

Rating: Mature/Adults Only

Pairing: Alexander/William (Spike/Xander)

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Spoilers: None.

Author's Notes: Written for the Scottish Ficathon. All human AU...sort of. You'll see.

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8,891 words

Unchained Memories

by
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Part One

Scotland, 1613

Alexander sighed and leaned heavily on the handles of the plow imbedded deep in the earth. He was tired and sore, just like he had been every day since he had returned to the land of his birth. But it was a good sore. That kind of sore that let you know you were doing something right.

Daylight was quickly beginning to fade and Alexander knew he had to hurry if he was going to finish his work for the day. A sudden burst of warmth mid-day had surprised him and he had to stop for a few hours to give Cordy a break.

He turned and smiled at his beautiful and faithful chestnut mare. She had been a present from his then girlfriend. Cordelia had called her Queen but once the lovers parted ways, Alexander discovered just how much like the heiress his horse could be, so he renamed her. It turned out to be quite fortuitous since the horse was as stubborn and obstinate as her name sake.

Catching his breath, Alexander turned and gripped the plow, clucking his tongue at Cordy to get her moving again. They worked the earth together, bringing fresh, fragrant soil up to the surface so Alexander could prepare it for planting.

Coming here had been hard, in more ways than one. It was the land of his birth, true, but it held more bad memories than good. It was beautiful, this little patch of earth he called his home. It was merely a small valley in the Highlands, surrounded by mountains on three sides with a small loch that shone like glass in the morning light. The heather was abundant and fragrant and filled the cool night air with its comfort.

But when he had returned just a few short months ago, Alexander's heart nearly broke at the sight of his homeland. His father had not only let the home fall into disrepair, but he had seemingly taken pleasure in ruining everything around it.

Alexander had grieved when he heard the news that his parents had passed away. He had not been surprised to hear of the awful circumstances surrounding their deaths, but he knew their tendencies toward drunkenness and violence so it was less of a shock than one would imagine.

Not many of the local villagers had been pleased to see Alexander return. Most of them believed him to be what his father had always accused him of being; a lazy, lump of a man and a disrespectful son. It didn't help that the news of him fighting alongside women had traveled far and wide and the villagers had teased him mercilessly about hiding behind his friend's skirts in battle.

But Alexander never let anyone tell him what to do, especially not some small minded, pig headed drunkards who had never fought in a real battle, not like he had. He fought with women at his side, it was true, but Alexander would not have had it any other way. Willow and Buffy were some of the strongest and most amazing people he had ever known and they gave him some of their strength in everything

they did.

Thinking about them brought a sadness to Alexander's heart. He missed his friends but he knew this is where he needed to be. This was to be his home, for better or worse.

Alexander was jolted to reality when he realized that Cordy had suddenly stopped. He looked and smiled, discovering that they had finished the field and just in time. The sun was preparing to dip behind hills of the highlands surrounding his land and the air had begun to chill slightly, a small breeze flowing from the loche.

He wished he'd kept his shirt close to him, but he had discarded it long ago when the heat of the day was beating down on his shoulders. So now he stood, in the cooling air, wearing only his kilt and mud-encrusted Hessian boots. His hair hung loose, flowing in near perfect ringlets near the middle of his back. It tickled his golden, sweat-slicked skin as it swayed back and forth with the sway of the breeze.

Standing with his face to the setting sun, Alexander took in the scents and sounds of his home. It gave him peace knowing that this was his, all his, and he had the power to make it perfect once again.

He was suddenly pulled from his peaceful daydream when Cordy neighed unhappily and shook her head. Alexander figured she was ready to go in for the night and he agreed. It wasn't until a moment later that he realized that his faithful mare had actually heard someone approaching long before he was able.

Alexander sighed and ran his arm across his forehead, trying to rid himself of the sweat on his brow and not realizing that he had smeared mud across his face in the process. He really didn't have the patience to talk with any of the local villagers tonight. He was tired and hungry and not in the mood to try and defend his manhood. All he wanted to do was put Cordy in for the night, eat his rabbit stew and get a good night's rest.

As he turned to greet his visitor and beg their forgiveness for his rudeness, Alexander was stunned into silence at the sight before him. The large black horse looked wild and powerful as it rode straight up to the gaping man. The rider was dressed all in black, save for the shock of platinum hair flowing in the breeze.

Skidding to a halt, the rider dismounted with an ease that Alexander envied. He landed softly on both feet, like a cat pouncing from a tree and stood staring at the half dressed boy.

Alexander catalogued the rider's clothes from his black leather boots, the black breeches with the leather ties at the fly, the black shirt that lay open at the neck, exposing a wide expanse of chest and the long black duster covering it all. As he looked up into crystal blue eyes, Alexander gasped in shock, finding himself face to face with the last person he expected to see.

"William?!"

Part Two

William rode hard into fading light. He had somewhere he needed to be and he knew if he didn't push himself and his faithful mare, he'd never get there in time. This land was new to him, uncharted territory.

As he looked around, he wondered if it were known territory at all.

The hills and valley that established this area looked wild and untamed. Maybe that was part of its appeal, but all William could think of was how much he missed marked roads and familiar surroundings.

