

Pairing: S/X

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Summary: Set in the early 1940's, Spike is a G-man sent on a mission in the Appalachian mountains to search for and destroy illegal alcohol when he has an accident. Xander is a moonshiner who takes him in

White Lightnin'

by
BmblBee

Part One

Spike was tired. Dead dog tired. He loosened his tie as he entered the building. He knew this was not the appearance of a dignified G-man, but fuck it. He couldn't be in any more trouble than he was already.

He tapped the brim of his fedora and nodded his head in acknowledgement of women he passed and continued on at an unrushed pace.

Yeah, he knew he was late, but considering they had pulled all his important assignments and given them to other agents, what did he have to hurry for?

The most important thing on his desk right now was trying to locate some missing receipts for a catered lunch of big wigs last week.

No, he figured he was as far down this ladder as the rungs would go. He really needed to pull himself together. He really needed to get his life back on track. He really needed a cup of coffee and a donut.

Making his way to his cubby hole of an office, Spike used all the stairways and back hallways he could in an attempt to miss seeing and being seen by any of the important people.

Slipping in quickly, he shut the door behind him. *'What a shit hole'* He looked around. *'Even a fuck up like me deserves better than this.'* The room in question did not answer.

It was small. Smaller than small. It had a low three drawer desk and wooden chair. A short file cabinet, which admittedly held few files, and a barred and bolted window. "Looks like a fuckin' prison cell. Hell a prison cell probably has more room than this."

Dropping into his chair, Spike unconsciously let it bounce back and forth on the old rusty springs. Barely hearing the repetitious 'squeak squeak' of the wooden seat, Spike tried for the millionth time to figure how it had all gone so wrong.

Just three years ago he was a young inspector at Scotland yard in London. He had his future all mapped out. Work his way up and some day would run the whole show.

He could see himself sitting down to lunch with Churchill, Roosevelt and other world dignitaries.

If only he wasn't the way he was. He winced. He hated that he was different than all the other men he worked side by side with.

They all wanted to run to the houses after work. Always talking about getting giggy with some hot tomato.

He tried. He really did, but his heart, and unfortunately his dick, were not there for him. Not until the shower room when they were all together after a hard day in the field.

All those men, sweaty, and wet together. He tried not to look. Hell, he gave himself credit just for not touching. Lord knows he wanted to.

London in 1938 was a very modern and progressive city. Unfortunately not progressive enough for a police inspector who was only attracted to other men. Pretty soon some of them started to notice.

Not long after some started to complain that he was getting a hard on around them and they wouldn't shower with him any more.

Setting aside a time after everyone else was done, Spike took to washing by himself.

A solution that would have worked except for one small fly in the ointment.

A small blond assistant fly by the name of Andrew.

A fly that took to buzzing around at the exact time Spike was in the shower.

Finally on the third afternoon, Spike made the first big mistake of his career.

Both wet, slippery and soapy, they kissed and fumbled around. Not sure what to do, Spike just knew it all felt right.

Turning around with his hands on the shower wall, Andrew thrust his ass out and told him to go ahead. Said he had done it before and it wouldn't hurt him.

Hesitating for only seconds, Spike did what his brain was screaming not to do.

It was a revelation.

It was everything the other men said they felt with wet pussies, only better.

Just letting his fingertip brush over Andrew's wrinkled hole made Spike's legs go weak.

Spike shoved his dick in deep. Jesus it was tight! Slippery from the soap, Spike moved quickly and smoothly.

He knew after just a minute or two he wouldn't last. It was just too wonderful. He pounded erratically and came deep inside Andrew's ass.

Spike knew whatever happened he couldn't go back to pretending any more. He was happier than he had ever been.

Andrew was quiet, but since he had orgasmed also, Spike just figured he was being careful, especially considering where they were.

After drying and dressing, Spike ask Andrew if he wanted to go to the pub. In tears, Andrew rushed away leaving Spike wondering what had just happened.

Hearing the laughter of several of the officers in the other room was when Spike first realized he had been set up. He was crushed.

He was summoned to the office of the chief of the division at a half eight the next morning.

"Good Morning Mr. Giles, Sir. You wanted to see me" Spike had entered the office right on time and dressed in his cleanest uniform.

He was well prepared to kiss some Giles ass in order to save his own. Rupert Giles sat stiffly behind his huge oak desk. Flipping through a stack of papers, he deftly avoided making eye contact.

"Yes, William Beemish is it? Come in lad. Please have a seat. I'm afraid there have been some very serious charges leveled against you. Nasty business to have to discuss."

"Charges, Sir?" Spike sat up straight and could feel himself start to sweat.

"Yes, unseemly and highly irregular charges. Young master Andrew has alleged that you accosted him in the shower yesterday"

"What?"

Spike was stunned. He knew some of the other officers hated him, and also already figured out that Andrew was a set up, but he really thought it was only to further torture him.

He never dreamed they would bring charges to headquarters. He was also trying to set aside the hurt he was dealing with over the betrayal of what to him was a life changing experience.

"No, sir. That is not what happened." Spike was getting frantic. He could see it all slipping away. Every thing he had worked for.

"Are you saying you did not have physical contact with that young man? I trust that as an inspector of The Yard you will be truthful and forth coming."

Spike knew he was fucked.

If he admitted to the sex he would be thrown out for perverse acts, a disgraceful charge that there was no recovery from.

If he denied it he would be discharged for dishonesty. Something in Scotland Yard that could not be forgiven, and with Andrew testifying against him, he was screwed.

Taking a deep breath, Spike cleared any emotion from his face and looked Rupert Giles in the eye.

"No sir. I do not deny the situation that occurred yesterday in the shower room. I do, however, claim that it was agreeable on both sides and no one was accosted."

"Yes, ahem, well you must understand that is really quite irrelevant, William, we can't possibly have someone here of less than exemplary morals."

Spike wanted to argue that hot tomatoes and wet pussies somewhat interfered with the high moral standings of the other inspectors, but knew at this point it would do no good, so he kept his mouth shut and waited to be sacked.

Having the most distasteful part of the discussion over with, Giles relaxed. "Look, William, my boy. I understand this is difficult for you. I have read your file and see that in all areas of the field you do extraordinary work. I know that you had your heart set on working and advancing here, but this makes it quite impossible."

Spike sat impassively, wondering why he was still here. Why not just get up and tell the old bird to fuck off. Break wind in the direction of his oversized desk and cushioned chair and walk out. Might even slam the door on..... "What did you say?"

"I said that we have an agreement with the government of the United States. They are interested in an exchange of information and investigative techniques. They have sent us three agents and we have sent some to them. If you are interested we could transfer you to New York to begin work at the bureau there."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then you will be sacked. Probably unemployable in any decent occupation and disgraced. Of course some circles are talking of a war on the horizon. You could always enlist in the service." Giles rocked back, his chair making no sound. A lack of noise that was not lost on William.

With a strained and unpleasant smile on his face, William rose and offered out his hand. "Looks like I'm going to the colonies."

Giles also stood and accepted the gesture. "Excellent. I will make all the arrangements and you will be off in less than a fortnight. When you arrive you will report directly to Mr. Liam O'Conner"

Holding William's hand still in both of his, Giles finally looked William in the eye. "This is a second chance, my boy. Please don't waste it."

"No sir. Thank you sir." William walked out and gently closed the door behind him. Looking down at the paper with the name and address on, William snorted.

'O'Connor. Fuckin' Irishman. Fuckin' figures'

Part Two

The crossing was nightmare.

'Doesn't the fuckin' Yard know there are air flights that transport over the pond now?' Spike wrestled his overpacked grip up the gang plank and proceeded to find his assigned state room 'Inside and lower level, of course'

Kicking the door open he swung his arm tossing the bag in ahead of him. It hit the far wall. Sighing, he stepped in to see that yes, the room really was that small. "Oh great. A full week of living in a floating mop closet."

Feeling more exiled than privileged, William wondered if he wouldn't have been better off taking his chances in London.

Surely he could have obtained employment in some related field.

He knew the truth.

Giles was right.

He had no options.

Dropping down onto the tiny bed, William put his head in his hands and wept. He felt as though he was the only man in the world that wanted to be with another man.

He had been thrilled to think he had found someone in Andrew. It had crushed him more than he was willing to admit when Andrew betrayed him.

Now he had no home, no job, no country, and no love.

Maybe he should just go up on deck and throw himself over. Curling up on his bunk, William let himself sleep.

He knew he wouldn't jump.

He was too much a coward.

The week was everything William had feared.

The days were nauseating with the ship rocking and William's stomach rolling.

Nights were worse.

The dining room was loud and ruckus. Filled with fat, loud, obnoxious American men who did little else but chew on cigars and talk of war.

Like home, these were men he had nothing in common with, and he had no interest in spending time trying to acclimate.

The women who flitted around the ship were impossible to avoid. Their inane twittering and giggling over his accent, blond hair and blue eyes made him cringe.

No, he did not wish to dance, and no, he would not care for a walk on deck. They were so bold and brazen he had taken to being just short of rude to ward them off.

As soon as he ate his dinner each evening he hurried back to his room as quickly as possible. It only depressed him more to see the couples on deck, holding hands, and kissing in the moonlight.

The days of isolation did, however, give him time to think. He would never again allow himself to be put in a situation like that. He would not be so open and vulnerable.

If Giles was right, and this was his last chance, he would make sure it worked to his best advantage. If he could succeed and exceed the time may come that he would redeem himself.

He could be so successful that they would overlook all the gossip and welcome him back home.

He could return to London.

He could return to Scotland Yard.

William felt somewhat encouraged.

He knew though that he would have to make some changes in himself. He would exude a more manly presence.

He would find a woman and force himself to have a relationship with her. He would joke with the other men and talk of vulgar things as they did.

In completing the transformation William made the decision.

From now on he would be called Spike.

It was a name and an attitude he hoped he could live up to.

Wednesday night saw the ship come alive. It was the night before they were to dock in the harbor of New York city, and the passengers seemed to celebrate without sleep all night.

William was both irritated at the disgraceful disruption and sick to his stomach from fear of facing the unknown, so he too got no sleep that night.

When he saw the sunrise out his tiny porthole he scurried about making himself and his belongings

ready. Dragging his bag up on deck he had to admit the excitement was infectious. Hundreds of people standing at the edge watching the city come up on them.

In awe he stood as they passed the Statue of Liberty. It truly was magnificent. He felt buoyed. Feeling better than he had in the last two weeks, William pulled himself up straight and heaved his bag up beside him.

This was a new start, and he would make the most of it. He was "Spike" now and although he wasn't sure who that was exactly, he knew it was someone who would succeed.

Waiting till the worst of the throng of passengers disembarked, Spike made his way off the ship. It was a madhouse of people, cargo, cars, and movement.

It was so much like London, it was almost reassuring.

'A city is just a city. How different could it be?' It was a question that would answer itself a thousand times over in the coming months.

Not sure where he was to go to procure a vehicle, Spike stood by himself looking for all the world like a lost child.

"Mr. Beemish?"

Startled, Spike turned to find a uniformed bobby smiling behind him. "Yes?" Spike watched as the attractive young man easily picked up the satchel and started with it to a waiting patrol car.

In answer to Spike's confused expression, he explained "Recognized you right away from your description, sir. You want to follow me?" Rushing to catch up, Spike apparently had no choice.

"They sent a bobby to fetch me?"

Tossing the bag into the trunk of the patrol car, the driver opened the passenger door for his charge "No, sir. They sent a Jack. Jack Tucker at your disposal."

Extending his hand, Spike accepted and shook it feeling like something in that conversation had not gone exactly right.

Jack's handshake was firm to almost painful.

"Wow, got some small hands there Mr. Beemish. Guess you high up muckety mucks don't do much hard work, Huh?"

Only a few of those words made sense, but the young man's smile still appeared sincere, so Spike

assumed he was not being insulted too badly and smiled in return.

"Yes, well, I have an address here...." Spike climbed into the large black and white car and was barely settled when the door was shut and the driver hustling to the other side.

"No sweat, boss. Know right where to take you." And with that they whipped out into the chaotic mass of movement.

Clutching wildly at the dash board, Spike felt faint when he realized no one had explained to him that cars drove on the opposite side of the road.

"Yo, you o.k. there, Boss?" Jack hoped desperately that this sissy looking man wasn't about to upchuck all over the inside of his brand new patrol car.

He would end up spending the rest of the shift cleaning it up, and even then it was a smell that never really went away.

"I am quite all right, thank you. Will we arrive soon?"

"Sure will, quicker than a rabbits hop. So, you gonna work for the bureau. huh? Big guy's a real peach. You spend your time pullin' yer weight and not yer pud and he won't bust yer chops."

Spike made no move to respond. He was given the impression that people in the colonies spoke the same english as the British, but nothing this young man was saying made sense.

He further found he was very uncomfortable with the familiarity with which this bobby spoke to him. It was something that would never be tolerated by the inspectors at the Yard.

The underlings knew their place and treated their superiors with due respect. Resorting to the one thing that seemed to satisfy the officer, Spike smiled and nodded.

Suddenly slamming on the brakes and cutting over two lanes of highway, Spike cringed as horns blew and driver's yelled.

"Pay them no mind. Cop's privilege,"

Laughing at Spike's shocked face, Jack turned into the parking lot of a huge twenty story building. "We're here."

Pulling into a roped off section of spaces, Jack hopped out and opened Spike's door. "You good or you want I should take you up to his office?"

As there was no way he wanted to be abandoned in this alien area, Spike stepped back as Jack

heaved Spike's belongings
out of the trunk. "I would be most grateful for an escort, Mr. Tucker."

"Sure thing. No sweat, Boss." Swinging the clutch effortlessly over his shoulder, Jack took off at a brisk walk that Spike had to hustle to keep up with.

Around the corner, out of sight, was a row of elevators. Spike tried to memorize all the steps they were taking in hopes of being able to find his way back, but knew it was hopeless.

Watching the arrow on the numbers, the elevator stopped on a "ding" as the "12" lit up on the top. The door slid open to a world of activity. People rushing by, typewriters clacking, phones ringing, and voices all apparently trying to out shout the other.

Without pause, Jack stepped out and turned to the left, Spike close behind. Apparently Jack was well known as everyone he passed had something to say, and he a snappy retort.

"Hey Jack, my man, what's shaking?"

"All eight inches after a leak, Bill"

"Morning, Jack. Looking good this morning."

"Back at'ch, Baby. How 'bout we swing to some platters some time?"

And on it went. Spike wondered what it took to be that well liked.

Stopping so quickly Spike nearly ran into his back, Jack pointed at an office door.

"This is it. Go on in. Secretary in the outer office will take care of you. Real slick chick by the name of Buffy. Tell her who you are and she'll introduce you to the head honcho. Good luck, Man."

And with a near painful smack on the back, Jack was gone, presumably to establish a time and place that he and the overly painted female could "swing to some platters".

Rapping twice on the door, Spike opened it and stepped in.

Part Three

Knocking twice, Spike enter a small functional office. It had dark wood paneled walls, with wooden desks and straight back chairs. Each desk had a goose neck lamp, a large black telephone and a cup of pencils.

The only difference in them was that the first also had a typewriter. Spike assumed that signified some type of seniority, so this was the one he approached.

Both desks were occupied by women. Something that was rare back in London. Snorting, he was firmly of the belief that women should be home tending to their duties.

Before he had the chance to announce himself, the blond that had been pounding away on the typewriter jumped up and rushed around the desk to greet him.

Stepping back to take in her appearance, the only word he could conjure up was "floozy".

She wore a sweater that must have been deliberately purchased a size too small, and a skirt that flipped loosely around her knees suggesting she was wearing only one under slip. Scandalous!

Her blond hair was pulled up in a thick rolling curl around her face. Her nails and lips were painted blood red. Glancing down it occurred to him that secretaries in this country must make very good money to be able to afford silk stockings.

Ones that she obviously made sure had very straight seams. When his eyes finally hit the floor, he was stunned to see she was brazenly wearing high heels. To work in!

"Hi. See anything you like?"

Snapping him out of his musing, Spike's eyes immediately met those of the blond who was now standing directly in front of him.

"What? Well I never. I'll have you know....."

"Hey, no biggy. Just joshing is all. I'm Buffy. Can I help you?"

Regaining his composure, Spike smoothed his suit jacket and fussed with the handkerchief that was tucked in his breast pocket.

"Yes. I am William Beemish. I am to see Mr. O'Connor in regards to my position."

"Wow! Listen to you talk. You hear him talk, Faith?"

The dark haired girl at the other desk had been watching the exchange with a grin. Winking, she sat

back in her chair.

"Sure did. Real classy. Better show him in before we gobble him up."

Positive he was being mocked, Spike clenched his jaw and tightened his hands.

Flouncing over, Buffy tapped on the frosted glass of a door on the side of the room. Sticking her head in, she announced him

"Hey, boss. Got a William Beemer out here to see you."

"Beemish" He attempted, but was ignored.

"Thanks Darlin'. Show him in." The voice was deep and strong.

Spike was ready.

"Go on in, Mr. Beemer, and if you want some coffee or anything, you know where I am."

"It's Beemish, and no thank you." Spike stepped in and closed the door behind.

"Wow, he's dreamy." Buffy floated back to her desk. "Real cat's meow."

"I guess. Kinda girly though." Faith looked at the office door appraisingly, then returned to her work.

The man behind the desk rose as Spike entered and extended his hand. "Liam O'Connor"

'Firm grip. Firm grip' Spike kept telling himself.

"Got some soft hands there, William." Sitting back down, he motioned for Spike to take the chair in front of the desk.

Straightening his back bone Spike corrected him. "Spike, sir. I go by the name of Spike."

Confusion wrinkled Liam's brow and he flipped through the papers in the file on his desk. Flinching, Spike wondered what all was in that file. He really wanted to start here with a clean slate and hoped his past problems would not have followed him.

"Doesn't say anything about that. But to be honest, it really doesn't say much of anything. I know you scored high marks on whatever written tests you took at your old job, and that you're here on one of those exchange of information programs.

Gotta be frank here Wil - Spike. Don't have much use for London Police tactics. We do things a certain way. If you can adapt, you're welcome. If not, well,"

"No, sir. I can adapt very well. I just want to learn your way of doing things and do a good job."

"Great! Great. Then we're good to go. Just one other thing. A couple lines in here about some trouble you got into doing the nasty with another inspector. Real modern of you folks to have women inspectors, but we can't have that happening here. Can't shit where you eat, so to speak. Keep 'er zipped, Spike."

Spike was absolutely mortified. He had no intention of discussing this matter, but was slightly glad for the misunderstanding. He made no move to correct the fact that it was not a female.

"No sir." He stuttered, unable to lift his eyes from his lap. "It is not a situation that will ever repeat itself."

"Good man." Leading Spike to the office door, Liam yelled "Buffy! Darlin' have someone show Spike here to the dorm rooms." Turning to Spike he explained "That will give you a chance to get settled into the job and get some money under your belt. Then you can find an apartment later. Sound o.k.?"

Nodding his relief, Spike had no idea how to finding a living space. This was an excellent solution, and encouraged him that the direction of his future was right.

"Follow me, dreamboat." Buffy bounced off toward the elevators, Spike collected his bag and followed trying to both keep up and keep back.

"Spike, huh? Can't wait to find out what that means."

Spike offered no response. Buffy looked like trouble. He knew he wanted people to think he was a real woman's man, but definitely not this woman.

Stepping outside, Spike feared he was going to have to get in another vehicle. Something he dreaded, and the thought of Buffy piloting said vehicle sent shivers up his spine.

"It's just a block away, we can walk." Bouncing ahead, she did not see the relief show on his face.

They stopped in front of a large victorian three story house, turning, she smiled. "This is it. I can't come in." Leaning in uncomfortably close, she whispered "No women."

Giggling she started back the way they came but paused to shout over her shoulder. "Go on in. Someone will take care of you. Hey, don't be a stranger. Come up and see me sometime."

The last part was said with such flourish, Spike was sure it was some type of reference, but it confounded him as to what so he just shook his head. Climbing the steps, he entered the front door.

The foyer was large, warm and welcoming. It had light painted walls with wide, thick, dark wood work. The carpet was rich colors and patterns. It felt thick and plush under his feet.

Off to the left was a library. Several men were talking easily in there. Some smoking. Some sharing a bottle of wine.

It was relaxed and masculine.

Spike wanted very much to be part of all this.

Part Four

Surprisingly, Spike settled quickly into the house and job. Because he was close, he was able to walk to work and avoid the vehicles and traffic. There was a small diner down the street and everything he needed was at hand.

The other agents accepted him and tried to help him acclimate to the way of life he was presently in. They did tease him constantly, but he learned to take it good naturally as they also teased each other.

Avoiding Buffy was easier than he feared since it was obvious she had strong interests in Liam O'Connor. Called him "Angel", sometimes to his face.

Spike was shocked.

Liam was amused.

Apparently he shared her interest.

The only problems he had were in adapting to the way things were done in the States. The guns, the shooting, the talk of and the dealing with gangsters. It was all so much more violent than he had known back in London.

In the beginning he had been called into Mr. O'Connor's office twice for discipline, but now had perfected the fine art of invisibility.

Then it happened. The second biggest mistake of his career.

It started on the Saturday night at the end of his first year in New York. It was the night before one of his fellow agents was to be married.

Some of the others were holding what they called a bachelor party. Spike had never heard of such a thing and had no idea what it involved, but they insisted he come.

It was to be held in a downtown night club called "Gangsters Roost". Prohibition had been repealed some eight years ago, so bars and night clubs had reopened and multiplied. They were on every street and some back alleys. It was frowned upon for agents to patronize them.

Catching a ride with some of the men in the dorm house, the party was already in full swing when they arrived. Reluctantly accepting the champagne, Spike took his first drink. After three more he was soundly drunk.

Dragging him onto the dance floor, a tall dark haired woman clung to him relentlessly. Despite his insistence that he didn't want to dance, she demanded.

Introduced herself as Drusilla.

Dru to her friends.

Apparently they had become friends.

She danced till he was dizzy and she talked of swimming with fishes. It was all very confusing. Unnoticed, the party had moved on to another club, leaving Spike behind.

Just as he was about to demand she allow him to leave, a fight broke out at the bar. Glasses were broken and shots were fired.

Screaming with laughter, Dru grabbed Spike's hand and ran with him out into the night. Begging her to take him home, Spike could take no more. He was sick, drunk, and dead tired.

How he got home he never could remember.

He thought his head would explode and it felt like someone had rubbed dirty underwear over his tongue.

Cracking an eye open he was relieved to see that it was morning and he was back in his own room. Safe and sound.

Or not.

Just as he was about to drift back off, the sound of frantic pounding came to his door. Without waiting for his response, several men charged in, all in uniform and followed close behind by Liam

O'Connor.

"Get up Spike."

Pointing to the bed Liam yelled at one of the policemen "Get her out of here!"

It wasn't till then that Spike realized Dru was lying nude and spread open beside him.

Covering his nakedness, Spike tried desperately to remember what had happened the night before. Dismissing the others, Liam sat down on the edge of Spike's bed.

