be tortured," Xander commented as he worked a fourth ball in, pressing harder to get the previous bits of iron worked farther up the body. Xander could feel the moment one pressed
into Spike's prostate as the lovely chained body twisted and fought the restraints. Spike panted heavily, a human habit Xander still found both curious and endearing. "You are a vampire, and while I don't condone killing, and I won't have you kill, I can't exactly call killing a sin for you. More like a disagreeable eating habit," Xander pointed out, pushing the iron up so far that his finger disappeared up to the second knuckle.

"Bloody fuckin' hell," Spike snarled as soon as he had enough breath to complain and not just pant.

"I am your sire. What sin have you committed since accepting your place in my line?" Xander demanded as he nipped the skin of Spike's shoulder where the muscle bulged out as the chain pulled the arm tight. Spike grew still.

"You can't expect—" Spike started, and Xander pulled his finger out and shoved a fifth sphere up so fast that Spike swallowed his words. This time Xander had to work at it to get the iron all the way up inside.

"I didn't come to you for help," Spike snapped out. "Shoulda crawled back and admitted I got my arse kicked by some thing with antlers who took Dru from me."
"You should have admitted your failure and taken your punishment," Xander agreed. Now he let his hand reach around and close around Spike's cock, the oil making his skin slide smoothly as he teasingly stroked.

"Didn't know you'd kept the Halloween upgrade, mate," Spike pointed out, but his breath came in shallow needy gasps.

"Vampires do not live alone. If you could not come to me, you should have gone to my line or even to Angel."

"Never soddin' turnin' to Peaches," Spike instantly snapped. Xander slowed his touches until Spike whined with need, forgetting his anger. Xander's mouth found Spike's ear, sucking and nipping as Spike's body struggled with the bonds. In order to not stop the game before it began, Xander kept the thumb of his second hand up Spike's ass while he tickled the back of the Spike's cock and balls with his fingers. Soon enough Spike's mouth gaped open like a dying fish, his head fell back so that his Adam's apple stood out on the curve of his neck, and his hands opened and closed in time with Xander's slow, torturous strokes.

"You vill never have the chance to turn away from me again," Xander promised. "You will turn to me as the center of your universe. I am sire. I offer protection. I
punish transgressions." Xander increased the pressure on his stokes, slipping his thumb over the now exposed slit at the end of the cock as Spike began trembling. Xander stopped. He stood, holding his childe's bound body and feeling the chest rise and fall with unnecessary breaths.

"So, your punishment is for thinking that at a mere one hundred you could stand alone. You're lucky a chip and not a stake found you. Lucky and strong," Xander corrected himself when Spike's breathing stopped a little too quickly. His hellcat carried scars from the Aurelius clan, and Xander intended to replace them with marks of his own. And his first order of business was to make sure Spike didn't ever feel weak, no matter what his idiotic clan had told him.

"So, you will endure your punishment without letting these balls drop," Xander said as he slowly pulled his thumb from Spike's body. "For each ball that drops, you shall either have to do something that truly pleases me, something you come up with on your own, or you will endure twenty-four hours chained like this so that I can admire this body I own," Xander stepped back, trailing an oily hand across Spike's hip as he walked diagonally across the large room to the bathroom tucked in the corner behind the television. He wouldn't damage a good whip with oily hands, and maybe he still had more than
just a shadow of Nusa's childe in him since he still remembered his own sire's adamant insistence on caring for equipment.

When Xander saw himself in the mirror, his eyes dark with lust and his hair unruly and hanging in front of his eyes in waves, he froze in surprise for a second. For that instant he'd expected to see empty air, and Xander washed up quickly, avoiding the glass that reminded him both how much humanity he had and how much the shadow of his vampire self affected him.

Returning to the bed, Xander picked up a brown, leather whip, the long tails hanging straight and the wood handle worn smooth by handling. "A number, childe. And don't disappoint me," Xander added when Spike opened his mouth too quickly. Spike looked at him, shifting a bit as he worked back up onto his toes to take the strain off his shoulders.

"A hundred," Spike finally offered, his gaze focused on Xander. Xander nodded his approval as he considered the number. He would keep the first sets light enough that a hundred wouldn't damage his hellcat too much.

"And what is the rule with the iron spheres?" Xander quizzed Spike.
"Five up there. Each one that falls means I need to do something to impress ya or go twenty-four hours strung up like a bloody Persian carpet," Spike answered.

"Not impress, childe. You never need to impress me. At a hundred you held a Hellmouth. You took your first slayer when you were so young you probably still smelled of your grave. You escaped the Initiative, an act only managed by three other demons in all of history. Childe, you have no need to impress me. For each sphere you let fall, you disappoint me, and that disappointment must be repaid with pleasure," Xander corrected him. Xander smiled as Spike's cock twitched in response, and Spike pushed himself up as far on his toes as he could.

"Count," Xander ordered. He brought the whip down sharply on the skin where ass and back met.

"Bloody fuck, one," Spike snapped, and Xander walked over and flipped on a light so that he could better appreciate the cobweb of red from the many tails of the whip. Xander waited until the heat of the hit had reached a peak before bringing the whip down in a series of lighter strikes that spread the heat from the shoulders down to the knees. Xander stopped and waited.

"Two, three, four, five, six, seven, and eight," Spike immediately offered. Xander waited, watching the skin
turn pink slowly before striking again, this time at Spike's ribs, making the ends of the whip twist around to his front and nip at his chest.

"Nine."

Another flurry along the legs, the edges of the whip tails dancing dangerously close to the vulnerable cock and balls, and Spike counted without complaint. Xander reached eighty before his shoulders started to ache so badly that switching hands no longer helped. He went to the kitchen to pull a beer out of the fridge, rolling his head on his shoulders as he considered the body still enduring silently.

Xander reached ninety three before a ball dropped, the heavy iron ringing against the concrete floor despite the area rug. Xander stopped and waited as he watched muscles strain as Spike fought to hold the rest.

"Childe?" Xander asked.

"Sire, can't hold 'em," Spike admitted, desperation coloring his voice. Xander closed the distance, tossing the whip on the bed as he slipped a thumb up into Spike, pushing to get the remaining four balls back up in place where Spike could hold them. Spike panted roughly, and Xander rested his head against a shoulder marked with
red railroad tracks that connected every part of his backside.

"I'm pleased with you for admitting your need. You have held up well," Xander crooned as the breathing grew more uneven. "We aren't finished, but you can relax for now, my young one," Xander said as he wrapped his free arm around Spike, pulling the suffering body to his chest as he felt the body sag into him. For long minutes, Xander stood, holding Spike as the breathing became more regular and finally stopped.

"Right, let's finish this, 'cause I'm ready to get down. It's takin' too bloody long." Spike finally said.

"Only you would complain when spread-eagle and at the mercy of someone famous for having none," Xander said as he slowly pulled his thumb from Spike body. The iron spheres remained inside. Retrieving the whip, he finished the last seven hits, drawing blood only once he reached one hundred. Xander smiled with pleasure as he realized he could still wield the whip just as artfully, leaving a regular redness across Spike with individual trail criss-crossing from the harder strikes. Xander continued to feel pretty damn self satisfied until he went to toss the whip on the bed and his arms practically screamed with pain.
"Problem there, luv?" Spike's head still hung wearily, but he turned it slightly to the side to look at Xander while Xander rubbed his arms.

"Yeah, I need a hot shower to get the blood flowing again, and then I have to finish that translation," Xander answered as he looked at the few items remaining on the bed.

"Let me down, and I'll join ya in the shower, Spike suggested with a flip of his eyebrow despite the fact that his body hung limply, the single scored whip mark slightly oozing, and red trails winding down his arms from the manacles. Xander felt his stomach turn at the sight, but that didn't stop him from feeling a little satisfaction from removing some of the hesitation from Spike's voice.

"I somehow think I'll get more done alone," Xander said as he grabbed a wood and leather item. "Open up," Xander ordered. Spike's eyes went wide in either disbelief or anger, but at least this time he obeyed without hesitation. Xander slipped the thick wooden dowel into Spike's mouth and then buckled it in place, effectively gagging him.

"Oh, you do remember what happens if these fall out, right?" Xander asked as he slipped a finger up into Spike, pushing at the iron balls and feeling only a slight tremor
when one pushed into the prostate. Xander could imagine that the nearly purple and rock-hard cock hurt Spike about as much as the whip marks. Spike gave a short nod.

"Right. Now that you aren't going to complain about boredom, I have to finish my work." Xander slapped Spike's hip sharply before heading for a cold shower because he really was a sick, sick boy. A sick, sick boy who wanted to still be hard in a couple of hours when he let Spike down. He just hoped that he had some Ben Gay left for his arms because they hurt like the last time he offered to spar with Buffy.

Part Seven

Xander heard the second ball drop while he tracked down felicitous numbers in relationship to the two Amphisbaena tribes that wanted to make eggs together. The dull clang of metal against concrete startled him, and then a strangled sound from Spike suggested that the vampire was struggling.
"Busy here, quiet down or I'll make you quiet," Xander commented as he continued scratching numbers on a notepad. Spike, surprisingly, did fall quiet. A second clanging sound echoed as the third ball fell to the floor. Xander shifted on his seat, equally lustful and uncomfortable with the thought of Spike's body aching as he struggled to hold the last two heavy spheres. Xander waited for them to drop, but no other sound came and he went back to calculating numbers of tribe members and days since the full moon and egg production.

Standing up from his desk nearly an hour later, he went over and ran a hand over Spike's back, feeling the welted skin under his fingers. Spike made a soft grunting noise around the gag, and Xander used a thumb to trace the puckered skin of the vampire's ass. The muscles shook with fatigue, and he could feel the cool iron right at the entrance.

"Let them go," Xander ordered and immediately the last two oiled balls fell into his hand as Spike wuffed a heavy sigh around the gag. Xander retrieved the other spheres from the floor and dropped them all into a dish on the corner shelf. Despite knowing that a vampire's colon was clean, he wanted to disinfect those five balls before putting them back into the leather pouch that hung on
the weapons rack. Just ew. Xander wiped his hand on his jeans and looked at Spike, who hung utterly limp.

Jumping up onto the bed, Xander unclipped the vamp's right arm, and Spike's body swung and hung limply from the left one, a new trail of blood creeping down his arm. Even through Xander moved as quickly as possible, Spike's left wrist had a deep cut from the manacles before Xander could loosen that chain from the ring and lower Spike's body to the bed.

Spike didn't move as he lay with his arms stretched over his head, and Xander realized that the young vampire's time with the Initiative had weakened him even more than Xander expected. When Xander climbed off the bed, Spike lay limply, his lips stretched around the wooden gag that he didn't even try to remove, and his legs still chained wide open. Xander opened his mouth to apologize, to say that he hadn't meant to do so much damage, but Spike blue eyes stopped him. Reaching over, Xander brushed a hair out of Spike's face, and Spike closed his eyes, his body settling into the mattress.

"My beautiful childe. Too exhausted to move, and yet you followed orders the best you could. So much control. So much deadly control," Xander praised, and Spike's
eyes remained closed as he lay wilted and still on the bed.

"Sore?" Xander asked as he walked around to the end of the bed and put his hand over Spike's loose asshole and perineum. Spike nodded slightly, and Xander easily slipped two fingers inside, rubbing the sore muscles and watching Spike's back arch like a cat. Nusa had played this game with him once, making him hold a dozen of the balls until each one dropped like an overripe apple from a tree. He remembered the unique aching that made his entire body sore. He remembered the pleasure when those sore and aching muscles were stretched by one of his sire's toys.

"Just relax and you'll enjoy this," Xander said as he unzipped his pants. Spike opened one eye and looked back, but he otherwise lay still. Xander slowly pushed into the already opened body, forcing himself deeper into Spike as the vampire moaned low in his throat, the gag muffling the sound. "Just relax," Xander crooned. He'd been afraid that he would come immediately, but seeing Spike like this had brought up enough guilt to prevent that. Strangely though, he didn't feel enough guilt to get rid of his erection, and that made him feel even more guilty because naked, chained, gagged, and
subjugated Spike should not make him so hard he ached. And yet…

Xander stopped thinking and just started slowly rocking in and out, groaning at the feeling of Spike's body trembling around his cock. He kept his motions slow, massaging and working those fatigued muscles. Below him, Spike arched and closed his hands into fists, and Xander started thrusting a little harder.

Now Spike's back arched so strongly that his shoulders came up off the bed, his forearms supporting his weight as he made noises that didn't sound like any language, and Xander knew over a hundred languages. Taking that as his cue, Xander began to slam into Spike, his thighs slapping against Spike's skin as he aimed downward into the prostate. Spike now added little thrusts, as much as he could with his ankles chained, as he rubbed himself into the bed.

"If you want to come, I suggest you do it before I do," Xander commented hoarsely. The sight of Spike's wanton pleasure quickly overrode any guilt as he could feel his own orgasm gathering. He slammed in again, and Spike growled around the gag, pushing himself up to his hands so that his back was inhumanly arched as the body stiffened. Xander thrust once more, and then started to
come himself. He dropped onto Spike, grabbing the vampire's arms and biting into an exposed and arched neck.

Once the waves of orgasm passed, Xander let his weight fall on his lover, his childe. His cock still buried and warm, he reached up and played with a bit of hair, wishing he could order his childe to grow it long, but understanding that this persona the childe had created was his armor. He would have to wait until Spike felt strong enough to let this personality go. Trailing his finger down Spike's nose, he finally reached the lips, tracing their edges as they stretched around the gag.

"I think we can get rid of this," Xander said, as he unbuckled the thing. Spike immediately pushed it out with his tongue, but before the hellcat could offer any complaints, Xander crushed his own mouth to Spike's. The angle was wrong with Xander laying on Spike's back and too lazy to pull out of Spike's body, but Xander didn't care. He explored alien teeth and tickled the top of Spike's mouth and nibbled at a lip as Spike's tongue explored him.

Finally Xander pulled away, pushing himself up onto his arms and looking down at Spike, who still lay like a rag doll with his arms flopped on the bed.
"I told you I would see you limp with pleasure and pain," Xander whispered.

"Not soddin' limp," Spike disagreed without moving, his words muffled by the mattress his face was half embedded in.

"Of course not, my hellcat," Xander conceded as he slowly withdrew. His cock ached in a good, overused kinda way. He'd been hard for hours, so he didn't know why he was surprised at being all owie. "I'm glad you're not limp, childe of mine," Xander offered as he slapped a hip, "because we have a meeting to go to if we don't want Giles to think you ate me." For the first time that day, Xander looked down at his damaged arm, where the hicky with the puncture marks still showed against his skin. Right, long sleeves for him.

"And the slayer?" Spike asked suspiciously, even though he didn't move.

"I told you last night, I'm not good with the thinky, so we're going with impetuous stupidity and hoping she'll forgive me later," Xander offered cheerfully. Spike just made a grunt.

"Bloody hell, might be nice if one of us had a plan," he finally added after Xander had retrieved several packets
of blood and one of the huge, plastic stadium glasses with a logo from a local hardware store on the side.

"Oh, I have a plan, not a good one, but one that will probably work if we don't end up dead first," Xander assured him as he waited for the blood to heat and appreciated the view Spike offered from behind with his legs chained open and the back of his thighs still red with whip marks. Now Xander could even see a trickle of white leaking out since Spike was too limp to tighten the ring of muscle at his ass. Oh yeah, he was a sick, sick boy. A happy, sick boy. A happy, sick boy who missed vampire stamina because not even a teenager could get up again this fast.

"And?" Spike asked when Xander fell silent.

"And nothing. I told you. No more thinkiness. Nope, no thinky, just acty," Xander insisted as he pulled the blood from the microwave and brought it to the bed. With a sigh, Spike pushed himself upright.

"Right then, planning on unchaining me?" Spike asked as he took the large cup filled with enough sire's blood to cure his pains. If Xander had to guess, he would say it was more sire's blood than Spike had ever been allowed. Spike drank the blood slowly, his eyes closed in pleasure.
"I rather like this view. I think I may leave you like this whenever we're home. You chained up like some offering, ready for me to take as I like, those muscles straining and your most private parts vulnerable only to me. I think you may spend quite a bit of time like that," Xander said as he went to one of the two small closets where he kept his less geeky clothes. Stripping off his t-shirt he considered his choices. Normally a night of Scoobie meetings and patrols called for flannel or brightly colored Hawaiian wear. Tonight, he decided to go for a change. He pulled a soft, midnight blue sweater over his head and turned to look at Spike, who watched him, the empty cup still in hand.

"Oh yes, I think that's a good place for you. It keeps you out of trouble, and it does so amuse me to see you like this," Xander said as he came after the cup.

He expected Spike to preen at the compliment, but instead he watched Xander carefully, that ocular game of dominance back again as he dropped his gaze to the ground.

"Say what you're thinking," Xander ordered as he took the cup.

"Wot? Nothing," Spike said, and the expression had cleared, his face becoming neutral.
"I tell you that we're going to a meeting, and you get... distant. I am sure this is not nothing," Xander contradicted Spike as he rinsed out the cup and put it in the dishwasher.

"Not scared of the slayer."

"I never thought you were, certainly not after you made a deal with her to save the world or attacked her in broad daylight."

"Just don't want her..." Spike stopped.

"Spike, I can't stop her from taking verbal shots at you any more than I will stop you from taking verbal shots at her. However, she will not physically attack you when you're helpless. She wouldn't, and if she would, I won't let her," Xander promised. Spike's expression returned, relief evident, and Xander turned to the closet to find the smallest things he could. He had a pair of jeans that had shrunk in hot water that would probably still be too big for Spike but at least they would sorta fit.

"So, if I tell her she's a slut for sleeping with Angelus?" Spike asked as Xander dug through the clothes that had fallen to the bottom of the closet.

"Not like I haven't thought it," Xander answered. "I'd never say it, but I've thought it."
"And if I point out that her hair color comes straight out of a bottle?" Spike's voice now had more of the devilish glee that Xander had first fallen in love with back when he'd been a vampire and Spike had tried to kill him.

"People in glass houses, Spike," Xander pointed out. "I have some evidence here that your hair color isn't exactly natural," Xander waved a hand toward Spike's naked body where the hair definitely wasn't blonde.

"Yeah, but I can carry it off; she looks like a washed out housewife with that color."

"Just as long as you don't call her fat, I don't care what you say. Just don't expect her to take it lying down," Xander pointed out as he came up with the jeans. They were wrinkled, but a quick spin in the dryer would fix that, and at least they were dark blue and in decent shape.

"And if I call you her lapdog?" Xander froze, his cold gaze turning to Spike as he felt fury rise in his chest. Spike's eyes dropped to the floor. "Not like I mean it, mate, but I'm thinking your chums... they don't want to know about this side of you." Spike's words cut through the anger, and Xander started to smile. His hellcat might be impetuous and foolish, but he wasn't stupid. Even more
importantly, he had turned that sharp mind to doing something to make Xander's life easier, as he should.

"Fair enough. Outside this room, we are the parts we need to be, but in here," Xander dropped the jeans on the top of the dryer revealed behind kitchen cupboards before walking over to Spike and grabbing the vampire by the back of the neck, "in here you are my childe, and you will not forget it."

"Not bloody likely to," Spike said as he leaned into the grip.

"I'll be happy to remind you any time you like," Xander answered with a smile.

"Just me that you'll remind?" Spike asked curiously.

"I'll do what I have to do," Xander insisted seriously, and Spike nodded. "Right now, unchain yourself and go get cleaned up. You're a mess," Xander pressed a key into Spike's palm and went to shove the jeans in the dryer with a damp towel.

~*~*~*~*~
"I'm still voting for chaining him in some dark basement," Buffy complained, her arms crossed and a determined expression making it clear that she wasn't going to go down easy on this issue.

"If any of us had a basement available I might consider the plan, but we cannot leave Spike unguarded," Giles had his patient teacher-voice going, and Xander bit his tongue as he tried to stay out of the fight.

"Xander guarding Spike," Buffy snorted.

"Hey! Sitting right here," Xander snapped back before he remembered he was supposed to be biting his tongue.

"No offense, Xander, but you're not exactly reliable-boy any more. I went by Hotdog on a Stick after I talked to Giles, and they said you'd stopped showing up for work like a month ago. What happens if you flake out when you're supposed to be keeping an eye on biteless wonder here?" Buffy turned on him, and Xander closed his eyes and counted to ten in three different languages.

"Brainless bint," Spike hissed under his voice.

"Buff, I stopped working there because of that huge bruise and cracked ribs I got flying into a headstone when those biker guys rose from their graves. Remember? Oh, wait, that was the night you had to quit
early to study for a chem test, so Giles and I had to deal with that one alone."

"Oh hey, look, they have ice skating on television," Willow piped in, turning the television up so that the overly cheery music filled the room. Spike snorted. Giles rolled his eyes.

"Are you saying I'm not doing my job?" Buffy's voice was low and dangerous.

"He'd never say that!" Willow instantly insisted.

"No, I wouldn't say that," Xander retaliated, crossing his own arms over his chest.

"I've given my life for this slayer-gig. I've given up everything to do my duty, so don't even go there," Buffy practically shrieked, and Xander could feel an edge of something permanent and ugly creep into the landscape.

"God, Buff, I know that," Xander dropped his eyes and rubbed a hand over his face. "I know you're doing your job."

"Like bloody hell she is," Spike offered from the arm of the couch where he sprawled as if it were his home. "Never seen a slayer that asks for nights off or lets other people do her work for her. Demons have minions, but I
never knew slayers to before you lot," Spike waved an unlit cigarette around the room as everyone froze in place.

"Hey, not big with the minioning, we are so not minions," Willow said as she sat up straight.

"I really think—" Giles started.

"Watch it, because if you think I should be more traditional with the slaying, Mr. Pointy has no problem with turning you to dust," Buffy took one step forward, and Xander practically threw himself off the couch and between the two. He didn't think Buffy would stake Spike, but he wasn't taking any chances.

"Hey, he's not with the biting, and you're not with the staking. We already agreed on that!" Xander said as he put his back to Spike and held out a placating hand toward Buffy. He discovered his mistake when Buffy's face reddened with fury, and he turned to see Spike making a face at her. Putting his elbow into Spike as hard as he could, he kept focused on Buffy, who now looked ready to stake him to get at Spike.

"Oi! Didn't call her fat... you said it was fair game as long as I didn't call the bint fat," Spike complained, and Xander felt his stomach roll the way it had when he'd
spotted that dead cat with the maggots making the scabby fur on it move. Buffy's face twisted into something first ugly and then hurt, and Xander preferred the angry Buffy to this injured expression.

"You talked about me being fat?" Buffy asked in a small voice.

"Xander! How could you?" Willow flew up from her spot on the floor looking for the perfect television show to stop a fight and aimed a fairly serious backhand at his arm. Of course, for Willow, "fairly serious" meant a fair-to-middling chance it would have killed a fly, but Xander still flinched.

"No!" Xander yelped as he considered the two women now glaring at him. "I never said she was fat. She just talks about dieting all the time when she doesn't need to diet and I told Spike to not say anything." Xander glared at Spike, who looked remarkable unfazed. When Xander had given permission for Spike to play the part of an unwilling captive, he hadn't expected it to go quite so far. He narrowed his eyes in frustration, and Spike suddenly got up and began exploring Giles' book collection.

"So, you don't think I'm fat?" Buffy asked.
"Of course he doesn't," Willow stepped in before Xander could say anything.

"Of course I don't," he echoed.

"Right, if we're finished with the pointless bickering, are we ready to discuss this new government Initiative? Or rather, what may be an on-going government program, since Angel called this morning with information on his contact with a similar group in World War II."

"Angel?" Buffy asked, turning away from Xander and Spike, and Xander breathed a sigh of relief right before Willow hit him again for good measure.

"And there goes Slutty the Vampire Layer on the quest for a good lay," Spike offered and Xander could only roll his eyes.

"Spike, do shut up," Giles answered as he picked up a legal pad full of scratchings. "This experimentation is a little..." Giles paused.

"Barbaric," Xander offered in the silence.

"Yes, quite."

"What did Angel have to say about them?" Buffy asked.
"They blackmailed him into retrieving an enemy sub. They made no attempt to perform experiments on him."

"Oi, that's because he ditched the thing before he met up with them again," Spike interrupted. "Knew the bugger was up to something when he tossed me and Lawson overboard."

"He what?" Xander could feel his anger rise at the thought of Angel carelessly tossing Spike aside, again.

"Lawson?" Giles asked.

"Nazis thought they could use demons, yeah?" Spike started, waving the cigarette Giles had forbidden him to light. "Had several of us on this sub when we staged a bit of a revolt. McAttitude shows up and tells us we can't eat the rest of the crew, then he goes and eats one of the crew, then he kicks me and his newest childe right off. Tells us he'll stake us if he sees us again."

"A childe?" Xander asked, horrified, "not a minion?"

"Mate, he had more sire's blood in him than I did. He wasn't just a childe, he was juiced on sire's blood."

"But Angel just—" Xander couldn't get the words out.
"Angel wouldn't have turned someone unless there was no choice," Buffy insisted.

"I'm sure that's true," Giles assured her.

"Who gives a flying fuck? He made a childe and then dumped him without a thought," Xander snapped.

"Xander? What the hell is wrong with you lately?" Xander felt a pull on his arm, and he turned to see Buffy looking up at him, her eyes wide with worry. The Xander he had been could see that he was hurting his friends, worrying them. The whispers from the past wanted to find Angel and beat him until blood ran in rivers.

"Buffy, that's wrong," Xander said earnestly.

"Angel wouldn't have turned the man if he didn't need to. They were fighting Nazis, demons and Nazis," she explained earnestly.

"And Nazis are right up there with demons on the 'absolutely must stop to save the world' list, " Willow agreed. "Way up there, maybe higher than some demons even."

"But he..." Xander let his voice trail off as he realized he had no way to explain the reason for his horror. He looked to Spike, whose carefully neutral expression
showed the vampire's distress, and then at Giles, who polished his glasses and avoided eye contact.

"Buffy, I'm tired and not feeling all that charitable toward Deadboy or the government or anyone else right now. Maybe I should just head out."

