

Pairing: X/S Rating: NC 17 eventually Summary: Set at the end of season five. Xander and Spike get sucked into a portal during the battle with Glory. Disclaimer: Not mine. Don't sue. Feedback: Makes me write faster. A/N: Happy Birthday Meleesa! A/N 2: Thanks to Alex, my wonderful Beta! You rock!

A World of Their Own

by
Jameschick

Part One

Dawn stands at the end of the platform; she can see the battle taking place below her but is helpless to do anything to stop it. She hears someone approach and looks up. It's Doc. "You. You can help me. Untie me. Please. Help me, she's coming!"

Doc continues to walk towards her, "Well, it seems she's running a bit late, is the thing. And, uh, if her Splendidness can't be here in time to bleed you... " Dawn realises that he isn't going to help her when he pulls out a knife.

Down below, Willow separates the mob of crazy people and Spike darts through. He quickly begins to ascend the stairs to save Dawn.

Up top, Doc produces a pocket watch and looks at it. "Well. What do you know? It's just about that time." Dawn sees Spike come up the stairs and calls his name. Then Doc spins around as Spike slowly strides toward him.

"Doesn't a fella stay dead when ya kill him?"

Spikes lunges forward, Doc sidesteps him and grabs him by the neck. He thrusts his knife into Spike's back. Spike gasps in pain. Dawn gasps in sympathy. Doc looks at Spike appraisingly. "I don't smell a soul anywhere on you. Why do you even care?" Spike replies, "I made a promise to a lady."

Doc shoots his tongue out at Spike. Spike ducks and the two grapple on the floor. Doc pins Spike's arms and tells him "Then I'll send the lady your regrets," before throwing Spike off the tower.

Dawn screams and reaches out for Spike as he falls. She loses her balance and falls over the edge of the platform. Her dress catches on an extended piece of a metal girder and she hangs there, suspended above the ground. Her arm is cut badly from the fall and is bleeding slowly.

Down below, the group looks on in horror as Spike plummets to the ground. Willow takes control, issuing orders to those around her. "Xander, get Spike. Anya, take care of Tara. I'm going after Dawn." The others do as they are told and Xander kisses Anya quickly before leaving her to care for Tara while he runs to collect the injured vampire.

Buffy gets to the top of the tower and sees Doc standing at the end of the platform looking down. He turns around when he hears her approach. "Oh, this should be interesting." He smiles at the slayer who just pushes him off the side of the platform and drops down to look over the edge.

"Dawn. Are you okay?" Dawn looks up at Buffy and tries to smile. "I'm okay, but I'm scared. Buffy, please get me out of here." Buffy swings her legs over the edge and begins climbing down to her sister just as the blood begins to drip off her fingertips and into the night air.

Xander gathers Spike up into his arms and starts to carry him back toward Anya and Tara when he hears the noise. It sounds like an airplane engine it's so loud. A strong wind begins to whip around him and he feels himself being pulled upward. He frantically looks around; his eyes lock with Anya's as he and Spike are sucked into a portal.

Buffy pulls Dawn back to the top of the platform just as the portal begins to open. "Buffy it's started." Dawn looks at her sister and makes a decision. "I have to stop it, only when my blood stops flowing will the portal close." Buffy shakes her head. She leans in and whispers to Dawn before hugging her tight. "I love you, Dawn." Buffy then turns and leaps off the tower, throwing herself into the portal.

Giles killed Ben. He knew that if he didn't, Glory would come back and make his slayer pay for sparing her life. He had to make the hard choices, it was Ben or Dawn; he knew he had chosen correctly. He looked up when he heard the noise and saw the portal open. He left Ben's lifeless body and headed back toward the others. He was too late to see Xander and Spike disappear, but he was just in time to see his slayer jump.

Anya screamed and ran toward the portal after Xander disappeared. She didn't want to live without him; if he was gone she had no reason for being. Tara grabbed her and held her back, she couldn't allow Anya to throw her life away. Besides, it was a portal that meant it had to lead to somewhere. Maybe there was a way to bring Xander and Spike back.