He dug his heels in, urging his horse harder, faster. He shouldn't have headed out so late, but he was in a hurry to find the boy and do what had to be done. The villagers that had given him directions for the Harris family land had laughed at him for wanting to find the "useless molly that came home too little, too late" before warning him that the valley was haunted.

William believed no such thing and rode off in a rush despite through protestations.

Now, he wished he had checked the sun before leaving in such a rush. The light was quickly turning from bright golden yellow to deep orange to a rustic red. A wave of panic broke over William's spine at the thought of being lost in this wilderness. He knew that once night fell completely, he would never find his way to the boy or back to the village.

He had to make it to the boy. He just had to.

Finally, he rode over a steep ridge and there it was; Harris Valley.

William took a moment to look over the land before he urged his steed on. It was a small valley with lush foliage running over its gentle crests and falls. In the distance, the Englishman could see a small lake so clear; its surface appeared as glass, reflecting the setting sun on its crystal clear surface.

Suddenly, William found the one he was seeking. Standing on the only flat parcel of land was Alexander. The boy stood transfixed, his face turned up to the setting sun and his hair flowing lightly in the breeze creeping up from the loch.

It struck the Englishman as odd. This hardly seemed to be the boy he remembered from Sunnydale. Where was the boy that was carrying thirty extra pounds and was too pale from late night patrol and research sessions? In his place, William saw a man, golden and lean, with definition cut from hard manual labor. He never remembered hair so long or lush, but he never saw it hanging loose like this. The boy always kept his hair tied back with a small leather strap or in a thick braid when Dawn got to him.

William had to admit, the boy had changed. Alexander was more a man than he had ever seen, but he was now also more the boy that William had first met when they were bitter enemies.

He rode up hard and fast before screaming to a halt right in front of the young man. Dismounting quickly, William landed on his feet and waited as the boy took him in. He stood stock still until the boy looked him in the eyes, shock spreading over his

golden features.

"William!?" the boy cried in astonishment.

A gentle smirk curved over the Englishman's pale face before he unleashed a harsh blow, catching Alexander's right cheek. As the boy fell into the mud, William knew this trip was well worth all his effort.

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Alexander lay in the mud for several long minutes, testing his jaw gingerly. It didn't appear to be broken but he would be sporting an angry bruise for several days. He always did forget how volatile and strong the Englishman could be.

He looked over his shoulder to see William offering him a hand. Tentatively, he took it and the blond man pulled him up and steadied him on his feet.

"What the bloody hell was that for?" Alexander asked angrily, still rubbing his sore jaw.

"That was for leaving without saying good-bye, ya wanker," William grumbled.

Alexander simply nodded before he let out a quiet laugh. "Ya came all the way out here just to get pissy that I didn't let ya know I was leaving?"

"No," William replied almost a little too quickly, "I came up here to talk to you. Miss that sometimes, you know. Besides, being around too many women was driving me around the bend."

Alexander laughed a little at that one. He understood that all too well. He had spent more than his share of his life surrounded by females; ones that seemed to only want his friendship and support. That was alright with the young man. He loved his friends and would trade them for nothing in the world, but too much female companionship was not good for ones reputation or sanity.

He reached over and laid a hand on William's tense shoulder. "Come. I was just

getting ready to put Cordy away for the night. Ya' can put yer Drusilla in the barn with her, if'n she promises to be a good girl."

William smiled and reached over to his faithful mare. "You'll be a good girl, won't you now, Drusilla."

The black mare shook her head and rubbed lovingly against her master. William chuckled and said, "She agrees, just as long as your 'Queen Cordelia' doesn't cause any problems."

Alexander laughed as he strode over to his horse, quickly releasing her from her bonds before leading her toward the small barn behind his home. William followed behind him, Drusilla at his side. The two men teased each other and laughed at the contrived jokes as they prepared their horses for the night.

Brushes were exchanged, blankets and hay were made ready, and water was put out before the men said their good nights to the females in their lives.

Alexander then led William toward his home. They apparently had a lot to talk about.

Part Three

William followed Alexander from the barn toward the small but sturdy looking house, his bags slung over his shoulder, still warm from where they rested on Drusilla's flanks. They were nearly halfway there when they heard a loud whiny, followed by the sound of stomping hooves coming from the barn.

Alexander snickered, knowing the noises were not coming from his Cordy. "Ya' know," he said, trying to control his laughter, "Yer horse really is crazy."

William smiled and nodded. "Yeah, I know. My Dru was treated real poorly before she came to me. She just needed someone who knew how to treat her. She's a might touchy still but she can be gentle when she's treated right."

Alexander nodded, smiling at the other man's admission. A small light flickered through the window and Alexander knew that the fire was still burning inside and his stew would be hot and ready to eat.

"Nice place," William said softly as they entered the small stone home.

Alexander sighed as he looked at the place he had rebuilt with his own two hands. He opened the door and ushered his unexpected guest inside.

"Ya' should'a seen it a few months ago. It took me nearly a fortnight and a half jus' ta get it livable. It seems ta be in pretty good shape now. Keeps the cold and rain out."