"That might be a good idea," Giles offered as he slipped his glasses on.

"But the pizza, the pizza hasn't even come yet, and we ordered the extra cheesy goodness, and you can't give up pizza," Willow said softly. Buffy stepped back and dropped into a chair, still looking cranky, but clearly not wanting to fight any more. Xander felt a stab of regret that he couldn't seem to find his footing with Buffy now; they couldn't seem to find that comfortable place where they could all three of them curl up and make fun of people on television. Of course, adding Spike to his life wasn't going to help matters, but he wouldn't abandon Spike.

"Tell you what, come over Saturday, and I'll order the pizza," Xander offered as he looked at Willow. He didn't limit his invitation to her exactly, but he did drop his eyes to the floor without looking at Buffy.
"But we have this big paper coming due," Willow had a dismayed tone, but Xander just shrugged.

"Hey, that's okay, college girls have college deadlines, and non-collegy boys don't," Xander offered with a small smile and another shrug. "Come on, Bleach Boy, let's run through a cemetery or two before we head back to the apartment."

Xander got up and headed for the door. Giles stepped into his path, and Xander looked up at the man, expecting worry or even anger. Instead Giles pressed a small book into his hand. "Do be careful, Xander," Giles suggested.

"No problem, G-man," Xander answered as he detoured around the man without looking down at the book. Xander opened the door and practically bolted into the night. He didn't bother to even wait for Spike as he power-walked the length of the block to where his blue lady waited in the pool of light from the only working streetlight on the block.

"Right then, what he give ya?" Spike asked, and Xander turned to find the vamp already leaning one hip into the two-tone car, a glowing cigarette between his lips as he sucked deeply. Xander glanced down and started laughing.
"Wot?" Spike asked, straightening up and leaning forward so he could see the title, "Imperium," written in a sharp scrolling script that was probably Rual or Waa'ath.

"He's a little behind the time, innit he?" Spike asked with a gesture toward the small demonic book of spells that allowed a person to gain control over another.

"Just a bit, yeah," Xander said, surprised both that Giles would offer that kind of help and that Giles would give him a demonic book. "Oh shit," Xander said as he looked at Spike in horror. "He knows I read demon."

"Yeah, so?"

"But that means he knows... okay, I don't know what he knows," Xander admitted. He looked at Spike, who just cocked a head at him.

"He goin' to be a problem?" Spike asked, obviously confused by the whole conversation.

Xander laughed. "God, you sound like a mafia boss when you say it like that," Xander said, worried that the laughter just might be hysterical. Walking around to the driver's side, he opened the car and slid in. Spike pulled open the windowless door on his side, and Xander added "car shop" to the list right under "new sheets."
"So, where to now?" Spike asked, as he slammed his door shut.

"To see a man about a chip," Xander said in his best 007 impression. He looked over his shoulder for traffic before guiding his car into the road as he headed for the bad part of town. The really, really bad part of town.

Part Eight
Xander parked his lady in the shadow of a jagged cliff, the moonlight showing an empty field of weeds and pebbles in various shades of grey, a wide-mouthed drainage pipe sticking out of the bottom of the cliff on one side, and a drunken barbed-wire fence on the other. Xander turned the car off and sat staring at the stone in front of him.

"Left Sunnydale a ways back there," Spike pointed out, shifting his boot from the dashboard to the floor.

"Technically, this is still Sunnydale, just really not a nice part of it."
"Don't seem to be enough here for it to be one thing or another," Spike pointed out, and then Xander watched as vampire bones cracked into place and Spike turned his head toward the broken window. Xander didn't have the nose for sniffing the air anymore, but given that he'd seen what kind of demons came stomping through here, he could guess what Spike smelled.

Xander opened the door, the dome light flashing on so that the pool around their car turned to color: the sick grey-green of grass, the brown and grey gravel, the grey stick like twigs that would never grow into trees, and it occurred to Xander that even with the lights on, this place didn't have much color. A second door slammed right after his, and Spike came bouncing around the car, flexing his hands.

"Right, we here for a fight?" Spike asked, his eyes scanning the darkness. Xander couldn't resist smiling at the kid-at-Christmas smile on Spike's face.

"Not if we can avoid it, because killing? Not such a good way to ask for help."

"Ask for help?" Spike dropped out of game-face, his blue eyes focusing on Xander although in the dark, they faded to grey as well.
"I told you we're seeing a man about a chip," Xander pointed out.

"Now?" Spike seemed confused, and now Xander cocked his head as he considered his vampire.

"Well, yeah?"

Spike slowly grinned, and if the last smile was a kid at Christmas, this was a pervert-in-a-sex-shop smile, a tired-husband-in-a-strip-joint smile and a teenager-discovering-Internet-porn smile all wrapped up in one. And why did all his metaphors about Spike's curving mouth have to be pervy?

"Goin' to fix me then?" Spike asked, and Xander finally understood.

"Doubt my word again, and I'll fix you," Xander suggested with a veiled threat as he passed Spike and headed for the giant drain pipe. Behind him, Spike's boots crunched over gravel and dead weeds, and Xander smiled at bringing that grin to Spike's face.

Xander didn't even have to duck his head to walk into the corrugated metal tunnel, Spike's heavy boots clanking behind him. No one would accuse them of trying to sneak in. Xander kept his hand out in the darkness, stopping when he felt the warmth of a wooden door
under his fingers. Rapping twice sharply, Xander stepped back in the pitch black and found hands at his hips, holding him lightly. Xander let his own hand trail over the back of Spike's fingers, appreciating that touch in what, for him anyway, was complete darkness.

"What?" a wheezing voice demanded as a square section opened, and Xander could see broad shoulders and curving horns backlit so that it became only a black outline of a Fyarl demon.

"Xander Harris," he announced firmly. "Or Xan Nusa," he added.

"That supposed to mean something?" the door demon demanded.

Spike growled, and the Fyarl bobbed its head aggressively.

"Just tell your Master," Xander said as he turned his back and walked away. He wasn't going to argue with minions, and turning his back on the beast made the strongest statement possible. Of course the fact that Spike's eyes flashed yellow in the dark as he continued to growl made the whole back-turning thing a little easier to do without it turning into a whole peeing-the-pants thing. Xander heard the door slam shut, and he waited.
He'd expected demands and frantic energy from Spike, but instead, a hand simply found his stomach, cool fingers working under his shirt and resting there without moving. Xander rested one of his hands on Spike's arm and looked out at the complete darkness, waiting.

The door banged open a second time and the outline of the demon returned. "This way," he practically coughed, his displeasure clear in the side to side movement of that massive head. Xander ignored the cranky Fyarl and walked into the inner passage which instantly widened out to a swap mart, well, a swap mart minus the funnel cake goodness and plus demons, racks of weapons for sale, occasional screams, and more than one creature on a leash, and very few of the leashed critters were actually dogs.

Xander steeled himself against images he'd tried his best to forget. He'd come here before, several times in fact, but each time, he felt this same shock and horror and really rather uncomfortable curiosity as he spotted bits of iron that he wasn't familiar with, and even more discomfort when he knew what they were. He'd stopped doing business down here not long after starting to do business down here, and Xander still blessed Uick for giving him a place to set up shop and meet customers.
"Knives, best around," a small brown elf-like demon offered, shoving a silver knife toward him. Spike's growl rose in volume, and Xander struggled to not grab for his own knife and his gun and even wish for a stick or two of dynamite. He kept his eyes forward and pretended disinterest as the corridor narrowed and quieted into the twisting tunnels of the deeper regions. The Fyarl had to duck now, his horns scraping once or twice on the sloping edges of the ceiling.

"Here," the demon thumped a door with a clawed hand and then headed back down the tunnel toward the fair. Xander pulled open the heavy door and found a familiar room inside. The rough stone walls had irregular bookshelves tucked between veins of rock, and an ornate carved desk stood on a thick rug.

Xander figured the desk had either been carved in place or magicked in because it sure couldn't have gotten through some of the turns in the tunnels. One soft brown leather chair sat behind the desk, and one smaller red leather chair waited for guests in front of the desk. Xander sat in the guest chair and tried to stretch his neck, making the bones pop loudly in the silence.

"Not feeling particularly good about havin' ta fight my way out through that," Spike said softly.
"Um, I'm thinking it's a 'no' on the fighting. Well, unless we really have to. If we really have to, fighting is better than not fighting," Xander amended himself, and Spike snorted. Shooting his vampire a dirty look, he waited until Spike dropped his eyes down and shifted. Disgusted noises were on the 'no' list, and Xander trusted that Spike had just gotten that message.

"Right, so if it comes down to fists and fangs, what's the plan?" Spike finally asked as his eyes roamed the room.

"Kill them?" Xander suggested.

"Bloody—" Spike snapped off his own curse.

"I did say this was a bad plan. It's just the only plan I have right now because this guy has supposedly gotten one or two of these chip things out," Xander chewed a thumbnail absent-mindedly, the last of his cool used up in the bluff that had gotten them this far.

"Coulda just given me a name," Spike's voice sounded brittle, and the vampire started pacing, his leather coat flapping behind him, whipping with a cracking snap each time he changed direction.

"I wouldn't send you in here alone," Xander said around the hangnail.
"Not an idiot," Spike growled, and Xander found himself catching an unhappy glare.

"I never said you were." Xander abandoned his chair and intercepted Spike on the next pass. He pulled his childe to him with a hand on the back of his neck, drawing the vampire close until they stood forehead to forehead and Xander could look into those bright whiskey eyes. "This man knows me. He likes to get me worked up. He would have demanded to see me anyway because it's part of his game."

"Then you soddin' well shouldn't be here." Spike's voice carried a frustration and an anger Xander hadn't heard before.

"I wouldn't be if you weren't with me," Xander promised him, letting his hand migrate south to Spike's shoulder and then around to the font where he could feel Spike's body vibrating through the fabric of his shirt. "I told this guy I'd never come back because I was starting to feel a little too much like some rare tropical bird he wanted to cage and look at..." Xander thought about that for a second. "Well, that and poke at, I get the feeling this guy's a poker."
"Not makin' me feel better, here," Spike complained, the swirling whiskey eyes now solid yellow and malevolent. Xander found the sight of his childe's anger delicious.

"You'll make sure I don't get caged, and I'll make sure he takes that chip out of my deadly childe's head," Xander whispered even though anyone might be listening. He wasn't trying to hide either his faith in Spike or his unhappiness at having to come here again.

"He touches ya and I'll eat him."

"Don't. You'll probably just get indigestion," Xander answered with a smile. With Spike now settled down to a soft growl, Xander flopped back into the chair before his knees could start knocking together.

The sorcerer always did have a wicked sense of timing, and he chose that moment to open the door and brush into the room, his open-necked shirt and tweed pants yelling "nerd" more than "powerful, evil, life-sucking chaos-worshiping bad-ass sorcerer," but Xander wasn't fooled.

"Ethan," he said stiffly as he stood and held out a hand.

"If it isn't my protégé," Ethan Rayne smiled, taking Xander's hand in both of his own, a gesture of friendship that made Xander long for some good old-fashioned lye
soap. "What has brought my successor back to me?"
Ethan asked as he walked around the desk and settled in, his elbows resting on the papers spread across its surface, his chin resting on his palms.

"I'm not your protégé. I'm not your anything. Ever."
Xander paused for a second as he sat down again. "Ever."
He bit his tongue to keep from saying more, but for some reason Ethan always did pull up his Zeppo side. Spike shifted slightly, and now Xander could hear shuffling near the door. He guessed from Spike's carefully disinterested expression that Ethan had brought a guard.

"Oh, my dear boy, you know I made you the man you are today," Ethan disagreed with a smile.

"You made me help the slayer? Wow. I missed that memo. Your buddies must be really put out with you." Xander struggled to hold back a dozen other comments since he needed Ethan. Otherwise, he would never be in the same room with the man.

"Now, now, bitterness does not become you," Ethan waved off the insult. "So, what brings you to my little corner of the world? I seem to remember that last we spoke, you said you would never grace me with your presence again."
"I didn't—"

"The words 'hell' and 'freezing' were used," Ethan interrupted.

"I hear there are some interesting weather patterns in Pylea this year."

"Brilliant," Ethan laughed. "You do have a wicked sense of humor, my boy." Ethan turned his attention to Spike, who stood with his back to a bookshelf as he watched the room. "I don't believe we've met."

"Spike."

Xander had to admit he was surprised at this new silent, deadly version of Spike. He'd seen Spike dance with glee through death and blood, but this version of Spike promised swift, emotionless death. Xander couldn't decide which signals gave him that impression, but he noticed that Ethan didn't offer his hand.

"Ah, William the Bloody. I had heard you and Xander had come to some interesting arraignments last year. You know how demons love to gossip."

"If they want to keep their heads attached to their soddin' bodies, they'd better keep their yaps shut about
me," Spike's voice had a soft tone that made his words seem even more sincere.

"So defensive. Perhaps the rumors are not just hyperbole and conjecture," Ethan offered, and Spike's sudden growl and the sharp snapping sound that could only be teeth made the man jerk back.

"Rumors? What rumors?" Xander demanded, even while appreciating seeing Ethan off guard for once. The man was always so damn smug that Xander felt a constant need to check his fly and make sure he didn't have a cow's lick of hair sticking up. However, Spike's ability to make the man flinch put him in a whole new light.

"That William the Bloody managed a short stay with our boys in green," Ethan offered.

"Oh shit," Xander had thought they would have more time. Any human with a grudge or a bounty could target Spike now.

Ethan laughed. "Word has traveled rather quickly that the Aurelius house has shifted yet again. One needs a scorecard to track allegiances."

Xander glared at the sorcerer for several long seconds, hating that Spike shifted uncomfortably. "I have every faith in Spike, and his allegiance is quite firm even if he is
proficient at hiding what I have demanded he hide," Xander defended Spike. "But right now, I just want the Initiative chip out of Spike's head."

"Oh, so the buggers did manage to bag William the Bloody."

"Watch it, mate, just as happy to rip your throat out as look at ya," Spike interjected, and Xander leaned back in his chair, enjoying the fleeting expression of concern as Ethan glanced toward his own bodyguard.

"Well, that's just ungrateful. After all, I am the proud... I suppose 'sire' is the wrong word—"

"Call yourself my sire and I'll gut you myself," Xander growled, leaning forward in the chair as the guard behind him took a rather loud step forward. Knowing that threats sometimes had to be followed through, Xander closed his hand around a knife he had tucked in his sleeve. Xander didn't lose focus on Ethan as Spike shifted into a fighting stance in response to the shifting bodyguard behind him. Xander just prayed the thing had some demon blood or it would be one hell of a short fight.

"Now, now, kill me and your pet is stuck with that thing."
"He's not a pet." Xander pulled his knife and sank the end of it a good inch into the wood of Ethan's desk, spearing a number of papers.

"Well, I never meant to insult," Ethan began, holding up his hands in surrender. More shifting behind him. "Whatever your relationship, I simply meant to point out that you need me."

"I know that or I wouldn't be here," Xander snapped. "Now what do you want to get that thing out of Spike's head?" Xander asked, pulling the knife from the wood and sitting back down. He noticed that Spike kept his fighting-ready stance, and Xander smiled approvingly at his childe's aggression.

"Well, there are certain factions that would like to see this three way race with the Initiative, the slayer, and the demon-population narrowed down," Ethan pointed out with a small wave of one hand. "Eliminate a player, and the game changes, shifts."

"I'm not big with the taking down the Initiative plan since that would take months, and I want this chip out now. Try again." Xander slid the knife back into place even though he kept his hand close.
"I never suggested targeting the Initiative. You don't even have to take action. You provide a little intelligence on the slayer—what she values, what motivates her, what she fears—and I will spirit the chip out of your..." Ethan stopped as he looked up toward Spike.

"Childe," Xander supplied the word. Ethan smiled. It was not a nice smile.

"Oh my boy, I am so proud of you. The day will come when I will point you out and say that I put your feet on the true path."

"Don't bet on it, you son of a—"

"Language, no need to get crass," Ethan interrupted him. "You know, I think I have just discovered where I made my mistake with Rupert. I tried to keep him by my side, keep him sheltered. He tasted power only through me, and so he found it easy to walk away from the potential. But you've tasted that power, haven't you, my boy?"

"Call me 'boy' again, and I'll cut your tongue out." Xander leaned forward, and out of the corner of his eye, Spike shifted again, moving closer with a cat-like and lethal grace.

"It would make it unfortunately difficult for me to complete the spell you want. So, will you meet my
price?" Ethan asked. He held up his two hands as though weighing items. "You give me some irrelevant information," Ethan tipped his hands one way to show a scale tilting, "and I cure your childe."

"Name another price." Xander fought to keep his voice calm.

"There is no other price." Ethan's smirk made Xander wish for vampire strength and vampire speed and a vampire's lack of morality over the whole killing issue.

"Maybe I'll just tell Giles that you're still here, sliming in the corners of the sewers," Xander threatened.

"Oh bugger. No! Please not that," Ethan mockingly begged in a voice heavy with sarcasm. "Do you truly think he doesn't know? Where else would a serious sorcerer be but a Hellmouth? And Cleveland is not my style."

"You suck." Xander said, realizing just a little too late that the defeated Zeppo voice revealed entirely too much to this man who did have a huge part in creating him, no matter how much Xander tried to deny it.

"And swallow," Ethan said with a smile and a waggle of his eyebrows. "It's not like I'm asking you to act against your precious slayer. You just give us a little information the way Giles can go to his books and call his friends and
find out a little information on any assassin who targets *her*. It's all quite fair."

Xander stared at the man, feeling the helpless rage as he found himself wanting to choke the spell out of Ethan, but they would never leave these tunnels if he tried that, and Xander knew that entirely too well. It didn't stop him from having violent fantasies including Ethan, a rope, and a face slowly turning purple.

"Deal?" Ethan's voice came out honey-smooth and soft like a kindergarten teacher.

"No deal," Xander said as he stood.

"Interesting. So, you're going to allow your childe to suffer? After all, you aren't sacrificing the slayer; you are simply providing a little intelligence to even the battle field."

"There are no even battle fields with you," Xander pointed out as he turned toward the door. A Kungai demon stood there, his yellowed skin and horn gleaming in the dull light of the office.

"Oh ye of little faith. How can you think that of me?" Ethan asked in a voice full of mock-indignation and very real humor.
"Because in nine hundred years I never played an even field if I could find a way to rig the game," Xander pointed out, glancing over his shoulder before heading for the door.

"I'll be here when you change your mind," Ethan yelled. Xander didn't bother answering. Xander also tried to ignore that carefully neutral expression on Spike's face... the expression Xander was learning meant that Spike was thinking something he didn't want to say to his sire. Why couldn't life be easy for him just once, he wondered as he headed through the tunnels, the Kungai occasionally offering directions either left or right from behind as the tunnels split.

Part Nine

"Right, suppose I should just be goin' now," Spike offered as Xander turned the corner that led to the "just bad" part of town. An emaciated creature leaned against the brick wall in front of the old folks' home, his legs and arms sprawling in a vaguely inhuman way. Maybe that's what distracted Xander from immediately processing the comment. Either that, or his brain was slowly grinding to a halt, or more of a halt, from all the stress.
"What?" Xander jerked the car to the right and then overcompensated, swerving over the yellow line before straightening out again.

"Oi, ya drive worse than I do," Spike complained while completely ignoring the question.

"Not even," Xander snapped as he raced a yellow light. "And you aren't going anywhere."

"Not goin' to put you between choosing the slayer or me, been down that path." When Xander glanced over, Spike's face had that neutral expression that never boded well, his fingers playing with an unlit cigarette.

"I'm not choosing Buffy... I didn't choose Buffy," Xander protested, the pieces falling into place as he considered his hellcat's habit of being tossed aside by his elders. "I won't choose Buffy," Xander finished in a determined voice. And really, he wouldn't. Of course, he wouldn't betray her either, but now was not the time to try and explain that. Now he had to convince Spike that he wouldn't repeat the mistakes of Angelus and Drucilla.

"Never said ya did. Just sayin' that you're goin' to have to eventually. Time for me to take a walk before that happens. Besides, like you said, when word of the chip gets around, I'll have a target on my back. Best if I just
stay ahead of the news." Spike's clipped tones made Xander's chest ache, and he tightened his fists on the steering wheel until his knuckles turned white. Part of him wanted to pull the car over and pound into Spike until the childe couldn't remember his own name, much less some imagined fear of being abandoned. Xander eyed the narrow front seat of the car for a half second, but really, getting arrested for public indecency wouldn't really do anyone any good. Xander had an image of Giles coming to bail them out, and he shivered. Oh yeah, not doing that. Sex could wait until the apartment.

"We're going to get the chip out before your back turns target." Xander said confidently.

"Seems like the only person who knows how to do that is back there, mate," Spike poked his thumb over his shoulder.

"He's not the only person." Xander immediately snapped, but then he paused. "Okay, right now he might be the only person, but if he figured it out, I can figure something out. I just need to be figuring boy for a few days... or a few weeks. I can do this." Xander bit his tongue and concentrated on the road. A few stray drops of rain hit his windshield, and Xander could feel a homicidal rage stalking the edge of his mind. Yeah, Ethan
was a sadistic son of a bitch, but Xander had really thought that a little groveling, a little inappropriate touching, and way too much money would bring the chaos mage around. Besides, Ethan should love Spike what with the blood-thirst and Spike's habit of bringing out Xander's own demon memories.

Xander still remembered the first time he'd gone down into the demon bazaar, lured by the chance to make enough money to move out of the basement where his parents had relegated him after one particularly nasty fight. Ethan had quickly latched onto him, claiming credit for creating the new Xander through his magic. But he didn't need Ethan. He'd known and forgotten more in his life than Ethan ever learned. Unfortunately what he knew and remembered didn't seem to have any answer to the problem of the chip.

"I can do this," Xander repeated softly as he hit the windshield wipers, smearing a dozen fat drops of water across the dusty glass. Spike didn't answer, but he did make a soft snorting noise.

A group of teenagers dashed for cover from the spitting rain, and Xander nearly choked on a sudden burst of laughter. Yep, count on Sunnydale kids to run from rain but to walk down dark streets without worrying about
vampires and demons and things that went bump in the night. Or more importantly, things that went grrrr in the night. Xander braked at a red light, and the sound of the door clicking didn't even register until he watched through the streaked window as Spike strode away from the car, not even bothering to shut the door behind him.

"Fuck," Xander cursed as he threw the car into park before diving out into the suddenly brisk night air. "Spike," Xander yelled as he ran after the vampire, ignoring the VW bus that braked so hard that it slid sideways with a squeal, barely missing Xander as he dashed through the intersection.

"Spike!" Xander yelled louder as he reached Spike and reached out to grab a damp arm. Spike shrugged him off with a violent shiver.

"Bloody easier this way, mate," Spike said as he kept walking without making eye contact.

"You're not walking, not again. Get your ass back to the car," Xander hissed as he trotted to keep up with Spike's wide stride, a sense of panic rising in his throat at the idea of losing Spike. Absentmindedly wiping the rain from his face, Xander reached out again, but Spike took a quick dancing-step forward so that Xander grabbed at
And Xander really hated vamp reflexes, especially when he didn't have any.

"Better this way, yeah?" Spike threw his still unlit cigarette to the damp grass and kept walking as heavy drops started falling more steadily now. Spike passed through the last streetlight's pool of light and disappeared into the darkness on the other side.

"Like hell," Xander said as he lunged forward and grabbed at Spike's coat, fisting the leather and refusing to let go as Spike jerked him down the street. "This isn't exactly inconspicuous." Xander pointed out. A face watched from the window of some shop with a cheesy Santa in the window even though they hadn't actually gotten through Thanksgiving yet.

"Then bloody let go," Spike said as he unexpectedly swiveled, jerking his coat out of Xander's grip and turning so the two men stood face to face. Xander reached out to touch Spike, and the vampire flinched back. Xander could feel his emotions shifting like a heavy load that someone hadn't tied down, a heavy load that slid back and forth in the truck threatening to tip the whole damn thing into the nearest ditch.

"I'm not letting you go. I already said that," Xander answered as he stood inches from a game-faced Spike.
Yellow eyes studied him, and Xander set his face into the closest imitation of Willow's resolve face that he could manage. The rain continued to drizzle, and Xander could feel cold soak into him and rise up from within.

"Soddin'—" Spike paused, and his face ripped back into human features, and now blue eyes looked everywhere but at Xander. "Can't fight a fuckin' five year old," Spike hissed. "I bloody well know you hate my weakness. If ya truly were still the vampire you used ta be, you'd stake me yourself."

"Spike." Xander started to deny it, but then he stopped. He could feel that urge. He could feel the bitter edge of something ugly that wanted to crush the weakness in Spike, but he could feel more from that older set of memories that often crowded his mind. He could feel admiration for a childe who had survived. He could feel a cold fury toward the sheep who thought they had a right to touch the wolf.

Vampires didn't protect the weak, but Spike hadn't fallen in battle. He hadn't proved himself weak. He was young and impetuous and he didn't expect the sheep to organize an attack. Xander felt a rage that made his muscles tremble with the need to fight. Sheep had no right to attack the wolves, and yeah, as one of the sheep,
he had completely lost his mind since he fought wolves every time he went on patrol. Well, not wolves wolves, but vampire wolves in the whole metaphor he had going on. Xander shook his head to try and find his own feelings in the middle of the emotional storm.

"You aren't weak," Xander finally managed to say. He couldn't explain his own feelings, but he knew that was true. "You escaped; you survived. You aren't weak." Xander reached out again, and again Spike flinched back.

"If ya were a vampire, you'd think me weak," Spike pointed out in a far quieter voice than he normally used, the accent softened into something proper that didn't sound right coming from Spike. "But you aren't a vampire, and a few memories don't change the fact that you're still the white knight who'd die for the world. You're going to bloody choose the slayer because it's who you are. Not plannin' on being around to see that."

"Shit, Spike, I'm not going to toss you out."