"Look, Spike, I don't know what kind of carrying on is o.k. in London, and a few years ago this type of shit would probably be overlooked, but fact is, a new wind is blowing through Washington.

President is screaming about all government agents being cleancut and above board. Know what I mean? I can see you fancy yourself some kind of cock hound with women, but I warned you.

This office here in New York is one of Washington's most important and they watch us like a hawk. Can't afford this type of scandal.

Now you've been identified as being drunk in the Gangsters Roost when that mob boss got shot last night. And then we find you in bed with a well known prostitute in a men's only dorm."

Spike's ears were hearing all the words, but his brain was having a great deal of trouble processing.

"Sir, please. It isn't how it seems."

Holding up his hands effectively silenced Spike.

"Can't just send you back, not without causing an international incident, President wants this kept hush hush. So tell you what we're gonna do. There's a small apartment down on 123th st. We use it sometimes for witness.' We are going to move you in there for a short time till we can reassign you. Now get dressed. One of the men will take you there."

'Cock hound with women'? The irony of the situation was not lost on Spike, but seeing no alternative, he packed.

The "short time" turned into nine long months. Months of just enough of a paycheck for the rent, food, and thank God, booze.

Finally Spike could do something right.

He could drink like a champ.

He stayed away from women, and drank away all thoughts of men.

And waited.

It was on a Monday morning.

The call came early.

He was summoned to O'Conner's office.

Told to be there at 10:00 a.m. Promptly!

Showering, shaving, and brushing his teeth, Spike tried his best to clear his brain and his bloodshot eyes.

This time when he reached the outer office, Buffy did not bubble, and Faith did not look up. Opening the inner door she was short. "He's here" and stood back while he passed.

'Well fuck it' Spike didn't give a fuck what the bitch thought. Frankly he didn't give a fuck what "Angel" thought either.

Standing by the door, he waited. What was it to be? Sacked? Sent home? Didn't much matter. He was ruined either way.

"Well sir?"

"Sit down, William"

Spike didn't care enough to correct him.

"We have a new assignment for you. I still think you can be a good agent, William. You got off badly, but I have every confidence that you can pull yourself up."

"Yes, sir, boot straps and all." Spike really needed a drink for this shit.

His brain was screaming, *'Just fuckin' spit it out, you ass'* His face was smiling and nodding.

"Anyway, I think you'll like this. A whole change of pace. Something new and exciting."

Liam waited.

Spike obliged. "Yes, sir?"

"We are sending you to Arkansas. You'll be based in the main office in Little Rock, but will be out in the field."

The only words his brain could collect together were *'What the fuck?'* Spike's face must have shown his confusion

"As you know, William, prohibition was ended years ago. However, during the time it was in effect, an industry known as bootlegged sprang up. Bath tub gin. That type of thing.

Unfortunately it has only grown more prevalent in the years since the law was changed. We send some our best agents out into the field to locate and destroy these illegal operations. We have decided this would be a good opportunity for you to get back into the swing of things."

Slowly Spike stood up, unbuttoned his suit coat and loosened his tie. "Let me get this shit straight. You want to send me down to the middle of Bum Fuck Egypt to sniff out some rot gut that a bunch of backwoods ass holes are cooking up in a tub? And you're sending me there because I'm one of your best fuckin' agents. That about right?" Spike's face screwed up in a sneer that would take up permanent residence there.

Refusing to waste any more time or patience on this loser, Liam returned to his paperwork. Handing Spike an envelope without looking up he continued. "This is your letter of introduction and a bus ticket. Although you will report there, I will still be your superior. Your boss. Don't fuck this up! Pack your shit, Spike you leave in one hour."

He was dismissed.

The bus trip was two days long. He arrived both road sick and half drunk.

He was not welcomed with open arms.

He did for the first six months try to get on the right track, but his life was already sliding further down.

His boss was an intelligent middle aged man by the name of Harvey Price who had started him out in this little shit of an office. He was assigned to the paperwork division.

Even that seemed too much for him.

After several serious fuck ups that often cost the state legal cases, Spike was given the most unimportant projects they could find.

'Fuck it' Spike didn't care.

So in retrospect, he decided, that's how he got here. How it had all gone wrong.

Snapping himself out of his brooding, he answered the phone just to stop the damn ringing.

"Spike. Get your ass in my office. Got you a new assignment. And don't fuckin' be late. It might be your last."

Part Five

Xander hustled out into the cool morning mountain air. His cock was stiff and ached with the need for an early wake up piss. He thought about trying to make it to the out house, but fuck it, if his old hound, Bubba could use a tree, so could he.

Fishing around in the front of his bib overalls, he grabbed hold of his best friend and freed him into the shock of cold air.

'Ahhh' The hot stream of urine steamed as it hit the tree trunk and ran to the ground. His ground.

Thanks to his Grandpa, he owned not only the old family cabin, but fifty acres of fertile earth that surrounded it. Off in the distance he could see the mist laying heavy over the tops of the Appalachian mountains.

It was a sight that had to make heaven envious.

Shaking off, he tucked himself away and started back to the cabin for a hot cup of coffee and a look at the books. He may be a bootlegger, but he was also a hell of a business man.

After all just because he got a free ride through four years of college on a football scholarship, didn't mean he was stupid.

He had studied hard and graduated with high marks.

Several corporations had approached him with lucrative business offers, but none of them interested him. He had been away too long. He wanted to come home.

He remembered how it had been upon his return.

The cabin was in disrepair when he arrived.

Abandoned and empty some ten years now.

The roof had blown off and animals were nesting in the bedroom.

He jumped in the first day and finished up just as the first snows of winter swirled in. Most of Arkansas stayed fairly warm, but winter in the mountains was isolating and difficult. It was everything he loved.

Walking back, he stopped behind the cabin and studied the area around, as he did daily. Couldn't be too careful.

Those fuckin' revenuers were always finding and busting up any stills they could sniff out.

Came right onto a man's property, they did. Just wasn't fuckin' American!

He was luckier than most. His still was set back into a wooded area that could not be reached from behind and no one could approach from the front without being seen.

Anyone who did stumble upon his cabin would only find a simple halfwitted soul who survived by trapping coon and beaver for food and hide and growing corn and veggies in a garden at the clearing.

Satisfied the property was unchanged, he continued back down the path. The next stop was a large ramshackle barn that sat about fifty feet from the back door of his home.

Checking the padlock on the barn door, he tugged it firmly to make sure it was secure. Inside this barn was his true pride and joy. The most valuable thing he owned.

Inside sat a glorious, 1939, shiny black, Lincoln V12, sedan. He had bought it wrecked his first month home and lovingly restored it. The already powerful motor had been punched up, and nothing in the state could touch it.

Xander knew that was where the real money was. Any old farmer could throw together a still and make a little corn mash, but the real money was selling to the local dealers and taverns.

And that took a first class rumrunner.

Someone who could out drive the law.

That took Xander.

Like anything else, he considered it a business. You took care of your equipment and used the elements to your best advantage. The back seat had been removed and packing crates were installed.

He could carry and deliver more crocks undamaged than any of those other fools who hauled in the beds of beat down pick up trucks. Wasn't no money in delivering broken crocks.

Hustling on back to the cabin, Xander stirred the hot coals in the fireplace and put on the pot for coffee. Tonight was a full moon and he had a lot of work to do today.

He liked to do his major deliveries at night when the moonlight lit the backroads. It meant he could drive like a bat out of hell with no headlights on. Law wouldn't even try to catch him tonight.

Tossing back a rag rug that laid on the floor in front of his bed, Xander lifted a loose slat and removed a metal box and thick bound ledger that were hidden there.

Opening the box, he counted the money and satisfied himself that it was all there. He then sat down on the bed to review the figures he had carefully logged. Convincing himself that all was as it should be, he replaced the items and carefully covered all with the worn throw.

Anxious to get started, Xander swallowed the last of the coffee and set the cup in the wash tub he used as a sink.

Circling the cabin he entered the open ended shed at the side. In there he kept all the innocent looking equipment a mountain dweller might use to live simply.

He pulled out his wheel barrow and pushed it, whistling, to the barn. Using a key from his pocket, Xander unlocked the barn and wheeled inside.

Stopping for a moment, he ran his hand slowly down the side of the car. "Got us a run tonight, Sweetheart. Just you and me as always. Don't want no woman, and can't have no man so it looks like it's you and me and by best friend Lefty on them lonely nights."

Xander chuckled humorlessly. He had money, a home in the mountains he loved, and thanks to a serious football injury, no worry about being drafted if the rumors of war were true.

Still, he sometimes missed the company and companionship of other men. He also missed the sex.

College had given him more than an education of the books. It had also schooled him in the secrets

of his heart. There had been several different college boys he had experimented with and he knew where his proclivity lie.

"Someday." He sighed. "Maybe someday God will just drop the perfect man right into my lap." Laughing, he wheeled over to a stack of sack corn and started loading them into the barrow.

Casually tossing the heavy loads in he whistled an old tune that constantly ran through his brain.

"We're in the money.
We're in the money.
We got a lot of what it takes to get along."

Leaving the barn, he relocked and double checked the padlock. Humming, he started off down the path to the still. Darting through the trees he was almost there when he heard it.

It was the unmistakable sound of a car crash followed by the unwavering blare of a horn stuck on blast.

Xander paused, suspicious. He then gave everything a quick check over and satisfied that all was right, he ran for the road.

The only road that led to his property. A road nobody had any business being on.

Part Six

Leaping effortlessly over the underbrush and darting around the well known obstacles, Xander rushed through the woods that he knew like the back of his hand. It wasn't hard to locate. He just followed the sound of the horn.

Reaching the road, Xander found it. The car had slid off the narrow road and slammed into a tree.

'Had to have been going at a hell of a speed' Xander noted. That was the only thing that would account for the way the entire front end of the solid chevy had buckled like an accordion. Steam rolled out of the crushed hood, and the horn continued to scream.

Approaching cautiously, Xander saw that the driver's door was slightly ajar. Pulling it open, he peered inside.

The driver was slumped over, lying face first on the bench seat. Reaching in to feel for a pulse in the man's neck, Xander was assaulted with the smell of whisky. "Figures. Fuckin' drunk"

Xander knew it was hypocritical, but he had no use for people who drank then made fools of

themselves. He himself did not drink. Not a drop.

For him it was all about selling a product. Thanks to whisky, his own father, Tony Harris, had been a drunk. Started when Xander's mother died of cancer when he was ten. Continued on till Tony's death of liver disease the week Xander was graduating from college.

But, hey, this was a free country and capitalism was the name of the game. He would make it, they would buy it, and everybody got what they wanted.

Quickly clamping down on his conscience, he reached in and pressed his fingertips against the man's jugular. The pulse felt strong and regular. *'Well, least he ain't dead. That would have been a mess to deal with'*

Before he went any further Xander went around to the front of the car and reached in under the hood. He didn't need to see to know which wire would shut off the horn. Feeling around, he found and yanked. The silence that followed was blissful.

Standing back, Xander took a few moments to assess the situation. The car had crashed on the back road about one hundred yards from the lane that led to his property.

It was impossible to determine if the driver intended to continue on straight or if Xander's home was his destination. That was a thought that made him extremely uncomfortable.

Deciding the driver was in no real danger of dying, Xander set about searching for the answers to his questions and concerns. Opening the back door, he sat on the seat behind the driver.

There were two carry alls and a cardboard box. Checking it first, the box contained a full set of encyclopedias and an order book.

A traveling salesman?

Maybe.

Something about it didn't feel right.

Popping the latch on the first suitcase he found just what would be expected. Clean underwear, handkerchiefs, a couple white shirts, a pair of pajamas, and an extra pair of suit pants.

Resecuring it, he reached over and lifted the other. It was much heavier and made a familiar sound. Flipping the lid revealed it was full of bottles.

Two empty and four full. Whisky. Cheap.

Xander snorted knowing his shine is probably a higher quality drink than this shit. *'Must not be much money in sellin' books.'*

Putting everything back exactly as it was he returned to the driver and rolled him over.

Xander gasped.

This was the most beautiful man he had ever seen. It took all the strength he could muster to not lean down and kiss those soft pink lips.

Gently, he brushed the blond curls back from the man's face. That's when he felt the hard, raised goose egg that was rapidly expanding on his temple.

He had taken a lot of hard hits playing football and was always told that if the knot comes on the outside of the head you will recover o.k.

The problem comes if the swelling is on the inside. *'Well this lump is definitely an outy so guess you're going to be alright. Now the question is what to do with you.'*

Standing back with his hands on his hips, Xander looked around as if by magic the solution to his problem would emerge from the trees.

"Shit. Can't just leave you here. Sure the hell ain't gonna try to take you to the law. They'd lock me up for sure. Wouldn't even care about no explanation and the nearest hospital is a hundred miles away"

Pausing in his rant at the silent man, Xander knew what he had to do. "God damn fuckin' cock suckin' drunk!"

He kicked the side of the wrecked car soundly, injuring his toe. "OW! Fuck!"

Reaching in, Xander grabbed the man by the legs and jerked roughly. Pulling him from the car, he flung the limp figure over his shoulder fireman style and headed for the cabin. "Sure ain't much to ya, is there? Light as a feather really."

Xander placed his hand firmly over the man's butt to steady him. Feeling the tight small ass caused his cock to twitch. He hoped to God he wasn't making the biggest mistake of his life.

Reaching the cabin, Xander pushed open the door with his foot, ducked his head through the doorway and went straight for the small bedroom area dropping his load like a sack of corn meal onto the bed. Xander continued to bitch.

"Why the fuck did I bring him here? I just know this ain't gonna be nothin' but trouble." Looking down at his now erect eager cock Xander knew exactly who to blame.

"What the hell do you think you want? Sure as hell ain't none of that. So now my hand ain't good enough for you? Well tough shit cause it's all your gonna get."

His cock may have one eye, but it apparently had no ears cause it didn't hear a word he said. It continued to swell and ache. "Oh, hell. Come on buddy, lets go out back and see what we can do about that."

Xander left the injured man sleep while he took his wayward cock to the wood pile for a serious spanking.

Part Seven

Even with the cold air, it took only minutes for the talk with Xander's cock to reach it's inevitable climax. Again shaking it off, he tucked himself away and returned to the warmth of the cabin. Checking his patient, Xander was not surprised to see he was still out cold.

Putting a pan of water by the fire, he waited till it warmed. Returning to the man's bedside, Xander removed the handkerchief from his suit pocket and dipped it in the pan. Wiping his patients face he noticed that a small amount of blood from a hairline cut, and the rapidly bruising temple were the only things marring the beauty of the sleeper's face.

Xander dropped the cloth back in the water and ran his hand over the unresponsive face. It was smooth as a baby's bottom. Xander wondered how often, if ever, he had to shave.

He then did the one thing he was most uncomfortable doing. He began a search of the man's pockets for information and identification.

He first removed the shoes, checked the soles for hidden pockets and set them under the edge of the bed. Next he slid off the trousers. The underwear matched that which was in the suitcase. If it had been different, the case could have been a plant.

Checking all the pockets, he found .32 cents, a small packet of headache powder, and a four leaf clover. Tossing the pants over a chair, he next peeled off the jacket. The lower side pockets held nothing. That in itself seemed suspicious, but he reserved opinion.

The inside breast pocket contained what he had been seeking. The man's wallet. Opening it he counted four one dollar bills.

A driver's license that gave his name as William Beemish of New York City. "Well, well Mr. Beemish. You certainly have come a long way. What is it you're looking for way out here."

Xander cocked his head to the side and studied the closed face of his patient. Behind the license was a business card that stated he was indeed an encyclopedia salesman.

Studying the card, he was struck by the feel of it. If he truly was traveling around showing this card to people and attempting to make a sale, why was the card so stiff and new feeling?

Placing the jacket on top of the pants, he quickly took off the button down shirt, leaving only an undershirt and boxers.

Covering him up with a heavy worn quilt, Xander sat back down at the hand made table and chair to think things through.

'Fuck. This couldn't have come at a worst time. Everything was running so smoothly. Got several big money customers expecting delivery tonight and no way to contact them.

But that might not be the biggest problem. What if this is a G-man. A revenuer

Pausing again he studied his visitor. 'Sure don't look like one. Wasn't no way this one would have the strength to swing an axe and bust up a still. Maybe he is just what he seems. Then what? Can't keep him'

Staring at his crotch he admonished, 'You heard me, you bastard. You can't have him!'

Sighing, Xander knew if he was going to try to make his deliveries tonight he needed to get packed. Checking the sleeping man one more time, he slipped quietly out the door.

Grabbing the wheel barrow he hurried back the path to the hidden still. Dumping out the sacks of corn mash for the next cooking, he started to load up with liquor filled crocks.

Returning to the barn, he took the key out of his pocket and unlocked the padlock. Wheeling the load into the barn he transferred the jugs to the crates in his car.

Rushing back, he repeated the process two more times. Finally securing the last of the liquor, he left the barn and reattached the lock and double checked it.

His order this week was more than usual and the preparation had taken most of the morning and into

the afternoon.

Afraid he had pushed his luck too far, he returned to the cabin. Upon entering he was relieved to see Mr. Beemish had not moved.

Hungry from the day's work, Xander took a jar of soup beans he had canned last fall from the shelf and dumped them in a pan by the fire. When they were heated, he sat at the table with a spoon and the pan. Not much need of using a plate when you ate alone.

"Oh, sorry. You hungry?" Xander lifted his spoon in the direction of the sleeping man. "No? Well let me know if you change your mind." Satisfied with the answer, or lack of, he continued to eat.

"Haven't had any one here to talk to before now. You don't mind do you?"

No response.

Xander continued "Get's kind of lonely up here. Not that I mind. Hell no. Had the chance to leave. To live in the city, but that just weren't me. Gotta know where your home is. Gotta know who you are. Know what I mean? What's that? Nope, never been to New York. So that where you were born Mr. Beemish? What? O.k. Billy, it is."

Xander finished his beans and had to admit it was very companionable to sit back and have someone to visit with.

Checking the time on his watch, Xander stretched and yawned. "Well, Billy, I hate to be rude but I'm workin' the midnight shift tonight so I believe I will take me a little snooze. No, no. Please don't concern yourself. I'm fine right here."

Throwing a quilt on the floor in front of the fire place, Xander curled up and went to sleep.

Part Eight

Spike moaned turning his head to the side. Prying one eye open in a squint, he tried to force it to focus. Thank God he was well familiar with alcoholic hallucinations.

If not he might have really thought he was lying in a cabin, a warm cozy cabin, with - hello - a sexy man sleeping on the floor. *'Damn, maybe I died and this is heaven'*

Trying to remember what he had done earlier or at least how much he had to drink, Spike's brain came up a blank.

Deciding it was all something he could think about later, he turned his aching head around and slipped back into sleep.

Stretching his back and listening to each vertebrae snap into alignment, Xander woke and mentally readied himself for tonight's run. The sun was already down and near as he could figure it was probably after 10 p.m. Learning long ago to trust his instincts, Xander knew he could estimate the time to within fifteen minutes and seldom needed a clock

Silently climbing to his feet, he tiptoed over to his visitor to check his status.

Still breathing. Check

No bleeding. Check

Still unconscious. Double check.

Tomorrow morning after he got a little sleep if Mr. Beemish still would not wake up, he would make some decisions. Right now he couldn't think about anything but the run. He knew it took all his concentration and could not afford the distraction of anything else.

Washing his face and hands in the wash pan, Xander stoked the fire and quietly slipped out the door. Fishing in his pocket he pulled out the key and unlocked the barn. Just because Beemish's condition appeared unchanged, Xander knew he could not take any chances.

Pulling the gear shifter in to neutral, Xander pushed the Lincoln out of the barn and relocked the door. Thank the stars he had loaded it earlier. Even with the full moon, there was just enough cloud cover that it was a darker night than he had anticipated.

Climbing behind the wheel, Xander pressed down the clutch and allowed the car to roll forward down the lane and towards the back road he would take to make his deliveries.

Once he felt he was enough of a distance from the cabin and had a good speed coasting, Xander popped the clutch and the engine roared to life.

He wasted no time in slamming it into second and on a double clutch, third. The adrenalin kicked in, as it always did, and he was off with a "Whoop!"

It was one of those nights that just went like clockwork. Each customer was on time and the deliveries went off without a hitch. Everybody paid without threat and next weeks orders were higher than usual.

Time and the Lincoln flew by. Both flashing in the moonlight like a ghost.

Checking the sky he calculated it would be daybreak in a couple of hours and he was down to his last stop. This was an out of town juke joint run by an old man name of Joe Smith.

Joe called his place "Percy's" and he was easily Xander's favorite customer. He was short, balding, and always chewed an unlit cigar.

He had told Xander once that they were too expensive to light, but he just couldn't kick the habit. He always saved him for last and took just a few minutes to chat. Xander had often wondered who "Percy" was but never got around to asking.

"Hey Joe. How they hanging?" Xander transferred his jugs from the crate in the back of the Lincoln to the bed of Joe's truck. and in turn took the empties from last week shipment.

He then finished up by throwing a stained oil cloth tarp over the loaded truck bed and tied it down.

"Xander, my favorite boy. They are hanging lower than they used to, and the old woodie got no more bark." He laughed and grabbed Xander in a bear hug. "Why you never come to see me?"

"You know I don't drink, Joe. Just ain't my thing."

"You ain't gotta drink to come visit an old man." Joe rolled the cigar to the other side of his mouth and shook his finger at Xander's smiling face.

"You're right. I promise to come see you for a cup of coffee, o.k?"

Changing tone Xander leaned against his car. "Hey, Joe, you ain't heard nothing about a new revenue in these parts have you?"

Taking the cigar out of his mouth, Joe spit the stray pieces of tobacco out to the ground.

"You seen somebody? There a stranger round here?"

"No."

Not sure why the lie, Xander suddenly felt the need to get back. "No, just wondered is all."

"Ain't heard nothin', but it don't hurt to be extra careful. You the best driver in these parts, and got the best shine. My customers always askin' for your stuff. Sides you one of the few shiners ain't never made nobody go blind from your shit. That's real quality."

"Thanks, Joe." Xander collected his pay for the shipment and hopped back in the car. Rolling down

the window, he waved
his hand out. "Take care, Joe. See ya next week."

Xander was already gone and missed the answering "Be careful, Xander. Don't take no chances!"

Flying back down the road, Xander hit his lane and slowed the cars engine to a hum. He pulled up in, and cringing at the rumble of the car's idle, he jumped out and opened the barn door.

As quietly as possible he parked and secured it. Creeping back into the cabin, he briefly checked the stranger then laid down on the floor exhausted.

Both men remained where they were for the next eight hours. The cabin cooled as the fire slowly died, and the light of day flooded the room.

Finally hunger, thirst, and the overwhelming need to piss nudged at Spike's body and caused him to rouse. Opening his eyes, the first thing he noticed was the wooden beams of the cabin ceiling.

'What the fuck?' Rolling his head to the side he noticed the man on the floor and had a sudden moment of *deja vu*.

Struggling to remember, it gradually came to him that he had wakened up earlier to what he had assumed was another game of the mind.

Not like he hadn't wakened up before in very strange places, he found the best thing to do was to slip out quietly and pretend nothing had happened, which usually it hadn't.