Willow saw Buffy pull Dawn back up to the top of the tower. She was just about to head back to Tara when she heard the noise. She looked over and saw Xander and Spike get pulled into the portal, she heard Anya scream and saw her rush out into the open. She was glad that Tara had stopped her, but she understood. Part of her felt like jumping in after Xander, as well.

Willow noticed that everyone was looking at the portal and staring. She looked up and saw Buffy, suspended in the centre of the portal. "Buffy, no!" Willow felt hot tears run down her face. In the span of seconds, she had lost the two people who had made up her world for the past five years. It wasn't fair. She had just gotten Tara back and now she'd lost her two best friends in one horrifying minute.

Dawn stepped off the last stair and walked over to the fallen body of her sister. Her sister who had told her to live - for her. She reached out to touch her but pulled away before making contact. Tara was beside her in an instant, pulling her into a warm safe embrace and stroking her hands over her hair. "Hey, lets get you away from here, okay?"

Giles called the ambulance while the others piled into his car. They had lost too much in one night. He had lost his slayer, a young woman who meant the world to him, and Xander who he thought of as the son he never had. Willow had lost her best friends, both of them. But Dawn, Dawn had lost not only her sister - and therefore the only real family she had, but she had lost the man she had been not so secretly crushing on for years, and the vampire that she called her friend. She had lost the most.

~!~

Xander struggled to sit up, but a solid weight on his chest was keeping him from moving. He opened his eyes and blinked at the bright sunlight. He groaned in pain and tried to push the heavy object off his chest. The object moaned in protest and Xander yelped. He began to struggle to free himself when he heard a very distinct British "Bloody hell!" emanate from the lump on his chest. The lump that - now that he could see clearly - had a white/blonde head and was wearing black leather.

"Shit! Spike!" Xander pushed the vampire off of him and began to frantically look around for shelter. He needed to get Spike out of the sunlight, now. He turned in a circle but all he could see was grass and weeds, trees and plants. And of course debris, a lot of debris from the building site.

Spike pushed himself up to his hands and knees and then flopped over on his back. He was in agony from the fall. He wasn't sure if his arm was broken, but it hurt like hell. He had a knife wound in his back and his face felt hot. He opened his eyes and screamed. "Fuck! Shit, cover me fer Christ's sake before I catch fire!"

Spike rolled onto his front and curled up under his duster. Xander ripped his jacket off and threw in on the vampire as well. After a few minutes, when Spike didn't start to smoke or catch fire, Xander had a thought. "Hey, Spike?" A muffled "What?" came from under the jackets. Xander chuckled.

"Shouldn't you be on fire by now? I mean, you were laying out here in the sunlight for God knows how long before we woke up, and no vampire flambé. Why is that?" Spike mumbled something that sounded like "Dunno mate," and Xander watched as one pale hand crept out from under the leather.

Spike waited for the inevitable pain of his hand catching on fire. When it didn't come, he stuck his other hand out as well. Still no pain. With a smile on his face he rolled back over and let the heat of the sun warm him in a way he hadn't felt in over a century. He didn't care that his arm might possibly be broken, or that his back was bleeding. He was in the sunlight! Him, a vampire, in the light of day and not frying to a crisp. This was like heaven.

Xander chuckled at Spike and then took a good look around him. Now that he wasn't so concerned about Spike's safety, he wanted to know where exactly they were. "Hey Spike, where the hell do you think we are?" He spun back around when he heard Spike chuckle.

"Not hell, Shaggy, feels like heaven to me. But to answer your question, I don't have a clue." Spike continued to enjoy the sun, he stripped off his jacket and his t-shirt, letting the warmth soak into his chest. He considered stripping his jeans off as well but figured he'd better not, he wasn't so sure how Xander would take it, him being in the full monty and all.