"Easier this way." Spike turned again, and Xander watched shiny streaks spread down Spike's coat as the rain spat on them. Brushing his own damp curls out of his face, Xander ran to get in front of Spike.
"You're not going anywhere," he repeated as he poked at Spike's chest, at the place where a red shirt hid runes carved into flesh. "Remember me being a bastard and not letting you go? Hello! Still a bastard, still not letting you go." Xander tried to make himself sound confident even though he could feel his stomach churning until he could taste the bile of fear in his mouth.

"Run back to the slayer," Spike said in a cold voice before he turned and headed north toward a cemetery.

"Spike, don't—" Xander stopped as the rain chilled air suddenly grew heavy, the air pressing in on him uncomfortably, making him gasp and slowing time. Then lightening flashed across the sky and something magical slipped by him in sticky, jelloy blobs that made patches of skin warm and then turn icy cold.

"Spike," Xander called as he started running. He caught up soon enough since Spike had frozen in the middle of the sidewalk between the Starbucks and the cemetery wall.

"Bugger," Spike growled, the word slurried by fangs, and Xander looked the direction of Spike's gaze. By the time he spotted the figures dressed in green and running toward them, Spike had already dashed past him with his coat flying like a cape.
"Oh shit," Xander agreed as one of the two, a dark mask covering the bottom half of his face, swung one seriously huge gun up toward him. Xander ran.

Spike led the race back toward the car, and Xander dashed after him, his sneakers pounding on the sidewalk with a slapping sound that he could barely hear over the pounding of his heart. Ahead of him, Spike slowed and turned to look behind, and then Spike threw out one arm, his other windmilling wildly as that lithe body twisted. For a second, Xander couldn't decide what Spike was doing, and then Spike collapsed to the sidewalk with a string of curses Xander didn't think were biologically possible. Only then did Xander realize the vampire had tripped in a display of the universe's worst case of bad luck.

Spike sprang back up almost immediately, but Xander had already reached him, and the sound of boots slammed the sidewalk about two inches behind Xander, and panicville was about a half inch behind that as Xander grabbed Spike's arm and charged into the middle of the intersection. A blue car trying to steer around his precious lady had hit a white van, and both drivers were out and yelling as Spike and Xander reached the car. Someone had shut Spike's door, and Xander vaguely realized that people now yelled at him as he struggled to
get the key into the ignition. Spike snarled another curse, and Xander looked over to see him standing with a broken car door handle in hand, the passenger side door still closed.

Xander shoved at the key so hard that he had a flash of fear that he'd break it, but it slipped into place so he could turn it and send the engine roaring to life. Just as he reached over to open the passenger side, Spike dove in through the broken passenger window head first, his ass still hanging out the window as Xander threw the car into reverse to get away from the two soldiers now charging into the intersection.

Xander hit the accelerator only to have a truck pull out of an alley and block him in. An angry-looking man in a cowboy hat flipped him off as he barely avoided hitting it. With one frustrated glance at Spike, whose bad luck seemed contagious, Xander considered his options.

"Bloody go," Spike yelled as he wiggled into the car, and Xander bit back a sharp answer as he threw the car into drive and cranked the wheel toward the sidewalk. The car bounced over the curb hard enough to make Xander hit his head on the roof as the dull sound of metal scraping concrete filled the air.
One of the soldiers detoured into Xander's new path, bringing his gun up. With the soldier aiming directly at him, Xander threw himself down onto the seat as he hit the accelerator as hard as he could. The sharp pings of bullets filled the air three times as the engine roared. The car lurched forward, and then the crunch of metal and then a sharp cracking sound, and then Xander sat up in time to see wide brown eyes as a soldier rolled off the car and fell to the street. Xander pulled the wheel to the right as he tried to avoid the second soldier, and he could feel the car bounce over a human-sized bump in the street.

Xander immediately felt like someone had kicked him in the gut. Someone big—demonic big—with big heavy boots that made his stomach collapse into his spine. Moisture blurred his vision and only once the windshield wipers didn't work did it occur to him to wipe the tears from his face. Next to him, Spike pulled himself into his seat, but Xander's mind remained with the soldier he'd plowed into and run over and probably killed. Inside his head, voices battled over just how to feel about becoming a killer for the second time. The only difference was that this time, unlike with Larry, he couldn't claim some spell had made him do it.
Part Ten

Xander stood in the middle of his apartment with his legs trembling. Looking from one corner of the room to another, he couldn't even decide what to do or where to sit. He could only feel the shock of the car bouncing over a body and then slamming back down onto the concrete. In fact, he felt vaguely seasick from the motion which still jarred his muscles even as he stood in the middle of his own lair. Behind him, Spike stood silent for once, his hands shoved deep into coat pockets.

"Strip," Xander said harshly. A whispering voice told him to calm down, but the rage of his childe's disobedience and the pain of having killed merged into a wall that shut out the whispering voices. Xander kept his back to Spike, but he could hear the slide of fabric as Spike did as he'd been ordered... for once.

Ignoring the items hanging from the wall, Xander went to the bed and pulled a box out from underneath. Pushing off the top, he considered his options, fingering each as
he imagined how they would cut through flesh. He finally picked up a long, thin metal rod. It almost looked like an old-fashioned television antenna until the base where it widened to a thick handle. Xander flexed the metal, testing the give before finally turning around.

Spike stood in the middle of the room, his arms folded over his chest as he watched warily. Xander didn't say anything as he circled his disobedient childe. The runes on Spike's chest showed up nearly black against his skin, and looking closer, Xander could see the uneven edges of charred flesh as though the runes had turned to fire and burned the skin around them. Xander poked at the double cup rune that showed just above Spike crossed arms. Spike answered with a hissed breath.

"You disobeyed me," Xander commented quietly as he stopped behind Spike.

"Just trying—" Spike started to explain himself, and Xander made the rod whistle through the air before it struck Spike's shoulder blade hard enough to make the vampire stumble forward a step and bring a line of angry red to the white flesh. Even though Xander had expected argument, Spike stepped back to his original spot and remained silent.

"You disobeyed me."
This time Spike didn't answer. Xander circled again, and this time he pressed the tip of the metal cane into the charred flesh around one of the runes.

"You didn't think I could hold you. You thought I was weak," Xander whispered. Spike kept his eyes down to the ground, and Xander brought the rod down on Spike's hip hard enough to make a line of bright red spots appear almost instantly. Spike swayed for a moment, but then he caught his balance. Xander couldn't remember the last time he'd seen this body so still.

"You brought the curse of old and powerful gods down onto both of us," Xander pointed out as he walked around to the back again. He watched Spike's muscles tighten in anticipation of the strike, and Xander allowed his fingers to trace the edge of a shoulder blade up to the spine where he then allowed his fingers to stroke the length of Spike's back down to the rounded ass. Under his caress, Spike sighed and corded muscles smoothed out. That's when Xander brought the rod down as hard as he could on Spike's right ass cheek. A single drop of blood gathered at the end of a long red streak.

"Bloody hell, you're the one who cast the mojo," Spike snarled, and Xander added two more stripes below that first. The third one hit where the leg and ass met and left
a small trickle of blood creeping down the inside of Spike's thigh. Spike gasped.

"You disobeyed me when you knew the consequences. You angered the gods with your betrayal, and you angered me." Xander swung the rod three times leaving three identical marks on the left side of Spike's ass except that now drops of blood trailed sluggishly down the outside of his thigh. The sight of that deep red bead leaving behind its brownish-red tail stopped Xander, and he reached out. He captured the drop with his finger and pressed into Spike's flesh as he followed it back up, gathering the fluid on his own finger before bringing his finger to his mouth and sucking it off.

Spike's face shifted, the bones of the demon coming forward. Almost silently, Spike sighed, and the cock that had been hanging limply thickened subtly. Xander watched the changes in his childe body. His childe. Spike. The demon didn't fight him now but waited for its sire's anger or forgiveness. Xander could feel the same draw he'd felt for Jalon, his first childe who he had driven a stake through back when warriors still traveled on horses and vampires owned the countryside at night. Xander curled his fingers around Spike's arm and felt the muscles tense under his grip.
While killing Jalon had torn at him as though he were cutting off a part of his own body, the idea of Spike leaving him had ripped at his heart. Of course, some of his love for his childe had died when the ungrateful monster had sided with Dracula against his beloved Nusa. But he felt a passion for Spike that approached his all-consuming love for Nusa. He couldn't let Spike leave. But he hadn't lost Spike; his childe stood silent under his hand.

He moved forward, resting his forehead against Spike's shoulder as he felt the fear of losing Spike go out like the tide. Unfortunately, that left behind the guilt and the pain of his own sins. He'd killed a man. He'd run over some soldier with brown eyes who probably just wanted to protect the world from monsters. He'd murdered a man who had chased them because of Xander's spell. Xander hiccupped as he tried to take a deep breath and push back the pain, the image of the man's wide eyes, the feel of the car jerking as it rolled over the body, the smell of rain and car exhaust heavy in his nose, the sound of distant shouting. He'd murdered.

His fist closed around Spike's arm as he tried to hold himself upright on trembling legs. His eyes felt too large for their sockets, as though they might fall out any second, and Xander closed them tightly against that
danger. His whole body jerked with an attempt to hold back a sob, and a cold tear slid down his cheek as he leaned into his childe.

"I killed for you," Xander hoarsely whispered.

"'preciate that," Spike answered, and Xander could tell just from the tone that Spike was confused.

"I killed someone who just wanted to make Sunnydale safer... someone who probably had no idea what he was facing, but faced it anyway because he thought he had to." Xander felt a coldness settle in over him as he imagined a whole history for the man whose body had slid off his car: a family. His head throbbed and he reached up and wiped his nose before he backed away from Spike a step. Slowly opening his eyes, he could see Spike looking at him with his head cocked.

"You backed me into a corner where I had to kill," Xander said in an emotionless voice that made Spike shift his weight from one foot to the other. "You." Xander stopped. He knew he had made the choice; his foot pressed the accelerator. But he couldn't stop his cold rage from drowning out the guilt that had been branded into him by those brown eyes. Spike didn't answer as he watched cautiously.
Xander brought the rod up and slammed it down onto Spike's back hard enough to break open the skin and make the vampire snarl before ducking his head submissively. Xander brought the rod down in another whistling arc that landed just under the last one. Again and again he attacked pale flesh: bruising and cutting with wild blows. One blow hit the back of Spike's knee, sending him crashing to the concrete where he stayed, bracing himself with hands on the cold floor as Xander continued the blows. Drops of blood now flew off the rod to splatter against Xander's face and hands. It felt right. He should have blood on his hands.

"Sire," Spike finally breathed in distress. Xander froze as he looked down at the bloodied vampire with angry welts rising from his skin and trails of blood seeping from him.

"'M sorry," Spike offered to the concrete, not raising his head. Xander dropped the rod which rang against the concrete and made Spike flinch again.

"Oh, god." Slowly, Xander sank to his knees and reached out a hand freckled with Spike's blood. He touched an unmarked spot on Spike's arm and then sobbed so strongly he felt like his lungs might detach from his body. "Oh, god," Xander repeated.
"I'm sorry. Won't do it again," Spike promised as he glanced fearfully over toward Xander. Xander reached out and touched Spike's cheek, leaving a streak of red behind.

"I can't lose you. I could have lost you," Xander whispered as an apology. "I can't. I can't lose you."


"They would have taken you." Xander reached out and grabbed Spike, wrapping his arms around the bloodied body so tightly that Spike flinched, and Xander just held more tightly. "They can't have you." Xander hiccupped as he pulled Spike to him.

"They don't have me," Spike reassured him while Xander started rocking forward and back.

"They tried to take you," Xander said to himself more than to Spike who he now rocked. "I couldn't let them." Spike didn't answer, but one hand wiggled out of the embrace and smoothed Xander's hair back, and Xander thought of his mother who had done that when he felt ill... both the mothers.

One had tired eyes and so often smelled of rum and brought him burnt toast and sat on the side of the bed
listening to him talk about his latest comic book. The other wore dresses that swished against the stone floors; her fingers would dance through his hair the way they danced through her tapestries, and he imagined she had cried when Nusa turned him. But the fingers weren't his mother soothing away a fever. He'd killed someone. He'd killed a soldier fighting for his country, and now a mass murderer tried to comfort him.

Xander pushed himself up and away from Spike, who sat on the concrete floor naked with his limbs sprawling in the middle of a Pollock painting of wildly flung bloodspots.

"I killed him."

"Yeah, ya did," Spike agreed.

"I killed him." Xander couldn't come up with any better explanation of his pain than that, and he turned his back on Spike, heading for the door to the outer apartment. Behind him, a body shifted. Xander didn't turn around. "Stay in here," Xander ordered before he opened the door and stepped out into the shower of his tiny outer apartment.

Xander turned on the television for noise more than to actually watch anything. He couldn't even really see the
screen as he curled up on a corner of the couch staring into the air and hugging his knees. The television created a cone of dim light that hid the shabby couch and made the chair disappear altogether. He could see the dust highlighted in different colors as the picture on the television changed, but somehow the dust and the television and even his own knees didn't feel real. What felt real was the bounce of the car over that body that he could still feel in his bones, only now he could also feel the metal rod in his hand. He could feel his arm still aching as each strike at Spike's back had sent a jarring recoil up his arm.

He continued to stare into space, ignoring the phone ringing and a pounding at the door. With his luck, the police had come to arrest him for hit and run, but Xander didn't have the energy to get off the couch. He figured they could haul him off and carry him to jail because his legs wouldn't get him as far as the door. A small scratching sound at the door finally attracted his attention, and he laid his cheek on his knees as he turned his head to watch the doorknob jiggle. Slowly, the cheap lock on the knob turned to the open position and something heavy pushed at the door. It didn't move.

Xander continued to watch as the deadbolt now shifted slightly. The scratching noise continued for a while
before the deadbolt again moved, and Xander watched with the same concentration he used to focus on the screensaver that had the flying toasters or for the metal his father's smith pulled from the fire and hit it over and over, slowly flattening it through sheer determination. Xander vaguely realized that both memories couldn't be true, but as he watched the lock slowly turn, he didn't really care.

Eventually the lock snapped to the open position, and the door opened. Outside, Angel crouched on one knee, a lock-pick in hand. For a long second, Xander just stared blankly as Angel stood up and slipped the tool back into a pouch that disappeared into a pocket. Without a word, Angel stepped across the threshold and closed the door behind him.

Xander had a flash of Angel coming to the apartment covered in black demon tar and laughing about how Xander had literally babbled the Gora to death by distracting it with his patented ramblings while Angel made the fatal blow to the back. At one point in his life, Xander might have felt bad about doing the whole babble and hiding behind a rock part in the fight, but he'd stuck swords in enough demons in his time.
And now he could put a human on the list of his kills. Well, another human because there was the whole Larry incident. And really, he had lots and lots of memories of dead and dismembered humans but not even the priest whose death vampire-him had drawn out for a week could compare with those brown eyes. He couldn't come up with a single excuse for the soldier's death. He'd chosen Spike over a human life, and that had to score high on the damned-o-meter.

"Xander?" Angel asked, and then he stopped.

"Deadboy," Xander answered tonelessly although he hadn't used that particular name at Angel in a long time, even if he did still say it behind the vamp's back.

"What happened?" Angel walked over and sat on the coffee table so that he faced Xander, and Xander watched the chipped wood sag. He waited for the crack that would send Angel crashing to the ground, but it didn't come. A large hand reached out and touched Xander's knee.

"Xander, you need to tell me what happened." Angel's voice stayed low and deep, but Xander still thought it sounded frustrated in some elusive way he couldn't describe. Or maybe he felt frustrated and was passing that feeling off onto Angel.
"Xander, you need to talk to me. Tell me what happened." Large hands now held his upper arms and Xander focused his eyes so that he truly saw Angel now. Yellow bled into the brown of his eye from the edges, and a chunk of hair stuck out at an odd angle. Xander brought his hand up and worked the stray lock.

"I killed him," Xander said softly.

"Spike?!" Angel's hands closed until Xander had to flinch in pain, and then Angel let him go altogether, leaning back on the coffee table until Xander was sure the thing would splinter into a thousand pieces, most of which would end up in Angel's ass.

"No, not Spike," Xander shook his head and looked down at the blood covering his hands. No wonder Angel thought he'd killed Spike. Xander opened his mouth to explain, but saying it would make it real and he couldn't live with having it real.

"Who, Xander?" Angel leaned forward again, and Xander pushed the vamp back out of his space so that he could stand. The room had very little space for pacing, but he made do in the six feet between the tiny kitchen island and the front door.
"Xander?" Angel asked as he shifted from the coffee table to the couch.

"I didn't want to," Xander said softly as he froze in place, and he looked toward the bathroom, toward the door that led to the reason why he would kill a human being.

"You aren't a bad person; I know you wouldn't kill unless you had to," Angel agreed, and Xander focused on the door as he returned to pacing.

"I am," Xander whispered.

"You are what?" Angel left the couch, his movements jerky, and Xander could see in every line that Angel wanted to be somewhere else... anywhere else probably.

"Why are you here?" Xander asked. Up until now, Angel's appearance had been like a nightmare where events don't have a reason. You leave the school and walk into the cemetery. Day turns to night, slayer turns to vampire, and it makes sense because it's a nightmare. He'd lived through a real nightmare before, and this had the same feel. But this wasn't a real nightmare, and Angel shouldn't just appear because Xander was desperate to be alone.

"Spike called," Angel admitted after a long silence. Xander should have been angry, but he couldn't find the
energy for that. He settled for a calm sense of betrayal. "He said you'd taught him that vampires don't handle things alone," Angel continued, "which is more sense than I managed to beat in him in two decades."

Xander started to laugh with Angel's dry chuckle, but the sound changed to a sob that he quickly cut off before the emotion could overwhelm him. "Angel, I'm fine. I just need some time," Xander said as he stared at the silver ring around the peephole in his door. "Not a vampire, in case you haven't noticed."

"Who did you kill?" Angel asked as he completely ignore the subtle un-invite.

"Angel, just go home," Xander tried a more direct approach, walking to the door and pulling it open. Outside the rain had passed, leaving slick oil puddles with slimy rainbows dotted across the concrete. The air had the blue haze of dawn, and he realized that Angel didn't have time to go far.

"Who did you kill?" Angel repeated without moving. He stood in the walkway between the closet and the kitchen island like the Rock of Gibraltar.

"Privacy. I know it was a new concept when you were around, but it means you give people space when they
need it. Either you're going, or I am," Xander said with his arm crossed defiantly. Angel stared him in the eye for several seconds before sighing. Dropping his eyes and shaking his head, Angel started walking for the door, and Xander stepped to the side to give Angel room. Of course, this put his back to the Barcalounger, so when Angel stopped in the doorway and darted out an arm, Xander had no room to retreat.

Angel kicked the door shut again with a foot as he wrapped his arms around a struggling and cursing Xander.

"You want to fight, fine. But you aren't going to retreat into some hole where you aren't doing yourself any good, boyo," Angel snarled as Xander's struggles took both of them to the floor. Xander tried to bring up a knee, but Angel's weight crushed him to the ground where he couldn't do much more than flop as ineffectively as a fish on dry land.

"You done?" Angel asked.

"Get the fuck off me," Xander snarled right back and doubled his efforts to get a hand free. He started wiggling forward, and Angel got a knee on either side of him, using his leverage to pull Xander back toward him. As his shirt rode up, Xander could feel the carpet burn
warm his skin and he resorted to pinching Angel as hard as he could right above the waist of his pants.

"That hurts," Angel complained as he drove more of his weight down onto Xander, forcing the air out of Xander so that all he could think about was breathing.

"Get off." Xander wheezed his words as he felt his brain growing fuzzy.

"Who did you kill?" Angel asked again, lifting himself onto his elbows so that Xander could gasp for air.

"A soldier. He tried to shoot Spike and I killed him. I ran him over. I slammed into him with my car and then I ran him over. I murdered him. Okay?" Xander snapped angrily, and Angel froze in place, allowing Xander to wiggle a few inches toward freedom.

"Oh, Xander," Angel offered with pity as he looked down. Xander chose that moment to drive his knee up between Angel's legs. The brown eyes morphed yellow, and demonic ridges instantly appeared. Angel growled and a large hand closed around Xander's throat. Instantly Xander was back in the mansion with Angelus over him, and he froze in fear. Almost as quickly, Angel let go, sitting up so that he pinned Xander's legs under his full weight and braced his hands on Xander's thighs but
didn't hold the rest of him down. Xander struggled up to his elbows.

"Don't you dare pity me," Xander threatened as he tried to kick Angel off.

"Xander. I know how you must feel."

Xander opened his mouth to deny that offer of sympathy, but when he looked at Angel, he realized that the vamp did know. He would be the only person to understand the demonic need to keep Spike and the soul that now condemned him.

"I didn't mean to. Oh, god, I so didn't mean to. Big with the not meaning to," Xander made a sound that stopped somewhere between a laugh and crying.

"I know you wouldn't. They were chasing you. They shot at you," Angel said calmly as he shifted his weight closer to Xander's feet. Xander took the extra space to sit up.

"Spike told you. He called you," Xander felt another stab of betrayal. He shouldn't. He couldn't sire Spike. He wasn't a vampire.

"He said I either had to come fix this or find a way to get your soul out of you so that it wouldn't do this to you
anymore," Angel confirmed as he braced himself on the Barcalounger and stood up.

"Not sure you chose right," Xander said as he continued to sit on the floor and stare at the brown carpet with flecks of olive green. His soul clearly didn't have the power to control his urges, so what use was it except for making Xander feel the guilt of his sin? Xander toyed with the idea that all souls were curses, and not just Angel's.

"Xander, you didn't have a choice," Angel said as he held a hand down toward him. Xander ignored it as he rolled to his hands and knees before climbing to his feet.

"I had a choice. I chose to kill someone," Xander told the battered old refrigerator which just continued to whine at him.

"They chose to attack you. They knew you were human, and the Initiative knows that not all demons are evil. They know I'm not evil, so they even know that not all vampires are evil," Angel offered, and Xander snorted in disbelief and then wiped his nose.

"I worked for them in World War II, got a sub away from the Nazi's, a sub full of vampires," Angel said softly. Xander turned to look at him and felt as though the
whole universe slipped suddenly two inches to the right. His stomach sent up a warning flare, and Xander ran the three steps to the bathroom, throwing up violently until his stomach ached and his throat burned.

He'd killed. Spike had turned to Angel for help. Ethan was gunning for Buffy. Xander threw up again, his stomach convulsing even though there was nothing left to vomit. The dry heaves wrung his body out over and over as he stared down into the toilet and considered that Double Meat Palace looked about the same when recycled, and hey, just because his life had fallen apart didn't mean he couldn't still crack inappropriate jokes in his head.

Eventually even his body grew as tired as his mind, and the heaving stopped. Xander leaned against the cold porcelain ring. "Push in the panel at the back of the shower," he said, and after a second where nothing moved, and he stared at olive green tile wondering if the vomiting had finally driven Angel away, a body moved behind him. Angel rested a hand on Xander's hip as he pushed into the tiny bathroom. Xander flushed the toilet, and Angel pushed against the shower wall, finding the latch and opening the unlocked door.

As Angel disappeared into his lair, Xander put his back to the cold tile wall and slowly slid down to the floor. He
deserved to lose Spike, and when Angel saw what he had done, he thought he would probably pay a little bit more on top of that. He remembered the pain from that night in the mansion; he remembered crying silently as he limped to Giles with each step sending stabbing pain up through his intestines.

Xander braced himself for round two when Angel saw Spike's torn and bleeding body. Despite Angel's protests, he still felt the same sire's instincts toward Spike that Xander did. Unfortunately for Spike, none of his sires seemed very capable of keeping a childe, but if Spike called Angel, Xander wasn't going to argue. After the beating he'd just given Spike, he didn't have the right to argue.

Another wave of dizziness flowed through him, and the feeling of being in that bouncing car returned as Xander closed his eyes and actively searched for the darkness that crept at the edge of his awareness.

Part Eleven
"If you wake him up, I'll rip your bollocks off your Irish hide," a voice snapped from some distant place that didn't quite make sense to Xander who sat on a rock at the bottom of the ocean playing with the seaweed that flowed around his naked ankles with slimy fingers.

"Watch your tongue, boy," another voice answered, and Xander was fairly sure it wasn't the clam even though the clam's dirty, white shell clicked open in time with the words. A flat wall of glass sped toward him and pushed back the water in an invisible wave. When he dug his fingers into the rock to keep his seat, the glass wall hit him in the nose hard enough that Xander's eyes watered as he now looked out into the Sunnydale night.

"Not your boy, now am I?" The first voice now sounded entirely too pleased with itself, and Xander put a hand up to the glass that kept him from warning a girl with a blue backpack that a monster walked two steps behind her, his black, snaky body arching up and over her so that his mouth dripped right over her head, but she still sauntered calmly through the dark.

"William," a voice threatened.

"Oi, you're thick as shite, aren't ya? Not William any more."
Xander ignored both voices as the girl turned and opened her mouth so wide that it became a cavern that she snapped over the snake monster, swallowing him whole. Xander pulled his hand back from the glass where he had been pounding, trying to reach her. Even though he stopped hitting it, the glass started shattering in a beautiful cobweb pattern that made the barrier groan and shriek.

"Just go sit down and stop pacing," the clam said, its shell flashed opal rainbows when it opened.

Xander watched as air started hissing into the water creating an ever-growing cloud of steam inside his water world. He tried to step back, but he found that the universe ended just behind his heels. The cloud of air sucked up more and more water. Xander opened his mouth to explain why air and water shouldn't act like this, but the cloud sucked the water from his own lungs.

"I'll pace if I want. It's our soddin' flat, and you're the guest here."

Xander tried to tell Spike to calm down because he sounded cranky, but the cloud pulled the water from his lungs like a scab separating from the pink skin underneath.
"And you're disturbing Xander," Angel growled. Xander wanted to watch the clam, but the air had churned the water white, and he couldn't see beyond his own nose. And really, something was truly wrong with this picture.

"Not like he isn't disturbed already, is it?"

Xander struggled to pull air into his lungs as the last bits of water fell from his mouth in phlegmy strings.

"He's just upset."