William chuckled lightly as he walked up to Alexander and laid a soft hand on his shoulder. "Alexander, you really need to stop putting yourself down like that. The place looks great. You did a wonderful job."

A warm flush worked its way from Alexander's neck and up into his cheeks. He wasn't used to these types of compliments and no matter how true or simple, kind words made him blush. "Thank you," he finally whispered as he followed the other man into his home.

Alexander quietly set out to prepare them both some supper, he himself feeling near starving after his long day, as William looked around his home. After dividing the stew into two bowls, he stoked the fire before handing the food to the Englishman.

"So," he said, smiling cordially, "How is everyone back in the 'Dale?"

William snorted lightly as he dug into his food. He ate slowly before answering quietly, "Everyone is well. Willow is dating that bird, Tara, cute couple they are. Buffy is...well, she's Buffy. Still fighting the good fight and getting along fine with that mick, Angel. Bloody poncy name, that. Giles is still around, although he's

talking of heading for his homeland again. Oh, and before I forget, Red asked me to give this to you."

Alexander watched as the Englishman reached into his bag and pulled out a small package. Opening it slowly, the dark-haired man smiled as he began to dig through the amazing surprises he found hiding inside; an assortment of scones, cakes and biscuits, all smelling as if Willow had just removed them from the hearth, several bars of soap, lovingly made by Tara's gentle hands, smelling of sandlewood and spices and the small fighting axe that Alexander preferred when fighting at Buffy's side.

Looking down at the tiny reminders of his friends and his former life brought tears to the warm hazel eyes. Remembering his visitor, Alexander wiped at his eyes with the back of his hand before clearing his throat. "Want a biscuit?"

William chuckled lightly and took the offered morsel before punching Alexander lightly on the arm. "Miss the bints, do ya'?"

Alexander couldn't help but laugh back. "Yeah," he admitted with a smile, "I lived with the girls for so long it's hard not to miss them, ya' know?"

The blond head nodded as William continued to eat. The two men shared a companionable silence as they finished their stew and biscuits. Alexander had turned and began to stoke the fire when he heard William's quietly whispered question.

"Why didn't you tell me you were leaving?"

The waver in the other man's voice gave Alexander pause for a moment as he stared at the renewed flames. He tried to decide what to do, before he turned back and laughed as if William had told a joke.

"Ya' came all the way out to the middle a' nowhere because I didn't tell ya' goodbye?" He turned and sat down heavily in his mirth. "I didn't know I owed you that. We hardly got along. Why do you care?"

Alexander did his best to not flinch at the look of pain in the azure eyes staring at

him.

"Thought we'd become friends, is all," William finally spit out, trying to look mad and failing miserably. "I know we started out bad but then..."

He didn't finish the thought before he stood quickly.

"This was a bad idea. I'll just take my leave."

Alexander leapt from his seat without thinking, grabbing a hold of the butter-soft, black leather cloak. William turned, the crystal blue eyes flashing with anger and pain, and the younger man sighed.

"Yer right," Alexander admitted. "We are friends. I did'na come to see ya' 'cause I was afraid you'd talk me in to stayin' and I needed to come home, to my homeland. This place needed me and I need it. Does that make sense?"

He waited with baited breath, not sure what his friend would do. In all his time with William, Alexander discovered that the other man's temper was almost as unpredictable and volatile as Buffy's. Slowly, the tension bled out of the other man's body before William softly smirked.

"Yeah, I suppose," William grumbled. "Rude, though, just leaving like that. Had to come all the bloody way out here just to make sure you were alright. Ungrateful brat."

Alexander smiled widely. Finally on familiar ground, the two men bickered and took shots at each other as they settled down for the evening. Eyes were averted coyly as both men began to undress as they teased and told stories. Alexander set William up on the extra bed that he had luckily fixed up several weeks before while he settled into his own not far away.

"Best get some sleep, William," Alexander teased as he pulled his blankets up to his chin and rested his clasped hands on his chest, "Now that yer here, I plan on using you ruthlessly."

There was a moment of silence before both men laughed heartily.

"G'night, William," Alexander whispered as the laughter died away and he closed his eyes.

"Good night, Alexander," William answered. Instead of following his friend in slumber, William turned on his side and watched the dark-haired man sleep by the dying embers still warm in the hearth.

Part Four

Alexander woke slowly, stretching from fingertip to toe under the warmth of his woolen blankets. The fire had died down to nearly nothing over night and the sun had yet to peek over the hills, so his home was bathed in the barest bit of light.

He sat up slowly, remembering his guest, not wanting to wake the still sleeping man. He smiled at the mass of blankets and messy blond hair in the bed across from his own. It was still hard for him to believe that William was here, sleeping in his home. Quietly, Alexander stoked the fire so the dwelling would be warm when his guest awoke before grabbing his flannel and new bar of soap.

It was chilly in the pre-dawn hours as Alexander made his way down to the loch. The water was still and smooth as crystal. The young man knew the water would be cold, the snow having melted just after his return to his homeland, but he was thrilled at the opportunity to use his present.

Normally, Alexander brought water to the house, warming it in pots to wash himself, but today he was going to have a proper bath. Just the thought made him smile.