"I'm going to take a look around, don't wander off." Xander shook his head fondly and then left Spike to his sunbathing while he headed off in the direction of a stand of trees. They were farther than they looked and by the time Xander got close, he could hear running water. He figured that was a good sign, he would need water pretty soon.

As he got closer to the trees he saw a slow moving river winding through them. There was a small waterfall - about eight feet in height, a lot of plants along the far side and the water looked crystal clean. He stopped at the bank and knelt down. After cupping his hand and bringing some water to his face, he sniffed at it before tasting it. It tasted pure and it was cold and refreshing. He drank a few mouthfuls and carefully made his way across the river to the other side by stepping on some rocks.

On the other side of the river, Xander examined the plants and shrubbery. He found some wild strawberries and raspberry bushes, but the others didn't look familiar. He took off his shirt and used it to carry the fruit as he made his way back across the river and toward Spike. He wasn't sure how long they would be stuck here before Willow, Tara, and Giles found a way to rescue them and he didn't want to starve while waiting.

Spike waited until he knew Xander was gone before skinning out of his jeans, boxers and boots to lie naked in the sun. His arm, while definitely sore was not broken. The wound on his back was healing up and he felt great. He wished Buffy were here so he could see her in the sunlight. He tried to imagine how she would look with the sunlight glinting off her hair.

Spike, while not the most educated demon when it came to mojo, knew that the chances of them getting out of this place were slim to none. If anyone could find a way to rescue them, it would be Red, but it could take a bloody long time for her to do it. He wasn't as upset at the idea of being stuck here as he should be. Probably had something to do with the fact that he was lying naked in the sun. He wondered if he had time to toss off before Xander got back.

Part Two

By the time Xander returned, Spike was back in his jeans and boots and smoking a cigarette. He looked surprisingly relaxed for someone who had been dragged through a vortex and dumped in a strange dimension. Xander just shrugged his shoulders; he'd long ago given up on ever trying to figure out Spike.

"I found a river and some food, no vamp-chow though. How long can you go without eating?" Xander was surprised to note that he was actually concerned about Spike and how he was going to eat here. Spike shrugged his shoulders and took a drag off his cigarette. He blew the smoke out through his nose and looked at Xander speculatively.

"You really want to know?" He was somewhat surprised by the question. He didn't figure Xander would even think about his needs. "A few days, a week at most. 'Course that was back when I was feeding properly; with what I eat these days, I'll be lucky to go three days before trying to eat my own arms."

Xander shuddered at the mental picture that provided. "Okay, and can I say ewww?" Xander stood and began to pace, being stuck with a snarky, arrogant vampire was one thing - he was used to that. But being stuck here with a half-starved, likely crazy, demon was not sounding like a good idea. "Can you hunt? Animals I mean?"

Spike looked at him like he was nuts. "Of course I can bloody hunt, pillock! Just not sure if I can kill the soddin' things. Chip, remember?" Xander's eyes grew comically wide at that statement. "You mean, you might not be able to kill like, a rabbit or anything? Wow, that's harsh. And, hey? How come you never tested it before now?"

"Spike shrugged his shoulders, he wasn't about to admit that he had in fact tried to catch a rabbit one night when he was out carousing but it got away. "Why should I? You lot were always good for a bag or two if things got too bad." It was true, as much as he hated to admit it; they did always feed him if he asked.

Spike suddenly got a wicked grin on his face and stood up. He stalked closer to Xander and shifted into his demon face. He watched as Xander's eyes grew big and he smiled around his fangs. "Of course, there is a chance it doesn't even work here; the sun don't affect me, maybe my chip is bugged too."

Xander didn't seem to be listening to him, and Spike couldn't smell even a hint of fear coming from the boy. He was disappointed. He wasn't actually going to bite him - even if he could - Spike was a sociable demon after all, and the idea of eternity here with no one to talk to would make him as barmy as Dru. "Soddin' hell, Xan. You could at least pretend to be scared of me."

Spike flinched back as Xander's hand darted out toward his face. He was startled to feel the boy's fingers trail across his forehead. "What the bloody hell are you doing, Harris?"