"Upset that he saved me. Upset 'nough ta sit in the dark for hours with his heart poundin' half out his chest. Don't tell me that doesn't sound a little balmy."

"It sounds normal for someone with a soul. Isn't that why you called me?" Now Angel just sounded tired, and Xander shifted restlessly, his body trying to cough even though he couldn't find the energy to truly move.

"I called ya because I'd already had the hide stripped from my back once for not askin' for help. But I meant what I said: You figure out how to fix that soddin' soul or I'll make it my bloody mission in life to get the thing out of him."

"Don't push it, William," Angel's voice had a dangerous calmness to it, and Xander realized he was in bed with a
sore throat and aching stomach that left him feeling like ground zero of a nuclear attack.

"Won't let it rip him apart."

"And I won't let you hurt him. If you turn him or manipulate him, I will rip your intestines out before I slam a stake through you."

"You don't have the knackers for it, Peaches. Ya couldn't do it before, and ya won't now."

"Oh Spike," a low laugh made the hairs on Xander's arm stand up even as he cracked open his eyes. "You never did understand me."

"And that's score one for uncomfortable de-ja-vu-age," he hoarsely whispered as he watched the two face off just like a scene from his nightmares. The only difference was the setting because this level of Spike and Angel snarling definitely need the Crawford mansion for the backdrop. "I can't leave you two alone for a minute, can I?" Xander croaked his joke even as his sore body tried to curl up in remembered fear. The two vampires who had been standing chest to chest in the middle of the apartment took a step back away from each other before turning to him.
"Not like I want to be alone with the wanker," Spike said as he stepped to the bed. Sitting on the edge, Spike sprawled against the headboard, one foot on the ground and the other bare foot braced on the mattress so that the knee bent up in front of him.

"Spike. You okay?" Xander struggled up onto one elbow, pushing the bedcovers away as he reached out to touch his childe. He could feel a need to touch and hold after the anger of earlier. He couldn't decide if his vampire side needed to remind Spike of the benefits of submitting to keep his childe in his place or if his human side just needed to make up for the beating. In the end, it didn't matter. Xander let his finger slide up the smooth skin of Spike's back and find the raised welts hidden by the black t-shirt.

"Bloody brilliant. Feel like givin' the ponce a show?" Spike answered as his own hand ran down Xander's shoulder. Xander shivered as the slow touch of a fingertip over his back and the expression on Spike's face told him what he needed to know. Spike was fine.

"You didn't call Angel as your sire," Xander said as he smiled slowly. Spike physically jerked back for a moment so that the headboard shivered with a metallic rattle.
"Bloody hell, no way I'd ever call the wanker my sire. No fuckin' way," Spike agreed, his eyes flashing yellow.

"Yeah, that makes sense now that the brain is more with the think," Xander admitted softly as he felt his cheeks turn hot. Nice. Nothing like blushing like some girl to make a man feel all manly.

"Ya thought..." Spike stopped, and then a slender hand reached up and tugged a messy curl before trailing a finger down Xander's cheek to the curve of his neck. "If ya think I'd let Peaches near my arse, your brain really was addled," Spike agreed.

"Xander, are you ready to talk about what happened?" Angel took a step closer, his boots silent even on the concrete floor.

"Um... no?" Xander asked.

"Ta ducks," Spike said to Angel who didn't move. "Toddle off to L.A. like a good wanker," he sneered.

"Shut up, Spike," Angel answered as he stepped closer. "Xander, you sat staring into the dark for hours without moving. You were..." Angel paused and made a helpless gesture toward the bathroom, "and you were unconscious for the better part of the morning. Spike
may not understand how to help your soul, but he called me for a reason."

"Called ya 'cause I couldn't see the slayer taking the news too well," Spike offered under his breath.

Xander looked from one to the other as his vampire side whispered the truth. Spike had called Angel for him. Spike tried to save the sire that had beaten him bloody... the sire who had stopped when Spike begged... the sire who valued him enough to keep him. Xander felt the ache in his eyes as he remembered how he'd begged his own childe to come to Nusa's aid. He remembered seeing that long face smile viciously as his childe ignored him. He remembered seeing Dracula stand by as Nusa's sisters ripped at her. He remembered the frantic need to get to Nusa and protect her.

Instead, he'd stood in the shadows, trapped by his sire's orders to never stand within Dracula's sight. He remembered that pain above any beating or torture Nusa had ever inflicted in her attempts to teach him some control. And then he'd done the same to his own childe. He'd left his faithful childe alone in an apartment unable to help his sire. He'd forced Spike to call the only person he could, even though he probably hadn't wanted
to. Xander reached up and put his hand on Spike's chest, waiting until blue eyes turned toward him.

"Thank you, childe," Xander said softly. Spike's sneer slipped away, and Xander could see the confusion and worry. "I shouldn't have forced you to stay in here," Xander admitted, and Spike's expression grew even more confused now.

"Xander, you need to talk about this. Do you even know if the soldier died?" Angel leaned back against one of the corner shelves and crossed his arms.

"Um, hello! I hit him and then ran him over. I think it's safe to say he's dead, unless he was a demon, and wouldn't that just be ironic." Xander turned to face Angel. Funny—he'd wanted Angel back in Sunnydale for months, but now as a soldier's brown eyes flashed across his memory, he just wanted Angel gone. He pushed the heel of his hands into his eyes to try and block out the memory. Unfortunately, the red and yellow dots behind his eyelids just merged into an imitation of that same image.

Xander felt Spike's hand briefly touch him and then withdraw. "I'm fine," Xander assured the nervous vampire, and he would have found it ironic that Spike
was doing the freakage, but he remembered that helpless rage just too well.

"Xander, what else could you have done?" Angel asked softly.


"And if the Initiative had killed you and taken Spike, what good would have come from that?" Angel asked. Xander snorted and pulled his hands away from his eyes.

"The world would have been safe for Twinkies and those mini-chocolate donuts with the sprinkles," he offered with a grin.

"Ignoring this won't make it go away."

Xander snorted so loudly that he had to wipe his slimy nose with the back of his arm. Scrambling over Spike, he padded barefoot across the floor, grateful to at least have jeans on. "No offense, Angel, but you aren't exactly good advise-boy on the issue of guilt," Xander pointed out as he headed for the small corner bathroom in the opposite corner. "It's not like you're big with the facing your past, so I figure I can bury guilt just as well as you."

Xander detoured around his couch and wondered why he'd never had the sense to add an actual door to the
bathroom. He stood in the tiny triangle room, looking at the mirror and not wanting to take his jeans off with Angel still in the lair. Bad memories there. Bad kneeling on stone floors and sobbing until the dust turned to mud memories there.

"Maybe I'm not the best at facing my..." Angel paused, "problems." Xander snorted again because he could practically hear the word "demon" in that pause. Oh yeah, he wasn't even the biggest head-case in the room. "But I know how not to handle this," Angel continued. "You can't ignore your feelings."

"I really am not in the mood," Xander said as he turned on the water, splashing some on his face and then cupping his hand to slurp water into his raw throat.

"Xander, even Spike knows that your soul is hurting right now. Let me help."

Xander leaned against the sink and stared at his own image in the mirror. He talked to the pale creature whose curls stuck up around his face. "I need time to think without you sitting on top of me," Xander said. "Figuratively or literally." Scrubbing his face with his hand, he struggled to find words that would send Angel away.
"I know I need to talk about it, and I'm big with knowing that I need to talk to someone who has a soul, but I need time to sort out my own thoughts first." Xander waited for some sort of answer, but the room remained silent. He sighed. "Look, if I don't talk to you later, you have my permission to kick my ass, but right now, I just need time."

"So, would later be a big dinner tonight?" Angel asked.

"Not up for the social thing, especially not with the blood sucking social thing."

"Since today is Thanksgiving and Giles has invited all three of us over there--" Angel stopped and shuffling feet scraped the concrete. Spike issued a quiet "Bloody, fucking hell," and Angel just made a strangled sound that was either a reaction to having to face Buffy or an attempt to not yell at Spike.

"I'm thinking that's a three-way 'no' to dinner," Xander said as turned and took the two steps to the archway of the bathroom where he could look into the rest of the room.

"I'll face Buffy if you face your friends. You can't hide this without tearing yourself to pieces." Angel stood next to the sofa, his thigh leaning into the leather and his arms
still crossed. Spike had his arms crossed in a look of defiant anger as he sat on the opposite end.

"Oh yeah," Xander said sarcastically. "That'll go over good. Buffy's killing herself over that whole perfect holiday magazine cover fantasy, and in the middle of her Martha Stewart mashed potatoes, I'll just announce that I'm a murderer." The last word came out a little strangled.

"Oi, that might actually be a bit of fun, then," Spike said as he suddenly sat up with a cheerful expression. Xander gave a half-hysterical bark of laughter that sounded way too much like the long-exorcised hyena.

"Fun. Right." Xander looked at Angel who definitely looked ready to smack Spike. "But if I have to go to the gallows for dinner, I am claiming my right for some serious private freakage, so Angel, don't let the door hit you on the ass on the way out."

"You can't--"

"Not listening," Xander said as he stuck his fingers in his ears and started humming. From the expression on Angel's face, Xander suspected that the vamp said something offensive, but then he just shook his head. Angel turned and left while Xander continued to hum
loud enough to make the sound echo in his head. As the heavy door swung shut, Xander took his fingers out of his ears.

"Bloody brilliant, mate," Spike offered, and Xander smiled. Spike opened his mouth as though he was going to say more, but he didn't. Instead he sprawled across the couch, one arm resting on the back and the other on his thigh.

"I'm fine Spike," Xander said as he headed for the refrigerator. Pulling open the door, he stood in the cold river and looked at the plastic-wrapped yellow cheese in perfect squares and half-eaten macaroni in Tupperware and two hotdogs mummified in the packaging that had once had 12 identical sticks of meat. For some reason, he found himself surprised to see everything just the same.

"Xander?" Spike's voice pulled him out of his refrigerator-induced trance.

"You know that pull you feel toward your sire? Where you feel like their life is your life?" Xander felt the pain of Nusa's death, and the cold air around him suddenly smelled of dust and cave mold. He remembered holding Nusa's ashes and feeling like he had died with her.
"Yeah," Spike answered slowly and softly as though he didn't want to say the words.

"It's like that. When one human kills another, it's like sliding a stake into your sire."

"Bloody--" Spike stopped in the middle of his own curse.

"Or maybe it's like killing other childer of your house," Xander amended himself. As much as some Sunday-school version of himself wanted to feel worse about the soldier, he could still feel Nusa's death more sharply. He glanced over his shoulder to see Spike's reaction. Spike cocked his head in confusion now.

"Wouldn't have minded takin' a stake to Penn m'self," Spike said without hesitation.

"Um, killing a childer of the house that you like?" Xander added. Spike continued to stare at him. "Okay, there's no way for me to explain except that it feels like staking your sire only not so bad, and now I'm feeling bad about not feeling bad."

"Soul makes ya soddin' nuts," was Spike's proclamation. "That Ethan, if he can get out a chip, he can soddin' well get out a soul. No soul, and you won't feel that. Better yet, let me turn ya. I'll make it feel good," Spike's strong arms wrapped around Xander's waist, and part of Xander
wanted to be weak. He leaned against the open refrigerator, the squish insulation under his palms, and part of him wanted to tilt his head and let go of the guilt. Spike's weight against his back promised to hold him up if he just gave Spike permission to take over.

"Why don't you try and force me to?" he asked instead.

"Oi, not looking to get another headache on top of the striped back," Spike answered with a snort of laughter.

"You're stronger. I'm tired. Why don't you try?" Xander pressed. The fingers that had intertwined at his stomach now separated, and he felt Spike step back.

"Just feels like it would go all pear-shaped if I did." Spike's voice had a slow, cautious tone as though he were walking a tightrope over sunshine.

Xander closed the refrigerator and turned to look at Spike who had a confused expression on his face again.

"And because I have a soul, I feel like giving it up would be wrong. Major wrongage. The big jackpot of wrong. I know you want to fix this, but I just need to feel bad because I did something I shouldn't have done."

"For me," Spike said, and where a human might have looked guilty or pained, Xander watched as Spike slowly
smiled, his hips tilting to the right salaciously and the tip of his tongue appearing at the corner of his mouth. Yeah, that wasn't guilt. Not on the same planet with guilt. Not even... Xander ran out of metaphors.

"I would do it again if I had to; that's what Angel was trying to get me to see. The only other choices were more wrong than the wrong I did."

"Yeah? So the great dobber isn't upset that ya offed the soldier boy?"

"Oh, he's probably going to add an extra year of brooding over how he somehow caused the whole mess from L.A., or how he shouldn't have let me take you in or how he shouldn't have let Dru turn you or something. Hell, I think he still feels guilty for the whole crusades thing."

"Yeah, that's Peaches." Spike smiled viciously. "Those gypsies knew how to make a curse."

"But he knows it was a better choice than us getting killed or captured or me running down some poor schmuck standing by his car." Xander stopped again as he leaned back against the refrigerator. "But it still wasn't a good decision. I should have known you would react like that. I shouldn't have taken you with me. Or maybe I shouldn't have invoked Janus in that spell because he can
be big with the unpredictableness. I definitely think he made things much with the worseness. That wasn't bad luck; that was like life-ending horrible, terrible, very bad, not good luck."

"Oi, ya sound mad as a bottle of chips," Spike pointed out, and Xander laughed.

"Yeah, but I go sounding all weird and then no one listens to what I say, and then they don't notice that I'm kinda not always well centered." Xander stopped the minute the words had escaped, and even though he hadn't ever said it to himself, he realized it was the truth. He played funny-sidekick boy, and no one looked for him to be anything else. Okay, after the whole book of spells Giles gave him, he might not be fooling everyone, but he had the whole thing down well enough for Buffy and Willow.

"That why the slayer hasn't picked up on the fact that ya have about as much vamp in ya as Peaches?" Spike asked, and he stepped forward again, letting one hand rest on Xander's hip as he pressed in. Xander leaned back against the cold refrigerator and allowed Spike to press into him. "That why she doesn't see ya?"

"Um, yeah. I mean, she never really did see me like I wanted, not when I was crushing on her or trying to out-hero Angel, and now that I don't want her to see me, it's
really not hard to still be the high-school loser around her.

"I see ya well enough pet, and I may not understand the soul, but I know you're a right bastard to cross and ya have enough mojo to curl Peaches' precious hair. Still wish you'd let me take the soul out, but even with the soul, you're vampire enough." Spike started rubbing a thumb into the tender skin above Xander's hip, and Xander groaned and let his head fall back against the refrigerator.

"I'm really not in the mood," Xander protested as his cock swelled.

"Figured I'd take your mind off it. 'sides, you seem in the mood to me," Spike suggested as he leaned his weight into Xander's crotch.

"Hey, I can't be held accountable for what my body thinks; I'm a teenager," Xander made a weak complaint. However, his hands reached up under Spike's shirt. He could feel the swollen skin in a pattern of intersecting lines, and he pushed a thumbnail into the edge of one. Spike growled and lowered his head to Xander's neck, scraping dull teeth over the skin until Xander made a pretty fair imitation of a growl himself.
"Bed," Xander hissed as he pushed against Spike. His legs still felt wooden, and with his hellcat's ability to make him weak in the knees, he didn't trust himself to finish this without falling on his face. Spike let himself be pushed back, but he never lifted his head from the earlobe he now assaulted with his teeth and tongue. With not-so-gentle pushes, Xander maneuvered them both to the bed.

Part Twelve

Xander felt hands slide up his back, scratching lightly so that he could feel his skin come alive by inches.

"I'll make ya forget, mate," Spike promised in a low whisper as Xander backed him to the bed. That made Xander pause. Now Spike's mouth nipped at Xander's bare neck in supplication, and an electrical charge ran through Xander's body, triggering both lust and a frustration that slowly grew out of Spike's assumption that he needed distracting. Of course, he did need
distracting, but that didn't matter as much as Spike assuming that he did.

Xander stepped back away from Spike, his hands wrapped around Spike's upper arms to keep him in place.

"I don't need you to help me forget, childe," Xander warned, and Spike's hip, which had canted out at a salacious angle, slowly straightened so that Spike stood up, his head lowered a little in a look Xander had learned to associate with confusion. Xander ran his hand over the fabric of Spike's shirt. The silk flowed under his fingers, cool and smooth, and he slowly popped one button after other open to reveal the strong chest below.

"I'm not so weak as to fall apart," Xander said as he popped open the last button and pushed the fabric open. He wasn't sure he believed it, but he said it.

"Never said--"

"Hush, my hellcat. You do get yourself in trouble with that mouth of yours. We'll have to find something to keep it busy," Xander ran his thumb over Spike's lower lip, and vampiric ridges pushed to the surface, skin stretching over inhuman angles. "Strip," Xander ordered, and Spike quickly popped the button of his jeans open,
the slide of a zipper filling the silent room as Xander walked to the weapons rack tucked behind the bed.

So many days he'd wandered the demon bazaar choosing one item after another, dreaming of what he could do. Now as Spike moved to obey his orders, Xander pushed away everything except the power that settled around him as he searched through chains and scabbards in his quest for the long straight board near the back of the triangle shaped space. The plank, with its heavy bolts on either end, had mage charms that made it damn near unbreakable. Xander pulled it free and turned to find Spike leaning against one of the bed poles.

"What now?" Spike asked, his cock already half full and hanging heavily. Xander didn't answer, but walked to his childe and grabbed the back of his neck, claiming Spike's mouth in a heated kiss. When Xander pulled back, Spike was more than half hard and taking small panting breaths.

"My hellcat does know silence," Xander observed as he walked to the empty center of the room and dropped the board to the concrete with a dull ringing sound. "On the floor," Xander ordered as he turned back to the racks on either side of his bed to find the right type of shackles.
He wanted something Spike would feel if he tried to fight. He finally chose iron chains with no padding.

When he turned around, Spike sat near the charmed wood plank, leaning against one knee while his other leg bent up so that Xander could only see a hint of cock. Xander stopped to just look at his strong childe: long muscles curved into each other, yellow eyes watched attentively, slim fingers twisted and tapped in constant motion.

"Plannin' on doing somethin' then?" Spike finally asked, stretching so that his full cock bounced a bit and his head fell back against one shoulder. Xander could almost feel his own inner vampire struggling to drop fangs. He could practically taste his childe's blood in his mouth: salt and strength and fury and iron. That taste had faded in the years since the spell, but now Xander could feel the thick substance in his mouth and sliding down his throat, the memory of it made him long to claim, to take, to own.

"Lay down," Xander ordered curtly as he walked over and knelt next to Spike, arranging the plank. Spike gave a dirty leer and lay back, spreading his arms so they lay on the board. In a silence broken only by the rattle of chains, Xander quickly chained each of Spike's wrists to the
metal bolts in the ends of the board. When he stood up, he could hear wood groan as Spike tested his bonds.

"Mage charmed. Fight all you vant, my hellcat, you vill go nowhere," Xander promised as he went for more supplies. Chains rattled and wood groaned. Xander smiled.

"Not plannin' on going anywhere," Spike finally answered.

"And again vith the mouth. You are not good at silence, are you my hellcat?" Xander asked as he returned with various supplies tucked in a bag where Spike couldn't easily see them. "Surely I can find a better use for it."

Xander straddled Spike and then slowly opened his jeans and pulled himself out. He moaned as he stroked himself slowly, his fingers tracing the vein on the underside of his cock. Spike moaned too. Slowly, Xander knelt so that he crouched over Spike's head, his cock dangling out of his jeans. He shifted forward so that his cock barely touched Spike's chin, and then he leaned back on his heels and watched Spike's hands flutter closed and the muscles in his arms and shoulders bulge as he strained against the restraints.
"Vant something?" Xander asked, amused. Spike glared up at him, his sexy smirk replaced with one of frustration.

"Not 'specially," Spike said as he pulled his mouth into a tight pucker and looked up. Xander laughed.

"My hellcat." Xander ran the back of his fingers down the side of Spike's face before bracing his hands on the concrete and bringing his cock to Spike's mouth. As he expected, Spike opened. Lips sealed around the head, and Spike started sucking. When a tongue pressed into the slit, Xander nearly came. Instead he closed his eyes and panted as he struggled to regain control.

When he opened his eyes again, he found Spike's head tilted back a little as Spike looked up toward him. Xander's cock still within his sucking mouth made his cheeks swell, but even so, Xander swore that Spike smirked even with the cock in his mouth. "Cocky little bastard," Xander whispered, and the suction on his cock increased as another inch disappeared into Spike's mouth. Now Spike's cheeks bulged out and Xander closed his eyes before the sight made him lose control.

Xander couldn't wait any longer. He pulled his hips up so that his cock came out of Spike's mouth, precum staining Spike's lips as the vampire tried to hold his treat. Then Xander thrust down. The edge of a tooth slid the length
of his cock, tracing a line of fire, and Xander growled his need as he pulled back and thrust again, and again. Below him, Spike could only writhe, his own arms spread wide and useless as Xander used him. Finally, Xander felt the pressure explode down his spine as he stiffened and came.

Spike noisily sucked under him, and Xander trembled. Then he collapsed, throwing most of his weight to one side where he lay crushing Spike's arm with his hip. Spike's head turned so that he could keep sucking at the limp cock. Xander wanted to push Spike away from the overly sensitive skin that burned and ached with each touch, but he couldn't come up with the strength to protest as he lay with his naked chest pressed against the cold concrete.

Long minutes, Xander floated even as the concrete crushed his hip and Spike's teasing made him shift uncomfortably with a painful heat that seemed to circle his hips. Eventually Xander's hand fumbled its way to Spike, gently pulling the cock free from greedy lips.

"Taste bloody good," Spike commented smugly, and Xander could hear his childe's arrogance at making his sire come so quickly. With a struggle, Xander pushed himself up onto his knees and tucked himself back in.
"Greedy childe," Xander accused him as he trailed fingers up Spike's stomach to a nipple. "How much control do you have?" he asked curiously. He knew he had very little control around Spike, but then he could always claim the weakness of a teenage body that seemed entirely too eager.

"You're a Master Vampire in your own right, even if you are my childe, so how much control can you claim?" Xander rolled a nipple between his thumb and finger, watching as Spike threw back his head and twisted his body as much as he could with his arms stretched. Again, the sight of that exposed neck made Xander flash on the memory of strong blood filling his mouth.

"I think we'll find out," Xander said as he shifted to one side of Spike and pulled his bag to his side. From out of the black sack, he pulled two red candles: fat pillars of wax with thick wicks. "Spread your legs," Xander ordered with a tap on Spike's knee. Without hesitation, Spike spread his legs, his full cock now resting on his stomach as he exposed himself.

Xander put a candle on the inside of each of Spike's thighs so that Spike couldn't close his legs without knocking over the candle. Spike watched suspiciously as
Xander pulled out a match and ran it across the side of the box. Fire flashed and a bitter odor filled the air.

"Best be careful or you just might get burned," Xander warned as he lit the two candles. Xander could see Spike tense at the presence of fire. The way the light flickered and reached for dead flesh sent fear rippling through the vampire memories, and Xander could see that same fear reflected in every line of Spike's body. The thigh muscles strained away from the flame, and Xander took a moment to stroke the stiff leg.

"Have you done anything to warrant fearing me?" Xander asked quietly. Spike's eyes bobbed between Xander and the flickers so close to his flesh. Xander waited. Many vampires, Nusa included, would fill a room with candles to prove their control, but the demon never stopped flinching. Spike's gaze eventually settled on Xander.

"Don't think so," he finally admitted carefully. Xander stoked the tense thigh under his hand. Some days he wanted to dismantle the entire Aurelius clan. He allowed his fingers to simply trace invisible lines as Spike slowly relaxed.

"I am not Darla. I won't turn on you without cause," Xander said quietly. "I staked my own childe for abandoning my Nusa and leaving her to die when I
ordered him to her side, but short of betrayal, I will never destroy you," he promised. The leg relaxed more, but Spike's eyes continually returned to the flame now sending islands of heat across his ankles. Xander passed his own hand over the flame, and felt his skin crinkle before he took it out and sucked the slightly burnt finger into his mouth.

"Hurt you a little maybe, but not maim or destroy you," Xander added after he popped the finger out of his mouth.

Reaching into the bag again, Xander pulled out a small bowl and vial. As soon as he uncorked the bottle and started pouring, the strong smell of alcohol drifted out into the room. "Wait here," Xander said with a slap to Spike's hip before he got up and went to the kitchen. When he returned with a bowl of ice water and a foot long wooden match, Spike was straining at the board and breathing loudly. Such a strange habit for a vampire.

Ignoring all that, Xander took a square of cloth from the bag and draped it over the edge of the bowl so that the fabric soaked up alcohol as he arranged himself with all his tools in hand. Slowly, he lifted the alcohol-soaked fabric and traced a circle on Spike's stomach, and now that stomach rose and fell in staccato breaths. Xander
stuck the phosphorus head of the match into one of the pillar candles, and the match flared to life. Spike jerked.

One of the candles rocked as Spike's ankle tapped it, and Xander sat with the match in hand, watching as the candle steadied. Only then did he bring the match to Spike's stomach. The slight pause allowed most of the alcohol to dry, so only a faint blue glow chased around the flammable circle. Spike hissed his breath in through clenched teeth, and a few faint hairs curled and withered with a bitter scent. Even though Xander was prepared to catch the candles as Spike fought, the vampire's legs remained steady and the pillar candles continued to burn.

"My beautiful hellcat," Xander murmured as he ran a thumb over the fire's trail. He could still feel a faint trace of heat remaining. He picked up the alcohol soaked fabric again and traced a squiggle line from between the nipples down to the belly button. The match had died, and Xander put the wood end into the candle flame again, and this time he touched the alcohol's path much more quickly.

The flame leapt across Spike's body in an impressive line, gathering speed until it reached the belly button where the pool of alcohol fed a blue flare rising inches from
Spike's body. With his hand, Xander wiped the flame from Spike before it could burn him more seriously. One of Spike's heels rose and then hit the concrete in an almost spastic jerk before his knees locked.