Stripping off his clothes, the dark-haired man stepped into the water, shivering at the bite of cold against his skin. He continued walking into the cool depths of the loch until the water was lapping at his hips. Alexander took a deep breath before

dropping down beneath the water's surface, submersing his entire body in one fail swoop.

The serenity of the morning was shattered by the resounding 'whoop' that came from the exhilarated man as he broke the surface of the loch. Alexander couldn't help but laugh with joy as he retrieved the rich smelling soap and began to wash up as he hummed happily to himself.

As he stood, nearly waist deep in the chilly water, Alexander watched as the sun slowly began to peek over the eastern mountain range. This was his favorite time of the day, when everything was peaceful and quiet and it felt like the sun was making an appearance just for him.

The young man was startled when he heard a quietly whispered, "Beautiful," from behind him. Turning quickly, he saw William smiling at him and Alexander smiled back.

"'Tis an amazing sight, is it not?" the wet man asked.

"That it is," William answered, his eyes never leaving the man in the water.

Alexander shivered, whether from the cold or from the intensity of the other man's stare, he didn't know. But soon William was stripping off his black clothes to reveal the perfect pale flesh hidden beneath. The dark haired man knew he should look away, it was only polite, but the more he saw, the harder it was to avert his eyes. Finally, the blond man was naked and slipping into the water. A gasped breath caught in Alexander's throat as his friend slowly made his way toward him.

William was nearly close enough for Alexander to feel the heat of him, smell the scent of dried sweat and smoke and sleep still clinging to him, see the gleam of mischief in azure eyes that sparkled wildly in the rays of the morning's first light. Then suddenly, he was tumbling into the cold water as William plucked the soap from his lax fingers and pushed him backward.

Alexander emerged from the water, gasping and sputtering for a moment before trying to glare at William. It didn't work. The other man was smiling and washing and he looked so perfect that Alexander couldn't stay mad at him. Instead, he

laughed before leaping at his friend, dunking the blond head under the water and trying to escape before William could retaliate.

A wild fight ensued with both men laughing and wet. Finally, they declared a truce before slipping out of the water to dry off and fix breakfast. It was going to be a long day and they were just starting.

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William knelt in the small garden, pulling weeds and smashing bugs while trying to protect the vegetables growing there in the process. He was tired and sweaty but he felt good. Really good, if he had to admit it himself.

He had been more than a little mad when he rode up to the Highlands to confront Alexander but now that he was here, all the fight seemed to have bled out of him.

The two men had spent the day working hard after their early morning bath. William sighed and closed his eyes just remembering the sight of Alexander in the loch. He looked like some sort of Greek god, his dark hair, long and curly, hanging down the muscular back and leaving trails of crystal water on the bronzed skin.

The early morning rays illuminated his skin made the younger man's skin glow and made him seem otherworldly, almost effulgent.

William relived the morning in his mind as he dug his hands in the dirt again, completely unaware of the shadow that had fallen over him as his mind wandered.

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Alexander stood back and watched as William dug around in the dirt. It seemed so odd to see this man like this. Not that William was a lay about, not hardly. The two men had worked together many times back in Sunnydale, but Alexander had never witnessed the blond man participate in something so...domestic.

Maybe there was more to his friend than met the eye after all.

They had worked together all morning, first plowing the field that Alexander had been working on when William arrived. With both men and horses working, they were able to make quick work of the field that Alexander was hoping to plant in a few short weeks once the weather warmed up enough.

They had eaten together, some dried meat and bread that William had brought along, with some wine that Alexander had saved from his time in Sunnydale. Watching the water of the loch they had played in that morning, the two men talked about old times back in the Dale and Alexander's plans for his newly acquired lands.

Food was prepared for the evening before both men got back to work; Alexander fertilizing the newly plowed fields and William weeding the small garden that held the vegetables they enjoyed daily.

Alexander was sweaty and covered in dirt and manure, his chest bare and his boots covered in muck. He decided it was time to call it a day and walked over to see if William was in the mood for another dip in the loch before dinner.

Standing behind the blond man, Alexander watched as William absentmindedly dug his hands in the ground, pulling up handfuls of dirt before sliding it through his fingers and doing it all over again. The other man didn't move or flinch, not acknowledging Alexander's presence at all.

Finally, Alexander chuckled. This finally caught William's attention and he turned his head, his azure eyes glazed and shiny.

Alexander laughed heartily at the sight before reaching down to clap his friend on the shoulder.

"Wha's the matter, William?" the dark-haired man asked, "No' used to the early mornin' hours or have I been workin' ya' too hard?"

The smile he received was blinding and his breath caught in his throat. William's eyes danced with mirth as he glanced up at the man standing so close behind him.

"Just thinking about this morning, is all," he replied, his voice practically a purr. "Was wondering how you developed all those pretty muscles and got rid of all that flab you'd been carrying around. Guess all this hard work and fresh air really did some good, eh?"

Alexander flushed at the words and seductive tone. He couldn't believe William would talk to him in such a way. That was how William would talk to Buffy or maybe Tara when he wanted to see her blush. No one spoke to Alexander that way, not in a very long time.