Xander withdrew his hand and let out a shaky laugh. "No lumpies. Spike? Did you just go all grrr? Like completely grrr?" Spike was confused, not about the 'grrr' - he understood what that meant; he just wasn't sure why Xander would ask, he had eyes didn't he? "Er, yeah mate. What of it?"

Xander started to giggle and then he pointed at Spike's face. Spike reached up to touch his ridges and yelped when he felt smooth skin. Not a single bump. "Bloody hell!"

"You look like an Anne Rice vampire! Oh my God, maybe you're impotent now too!" Xander's giggles had escalated into full-blown laughter. Spike just smirked at him and shook his head. "Nope, not impotent. Already tested the equipment while you were off picking berries." Spike couldn't help but laugh as Xander shot up off the grass and looked around frantically.

"Don't worry pet, you're not sitting in it or nothing." Xander sighed, and Spike debated on whether or not he should tell him how he had cleaned up his 'mess'. He licked his lips and thought better of it.

"Alright, since you're the glorified bricklayer, you can find us some sort of shelter." Xander looked at Spike sceptically. "And what prey tell are you going to be doing while I do this?" Spike snapped his fangs at the boy and said "Hunting."

~!~

While Spike was off on his 'hunt', Xander sorted through the debris from the tower site. There were quite a few useful things among the rubbish, one being the weapons bag. Along with that there were a couple of heavy canvas tarps, a steel drum, three hammers, four boxes of nails, some sheet metal, a crowbar, and three glass jars amongst other various things. Most of it was junk, but Xander thought some of it might come in handy.

Xander was thinking of using the tarps and some of the various bits of metal to fashion a tent for the time being. He wasn't sure how long they would be stuck there, but he figured it wouldn't be too long. Willow would find a way to bring him home, he was sure of it.

Spike tracked his prey through the trees that lined the river's edge. He could hear the beating of its heart, smell the blood in its veins. He almost laughed when he realised how much he was enjoying this. He hadn't hunted for food in far too long, no matter that his prey was animal instead of human.

Spike waited for the perfect moment to strike. Just as his victim was approaching the water's edge to drink, he attacked. It was quick, painless - for him at least, and efficient. His fangs sunk deep into the throat of the young deer and he swallowed mouthful after mouthful of hot salty blood. Next to stale, bagged, pigs blood this was ambrosia. The deer fell dead and Spike licked his lips before hefting the carcass over his shoulder and heading back to Xander.

Xander took one look at the dead animal that Spike had dropped at his feet and jumped back. "What the hell!" Spike chuckled at him and nudged the fawn with his boot. "Dinner. You do need to eat ya know."

Xander screwed up his face and shuddered. He was so not eating something Spike had been sucking on. "I realise it's been a long time since you were human, but as a rule, we usually prefer our meat cooked. I don't see a stove around here, so get rid of it."

Spike rolled his eyes and fished around in his duster pocket. He drew out his lighter and tossed it to Xander. "Make a fire, git. I'll skin it for ya." He smirked when Xander shuddered again. Well, the boy needed to get used to the idea that they could be here for awhile. Besides, he'd lived with him, he knew a few berries weren't going to hold him over for long.

~!~

They had been there for four days. Xander had found a cave not more than a half mile from where they had woken up and they had moved into it, after Spike had eaten the previous occupant. Spike spent all day, everyday lying in the sun. Xander didn't blame him, he knew that once they got home Spike would miss it. They hadn't talked much about home, Xander was grateful. He knew there was a possibility that they were all dead. Glory had opened the portal; otherwise they wouldn't be here. If they did survive, if everything was okay, it could still take a long time for them to find him.

Xander and Spike had emptied their pockets to see if they had anything useful in them. Other than the lighter, Spike had a flask of cheap whiskey, a deck of cards, two knives, a straight razor - which Xander had appropriated for himself to shave with, and two battered packages of cigarettes. In Xander's pockets there were keys, a cell phone - Spike put on a big production of trying to call for help - it had actually made Xander smile - two Twinkies - which Xander had eaten immediately, Anya's ring - which Xander kept to himself, and his work schedule for next week. Nothing of any real use, other than the razor, lighter, and the playing cards.