Attempting to swing his legs over the side of the bed shot white hot shocks of pain straight up his spine and splintered in his head

"God Damn!"

The pain that traveled through his head felt like a sledge hammer. He'd had some hangovers in the past but this was way out of the realm of 'one too many'

Spike had a really bad feeling about this.

Part Nine

Xander woke up and jumped to his feet instantly when Spike screamed. Snatching his six inch skinning knife off the fireplace mantle he turned in the direction of the voice and raised his arm.

With his eyes closed and lost in the haze of his own pain, Spike was unaware of the reaction he had caused or the danger he was in. Moaning in agony, Spike clutched his head and tried to straighten his legs.

The desperate sound was all it took to snap Xander to alertness and bring back the flood of memory that explained the stranger, Mr. Beemish's, presence.

Replacing the knife, he tugged up his overalls and went to the bedside. "Take it easy, Mr. Beemish" Xander kept his distance while trying to sound as gentle and comforting as he could. As Xander's voice slipped into his pain soaked brain, Spike turned his face to the side and opened his eyes.

Xander involuntarily took a step back.

He had never see eyes that blue.

They gave the man's face a whole different appearance.

Suddenly Xander could see himself gliding closer. Dropping his bibs from his body as he inched nearer. He could feel the man's breath on the palm of his hand as Xander brushed his fingers over the closed eyes, cheek bones, and lips of this angelic face.

He could imagine lowering himself over the slighter body and feeling it squirm under him. Smelling his hair, Tasting his mouth, hearing those moans as he caressed and entered.....

"Who the fuck are you and where the fuck am I? And the name's Spike, not Mr. Beemish!"

'Oh yeah, angel has a potty mouth'

Xander smirked, then checked himself as reality knocked and entered the picture. This was still a stranger and Xander had way too much to lose to risk it on a pretty face and a tight ass.

Easily cloaking himself in his simple hillbilly routine, Xander looped his thumbs in his bib overalls and smiled openly.

"You hurt pretty bad mister? Ya wrecked yer car up the road a piece and I brung ya here. Ya been sleeping fer the longest.

Pert'near a whole day."

Spike laid there staring through pain wracked eyes. *'Oh dear God. Just my luck. Best looking guy*

I've seen in years

and he's a fuckin' imbecile. Christ, I need a drink and a piss followed immediately by a bullet through my brain'

"See here Lil Abner, I need a piss, a drink, and possibly a doctor. I think I'm paralyzed." Spike gritted his teeth trying to control the agony and panic.

Trying not to show too much concern, Xander figured the best thing to do was keep his distance emotionally and get this guy on his feet and the hell off Xander's mountain just as soon as was physically possible.

Everything about him was unsettling. The face, the eyes, the accent. There were a couple of boys at college that talked like that, so Xander knew he must be from England. That only added to the question of what the hell he was doing way out here.

"Well, let's take care of the piss first. Seeing as how ya cain't git up, yer gonna hafta piss in a bucket."

Xander rushed out of the cabin to the shed for a metal pail. Taking a few minutes to compose himself, he wandered back the path and relieved his own full bladder.

Xander had never been one of those men who let his dick rule his life. He had his priorities and never made a decision with out weighing all the pros and cons carefully.

He had worked too hard to build up a life and business to let something as stupid as his cock throw it all away. Shaking said cock a little harder than usual as warning to it, he tucked himself away, grabbed the pail and returned to the cabin.

"Christ! I'm about to fuckin' bust here, Joe Bob. You gonna help me out or what?" Wincing in pain, Spike did his best to sound brave. Truth was he was terrified. He couldn't move his legs and his head was trying to explode behind his eyes.

Taking a deep breath, Xander approached with the bucket on one hand and reaching for the strangers dick with the other.

"Whoa, what the fuck you doing? I said I couldn't move my legs. Never said nothing about my hands."

Jumping back Xander mentally slapped himself. Just what the hell was he doing?

Stepping back in, he held it down while Spike pulled his hard cock from his boxers.

Xander couldn't help but stare.

It was big.

Long and thick.

Pink and hooded.

Uncut.

Unconsciously Xander licked his lips.

Letting go with what felt like gallons of hot stored piss, Spike let the relief wash through him. Just as he finished he shook it off and glanced up in time to see Xander's pink tongue slip from his mouth to lick his soft full lips.

Spike moaned at the erotic sight. Assuming the sound was caused by pain, Xander stood quickly. "I'll go dump this then see to your back." Before Spike could answer, he was gone.

"Oh My God. Oh My God. Oh My God!" Xander dumped the bucket and paced frantically. "Get a grip on yourself. Put your best yokel back on and find out some information about this guy. You are losing it, Xander." Setting the bucket back in the shed, he calmed himself down, pasted on a slow smile and reentered the cabin.

"We ain't got no doctors round these parts, but I been takin' care of meself for always, and my Momma taught me alot, so let me take a look K?"

Having played four years of college football, Xander had seen more than his share of spinal injuries. He at least knew enough to know when there was real damage and when it was something the body could heal on its own.

Spike did not want this simple knucklehead poking around his back, but had to admit the man was in good shape, very good shape, fuckin' fantastic shape! So apparently he knew something.

"Yeah, O.k., but first I really need a drink. You got anything around here?"

Frowning, Xander's suspicious side started whispering in his ear. 'This could be a trap. Maybe he just wants to see if you keep any shine. Maybe he can walk and he's just trying to trip you up.'

"Sorry, ain't got nothin' I don't drink. Not a drop. No sir." Xander rocked back on his heels and smiled proudly. He could not be caught that easy.

Trying to hang on to the last thread of sanity he had left, Spike grabbed Xander's arm and pulled him down so that their faces were just inches apart.

"Look here you simple hillbilly idiot. I'm in pain and I need a drink. If you don't have anything here then go back to wherever my car is and bring up my cases. One of them has what I need in it. Do it Abner. Do it Now!"

Jerking his arm back and standing firm over the crippled man, Xander looked him straight in the eye and scowled.

"First, my name is Xander, not Abner. Second, when you wrecked yer car ya smelled like you already had plenty to drink. Now after I look at yer back I'll go get them cases, but fer now ya need to stop talking so hateful to me."

Knowing he was in a no win situation, Spike decided if he wanted this mountain moron to do what he needed, he should shift tactics

"You are very right, Xander. I apologize. I'm just in so much pain that I really need a drink. Would you please go get my carry alls for me?" Looking as miserable as he felt, Spike let his face do his begging.

Close to caving, Xander regained his common sense but held firm. What if this was a ruse to get him away from the cabin for a while. What if there was nothing wrong with this guys legs and he searched the property while Xander was gone.

He couldn't take that chance. "The back first."

He waited, curious to see how Mr. Beemish would respond.

Part Ten

By this time, Spike had decided to do whatever it took to get this grade school drop out to bring him his booze. Letting Xander roll him over on his side, the pain shot through his body with such force he could do nothing but sob.

Xander immediately stopped and gave the stranger time to adjust. "I'm sorry. I'm trying to be gentle. Can you feel anything at all in your legs or feet. A tingly, prickly feeling maybe?"

Taking a deep breath and allowing the pain to wash over rather than paralyze him, Spike tried to concentrate on what Xander was asking. "Yes. Yes, it feels like pins and needles. Do you think that

is good?"

Gingerly, Xander eased Spike's undershirt up. Right in the center of Spike's back was an ugly large bruise. Looked like the shape of the door handle on the car.

He must have slid sideways in the seat and slammed his back against it when he wrecked. Probably already too drunk or passed out to know what was happening.

Carefully running his hand over it, Xander felt the swelling and knotted muscles. He had seen this happen often on the football field, though not as severe as this.

Xander knew the swelling around the spine would need a few days to come down. After that he should be able to walk some, but it was going to be a long recovery, and a lot of pain.

It did bring a small amount of relief to know that he was not being set up. This was not a faked injury, still it didn't solve the problem of what to do with one very crippled Mr. William Beemish.

Spike clutched the quilt and strained not to cry out. Christ, if he only had a drink. "Well?" he asked through gritted teeth

"Ya got a lot of swelling and an ugly bruise around your backbone. Most likely cain't walk on acounta that. Take a few days for the swelling ta go down then we can see what happens."

Xander groaned mentally at the thought of this rude, gorgeous ass hole ('Now why did I think that term?') being here for God knows how many days.

He couldn't possibly keep up this stupid hillbilly act, and how the hell would he keep his still fired up and next weeks shine cooked and delivered.

This was not good. This was not good at all.

Allowing Xander to ease him onto his back again, Spike contemplated the diagnosis Dr. Stupid had given him. *'Bloody hell! There is no way I can lay here at this man's mercy for days on end. If he doesn't go get that case soon he is going to find out he has more on his hands than just a fuckin' cripple.'*

It had already been way too long and Spike could start to feel his hands shake. The cramping in his stomach would flare up and in no time he would be in the middle of a raging case of the DTs

"Please, Xander, I let you look at my back. Now, please go get my bags. I really need a drink to ease this pain, please."

The man's begging stirred more foreboding in Xander than pity.

He had grown up the son of Tony Harris. He knew the signs of an alcoholic. The twitchin', the licking his lips like he is always trying to taste something, the begging one minute then the screaming threats the next.

Xander didn't know how bad Beemish's alcoholism was, but he knew this was going to get ugly.

Well fine. Who the fuck cares. I am not this brother's keeper. Sides, if he stays drunk I won't have to deal with him.

"Sure, Mr. Beemish. I'll go get your stuff right now. It's just a fair piece up the road. You rest here and I won't be but a bit." Xander got no response, but didn't really expect one.

He closed the door and took a deep breath of the cool mountain air. Leisurely, he started down the path. He was in no hurry. Waiting till he was clear of the view, Xander darted into the woods and circled around behind.

Making his way toward the still, he studied the area for any signs of change or disturbance. Satisfying himself that all was as he had left it, Xander stoked the coals.

He knew if the copper coils of the still went cold the shine in it would turn. He had a couple more days before he would drain off this batch and would worry about the next one later.

Continuing on about one hundred feet further back, Xander approached what appeared to be a pile of brush.

Looking all around, more out of habit than fear, Xander pulled some of the scrub away to reveal a small cave dug out of the hill side. Ducking his head he stepped in.

Immediately he was absorbed in the deep earthy smell of damp soil and foliage. It was a primal smell that always made him feel one with the earth.

Crouching down he felt around and located the spare crocks he had stored along the cave wall. It wasn't much.

Just a few he kept in case his still broke down or was damaged. It wasn't enough to fill all his orders, but at least most of his best customers would be supplied. Joe would get his first.

Secure in the knowledge that everything was untouched, Xander reconcealed the cave entrance. Checking the tubing, coils and tub of the still, Xander banked the fire and started away.

Stopping as he always did at a fair distance, he turned to survey the entire area. Xander knew he would instinctively know if one twig or leaf was out of place.

But for now, it wasn't. For now, all was as it should be. Feeling somewhat better, he started again for the site of the wreck.

Spike watched Xander leave. After giving him a few minutes to make sure he was really gone, he allowed the tears to fall.
His life was so fucked.

He had no idea how far away the car was. Would he be gone five minutes or five hours? He had to hold on.

Thank God for once he did follow his superior's advice. There was nothing in the car that could in any way connect him to the government. Not that he had anything to fear from Xander. Kid probably couldn't even read.

Besides, Xander wouldn't be looking for anything. *'Damn, why were the really good looking ones so unexceptable and untouchable. Why can't I find a man that wants what I want.'* Spike felt the familiar saddness sweep over him.

Again the tears ran slowly from the corners of his eyes down to his ears. Unable to stop crying, he wiped his nose on the back of his arm and automatically tried to turn over.

"FUCK!"

The pain shot through his body like a sword slicing up his spine.

"Xander!" Keeping as still as possible, Spike strained to stare at the doorway listening for any sound outside.

'Please God, make him come back soon. Jesus I need a drink.'

Part Eleven

Making his way down the slippery hillside, Xander finally reached the site of the wrecked car.

Everything was exactly as he had left it yesterday, confirming his suspicions that no one else would have come along in time. Xander was glad he hadn't turned his back on the injured man. Even if he was turning out to be a real pain in his ass.

The steam from the engine had cooled and by the looks of the puddle underneath, all the fluids had drained out. Xander knew that by leaving the car out here sooner or later one of the other men that lived on this mountain would find it.

When that happened it would be stripped slicker than a skinned possum, the parts sold off or used to patch their own vehicles or farm machines.

Xander just shrugged.

Didn't matter none to him.

This crumpled pile of tin wasn't gonna help him get rid of Mr. Beemish. No, Xander knew he was stuck with him. For now anyway.

Still suspicious, Xander decided this was an excellent opportunity to find out as much as he could about the mysterious traveling salesman.

He started with the trunk.

Using the keys that were still in the ignition, he popped the lid. Blanket, road flag, and spare tire. Worn with nearly no tread.

'Funny, you'd think a man living on the road would have a trunk full of stuff. Dirty clothes, reminders from home, nasty picture postcards to yank his stick to. Something.'

Slamming the trunk lid shut he moved around to the passenger side. Peering into the crushed front seat, Xander saw the box of books that had tumbled on impact. One full set of encyclopedias A thru Z.

Due to the damage, the crumpled car door would not open, but the window had shattered, so reaching in he picked several up, one at a time. Each was checked.

Xander noted that most still had stiff spine bindings meaning they had never been opened for display. Either the salesman had no one who wanted to look at his books or he had not tried very hard to make a sale.

Throwing the last one down on the pile, he then pressed the button to open the glove box. Riffing through the papers, he found a registration stating that the car did indeed belong to one William J.

Beemish of New York City.

According to the documents Mr. Beemish had owned the car for nearly two years, yet the papers were crisp. Brand new feeling. Nothing criminal about that, still.....

Only other thing in there was, of course, a pair of gloves. No family photos, no gum or candy, nothing personal that identified the personality of the driver.

Something about the whole scene reminded him of the acting productions he was in at college. It all had a staged feel about it.

"Shit, Xander. Get a grip. You're too fuckin' paranoid." Finally he jerked open back door on the passenger side. The two cases were still there, untouched.

That's when something else odd struck him. Xander remembered looking in the suitcase yesterday and finding nothing but some clean clothes.

If there were no dirty ones in the trunk then it meant he had not been here more than a couple days, cause God knows there were no laundromats on this mountain.

So how did a man from New York get here in two days, and just how many fuckin' sales did he think he was going to make to people that he assumed couldn't read anyway.

One way or another, Xander had determined he needed to get some answers from the stranger laying in his bed.

Kneeling down on the wide floor of the back he retrieved the other case from under the seat. Mr. Beemish had probably stuck it under there to be out of sight.

That was more than likely what had saved the bottles from damage in the accident. Opening it up, he wrinkled his nose in disgust. Wild Turkey. Red Rose. Black asp.

Some bottles with no label that had obviously been refilled several times over. The names were all ones he knew well.

Cheap rot gut his father would drink when he could afford it. But then that was before his own still started producing enough to drink himself to death.

Xander knew he had found part of what he was looking for. These were the intimate details of William Beemish's life.

It might not explain who he was, but it sure as hell told Xander what the injured man was.

He was nothing but a waste of space.

He was a fuckin' drunk.

The alcohol was the family photos and the memorabilia from home. It was all he needed in his life. It was all here, glowing gold and shimmering white in these bottles.

The flood of memories of his own childhood came back to him in a rush, and before he could second guess himself, he made a decision. Closing the lid of the suitcase, Xander held it high over his head and slammed it to the ground as hard as he could.

The sound of the smashing glass echoed throughout the woods, temporarily stopping the singing of birds and chirping of the tree frogs. Even the breeze flowing through the branches froze.

Silence.

For a few seconds, the woods stood still waiting to see what Xander would do next.

Seconds passed and just as suddenly as it stopped, it resumed. The birds, the frogs, the sound the movement. It all went on like nothing had happened.

Xander picked up both cases to return to the cabin. Before he could take one step, a red bird flew down, a cardinal, wild and free, and to his amazement, landed on the broken carry all.

It chirped and looked at him, its head turned to the side. Then, showing no fear of him, it flew off.

Four years of college didn't change the inner man.

Xander was mountain, born and bred.

He was raised his whole life to know the signs and omens.

The signposts that life sends you to show you when you are on the right or the wrong path.

City folk get them too, they are just too busy rushing around and bein' better than everyone else to see them.

It wasn't something that determined his every move, but he was smart enough to recognize and

respect them when they came along.

Like road pointers his momma used to say. They can aim you in the right direction if you are smart enough to read them.

Xander considered himself a very smart man.

He took this as a good sign.

He knew he had done right, and any indecision was immediately erased.

Mr. Beemish, the alcoholic, just climbed on the wagon.

Part Twelve

Stepping onto the front porch, Xander steeled himself for a less than warm welcome, and opened the door.

"Where the fuck have you been? Jesus, I thought you forgot about me."

Spike's anger quickly melted to overwhelming gratitude when he saw the cases in Xander's hands.

Trying to appear casual, Spike smiled broadly "Oh, good, I see you found them. Well come on, join me for a drink."

"Spike.."

"I know, I know. You don't drink. Well I do so be a good boy and pour me a bit in a cup, yeah?" Spike was licking his lips. His fingers twitched like they wanted to reach out and grab the bags from Xander's grasp.

Xander watched him, disgusted. The flood of memories washed over him, and it was almost like having the old man himself back again.

Only this time he was the one in charge.

No more being slapped or punished when the bottle was empty.

No more fear of the rage.

No more hiding in his own home.

Besides, he was supposed to do this.

The signs and omens had told him so.

With a great deal of satisfaction and a barely suppressed smirk, Xander dropped the case to the floor. The sound of the broken glass caused an instant and expected reaction.

"What the fuck did you do? You stupid fuckin' asshole! If I could get off this bed I'd kill your stupid fuckin' ass. I NEED A FUCKIN' DRINK!!!"

Silently watching, the small smile never left Xander's face. *'O.k. then. Guess we're off and running.'*

"Didn't do nothin' Spike. Your bags got thrown around in the car when you got stinkin' drunk and slammed into that there tree. I checked, but weren't nothing left unbroke. Guess you're just fucked."

The last part was verbalized very distinctly with no hint of ignorance or stupidity. Xander crossed his arms over his chest, shifted his weight to one side and looked the salesman straight in the eye. If anything, the smile stretched just a hair wider.

Spike stared at him as the reality of the situation slowly sank in. *'No no no no'* "Xander, please, you don't know what you are doing. I'm sick. I need that stuff. It's the pain, Xander. I need it for the pain. Please Xander. You don't understand."

Calmly, Xander turned to the shelf on the wall and took down a jar of soup beans.

"I'm going to fix you something to eat, Spike. I suggest you try to take in as much food and water as you can today, because you probably won't be able to keep anything down tomorrow."

Sobbing and nearly hysterical, Spike continued to beg.

He was terrified.

Not only of going through the DT's but of what he might say while out of his mind. What if he gave himself away?

Spike had a sinking feeling he had seriously underestimated Xander. What if he knew some of the bootleggers Spike had been sent to this part of the country to find?

If those cut throat murdering moonshiners were to find him here, crippled and unable to defend himself, well he didn't want to think about what they would do.

The New York office had held training sessions. A few of which he had been sober enough to attend, and they were all warned that these backwoods animals would butcher them, bury the bodies and no one would ever find them.

Not that anyone would look for him.

Spike knew he had been given this assignment as a last chance.

Achieve results or be killed out here in the boonies.

Really made no difference to the government that sent him. Either government.

Forcing himself to calm down, Spike desperately tried to think. Clearly begging would not work He had to reason with him.

He had to make him understand how bad this situation was going to get.

Watching Xander's back as he whistled and stirred those disgusting, stinking beans, Spike wiped his eyes and nose on his arm. "Boy, those smell swell. You must be a really great cook."

Xander rolled his eyes unseen, and kept stirring.

"See fact is, Xander, I got this problem. Hate to admit it, but truth is I drink a bit too much. Actually," Spike chuckled sourly "I drink a lot too much. So if I don't get it I am going to get sick. Really sick. Puking and shaking sick. So I would really appreciate it if you could run into the nearest town and get me some help for my legs and bring me back a bottle. O.k? I can pay you."

Spike held his breath and waited.

Scooping some hot beans into a wooden bowl, Xander turned back around.

Approaching the bed, Xander blew on the beans and stirred them to cool, never looking at the man whose life seemed to depend on Xander's benevolence. He tried to suppress the glee he felt in the shifting power play of the drunk/Xander dynamic.

"First up, you ain't got no money. I already saw your wallet. Second, town is a long days walk away. Can't leave you alone that long and last, I already know what it's like to see a drunk go through a body's cleanin'. My

Pa did it more than once, but if you want I can fetch you some of them headache powders you had in your pants pocket. Now, you best eat up while you can."

Xander stood back and waited, finally meeting Spike eye for eye. Spike threw his head back. His face turned a furious purple and his hands clutched the sheets.

"FUCK YOU!! GOD DAMN YOU!! I NEED A DRIIIIIIIIINK!!!"

Calmly Xander sat back down in his chair and ate the beans. This might take a while and there was no sense in both of them going hungry.

Part Thirteen

The screaming, crying, begging and demanding kept up for an impressive amount of time.

All without response from Xander.

He sat quietly watching and wondering.

How does a man come to this. He knew in his own father's case it was a way to die along with his wife. Unfortunately it took him nearly twelve years to do it. Shame the needs of a young son weren't enough to give him something to live for.

What was the unhappiness in Spike's life that drove him to drown himself in a bottle? Xander saw the strain of the pain and anger play over the features of the beautiful face. The amazing blue eyes would alternate between squeezed shut and flaring with fury.

Xander knew Spike was in agony from his back and head injuries and considered maybe the body flush might be more than he could stand.

Mentally checking himself, Xander knew he couldn't waver now. No, Spike was weak enough for both of them. *'Just a sniveling drunk'* he tried to remind himself.

Rising from his chair, Xander walked to Spike who had, by now slowed down to a quiet whimpering. Still not speaking, Xander brushed the hair out of Spike's damp face.

"Get the fuck off of me."

The words were spoken low, with a sadness and resignation. Spike turned his face toward the wall and slapped weakly at Xander's hand.

"I need to go out and tend my garden and check my traps, Spike. I want you to drink some water and take a pack of headache powder. I won't be long."

It was now Spike's turn to be silent.

Returning to the sideboard Xander brought him a cup of water with the powder dissolved inside. With no further complaint Spike drank it all. He refused to admit that soothing his raw throat, it felt wonderful.

"I need to piss."

Xander set the cup down and went to retrieve the bucket.

Neither spoke as Spike freed his cock and emptied his full bladder.

Taking the bucket to the door, Xander turned to his patient.

"I'll be back as soon as I can. When you're all done with your tantrum I can rub them tight muscles. Might help the swelling
'long your backbone."

"Fuck you." The response was murmured but heard.

Xander walked out, closing the door behind him. When he was well away from the cabin, his own tears fell.

The memories and emotions of his own past were jumbled up together with the pain of the man who was a literal prisoner
in his home.