Deciding that the other's flirting was just silliness that was inspired by the two men being the only ones around, Alexander kicked his booted foot out, nudging his friend's backside lightly.

"If'n yer done playin' around in the dirt, I thought mayhap you'd like to have a splash in the loch. I smell like the wrong side of yer horse and I'd like to get clean before eatin' and beddin' down for the night. Comin'?"

Alexander watched the sparkle that shone in the crystal blue eyes before he turned and ran toward the calm water. He stripped off his boots and was loosening his kilt before he was tackled at the water's edge. Both men tumbled into the loch, laughing at each other and tossing hollow insults to and fro in between shy, sultry glances and surreptitious touches.

They took their time, washing and playing in the dying Highland light.

Part Five

Alexander laughed as he trudged toward his home. He had truly enjoyed his time in the loch with William, although the lithe man did get the better of him a time or two. He had to admit that William was much stronger than he looked. The dark-haired man had considered taking the bait of trying to take William one last time but the feel of wet wool against his skin made him shudder.

Toes squishing in his soaked boots, Alexander smirked as he reached the large bench outside his home, sitting to slip off the soggy boots. He stood quickly and

efficiently removed the yards of wet fabric from around his waist. Shaking out the soggy fabric, Alexander smoothed down the rough wool before draping it over the bench to dry.

Looking over his shoulder, Alexander could barely hold in his laugh when he spotted William staring at him. "Hurry up, ya' nutter, and get yer kit off before ya catch yer death."

He passed by William and into his home, never noticing the affect his nakedness had on his friend. Alexander simply stoked the fire and waited for William to follow. Once the Englishman came inside, Alexander threw a flannel at him as he continued to dry off himself.

"Ya still have tricky moves there, my friend," Alexander laughed at his friend as they both toweled off, each dripping in the small space.

"You're not too bad yourself," William replied, his eyes sparkling with something the younger couldn't quite place.

"I learned from the best." Alexander reached over and patted William's shoulder, meaning it only in a friendly way, letting the other man know that he appreciated all the help he'd given him in the 'Dale and here at his home, but his fingers seemed to have a will of their own as they drifted over water chilled skin covering the sleekest muscle he'd ever seen.

Realizing his actions, Alexander jerked his hand back as if burned by the fire before he turned; quickly looking for something to cover himself with before he embarrassed himself.

When he turned back around, William was thankfully clothed and smiling at him.

Alexander opened his mouth to say...something, anything to break the odd silence when his stomach growled loudly. Both men laughed before turning toward the hearth, ready to fill their bellies after a long day working the earth and playing in the loch.

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Laughter filled the small home as the two friends shared stories and enjoyed themselves as the day slipped from dusk into night.

"You did not!" Alexander exclaimed, whooping his laughter in true joy.

"I did," William said proudly. "Bloody ponce was mad at me for months until it grew back."

"I can't imagine Angel without his treasured locks. Yer lucky ta still be breathin'."

A comfortable silence settled between the two men once their laughter died down. Neither man seemed too willing to break the camaraderie between them, but they both knew they had questions waiting to be asked, wanting answers they may not be ready to hear.

William was the first to venture forth.

"Can I ask you a question?"

"Only if I can as well."

Alexander watched as William thought the proposal over for a moment before nodding. "Very well, a question for a question. I'll start. Why didn't you marry Anya?"

Alexander shook his head, nearly reeling from the blow of the question. "Ya dinna know how ta pull yer punches, do ya, Will?"

The blond man smiled at the familiar, casual use of his name but only nodded in answer, waiting for the other man to speak.

Alexander sighed, his bare chest heaving as he thought how best to answer. He rubbed his callused hands over his face before looking across at his friend. "I dinna love her like she deserved. I do love her and I know she loved me but it was wrong. T'was like we were doing it because t'was what was expect o' us. I felt obligated and she felt like that's what a woman should be wantin'. It woulda ended badly, I've no

doubt, and could no have done it to her."

Brown eyes searched blue, expecting to see contempt or hatred leveled at him. All he saw was quiet understanding.

"My turn. Are ya still in love with Buffy?"

Alexander smiled when he realized he'd made a direct hit, much like William had with him.

"Yes," William answered slowly, refusing to look Alexander in the eyes. "You know that what Buffy and I tried to have was wrong. We were both hurting and it seemed like love at the time. War is a bad thing, especially for those so young. It would never work."

Alexander understood, or at least he thought he did. They had all lost so much in a war that seemed never ending. But they fought the good fight and never looked back. Finally, the tide seemed to be going their way and, one by one, they each began to return to their lives. And Alexander's life was here, in this valley, where he could be his own man and live his own life.

The dark-haired boy was pulled from his thoughts when William softly asked, "Why did you leave without saying goodbye to me?"

Deep brown eyes shot up to stare into crystal blue, brimming with hurt and pain. Alexander looked back down at his hands before quietly answering, "'Cause I knew if'n I'd tried to tell ya, I'd never be able to leave. You'da talked me outta it and made me stay and I needed to leave, Will. It was me time."