Xander spent his days wandering along the river, fishing, gathering fruit, and thinking. He was bored. He had run out of things to occupy himself with. He needed a project, something to keep his hands busy. That was how he found himself picking reeds from the river and weaving them into mats. They would be more comfortable to sleep on than the folded-up tarp he was currently using.

Spike snorted in amusement as Xander weaved. He was doing a decent job of it but it wasn't tight enough to hold for long. He'd bet money on the thing falling apart in a week. Xander sighed in frustration as he tried to tighten the mat he was working on. "Hey, Spike? Anywhere but here."

Spike looked over at him, confusion clearly written on his face. "What the hell are you going on about?" Xander chuckled. "It's a game, bleach head. We used to play it back in high school when Giles had us cataloguing his stuffy old books. I say 'anywhere but here' and you tell me where you would rather be and why. Get it?"

Spike thought for a minute, he really couldn't think of any place he would rather be; this place suited him just fine. He just wished that he had better company. "Can't think of anywhere. I like it just fine here, I get to lay about in the sun all day, the blood is hot and fresh, even if it is animal. And I get to hunt. Ask me again, when I've gotten tired of the sunlight, say in a hundred years or so. What about you?"

There was only one place Xander wanted to be; back home in the basement of the Magic Box hearing Anya accept his marriage proposal. "The Magic Box, in the basement about an hour before we went after Glory." Spike had expected him to say something along the lines of 'the food court at the mall' or 'the locker room of the Laker Girls', not the Magic Box. "How come? What's so special about the shop's basement?"

Xander dug into his pocket and brought out the ring box, he opened it and just stared at it for a while. "I proposed to Anya there, right before we were going to leave." He chuckled. "She hit me. Said I was only asking because we were going to die and I wouldn't have to go through with it. I told her I was asking because I knew we were going make it; she said yes. She told me to give this to her after we made it." He showed Spike the ring and then put it away.

Spike didn't know what to say. Yeah, he loved Buffy but he was smart enough to know she would never see him as anything more than a demon. Xander had a real chance at a happy ending; at least he did before all this happened. "Something to look forward to then, eh mate? You figure she'll kiss you before or after she slaps you for getting yourself sucked into a portal?" Xander couldn't help but smile. Anya most likely would hit him first.

"We're going to be stuck here for a long time aren't we, Spike?" Xander picked up his mat and started weaving again. Spike rolled over to face him and sighed. "Yeah, pet. I think we are." There was really nothing else to say so they sat there in silence absorbing the fact that this place was going to be home from now on.

Part Three

It had been six months since the day Xander woke up in this strange place with Spike still passed out on his chest. Six months of no electricity, no junk food, no television, no hot water, and no

Anya. To say he was a little tense was an understatement. He needed to keep busy and he was tired of living in a cave like a Flintstone, so he decided to build a cabin.

The construction was slow but it was coming along. It kept him busy and the hard work made him so tired that he didn't really have time to think, which was definitely a good thing as far as he was concerned. Surprisingly, Spike was a lot of help. He helped him cut down trees, trim off the branches, carry the logs, and on the odd occasion he would swing a hammer as well; as long as Xander told him what it was that needed to be done.

For the most part, Spike did the hunting. Xander had trapped the occasional rabbit and fished in the river but since Spike needed to feed anyway, Xander left that job up to him. He himself had started a vegetable garden with some of the wild plants he'd found here and there. So far he had carrots, sweet potatoes, onions, and turnips. Of course he still picked berries when he went down to the river as well. He was hoping to find some corn and maybe some peppers eventually.