Xander picked a floating ice cube out of the white, plastic bowl and traced the line down Spike's chest. When he reached the belly button, he swirled it around the smooth flesh before reaching down to suck the water back out of Spike's navel. Using his tongue, he explored the curve of Spike's stomach and the line where soft skin turned to the slick of the burn. Spike hissed again, and even though every hiss sounded pretty much the same, this time Xander could feel Spike struggle to control himself through the pleasure.

Backing off a little, Xander blew across the damp skin and watched Spike's skin rise in a mountain range of bumps. Xander could feel Spike's cock twitch and brush his cheek as he explored the width of Spike's belly with his mouth. He used his tongue to retrace the fire's path north until he finally ended up between Spike's nipples. Then he lifted his head and looked Spike in the eye before leaning over and biting a nipple hard enough to taste a hint of Spike's blood.
The body below him arched off the concrete, and Xander quickly glanced toward his hellcat's feet, but Spike's legs remained open and didn't even touch the candles.

"Such control," Xander praised as sat up. The body which had tightened into a coil relaxed at that word of praise. Muscles that had stood out in sharp cords melted back under the skin.

Xander picked up the alcohol soaked cloth again. Spike's vampire ridges fell away so that blue eyes watched, the demon controlled and caged within. As reward, Xander pressed his thumb into the head of Spike's cock. The game face hovered just under the surface making Spike's face shimmer and then it sank back down under the human features. Xander slowly trailed the long, wooden match above Spike's body just close enough for the vampire to feel the heat as small bits of ash dropped onto the pale skin.

"Truly a Master Vampire. Can you feel panic clawing at you like a hungry animal?" Xander asked curiously. Spike didn't answer, but his eyes fell closed in a show of trust that made Xander want to rip into Spike's throat and then offer his own in return. Since that couldn't happen, he picked up the alcohol-soaked cloth again.
Xander traced a swirling pattern on Spike's chest and almost immediately touched the match to the wet trail. The fire raced along Spike's body, reducing a few thin hairs to ash curls and glowing brightly. Xander watched the blue heat devour the alcohol and turn the skin red. Then he drew his hand through the flame, pushing it out of existence. With his hand on Spike's chest, Xander felt the hot flesh and the rapid movement as Spike gasped broken breaths. A foot bumped one candle, and Xander watched as hot wax splattered onto Spike's ankle. Immediately, Spike threw his head back and arched his neck out invitingly.

Since Xander couldn't effectively bite his childe into submission, he did the next best thing. He dropped down and sucked Spike's cock into his mouth. Spike growled a long string of syllables without actually forming a word, and the board under his arms creaked loudly as Spike's whole body convulsed. One foot kicked so hard that a red candle flew across the room and slammed into the wall between the living room and the kitchen, scattering drops of red wax in a fan shape across the concrete.

Xander abandoned Spike's cock and snatched the second candle before it could follow. Blowing out the flame, he then concentrated on the feel of Spike's cock against his tongue, filling his mouth as he tried to hold down a
thrashing vampire. Spike thrust wildly upward into Xander's mouth only to have Xander pull back so that he always had just the head in his mouth. Reaching down, Xander grabbed a tight curl and yanked firmly. Spike made a strangled sound, and thrust even higher, his heels braced against the concrete and his back arched.

Xander took more of the cock into his mouth and wrapped a hand around the base of it, squeezing as Spike thrust up once more and then started coming. With heavy spasms shuddering through him, Spike spat several times and then collapsed back to the concrete, his mouth sagging open as he breathed heavily. Xander wiped the back of his hand over his mouth and chuckled.

"So much for having more control than me," Xander said, fully expected a smart-ass reply. Instead Spike lay silent and possibly boneless, even his hands motionless in their shackles. Xander stroked the vampire's side, tracing the outlines of the runes which had lost their blackened edges. "Nusa used to play this game when I was young," Xander said as he shifted around so he could lay next to Spike. He wished they were in the bed, but fire and bedding hadn't seemed very mixy.

"Lucky you," Spike finally answered after several minutes.
"I vas," Xander agreed. "I played with Jalon, but he never could control the demon. He never lost his demon's face when I played with him."

"He the one you staked?" Spike asked, but Xander couldn't hear any suspicion or wariness, just curiosity.

"Igen," Xander agreed.

"He didn't soddin' deserve ya," Spike complained without energy.

"I don't know about that." Xander pulled the shackle key from his pocket and reached up to Spike's wrists. Reaching over to unlock the far wrist, Xander caught a strange expression on Spike's face.

"He bloody well shouldn't have turned on ya. If you ordered him to Nusa's side, it was his place to turn to soddin' dust before he left it."

"But he didn't, did he?" Xander pointed out. "Should does not matter. In our world, the only law is to be strongest, and I wasn't. My childe feared others more than me, and my sire died for it." Xander finished unlocking the second shackle and then sat up and crossed legs as he played with the silver key.
"Not your fault." Spike pulled himself up so that he sat facing Xander, who only made a short derisive bark of laughter. "Bloody hell, Peaches staked his own sire and still explained it away."

"Nusa died, and I sat in the shadows watching," Xander said as he turned the key to catch the glints of light from the track lighting in the kitchen.

"You watched?" Spike said, his voice growing loud.

"She ordered me to not let Dracula see me; she didn't order me away, and I wouldn't leave her. I thought..." Xander stopped and swallowed. "I thought Dracula would punish her for defying him. I thought he'd hurt her and then accept her back like a thousand times before. I wanted to be there."

"But he dusted her," Spike finished.

"He let his other brides do it for him, and I stood by helpless." Xander could feel his chest ache with loss. "I failed."

"Seems like you followed orders."

"You bloody saved the world; think that puts you right with the slayer and the watcher."

"I killed someone. Think that puts me wrong." Xander looked up at the ceiling for a second as he pushed back the tears that threatened.

"Not like I can talk on right and wrong, here," Spike reached out, resting a hand on the wrist that twisted the key right and left. Xander looked at his childe, "but I don't see the wrong in defending what's yours."

"Yeah, vampire logic. Slayers aren't big with the vampire logic," Xander dropped the key. "And hey, I'm fucking up with you right now. You need a strong sire, and here I am telling you what a fuck up I am." Xander shoved Spike's hand away and stood up. For a second, the world tilted around him, and he stumbled back only to find Spike's hands at his waist.

"I may be your childe, but I'm a Master Vampire in my own right. Not goin' to confuse grievin' with weakness." Spike's hands pulled at him. Xander fought the embrace, but the hands that held him were too strong, and he could feel a rage at his own weakness rise in his chest. He'd never really been fond of himself, but Xander really resented the fact that he hated himself.
"It is weak," Xander said as he pushed at the arms holding him.

"It's bloody human," Spike corrected him.

"Yeah, you see, human. I'm human; you're vampire. And never the twain shall meet." At Xander's words, Spike's arms tightened until Xander found himself crushed to Spike's chest.

"Wot? You sayin' you want me out?"

"What? Shit! NO! Okay, that did actually kinda sound like that, didn't it?" Xander struggled to turn and look at Spike, but the arms around his waist held him so tightly that he could only look over one shoulder. Yeah, he obviously wasn't tracking well, and now Xander's guilt at screwing Spike up equaled his frustration at himself for not being strong enough to physically overpower Spike. And really that was just stupid since he could order Spike to let him go, but Xander had decided that his vampire brain had a few logic holes.

"The brain got sucked out somewhere over there," he tried joking, but Spike just tilted his head again.

"Not lettin' you go," Spike finally answered.
"You see, you should want to. I don't want you getting the fuzzy, dirty, linty end of the lollipop again, and you should run like hell. Wait, you did try running like hell," Xander corrected himself. "If I was a decent sire, I should let you run. If you stay, I'm going to fuck up and do something that gets you dusted, and I'm terrified because I don't know what I'm doing." Xander stopped. "God, can we just stop talking before Oprah comes out of some closet with a camera crew and starts asking about our childhoods?" Xander pushed away again, and this time Spike's arms released him.

"Our childhoods?" Spike echoed.

"A bit complicated in my case what with the whole son of a Duke who I disappointed by growing up to eat him instead of taking over the castle as was traditionally expected. Of course, I could go with door number two where I just told Tony Harris what he could do with certain pieces of his anatomy and offered to make a demonstration if necessary. Yeah, let's not talk family," Xander finished as he sat on the end of the bed. "See, nice pattern of failure there."

"Failure?"

"Yeah, like when Giles thinks I'm a good guy and I—" Xander stopped again and blew air out his mouth as he
tried to get that emotion back into the 'yes, it happened but we will never speak of it again' box. It was a pretty damn big box, but not quite big enough. Xander felt his chest tighten.

"You're strong enough to do what ya need to," Spike said carefully as he walked over, stopping right in front of Xander.

"And now I'm confusing the hell out of you with the irrational crying over things I can't change."

"Not like I haven't been there." Spike sat on the bed, making the whole mattress tilt.

"I can't—" Xander stopped since he had no ending for that sentence. He remembered the shock on the soldier's face as he slid across the hood. Xander felt tears start. "Can we just have sex again because the whole talking about our feelings... I can feel myself turning into a woman." Xander took a deep, staggering breath as he tried to stop the tears.

"Won't find me turning down a good shag," Spike agreed.

They sat on the bed in silence, and Xander stared at his hands. A small brass clock on his desk make a clicking beat, and Xander moved his stare to the concrete floor as
he traced the tiny cracks. Spike shifted on the bed. Xander sighed.

"God, I'm losing my mind," Xander whispered to the air.

"Bloody hell, pet, not like I haven't been there, too."

Xander felt a strong arm curl around his shoulder, and he allowed himself the weakness of leaning into that strength. Then Spike used inhuman strength to pull both of them up and onto the bed where he curled around Xander. Arms and legs and thighs pressed into Xander, and fingers made dents in his skin. Xander settled his head on Spike's shoulder.

"I shouldn't. You need—" Words failed.

"Shhh," Spike crooned. "Dru used ta cry about her mum and her da all the time. Get to cryin' until she forgot what she was and tried ta go spinnin' into the sunlight. 'Course, that's not the best example of it bein' okay seein' as how her grief made her a bit off her rocker."

Xander hiccupped as he lay in Spike's arms, the grief so overwhelming that for one blissful moment he felt nothing before he could feel the pain settle around him. The image of the soldier rolling off his hood played in his head over and over. Spike's arms held him closer, and he could feel Spike's.... Xander considered what to call it.
Despite what Angel and Giles had always said, he still thought he could feel Spike's love.

"I near crawled in a bottle and died after that soddin' spell ended," Spike said softly. "Felt so bloody alone with Dru nattering on about 'Daddy' and the minions not havin' a brain among 'em. Woulda cried 'cept one of the minions would have taken it as an invite to stake me."

"God, I'm sorry." The first true sobs escaped Xander as he considered how badly he'd failed, both as a White Knight and as a sire.

"Don't be. I was so bloody angry, I would have broken your neck if ya tried to keep me. And at the mansion... I wanted to bloody rip you apart. You reminded me of what I'd lost when Peaches went and got the soul. You reminded me and then ya went and got a soul of your own." Spike sighed and went silent for a moment.

"And then I saw ya standing there refusing to be humiliated even by Angelus. Ya smelled of fear and death, and you had the great wanker's scent all over ya from where he'd pawed at ya, but you stood there and made a play to save the world. And when I touched ya, you still wanted me. Could smell it even under the fear." Spike's hand slid up Xander's back, fingers following the line of the backbone up to the neck as his other hand
worked the button and zipper of the jeans. Xander lay there and let tears run down his face for the soldier and for Spike and for himself and what he suffered that night after Angelus took him back from Spike.

"I don't know what to do," Xander admitted, a small part of him growling at the admission. He could feel a coldness settle into his bones, like ocean water stealing the heat of his body on a November night.

"Just let yourself grieve, and I'll take care of ya. Later, we can go to dinner and devil the slayer into givin' herself a stroke," Spike said, and strong hands pushed at the jeans until they lay together, naked limbs tangled. Xander lay in Spike's arms as the vampire started rocking. A dam broke and now the sobs came one after another, making his whole body heave. Spike's fingers dug into his skin and held him together as he cried.

Part Thirteen

Xander stirred his mashed potatoes, blending the flecks of brown and black as he tried to achieve a perfect even gray.

"I burned them. I can't believe I burned them," Buffy complained. Buffy glanced toward Angel, and Xander
flinched. If he hadn't gone over the deep end, Spike wouldn't have called Angel, and Angel wouldn't be playing babysitter to make sure he 'fessed up, and then Angel wouldn't be here looking miserable and making Buffy look even more miserable.

Heck, Xander hadn't seen Buffy look so frazzled since she'd done the dead thing; in fact, when she opened the door to see Angel, she lost so much color from her face that she looked near dead. And Angel's hands fluttered. Literally. He finally shoved them deep into his pockets, and Xander could almost taste Angel's need to touch. Yeah, this was turning out pretty well sucky all 'round.

"They aren't burned; they're just... a little crunchy," Willow came to her defense. From the couch, Spike snorted. He'd been exiled from the kitchen and table after trying to slip blood into the cranberry sauce. Xander pushed his potatoes closer to his green bean casserole and watched over his shoulder as Spike dipped strips of turkey into his cup and then pulled them out dripping blood. Angel sat in the chair, choosing exile over sitting at the table with his mug of blood.

"They're burned," Buffy insisted. "Don't try to make excuses, I have officially ruined Thanksgiving."
"I hardly think burned potatoes spell the end of civilization," Giles offered, but Xander noticed that he spent more time pushing potatoes around than actually eating them.

"But it's Thanksgiving, and I wanted it to be perfect, and instead the potatoes are burned, and I don't think pumpkin pie is supposed to be that color. I wanted this to be traditional." Xander gave up Spike watching to focus on Buffy, who could take an apocalypse in stride but was clearly losing it on the burned potatoes.

"Hey, considering my mom's tradition included reheated KFC mash potatoes and a cans of beets, I'm calling this perfect," Xander added as he scooped up a big load and shoved them in his mouth.

"I still think we should have done something to honor the millions of Native Americans who died as a result of European invasion," Willow softly whispered.

"Oh, no, you are not starting that again. No discussion of disease, genocide or conquest at my table," Buffy threatened as she made stabby motions with her fork in the air.

"I rather thought it was my table," Giles said at the same time Spike blurted loudly, "Blood and genocide's a fun
way to spend a day. Used ta amuse Dru no end to pull someone into bloody bits."

"You're ruining the day. I had this all planned, and you're ruining it," Buffy said as she stood up quickly enough to make her chair bounce backwards and nearly fall. Xander swallowed quickly. Buffy's eyes darted between the table and Spike and Angel, and Xander could practically feel the pain from her.

"Not ruined, the day is definitely not ruined. Is it?" Willow turned her best challenge face to each person in turn. Only Spike glared back at her without ducking his head.

"Not really one ta judge since any day with the slayer's a bit of misery for me," he offered with a smile. Willow's face froze and then she looked to Xander in horror.

"So, anyone up for parade fun? We could count the number of fake smiles," Xander suggested. "Or maybe play 'spot the giant animal naughty parts'," Xander added in desperation. Okay, so there had only been one float in the parade that one year that had a boat placed in a suggestive position, but the sight of a giant flower bear with what appeared to be a giant bear penis sticking out in front had been worth many years of mocking.
"The parades were this morning," Willow said in her disappointed voice that always made Xander feel about two inches high... well, either that or it made him want to eat her, and he really did need therapy.

"Angel, you can come back to the table. The comment about the yuckiness of blood was for your idiot childe," Buffy said as she stood beside the table looking somewhat lost.

"Oi, watch your mouth, slayer. Not the broody one's childe, am I?" Spike's glare made it very clear that he hadn't intended the comment as a question.

"I'm fine here," Angel demurred. "And Spike really can't be called my childe any more, Buffy."

Xander watched through his lashes as Giles snatched his glasses off his face and polished them as he looked from one to another. Oh yeah, the man knew way too much. Xander found himself wanting to eat nosey watchers who recorded in books exactly how vampires changed sires.

"I don't know why he has to be here at all," Buffy sighed under her breath, and Spike crossed his arms and sneered her direction.
"He came with me," Xander said quietly. A parade of inappropriate jokes trotted through his mind, but he actually managed to keep his mouth closed as he let his words sit in the air without even trying to distract or apologize.

"Oh yeah, like that makes it so much better. I still don't understand why Giles pushed him off onto you, because chip or no chip, he can't be trusted." Buffy crossed her arms, and Xander bit his tongue to keep from pointing out that she was only getting all cranky because she was strangely insecure about her potato skills.

He glanced over and Spike had a closed expression. Xander paused for a minute, wondering why Buffy's words would even bother Spike, and then it occurred to him that he wasn't exactly sticking up for Spike. He glanced at Angel, who had narrowed his eyes. Part of Xander wanted to hide in the mashed potato castle he had created on his plate. Okay, he could do this. He just needed to do this in front of Buffy. Funny how Buffy make him want to hide under jokes and brightly colored shirts.

"Yeah, 'cause he's a vampire," Xander said softly, daring Buffy to walk out onto that thin ice.
"No, because he's soulless," she insisted before she snatched the bowl of flecky mashed potatoes and disappeared into the kitchen. Plastic rustled, and Xander just wished his own personal castle of gray charcoal mush had joined its mother in the trash, preferably with him still in it. Buffy came back without the bowl and practically threw herself down in a chair. Her eyes focused past Xander toward the living room. From her sad sigh, Xander guessed she wasn't looking at Spike. Xander never thought he would miss his mother's Thanksgivings, but drunk people slobbering over fast food and dry turkey was way better than this.

"A soul doesn't make a person perfect, or even good," Xander stated quietly. He shifted a little more, sitting sideways in his chair so he could see Angel and Spike better. Angel studied his mug, and Spike watched, the closed expression replaced with curiosity.

"But not having one, that's a guarantee that a person is bad," Buffy countered. Willow stirred her potatoes; Giles put his glasses back on his face and then immediately removed them again.

"It means a person doesn't care about right and wrong--doesn't understand right and wrong," Xander admitted
slowly. "But a person can be big with the not understanding and still not kill."

"Yeah, right," Buffy snorted as she stabbed several green beans. She shoved them in her mouth with enough force that Xander worried about things like her stabbing herself in the back of the throat. Xander glanced over at the vampires, but Spike looked confused and Angel just continued to stare at his mug silently. No help there.

"Just because a person has a soul and wants to do the right thing doesn't mean that he always does... do the right thing I mean. A soul can't keep a person from screwing up," Xander tried again. "And hey, why do we always screw up instead of screwing down or screwing sideways?" Xander bit his tongue. While Giles stared at him intensely, Buffy just kept glaring at her plate as though it was about to grown horns and try to suck the world into hell. He actually would have preferred hellsucky distraction.

"Are we talking about Faith, because if I can't talk about genocide at the table, I don't think you should bring up Faith," Willow interrupted with a near whisper.

"In my family, having serious conversations over a large dinner was very traditional," Giles answered as he busied his hands with polishing a fork with the pink paper towels
Buffy had put next to each plate. "Thank god we rarely had dinners together," he added.

Everyone fell silent. Xander worked the turkey with his knife and fork. He could practically feel Angel silently glaring at the back of his head, but Xander needed to mentally practice some more. 'Hey, Buff, I killed someone.' 'Guys, I've decided to check out Faith's side of the moral fence.' 'I killed someone, but don't worry, I don't plan on going full-out evil.' Yeah, he needed a better line. Outside of his head, the sound of tapping silverware filled the air.

"I'm glad you could come to dinner, Angel," Buffy finally said as she stared at the plate.

"I told you that I would be here whenever you needed me. I just couldn't--" Angel stopped. Buffy's fork smashed a pea and then pushed the remains around on the plate.

"I know," she said softly. "I guess I just didn't expect you back so quickly."

"Xander needed me," Angel offered, and Buffy looked up, trapping Xander in a confused gaze. With the heat rising to his face, Xander glared over his shoulder at Angel who looked back with calm certainty.

"Xander?" Giles asked sharply.
"You got fired again, didn't you?" Willow asked. "I tried to see you the other day at the hotdog place, and they said the manager fired you for missing shift, and I didn't say anything because I know you're all sensitive, but you just need to find a job that fits what you do. Have you tried phone work? You have a good voice, and I bet you'd do well with phone work, and you wouldn't smell when you got off shift." Willow managed to get all that out in one breath, and Xander could feel his face turning a darker shade of red. God, how many lies did he need to confess in one day?

"Um, I might have another job," Xander admitted. "I do some translating and I don't have to do anything smelly. Well, usually," Xander admitted after a pause. "There was this one book written on Drayack dung that kinda smelled bad."

"Drak dung? What?" Buffy's skin wrinkled between her eyes, a sure sign of worry. But then again, she also narrowed her eyes, which meant pissed, and Xander stirred his green bean casserole into his mashed potatoes.

"Xander works for Uick," Giles said softly, and Xander could see Angel's eyes going wide. Of course, his own eyes went wide at the thought of Giles knowing. From
the look Giles gave him, a cross between annoyance and sympathy, Xander suspected that the man was big with the knowing.

"Oh goddess. A demon?" Willow squeaked.

"He's not a bad guy," Xander hurried to defend his boss. "And I'm fairly sure he has a soul because he does worry about right and wrong and not doing anything to blow the world up, especially if he's still on it," Xander pointed out, waving a bit of turkey on the end of his fork, and he really wished he could find some vampire cool because he could feel every insecurity blowing up like a balloon until it pushed all the cool out through his pores.

"I'm afraid the Council would disagree with you, Xander," Giles commented right before he shrugged noncommittally, "but then I've had more than enough evidence to suggest the Council is full of shit." Giles' words made everyone look at him in shock.

"Please, people, your generation did not invent profanity," he said as he stood and took his plate with most of the food still on it to the kitchen. Xander took that as permission to give up and he followed with his own mangled dinner even though Buffy and Willow both glared fire at him.
"Oi, you tell 'em Rupert," Spike added from the couch. Xander finished scraping his leavings, and he passed the table on his way back to the living room, dropping down on the couch close enough to Spike that their hips pressed into one another, and he put a hand onto Spike's thigh. If he was going to torpedo the dinner, destroy his friendships, and incur the wrath of the slayer over a ruined Thanksgiving dinner, he might as well do it with style.

"Um, Xander, touchage," Willow choked out, her eyes wide as she stumbled over her words.

"Think he noticed, ducks," Spike offered with a happy leer.

"Oh no. No, no, no. What have you done to Xander because Xander is not gay. He had a crush on me!" Buffy protested.

"That'd be enough ta make a man bent," Spike shot back, and Xander moved his hand off Spike's thigh long enough to slap the vampire up side the back of the head.

"Oi, just saying the truth, and I didn't even point out that chattin' up that lanky streak of piss doesn't prove your heterosexuality."

"Listen, you castrated--"
"Spike, keep a decent tongue in your mouth or I'll rip it out," Angel interrupted Buffy as he stood up and glared down at Spike.

"Bloody bog-trot--" Spike started, and Xander slapped one hand over Spike's mouth before Angel completely lost control.

"Hey, no bloodshed. Bloodshed bad," Xander insisted as he held his free hand out toward Angel placatingly. The suction and delicate trace of a tongue over his palm simply made him blush darker.

"Perhaps we could get back on topic without any violence which might threaten my living room furniture." Giles leaned against the wall looking both tired and ready to snap.

"Xander, why did you call Angel for help?" Willow asked as she abandoned the dinner table and the hacked turkey and the pile of brown rolls.

"Um, I didn't?" Xander said, even though he knew he was only delaying the inevitable. Surprisingly, Spike remained silent and Angel sat back down in the chair. For a second, Buffy remained dangerously close to Spike, her back stiff with anger. However, then she stepped back to Angel's
side, leaning against his chair. Angel stared at his hands, crossing and uncrossing his fingers in his lap.

"Xander?" Willow asked, and while he could stand up against everyone's anger, he had no defense against Willow's worried face.

"Whatever happened, you can tell us," Giles assured him.

"Spike happened. I don't know why you let him anywhere near Xander. Angel, you need to take Spike with you or I'll just stake him right now." Buffy went so far as to reach for her trusty stake, and Xander could feel a sire's anger rise like a fire doused in gasoline.

"No!" Xander growled as he stood up. Buffy physically started before crossing her arms. And that was Buffy's cranky expression. Part of Xander wanted to crawl into a corner, but for the first time Xander braced himself. Okay, most of him braced himself while a little part ran and hid. "Not happening," he repeated.

"Buffy, it's not my decision to make. If Xander wants Spike to stay here, I won't get in the middle," Angel said softly. Xander felt a bit of smugness.

"Okay, I'm feeling out of the loop here. Is anyone else feeling out of the loop," Buffy asked the whole room.
"I rather wish I were more out of the loop," Giles commented, and Xander eeped as he felt Spike's hand grab his ass. Willow made a matching noise and sat down in the dining room chair Xander had just left.

"Spike," Xander said from between clenched teeth.

"They seem so bloody clueless, just thought I'd hand 'em a clue," Spike said and then he ran his tongue inside his lower lip in a way that made Xander want sex. A Giles-cough reminded Xander of the audience, which killed the lust-itch.

"Oh goddess," Willow breathed. "The kiss." Even though shock had reduced Willow to incoherent fragments of sentences, Xander blushed as he realized what she realized, which was entirely too much realizing going on.

"Kiss? What kiss?" Buffy asked.

"Halloween. I saw Xander... vampy Xander... kissing Spike."

"Yes, I think we can, given vampire natures, assume that more than kissing happened. I really do need to go kill Ethan Rayne."

"You mean you two—" Buffy stopped as she looked from Xander to Spike with wide eyes. "And I am getting the
wiggins here." Buffy sat down on the arm of Angel's chair.

"I'm already there," Willow added. "Not that there's anything wrong with the gay thing, because I'm all for gayness... or straightness. Either one is just fine. But you hated Angel being with Buffy." Xander flinched. Of course it had to come back to that.

"I hated Angel being with the slayer," Xander corrected her. "Okay, at the beginning I just hated Angel because he had the cool going and I didn't, but then I found my cool, which is about the same time I found my inner bloodthirsty demon, and then I just didn't like the slayer thing. It's a little too Romeo and Juliet, and unless I slept through the wrong part of class, that didn't end well."