He couldn't look up, couldn't stand to see those sparkling, mirth-filled eyes filled with hate or even contempt. He had taken their friendship and pretty much stamped it under his feet.

So caught up in his own thoughts, Alexander never noticed the warm fingers that slowly worked their way up his arm. The gentle touches grew stronger, more insistent and the dark haired head slowly lifted to look up at William, so close, closer than Alexander had ever remembered him being before.

Those persistent fingers slipped over his neck, hovering over the pounding artery before tracing the stubble covered jaw line, finally reaching into the still damp mass of sable curling locks. Alexander gasped lightly as he was pulled into the gentlest, warmest kiss he'd ever experienced; just a brush of sweet lips and a hint of wet tongue and a rush of hot breath.

Just as he'd realized what was happening and had the faculties to respond, William was gone. It took the startled young man a few moments to realize that his friend was in his own bed, pulling up his covers to bed down for the night.

Alexander realized he had one more question left to ask.

"Why did ya kiss me?"

"Because I can," William answered from under his small mountain of blankets.

"And because I wanted to."

Alexander could hear the smirk in his friend's voice and he didn't know if he wanted to beat or kiss the smile he knew was gracing the beautiful face.

Hell, maybe he'd do both.

As he crawled into his own bed, Alexander determined to wait until the morning to decide.

He lay awake long after William's quiet breathing drifted over to him, watching the other man sleep by the light of the hearth and wondering if his life was ever going to be normal.

Alexander gasped as he shot up in his bed. This was wrong, just so wrong. He'd had a dream, an erotic dream about the friend sleeping across from him. His eyes darted over to William to make sure that the sudden movement didn't wake the Englishman. Thankfully, William's breathing remained slow and even and Alexander slowly lowered his head back down onto his pillow.

The images from the dream replayed in his mind; images of pale skin pulled tight over rolling muscles, soft warm lips and intense, smoldering crystal blue eyes. He reached beneath the covers, wrapping his fingers around the erection tenting the blankets covering his body.

Alexander considered a quick wank before his friend woke but the mere idea of being caught by William made the nervous man freeze, his hand barely halfway through a decent stroke. Knowing that there was no way his erection was going to wane without some intervention, Alexander stood, wrapping a blanket around his waist before stoking the fire in the hearth, leaving the warmth of his home and making his way down to the loch.

The sun had not yet risen but Alexander found his way down to the water's edge with ease. Dropping the blanket, he dipped his foot into the water, shivering at the cold. Quickly, he made his way into the loch, stopping when the ripples began to lap at his upper thighs.

Alexander turned his face toward the east, smiling as the first rays of morning light began to peek over the hills. His erection had yet to deflate and the young man considered dipping down into the chilly water but the memory of William's lips on his from the night before came forth and he couldn't resist a simple tug on his need.

It felt so good. Alexander moaned lightly in the back of his throat as his hand moved slowly, languidly moving heated skin over hardened flesh. Golden light began to spill over the valley and Alexander wondered what William would look like standing in it, naked and needy. He was sure he would look...

"Beautiful," came whispered from behind him.

Alexander whipped around, shocked at the sight of his friend standing at the shore, watching him slowly wanking in the loch. Covering himself, hoping he could pass this off as a simple dip in the lake, he nodded toward the hills.

"Aye, 'tis beautiful, is it not?"

William's eyes never left Xander's muscular form. "That it is."

Alexander began to open his mouth, to say something, anything to explain when William quickly dropped the blanket he was wrapped in before plowing in the loch and heading directly toward Alexander.

Warm hands dug into the tangled sable locks before pulling Alexander's head down into a scorching kiss. Every nerve ending came alive and Alexander jerked as if struck by lightning. He gasped and William took full advantage, thrusting his tongue into the open mouth, tasting, teasing, taking what he wanted from Alexander.

Finally pulling away for air, the two men stared at each other for endless moments, the sound of their breathing and the lapping of the water at their legs the only sound in the quiet morning.

"Why?" Alexander whispered, searching sparkling blue eyes for his answer.

"Because I wanted to," William answered, a small smile gracing his face before he grabbed Alexander by the hand, pulling him from the lake and toward his home. The blond man had the presence of mind to grab the discarded blankets as they passed them before reaching the small dwelling.

Pushing Alexander into the room, William quickly followed before slamming the door shut behind them. The room was pleasantly warm from the fire blazing, welcoming them in from the cold. The shocked man turned to say something to his friend, to understand this madness, when he was captured once again, his face trapped between two cool hands and seeking lips attached to his own.

Blunt teeth softly nibbled at Alexander's kiss swollen lips until he slowly parted them. He gasped at the feeling of William's soft warm tongue tracing his teeth

before relaxing and surrendering to the will of the other man. His legs suddenly felt like they could not bear his weight and he sagged down against William's chilled chest. Strong arms wrapped around Alexander's waist to hold him up as he was slowly led over to the bed on the far side of the room.

When the back of Alexander's knees hit his bed, he collapsed and sat with a thump, his head tilted back so far that his throat strained with every swallow. The two men stared at each other for several long minutes until Alexander finally whispered, "What is this, Will?"