Hurrying back the lane, Xander didn't stop till he reached the still. He stoked the hot coals and drained off four crocks for storage in the cave.

It would help some with next weeks delivery.

Another problem.

One he had no time to think about now.

Forcing all his concentration on the contraption in front of him, Xander tried everything he could to clear the thoughts of Spike from his head.

Nothing worked.

His brain kept returning to the suffering of the stranger.

Xander was torn

.
He knew he possessed the very elixir needed to stop the agony Spike was going through. All he had to do was take him a bottle.

The part of him that enjoyed watching a worthless drunk beg for a drink was quickly fading away in the face of the reality.

Suddenly he realized he was finding no joy at all in what was happening. Xander still was not satisfied that there wasn't something suspicious about Spike and what he was doing here on Xander's mountain, but whatever it was, it had nothing to do with the consequences of the wreck and the alcoholism.

He finished up and circled around to the clearing. Fall was coming on fast and the vegetables in his garden would soon be ready for canning. He walked the rows and was pleased to see everything had done really well.

It had been a long growing season and he should have plenty to hold him till spring.

The winters were snowy and isolating up here. A man had to be prepared. Meat he could catch at any time, but a man needed fruit and vegetables to stay strong.

Finally wandering to the creek, he checked his traps. Two were empty, the other had caught a beaver. Good money in beaver fur. Someday he hoped to get better traps and make a full living off them. City women couldn't get enough of them fur hats and coats. Silly creatures.

Taking the carcass, he reset the trap and headed back home. It was still early enough he could get it gutted and skinned and the fur hung before dark.

It was all so simple.

He knew exactly what to do with an ear of corn or a dead critter. Wish it was that uncomplicated with people.

Maybe he read the sign wrong.

Maybe he was hurting this man in a way he had no right to.

He had to give this some serious thought.

Coming back home, Xander found his walk slowing. He hated opening the door and facing the agony inside. Placing his ear against the closed door, he heard no sound.

No screaming, no crying.

Easing it open, he stepped in.

Bracing himself for the worst.

What he found was not what he expected.

Spike had apparently worn himself out and was sleeping fitfully. Watching the face of the man on the bed, Xander felt something tugging at his heart.

Spike looked so young.

Xander had assumed he was in his late thirties, but now realized he could be at least ten years younger.

Crouching down, Xander leaned in as close as he dared. "What happened to you Spike? Who are you and what do you want here?"

Xander's only answer was another moan. Spike's eyes darted wildly behind the closed lids. Xander stayed where he was till his knees shook from the strain of the position he held himself in.

Standing back up, he figured it was best to go ahead and prepare the cabin for the night. That way all would be done when Spike woke later. He knew the worst was still to come.

Slipping back out he took the water jugs to the spring house and filled both of them. Tending to the beaver was quick and efficient. He then went to the hen house collecting eggs for breakfast, mentally reminding himself of some repairs he needed to do on the coup before winter.

Returning, he put the kettle on the fire for some coffee, and settled in to wait.

Part Fourteen

Before sleeping Spike had laid sullenly while Xander sat there. Exhausted from all the dramatics, he was ashamed and angry at himself for his weakness.

Watching Xander come over to him, he waited to see what punishment the mountain man would inflict on him for all his hysterics.

He was shocked when Xander touched his face so gently. He slapped the hand and turned his head in an attempt to try to get some sort of grip on himself.

His body was so twisted with pain and agony he found it hard to breath, and his emotions were off the scale. Spike knew he had made everything worse by all the screaming and the fit, but he just didn't seem to be able to stop.

He remembered the time a few months ago when he had tried to get off the drunk. He had locked himself in his apartment and thought he could ride it out. He had caved in after just three days. The pain and hallucinations were more than he could stand.

Stumbling out, he'd headed for a bar and stayed drunk for a week. That's when he really gave up on life. He knew he would never be able to stop drinking till he drank himself to death.

Aware that this was the last chance for his job, he already knew he would fail. At this point he no longer cared.

The only reason he wanted to find a bootlegger now was to buy a bottle and drink it dry.

Offering him some water and the pain powder shocked Spike. Up to now he was sure Xander was taking great pleasure in his situation, but the look in Xander's eyes confused him. If he didn't know better, he would have sworn he read compassion there.

After the water, Xander had said he was going out. He had chores to do.

Spike wanted desperately to beg him not to go.

To stay with him and, what?

Touch his forehead again?

Spike hated that he was so weak. So needy.

Knowing that tomorrow would be a hundred times worse, Spike tried to calm himself down. Forcing himself to relax, he straightened his body and tried to focus his concentration. The powder took just enough of an edge off the pain that he could regain some composure.

A little corner of his mind wished Xander was there to see him. He would be proud of Spike for controlling himself. "Fuck you" he yelled one last time to the empty room, though the heat had gone from the sentiment.

"I don't give a fuck what he thinks of me." But he knew that wasn't true.

Relaxing his arms, neck, hands, and trying to ignore the annoying prickling in his legs, Spike finally dozed off.

His last wakeful thought being, *'Wonder if he will still rub my back?'*

Xander had been gone for some time. Part of him wished he didn't have to return at all. That was the part he was most ashamed of. After all, Beemish is going through all of this because Xander's holier-than-thou opinion was that he needed to get sober.

What right did he have to inflict that sort of pain on another man? Standing on the front porch, Xander listened at the door.

No screams. No cursing. Entering quietly he was relieved to see Spike had actually fallen asleep.

He stood and watched as Spike moaned and fussed. Checking his forehead, Xander could see the sweat starting to bead up.

Using a damp cloth he wiped Spikes face and spoke to him in hushed tones. "Shhh. It will be alright. I'll take care of you.

You can do this, Spike. I know you can."

Spike's body relaxed and his sleep became more peaceful. Xander watched for a few more minutes then went to his chair by the fire, covered himself up, and dozed off.

Xander was dreaming.

He dreamt he was back in college and running on the campus.

He was with his friends, his team mates.

They were off to celebrate their last victory at an off campus, off limits tavern.

He was laughing and life was easy.

Gradually he was falling behind and they were getting further and further ahead of him.

They called to him to catch up. "Xander. Xander!"

The calling was getting frantic.

His friends were out of sight now, but the calling continued.

"Xander!" Swimming up out of the depths of sleep, Xander realized it was Spike.

Spike was calling him.

Rushing to his side, he was dismayed by the slight man.

Spike was sweating profusely and shaking violently.

"I'm so fuckin' cold. Xander I'm cold and sick."

No sooner had Xander grabbed a bucket than Spike turned his head to the side and vomited.

Having nearly nothing in his stomach, it was mostly water and bile. The power of the retching causing a strain on his back.

Bringing the quilt from his chair, Xander threw it over Spike's shivering body.

"Just hang on, Buddy. I know it's bad, but I have faith in you. You can do this." The sincerity and comfort in Xander's voice caused a whole new flood of tears to fall.

No one had ever had faith in him before. He knew he was going to feel so much worse when he failed. When he disappointed Xander.

But - maybe he could do it. Maybe.

"Listen Spike. Don't get the wrong idea, but I'm gonna lay down on the bed between you and the wall. Real easy we're gonna roll you onto your side so if you throw up again it won't twist you up.

While you're on your side I'll start working those muscles around your spine. Might hurt a little, but it will help with the swelling. You o.k. with that?"

Spike was so much more than o.k. he had no words.

All he could do was nod.

Crawling up the bed Xander eased himself down slowly. Placing one hand under Spike's shoulders, and the other under his hips, Xander carefully rolled him to his left side.

Crying out, Spike grabbed fists full of the bed sheet. "Sorry, Spike, sorry. O.k. you're there now. Just try to relax".

Still shivering, sweating, and dry heaving, Spike had to laugh.

"Yeah, relax."

Xander joined him and the feel of their bodies chuckling together felt better to them both than either would admit.

Rubbing his hands together briskly to warm them, Xander placed both his palms flat on the center of Spike's back.

Slowly and firmly he pressed and worked his hands up Spike's back bone. He could feel the knotted muscles and massaged them in circles with his thumbs.

Moaning at the wonderful feel, Spike allowed himself to give his body over to the man behind him. Smiling, Xander continued "Better?"

Just as Spike opened his mouth to answer, his stomach convulsed again and he retched harder than before. Whimpering, he leaned back against Xander's hands.

Sympathically he answered his own question "I'll take that as a yes."

Spike smiled despite himself.

Part Fifteen

Both men stayed where they were for most of the morning. The warmth of Xander's body helped relieve some of the chills, and slowly the heaving, subsided.

By early afternoon they had dozed off. Hoping the worst was over, Xander rose only long enough to take care of the cabin and nature's needs.

He then allowed himself to relax and pull Spike's body back against him. Surprisingly Xander received as much comfort from the closeness as Spike did.

The relief, however was short lived. Before the sun had a chance to set Xander was awakened by Spike again screaming and wildly flailing his arms.

"Xander! Oh God Xander get them off me!"

Looking around frantically, Xander couldn't find the sources of Spike's distress. "What? What is it?"

Slapping and scratching at himself, Spike was shrieking in pain and fear as he tried to free himself from Xander and the confines of the bed covers.

"The bugs. The bugs are crawling all over me, God Xander get them off. They're biting me! Help me, please Xander, help me."

Terrified that Spike was going to cause himself serious damage, Xander immediately rolled him to lie flat on his back.

Straddling his hips, Xander grabbed his arms and held them tight against his body.

"Stop it Spike. There aren't any bugs. You're o.k."

Sobbing wildly, Spike continued to struggle. "I can feel them, Xander. Please God I need a drink. Please Xander, please."

The sobs and begging were heart wrenching.

Xander hated himself for what he was doing. 'How could I have ever taken any satisfaction in this?' Xander was so overwhelmed with self loathing he dropped his forehead down till it touched Spike's

The strain and shame was finally too much and Xander collapsed in tears. So caught up in his own pain it took a few minutes before the sound of the soft voice crept through.

"Shhh. It's all right Xander. It will be all right."

Calming himself and lifting his eyes, Xander looked into the clear blue ones that had now regained their sanity.

Leaning down again, Xander lightly placed his lips over Spike's.

Not a real kiss, it was something less and something more. Pulling back abruptly, Xander was shocked at what he had allowed himself to do. "I'm sorry, Spike. I don't know why I did that."

Yawning, Spike smiled weakly, "I don't know either, but I would like very much if you would do it again. Then I could do with a drink of water, a piss, and another nap."

Gladly, Xander complied with all his requests, starting with another very soft, closed mouth press of warm lips against cool, shaky ones. A little water coming and a little more going, and Xander reclaimed his spot behind Spike on the bed.

"Xander?"

"Yes?"

"Would you rub my back again?"

Smiling broadly, Xander again positioned Spike on his side and resumed the deep muscle massage till the even breathing signaled Spike had drifted off. Xander followed him into sleep minutes later.

Waking up first, Xander watched Spike sleep. His sleep was still restless, but not violently. Slipping out of bed, Xander went outside to piss and collect some fire wood. Taking advantage of the time alone he hustled back the path to check his much neglected still.

The fire was out, but luckily the coils were still warm. Xander drained off what was settled in the tub and put the full crocks into storage. He still had a few days till delivery and enough in the cave to fill all his orders so he could now let it cool and set.

Even though Spike was unable to get out of bed, Xander could not risk discovery. A lot of questions about Spike still lingered in Xander's mind. Whatever had happened last night would not override his common sense.

Returning to the cabin with his arms full of wood, Xander was pleased to see that Spike was not only awake, but seemed a

whole lot stronger. "Hey, look at you. How do you feel?"

Spike smiled weakly, but his eyes were clear. "Do you want me to say I'm all better or tell you the truth? Cause

fact is I feel like shit. My head, stomach and back still hurt, and if I could get out of this bed I'd knock you in the head with one of those logs and walk to the nearest town for a bottle of booze."

Xander broke into a full on smile. "So you're better?"

"Well, I'm still alive." Spike chuckled.

"Great. Today is a big day. First you're going to eat something and drink some coffee. Then we're going to wash you up some cause gotta tell you Buddy, whew! After that we'll do another back rub. I figure a couple times a day should go a long way to ease the muscles and bring down the swelling."

By now Xander had turned his back and was busily preparing the coffee and cracking some eggs.

Frowning, Spike stared at his back. With all the pain and sickness he hadn't noticed, but now his brain was clearer and something had become blaringly apparent.

Xander's whole hoopy accent was gone.

He no longer sounded like an ignorant hillbilly. Somewhere between yesterday and this morning he had adopted an intelligent manner to his speech. This realization made Spike very uncomfortable.

Watching Xander's movement, Spike's thoughts absorbed him *'Why would a man pretend to be something he wasn't. There was only two reasons for that. Either he was ashamed of who he was or he is hiding something.'* Spike knew how that applied to him, but, *'Which one of those are you, Xander?'*

Deciding to try and get some answers, Spike casually laid back on the bed. "Why are you doing this, Xander? Why are you being so good to me?"

Straightening up, Xander turned to face him. "I don't know Spike. I know I couldn't just leave you out there in the woods to die. It just isn't the way people live up here. We look out for each other."

"But I'm not one of you am I?" Spike watched his face closely.

"No, you aren't. Why are you up here? Who are you and what are you looking for, Spike?" Seems like Xander had questions of his own.

"What make's you think I am looking for something? I am just a plain book salesman trying to make a sale." Spike noted that rather than get answers, he was defending himself. He was not going to let

that happen. "Who are you Xander? What do you do up here?"

Both men stared suspiciously and silently into the eyes of the other.

Finally breaking the spell, Xander laughed and turned back to his cooking. "I ain't nobody, Spike. Just an ole mountain man tryin' to git by in life."

Spike's forehead wrinkled down.

That was the worst answer Xander could have given.

Part Sixteen

Nothing more was said by either about their suspicions that morning. Neither really wanted answers to their questions and neither wanted to face why.

Xander finished the eggs and coffee. After handing Spike a small plate, he sat in his chair and proceeded to shovel in his own.

Still feeling nauseated, Spike drank the coffee, but could only face a bite or two, and he was afraid that was not going to stay down.

"Don't try to force it. We can try again later."

Xander put his empty dish in the wash pan and dumped Spike's food in the trash.

After a quick clean up, Xander took the wash pan and started for the door. "I'm going for some water to heat. Then it's bath time."

Spike noted that the last part of that was said with just way too much glee.

Wondering why no one had mentioned last night's kiss made Spike struggle to remember if it was real or maybe just a new version of the DT's pink elephants.

'No, I'm sure it happened. It was so wonderful, no way could I have dreamed that. Does he regret it? Is that why he isn't talking? Is he waiting to see what I think? What do I think?'

Returning quickly, Xander set the pan on to heat. With his back to Spike, he stoked the coals and positioned the pan.

"Xander? Did you kiss me last night?"

Spike could see Xander's spine stiffen. Slowly he rose to his feet and turned to face him.

"Yeah, sorry about that. It just seemed like the thing to do at the time. Don't worry, I'm not going to attack you just cause you can't move." Xander waited to see what kind of names Spike would call him.

Disappointment clearly flashed over Spike's face. "Of course. No need to apologize. I didn't think you would do anything like that. You seem to be a very honest man."

"You didn't want me to kiss you again did you?" Xander took a step closer.

"Did you want to kiss me again?" Spike tried to prop himself up on his elbows.

"Maybe. But only if it's what you want." Two more steps nearer.

"I guess it was kind of nice. I suppose I wouldn't mind if you wanted to do it again."

Xander closed the distance between them.

Sitting on the side of the bed, Xander leaned down till his face was no more than an inch above Spike's. Now more relaxed and confident, Xander smiled and nudged his nose against Spike's. "So you want to be kissed do you?"

Spike placed his hands on the straps of Xander's bibs. He was wearing no shirt underneath. Pulling his body closer, Spike let his eyes drift down to focus on the slight upturned corners of Xander lips.

"Got nothing else to do this morning. A kiss might be nice." Spike suddenly found he needed way too much oxygen.

His eyes drifted closed as he waited.

Xander closed the gap, but just before touching, he diverted and devoured Spike's neck and ear lobe. The move was so unexpected, Spike moaned and turned his head further to give Xander more neck to kiss.

Xander obliged by giving Spike's neck a thorough seeing to. Afraid Spike was going to hurt his back by squirming around,

Xander took pity on him and finally, at last, gave him the kiss they had both been waiting on.

Starting out easy it rapidly became deep, wet, and all consuming. Spike felt as though this man was going to climb into his mouth and taste his very soul.

He had never been kissed like this, but it was all he had ever craved. Using his own tongue to give as well as he was getting, Spike could detect eggs, coffee, and the intoxicating flavor of Xander.

Clutching frantically at the heavier man above him, Spike's body knew instinctively that Xander was the answer to all the sexual craving and frustration Spike had always felt.

Pulling back, Xander looked down between them and broke into a huge smile. "Well that's a good sign."

Trying to follow the change in action, Spike realized Xander was talking about Spike's very hard, leaking cock.

Spike was thrilled. He had secretly been afraid the accident had done permanent damage and that even if function did return to his legs other things might never be right again.

Suddenly all he could think about was proving to Xander and himself that the cock they were discussing was indeed working as well as before.

Xander let his eyes stroll up Spike's body. He had never been with a man like this before. All the others had been athletes like him. Large, hard, well toned.

Spike was none of that. He was delicate, firm but softer. Still, no less masculine. He wanted to possess every inch of this body.

Lying on his side on one elbow, Xander put his other hand around Spike's throat. Both could feel the power implicit there.

Even knowing that hand could crush his windpipe, Spike was more aroused than worried. Xander was claiming an ownership in this.

Even if it was only for the next few moments, they both were in agreement that Xander was king of this castle. Releasing his grip, Xander let his hand run down Spike's chest to the flat of his stomach. A stomach slightly sunken from too much drink and too little food.

Sinking his fingers deep into the nest of thick blond curls, Xander tugged roughly causing Spike to whimper in need. Reaching lower, Xander circled his hand around Spike's throbbing dick. Brushing his thumb across the seeping head of the uncut cock, Xander forced Spike to look him in the eye.

"Do you want me to bring you off? Make your balls pull up hard till they blow?"

Shit!

"No one has ever spoken so crudely to me before." Spike's voice was strained and barely above a whisper.

"But you like it, don't you? You want me to be rough and dirty with you, don't you Spike?"

The intensity too much, Spike had to close his eyes. "God, yes, Xander. Please."

"Do you trust me, Spike?"

Spike's eyes flew open. Had he been reading his mind? No, Xander was only talking about sex, and when it came to that

Spike could absolutely affirm that yes, he did trust Xander not to hurt him. "Yes, Xander, I do trust you."

Xander was not stupid enough to think that trust extended beyond the bed, but for now maybe that was enough.

Standing quickly, Xander unbuckled the straps of his overalls and let them drop to the floor. Spike made no effort to conceal his interest.

"Curiosity killed the cat." Xander chuckled, but did nothing to cover himself.

"Ah, yes, but satisfaction brought him back." Spike finally lifted his eyes.

"Does this satisfy you?" Xander had his large hand wrapped around his thick dark cock and shook it in the direction of Spike's face.

"I think it is about to." Spike licked his lips and waited to see what Xander would do next.

He didn't have long to wait.

Part Seventeen

Sitting back on the side of the bed, Xander resumed rubbing over Spike's silky smooth skin. "I'm not going to fuck you Spike. Not today. We're gonna get your back all healed up first."

Spike whimpered.

Xander chuckled. "Oh don't get me wrong, we are both gonna shoot a wad, I just ain't gonna stick it up in you. Not yet anyway."

That promise more than satisfied the blond book salesman. The government agent had checked out about an hour ago and showed no sign of returning anytime soon.

"How are you going to do that?" Spike's words came out in short breaths. Anticipation climbed through his belly like a snake.

In a flash, Xander lifted himself and straddled Spike's prone body. Xander's knees were on the outside of Spike's knees.

Slowly lowering himself Xander's heavy sex bumped and nudged lightly against Spike's.

Pictures of Andrew flashed instantly into his brain.

Reminding himself that this man was nothing like Andrew, Spike released the memory. *'Xander would never betray me like that.'* He prayed to God that thought was true.

Bracing himself on his elbows, Xander pressed his cock lower. With a slow rocking motion he began just lightly rubbing them together. Both wet and slick from early emissions, the friction soon became easier. As the moisture and need increased so did the pressure, the speed and sound.

"Please, Xander, press harder. You won't hurt me. God, that feels so good."

Lifting himself with his arms, Xander pushed up and without losing cock to cock contact he switched his legs to the inside of Spike's. Then with his knees he shoved Spike's still useless legs apart.

Much to his shock Spike felt the pressure of Xander's knees against his own. He was thrilled, unfortunately his brain could no longer string the words together to tell Xander of the physical improvement.

He also had trouble remembering why it mattered.

He relaxed back content to let Xander do the work. His cock still functioned and he was regaining some sensation in his legs. How could anything go wrong?

His arms trembling with the strain of supporting his weight off the injured man, Xander let his head fall forward as he continued to grind himself against Spike. Sweat dripped from his dark shaggy hair to the blond head below and ran to the bed beneath them..

The sounds of skin slapping was constant, covered only by the moans, grunts and "Yes, yes, yes" That echoed through out the cabin.

Finally dropping to his elbow on the side of Spike's shoulder, Xander wrapped his hand around both thick, sticky cocks and proceeded to stroke them roughly to completion. Something that only took seconds considering both men had been alone for far too long and the passion had risen too high.

At the first feel of his orgasm sending fire up through his balls to cock, Xander flattened himself to Spike's body. If he couldn't shoot deep inside he could at least unload his spunk onto Spike's skin.

The feel of the hot cum and the jerking of Xander's cock against him sent Spike's own reaction into overdrive.

The combination of fluids between them was like gallons of hot lava. It squirted and bubbled out of both cocks to mix with the perspiration that already slicked their skin.

The exertion had taken its toll and Xander's muscles gave out. Falling to the side of the bed he closed his eyes and breathed in deeply smelling the odor of their combined release.

It was wonderful.

Xander placed his hand on Spike's stomach and idly rubbed circles, smearing the stickiness like fingerpaint.

Spike was also relaxed and happy to allow his body some much needed recovery time. He knew he should be disgusted by Xander's finger doodles in the drying mess but at the moment it just wasn't worth the concern.

Finally raising his head, Xander noticed the boiling water on the fire. "Baths ready."

Climbing over Spike's limp spent body, Xander went to the large copper pot and scooted it away from the heat. "Need some cold water to cool that down. Be right back."

Spike smiled as he watched Xander casually walk out the door still stark naked. Suddenly he remembered. 'My legs!'

"Xander, my legs!"

Xander rushed back and dropped the bucket of water by the pot. "What's wrong? Are you in pain? What's the matter with your legs?"

Taken aback by the concern in Xander's voice, Spike quickly explained. "I can feel pressure. When you pushed on my legs earlier, I felt it. Xander, I think I am going to get better."

Matching Spikes grin with one of his own, Xander went to the end of the bed. Reaching down he

wrapped his hands around Spike's ankle. Massaging deeply he worked his hands up to the calf, knee and thigh.

"Can you feel any of that?" Xander searched Spike's face for a reaction.