"Always preferred Titus Andronicus myself," Spike said with a shrug as he sprawled on the end of the couch looking more and more comfortable.

"Yes, that's hardly a surprise," Giles commented. "However, none of this explains why Angel would feel a need to come back to Sunnydale."

"Um." Xander stopped. This was not how he'd practiced this speech. "Uh."
"Bloody hell, mate, just cough it out so we can bunk off and head back to the flat. Soddin' stinks in here with all the burnt food."

"Watch it," Buffy threatened as she reached behind her, but at least this time she looked like she was joking... mostly.

"Um, how far back should I go?" Xander asked as he glanced toward Angel looking for help. Instead Angel just clenched his jaw and refused to say anything as Giles suggested that they start back on that Halloween.

"Xander, we all love you, you know that, right?" Willow asked seriously, and Xander closed his hand around Spike's knee until his knuckles turned white.

"Um, you might want to wait until the end of the story to say that. I think I may need to hear it then," Xander admitted as he felt an almost overwhelming fear at the thought of letting these people see how much of the vampire he still carried with him. He looked over to Angel, and the older vamp turned his head and stared at a wall. Right, really no help there.

Taking a deep breath, Xander started with capturing and raping the two Aurelius demons. At one point, Buffy gave
a small sob and reached down for Angel's hand, twining her fingers with his.

Xander went on to the night when minions had dragged him back to the mansion and he had played for time as he distracted Angelus with his own body while Spike went to find Buffy. While Giles' hands curled around the back of the chair hard enough to cut off circulation in his fingers, Willow sat with silent tears. Xander stared at the floor, feeling like he was betraying his friends by putting his own pain off onto them. When he stopped telling the story, Spike's hand reached out and curled around his arm, pulling him into a loose embrace that Xander leaned into.

Xander then went into how he had forced Spike to submit. Well, mostly. He left out the parts with the sex, but from Angel's yellow tinted eyes and Giles furious wiping of glasses, Xander didn't think he'd fooled anyone. When he got to the part where he and Spike were running from the soldiers, he stopped. His mouth got drier than Buffy's turkey, and he found himself utterly out of words. Nada. Zitch. Not even a conjunction.

"Xander, you can tell us," Willow said as she leaned forward on her chair, one hand reaching toward him and then pulling back when Spike growled. The arm around
Xander tightened, and he could feel a jealous protectiveness in every tense muscle in Spike's body. It gave Xander strength to take a deep breath and try again.


"Oh good lord." Giles sat down quickly.

"Xander!" Willow wailed softly. Buffy didn't say anything; she just leaned back into Angel who continued to look at the carpet even with his fingers still curled around Buffy's hand.

"Bloody hell, I've eaten thousands of the bloody happy meals, don't know why you lot are getting your knickers in a twist over one soddin' soldier boy," Spike snapped back, and Xander could feel himself harden. It was as though the pain and guilt and shame curled up like a hair set on fire, and he sat up on the couch.

"I did what I had to. He was after us," Xander calmly insisted.

"They were after Spike," Buffy shot back as she stood up and stepped toward them. Xander could feel pins and needles prickling down his back as Buffy stepped closer.
Standing up, he met her eyes without flinching. "They were after Spike for a good reason; he's a killer." Buffy put her hands on her hips, and the guilt and tears she had shown earlier in his story disappeared under shock and more than a little anger.

"What exactly did you do?" Giles asked.

"I hit him with my car, and then I accidentally ran over him," Xander admitted, and for the first time, he said it without any guilt at all. The human attacked him, he killed the human. Simple.

"Did you stop and check him?"

"Right, we just pulled the car over and asked his mate if everythin' was okay," Spike sarcastically bit. "I'm deeply ashamed that you lot ever managed to stop my plans."

"So you don't know whether you killed him or not," Giles said, ignoring the sarcasm.

"Um, hello, I hit him with a car and then ran over him. I'm thinking dead," Xander sat as his knees became suddenly weak. "And I'm thinking therapy."

"For a dead guy?" Willow asked.
"For me," Xander corrected her as he leaned back. Spike's hand immediately found his neck, rubbing at the sore muscles.

"Xander, how fast were you going when you hit the soldier?" Giles had his teacher voice out now, and Xander sighed in frustration. He could feel guilt and pain circling the edge of something hard that made him not really care.

"Wasn't really paying attention, G-man."

"Bastard stepped right out in front when Xander tried to pull onto the curb," Spike said for him.

"So, even assuming that you floored that old banger of yours, you couldn't have gotten over ten miles an hour."

"And then I ran him over," Xander pointed out. Willow finally closed her mouth, which had been formed into a perfect oval since the big revelation.

"Xander, the human body is rather remarkable. It is entirely possible to survive such an accident, especially with immediate medical care."

"What? You mean... Wait, we didn't stop to help," Xander could feel the babble rise as relief washed through him
so suddenly that his muscles seemed to turn to big, soft, overcooked noodles just like his mom used to make.

"The other soldier was right there to take him to hospital," Spike pointed out as he rolled his eyes. Xander sucked air in to quickly, making him light-headed. Then he planted an elbow in Spike's stomach for the whole eye roll thing.

"Not to be the one with the but, but that still doesn't change the fact that Xander would have killed for Spike," Buffy pointed out, her hands still planted on her hips. Xander wondered if it was just him or if the room had actually started shrinking. He felt the room shrinking. "Does anyone else have a problem with—?"

"I think I would have done the same," Angel cut her off as he pulled his hand free.

"You wouldn't have killed an innocent person," Buffy insisted.

"I killed a demon who was trying to protect a girl. I let a human die and then fed off his body. I've done things that I'm not proud of, and I had the soul the whole time." Angel stood.

"You wouldn't," Buffy turned to look at each member of the room, clearly confused. Willow just looked back with
her mouth open again. Giles returned to cleaning his glasses.

"I really think we've outstayed our welcome. Buff, I'm much with the sorriness about the dinner."

"Oh no. You do not get to drop verbal napalm and run for the hills."

"Yeah, no running, mister," Willow backed Buffy. "But maybe we could talk this out with just us," she added sheepishly.

"Perhaps it would be best to have a discussion without quite so much aggression in the air." Giles didn't name names, but his eyes focused first on Angel and then Spike. Part of Xander could understand that since the vampires weren't part of the Scooby gang. Most of him just wanted to growl at Giles, though.

"Xander, I'm sure they would feel better for talking to you without us. Spike and I can patrol a graveyard or two," Angel commented without emotion. Xander wondered how he managed it with his hands dug so deep into his pockets and his body practically radiating shame.

"Oi, that's the bloody slayer's job, and unless someone pays me, I'm not doin' it," Spike instantly complained.
The hand on Xander's neck tightened, telling Xander his childe's real concern.

"Spike, I'll be fine. You and Angel go do something vampiry, and I'll be back at the apartment in a couple of hours," he promised. Spike's leg started bouncing, and as Xander leaned against Spike, he could feel the body tighten.

"Willy owes me a few drinks for nearly turning me to dust," Angel said as he took a step toward the door. "I think it's time to collect."

Xander looked over suspiciously. Angel typically avoided Willy unless he wanted information, and the innocent expression didn't make him any less suspicious. Spike's leg stopped bouncing, and he cocked his head as he looked up.

"Right then. You're buying," Spike announced after a second. Standing up, he cracked his neck first one way and then the other before heading for the front door. Angel followed, and Xander was left with his oldest friends in the world. As the door closed, he found himself wishing he was facing a mob of angry townspeople—pitchforks, torches and all.
Part Fourteen

"But you aren't a vampire anymore," Buffy objected again, and this time even Giles sighed.

"Still with the vampy thoughts," Xander said for the hundredth time. Buffy looked constipated, and Xander waited for round billionth of 'just ignore the feelings'.

"Maybe we can magically block the memories," Willow added hopefully as she curled in her chair, her knees pulled up to her chest.

"Um... I'm thinking NO!" Xander protested.

"I do tend to agree with Xander on that point," Giles added as he sat on the opposite side of the couch from Xander, his forehead resting in his palm, and Xander picked a thread on the bottom of his shirt. He knew there'd been a reason he'd hid the spell's effects, and avoiding a scene like this had been at the top of his list.
"But you aren't a vampire. I don't go running around acting like a lady," Buffy said as she completed another paced circle around the couch. Xander choked on a half-laugh as he considered just what Spike would say to that.

"I rather think that 900 years of memories would be harder to dismiss," Giles said. "But then I've said that at least a dozen times already, so feel free to ignore me again."

"Buffy, it's part of who I am now. It's been a part of me for years." Xander focused on the long thread between his fingers.

"The memory of killing and torturing and... raping, that's just a natural part of you?" Xander could hear Buffy's voice break on the last word, and he could almost see her real pain as though she had taken out a billboard and planted it right over her head. He could sympathize with the feeling more than she understood.

"Buffy," he said carefully. He really didn't want to get knocked on his ass. "What happened was about vampire structure and society. It doesn't change the fact that his soul loves you and probably always will."

"What?!" Buffy stopped her pacing to plant her feet in a pose that looked suspiciously ass-kicking-ready. "Don't
even go there," she warned with her eyes narrowed. "I am worried about a friend because he seems to have lost his mind," Buffy took two steps forward and pulled Xander's arm hard enough that he nearly fell off the couch. She twisted his wrist, and for a brief flash of blind panic, Xander thought she was attacking him. When she just stood staring down, he eventually looked at the inside of his wrist.

The bruise Spike had given him the first night in the bathtub had darkened to a deep purple with wisps of green along the edge. The crescent fingernail marks were dark with scabs, and two tiny circles of clear skin marked the entrance of fangs.

"Xander! Good lord, what were you thinking?"

"Hey, you're on my side here," Xander objected as he yanked his hand back, or at least as he tried to yank his hand back. Unfortunately, he just managed to wrench his wrist as Buffy held him in a vice-like grip. "And no fair using slayer-strength on the average-guy."

"Average?" Buffy huffed her disbelief. "Average wouldn't look like a chew toy."

"At least mine won't scar," Xander shot back, and Buffy instantly let him go as though burned. "Of course, I heard
scars are the new pink this year," he instantly tried joking even as he pulled his sleeve down to cover the bruised arm.

"Xander, this is... this is too big to have a name," Willow spluttered. "You let Spike bite you. Wait. Spike bit you? What about the chip?" Willow uncurled, and leaned forward in the chair.

"It didn't exactly hurt." Xander could feel his skin grow warm under all their glares. "And hey, I'm not the trailblazer with the getting bit. I'm just following the fashion trail Buffy set down." A small part of Xander felt guilty for using Buffy's own scar to distract from his wrist, but all was fair in love and family fights; he'd learned that at an early age.

"I had to do it to save Angel," Buffy said tensely as she crossed her arms and glared down. Xander suddenly felt sorry for the fledges who crawled out of their graves to find that face looking down at them. A coldness wrapped itself around his spine as he looked up and struggled to not flinch.

"And I had to save Spike," he answered calmly.

"So, your blood has magical properties?"

"Not exactly."
"Point made," Buffy snapped in triumph. "Letting him feed... just... distubo time."

"The feeding is not your concern," Xander let the coldness down his spine seep into his stomach as he leaned back against the couch and spread his arm over the back.

"I think we are all concerned about the possibility of Spike turning you. If, as you say, the biting is consensual and not painful, what prevents Spike from feeding until he kills you?" Giles' voice sounded rough.

"I do. He asked to turn me, and I said no," Xander answered flatly. "He does not make such decisions on his own." Willow made a noise that sounded as if she had accidentally swallowed one of her goldfish and gotten it stuck half way down.

"Xander," Giles said, and then the glasses were off, and the watcher fell silent again.

"Am I the only one who thinks he's lost his mind?" Buffy asked. She didn't get to finish that thought because the phone chose that moment to ring. Xander didn't move, watching carefully as Buffy backed away and headed for the phone.
"If it's those bloody telemarketers, tell them to stop calling or I will not be held responsible for my actions," Giles said tiredly as he again rested his forehead on the palm of his hand.

"What?" Buffy answered as she picked up the phone. An immediately look of annoyance slowly faded into something darker as her mouth moved into a frown and her stake hand closed to a fist. Xander shifted on the couch, sitting forward as he watched the slayer's body slowly tighten like a spring.

"Where did they go?" she demanded of the phone. "Don't give me that; I will come down there and blood will be had," she almost immediately snapped. Xander stood, his body reacting to the slayer's anger with his own flood of adrenaline that left him moving toward the wall where he could have cover at his back, and yeah, he knew that reaction was stupid even as he did it, but he did it anyway. His nerves at least settled once he could clearly watch the other three and the door.

"Well you'd better find something," Buffy nearly growled into the phone before slamming it down so hard that plastic cracked.

"Buffy?" Willow asked.
"Angel and Spike... they were at Willy's asking questions about missing demons. The Initiative raided."

"Spike," Xander felt his own anger burn through him, turning all other feelings to ash.

"He and Angel ran out the back with soldiers on their tails," Buffy admitted quietly. Xander didn't comment as he went to the weapon's trunk and pulled open the heavy lid.

"Perhaps we should wait to see if they contact us," Giles suggested. Xander ignored the man as he considered his weapon choices. He would have preferred his own, but he didn't have time to get them. Instead he chose a crossbow and a long sword to go with the various knives and smaller weapons he always carried.

"Maybe I could scry for them. I have a demon locating spell," Willow suggested. When Xander stood and turned, he found himself inches from a very angry looking Buffy.

"No way you get the crossbow," Buffy said as she reached for the weapon. "That is so mine." As she grabbed the weapon, Xander could see the same cold fury in her eyes, but then she felt just as strongly about Angel as he did about Spike. He surrendered the weapon
and reached down for a replacement, a set of throwing knives he could slip into his waistband.

"Willow, you try to find them from here," Buffy ordered as she found a short sword to slip into place next to the crossbow. You had to love a town where you could wear medieval weapons without anyone commenting.

"And if I find them?" Willow asked.

"Call my mobile phone," Xander offered as he pulled a Xan Nusa card out of his pocket. Willow took the card and opened her mouth in the shape of an "oh," but no sound came out.

"You ready?" Xander asked Buffy.

"Totally," she agreed, "just don't think you're getting out of this conversation because I still think you've lost your mind," she said as she headed for the door. Xander rolled his eyes at her back and then tucked the throwing knives into his waistband as he followed. Let her think she led, he would do what he had to in order to save his childe.

After parking his car a safe distance from Willy's place, Xander stalked the street, avoiding the pools of light under the lamps. "Anything?" he asked Buffy as she walked beside him, peering down alleys.
"Just rats. I hate rats," she answered. Xander could have growled his frustration as he closed his fist around the hilt of his sword. Hunting normally excited him, but all he could feel was a rising frustration with the lack of Willow callage and the dullness that hung over his senses making him squint at the dark and the fear that he had failed his childe.

Xander stopped as he considered a form leaning against the side of a building. The limbs canted out at awkward angles, and Xander headed across the street, ignoring the cars that had to stop for him. When he got half way across the street, the creature looked at him, and then turned to run with long loping strides that didn't even come close to human. Xander sprinted after.

"Hey!" he yelled as he ran after the creature. It leapt a brick wall, and Xander scrambled to the top of a utility box and then struggled to the top of the wall before falling down onto the far side and rolling down a grassy slope. And of course it had to be a tombstone that stopped the roll, he thought as he ignored the sharp pain in his elbow and got to his feet. The creature had quite a head start, and Xander threw himself forward until his calves burned and the tops of his thighs burned and his side cramped. Still he ran.
They reached the far side of the cemetery where the creature again used long limbs to vault the wrought iron. Unable to stop himself, Xander flung himself into the fence hard enough to force the air from his lungs. A flash of passed him as Buffy went up the fence like some sort of blonde Spiderman. Xander leaned against the fence just to stay upright as he looked up. Yeah, he was not making it over that.

Rubbing the cramp that threatened to rip the muscles out of his side, Xander shuffled along the inside of the fence to the gate. Still muttering curses at his own body, he reached the arching entrance just as Buffy came back across the street dragging a lanky kid with a face that was too thin and a nose that hooked under at the end. In any other city in America, Xander would have just assumed the kid was ugly. Buffy kept him bent over in a headlock, and long, twig fingers clutched her arm.

"Didn't do nothing. Didn't. Didn't do," the kid-like creature complained as Buffy dragged it to the entrance of the cemetery. Xander stood up straight, ignoring the spasm in his side as he looked down at the half-demon in Buffy's grasp. Given the pale blue eyes that shone under the yellow of the streetlight and the unnaturally thin body, Xander guessed the creature was at least half Elak.
"Ve never said you did anything," he commented as he reached over and took off the ball cap that covered the white-blonde hair. When he gently finger-combed the long, silky strands, the Elak jerked in Buffy's grip, nearly pulling the slayer off her feet.

"You have, however, seen something," Xander said confidently as he continued to play with the creature's hair. Buffy looked at him strangely, but Xander ignored her as he stroked. As he expected, the Elak's body eventually started relaxing under the touch. Elak were such predictable, social creatures.

"You watch for someone, yes?" Xander asked softly. The Elak jerked again, but with far less energy. Buffy simply grunted and tightened her hold until the kid made a half-choking sound.

"You stand on the street and watch. So much watching, and surely you must see something."

"I didn't do anything. Nothing," the Elak protested again as he squirmed ineffectually.

"I do not doubt that, child." Xander allowed his hand to wander down under the demon's chin, cradling his face and tilting it up slightly.

"But you saw two vampyra running from soldiers."
"No. I didn't. No vampires. No," the demon chattered. Xander knelt down so he could look into the creature's eyes.

"Tell me what you saw, little one," he said, and he tightened his hold on the creature's chin until his fingers dug into the skin, making white islands of flesh around each finger. The Elak shivered.

"I saw soldiers," he admitted, and then his eyes closed.

"Where?" Xander asked.

"The college. Near the college. Holes in the ground."

Xander looked up at Buffy in surprise.

"The college? You're sure?" Buffy asked as she tightened the arm she had around the Elak's neck until long fingers scrambled and scratched at her arm.

"Yes. Yes. Told to watch. I make sure they aren't near," the creature cried out. Xander put a hand on Buffy's arm, and Buffy loosened her hold.

"Listen to me, little one," Xander said as he again smoothed hair away from the creature's face gently. "The soldiers have taken our friends, and you will show us their holes. Otherwise, the slayer and I will track down
your nests and we will not stop until every one of your nest mates lies in a pool of darkened blood. Your whole clan will suffer unless you can show us the soldiers so that they might suffer in your place." The demon's eyes grew large. Xander struggled not to ruin the moment with a sneeze as the musk of Elak distress filled his nose.

"But help us, and the slayer will give your clan free passage. They will walk the Hellmouth without challenge." Buffy made a small noise of objection, and Xander closed his eyes and sent up a quick prayer for her to trust him just this once. It must have worked because she didn't say anything even though she stared murder down on him as he crouched in front of the frightened Elak. "Will you show us?" Xander asked. The demon's eyes were watery with fear, but he nodded.

"Good, child," Xander offered as he returned to stroking the young Elak's hair with one hand as he used his other hand to pull Buffy's arm away from the creature's neck. "They have taken our clan. You help us to find our clan, and we shall owe a debt to your clan," he added as the Elak slowly stood and looked from one to the other with wet eyes. Buffy stood with her hands crossed over her chest in clear annoyance.
"And if you make me run again, I will not be pleased with you or your clan," Buffy added, and Xander smiled that she had picked up on his own threats against clan.

"No running. No," the Elak agreed. "This way. They have holes."

"Wait," Xander stopped the Elak with a hand on his arm. "A vampire came out of the soldier's burrow. Do you know where that hole is? The hole where the vampire came out?" Xander asked.

"Yes. Far hole. I know that hole. This way." The Elak bent over and grabbed his hat from the ground, putting it back on and pulling the brim down to cover his eyes. When the creature started walking in a casual human stroll down the street, Xander followed with Buffy at his side.

"Do you have any idea what you're doing?" she whispered as they crossed Third Street. Xander flinched since the whisper was as good as a shout considering an Elak's hearing.

"I am getting Spike back," he replied in a conversational tone. Buffy gave him a strange look before she glanced up toward the demon that led them past the Espresso Pump toward the south end of campus. Luckily, Buffy's
dumb blonde routine only covered trigonometry because with a knowing look she nodded and fell silent.

A brick wall marked the edge of campus, and the Elak neatly scaled the obstacle.

"Up you go," Buffy offered as she made a cradle out of her hands. Xander rolled his eyes at the indignity of getting tossed over the wall by a slayer, and Buffy's quick smirk looked almost like Spike. Since he didn't have another choice, he put his foot in Buffy's hands and braced his hands against the wall right before she heaved him up into the air.

Xander missed the top of the wall and tumbled right over, falling to the ground where he lay with his sheathed sword poking at his ass and his lungs empty of air.

"Xander?! Are you okay?" Buffy asked as she dropped down to the grass beside him. Xander struggled to breathe as Buffy set about poking his body looking for broken bits.

"I'm fine," he finally managed to wheeze out, despite the fact that most of his body had a different opinion.

"Maybe I should take it from here," Buffy suggested, and even though she sounded helpful and caring and
worried, Xander nearly growled at the suggestion he was weak.

"I'm fine," he insisted again as he rolled to his side. His body growled back at him.

"Yeah, right, 'cause you look really fine," Buffy said as she stepped back and watched Xander's struggles to get up.

"I'm going to get Spike."

"Would now be the time to point out that we don't even know the Initiative has them?" she asked as she held down a helping hand that Xander ignored.

"No because if the Initiative doesn't have Spike, I'm going to kill him for worrying me this much," Xander groaned as he forced himself back to his feet despite the stabbing pains down his back.

"Now I know you're under a spell, you're turning into my mother," Buffy offered as she started walking toward the Elak who had stopped under a tree, leaning into the trunk until he almost disappeared into the shadow.

"Not funny," Xander said as he limped after them. His phone made a strangled chirp that made Xander think he might have landed on the thing, and he pulled it out of his pocket.
"Xan Nusa," he snapped quietly as he tried to find a walking motion that allowed him to put more weight on his left side.

"Xander?" Willow asked.

"Please tell me you've found them because I could do with good news right now," Xander said as he limped a little faster after Buffy and the young Elak.

"They're on campus, somewhere near the chem lab, so they must be following--"

Xander must have made a noise because Willow stopped. "That's not good. Why did you make that sound. I'm not liking that sound."

"The Initiative is buried under the campus," Xander admitted as he pushed through a line of neatly manicured bushes right behind Buffy.

"Oh goddess. This really isn't turning out to be a very good Thanksgiving," Willow suggested.

"I'm having trouble imagining a worse one," Xander agreed, and then he bit his tongue for even thinking that on the Hellmouth. "But the good news is that we have a line on a way into the Initiative."
"Go Hometeam! We'll show them that it takes more to hunt demons on the Hellmouth than just hunting demons!" Willow cheered him on. "What do you need from me?"

"A new back?" Xander suggested first. Willow was silent on the other end of the phone. "But really we're going to need some magical intervention to get into the Initiative if Spike and Angel are down there. Any chance you and Giles could meet us by the chem lab with some basic spell materials?" Xander asked as Buffy stopped in front of him so quickly that he ran into her.

"No problemas. Spells extrordinare on their way," she promised.

"And bring nightshade," Xander whispered as he watched Buffy and the Elak crouch on the ground and pull aside bushes to reveal an air shaft. The edges had the blobby, charred look of newly welded metal, and the grate stayed firmly in place even as Buffy pulled as hard as she could. Xander flipped off the phone and slipped it back into his pocket about two seconds before he realized he hadn't said goodbye.

"No go," Buffy finally admitted as she let go and considered the white grooves in her fingers from straining against the metal.
"So we wait for backup," Xander said as he carefully sat down using a tree to lean on.

"What's your name?" Xander asked the young demon whose eyes continually bobbed from one distant point to another. He was probably listening to conversations on the other side of campus.

"Peter," he answered quickly.

"Your real name," Xander demanded as he watched the Elak's body tense. Suspicious blue eyes turned to him.

"I am Xan Nusa. I was a primal until my friends removed the offending spirit, and I still carry the memories of a millennium-old vampire, which gives me the knowledge of a mage and allows me to be sire to William the Bloody, also known as Spike. My friend is Buffy the Slayer. She is the oldest slayer to exist in several millennia, and she defeated the Master of the Aurelius line, and the man who founded Sunnydale." Xander made his words casual, but blue eyes now definitely focused on them as long fingers twitched nervously.

"The line of Not is honorable, and you do us honor. Our clan comes to our call, and we will recover our missing members. If you will to ally yourself with us, tell your clan leaders to make a distraction far from here at dawn."

"And if they do not?" Eoptra asked, his fingers continuing their twitches.

"Then the line of Not has assisted us, and we will remember," Xander answered calmly. Eoptra nodded his own head, and his eyes returned to searching the distant darkness.

"Of what clan are you?" the demon asked. Xander opened his mouth to say Giles' clan since the older man had played clan leader to the group since he first arrived, but he couldn't make his words form. He belonged only to one person. "Nusa," came from his mouth. Buffy looked over at him, but didn't argue as the Elak straightened up and started wandering toward the main exit looking like one more college student wandering home after a long night.
Part Fifteen

Xander leaned back against the tree and took shallow breaths as he considered the possibility that he might have broken a rib... or possibly two or three. Buffy sat cross-legged on the ground next to the vent. She filed a nail with total dedication, but Xander didn't miss how the file would occasionally pause for just a beat, Buffy's eyes scanning the area before the regular thwaa-thw of the nail file returned.

"So, Nusa?" she finally asked in the darkness. Xander wondered whether faking unconsciousness would work. After a long silence, he decided that chickening out now really was a little... well... chicken-shit.

"You don't want to know," he finally answered. For a long time, the night was so quiet that Xander could hear drunken shouts from the dorms on the far side of the chem building. Just when he thought he'd escaped, Buffy sighed.