William's lips curved up just the slightest as his eyes twinkled in the low light. "This is us, Alexander."

"But...but this is wrong. Tis a sin, William. We canna do this."

In an instant, Alexander found himself on his back with a very angry Englishman pinning him to the bed.

"This is wrong, is it Alexander?" William growled as he slowly rolled his hips, slowly dragging his erection against Alexander's. "This is why you ran away. This is why I came. We've denied ourselves for too long. This is what we are, who we are, what we need."

Alexander shook his head against the words. It was wrong, he knew that, but he couldn't deny that this felt so right. His breath seemed to be stuck in his throat and his heart was beating too fast as every roll and dip of William's hips caused him to ache and moan.

William leaned down, Alexander's wrist's secured beneath his palms, as he spoke softly, their lips brushing with every spoken word. "I want you, Alexander. I have for a long time, but I denied it, thinking you'd never want me. But then you left and you never said a word. I had to know, had to see. Tell me you don't want this. Tell me you don't want me."

Alexander groaned at the overwhelming feelings rushing through him. William's words and the gentle thrusts were sending him closer and closer to the edge of his sanity.

"Tell me," William purred, his mouth so close the two men were practically sharing the same breath.

"I canna," Alexander groaned.

The look on William's face was full of pain and heartbreak and it was almost more than Alexander could bear.

"I canna tell ya that I don't want ya when I do so bad it feels like it's tearin' me up from the inside."

The smile that lit up William's face was brighter than sunshine and Alexander felt warmer than he ever had under its glow. Before he could say another word, William was blanketed atop him, covering the larger man from head to toe. The grip on his wrists was suddenly gone as long, strong fingers began to explore his naked flesh and Alexander was quick to follow suit, stroking the back and shapely ass exposed to him.

They explored each other in earnest, touching and kissing, finding and learning every hot spot, feasting on each other like men starving for touch, for affection, for love. William produced a small jar that he brought just for this purpose, slowly slicking his fingers before letting them drift down between Alexander's cheeks.

The dark-haired man gasped at the unfamiliar sensations, but let his lover continue, knowing that William would never hurt him.

William took his time, gently stretching and preparing Alexander, stopping to croon and calm the other man whenever he groaned and cried out in pain.

Finally, they were both ready, panting with need and desire. William moved to kneel between Alexander's spread thighs and the prone man lifted his knees to his chest, exposing himself completely to his lover.

William closed his eyes, trying to regain his control at the sight of Alexander's trust and need. Opening his crystal blue eyes, William smiled at the man waiting for him. "Ready, luv?"

Alexander nodded wildly, barely able to speak. "Aye," he finally whispered. "Take me."

William shuddered at the needy words that stripped him bare and left him open. He moved forward, taking his aching cock in hand, slowly leading himself to Alexander's stretched, slick opening.

Slowly, gently, he pressed inside, the guardian muscle slowly giving way until he was inside, both men gasping and groaning at the feeling.

Brown eyes opened to stare into blue, small tears threatening to spill over.

"All right?" William whispered, afraid he was hurting his lover.

"Aye," Alexander whispered as he reached up to cup William's ass. "Now move before I have ta kill ya."

With a gentle laugh, William leaned down to capture the lips smirking at him before pulling his hips back before snapping them back hard, making Alexander squeak.

What started slow and tender quickly escalated to frantic and passionate. The small home was filled with sounds of their groans and the rhythmic pounding of flesh on flesh. They were lost in each other, finally giving over to what they've wanted for so long.

Alexander looked up into the crystal blue eyes watching him with need and love. Nearing his end, he arched into the delicious thrusts, gasping when William's cock rammed into his sweet spot deep inside.

"William!" he called out, lost in the sensations pouring through him as he rode out the waves of pleasure rolling over him.

Distantly, he heard his name called, sweeter than he'd ever heard it before.

"Alexander."

"Xander?"

"Xander!"

Xander's head shot off the book where it had been resting. Confused, he looked around the Magic Box and at the curious looks leveled at him by his friends as his heart ached to be back with William.

Part Seven

Xander looked around the room at the five sets of curious eyes watching him as Spike stretched and yawned in the corner, as if he were completely bored with the proceedings.

"What?"

Dawn snickered as Buffy rolled her eyes. Willow just shook her hair, sending her red hair flying.

"Xander," the young witch said, laughter lighting her voice, "You were asleep."

"Did I snore?"

"No," Dawn replied as she tried to hold back her laughter. "But you were sure talking a lot."

Xander felt his heart drop into his stomach. Alright, maybe not specifically *into* his stomach but his stomach region where everything was all fluttery and suddenly very not happy feeling.

"I was talking?" he asked, trying, and failing, to keep the terror out of his voice.

"Yup," Buffy replied, wide smile gracing her face.

Xander looked around at his friends, checking for any signs that he might have made a complete fool of himself. "What did I say?"

"Don't know," Tara answered. "It seemed to be another language."

"A sexy other language," Dawn sighed.

"Really?" Xander perked up. He sounded sexy? "Sexy?"

"Oh yeah," Buffy, Tara and Willow sighed before giggles broke out around the table.