"Not below the knee, but I can feel when you squeeze my thigh and definitely around my hip. Oh, God, thank you Xander. I was afraid I would never walk again."

Xander had the same fear and didn't have the heart to tell Spike they were not out of the woods yet, but it was something.

Busying himself about the cabin preparing the water, getting a towel, and retrieving a cake of Casteel soap he had bought on his last trip in town, Xander returned to the bed.

"I really didn't do nothin'. Your back just needed some time to recover. I figured when the swelling went down it would be better."

Soaping the rag, he washed Spike's face and neck. Both men were aware that with his hands operational, Spike was more than capable of doing this for himself.

Neither mentioned it.

Cleaning his arms, chest and stomach next, Xander slowly washed off all the flakes of their earlier activity. Spike closed his eyes and allowed himself to float in the feel of strong masculine hands touching every part of his body. It felt wonderful to be clean and heavenly to be handled.

Only a man who has lived without human touch can understand the depth of the need for it. At times he craved it more than the drink.

Most times he drowned the craving with a drink.

As he finished Spike's feet, he set down the bucket and rag.

"I'm going to roll you over on your stomach. You just lay there a minute while I dump this water and get some clean. After I wash your backside I'm gonna lay hot wet cloths on your back then give you another rub. That o.k.?"

Xander carefully rolled Spike over on the bed. With his face in the pillow the only response he could give before dozing off was "Mff, yeff, very uh kay"

Part Eighteen

Spike woke only marginally when Xander returned. He was the most relaxed he had ever been. Even with the partial paralysis in his legs, he felt totally unconcerned. He was clean, cared for and Xander was laying hot compresses and massaging his back.

The nagging need for a drink was still there, but for once it wasn't the most life controlling thing on his mind. He knew there were several issues to be dealt with such as his health, his job, his car, his life in general, but all that would still be the same tomorrow.

Equally pressing was the matter of his feelings for Xander. Frowning slightly, Xander was on his mind for other reasons. Just who was this man?

He obviously was not the ignorant uneducated man he presented himself to be, but why? Why does a man pretend to be something he is not? What is he hiding? Realizing how hypocritical that was, Spike tucked it all away for examination later.

Feeling those skilled hands work out a particularly hard knot, Spike decided that whatever it was, there was nothing he could do about it now, so why not just relax and enjoy.

The universe had never been generous with the freebies in Spike's life. He figured he was due.

Smiling at the moans, groans and grunts Spike was making with each kneading pass Xander's hands made on his back, Xander studied the slight form lying on his bed. All the unanswered questions he had about this man and what he was doing here hung heavily in the back of Xander's mind.

He knew it was inadvisable to allow himself any type of emotional connection. He already had everything planned out.

He would run shine for a few more years and save his money. When he had enough he would, what? What was he saving for? If he didn't know that, how would he know when he had saved enough?

Truth was, he hadn't really thought too much about the future. He loved the excitement of rumrunning. The thrill of being the fastest, the best. The rush of adrenalin.

No, it was best to just get this stranger on his feet and off Xander's mountain. So caught up in his thoughts, Xander had not noticed that Spike had fallen sound asleep. Drying his hands, he knew this might be his best chance to get some necessary work done outside.

After all, he was a businessman first, and he had been neglecting his business. Xander tip toed to the door and quietly slipped out.

The late fall air was getting more cutting as the days passed. Cursing himself for not grabbing a coat, Xander hurried down the trail. Coming to the still, he knew he had to fire it up and start the pot and coils heating for the fermentation.

Banking a fire, he went to the back to check the tubing. As he reached out, Xander snatched his hand back seconds before he touched the pipe. He stared at the copper head that had wrapped itself around the base of the still.

Slowly Xander stepped away, knowing any sudden move could cause the poisonous snake to react. He hadn't seen any copper heads in this area for a long time and he felt sure this was an omen that could not be ignored.

The feeling of impending doom twisted and curled in his stomach in a way that matched the slithering coil of the snake's body. What did this mean? He desperately searched the area for a sign that would make the meaning of the omen clear, but saw nothing out of place.

Quickly he threw a fire into the tent shaped stack of sticks under the copper pot. Much to his dismay the snake made no effort to leave, preferring to cling to the coil and burn to death.

Oh God, this was not good. Xander remained watching as the snake went up in flames.

Turning quickly he rushed back down the path to the cabin. Tripping and stumbling, he finally tried to cool down.

'Stop it Xander' he admonished himself. Slowing, he detoured to the barn. *'Don't let yourself fall apart over something crazy. Everything is all right.'*

He pulled out the key and opened the door. The sight of his car always pleased him. It was his greatest accomplishment. It sat waiting for the next run. It sat untouched. He slid in and sat behind the wheel. It calmed him. It reassured him.

He thought about all the things he had in his life. Oddly, his thoughts focused on the man in his bed. He looked at the crates half filled with jugs of shine. For the first time in his life he thought seriously about what he did.

He wondered how many of the people who drank his liquor suffered the way Spike did. How many lives had he destroyed?

It was a shocking realization, too overwhelming to resolve without time and deep consideration.

Climbing out, he closed the car door and left the barn. He knew whatever happened, his life was about to take a different turn.

Xander had been gone a long time when he finally kicked open the cabin door and rushed in, his hands and face numb from the cold.

Spike had just woken up and was noting to his delight that his back felt much better and in stretching he found he could wiggle his toes. He was thrilled and couldn't wait to tell the man he thought responsible.

"Hey, you're awake." Xander felt like a weight had been lifted from his shoulders. He wasn't sure what he was going to do about the omen, or Spike, or how he would find their connection, but he now knew a sign would show him the right way.

"Look, Xander, look." He wiggled his toes and pulled the top half of his body up to rest on his elbows. Each man looked at the other and they burst out laughing, delighted.

"This calls for a celebration." That's when Spike noticed what Xander was carrying.

He had a skinned rabbit and a large round white ball.

"What the hell is that?" Spike chuckled.

"It's a puff ball. You have never tasted puff ball? Well you, my good man, are in for a treat."

The rest of the afternoon was one of the best either man had ever spent. They laughed and talked easily as Xander cooked. He showed Spike how to slice, roll in flour and fry the puff ball explaining that it was a type of mushroom.

By evening they had feasted and were both content to rub full bellies and relax by the warmth of the fire. The conversation had quieted comfortably.

"Xander?" Spike watched Xander rock lazily in his chair by the hearth.

"Hmmm?"

"Will you sleep with me tonight?"

Xander gazed into the bluest eyes he had ever seen.

He no longer cared who Spike really was.

He didn't even care who he really was.

He knew what he wanted and for tonight, he would have it.

Part Nineteen

Xander looked at the man in his bed.

The man his whole body ached for.

He focused on the deep blue eyes that stared back at him.

He wanted nothing more than to go over and lie down with him.

Touch and taste him.

Wrap his arms around him and feel his heat and comfort. Feel every inch of that cool skin and slide his heavy cock deep into Spike's body.

"Much as I want to, Spike," Xander continued to rock in his chair. "You're gonna be leaving in a few days." Xander continued. "And to be honest, I get lonely up here. I can't afford to let myself get attached to anyone, and if I sleep with you....Well it just can't be anything more than it is."

Xander surprised himself. Why would he open himself up to this stranger? Why not just take what he wanted? Finally he stopped and turned his head in the direction of the bed.

The sympathy and understanding in Spike's eyes were all the answer he needed. He knew Spike was feeling the same thing and he realized at last he knew who this man was.

They couldn't have been more different. Size, shape, background, lives. Yet, they couldn't be more the same. Thoughts, feelings, needs, desires. Without saying another word, Xander rose from his chair and approached Spike slowly.

He unhooked the buckle of his overalls and let them drop to the floor. Pulling himself into a sitting position, Spike drew in a breath at the sight of Xander's body. It seemed even more beautiful than the first time. It was large, strong, proud, all descriptions that could also be attached to Xander's erect cock. A cock that swayed, heavy and thick with each step he took.

Stopping at the side of the bed Spike reached out and wrapped his slender fingers around the girth. "You have the most beautiful cock I have ever seen. It's so big."

Spike placed his other hand on Xander's stomach and felt it ripple under his touch. Gently stroking him, he let his hand slide further down to cup the full, lightly haired balls.

Tugging slightly on the cock in his hand, Xander took the hint and stepped closer stopping only when he was aimed at Spike's mouth.

"Do you want to suck my cock, Spike?"

Holding Xander to the side, Spike rubbed his face in the crease between thigh and sac, holding the heat of the throbbing cock against his cheek.

"I want everything about your body." Breathing deeply, he absorbed the masculine smell of the man. Unable to wait any further, Xander slid his fingers in to Spike's hair and tightened his fist. "Open your mouth Spike."

Smiling, he did as he was told.

Xander tipped Spike's head back and stroked his own cock roughly before pushing it in. Xander took pride in his ability to control himself, but right now it was all he could do to keep from fucking Spike's mouth till he flooded and choked him with his cum.

Spike was light headed with need. His own cock was harder than he could remember. Rubbing his hand over himself as he sucked, Spike could feel the heat of want flush through him.

Pulling out of his mouth before he came, Xander continued to stroke himself. "Spread your legs for me, Spike."

Frowning, Spike looked up. "I don't think I can"

Xander smiled and squeezed a drop from the head of his cock. Spike leaned forward to catch it on his tongue. When he did he moved his legs.

"Xander! Xander they moved!"

"Yeah, but I don't think they're healed yet. Roll over on your stomach and I'll do your back again."

Spike was crushed. A back rub was not what he wanted from Xander. Laughing, Xander straddled Spike's body and carefully rolled him over. Leaning down he started at the back of Spike's neck, kissing and biting.

"Oh God, Xander. You were right. That is exactly what I need." Licking a path down his injured backbone, Xander was careful of his spine.

Finally stopping at his tailbone, Xander massaged his butt cheeks. "You have got the sweetest ass I have ever seen. Do you want me to tell you what all I'm gonna do to this ass?"

Working his hand underneath himself, Spike wrapped his fist around his own cock

"Yes, please tell me." he begged breathlessly.

"First, I'm gonna spread you wide open and lick your hole. I'm gonna get you all wet and loose with my tongue. I'm gonna eat you till you scream from the need to cum, then I'll stop so you can't"

Spike whimpered and humped trying to get some friction. Xander had him pressed too tightly to be able to move his hand the way he needed.

"Then I'll start working my fingers in you to get you ready for me. But it won't help you cause I won't touch your sweet spot. Not yet."

Xander felt Spike stop moving.

"Sweet spot?"

Xander had his nose wiggled deep between the cheeks of Spike's ass. When he realized the implication of what Spike was saying, Xander laughed. "Oh, Spike, have I got a surprise for you."

With that he proceeded to make good on his promise. Burying his face deeply in the crease, Xander feasted on Spike's pink hole. Each swipe of Xander's tongue caused the puckered entrance to wink and flex in an attempt to capture and hold the hot wet mouth. Sliding his hands under, Xander pulled Spike's ass up.

If he could have pushed his whole face into Spike's ass, he would. The move gave Spike enough room to move his hand.

Before Spike could stop himself from stroking, Xander shoved his tongue in. Stiffening, Spike's orgasm shot through him like lightning.

Smiling, Xander lowered Spike back down onto the wet spot on the bed. Spike collapsed with a squish. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

Spike could not believe he had embarrassed himself like that.

"Ain't nothing to be sorry 'bout. Never said we were done."

Xander ran his hands up and down Spike's sides giving him a moment to catch his breath. Reaching under him, Xander coated his fingers with the thick wet spending. Spreading it over Spike's relaxed hole, Xander inserted a finger with no resistance.

Spike focused and struggled till he was able to spread his legs further for Xander's exploration.

"That feel good? You like to be finger fucked?"

Spike tried to raise himself back up hoping to get more of Xander fingers in his body. "Yeah, it does feel good."

Xander pulled out and slid two in. Working them in deeper, he crooked and touched.

Grunting, Spike felt himself start to harden as the strangest most wonderful feeling shot through his balls and cock. "Fuck! What was that? Please do it again."

Xander chuckled.

Part Twenty

Spike was dumbstruck.

He had heard that every cloud had a silver lining. It would seem that the cloud of his drunken life and disabling car crash was blinded by the light of this silver lining.

The silver lining that at this very moment had his fingers deep in Spike's ass touching a spot that Spike had no idea even existed.

How on earth could this simple mountain man know more about Spike's body than he did?

Deciding all that was a pondering that could wait for another time, Spike slid back into the mindless land where only the cock existed.

"Are you ready for me, Spike? You ever done this before?" Xander had three fingers deep in Spike's body and had worked and stretched him as much as he could.

"Christ, Xander, I want it so much I could scream. I want to feel you inside me, but I'm scared. Is it going to hurt?"

Spike kept his face down. He didn't want Xander to see all the mixed emotions he was having trouble hiding.

He felt as though he were floating in the middle of the ocean, holding tight to a tow rope being pulled by a ship that had been his life. Slowly drowning, he could see Xander on a boat that would be Spike's future and he was tossing a line out for him.

All Spike had to do to grasp the new line was release the old. The thought of letting go of all he knew to reach for the unknown was terrifying. The thought of losing this opportunity scared him even more.

"Were gonna go slow. Give you time to get used to it. It might hurt a tad to start but once I'm all in it's gonna feel so good. You just wait and see." Xander rubbed his rough hands around Spike's stomach and up his chest.

Spike relaxed considerably. He really did trust Xander not to hurt him, and he had wanted to be with another man like this ever since he realized he was different than other boys way back in school.

Having made the decision, Spike released the line and swam toward the direction of Xander's body and voice. "Do it."
Spike used all his focus on relaxing his entrance.

Xander kissed Spike lightly down his back and coated his own cock with the rest of the mess on the bed and Spike's stomach from his earlier release.

Positioning himself at Spike's hot, stretched opening, Xander pushed.

Involuntarily tensioning, Xander could not get it in. It was just too tight and he would not force. "Come on, Spike. You gotta ease up."

"Sorry, sorry. Guess I'm still just a little nervous."

Xander held back. "Do you want to stop?"

Looking back over his shoulder, Spike finally faced Xander. "No! Please, Xander. Just do it."

So he did.

Without another word, Xander positioned the head of his swollen, red cock at Spike's hole and shoved in. The head popped through the tight ring surprisingly quickly.

Both men froze.

Spike squeezed, and Xander groaned. "Oh, hell, you're so fuckin' tight. Don't move. Don't squeeze."

After a couple of minutes they relaxed and Xander made the most of the opportunity. Leaning forward over Spike's back, Xander slid in balls deep.

Spike stiffened. It hurt, but strangely, not as much as he had feared. It also felt good. It felt complete.

Before he had the chance to examine all the components involved in what was happening with him, Xander moved. He pulled back slowly and pushed in.

The second time was faster. The third, harder. That's when he hit it. "FUCK! Do it like that. Do it just like that."

Xander smiled and let himself go. Knowing he had the angle right, he slammed in. Spike dropped his head to the mattress and let Xander own his ass.

"Damn, you're so tight. Feels so good." The sweat ran freely down Xander's face and dripped onto Spike's back to mix with his own.

Slowing his movement to a slow hump, Xander leaned down and licked the sweat off.

Reaching around he was pleased to find Spike again hard as a rock and leaking from the throbbing, straining head.

Xander wet his palm with Spike's juice and fisted him in rhythm with the pumping in his hole.

Sharply aware of the recovery in his legs, Spike felt the tingle start in his toes and travel up to his balls. He tried his best to hang on the precipice, but the constant stimulation to his prostate was too much. "Xander I can't..... I need to.....FUCK!"

Jerking stiffly, Spike tightened and came, amazed that he still had so much juice left in him after his earlier spend. The muscles rippling and flexing around his cock was all it took for Xander to follow

closely after.

Holding himself in as deeply as possible, he flooded Spike's bowels with his cum. Shivering with after shocks, Xander waited till both were relaxed and Spike's muscles released the hold it had. Slipping out carefully, Xander lowered Spike to the bed and laid down beside him.

Without moving or opening his eyes, Xander mumbled sleepily "Your legs o.k.?"

Spike twitched, flexed, and wiggled as best as he could. "Actually they seem to be much better."

Xander yawned. "Good. Your ass o.k.?"

More wiggling, squirming and clenching as Spike tested the area in question. "Feels sore as hell. It's wonderful." He chuckled.

Xander never heard the answer.

He was already sound asleep.

Part Twenty-One

Xander woke slowly.

All the wonderful warmth and pleasure of the night before came washing over him like a hot spring. Feeling around next to him, he was surprised to find that he was alone in his small bed.

Sitting up, he wiped the sleep from his eyes, and looked around the dim room. Morning had not yet risen and the sky still carried the deep blue of a false daybreak.

Quickly becoming frantic, he found that the cabin was empty. Leaping from the bed, Xander rushed to the door just as it opened and Spike, holding tightly to the door latch for balance, stumbled in.

"Where the hell were you?" Xander's words came out harsher and more angry than he meant.

"Well, good morning to you too." Spike was confused and trying his best to balance on wobbly legs.

"Oh, God, I'm sorry. I just woke and you were gone. I was worried. Are you sure you should be up?" Xander rushed over and slid an arm around Spike's waist.

Spike chuckled as he let Xander help him to the chair by the hearth. "Yeah, had to pee, didn't I. You were sleeping so well I hated to wake you. Anyway, I wanted to try out my sea legs."

Spike eased himself into the rocker as Xander knelt in front of him to begin rubbing his legs to warm and stimulate them.

"I'm afraid if you have an outhouse I didn't find it. I Made it as far as the large oak tree." Spike smiled.

He felt fantastic.

When he woke this morning, the booze was not the first thing on his mind. He was with an amazing man, his legs were healing, and last night was an earth shifting revelation. He had something he had not known for years. He had hope for the future.

He sighed and sat back as Xander massaged this feet, calves and thighs. Xander was also lost in thoughts of the future.

His brain worked frantically to remember if there was anything out there that would give him away.

He knew that Spike could not have made it back to the clearing where the still was and the barn was locked securely.

He mentally traced a path around the property looking for anything that might appear suspicious.

Gradually he relaxed as he reassured himself all was good. His caution and paranoia had served him well.

Spike was starting to become uncomfortable with Xander's silence and assumed it had to do with their activities.

"Xander? Everything all right?"

Reassured, Xander finally looked up. What he saw took his breath away.

Spike's face was bathed in the combined colors of gold from the dying fire and the purple hues of early daybreak.

His soft blond curls were messy and sex ruffled.

But the eyes.

The eyes held Xander's gaze locked. They were almost too blue to be real. They were so open and honest. They showed Spike's soul and made Xander feel as if his own was an open book.

Rising to his knees, Xander leaned forward and took Spike's face in his large hands. With no words spoken between them, Xander kissed him. A kiss that started out gently, but deepened when Spike was the first to open and allow his tongue to search for its match.

In his attempt to deep mine for Xander's tonsils, Spike pushed forward causing Xander to tip back. Without ever losing each others mouth they tumbled to the floor with Spike on top. "Let's do it again, Xander." Spike's voice was breathless and raspy.

"Are you sure? Are you too sore?" Xander was fumbling with his buckles even as he ask. With both of them naked, Spike started to lay down.

"No, not too sore."

Xander stopped him, holding Spike's hips firmly. "Stay on top. I'll help you ride me. That way if you are sore, you can make sure it feels good to you and doesn't hurt." Xander turned and grabbed a tin can sitting by the fireplace.

Wrinkling his nose, Spike peered into it. "What the fuck is that?"

Xander laughed "It's animal fat I use for cooking. It'll make it easier when I slide my big cock in your tight little pink hole."

"Oh, fuck, Xander." Spike closed his eyes. At that moment Xander could have spread motor oil and jelly jam on his dick and Spike wouldn't have cared. He had never heard a man talk like that. So intimately. So erotically.

Dipping his fingers in the tin, Xander scooped the fat and smeared it on his hand. Wrapping his hand around himself, he coated it quickly, enjoying only a few stroked on his already aching cock.

With Spike sitting on his hips, Xander used the rest of the grease on his palm to cover and slick Spikes cock. He fisted it slowly from root to tip. Never giving enough speed or pressure to encourage completion. Spike groaned. It was heavenly torture.

Xander let his slippery hand ease down to Spike's sac. For a small man it was wonderfully full and heavy. Xander loved the feel of it rolling in his hands.

Unable to wait any longer, he dipped his fingers in the can one last time and reaching between their legs, coated Spike's hole thickly.

Flicking his finger tip over the wrinkled entrance, he rubbed and relaxed it. Slipping first one then two fingers in, he was pleased to find Spike eager and seeming pain free after what was assumed to be his first time last night.

"You ready?" Xander's words shot through Spike like a knife through hot butter. His whole body felt

flushed and weak with the need for Xander's cock.

'One time and I'm a slut. Maybe Xander will be my new alcohol. I'm turning into a Xandaholic.'
Spike chuckled "Fuck yes I'm ready. Just help me, yeah?"

Spike leaned forward chest to chest as Xander reached behind him and lined his cock up to Spike's ready opening.

Guiding his hips, Xander eased Spike up and held him on shaky arms till Spike was sitting flush on Xander's cock.

Spike braced his hands on Xander's chest and slowly rocked back and forth till he found what he needed. As soon as his body jerked, Xander knew Spike had hit it. Holding Spike's hips and helping him move, Xander knew this would be a quicky.

Spike moved regularly slamming Xander's cock into his prostate as hard as he could. With his head thrown back, he rambled. "Fuck. So good. So good. Xander. Xander."

Bending his knees and placing his feet flat on the floor, Xander held firmly onto Spike's slim body and picked up the pace. Pumping up deeply, Xander could already feel his balls start to tighten. "Come on Spike. Show me."

Spike pulled one hand off Xander's chest and wrapped his fist around himself. The sight sent Xander over the edge. Letting Spike's body drop plunging his cock deeply, Xander felt his balls empty.

The feel of it and the sight of Xander's face tipped Spike over the edge with him. Spurting thick streams on Xander's stomach and his own hand, Spike's upper body collapsed down like a deflated balloon. He laid there listening to Xander's heart slowly return to normal.

"Hey, Spike?"

"Hmmm?"

"You stink."

Both men snickered.

Part Twenty-Two

Lying on the floor, Spike watched as Xander carried in the copper tub and started hauling buckets of water to heat.

"Xander?"

"Huh?" Xander paused in his task.

"Don't you ever want to comforts of life? An indoor toilet, electric lights, running water? Or have you just always lived like this?" Spike was propped up on one elbow.

Xander was now stoking the fire and hustling about to collect the soap and some clean clothes for them both. Thinking back on his years at college, he had thought it such a luxury. The lights, the showers, the plumbing, the heat.

Xander concentrated on the water in the pot. "I know most people have those things, but it didn't seem worth it just for me. Now if I had somebody else here I would make it nicer. At least pipe in water from a well or the spring."

Xander shrugged and resumed tending to the details of his task. Letting his mind continue on that path, Xander thought of all the things he would do if someone like Spike were to live here with him.

He would make a real home. Maybe add a room, a second fireplace. A kitchen of sorts. Someone like Spike, but not Spike.