"You know, there are lots of things I don't want to know, like what my mother and Giles were doing with handcuffs. And now that I stop and think about it, that was Ethan's fault too. I really need to go kick his ass."
"Want his address?" Xander asked with a laugh.

"You have it?" Buffy's shocked voice made Xander review what he had just said and then flinch at his own stupidity.

"Um, maybe?" he admitted.

"Xander, whose side are you on here?" Buffy asked as she dropped the nail file to the grass and turned to face him. Even by the light of the fading moon, Xander could see the betrayal and anger in her face. Cold fingers crawled down his backbone, and Xander had to force himself to take even breaths. This was Buffy. She wasn't "a" slayer, she was "his" slayer... as in a best friends, used to have an unrequited love thing.

"I'm on your side. Hey, supporto-man here," he protested.

"And why didn't you tell me Ethan had slimed his way back into town?"

"Um, actually, he never slimed his way out," Xander corrected her.

"Great. And you've what? Covered for him?"

"Hey, no coverage!" Xander immediately protested. "If you want his address, I will gladly provide it and bring
popcorn to the official ass-kicking. It's just—" Xander paused. He knew what he wanted to say, but figuring out how to say it with all these vamp thoughts crowding into his head wasn't easy. "He's human, Buffy. It's not as easy as going in there and putting on a good slay."

"Like you and the soldier you hit?" she immediately asked. Xander cringed at that, but then he'd gone for her scar after feeding Angel, so he figured he had a cheap shot or two coming. He bit his lip rather than snap back.

"Okay, that was bitchy," Buffy offered after a few seconds of silence. Xander shrugged.

"Had it coming," he admitted. Buffy snatched her nail file back and sat staring down at it.

"So, Nusa?" she repeated.

"You're just like a dog with a bone, you know that?" Xander sighed as he realized he would not be distracting, confusing, or not talking his way out of this one.

"And this is news to you?"

"No, just saying," Xander rolled his eyes in defeat. "She was my... my vampire self's sire."
"And that's whose clan you're in? You could call yourself a Harris or a Scooby or part of Giles' clan or the slayer clan or the Flintstones for all I care, but you call yourself part of Nusa's clan?" In the still pre-dawn air, Buffy's voice cut through the air so that Xander half expected soldiers to hear her through the earth and concrete.

"Just a thought, but maybe we shouldn't be talking about this here."

"Not really anything else going on, at least not until Giles and Willow get here." Buffy looked up at the stars and stretched her neck in a way that reminded Xander of Spike. They both had predator's reflexes. Funny enough, Spike scared him a lot less. The worst thing Spike could do was eat him.

"Xander, explain this in a way that I can understand. I just don't get it," Buffy practically begged.

"Buffy," Xander stopped, helpless in the face of slayer confusion and betrayal. She sat on the cool ground watching and waiting, and he struggled again to put words together that would make her understand. "Angel. You love him," Xander held up a hand to stop Buffy from launching a defensive attack as her back went stiff. "And I'm okay with that, mostly. But what I think doesn't matter. You love him, right?" Xander asked.
"Yeah," Buffy said softly, and all the anger and frustration drained from her like the time he had popped the inflated kiddie pool in his back yard and the thing had turned to flabby, damp plastic pile while water flooded the garage. Only now Buffy turned into a flabby, damp slayer, and Xander could feel the guilt wash over him at bringing back all the pain.

"But he has Angelus down there. He thinks Angelusy thoughts and then does the guilt trip for thinking them. He remembers killing and raping and part of him treasures the feeling of power and that's why the rest of him broods."

"We've had this discussion before, and I don't need a lecture." Buffy's voice carried a clear warning.

"Not lecturing. I'm just telling you that it's the same for me. I have my own Angelus, only not so much with the insane bastard who would send the whole world to hell. But I remember those things I did, okay the things I didn't technically do, and part of me liked the feeling of power."

Buffy looked at him with a slightly concerned expression. "Am I going to have to worry about you digging up any obelisks?"
"I'm not sure I could dig up the spare key to the basement I buried in my parents' back yard 'just in case'," Xander admitted. "But broken bones or no, I don't want to go on some killing spree just because some part of me remembers really having fun when the whole Turk war meant you could leave bodies lying all over the place and no one even raised an eyebrow."

"Disturbing much? Geez, Xander, that's a little more than I want to know."

"Yeah, but that's just it. Angel and I both remember our bodies doing these things that felt really good, but that doesn't mean we're bad. It just means we have very serious psychological issues that probably require serious therapy." Xander watched as Buffy's body slowly slumped toward the earth. Muscles that had been tight, loosened. And really, he found it rather amusing that she had been upset enough to get that battle ready around him because he wasn't exactly a threat right now.

"So, you don't actually hate Angel?" she asked.

"I never hated Angel." Xander paused and did an internal honesty check. "Okay, I kinda hated him at first when I thought I had a chance at getting in your pants, but as soon as that bit of stupidity passed, I felt only mild annoyance at the vamp. And then there was the whole
me raping him thing, and the him raping me thing, and now we're okay." Xander smiled as Buffy expression turned almost lemon-sucking squinchy horrified.

"You do need therapy. Serious, expensive, professional therapy," she announced. "And Willow's coming, so don't go getting her all upset or she'll burn your eyebrows off with her magic fire," Buffy warned. Xander looked at her strangely, and Buffy just shrugged. "I drank the last of the milk and she got all cranky. But it all worked out because I got like pounds of guilt-chocolate."

"Ah, the best kind of chocolate," Xander said with a knowing nod.

"Chocolate?" a voice in the dark asked, and Willow came around the end of a row of bushes. "Did someone say chocolate?"

"Good lord, people, this is not a slumber party." Giles came around the bushes behind her, carrying a large satchel that clinked with each step.

"Willow, G-man!" Xander happily greeted them. "Tell me you brought nightshade," he said with his fingers crossed. "Cause I really don't want to rescue the guys and then get them burned to dust."
"Right here," Willow offered as she held up green leaves that still had tiny purple flowers attached.

"That's my girl," Xander said as he held out his hand.

"Despite its rather ominous name, the plant really isn't useful for much other than poison," Giles said as he knelt down in the grass. One by one, he efficiently pulled vials and dishes and clumps of herbs from his bag until he had a regular magical buffet, not that Xander would eat any of the ingredients. The drooping heads and fuzzy stalks of borage, the fern-like leaves of yarrow, and the heavy blue Monkshead flowers balanced on thin stalks lay next to ingots of pewter and a dish of salt and enough talismans to chase the Pope back to Italy crying for his mother.

"A poison, a cure for spasms, the main ingredient in a spell that can steal someone voice, and the activating ingredient in a nox noctis spell," Xander corrected him about the harmless-looking plant Willow had handed him.

"Really? I hadn't known any nox noctis spells survived the Inquisition. La Beata de Piedrahita supposedly had the last known spells in her library when the Inquisition arrested her."
"Yeah, but I learned the spell before they got burned," Xander said with a smile and a waggle of his eyebrows as he pulled a small talisman from his belt. The nox noctis was the first spell he ever learned, one that gave Dracula and Nusa some of their most powerful advantages.

"Oh," Giles offered quietly. Willow made little wet noises, and Xander realized she was on the verge of crying.

"Hey, I'm still Xander. Do you want me to say something stupid to prove it to you?" he asked as he pushed himself forward and tried to ignore the sharp pain just under his left armpit.

"I hardly think that's necessary. Before the night is out, I trust you to say something stupid on your own without prompting," Giles commented. Xander froze, trying to decide if he'd been insulted or allowed in on a Giles-joke. True, it wasn't funny, but it still had the ring of joke to it.

"How can I ever live up to such faith?" Xander joked back. Giles gave him a quick smile as he pulled out some of the more explosive ingredients.

"And what's the plan once we get inside?" Giles asked as he carefully pulled a vial from out of his pocket.
"We break in, we make a lot of noise, we grab our vampires, and we run out," Buffy said as she pulled her crossbow around to the front.

"Yes, well, as good as that sounds, I would feel better if there were an actual plan in that plan," Giles commented. Carefully tipping a vial, he poured a thick liquid over the bolts on one side of the grate.

"I could cast a confusion spell. It would make it hard for them to fight back, and as a bonus, they would walk into walls and trip over their own feet."

"A Three Stooges spell? Now that's magic I can get behind," Buffy said with a smile. The first traces of grey appeared in the east, making the campus buildings look like someone had traced outlines around them.

"And have you practiced this spell?" Giles asked.

"Yes," Willow immediately insisted as Giles kept mixing ingredients in a thick white bowl. "Once," she added softly.

"I should be feeling stark raving terror, and yet I can't seem to rally more than minor annoyance," Giles said as he pulled out a lighter and lit the end of a small twig.
"You broke Giles," Buffy jokingly accused Willow, but Willow just gathered her own supplies from the pile laid on the ground.

Giles made a small chant as he set fire to a broad leaf and dropped it in the bowl. Xander recognized the smothering spell just as Giles set fire to the liquid explosives pooled in the cracks of the grate. Fire popped loudly, sending a spear of bright light into the air before the grate groaned and collapsed in. The two surviving hinges meant the grate bounced against the side of the shaft, but instead of the crash of metal against metal, the smother-spell meant that only a soft thumping noise disturbed the night.

"And into the belly of the whale," Giles said as he gathered up the materials Willow hadn't already scooped up.

"No whale, but I'll settle for arrogant government types who've stuck their noses in where they don't belong," Buffy suggested as she swung her legs into the shaft. With a quick flip, Buffy disappeared into the darkness. Xander groaned at the thought of that drop, but he pushed himself toward the dark hole.

"Oh no, mister, no way are you going down there."
"Try to stop me," Xander practically snarled at Willow as he headed for the opening. Unfortunately, Willow held him back with one hand, and Xander's side rippled in pain that left him sagging back against the tree. "Okay, that was a pretty good try," Xander admitted as he gritted his teeth.

"Sorry. God, I'm sorry. Are you okay?" Willow hand immediately moved from his chest to his wrist where she curled her fingers around, obviously seeking a pulse.

"Great, I make these wheezing sounds for the comedic effect," Xander answered as he struggled to catch his breath again.

"And my faith is upheld. The night is clearly not over yet," Giles commented. It took Xander a second to connect that to the earlier not-funny joke.

"Hey, that wasn't stupid."

"The thought of you trying to take on the Initiative while too injured to even sit up isn't your finest piece of reasoning," Giles pointed out. "Unfortunately, I think Buffy needs to handle the fighting."

"Oh, the spell, I need to do the spell," Willow hugged her supplies to her pink sweater and disappeared down the hole.
"Well, I guess we guys gotta just sit here and wait 'til the fighting women-folk get back, huh?" Xander said as he shifted to try to take the strain off his side. His sore knee rewarded him with a dull aching throb.

"I think getting you to hospital might be the best move," Giles said as he moved over to sit in the dirt next to Xander.

"I'm not moving. If Spike and Angel don't get up here before dawn..." Xander looked to the east where the buildings were now highlighted in pink as the sunrise approached.

"I have blankets in my trunk. I'll get them, and they can run for the car," Giles offered.

"Across the campus, over a wall, and into your car. Giles, I'm not the only one talking stupid here. I need to do the spell."

"Maybe you could show me how to—" Giles stopped in the middle of his sentence. He stood up and paced the space between the tree and the shaft. "I really hate being this helpless," he muttered.

"Tell me about it," Xander agreed as he tried to breathe without moving.
As the sun crept up in the sky, Xander leaned back and prayed for the first time in years. Streaks of light appeared, and a quiet fell over the campus: The drinkers had already wandered home, and the early risers hadn't risen yet. He imagined he could hear the sounds of Buffy knocking soldier heads together. However, as the sun rose, fears of her stuffed in one of the cells Spike had described started gnawing at the edges of that confidence.

Giles stood leaning against the tree absent-mindedly cleaning his glasses. When a hand grasped the edge of the vent, his glasses tumbled to the ground as he hurried to grab the wrist. Xander sat up so quickly that he got light-headed as he ripped the nightshade leaves he had clutched the whole time. He began the spell.

"Willow, thank god," Giles muttered before he knelt at the edge of the shaft and peered into the dark. Xander concentrated on his chant even as the lack of any more hands at the top of the shaft sent cold fear stabbing through his stomach more painfully than the obviously broken ribs.

A grunt announced another survivor, and this time Angel appeared, ducking into the deepest shade next to Xander. Xander could distantly hear voices, but he
concentrated on weaving his spell out of the threads of magic that constantly hovered over the Hellmouth. When the morning light started darkening as though a cloud had passed over, Xander breathed a sigh of relief.

A brash voice echoed through the metal corridor, the words lost to Xander as he struggled to keep up the illusion. But the tone of glee and violence could only come from one person. Familiar hands brushed his face, blue eyes appearing in front of him for a moment, but Xander focused on the chant. Strong arms lifted him, and then Xander felt movement as the world blurred to the feeling of Spike's arms under him and the smell of leather and cigarettes.

Dimly, Xander realized they had reached the car, and the rumbling of the motor gave him a rhythm for the chant as the magic slid away from him in slick puddles, the darkness deepening when he tapped one source only to lose it again. He could feel his lungs strain as though he were holding his breath, but he ignored the pain. At least he did until the feeling of floating warned him of imminent unconsciousness.
Part Sixteen

The sharp beeps sounded familiar as Xander listened to the noise from a distance. As he slowly wandered back to himself, he went from thinking the alarm was going off to thinking he'd left the television on to thinking that he might be hearing his own heartbeat announced in mechanical tones.

The realization that he was in a hospital made his heart race, and the machine echoed his alarm.

"He's waking up. Giles, he's waking up," Willow's voice sounded like she was bouncing as it faded in and out. Either that or his hearing was fading in and out.

"I did notice," Giles offered.

"'bout bloody time. You lot are just lucky that he woke up."

"Spike, don't even start that again."

"You bloody bag of bones, if he'd died, I would have ripped your heart out your naffin' chest."
"Considering that you're neutered, I'd enjoy watching you roll around on the floor pathetically whining after you tried," Buffy snapped back in a tone that made Xander moan as he struggled toward consciousness.

"You soddin' little pillock—"

An unfamiliar voice interrupted the argument between Buffy and Spike. "You cannot disturb Mr. Harris, and if you insist on making so much noise, I will put you all out no matter what the chart says." Shoes clip clopped away quickly.

Xander was grateful since he couldn't seem to get up the energy to open his eyes much less yell at them for acting like five year olds.

"If you had taken him to hospital when he broke his bloody ribs in the first place," Spike snarled far softer than before.

"It's not like I knew. I didn't know," Buffy's voice faded, as if she'd turned away, and Xander fought to get one eye open a crack. Spike hovered an inch from his face, blue eyes staring at him.

"Spike," he whispered, or he tried to whisper. His throat felt dry.
"Give him a chip of ice," Giles suggested, and Spike's fingers mysteriously appeared at his lips with a sliver of ice that tasted like nicotine. Xander sucked at it and struggled to swallow as he finally got his second eye open.

"Daft bugger. No fair goin' and gettin' yourself killed now. Got to make fun of the slayer, now don't we? Turns out the boy she fancies was runnin' into walls down there."

"But-outsville, Spike," Buffy hissed, and Xander looked over to her in surprise. He hadn't even known she had fallen for anyone, especially not the way she kept sighing at Angel. Angel who was missing. Xander slowly put the pieces together, and he had to admit to feeling a slight twinge of pain for the vamp. Hopefully he hadn't heard the story.

"Peaches wanted ta eat the wanker," Spike whispered with a sly smile, and Xander closed his eyes in sympathy for the other vampire. Vampires shouldn't be alone, and the only 'divorce' in the vampire world included a sword and a neck... or a stake and a heart... or if someone was really pissed off, the sun and a lot of chains.

A cool finger touched his hand, and Xander opened his eyes to find Spike looking at him confused. Giving his childe a small shrug since his connection with Angel
didn't exactly make sense in vampire terms, Xander looked around the room. Giles sat in a chair with a book across his lap. Willow and Buffy stood near Giles, and even Uick had made an appearance. He had an old-fashioned fedora pulled low over his ash-grey face, and he had stuffed his thick hands deep in his coat pockets.

"Uick?" Xander croaked out. The demon shifted a little closer to the open door and nodded briefly.

"You'll be back to work soon, yes?" he asked. Xander smiled. He never would have thought his boss would show up, especially with the slayer glancing back and forth from him to Uick. That would be enough to make any demon get the wiggins.

"Yep, no problem. I've been concussion-boy before, and it never keeps me down long," Xander answered. Uick's nose flared in confusion.

"Pet, you've been unconscious for three days now," Spike offered softly.

"But he is awake. He will be back to work soon," Uick insisted mulishly, and then he turned and walked out. Barqu rarely showed emotion, so Xander was touched just by the visit. Touched, and more than a little confused.
"Um, days?" he asked the rest of the group. Spike stayed on his left, and the girls crowded to the right side of his bed, hands resting on an arm that an IV that made Xander think of the Borg.

"Three cracked ribs, a concussion, and most seriously, an electrolyte imbalance that threatened to put you in a coma. The doctors have been utter gits and as annoying as Spike in their curiosity about what happened to shut your body down so completely, but they did save your life," Giles offered without getting up from the chair. The man looked tired.

"Coma?" Xander struggled to put all the words into an order that would actually make sense in his brain.

"There is no dying on my watch, mister," Buffy threatened him with a finger pointed at his nose. "And if you ever hide injuries like that again, ass-kicking will be in your future."

"Get in line behind me, slayer," Spike added.

"Okay, you two ganging up on me is feeling... strangely familial," Xander finished with a small smile. Buffy looked slightly confused, but Willow and Spike grinned back at him.
"Yeah, luv. Just don't ever do that again," Spike asked in an accent that suddenly dropped all of its harsh Cockney edges.

"Didn't mean to do it this time," Xander said. He would have pointed out that he did it trying to save Spike, but from the way Spike kept looking at him, he didn't feel like rubbing that in.

"Xander, I am well aware that Ethan tends to... exaggerate... the truth. Have you trained with him at all?" Giles asked from the chair. Spike looked over and the two men exchanged a look that left Xander feeling slightly uncomfortable. Out of the loop uncomfortable.

"Not even one day. That guy is creepy, like the cockroaches you find behind the toilet creepy," Xander said with a shudder. "I found out after the fact that he vouched for me when I did work in the bazaar, but there is no way I'd ever trust him enough to take magic lessons, especially after he offered to tie me up and lick honey off my body."

"EWWWW," Buffy and Willow both shrieked as they backed away at the same time. Xander smirked.

"Not a good image. Not a good image," Buffy added while Willow squinched her face up.
"Oi, speak for yourself," Spike offered with a leer, and Xander raised his hand to weakly swat at his unruly child.

"So Nusa was your only teacher?" Giles ignored everyone else's theatrics.

"Yeah," Xander agreed.

"My guess is that she never taught you shielding." Giles pulled his glasses off and looked at Xander with an expression that stuck somewhere between disappointment and sympathy.

"Shielding?"

"Living creatures who tap the sorts of magics you used must shield themselves from having the magic drain their own life forces. However, you learned to cast spells when you were dead, so you never learned how to shield."

"And I'm guessing shielding is important?"

Willow made a strangled sound. "Important?" she practically squeaked in outrage. "Xander, you shouldn't even levitate a pencil before learning to shield. You could have had all your magic sucked right out of you or had your life sucked out of you or turned yourself into a big popping balloon of magic that ripped open a new Hellmouth, and not only do we not need another
Hellmouth, but I would miss my Xander-shaped friend who can sometimes be a real idiot." Willow closed the distance and slipped her hand into Xander's right hand.

"Right, no turning myself into a Hellmouth," Xander promised as a cold shiver ran through his body.

"Ya mean when he did magic, he was hurtin' himself?" Spike asked.

"Every time he said a spell, he risked being utterly destroyed," Giles agreed. Spike's eyes locked onto Xander as though his gaze could keep Xander in place. Yeah, Xander didn't expect to be getting any more privacy any time in the near future.

"No more magics," Xander promised as he held up his free hand in surrender.

"Better not, because if you get yourself killed, Spike cannot move into our bathtub," Buffy said as she crossed her arms over her chest and glared at Spike. When Spike ignored the insult, Xander realized just how upset the vampire was. Xander reached out with his left hand and curled his fingers around Spike's wrist.

"Girls, perhaps we should give them a minute," Giles suggested as he stood up.
"But he just woke up; we haven't had hardly any time with him," Willow protested, but Giles put an arm around her shoulders and guided her out of the room.

"I do not want to even think about why they need privacy. Giles, that is just ew," Buffy complained as she went into the hall, and Giles stood in the doorway with his hand on the handle of the door.

"Xander, I'm very glad you're going to recover, but I will have you know that I will stand in line behind Spike and Buffy to kick your arse if you should you ever consider doing anything so dangerous and foolish again," Giles said in a tone that Xander had only heard the older man use once... when a student checked out an occult book on accident and then dropped it in the boy's toilet.

Then Giles' voice grew much softer. "And if you intend on doing any further spells, you shall come to work with me on proper shielding before you so much as freeze water."

"But I've done lots of small—"

"Luv, don't make Ripper throw a wobbly," Spike interrupted. Xander looked over in confusion, since interrupting a sire was up there with pissing in your own cornflakes as far as being stupid. Spike's expression stopped him from any more argument.
"Right. Absolutely no magic without learning how to not kill myself," Xander promised. Giles nodded briefly and then left, pulling the door closed behind him.

As soon as the door closed, Spike gently pushed Xander over in the bed to make room for himself. He pulled out a cigarette and then sat on the edge of the bed with the thing between his fingers.

"Okay, so spill. What is going on with Giles, and why are you looking so... I don't even know what that expression is, but it's not good," Xander said as he watched Spike's profile. Spike grinned and looked over.

"Can't fool ya, can I?" Spike asked.

"You don't seem to be trying very hard, so just spit it out," Xander said as he reached back to pull the pillow out from under his shoulder. Immediately, Spike was there supporting his body and pulling out the awkward pillow before slipping it back in place behind Xander's head.

"Ya nearly died tryin' to keep that spell up. That plus your injuries, and I thought I'd be out another sire," Spike said as he sat back down at near Xander's hip. The tilt of the mattress meant that Xander pressed into Spike's back.
"Hey, I'm harder to kill than that," Xander promised. "Mummies and mantis and hyenas, oh my," he sing-songed in Wizard of Oz style. Spike didn't smile, but then Xander wasn't sure whether Spike had seen Wizard of Oz.

"Told Ripper that I wouldn't risk ya tryin' any soddin' spells to get the chip out, not knowing that you'd do this to yourself just ta protect me," Spike added, and fingers played with the unlit cigarette.

"We'll find a way. I won't do a spell, but there's always blackmail and bribery. The nice thing about Ethan is that he's very bribable."

"That's just it. Told Ripper that I wouldn't let you keep tryin' because Ethan knew he had ya by your short and curlies, and I didn't like what he'd make you do. Told him I was going to take off before you woke up." Spike's fingers went still, and Xander felt a rage roll through him.

"You are my childe, and you will not leave," Xander snarled. "I would go to L.A. and bring you back in chains if I had to."

Spike's lips twitched. "Not a bad offer, luv. But I told Angel to piss off. Ya wouldn't find me in L.A."
"I don't think Dru would—" Xander stopped as the expression on Spike's face told the story. Dru had turned him out, he wouldn't go back to Angel, and he thought his human sire was dying. The chip meant that he couldn't make childer or minions of his own, and the minions wandering the Hellmouth weren't going to have much respect for a vampire who couldn't bite. Those facts added to the fact that vampires just didn't live alone equalled a grim picture.

"I would follow you to hell and make you sorry you ever stepped foot on earth if you even thought it," Xander hissed through clenched teeth. "You have survived too much to just give up."

"Not considerin' it now."

"You'd better never consider it again."

"Right, well, that's not the bit I'm tryin' to tell ya," Spike changed the subject. "Ripper and I talked, and when we knew you were going to survive this, we came to an agreement," Spike waved the hand that held the cigarette around the hospital room at the word "this."

"And would this agreement have anything to do with why you're calling him Ripper?" Xander asked.
"He can be a right bloody bastard." After a second, Spike added, "I like him. Anyway, we both decided that we couldn't let you try to take the chip out. Spell that delicate would take a lot of power, and it'd take years for ya to learn how to do that kind of mojo as a human."

"And?" Xander asked. It wasn't like Spike to dance around the topic so much.

"Made an oath ta not touch innocent blood," Spike finally confessed. Fingers worked his shirt buttons as the cigarette bobbed up and down. "Look like a bleedin' steno pad," he complained as he pulled one side out. Under Xander's runes, three wavy lines stood out in faint blue.

"But, why?" Xander traced the figures with his finger, and part of him felt rage that someone else had marked what was his. Yeah, he was definitely going to have a word or two with Giles about who got to leave scars on Spike's body.

"He got Ethan ta do the spell. The chip's out, luv. We figured this way, you wouldn't go and do somethin' stupid." Spike scratched the back of his head and smiled.
"Giles... Ethan... How?" Xander stuttered to a stop. "Do I want to know?" Xander asked. He smiled slowly as he realized his hellcat had reclaimed his power.

"Bloody impressive with a whip. By the time Ripper finished, Ethan would have given him anything. Too bad Giles doesn't want a full time chaos mage at his feet."

"Giles?" Xander wailed. "Oh no... no, no, no. I do not want to know about Giles-sex. He's like old," Xander complained.

"Not as old as me," Spike pointed out.

"Yeah, but you'll be young and beautiful forever. Giles is..." Xander stopped as he thought of Giles with his sharp gaze and grey hair. "Okay, you are giving me not-good thoughts. Giles and sex will never again be mentioned in the same sentence," Xander finally decreed. "Ew."

Spike laughed. "Right. No more talk of Ripper. Are ya feelin' alright? Doc said ta get some nibbles in ya, but the glop they got around here looks a mite bit questionable."

"I just want to rest," Xander said as he pulled Spike down so that his vampire lay next to him. Xander rubbed a thumb over the silk of Spike's shirt. "Three days, no wonder I've had such strange dreams," Xander whispered as he felt Spike's body curl around his.
"Yeah? I show up naked in any of them?" Spike asked.