"It was an ancient Scottish dialect of Gaelic, if I'm not mistaken," Giles interjected without looking up from the text in his hands.

"But why?" Xander questioned as he looked up and caught Spike staring at him. When their eyes met, Xander felt a spark shoot through him. He smiled lightly at the vampire but just when he thought he saw something in the crystal blue eyes, Spike turned away.

Xander shook his head to clear it of the thoughts and memories rising up about William and the loch and a warm hearth. He turned to Willow and asked, "What happened?"

"Well, we were all researching the latest demon..."

"Except for me," Spike interjected for his perch on the counter.

Willow rolled her eyes. "Except for Spike. You were reading that book that had the yellow pages."

"And you kept saying that it smelled funny," Dawn giggled. "Like Giles' suit after a night in the rain."

The Watcher lifted his eyes over the top of his book and glared at the dark-haired boy for a moment before returning his attention back to his research.

"So Dawn handed you that book there," Buffy pointed to the edition that had previously been serving as a pillow.

"After a bit, Dawn asked you what you were reading," Willow explained, taking over the story. "You smiled and said you weren't really sure since it seemed to be another language but you read it out loud anyway."

Giles pushed his glasses up as he pinched the bridge of his nose in exasperation. "And how many times have I told you not to read aloud in front of the books, Xander?"

"Apparently not enough," Spike grumbled from the back of the room.

"Anyway," Buffy growled as she turned to glare at the vampire before turning back around to the table. "You read the thingy and then you just fell over."

Dawn made a funny whistle followed by a big explosion sound as she slumped over the table as her head smacked the solid wood.

"So, what did I spell?" Xander asked. Confused and amused looks were leveled at him as he looked around. He sighed heavily. "What was the spell?"

Giles finally dropped the tome he had been studying and reached out to snag the book still hidden beneath Xander's hands. He looked at the spell for a moment before commenting, "Interesting. It seems to be a Celtic spell. Roughly translated, it seems to be 'Unchained Memories'. The spell is designed to return a memory of a previous life to the caster so that they can find their soulmate. The spell may be repeated as many times as necessary to find the common thread or person so that one can find the person they were meant to be with in this life."

"What about the other person?" Xander asked quietly.

"Apparently, the caster's soulmate will fall into the same trance, reliving the same

memory so that they can find each other."

The room was quiet as everyone stared at a shocked Xander until Dawn finally blurted out, "Well, who was it?"

"What?" Xander asked as everyone waited to hear about who he had seen in his memory.

"Who did you see?"

"Anyone you recognized?"

"Was I there?"

"Was it sexy? It sounded sexy."

"Stop!" Xander shouted, holding up his hands to stop the onslaught of questions from the excited girls. "I don't know. It all seems so...mixed up." His voice dropped to a whisper at the end as he searched out the eyes he had seen gazing at him with so much love.

Spike was up and off the counter before Xander could catch his eye. He shrugged his duster up onto his shoulders before sighing heavily. "Well, as exciting as this all is, I'm sure there's got to be something more exciting than sitting around and talking about the whelp's ancient love life, especially since he has the huge lack of one right now."

Xander sank in his seat. Spike didn't love him, he hated him. Just because they had once been lovers didn't mean that Spike could love him now. He watched as the blond vampire wandered over to the table, leaning down to kiss Dawn on the top of her head.

"Later, Little Bit," he said before walking behind Xander. Pretending to drop something, Spike leaned over directly behind the sulking boy. "Nice memory, Alexander. I must say that you looked a right sight in the kilt. Might have to buy you one. And, yeah, the accent was sexy."

That voice. Xander knew that voice. It was his love, his William. He turned his head to look into sparkling azure eyes. Spike nodded his head toward the door before turning to leave.

Xander waited exactly three seconds before hopping up from his seat. "Yeah, I'd better go too. Big day tomorrow." Xander yawned widely. "Gotta work, you know. Some of us are working boys, you know. Not like a working girl, but a boy...who works. So sleep so I can work."

Everyone just stared as Xander stood by the table, waiting for someone to give him his leave. Finally, he just blurted, "Bye!" He rushed toward the door before racing back to the table, pulling the book out of Giles' hands before clutching the volume to his chest.

"Just in case," he explained before rushing out the door to find the blond vampire.

The Magic Box was quiet until Xander was heading down the street, chasing down the vampire.

Dawn looked around the room and asked, "So, everyone saw that Spike fell asleep when Xander finished the spell, right?"

"Yes, Dawn," everyone grumbled.

"And everyone heard Xander say 'William', right?"

"Yes, Dawn."

The beaming teenager held out both hands, palms up, until four crisp twenty dollar bills were grudgingly placed in them. She squeed loudly and clutched her new found cash to her chest.

"I told you," she crowed as she looked around the table before staring outside at the men she'd helped bring together as everyone else went back to their research. She watched the two men as they talked quietly, small smiles on their faces and exchanging subtle touches before Xander led Spike toward his car.

"Soulmates."

She sat and stared dreamily after the men as they climbed into Xander's car and drove away. Now it was on to the next part of her plan: to figure out how to get Spike to tell her about their memories.

She could hardly wait.

The End