Xander knew if Spike found out that he was nothing like the man he pretended to be, Spike would hate him. He would know how dishonest Xander was.

Being a moonshiner was one thing.

Being a liar was unforgivable.

"After we both wash I'll heat more water and wash all the clothes. I usually take them to the creek to rinse then hang them out. While I'm doing that I'll also check my garden and chop some kindling for the fire. Also been neglecting my traps. You relax here and I'll be back in a few hours."

Xander glanced at Spike sideways to see if he would accept all that. Truth was, all that did need seeing too, but mostly he had to get the car ready for tonight's run. He wasn't sure how he was going to manage it, but would think of something later.

He also needed to make some decisions about starting the next batch of shine. Tonight would deplete all his reserves in the cave and the copper lines had gone cold.

He was a business man with a business that could slip away. His customers were loyal, but that loyalty only extended to whomever was running the shine, and a lot of good ole boys round here wouldn't mind taking over his route.

Selling their own more inferior lightnin'. Not caring who they blinded or poisoned with it. Buyers knew that was the risk.

Spike was also lost in his own thoughts. "What? Oh, sure. That's fine."

Something Xander had mentioned off handedly had bothered him very much. The thought that Xander would make the cabin more comfortable for...who? Make it a cozy home for ..what? Some slutty tart from the nearest town?

Or worse, an ignorant hillbilly from down the way? A man who would not have the sensitivity to understand someone like Xander? No! Xander was so much more than that. He deserved the best. He deserved the world.

Silently he watched his mountain man fuss around for him and it touched his heart.

If only he wasn't a government agent. Not that Xander had anything to fear. Xander was the type to live his whole life and never break a law. Xander was an innocent, but how could Spike tell him that he was a lie.

He was not a book salesman. He was a revenuer. A fuckin' g-man sent to snoop around and destroy the way these simple people lived. Probably people Xander knew.

Maybe one of them was the bastard Xander wanted to make a home for. Well that much he didn't care about. He only cared that Xander would see him as a liar.

Finally ready, Xander helped Spike sit down on the floor with him and they took turns with the soap and rag, washing, rinsing and playfully touching.

Both men forgot their earlier thoughts and fears and relaxed in the company of the other. After drying them, Xander helped Spike dress and sit back in the rocker.

He threw all the dirty clothes in a pile and fetched clean water. Xander had a cup of soap shavings he used and proceeded to scrub each of their belongings.

He and Spike chatted easily while he worked and they spoke on different subjects. Comparing backgrounds and families, they found they had a lot in common.

Xander was enjoying the companionship more than he could have imagined. He had always been very content by himself, but now after just a few days here with Spike he dreaded the thought of facing a solitary life again.

It had fallen into place so naturally. Seemed like Spike had been here for months instead of just days.

Finally washed, Xander tossed all the soapy items back in the tub and hoisted it onto his shoulder. "Well, I'm headed out. You need anything before I go?"

Spike rocked back and forth in the chair rhythmically, eyes closed and a big smile on his lips. "No, I'm very content, thank you. I may just take a short nap while you are gone. Seems something has worn me out."

Chuckling, Xander turned to go. "Yeah, a nap would be good cause that something will hurry back as quick as he can."

Xander headed straight for the creek and dumped the clothes in the water. After rinsing them as well as he could, he wrung the water and hung them to dry. In this foggy mountain air Xander knew it may take a day or two to completely dry.

On the way back, Xander checked where his traps were stored. He hadn't reset them in almost a week and knew he was missing out on some very valuable pelts.

Coons were a regular, but beavers were more plentiful this time of year as they built their dams thick for winter. Soon as Spike was gone he would get himself back on track

Looking at all the empty traps and knowing his nearly abandoned still was sitting cold in the woods, Xander started to get pissed off.

"God damnit, Xander you're going to lose everything you've spent a lifetime building. And for what? Someone that will be gone in a day or two. Get your fuckin' head out of your britches and do what you need to do to protect yourself.

Winter's coming and you need all the money you can put back to see you through to spring."

Stomping and mumbling, Xander headed up the path to collect the last of the stored jugs and load them in the car.

He had made his decision and just wanted done with the liquor.

He wanted to focus on the trapping.

He wanted to be the man Spike thought he was.

The time for cocking off was over.

Part Twenty-Three

Spike sat quietly and watched Xander leave for the morning. He knew the man had been neglecting his chores in order to tend to Spike and his injury.

He had never known anyone as selfless as Xander. He had taken Spike in and cared for him so well. Feeding him, bathing him, even helping him wipe his ass.

Spike could not even imagine any of the people he worked with, some he even considered friends, of a sort, doing any thing remotely like that.

He knew entering into a sexual relationship was probably a stupid thing to do, but how could he not?

Being alone offered Spike the chance to look at things honestly, and he had to admit the truth, at least to himself. He was in love.

He had fallen hard and knew no matter what happened, his heart would always live in this small cabin in the mountains. Feeling clean, fed, warm, and in love, Spike rocked by the fire and fell asleep.

Using all his stealth, Xander darted through the trees to the path at the rear of the cabin. Loading up the last crate from the cave, he crept toward the barn.

Keeping to the side of the cabin that had no window he spun the dial on the padlock to the combination and opened the door. The sight of the souped up Lincoln shining, patiently waiting, filled him with confidence.

He had made several decisions and knew now what he wanted. Running his hands lovingly down the side of the car, he wanted her to be the first to know.

"This is it old girl. Our last run. We can't be destroying people's lives any more. Can live a good life

on the trapping and growing. Maybe start to work on the cabin again. Maybe find someone to share it with. We're gonna stop and talk to Old Joe tonight. Everyone else can go to hell."

Xander felt light as a feather. He still had one more thing to deal with, then he could return to the warmth of the hearth.

He could return to Spike.

Hurrying to finish, Xander did the one thing he had never done before. When he left the barn he forgot to double check that the lock had secured.

He jumped.

Startled awake. Spike looked around the cabin.

Nothing had changed.

Nothing was wrong.

Xander still hadn't returned and Spike had no idea how long he'd slept or what the noise was that woke him. Reassured that all was fine, he yawned and stretched.

He would have liked to know what the time was, but Xander had no clocks. Didn't seem to need any. Xander always had a good notion of the time of day without a timepiece.

Hoping to doze back off, Spike soon realized that was not going to happen. His bladder would not allow it. "Damn." Straining to listen, Spike could hear no movement outside, but figured it was worth a try. "Xander?"

Nothing.

Struggling to his feet, Spike was delighted to find he was steady and in very little pain. Shuffling forward, he opened the door and peered outside. Xander was nowhere to be seen.

Spike almost hated to admit it, but he knew he was more than capable of going out on his own. He was almost healed and then Xander would be sending him on his way.

Making his way around to the side, he spotted the outhouse and decided to make a go of it. The walk was slow and his leg muscles ached and cramped, but each step was a little easier than the last.

The air was crisp and the landscape was breathtaking. Spike could easily see why Xander was happy to make this his home.

Entering the toilet, the cold fog bit and curled around his cock and balls. Spike urinated and shook quickly, tucking himself away for the trip back to the house.

As this was the first time he had really been outside the cabin, Spike was curious to look around. Everything was surprisingly neat and organized.

The wood pile was stacked high and ready for the cold nights ahead. Directly behind was an open shed with some feed sacks for corn and a wheelbarrow. It was all exactly as Xander had said.

Whistling, Spike headed for the porch but was reluctant to go in. Although it was chilly it was not unbearably cold.

He had been inside and laid up for so long it was beyond wonderful to be up and moving.

Walking around to the other side Spike saw a path leading to a barn. He decided that would be just far enough to walk without tiring himself too much, and Spike had a need to know everything about Xander. Looking all around again to make sure he was still all alone, Spike started toward the barn.

Unsure about over stepping his bounds, Spike approached the barn door slowly. He noticed a padlock on the latch, but when checked found it to be unsecured. *'Well if it was anything important Xander would have locked it up.'*

Spike removed the lock and opened the door.

Part Twenty-Four

Xander hustled quickly through the trees and down the incline to the road. He wanted to check that Spike's car was still undisturbed and that no one had stolen his papers or books. He had decided to load all the things up in one of the boxes and return it to the cabin.

He was sure Spike would feel better if he knew his property was safe. He smiled at the thought of making Spike happy.

Approaching, he was shocked find another car parked close behind the wrecked one. Though unmarked, the man in the black suit and plain car just screamed "government."

He considered ducking back into the cover of the woods, but cursing his carelessness, Xander knew he had already been spotted.

"Hey! You! Boy! Get down here." The G-man stepped closer. With his hand on his hip Xander could clearly see the gun holster strapped to his shoulder partly concealed by his suit coat.

Without missing a beat, Xander slipped into his alter ego and sauntered down the bank. "Hey mister. Looks like you all mashed up yer car real bad. You hurt?"

The agent studied and dismissed Xander as any type of interest or threat.

Flashing a wallet with a badge, the agent tilted his head back towards the damaged vehicle.

"My name is special agent Liam O'Connor. The man driving this car is also a government agent. His name is William Beemish. Short, blond, talks with a fucked up accent. He sometimes calls himself Spike. Do you know what happened to him?"

Xander was speechless. He felt like he had just been punched in the stomach. He felt dizzy from the rapid mental turn around and fought desperately to keep his face blank and not vomit.

"Hey, Dummy. I'm talking to you. Have you seen the man who was driving this car?"

Liam was quickly getting pissed off. He did not want to be here much less wasting his time talking to an uneducated hillbilly that probably never finished the third grade. And frankly he sure the hell didn't care what happened to Spike.

The only reason he came out here was to save his promotion.

If he was to get the spot in Washington when they started that new agency, he couldn't have lost an agent on his record.

So here he was stuck in the boondocks talking to this idiot and getting mud on his new shoes.

"Nope, didn't see nobody. Don't usually come this way. I live up there." Xander pointed in the opposite direction, toward the town. "Ain't heard nothin' bout no strangers in these parts. Nearest town is ten miles up the road. They got one of them Greyhound busses there. Maybe your friend took the bus back to the city."

Xander's brain was frying. He had been taken.

He had been lied to.

He had let his heart confuse his common sense.

His thoughts centered on one urgent point. *'Oh Fuck! Spike is back at the cabin. Alone.'*

Liam appeared to be considering this suggestion and headed back for his car. Yeah. the bus was reasonable. Before leaving, he reached into his coat pocket and handed Xander a small card.

"You hear anything about him you go find someone to read this to you. It has my name and address on it. Can you remember that?"

Xander nodded dumbly, and Liam walked away. He had already forgotten Xander was still standing there.

Watching him leave, Xander backed up and blended in with the surrounding foliage. As soon as he was satisfied that it was safe, he ran for home.

Xander was still a good one hundred yards away when he knew something was wrong. All his instincts and built in alarms were screaming. Before entering the cabin, he circled the property. The once neat wood pile was now scattered as though someone had tossed it piece by piece.

Darting to the side path he saw it when he turned the corner. The barn door stood wide open. Xander stopped. Took a deep resigned breath and slowly walked forward.

Funny how one afternoon can destroy a lifetime.

Xander now knew who the snake in his omen was.

The snake was Spike.

A man who had come up here and made Xander question himself and his plans for the future.

A man who made Xander fall in love.

The snake was Liam O'Connor for coming here and telling Xander about a man he didn't know. Spike was not that hateful man's William Beemish.

The snake was the still itself. The money and danger had been intoxicating.

He knew it would not end well, but like Spike's alcoholism, Xander knew he was just as addicted to the booze. He was worse because he was destroying lives for his own profit and pleasure.

And that was the bottom line, wasn't it.

The real snake was him.

Xander Harris was the snake.

The catalyst that would cause the end of it all.

If he hadn't been a shiner it wouldn't have mattered who or what Spike was.

Xander wiped the tears from his eyes and stepped into the barn. There sat his prized Lincoln. The doors wide open and the windshield smashed. Some of the jugs had been tossed to the dirt floor, but most were still sitting in the crates. Still waiting for the night's delivery.

Xander left, pulling the door closed and resealing the padlock. Sighing deeply he turned and walked, not sure what he would be facing. He wouldn't stop Spike from arresting him. He had always known that was a possibility. His arrogance just didn't let him think it would happen.

Stepping up on the front porch, he noticed the door ajar. Pushing it open he entered. The room was cold. The fire had been neglected and gone out. The oil lamp too was unused making the cabin dim.

Giving his eyes a minute to adjust to the lack of light, Xander finally found what he was looking for. There sitting in the rocker by the cold hearth, was Spike.

Drunk.

Part Twenty-Five

It had taken Spike a few minutes to truly understand what he was seeing.

When he had entered the barn his first thought was that someone else must have been storing his car in Xander's barn.

Then the agent side of his brain kicked in and immediately started analyzing the situation.

This car was spotless. No dust meant it had not been sitting idly. It had been driven and lovingly cared for.

There was plenty of room outside and a padlock on the barn door which indicated the car was being kept out of

sight for a reason. Hidden from prying eyes.

Spike jerked open the passenger side door. It was everything he had been taught to look for. The rear seat was gone, replaced by wooden carrying cases that reached back into the trunk. Cases filled with brown jugs.

Spike pulled out one of the jugs and uncorked it. The smell that assaulted his nose made his shaky legs even weaker. He tossed the jug to the ground and collapsed sobbing. "God damn you Xander!"

He couldn't believe he had been lied to.

Everything about Xander was a lie.

His broken heart filled with hate and despair.

Everything he had come to believe in was a deceit.

All his adult life he had guarded his emotions against affection for another man. Then Xander came along and filled him with hope. He was shattered. Crushed. Full of rage.

Pulling himself to his feet, he held tight to the car for balance. Summoning all the strength he could, Spike unleashed all the fury he felt inside. Picking up a lug wrench from a tool shelf, he swung.

There was no satisfaction or relief in seeing the glass shatter.

It only made him feel worse.

He knew there was only one thing that would help the pain to go away. The same thing he had begged Xander for and was denied. "Don't have no booze here" Spike mocked in his best Xander voice.

Spike snatched one of the jugs from the car and pulled the plug. No longer caring about the consequences, Spike swallowed.

He felt every cell in his body welcome the burning drink. It warmed his throat and stomach as it ran down. He could almost count the brain cells that fried and died blessedly. Tipping the crock, he let another mouthful go down.

Laughing sourly Spike had to admit, "You make some quality shit, Xander. I just might become a regular customer."

Trying to clear his head, Spike considered his options. Even with reason and logic drowning in

liquor, Spike knew he would not arrest Xander. He just wasn't sure why. It would be the perfect revenge. The divine punishment, yet he also knew it would bring no satisfaction.

The half empty jug slipped from his hands and fell to the dirt floor, spilling. Grabbing another full one, he staggered back to the cabin with it to wait for the moonshiner's return.

He had no interest in finding the still.

"RULE ONE: Find and destroy the apparatus."

HA!

Maybe rule one should be 'Don't fuck the moonshiner'

He sat there for what seemed to be hours. The jug was almost dry and the fire had gone out.

The cabin was getting cold and Spike briefly thought of stoking it and adding some wood. *'Fuck it.'*

He wanted the room as cold as his heart.

Besides, this was Xander's place.

If he wanted it warm he should be here to care for it.

The afternoon sun had passed to the other side of the cabin causing the room to dim. Xander had shown him how to light the lantern, but that too went untouched. Slipping in and out of his drunken haze, Spike finally heard the footsteps he had been waiting on.

Xander stood inside the door for a moment allowing his eyes to adjust to the faded light. "You're drunk. Or should I say, you're drunk, Agent Beemish."

Xander slammed the door behind him. Crossing the room, he angrily snatched the jug from Spike's lax fingers and threw it smashing against the hearth.

"What?" Spike had centered himself and prepared a somewhat coherent outraged speech. He would throw all Xander's lies in his face then sit back and enjoy his begging apologies.

Now he was off balance. How did Xander know who he was? The combined effects of the alcohol and confusion left Spike silent.

"Nothing to say, Spike? Good, cause anything out of your mouth would probably be a lie anyway. You're a fuckin' liar and a stinkin' drunk. You want to arrest me? Well kiss my ass!" Xander was

pacing back and forth in front of Spike making him dizzy and causing his stomach to threaten a revolt.

The hate of the words cut through his heart and mind like a knife. "FUCK YOU, Xander! I'm a liar? Well what the fuck does that make you? A God damn back woods, ignorant, moonshining, hillbilly. Yeah, I'm an agent, but you're a"

Stopping in mid rant, Spike rushed to the door on weak legs and barely made it outside before vomiting what felt like gallons of alcohol onto the front yard.

Xander stood watching. He had always been disgusted at the weakness of a man trapped by alcoholism, but watching Spike he found the anger and disgust was only directed at himself.

He had done that.

He wanted to run to him and hold him while he threw up. He wanted to comfort him, but pride and shame held him back.

Spike slumped weakly against the door frame. The painful retching had somewhat sobered him up. "I hate you." The fact that it was said quietly did not lessen it's effect.

It knocked out what little breath Xander had in him. "Yeah, well, I hate you too."

Crossing the room, Xander grabbed Spike by the arm and tossed him roughly onto the bed. "Sleep it off, Spike. We got five hours before I start my run. When I go I'll drop you about a mile out of town. Get on the bus tomorrow morning and get the hell off my mountain and out of my life."

Xander turned and stomped out of the cabin hoping Spike couldn't see the tears that had already started to fall.

Part Twenty-Six

Silently Spike cried himself to sleep. He was so angry at Xander for lying to him, he couldn't think straight. And how dare he throw Spike's job up in his face?

He hadn't thought of himself as a government agent for a long time, and he knew it wasn't something he was planning on returning to even after he was healed.

He was so flustered and addled by drink he hadn't even thought to ask how Xander found him out. Probably didn't matter anyhow.

Spike could have kicked himself.

He had let his heart spin a fantasy of the two of them living together on this mountain. Growing old together and caring for each other. Thoroughly broken, Spike sobbed till he fell asleep.

Furious, Xander returned to the barn to assess the damage to his beloved Lincoln. Circling, he found it seemed to be only the windshield. Something that could be replaced without a lot of expense and work.

There was no damage to the body of the car, which he was grateful for. "Must have been too fuckin' drunk to do a proper job." Xander snorted and lightly kicked the tire.

Too bad the damage to his heart could not be fixed as easily. Telling himself the sorrow was for his car, Xander sat behind the wheel and let the tears fall.

Everything had been so wonderful this morning. Now it was all gone. Slipped through his fingers like water.

Curling into a fetal position on the front seat, Xander also finally dozed off.

Waking slowly, Xander was momentarily confused as to why he was laying on broken glass in his car. It took only seconds for it all to rush back in and overwhelm him with the depression of it.

Rubbing his hands roughly over his face, he climbed out and brushed the shards off his clothes. Sniffing, he wiped his nose on the back of his arm and began preparing the car for the run.

He straightened the cases and counted the jugs. He cleared the broken glass off the seat and shook the floor mats.

He felt numb. He was no longer mad. He was nothing.

Entering the cold dark cabin he saw Spike shivering on the bed in his sleep. Yesterday he would have covered him with a quilt. Yesterday he would have laid down and covered him with a blanket of Xander and cuddled him.

With a mental slap, he knew what had to be done. "Get up, Spike. It's time to go." Xander kicked the bed frame then turned to reset the fire logs. He would light it when he got back. Alone.

Groggy and badly hung over, Spike sat up and scratched his head. Against his better judgement, Xander turned and looked at him. Spike seemed so small and fragile on the bed. His blue eyes bloodshot and squinting. His blond curls were bed mussed.

Xander remembered when he had done that to Spike's hair. The numbness wore off in an instant and the pain doubled and crushed him.

Xander turned his back to Spike and gripped the mantle of the fireplace to regain control of himself. Without looking back he walked to the door, pausing only to say, "You have two minutes. I'll pick you up out front."

Spike watched him go and knew all hope walked out the door with him. He tried so hard to focus and understand everything that had happened but his head was splitting and his stomach wanted to explode.

He didn't blame Xander for hating him. He was a sloppy, stinking drunk. Just like Xander had said. That much he remembered clearly.

He also found it hard to recall what it was that he was so angry about. Because Xander had booze and wouldn't give it to him? *'No, that would have been the worse thing he could have done. Instead he held me through the shakes. Rubbed my back and took care of me.'*

Spike eased himself out of the bed and began collecting his few belongings, tossing them into his suitcase. It took only one of the two offered minutes. He had nothing that required the extra time.

He heard the rumble of the engine when Xander started the car. He watched from the porch as it pulled forward. It really was beautiful. Spike knew next to nothing about cars, but he knew perfection when he saw it. Sleek dark, and powerful.

He winced when he saw the damage that he had done. Just one more thing in his life that he had ruined.

"Get in Spike." Xander reached over and pulled the handle on the passenger door.

"Xander. I..." Spike wanted very much to apologize for the broken glass. He had no right. If only he hadn't been drunk maybe they could have talked. Maybe.

"Don't! Whatever you're gonna say, just don't. We should be there in thirty minutes. Just sit there and don't talk."

Xander knew if Spike said anything at all he would cave.

Spike could talk about the price of pork bellies and Xander would melt. He had to remain strong. Get this man out of his car and go on with his life. What else could he do?

The woods were silent save the sound of the massive V12 motor flying down the barely

distinguishable dirt lanes.

Xander knew this mountain like the back of his hand. The dips and turns, the pitfalls and soft spots.

Too bad he didn't know his own heart as well. Xander stared straight ahead. Spike watched out the dark side window.

When he knew he was less than a mile from the town, Xander turned off his headlights and slowed to a stop.

"Towns that way. About a fifteen minute walk. Bus should be leaving first light. Oh, and Spike, if you're coming back to arrest me, please send someone else. I don't want to ever see you again." All that was said quietly, without ever taking his eyes off the road ahead.

Mustering all the false bravado he could, Spike snorted. "You aren't important enough to arrest, Xander. And don't worry, I have no desire to return to this shit hole."

Spike hoped Xander hadn't heard his voice crack on the last of that pathetic farewell. He collected his bag and had no more than stepped out when the car roared to life and sped off.

With a deep sigh, Spike turned and walked away.

Part Twenty-Seven

The winter had been long and harder than usual. Xander kept busy, throwing himself into his chores and not allowing his mind to wander any further than the task at hand. He exhausted his body till his brain couldn't think.

He had cleaned and reiled his traps, doubling his catch from the previous year. The pelts were skinned and stretched in the air to dry.

He knew when he took them to town for sale it would bring enough money to see to all his needs for months. He could buy seeds and canning jars for his garden, and the basic supplies of flour, coffee, and lard. Yes, Xander had everything he needed.

Christmas had come and gone with no note taken of the day. The new year the same. The day didn't matter since he had made his resolutions long before that.

The still had been dismantled and the cave closed over. A trip to the junk yard found a windshield that fit the car perfectly. The seats were put back in and the car parked. Xander still lovingly washed and cared for it, but no longer took it on the adventurous treks through the mountain trails.

Time spent in the Lincoln was painful. It often forced him to recall the last night he took it out. His heart twisted when he remembered nearly tossing Spike out the door and driving away.