"I don't remember," Xander answered as he shifted to get his arm around Spike. "I remember Harmony vamping through and then there was this Frankenstein guy who kept crying for his mommy, and right in the middle of that, Dracula shows up and throws a Halloween party only he wrecks Joyce's house after you keep trying to get Buffy to dance with you," Xander said, fragments of the dream bobbing up while most of it remained buried in sleep.

"Loony as Dru," Spike said in a voice already half asleep. He reached over and dropped his cigarette on the side table.

"Not even," Xander snorted. "It was just a dream. Yeah, Dracula... not the sort to vacation in California." Spike turned so that his face was to the scratchy hospital gown, and Xander moved his hand up, rubbing a shoulder. When Spike started a soft rumble that sounded suspiciously purr-like, Xander closed his eyes and let himself start to drift back to sleep. The IV would fix what his bungled magic had done.

As his hand moved up, Xander realized that Spike didn't have any gel in his hair. Xander's fingers stroked through soft, silky curls with the tips of his fingers. He
remembered the very first night he's seen Spike through a vampire's eyes. That night he had promised himself that he would keep his hellcat, and as his fingers combed through Spike's loose curls, he let himself sink into sleep. Even the memory of Dracula's eyes peering at Xander through a nightmare couldn't keep him from feeling content.

The End

A snippet from the Trickster Verse

"Xander?" Giles asked from behind the counter.

Xander wiggled under the counter, getting a better angle on the screw that eluded him before he grunted an answer. "Yeah?"

"I had wondered if you had ever considered recording your experiences as a vampire."

"Wot?" Spike asked with that special brand of joy he got any time he needled any of the Scoobies. "Ya want details about how it feels to let your teeth sink into
someone's flesh? How it feels ta wrap your arms around some bint and drink her life's blood as her heart thumps like a rabbit? I'd be happy to play show and tell."

"Eww. Okay, majorly disturbo," Buffy complained from her spot on the couch. Xander tightened the screw that had made the counter top all wobbly before he stood up. While Buffy looked towards Spike with disgust, Riley, her new true-love, had an expression that crossed fear and anger. Even now, Xander's long-banished vampire instincts sometimes rose up, and right now Xander could feel an itch to make Riley his prey. Riley was strong... and just a little pretty, and Xander could just imagine how he smelled of fear and prey. Okay, a little too much vampire in that thought.

"Um, Giles, why the sudden curiosity in the vampiness?" Xander asked, dropping the screwdriver on the now-stable counter.

Giles sighed. "Quinton Travers is arriving in town next week."

"Travers? The guy who nearly killed me?" Buffy interrupted. "Twice. Nearly killed me twice. When people do that, I'm voting 'no' on having them come for a visit."
"He nearly killed you?" Riley demanded. "Who is this guy?"

Spike rolled his eyes and wandered closer to Xander. His long fingers twitched nervously, and Xander could see they were going to have to hunt tonight or Spike would be bouncing off the walls when Xander wanted to sleep. Some days being around Riley did that to Spike, and Xander understood because Riley trying to play alpha dog kinda made his own non-existent fangs itch, so he could just imagine how much Spike wanted to eat the guy. However, Riley was also a good guy and actually made Buffy smile, so Riley was definitely on the no-killing list. When Spike's arms wrapped around Xander, he just leaned back into the touch and captured Spike's restless hand in his own.

"Travers is a leading member of the Watcher's Council," Giles explained.

"A homicidal leading member of the Council," Buffy corrected him. "He's the guy who sent guys to kill me when Faith shoved me in her body."

"But didn't he do that to protect people from a homicidal
slayer?" Riley asked. Buffy turned and glared.

"Oi, don't go confusin' the slayer with logic; makes her all cranky," Spike suggested with a snort.

"Fine, but he doesn't have an excuse for the whole poisoning thing where he tried to make me all weak and then shove me in a locked room with a vampire. That was just wrong. Evil and wrong. And he almost got my mother killed, so if he wants to come and visit, well, he can't," Buffy finished.

"Buffy, I quite understand your concerns, but this time he is actually coming to speak with Xander."

"Me?!!" Xander nearly yelped, all his vampy coolness abandoning him.

"He apparently has an academic interest in Xan childe of Nusa, so he is traveling here to speak with you."

"Hey, I have an idea, it's called a phone. 'Hello, do you have time for an interview?'" Xander pantomimed picking up a phone and imitated a bad English accent before answering the question in his own voice. "'No!' 'Well then, pip, pip, ta, ta, thanks anyway.'" Xander
mimicked hanging up on Travers.

"I suspect he already knows you would hang up on him," Giles pointed out before heading for the latest shipment of magical goodies stacked in the corner.

"Soddin' hell, if you lot don't want him, give him the boot. Whose bloody town is this, anyway?" Spike complained softly. Xander ran his hand over Spike's bare arm.

"While I would normally frown on the running someone out of town cliché, just on the grounds that it is cliché, this time I'm voting with Spike," Xander nodded.

"If you choose to not speak with Travers, I certainly won't take offense," Giles shrugged.

"Maybe we should call him, and tell him he's not welcome," Riley suggested.

Buffy tossed the book she had been researching down on the coffee table. "I'm thinking he's not going to listen. He's never really been good at listening; he's more with the telling people what to do."
"Already have enough people around here tryin' to do that," Spike snapped.

Xander patted Spike's arm, well aware that as far as Spike was concerned, Xander's word should be law. "Giles, I'm not talking to him, so tell him that he's just going to have to go to his grave curious about Xan childe of Nusa."

"Yeah, and I'd be happy ta help him into that grave," Spike flashed into gameface.

"Big talk from the chipped one," Buffy chirped. Spike turned his fanged snarl in her direction, but he didn't say anything. Of course, he didn't have to say anything since everyone in the room except Buffy and Riley knew that Spike wasn't chipped. Yep, that piece of information would make for the awkwardness, especially since Buffy would never trust Giles' spell or Xander's rules to keep Spike in line. Buffy stuck out her tongue and Spike flipped her two fingers.

"You know you wouldn't eat Travers. He's all old and stringy," Xander joked.

"True, I'd get gristle in my fangs."
"And dust from all his infernal books," Giles added as he came back to the counter with a box of glass globes. Xander looked at Buffy who was barely containing her own smile. Yep, Giles criticizing someone else for the book lovin'... that was funny. Xander started to laugh, covering it with a quick cough.

"Seriously, though, Xander, how much of that do you even remember? I mean, I get that you still have the vampiness going on with the instincts even though you're all human, but did you get the full memory upgrade?" Buffy leaned back and looked at Xander seriously. "I can't remember anything about what it's like to be a lady except which fork to use at dinner, and we got whammied on the same night."

Xander could feel Spike take a breath, probably to make some comment about Buffy and her lack of ladyliness, and Xander drove an elbow into his childe's gut.

"I've still got the full upgrade, Buff. I mean, I can't do magic what with the whole me almost killing myself because I don't know how to shield my life force, but I remember every lesson, every spell, every book. I remember life pre-indoor plumbing, which was not my
idea of fun. I remember my sire and every day of life up to when I just appeared on the Hellmouth. Some stuff I wish I didn't remember, but that's all here, too." Xander chewed his lip as he did remember the darker times. When he'd been a vampire, for the 900 years he'd wandered Europe, he'd reveled in the blood and pain he'd caused. He'd torn human bodies limb from limb, and he still remembered the satisfying crunch when a human bone finally yielded, the flesh pulping and purpling under his grip. Yep, he remembered a little too much.

"Xander, you okay?" Riley asked.

"Yeah, hey, just got some stuff rattling around. It's weird because I remember enjoying it at the time, but it's definitely of the nausea-inducing now."

"If you would have let me get rid of that bloody soul, you wouldn't mind those memories," Spike pointed out.

"If you... what?!" Giles demanded. Suddenly the man was standing right there, all attention on Xander and Spike, only half his glass globes priced as they lay forgotten on the counter.

"Hey, from a vamp standpoint, it's logical," Xander
hurried. "I mean, I remember enjoying things that are really low on the enjoying scale, or even the thinking about without hurling scale. I was a vampire, Giles."

"And if you even think of making him a vampire again, you lay one finger on his soul, I will stake you back to dust." Buffy just about hissed the words at Spike as she came off the couch, Mr. Pointy in hand. Xander stepped forward, intercepting her.

"Back off, Buff," he warned. And now Riley was up off the couch.

"He's talking about your soul like it's something he wants to get rid of. Why is he still here? Why doesn't anyone remember that he's evil?" Buffy demanded.

"Bloody right I am!"

"Enough, Spike," Xander warned. He might not have a good track record controlling Buffy, but he sure as hell knew how to control Spike.

"Oi, she started it!"

Xander turned and glared at Spike until the stubborn
expression turned to exasperation and he physically backed up a step.

"And Buffy, you don't know what it's like to have a soul and remember the pleasure I got out of ripping a man's intestines out as slowly as I could. I remember sinking my teeth into a slayer's neck and feeling her heart stutter as I held her body. And I don't even think you want to hear what happened with the monks that opened a monastery on Nusa's land because that... that was ugly. Only the way I remember it, I was totally down with the torture and raping and random tossing about of body parts."

"Oh dear, I had rather hoped that particular story was apocryphal," Giles said softly.

"Nope. Nine hundred years of murder and mayhem, and my soul has to figure out how to deal with the fact that part of me enjoyed it."

"But that wasn't you, Xander." Buffy stepped forward, the stake slipped back into her waistband as she let her hand rest on Xander's arm.

"That was me, Buff. Xander Harris son of Jessica and Tony
is part of me, but so is Xan Thonuzoba second son of Lord Thonuzoba and the Lady Aliz Thonuzoba of Kolozsvar. And can I just say, I sucked at math in both lives.

"But, it's not like you were really there," Riley put his two cents in.

"Exactly," Buffy quickly agreed.

"Actually," Giles interrupted with a cough, "that might not be true. Chaos magic is uniquely unstable and incredibly powerful. Xander's memories were different from yours from the beginning, describing an entire life that existed up to the point where he was brought to the Hellmouth. Your memories always seemed to be more nebulous. And Willow received no memories at all. For a spell to have such wildly differing effects, lord knows what powers Ethan tapped. Some sort of temporal loop, the creation of a new reality, or even the merging of two beings are possibilities. We certainly know that Nusa was the oldest of Dracula's childer, and that she had a childe named Xan who she protected despite her own sire's displeasure. And we know that he disappeared from court life around the time of World War One even though he continued to show up every now and then,
always avoiding Dracula, who from what the Watcher's diaries suggest, did not think highly of him."

"Um, hated my guts comes closer to the truth. He's kinda all about being the king of his domain and having the harem thing, and unlike most vamps, he definitely cares about gender. No boys need apply. I know he told Nusa to dust me, and if he hadn't been an asshole off running after every girl in the country, she might have done it. You know, she only turned me to get my father back, and oh boy did she do that. But if Dracula had been just one bit less of an asshole, she probably wouldn't have kept me around."

"Poncy bugger, Drac. He bloody cheats at poker," Spike complained mildly, but then he pulled at Xander's arm, silently urging them to leave. For a second, Xander considered staying, considered going through one more round of explain the vampire/soul/memory shit again, but really, it wouldn't change anything. Buffy and Riley would still wonder why he couldn't just let the vampire stuff go and Giles would worry and Xander would be the one to suffer the nightmares. Officially not worth it. Xander let Spike pull him toward the exit.

"You know, I really have better things to talk about, and
it's been a good twelve hours since I had sex," Xander offered with a smirk. Sure enough Buffy held up her hands in surrender.

"Nonono... surrogate brother will not discuss sex. Surrogate brother will not discuss gay sex with the undead," she exclaimed with mock horror. The awkward moment passed as Riley pulled her back to the couch and Giles returned to his counter and his glass globes.

"What should I tell Travers when he arrives?" Giles asked.

"Um, tell him to bugger off," Xander suggested, borrowing one of his childe's favorite sayings. Spike laughed, and then pulled him from the room.

Xander and Spike headed out into the night, Spike immediately darting ahead. Some days Xander really missed vamp speed. But at least he was doing less tripping over his own feet.

"You'd think the stupid gits would get it after ya explained it a few dozen times," Spike snorted as he pulled a cigarette out of his duster pocket.
"Change is hard," Xander observed. It was. And them accepting a changed Xander wasn't ever going to be easy. "They do try."

"Yeah?" Spike asked. He turned, walking backwards so that he could watch Xander.

"What?"

"Got the accent goin', pet. You feelin' all big and evil tonight?" Spike wiggled his eyebrows in invitation.

"Most people frown on the evil."

"Most people haven't see ya do your stuff. Never did have a sire as good with chains as you are."

"You do know I'm human and I have to recover at some point."

"Ya had enough time."

"Okay," Xander said as he stopped, arms crossed. "I know we agreed to never discuss sex in inappropriate places, but despite my whole lie to Buffy, we did have sex in Giles' shop. We had incredible sex, and I'm trying
really hard to not think about the fact that we did it on Giles' couch. However, my human body requires recovery from massive amounts of mindblowing sex."

"You could just torture me for a bit," Spike suggested as he slid closer, his predator's body moving like an oversized cat, all grace and fluidity as he stalked close. When he got in touching distance, Spike reached out and let a fingernail scrape down over Xander's shirt.

"You aren't coming until I come," Xander warned.

Spike just gave a one-shouldered shrug. "S' alright," he agreed. Xander shook his head and kept walking toward the cemetery that lay between the magic shop and their apartment.

"You get me four kills and I might be tempted to play a bit," Xander agreed casually. "Otherwise, I have three translations I need to work on." Xander looked up, and Spike had a look of gleeful anticipation on his face. Yep, Xander remembered when life had been easy and he only needed to please sire. Sometimes he'd failed and the pain of watching Nusa ignore him had ripped at... well, he hadn't had a soul, but it ripped at something. But then he'd do what she asked, he'd get it
right, and then Nusa had made him the center of her attention. She'd tortured him until his skin was red with his own blood, and he'd quivered in pleasure knowing that his sire thought he was worth the time. And then, when he'd really gotten it right, she'd led him to her bed, she'd fed from him and fed him in return. She'd taken her own pleasure and brought him to orgasm so often that she'd worn out even his vampiric ability to recover. Yep, Xander remembered those times. Some days, he remembered those days more clearly than days spent sitting behind Cordelia in history class.

"Four?" Spike asked, his tongue already tracing the inside of his lower lip in an expression of lust or the anticipation of violence... with Spike they were pretty much the same.

"Unless you wish to simply concede the night to me and watch as I perform translations," Xander answered with a hint of challenge. Spike danced backwards for a step before he turned and nearly dashed for the cemetery. Laughing, Xander raced to catch up. God help the fledges who rose tonight because Xander was betting that Spike took down at least five of them. On the way home they'd just have to stop and get him some beef jerky or something because tonight Xander would be needing the protein.
The End

Trickster Back Story

Parents and Childer

Xan Thonuzoba strode through the corridor, his boots making echoes that chased him as he headed for his father's chamber. How dare his father forbid him from the hunts. For the hundredth time, Xan cursed the fever that had taken his older brother. As the younger son, he had been free to pursue his own interests, but now his father's edicts chafed him at every turn.

The heavy doors to the hall stood open, and Xan entered. He bowed low to his father who sat facing the fire, a rug thrown over his lap.

"Father," Xan said carefully. His father may need him as heir, but Xan would not mistake that need for love or assume his father would not order him whipped as easily as he would any common serf. Xan need only learn that lesson once.
"Boy," the elder Thonuzoba said. The rug over his lap carried the design of a charging boar, the symbol for their family name, but it wasn't boar hunting that Xan itched for.

"Father, mother says you have forbidden the hunts."

"Since you know, why do you bother me?" the lord asked. He put down the scroll and looked up at his son with a frown.

"I hoped you would allow me to argue my case, father," Xan said respectfully.

"The death of Prince Imre has burdened the people, and you will not add to that by risking your own neck in the hunt."

"But the vampire—"

"Enough," Thonuzoba bellowed, standing so that the rug slid to the floor. "You will obey, or I will beat obedience into you."

Xan stood frozen for a moment, frustration and fear warring within him. "Yes, father," he finally agreed.
Arguing with his father never worked since the man had little interest in or respect for his younger son, so Xan simply bit his tongue and backed from the room.

The vampyr would hunt again tonight. Every second or third night they walked the villages, telling the serfs that those who forgot to worship would pay with blood. Neither King István nor his own stubborn father would convince the people to abandon the old ways and embrace Christianity if they refused to deal with the vampyr and their power.

Xan had fought them two nights ago, slipping the sharpened end of a wooden cross into a curved breast before the woman had exploded into dust. The others had scattered, but Xan had no doubt they would return tonight.

"Xan?"

He looked up to see his mother smiling at him, her face pale with the fever that had so recently sent her to her bed.

"Mother. You shouldn't be up," Xan said quickly as he went to support her uneven steps. Her face was cool and
sweaty, and Xan cursed the servant who had allowed her out of her bed with such an unsteady gait.

"I had thought you might anger your father," she said, glancing toward the open door to the great hall.

"No more than usual," Xan promised.

"You have always been a good son," she said, but Xan shushed her as he guided her toward the stairs. "No. You have a visitor. We must be polite and greet them," she insisted weakly.

"I will greet the visitor, you rest," Xan corrected her.

"I am not so weak as to forget that I am the lady of this manor, and neither shall you," she said firmly as she turned to the small front room. In the cold of winter, the room would be cold enough for ice to form on the windows, but Xan could not tug his mother toward the warmer safety of her room. "No," she insisted firmly.

Xan sighed as he resigned himself to supporting her weight and hoping the visitor would leave soon.

"Ah, is this your charming son?" a woman's voice asked.
Xan looked up into the dark eyes of a stunning woman. She was close to Xan's own twenty years, but black hair flowed down her back as though she were a child too young to bind it.

"Nusa," his mother greeted the stranger warmly as she stepped forward and held out her hands.

"This is my son, Xan of the family Thonuzoba, heir to Lord Thonuzoba, favored of King István."

"So much title for such a young man," Nusa smiled as she looked toward Xan and offered a small curtsy.

Xan gave an answering bow. "My lady, I am most pleased to meet any acquaintance of my mother's."

"Ah, but I am more than an acquaintance," Nusa corrected him, but she did so lightly, a laugh almost dancing on her lips so that Xan could not take offense at the correction.

"I had thought I knew my mother's lineage, but if you are some family, I offer my sincerest apologies, my lady."

"So polite. Come, sit with me," Nusa said as she returned
to the seat closest to the window where the wind crawled around the cracks and chilled to the bone. Xan went with a small, confused look toward his mother.

"I will admit to being confused, my lady," Xan finally said as he sat next to her.

"Your mother speaks so highly of you."

Xan glanced toward his mother and then back to the stranger again. Perhaps she came bearing an offer of marriage. She was not the daughter of any local lord or Xan would have known her, but he had to admit that he found her smile as intoxicating as any wine, and she had a beauty he couldn't define.

"My mother sometimes exaggerates my qualities, as a good mother often does," Xan replied modestly. His mother smiled at him from across the room.

"You were always my favorite. Your brother was coarse, but you have more grace, my son," his mother whispered. "I only wish you could be mine again." Xan watched his mother's smile grow sharp, her eyes yellow and her face distort into a mask. He went to stand, but a strong arm pulled him back down to the bench. He
turned to find Nusa staring at him with yellow eyes.

"No," he whispered. He had no weapons, and no servants would be so near the front of the house. He jerked, but inhuman strength held him immobile.

"If you are as good for me as you were for your own dear mother, perhaps you shall become a favorite of mine, as well," Nusa suggested with a tilt of her head. Fear tangled in Xan's entrails until he couldn't breathe.

"Shhh, child," Nusa hushed him before she bent close, pulling down his collar and kissing his neck. Xan jerked again, but strong hands held him helpless. "Such a pretty boy," she muttered against his skin as she nipped at the flesh. Xan watched his own mother turn her back as she walked confidently to the door where she stood watching the corridor.

"Mother," Xan called weakly.

"Too late to call for her; now you will learn to call for your sire," Nusa said before she drove fangs into Xan's neck.
Implacable

Xan woke hungry. Ravenous. His stomach ached for food and he sat up with a snarl. His room looked different. The stone walls looked rougher, and he could see tiny holes where mortar had crumbled and light slipped between stones. The tapestry hung across from his bed no longer reminded him of the summer because he did not see the carefully woven scene; he focused on each knot and every individual thread.

The strange changes so captivated him, that Xan forgot his hunger for a moment as he struggled with memories that pressed into his mind. Slowly, he stood from the bed and walked to the middle of the room

"Mother?" he called. Anger made him snarl the name. She'd led him to a trap. But not. Xan shook his head as the anger turned to gratitude. She'd made him new. No. She hadn't. Nusa had.
Xan looked around the room, and there she was, her black hair flowing down the front of her shoulders as she watched him. She sat on a low carved bench that stood under a heavily shuttered and draped window.

"Sire?" Xan asked softly, afraid to presume too much.

"You wake well, young lord," the vampyra said as she stood. Her face shifted and her yellow eyes flashed at him. Xan dropped his eyes to the ground and bowed his head. She was power. She was sire.

Waiting to learn if he would pass inspection, Xan waited, almost missing the sound of a beating heart. When his father would pass judgment, Xan would count each heart beat and wait for either the threatened punishment or the moment when his father would turn away without a word. From his father, he'd learned to expect either fury or disdain.

Instead Xan felt fingers brush through his shoulder-length waves of hair.

"Such a pretty boy, and so controlled. I had expected hungry pleas or mindless violence," Nusa commented. The words reminded Xan of his ravenous need.
"I do hunger, Lady," he said softly, not sure whether her petting had given him leave to call her sire.

"No doubt," she agreed amicably before wandering the room. Watching from behind his hair, which tumbled forward, Xan simply observed as she walked the room, running delicate fingers over the tapestry and stopping at the polearm hung from the wall. With a smile, she ran a finger over the sharp metal, and the scent of blood made Xan's face ache. He reached up and felt his own ridges. He smiled and used a finger to feel the sharp fangs that had descended from his upper teeth.

"This would do a man great damage," Nusa commented.

"Yes, my Lady," Xan agreed. He'd once taken off a rider's leg at the hip with that polearm. Despite his valor in battle, his father had only cared for the horse Xan had ridden to lameness.

"King István should meet with such an end, but you and I shall not get close enough to serve that punishment," Nusa said sadly.

"My Lady, ask, and I shall find a way to sink my weapon
into his guts for you," Xan hurried to offer as he stepped forward. Nusa turned and smiled at him.

"You are as true as your mother vowed." Nusa stepped forward and raised her hand to Xan's cheek, cupping it for a moment. "And if I warned you that István knows well of the vampyr and has taken precautions against us?"

"I seek only permission to pursue his death, even if I die trying," Xan assured her.

"Childe," Nusa muttered, and Xan could feel the fear and tension pulled from his body with that single word. He was childe, not minion or one to be cast off without ever being given a title at all.

"Sire," he answered reverently.

"We can hurt the king in other ways, take his followers from him," Nusa said as she turned again to the room. Xan waited as she picked up a gold finger-ring and twirled it. She stopped at a board with stones, each inscribed with an Arabic number.

"What is this curiosity?"
"An abacus, Sire. Pope Sylvester offered a number to King István, who gifted one to my father."

"He must value you to let the heir keep such a treasure in his room," Nusa said as she plucked two small stones from the board.

"No, Sire," Xan shook his head. "My fa... Lord Thonuzoba wished only to remind me that I am a fool who cannot learn to the use of it, not even with a tutor." He flinched from that confession. While he could do well enough with regular numbers, the I for one, the V for a handful five, the X for a man with his ten fingers, he could never fully grasp the new numbers with their curves that looked so much alike, and the insane way that the placement changed how much they meant. A number should be a number, never changing, and yet the tutor had spoken impatiently of columns and places until Xan's head pounded and he had turned phlegmatic.

Nusa laughed, and Xan physically stepped back. He could feel doubt press in on him. Doubt and fear. Now sire knew he was useless. He could feel his unwanted blush, and all hunger vanished under the failure.
"And can he use it, young lord?" she finally demanded.

Xan could not find words for a moment, and finally he shook his head. "No, my Lady."

"You will learn what is needful: how to hunt, the sweet taste of a human death, the ways to please me."

"Yes, Sire," Xan quickly agreed. Nusa turned and looked at him before raising her fist, the valuable stones still in it. Slowly she squeezed and Xan could hear the sharp crack as first one stone and then the other yielded to her strength.

"Then do not worry about things which do not matter," she said as she opened her hand to show five small shards of stone and dust. She dropped them to the ground and headed toward the door.

"The sun sets soon, and you must see to your father."

"Feed?" Xan asked, a feeling of cold joy running through him at the idea of ripping through his father's flesh.

"You shall feed first, but I do not want LordTHONUZOBATouched. You must hide your true face from him."
"Sire?" Xan asked, confused.

"You shall confront him in front of the land owners. You shall condemn him as a heretic and a blasphemer and as a coward who refuses to face the vampyr out of fear for his own life. You shall say all the lovely things you have thought for so many years, and then you shall walk out of the room and return to me." Nusa whispered the words as she stood in the hall just outside Xan's room. Xan smiled as he thought of the many things he would say. Yes, he knew the words.

"I can see your cruel thoughts, childe," Nusa used a hand behind Xan's neck to yank him forward, and before Xan could respond, her lips pressed to his, demanding wantonly as her other hand reached down and grabbed his cock. When she pulled back, her lips were stained with blood from their teeth clashing, and Xan licked the small cut on his mouth.

"Sire," he breathed.

"Do this for me. Crush him and denounce him, and walk out still wearing your human face. I know your urge to kill and rend, but obey me, and I will reward you, childe,"
she said with a wicked smile, and Xan knew he would do anything for her.

"Yes, sire," he agreed without hesitation. Turning to the steep stone stairs, he hurried down them, anxious to prove that he could control his hunger and his anger well enough to please his new sire in a way he never had his old one.

The End