He didn't make his run that night, instead driving straight to Percy's Tavern to see old Joe Smith. Pulling in to the rear of the building, Joe had come out to greet him as he always did.

"Xander, my boy. You're early. Come in. Sit with me for a while." Walking to the side of the car and peering in, Joe's brow wrinkled. "You got a full load. You not drop off at your other stops? Hey, who broke your window?" Joe backed up looking all around "You got revenuers on your tail?"

Quickly Xander reassured him, "No, Joe. Just had a little accident. It's o.k. I'm just not making deliveries any more. I'm out of business. This is the last of my stock. You want it, you can have it. No cost."

Joe walked over and put his arm around Xander's shoulder. "Come in boy. You look like you need to talk." Fighting hard to keep the tears at bay, Xander nodded.

Once he settled into a chair in Joe's back office, Xander broke down. Everything poured out of him in a flood of pained words.

He spoke of all the mistakes and deceit on both their parts and his shame and self revelations. Joe sat silently and let Xander go on. He knew the young man had all this festering in him and it had to come out.

At the finish he told how he had almost tossed Spike out on his ear, then left him alone in the woods.

Xander's strength drained away with the words. When the story was finished, so was he. He sat slumped over with his head in his hands.

Moving to sit beside him, Joe put his arm around the young man and pulled him close. "Who are you really mad at, Xander? Him? Or yourself?"

Xander shrugged. "Both of us, I guess. It doesn't matter. He's gone and I'm back to being alone." Lifting his head, Xander looked Joe in the eye.

"Do you think this is an omen? Because I have feelings for him and not a woman?"

Joe gave his shoulder a squeeze and laughed. "No, Xander. Your heart seeks out another heart. It doesn't look first at the plumbing. Sides, I got a younger brother who likes the men too. It don't matter none. What matters is that it is not meant for a man to be alone. You all by yourself on that mountain. Not good Xander. You gonna wear your hand out."

"Joe!"

Both men laughed, and Xander relaxed. He knew coming here was the right choice.

"Now, be a good boy and help me unload your crates. If you not gonna run shine no more, I gotta take all you got to give."

Feeling some better, Xander carried the jugs in and stacked them up in Joe's hidden storeroom. When he was finished Joe walked him to the car.

Placing the palm of his hand on Xander's cheek, he patted it. "Watch the signs, boy. It will come when you least expect it and when it does you will know what to do."

Thanking him, Xander climbed behind the wheel and drove off.

And so it went. Time passed and Xander watched for a sign, but none came.

'Maybe that's a sign in itself' he wondered. He cut the wood and canned his food. The hunting was good and he had plenty of meat.

Using the copper tubing from the still, Xander piped water from the spring house to the cabin. He found a good used hand pump and, by February, had water.

April saw the first new buds of the spring flowers. He knew when the last of the ground frost was done, he would start his planting.

It had been six months since Spike had gone, and Xander had all but given up on a sign. He wasn't even sure anymore if it all had really happened as he remembered it.

Xander rocked slowly. The day had been the same as all the others. Nothing changed, not bad, not

good, just the same.

He dozed in his chair. Even after all these months the bed still held too many painful memories.

Sleep came quickly and his dreams this night were vivid.

He was back to that terrible night all those months ago.

He had told Spike to shut up and get in the car.

Xander turned and fussed in his sleep.

He drove like a fool, scaring them both till he came to the town.

His dream relived the car stopping and Xander telling him to go.

The tears rolled down as Xander struggled to wake.

Suddenly the dream changed.

Before getting out of the car, Spike turned to him.

He placed his small hand on Xander's arm and smiled with those blue eyes. "I'll wait for you, Xander. Come for me when you're ready." Then he turned and was gone.

Xander woke with a start. That wasn't what happened!

What was that?

His heart jumped and hope flooded his body with warmth and excitement.

He had finally had his sign.

He knew what to do.

Xander rushed around packing for his trip to the city.

Part Twenty-Eight

Spike had always heard that you couldn't change your life till you hit rock bottom. Standing alone in the woods, bag in hand, sick, and heartbroken, he would have thought his life was as low as it could go.

He would have been wrong.

After getting lost, it took him the better part of an hour to find his way to town. Once there he slept on a bench in front of the bus station waiting for morning. Knowing he had no money for a ticket, Spike had no idea what to do next.

He woke to someone intermittently shaking him roughly and kicking the bench. "Wake up Spike! Jesus Fuck I can smell the booze all over you."

Startled, Spike attempted to jump up only to lose his balance and fall to the ground.

Liam stood over him with a disgusted look on his face he made no attempt to conceal. At least that boy had been right and he had found Spike with very little effort.

"Mr. O'Connor?" Spike struggled to his feet. His head still throbbed, but his stomach seemed to have settled enough that he possibly might live through the day. "What are you doing here?"

Liam grabbed him by the arm and roughly steered him towards the dark vehicle parked across the street. "What the fuck do you think I'm doing. You haven't checked in for over a week, Spike. Guess I can see why. You been laying drunk this whole time?"

Spike allowed himself to be manhandled into the car silently. He thought about the past week and straining to hold back the tears, said nothing.

Liam rolled his eyes "Yeah, I figured. Well this is it Spike. When we get back you can collect your things. You're fired."

Spike heard the words but didn't care. He had lost everything else what was a job he no longer wanted anyway? He sat and watched out the window.

The trip back to the city was long and lonely. Liam ragged on him nonstop. Told him what a loser he was. How he was just going to drink himself to death anyway so why didn't he hurry up and do it.

Nothing he said touched Spike in the least. How could it? It was all the same things he had told himself a million times over. Besides, Liam O'Connor's opinion of him didn't mean squat.

The next few months were all consuming.

Spike was unceremoniously tossed out of the agency the day he returned. Jobs were hard to find

especially for a foreigner with no real skills.

After the first two months of unemployment, he was evicted. Christmas was spent living in a flop house with fifty other men down on their luck. New Years dinner was soup in a bread line, and he was grateful for it.

Still, he was able to fight his need to get drunk. Whenever the urge would become too strong, he remembered Xander. All the man had done to help him quit, and the look of disgust when he failed.

Sobriety was the biggest achievement of his life. He was proud of himself for the first time ever.

1941.

The first of the year came with no parties, no friends. But it did come with something Spike needed much more. It came with a job.

A man had come to the shelter looking for sober young men who could work on the docks. It was hard back breaking work especially for someone of Spike's smaller stature, but it was honest work that paid enough to get him on his feet.

A small rental room and regular meals were all the needs he had, or so he told himself. Still, there was not a day that went by that Spike didn't think of Xander. Miss him and wonder if he had found that someone special to share his home with.

The snow and ice of February bit into his skin and no amount of clothes or gloves could make him warm. Spike clearly reveled in the day in April when he stepped outside and could smell spring in the air. The sun had a warming promise to it and the sky was a cloudless blue.

He pulled his collar up around his neck and started for work. The wind had kicked up and was still cold and biting. Out of nowhere a maple leaf blew up and swirled around him. The fact that there were no trees any where around made it seem such an oddity.

Mesmerized. Spike watched it as it tumbled and lifted in the air. Spinning and turning it went higher till it was almost out of sight.

On a silly impulse, Spike blew it a kiss and called after it "Take that to Xander."

He laughed at the himself and the childishness of the action.

Then bracing against the frigid air, continued on to the docks.

Part Twenty-Nine

Reaching under his bed, Xander pulled out a small metal trunk that had been his fathers when he was in the war. Now it held all of Xander's 'important', as he called them. He had a good suit of clothes from his days in college that he really had no use for now.

He had a leather strap that served as a collar for his old hound dog that had run off and never come back. He had some books, novels he kept from school that he had read a hundred times and would still read again.

And he had a smaller box of papers. Birth and death certificates. All his saved money. Car title and land ownership deeds. There was also a well handled small white card.

A card with the name and address of a jerk. But it was a jerk that would know how to find Spike.

Taking out the clothes, money, and the card, Xander replaced the other items and slid the trunk back under the bed.

After putting on the wool pants and white shirt, Xander tucked the card in his pocket and packed a few more clothes in a suitcase.

A suitcase that used to contain broken bottles, but had been lovingly cleaned and stored. He checked around the cabin. There was really nothing there that required his daily attention or maintenance.

Taking a last look at his empty bed, his heart carried the hope that he would find Spike and convince him to return to the mountain. Xander pulled the door closed and headed for the barn.

The air had been still all morning and Xander was surprised when a sudden gust blew up. Turning his face, a large wet maple leaf flew around him and stuck to the center of his chest. Despite blowing down a puff of breath, it clung on tight.

Peeling it off, Xander felt like it was a good sign and decided to take it with him. He threw his case in the car and jumped behind the wheel. "Let's go girl. You been sitting too long. It's time for a new adventure." The engine roared to life and he was off.

It was a longer trip than he had anticipated. Sleeping the first night on the backseat and eating in

greasy spoons, he drove almost nonstop.

The card had given the address as a building in the center of New York City. He had heard from classmates who lived here how big the city was, but big didn't even begin to describe it.

He arrived late the second evening, and parking on the street, slept again in the car. By morning he was rumpled, hungry and badly needed to piss. He slipped down an alley and leaned against a building hopefully out of sight.

Only after releasing a hot stream of acrid urine did he notice the blankets and boxes. He was shocked to realize people were living here. In cardboard crates and cheap wood shantys. He prayed to God Spike had not sunk to that level.

Xander now felt a new urgency to locate him and after stopping three more times to ask directions, he found himself parked in front of a huge imposing government building.

Double checking the address against the one on the card, he satisfied himself that he was in the right place.

Xander did his best to right his clothes and finger comb his hair. Entering through the front doors he went directly to the security guard at the inside desk.

"Good morning. I'm here to see Mr. Liam O'Connor."

The security guard never took his eyes off the newspaper he was reading. "You got an appointment?"

For a quick moment, Xander considered lying, but knew it could be easily checked. "No, but he said to come see him if I had any information." Xander smiled broadly. The statement was true, the information, not so much.

Still deeply absorbed in the daily adventures of Mutt and Jeff, the guard pointed in the direction of the elevators. "Fifth floor. Office 503. Name's on the door.

Xander walked in the direction indicated, entered the elevator and waited patiently for the clanking metal cage to arrive at his stop. 503.

Easy enough to find. He tapped twice on the office door and stepped in.

The two ladies typing madly on the machines at their desks both stopped and looked up. "Good Morning. Can I help you?" The cheap blond seemed to be in charge so he approached her.

"Yes, my name is Alexander Harris and I need to see Mr. O'Connor on a confidential matter."

Blondie crossed her legs and ran her eyes up and down Xander's body slowly, pausing almost imperceptibly at his crotch. Opening her desk drawer, she pulled out a tube of blood red lipstick and sensually applied it to her mouth, finishing the job with an exaggerated smack of the lips

"You got an appointment?" She fluttered her eyes and wiggled her ass in her chair. The smile on her face was nothing less than predatory.

Staring at the smear of red on her front tooth, Xander pulled the card from his pocket. "No, but he said to come and see him."

Rising slowly from her seat, she swished to the main office door and stuck her head in.

She spoke too quietly for Xander to hear, but he was sure she announced him. He concealed a snicker when her conversation was completed with a "Fuck!" and a hanky rubbed briskly over her teeth.

Returning to her seat she jerked her head in the general direction of the inner office. "Go on in. He will see you."

Part Thirty

Xander instantly recognized the man standing in front of him as the same asshole he had met six months ago. The time had apparently not been kind to him as Xander noted he now looked more like a worn out private dick rather than a polished Government agent.

Xander shrugged. He was totally disinterested in what problems this jerk had. He had enough of his own. Which brought him back to the reason for his visit. "I need to know where Spike is."

The look on Liam's face was priceless. It had taken him a few minutes to remember the hay seed he had spoken to all those months ago on the mountain. But this didn't sound like the uneducated moron who had claimed no knowledge of the lost agent. "Thought you never saw him?"

Liam leaned forward in his chair. This promised to be an interesting morning after all.

"Yeah, well I lied. I need to talk to him. How can I find him." Liam copied Buffy's slow perusal of Xander's body exactly. Right down to the pause.

"Suppose I can guess what you want with him. Gotta admit I had the same thought a time or two." Straightening up, his face then changed to an expression of anger and disgust. "Course that was before the little shit cost me my promotion. Fuckin' little drunk."

Xander gritted his teeth and balled his fists at his sides. "Look, I don't care about your promotion or how many people you want to fuck, I just want to know where Agent Beemish is." Then mustering up all the self control he had, Xander added, "Please."

Liam rested his forearms on the desk and looked smug. "There is no Agent Beemish. He was fired. Last I heard he was working down on the docks. Was homeless for a while. Now, I don't know. Can't say exactly where he is, you just gonna have to go down and ask around."

Though hurt, Xander could not say he was surprised. He had feared as much. He wanted very badly to ask O'Connor if Spike was sober, but he was afraid the man would enjoy the answer too much, so he stayed silent.

With just a nod of his head, Xander turned to leave. Before turning the knob he looked back one last time. "You're a real asshole. You know that?"

Liam nodded. "Yeah, I know." and he sat back propping his feet up on his desk and chuckled.

After receiving directions from the security guard, Xander headed for the area of the city's shipping ports. The guard had told him he couldn't miss it. Unfortunately he was right. It was huge. Miles of shoreline filled with giant ships loading and unloading cargo.

Cars, trucks, thousands of men shouting, working. Trying to find Spike would be next to impossible, but Xander had come too far to just give up. He had to try.

He dove into the throbbing pulse of activity. Asking first one then another. Any man he could persuade to talk to him.

Without a picture, all he had was a description. Most, suspicious of his motives, would not even speak to him. Those that did would just shake their heads. No one knew or cared who Spike was.

Hours of frustration and failure were taking their toll. Xander was tired, angry and above all hungry as fuck. Finding a small greasy spoon that catered to dock workers, Xander settled into a booth and ordered a burger and a cup of coffee.

Choking them down he tried to decide what to do next.

"Y'all look like life been yanking your neck tie a tad too tight" Xander lifted his face. The young waitress that had served him was now leaning against the next booth with a smile aimed in his direction. "You look like a man that's out of work. That it?"

"What? No. I'm trying to find someone and I just haven't had much luck." A thought came to Xander. "Hey, I'll bet most of the men that come in here work on the docks. Maybe you know the man I'm hunting. Kinda short, blond hair, early twenties, name's William. Sometimes calls himself Spike?"

"Shoot, darlin' Lots of men come in here match that description, but the name don't sound familiar. Sorry." Tearing off his tab, the waitress dropped it on the table. "Can I get you anything else?" When Xander shook his head, she walked away.

Xander continued his walking and searching, but the end of the day brought only more discouragement. He had not been able to locate anyone who knew Spike.

It was beginning to feel hopeless. Unhappily, he returned to his car and his cramped bed in the back seat. Maybe some sleep would bring a new idea.

Spike was whipped. Twelve hour days of lifting heavy crates were taking their toll and his body felt like he had been horse whipped. An idea had been tiptoeing around his head lately and for some reason today it was starting to grow.

Maybe because it was spring. A time that should have been full of hope and new beginnings. Maybe because of the shape of the world. A place right now that showed no hope of peace. The radios and newspapers had talked of nothing but war.

London had been bombed and Germany seemed to want to devour everything in it's path. It was only a matter of time till the States became involved.

Another world war.

Who would have thought.

They promised the first one would be the last.

All this combined together to solidify the decision Spike had been trying to make.

He wanted to go home.

He wanted to go back to the cabin on the mountain.

He wanted Xander.

Part Thirty-One

Decision made, Spike wasted no more time. He collected the money owed him and walked off the job. It didn't really matter. It wasn't the type of career that required a skill beyond a strong back and the need for a regular paycheck.

For every man working, there were a hundred more waiting on a chance to step in. Returning to his room, Spike packed his few belongings back into the same case he had arrived with.

He headed straight for the bus depot and bought a ticket. A one way ticket. He was prepared to offer any apologies, begging included, that it took for Xander to accept him back. Pride was a much overrated virtue.

He had lost too much time already. He wouldn't lose any more.

Xander hated to give up. He had come so far, driven for two days and had such high hopes. He couldn't quit. Not yet.
Not without trying again.

Driving to the nearest gas station, he used the men's room, washed up, changed his clothes and brushed his teeth.

All things that made him feel one hundred percent better. It bolstered his confidence and gave him the encouragement to try once more.

The diner opened early for breakfast so the dock workers would have a place to congregate before the sun came up.

Bullshit, complain, and talk of current events.

Dropping back into the same booth, Xander waved at the dark haired girl that had waited on him yesterday. "Hi sugar. Y'all find your friend? Or ya just come back to see me? Names Fred, by the way"

Xander blinked. Fred? Oh well, the flirty waitress was so low on his list of priorities, she wasn't even a blip on his radar.

"Nope, still looking, but after a big breakfast I'm headed out again." Xander smiled and tucked the napkin in under his chin. He placed his order and drank his coffee.

The diner filled with an eclectic mix of business men, dock worker, vagrants, and working girls. Xander scanned each man that entered carefully. Watching closely as each turned to face him or removed his hat.

None was the one he wanted. None could have come close. He ate quickly and before leaving thanked Fred and left her two bits as a tip. She waved, wished him luck, then returned to her conversation with a dark skinned man at the counter.

"Who was that?" He pushed his cup forward.

Fred poured him more coffee. "Another snoop sent by O'Connor's goons. Still looking for Spike. Don't worry, I didn't tell him anything. So, you want the pancakes?"

Xander returned to the shipping docks. His luck seemed to have improved some. At least today people were more willing to talk to him. One of the bosses even offered him a job. Seemed a worker had just up and quit in the middle of the day.
Huh, city folk.

There were also several false leads. Men who met the description, but upon hunting them down didn't even appear close to resembling Spike.

By evening the workers here tired, hungry, and heading for home. Xander decided it was time for him to do the same.

Returning to his car, he slid in and rested his head on the steering wheel. He was torn. He knew he couldn't stay here and just wander the docks every day, Hell, Spike might not even be here.

That fuckin' O'Connor could have lied to him. Maybe Spike was never here. On the other hand, going home alone was depressing as hell.

He had let himself get too hopeful. Let his heart make plans reality couldn't see through. Xander sighed. It was late and he was tired.

He thought about eating, but just couldn't make himself move. Curling up on the seat, he wiped the tears from his eyes and made the decision to leave first thing in the morning.

~*~*~*~*~

The bus driver took his ticket and threw his bag into the cubby hole in the bottom of the bus. "Just

made it, son. We're pulling out in ten minutes. Grab a seat and settle in."

Spike had picked up a card with the travel schedules on. According to this they made only a few regular stops for bathroom, food, and to switch drivers.

He should be on the mountain in less than thirty hours. With his head down studying the timetable, and his heart high, Spike felt the bus pull out and start down the highway. He knew he was too charged to sleep. He checked his watch, twenty-nine hours, fifty minutes.

The warmth of the springtime sun disappeared at dusk and the car turned cold. Xander shivered and pulled his jacket tighter around his body.

He refused to spend the exorbitant fee of \$2.00 just to rent a room at a motel. How did decent people have the nerve to charge so much just for a place to sleep. It wasn't like he wanted to buy the damn thing.

Trying his best to get comfortable, Xander looked up at the rumble of a huge engine and watched a giant Greyhound bus chug past. It was the last thing he saw before dozing off to sleep.

Part Thirty-Two

The bus was nearly full, but Spike had been able to find a seat towards the back. He would have preferred the privacy of a seat by the window where he could rest his head and sleep but if push came to shove, he was just glad to be aboard and headed in the right direction, for once in his life.

The sun was starting to just set and the interior of the bus was dim. Looking around him he could see the other passengers settling in for their own journeys. Trying to find a position of comfort for the night.

They were an odd mix of humanity. All with their own destinations and reasons for getting there. Beside him, staring out the window was an older man. Dressed in a suit that had definitely seen better days, it was, however, clean and carefully mended by someone who must have worried how he looked.

Glancing discreetly over his shoulder, Spike watched the young couple behind him. They could hardly keep their hands off each other. They must have been late teens or early twenties, and wore obviously new, matching, cheap wedding rings.

He had his arm around her shoulder and would 'accidentally' let his fingers wander and brush over her breasts. This would cause her to giggle, as though it was always an unexpected surprise. Glancing down, Spike noticed her hand slip over and settle in his lap.

The young man moaned quietly and Spike turned his head. Directly across the aisle was a young mother. She had a baby in her arms and two more toddlers wedged into the one seat next to her.

Rocking the baby, she spoke softly to the other two and did her best to make them comfortable enough to be able to sleep.

The fat middle aged man sitting in front of her was loudly making note of the fact that he was not happy to be sitting near children. Every little movement caused him to turn and glare. Each glare elicited an apology from the beleaguered mother.

Spike watched it all silently. He had his own thoughts and personal struggles. What would he do if Xander wouldn't accept him back? He had saved some money and even after buying his ticket, paying his bills, and setting aside a little for food on the trip, he still had a \$20.00 bill.

It was hidden in his shoe and if worse came to worse, it would buy him a return ticket. He could always go back to the docks.

It was a thought more depressing than any he had ever faced. Still, the one thing he was most proud of was the fact that as bad as things got, he knew he would not return to the drink.

He had not touched liquor since that terrible day. His last day with the man he loved. No, no matter how this all turned out he would not find the solutions in a bottle.

Checking the schedule once more in the last bit of light, Spike knew they would be stopping for a quick bathroom stop in a gas station in two hours. He could easily sleep through that one.

A food stop was three hours later. Most of the passengers must have been in bladder agreement as they were already twisting, turning and positioning in their cramped seats hoping for a few hours sleep.

Though Spike wished for the time passing mercy of nocturnal repose, he knew he was way too nervous. He also knew from the rustling and whispering sounds behind him, he wasn't the only one who would not sleep tonight.

Silently Spike watched the lives around him.

The hours and stops rolled by.

The young couple behind rarely got off the bus.

The were possibly getting off on the bus. Spike smiled.

The old man beside him was a minimal.

A quick piss.

A sandwich and a cup of coffee.

No conversation.

That suited Spike who really didn't want to know. One thing did become glaringly clear. The young mother across the aisle was traveling on less than a shoestring.

Often he would hear one of the children fuss that they were hungry. Only when they became insistent did she reach into a small brown bag under her seat and bring out an apple or half a sandwich for them to share.

What made Spike speak to her, he couldn't say. "Looks like you have your hands full, yeah?" The mother smiled, creating tired little wrinkles at the corners of her eyes.

"Yes. They have never traveled before and I'm afraid they are a bit restless."

"Nonsense" Spike spoke quietly "They are very well behaved. Are you taking them on holiday?" The smile faded and she kissed the baby's head.

"No. My husband was drafted and we couldn't afford to live on our own. My parents have agreed to take us in. We are going there."

Spike could tell this was not an arrangement that had been agreed to willingly. Probably on either side. The upcoming war would change a lot of their lives.

He knew that due to his citizenship and the resulting damage left to his heart by a case of childhood rheumatic fever, he could not be drafted, but he didn't know about Xander. What if he just got him back only to lose him again?

The bus pulled in to a diner. It was 4 a.m. and this would be the only stop of the morning.

Gas, bathroom, food. They had thirty minutes. The driver left no room for misunderstanding. As Spike rose to go he noticed the mother sharing some crackers and fruit with her children.

Twenty-five minutes and all were back in their seats and ready to go. As they started out, Spike handed a brown sack to the mother and nodded.

Looking inside, her eyes welled with tears as she saw the sandwiches, milk, and cookies. Clutching it close, she dropped her head. "I couldn't possibly accept so much from a stranger."

Spike grinned. "Names William. Pleased to meet you." Returning the smile warmly she quickly divided the food among the eager children. "Thank you William. My name is Hope."

Spike chuckled. "Hope" That was what Xander would have called a sign.

The day was bright and sunny. With the children's tummies full they were cheerful and content. Even the grouch in front of them seemed able to ignore them in favor of the book he had brought to read.

Before dozing for a midmorning nap, Spike noticed the old man beside him bring a picture out of his vest pocket and run his thumb over it slowly. It was a lovely lady. Though the picture was old and worn, he could see the sparkle in her eyes.

"That the missus?"

The old man jumped at Spike's words, almost as though he had not noticed him sitting there. Taking one last look, he tucked it back quickly. "Yes, she died last week of the cancer. Been together forty-two years." The old man turned his face back to the window.

Conversation over.

There was nothing to discuss.

Part Thirty-Three

The trip was long.

It's impossible to comprehend how long thirty hours can be till you are trapped in a cramped little space, breathing stale smoky air and other people's body odor. It's even worse when you realize part of what you are

smelling is yourself.

It didn't matter.

With each mile Spike's stomach got more jumpy. He considered getting off at the next stop, wherever that happened to be.

He considered going back.

He considered throwing himself in front of the bus and letting it roll over him.

Like a nickle matinee, his brain played several versions of the reunion. He would be welcomed with open arms. He would be rejected, the door slammed in his face. Xander simply wouldn't remember who he was. The last one scared him the most.

The one he liked the best was the one where Xander drags him through the door and kisses him passionately. He would be wearing the silly bib overalls he always had on. He would let them drop to the floor and insist Spike undress as quickly as possible.

Xander would already be hard. His perfect cock standing hard, flushed red and leaking at the mere thought of fucking Spike.

Xander would scoop Spike up in his arms and pull his body flush against him.

Cock against cock.

Smearing juices between them.

Wetting each other's bellies and cocks with the wet leaking need

They would kiss.

Spike reveled in the memories of Xander's kisses. They were deep, searching, all encompassing. Sometimes Spike would jack off just to the thought of Xander's kisses. Spike squirmed in his seat as the visions became clearer.

Xander would stand straight with his hands on Spike's head.

He would steer his mouth down to suck and lick on Xander's nipples.

First one then the other till they were both hard as pebbles.

Slowly he would run his tongue down Xander's chest swirling around and tugging the trail of hair

that led to the
grand prize.

Dropping to his knees he would come face to face with the only cock he had ever known as intimately as his own.

He would want to suck it, but not yet. First he wanted to rub his nose in the hair, the crease, under the sac.

Reacquaint himself with the musky individualism of his man.

"Please, Spike. I've waited for you too long."

Xander's voice would be husky and breathless.

After tasting and licking the sweet bitter bubbles from the slit, Spike would finally please them both and swallow it down till it hit the back of his throat.

Spike could clearly remember the little grunting sounds Xander made when his cock was receiving a good sucking.

Spike would wrap his palm around his own desperate erection and fist himself in time with his tongue's massage of Xander's thick, throbbing flesh.

Unable to hold back after their long time without each other, Xander would hold Spike's head in a viselike grip and unmercifully fuck his face till he doubled over and shot hot globs of cum down Spike's throat.

It would be pure romance.

Sighing, Spike opened his eyes and noticed Hope snickering. Mortified, Spike snatched his fedora off the floor between his feet and dropped it onto his lap.

Blushing, he couldn't meet her gaze. "Sorry" His voice was quiet, but the smile on his lips showed no regret.

"Seems you're missing someone special too." It was the only acknowledgement of the tent his hat barely covered before she returned to tending her children.

~*~*~*~*~

Xander had driven through the night. He would have made better time if he had not stopped three times after just leaving the city.

Each time he would pull off the road and consider going back to the docks.

Try again.

Question more people.

Go back to O'Connor and ask him for help.

Each mile he travelled was further from Spike, and it felt like failure. Like defeat.

All the things he had thought about saying to him, all the things he had thought Spike would answer, he had never allowed himself to think about the possibility that he would be unable to find him at all.

The only consolation was the thought that maybe he could try again.

Save some money and maybe move to the city.

Get a job and stay for however long it took to find him.

Yeah, that's it.

That is exactly what he would do.

Feeling somewhat better, Xander went through the motions of driving, eating, and stopping for gas and a pee. He even pulled over for a nap. Just a few hours to rest his eyes and get him back on the road for home.

Home.

It was a thought that comforted him.

He wanted to sit in his chair by the hearth and rock.

He just wished Spike were by his side when he did it.

Part Thirty-Four

Thirty promised hours had stretched into thirty-two due to a detour and being stuck behind a tractor on a long stretch of highway.

Spike wanted to scream. A night, a day and the moon was again full. Almost there. He twitched and squirmed.

"Won't be much longer."

Spike looked over at Hope's words, and saw her smile sweetly. "You got someone special waiting for you?"

"I hope so." Spike kept his voice low. Most of the bus was again sleeping. "We didn't part on very good terms. I don't know if I will be welcome or not."

Lifting his head, Spike looked her in the eye. "I know I love him."

Hope's smile never faltered. "Then it will be all right. Just make sure he understands he is a lucky man to have you."

Spike laughed "I'll tell him that."

Hope looked out the window "Seems like you will be telling him soon. Isn't this your stop?"

Spike's heart jumped to his throat. He was here. He still had a long walk ahead of him, but he was finally here. Suddenly his nerves threatened to fail him. He couldn't do it. He couldn't move. Looking over he saw Hope glance down at his hat and wink. Quietly they shared a laugh.

Standing, he gathered his courage and his things together, he popped his backbone into alignment and prepared to disembark.

Before leaving, he turned and reaching into his shoe pulled out the \$20 he had hidden there. He wouldn't need it.

Whatever it took, he would do.

He was staying.

He was home.

Kneeling down he slipped the money in Hope's hand and ran his palm over the sleeping baby's head. "Make sure you and the children eat well before arriving at your parents."

Hope's eyes got big, but before she could protest or refuse, Spike was gone.

He stood on the platform outside the bus station. God it felt good to be off that damn bus, to stretch his back and legs.

Almost made the walk a welcome change from the long ride.

He knew the road he had taken the first time he had been in this town, and he knew where he had wrecked the car.

From there he was sure he would be able to locate the path up the hill. He thought momentarily about waiting till daylight, but the light of the full moon was bright and he had already waited too long.

Switching his suitcase to his other hand, Spike flexed his shoulders and started off.

Xander had hoped to drive straight through, but he was just too tired. Maybe a short nap. Just to rest his eyes. Besides he had nothing to rush home to. The cabin would be cold and empty, as always.

But at least now he had a plan.

He was not giving up.

He would never give up, it was just going to take a little longer than he had originally thought.

Laying down in his car, he looked up at the moon and wondered where Spike was right now. He wondered if Spike was alone and if he ever thought about him. He wondered if Spike was looking up at the moon tonight. He wondered if Spike was sharing the moonlight with someone else. He fell asleep wondering.

It hadn't rained much this week and the road was dry. Spike was grateful for that much. The mud would have made walking dangerous and slippery in the dark. Each mile led him further into the darkened woods.

Figuring about twenty minutes a mile, Spike estimated it would take about two hours to get there. He tried to stay focused. The noises that surrounded him were like nothing he had ever heard and it scared him shitless.

Howling, barking, and what the hell kind of animal made that screeching sound? Spike kept going trying not to let his imagination get the best of him.

Xander was startled awake by someone tapping on the car window. Trying to see, he was blinded by the flashlight in his eyes. Quickly he rolled down the window. "What? What is it?" He struggled to clear his brain.

The light snapped off. "Just checking to see if you were o.k. Saw the car pulled over and thought you might need help."

The uniformed officer peered into the car, looking to see if Xander was alone.

Xander rubbed his hands over his face. "Yeah, just got tired is all. Needed a quick nap, but I'm all right now. I'll be pulling out in a couple minutes. Thanks."

"No problem son. You go on home now. I'm sure someone is waiting on you." Xander watched as the cop returned to his patrol car and drove away.

"Yeah, if only that were true." He stepped out, stretched, pissed and got back in. Three more hours drive and he would be home.

Suddenly he felt an urgency to get back. A strong need to return to the cabin on the mountain. A confusing but desperate feeling. He fired up the Lincoln and burned rubber.

'It's got to be round here. It can't be much further.' Spike was sure he was getting close. The twists and turns of the road felt familiar and he knew the tree he had run into must be coming up soon. But the trees blotted out most of the moonlight, and Spike was, after all a city boy. It was confusing. It was frightening.

Slightly misjudging the distance, Spike went another half mile before he finally saw it. Shining like a skeleton in the moonlight, there was very little left of the car that he had smashed into the tree over six months ago. Still, it was the sign post he had been seeking. It sat like an arrow pointing in the right direction.

He laughed and ran up for a better look. There it sat, just where he had left it. But certainly not in the same condition. The tires and rims had all been taken as was the back seat and most of the dashboard.

The interior was stripped and even the bumpers were gone. Checking quickly he found the paperwork from the glove box and the books were also missing.

He hoped whoever had stolen the parts had put them to good use. It couldn't have mattered less to

him. It wasn't why he was here.

Taking a few minutes to get his bearings, Spike faced north and located the trail up the hill. With no more hesitation he dove deeper into the woods.

The closer he got the more Xander felt the pull. It was a gravitational thing and he was circling the home planet. Drawing closer and closer. He desperately needed the comfort of home.

Nothing in the world mattered now but the cabin in the woods.

Two more hours.

Part Thirty-Five

His legs ached and his body shook from the damp cold. Why in God's name did he think it would be a good idea to climb a mountain in the middle of the night?

His pants were torn on thorns that had scratched his legs, and at one point he could have sworn a bat was nesting in his hair. Maybe he took a wrong turn. Maybe he missed the path. Maybe....

Spike stopped dead in his tracks squinting his eyes to assure himself that it was not a mirage. There it was up ahead. Just as he remembered it. Tightening his grip on his bag he ran.

The cabin was dark and looked deserted, but it didn't matter. He was here. He was really, finally here.

Rushing on, Spike jumped the three steps to the porch and grabbed for the door. He would wake Xander. He would talk to him and convince him to give them a chance.

Taking a deep breath, he opened the door and hurried in. It took only seconds to realize the cabin was empty. It looked like no one had been here for some time.

Knowing how careful Xander was about the fire, Spike was dismayed to find it cold. If he was just

out on a delivery run he would have warm coals.

These had been out for days.

Checking around, he was somewhat reassured to find all of Xander's belongings still here. Wherever he had gone, he would be coming back. Spike would wait.

Spike took off his hat and jacket. He set aside his suitcase and rolled up his shirt sleeves. Xander would want a fire started so the house would be warm when he came home.

Spike set to task. He lit the oil lamp and turned the wick low. He was pleased to find the kindling ready and logs piled up. He started the fire and banked it for the night.

Checking the shelves, Spike found a jar of soup beans and poured them in a kettle which he set to the side of the hearth to warm slowly.

With everything done, an exhausted Spike sat in Xander's chair and rocked himself to sleep. He had never felt such peace.

~*~*~*~*~

He was amazed he had not been stopped for excessive speed. Xander chuckled and patted the Lincoln as they turned onto the path to home. "We are still the best aren't we old girl?"

Though still down in the dumps at the failure of his trip, Xander decided he was just too tired to think about it tonight.

A good nights sleep and everything will look better in the morning. He wasn't sure he believed that, but admitting defeat meant admitting he may never see Spike again.

Turning the car onto the path he felt it immediately. Something wasn't right. He slowed his advance to a crawl and eased it into the barn, engine rumbling low like the warning growl of a threatening guard dog.

Quickly going through the motions of a habit, he parked the car and locked the barn. When he approached the cabin, he could see the dim glow of the oil lamp through the windows.

Sneaking up to the porch he gingerly cracked open the door. What he saw inside caused his heart to try to burst from his chest.

The cabin was warm and welcoming with the smell of food bubbling in the kettle. The golden glow from both the lamp and fire bathed the room in a soft loving light.

But all of that was peripheral.

The only thing Xander could see was the man sleeping in the chair by the hearth. *'Please God don't let this be a dream'* Just in case, Xander eased forward for fear of waking them both.

~*~*~*~*~

The weight in his lap slowly brought Spike to wakefulness. Looking down he saw Xander sitting on the floor between his legs. He had his head resting in Spike's lap and his arms around Spike's waist. Reaching down he ran his hands through the silky softness of the rich brown hair.

"Xander?"

Lifting his face, Spike could see the tears on Xander's cheeks.

"Are you really here?" he whispered.

"I'm here" Spike continued to comb his fingers through Xander's hair. "Is that all right?"

Xander sighed and laid his head back down. "I think I'll die if I wake up and it isn't true. I've hunted for you for days. I'm so tired I'm afraid I'm asleep and you're just another version of the same dream that comes to me every night." Xander tightened his grip around Spike's waist.

Sliding off the chair, Spike went slowly to his knees on the floor facing Xander. He wiped the tear streaked face and kissed his lips lightly. "I've come a long way to be here Xander. Am I home?"

Finally convinced Spike was real, Xander held the other man's face in his hands.

"You are home, Spike" Xander leaned in and captured Spike's mouth in a kiss that was filled with all the pent up passion that they had both lived with since the day they parted.

With each break for air one would confess his heart.

"I promise no more drinking."

"I don't make or sell it anymore."

"I'm sorry about your car."

"I don't care about the car."

"I missed you."

"I love you."

That was the one Spike had been waiting on. He sat back with a smile on his kiss swollen lips. "I love you more."

Slowly Xander unbuttoned Spike's shirt and ran his hands over the slim body. He was shocked by the change the work on the docks had caused. Spike's body was now hard and his chest and stomach chiseled.

Xander burrowed his nose in the side of Spike's neck and breathed in the smell of the man. It matched his memory exactly. This was pure Spike. This was his Spike.

Spike rolled his head to the side. "Take me to bed, Xander."

Part Thirty-Six

Food and sleep were forgotten. Dissolved away with the despair and misery he had ridden home with. Replaced now with hope, love, lust, and confidence in the future. All the good things life had to offer were within his reach.

All rolled up in the shape of a short, wiry, muscular man with soft blond hair and beautiful blue eyes.

Xander tried his best to maneuver them toward the bed but it was difficult with his mouth plastered over Spike's and his tongue trying to take up residence on Spike's tonsils.

He wanted it all and he wanted it now.

Sensing his desperation, Spike stepped back. "I'm not going anywhere, yeah? Let's do this right. After all, I'm all healed and you'd be surprised how flexible I can be." Spike wagged his eyebrows.

Xander's eyes glazed over. He scooped Spike up and carried him to the bed, dumping him unceremoniously. Spike laughed and stripped off the rest of his clothes. Xander was already naked and standing by the bed.

Spike slowly stroked his hand up his own cock. "Am I going to have to do this alone? Cause God knows I've had plenty of practice."

Xander could not take his eyes off him. How many nights had he tried to picture Spike just like this. Eager, loving, and best of all, happy and horny.

It was everything Xander wanted.

It was everything Xander thought he had lost.

He knew despite the fact that he did not deserve it, he had been given a second chance. He would not need a third.

Spike watched all the thoughts and emotions play over Xander's face. Naked and hard, he waited calmly for Xander to lay with him.

He could feel the anticipation crawl around in his belly and settle somewhere between his sac and ass. The memory of the burn of being entered had him twitching.

It must be like getting a tattoo. It is a pain you almost embrace because you know it will mark you permanently, forever changing something about you.

At least that's what he had heard on the docks. That was the talk among the men who had been inked and stamped. Just as Xander was about to put his mark on Spike's body and heart. Forever marking him as "owned"

Finally Xander cupped his balls and ran his hand over his own thick length as he approached the bed.

Spike held his hand out for Xander to join him. In a flash Xander pounced. He straddled Spike's body with his knees at Spike's hips.

Reaching forward he grasped Spike's wrists and pinned them roughly over his head. Leaning down, Xander nipped Spike's earlobe almost painfully.

"How many other men have you been with since you went to the city? How many did you lay down and spread yourself for?"

Shocked at the sudden shift in mood, Spike struggled to free himself. "None, I swear Xan, none."

Nibbling on his neck, Xander growled low into his ear. "That's good cause if you did I would have to slam myself deep inside you and flood you with my cum to flush out any trace of the others. I would have to fuck you ten times for every other man you were with."

Spike's head fell back and his eyes rolled up. "Yeah, there were dozens, Xan, dozens of men."

Xander smiled against Spike's hair at the obvious lie. "I love a man that can think fast on his back." He chuckled deeply.

Xander rearranged himself so that he was laying between Spike's legs. Licking and sucking first one nipple then the other, Xander took extra care to devote an equal amount of time and attention on each.

Spike was silent hoping Xander would move along a little quicker. "Do you remember me sucking your cock, Spike? Did you jerk off to the memory of it?"

Spike knew Xander would be impressed at the sheer volume of times he had fisted himself to the thoughts of Xander's mouth around him, but the lies continued. "No, I never gave it a minute's thought. Maybe you could remind me."

Xander sighed dramatically. "I guess I got nowhere else to be for a while, so what the hell."

Spike wiggled his ass to get more comfortable and waited for what he knew would be a trip to heaven.

Thank God Xander was the conductor on this train to Tongueville, cause Spike had a ticket that needed to be stamped.

Part Thirty-Seven

Spike settled in for what promised to be a trip to heaven. He didn't have long to wait.

Sliding down, Xander stopped when he was face to face with the purple straining head of Spike's cock. Leaning in Xander kissed it lightly on the tip

"I've missed you, buddy." The cock nodded and oozed out a bubble as if to say "I've missed you too."

Wasting no more time, Xander ran his tongue from the base of Spike's cock to the dripping tip. He then wrapped his lips around the spongy head and squeezed it.

Spike jerked his hips upward trying to force Xander to take more of it in. Xander took the hint and let it all slide in till the sticky, wet slit touched the back of his throat.

Spike grunted and threw his leg over Xander's back to hold him in place. Xander set a fast pace. Throwing finesse out the window he focused on sucking.

He gripped Spike's cock in his mouth and set up a deep rapid movement. Spike was rocking his hips. His brain had shut down and his whole life centered in that warm wet mouth.

Just as he felt his balls start to tingle and tighten, Xander pulled back and released him with a slurp.

"Nnnoooo!" Frustration and precum were rolling off Spike by the handfuls.

Stretching back up, Xander kissed Spike again. He shared the taste of Spike's cock with him and gave his orgasm a chance to retreat.

After a minute or two he lifted Spike's leg over his shoulder and kissed the inside of his thigh. Reaching into the special box under his bed, Xander pulled out a small bottle of lanolin he had bought on his last trip to town.

Spike's eyes got big. "Well, looks like you have made changes since I've been gone. That for anyone special?"

Xander poured a bit of lotion on his hand and a smile on his lips. "Dozens of men, Spike. Dozens"

Spike grabbed Xander's wrist holding the lotion filled hand in place. Making sure he had Xander full attention he kissed him. "Only me from now on, right, Xan?"

Xander dove in.

He let his tongue take total possession of Spike's mouth leaving no question as to where Xander's love and devotion lay. Rubbing the lanolin around his fingers, Xander let his hand wander down to the soft skin below Spike's balls.

It all felt just as wonderful as he remembered. Xander let his forefinger brush lightly over the eager puckered hole. Spike threw his other leg up over Xander's shoulder lifting his hips high off the bed.

"Please, Xander, do it quickly. I've been empty for so long. All I have thought about is you being inside me." Xander thrust a finger inside. It was hot as fire.

As quickly as Spike's ass tightened, he immediately relaxed it. "More, please more."

"Not too fast. I won't hurt you." Xander pulled out the finger and carefully inserted two.

Spike squirmed breathlessly. "Touch me, Xan. Find the place inside. Nobody but you has ever touched me there."

Just thinking about and waiting for the feeling of it had Spike twitching.

Crooking his finger, Xander found and pressed it.

"Ugh, Oh God that's it. More. More."

Xander tapped it several times till Spike was grabbing the pillow under his head and pressing his heels into Xander's back.

Removing his fingers, Xander added more slick to his hand and quickly coated his own neglected cock. It felt so good he wanted to just keep working his flesh smoothly into his fist till he exploded, but he knew he had waited too long for this moment to give it up like that.

Positioning the head at Spike's hole, he held himself firmly and reveled in the feeling of just rubbing it back and forth, sliding the leaking tip against the tight wrinkled skin. "Stop teasing, Xander!" Spike whined and jerked trying to force Xander's entrance.

Xander leaned forward forcing Spike's knees closer to his own chest.

With only a slight pause, Xander's cock pushed through.

Both men tensed.

After only seconds, Xander slid in, fully seated.

Both men sighed.

This time Xander waited till Spike indicated he was ready to move. Slowly, testing the waters, reviving old memories and building new ones, Xander set a slow shallow pace.

Using his heels for leverage, Spike left no doubt that this pace would not do.

Xander shifted, altered his angle and when he saw the shock on Spike's face, he let loose.

Pounding deep and hard, Xander let all thought and reason leak out his ears as he lost himself in the world of cock and ass. A world Spike shared with him.

Xander felt it first.

The tingle in his spine and groin. He knew by the time it turned to an ache in his balls it was too late to stop.

Wrapping his fist tightly around Spike's bouncing cock he tipped his sweating head down. "Come with me Spike."

Spike never heard his words. He was drowning in the sensations of his body as it gave up the most powerful orgasm of his life.

Feeling the interior wall clamp down on him, Xander let his own release fill Spike's cavity with spurts of liquid passion.

Eventually the spasms slowed as their bodies emptied themselves. Carefully, Xander withdrew, separating them. Spike's legs fell to the bed with an undignified "thump". He was too spent to care.

After retrieving a rag and quickly cleaning them both up, Xander jumped back into bed positioning himself between Spike and the wall.

Rolling onto his side facing away from his love, Spike yawned deeply. "Xander, would you do something for me?"

Struggling keep his eyes open, Xander was rapidly succumbing to the stress of the week and the lack of sleep.

"Anything, Spike. What can I do?"

Wiggling his body around Spike sighed in anticipation of the other thing he remembered.

The second best talent Xander possessed. The other memory he had longed for on those solitary nights.

"Would you rub my back?"

Xander smiled, kissed the back of his neck and slid his hand up between their bodies.

It had all been worth it. The loneliness, the trip, the struggle. Everything that had led them to this moment. The moment that would start the rest of their lives.

"Yeah, Spike. I think I can do that for you."

The End