Today had been especially hard work. The cabin walls were getting high enough now that he needed to reach up to place the logs, his back was hurting, and he stunk something fierce from sweating all day. As soon as Spike left to hunt, Xander headed for the river to wash up. He really missed soap and deodorant. But he did enjoy standing under the waterfall. If he closed his eyes and concentrated really hard, he could pretend he was back home taking a shower after Anya had used all the hot water.

Spike had spent the day helping Xander work on the cabin. It wasn't an easy job and he had to admit that the boy certainly knew what he was doing - not that he would ever tell him that. When he got back from hunting, the sun was just starting to set. He didn't see Xander anywhere nearby so he wandered off toward the river to see if he was there. As he neared the water he could just make out the sound of Xander's voice - singing. Spike chuckled and picked up the pace, he figured he could tease the boy about his lousy singing voice. If nothing else, it might be worth a few laughs. What he saw when he got close was enough to wipe the smile off his face, replacing it with a look of shocked awe.

Xander stood just under the waterfall, his head thrown back and his eyes closed. He ran his hands through his hair, pushing the sodden locks back from his face. His well-tanned, muscular frame was practically glowing in the light of the waning sun, and for some reason, Spike couldn't help but wonder if his skin felt as smooth as it looked. He watched as the water poured down, over broad shoulders, to a well-defined chest. His gaze lingered on the now sculpted abdominals before lowering to the flaccid - yet still impressive piece of flesh nestled in dark curly hair between well-muscled thighs.

The water was slightly cold, making his nipples hard little nubs. Xander moaned softly as he accidentally grazed one with his fingernail. He had been celibate far too long if something that innocent was making him hard - and it was. He turned around under the water and scrubbed at his face.

Spike watched as Xander turned around, presenting him with a clear view of his well-muscled back and firm ass. All the work they'd been doing building the cabin had done wonderful things for Xander's body. Gone were the layers of baby fat that had accumulated since he'd become foreman. His muscles were lean, and well defined. He had the body of an Adonis. A body that Spike was starting to look at in a whole new light. He'd never been much of a man's man, preferring ladies if given the choice, but here and now, Xander was looking imminently shaggable.

Xander tried to will away his erection, not knowing how long he might have before Spike came back with dinner. It wasn't working. The two of them spent almost every waking minute together either working on the cabin, playing poker, weaving mats to sleep on or just talking. So it left them little or no time to be alone. Xander decided to take advantage of this rare opportunity and relieve himself.

Spike groaned as he realised what Xander was going to do. He watched as the other man stepped out from under the falls and walked over to the far riverbank. As Xander stretched out comfortably in the shallow water, Spike unconsciously began undoing his pants.

Xander took a quick look around to make sure Spike wasn't around before wrapping a fist around his shaft. He stroked himself slowly, enjoying the feel of his work-calloused hand on his hard length. He was a bit disappointed that it would be over so quickly as it felt incredibly good and he wished he could keep it up for hours instead of the few minutes that he would be lucky to last.

Spike realised that he had taken himself out and was mirroring Xander's movements stroke for stroke. He hadn't tossed off to a live show in longer than he could remember and decided to enjoy it while he could. All too soon he felt the familiar tingling start at the base of his spine. He looked over to see that Xander had his eyes clenched shut, his fist moving furiously over his cock as he strained toward completion. He felt his orgasm overtake him at the same instant Xander shot his milky emissions all over his chest.

Spike chuckled ruefully as he cleaned up and put himself away. "I've been here too bloody long if Harris is starting to look good!" Spike backed away and went back to their cave. He needed to distance himself from what had just happened. He would not start thinking about the boy that way. They were bound to be here a long time and they were starting to become friends. Spike didn't want to screw that up just because he was horny. It wasn't worth it.

By the time Xander came back, Spike had skinned and gutted the two rabbits he'd fed off of and had them cooking over a fire. One thing was certain, with all the trees they'd been cutting down, they wouldn't be hurting for firewood any time soon. "Hope yer in the mood for rabbit, Xander. I couldn't find anything else."

Xander shrugged his shoulders and hung his wet jeans and t-shirt out to dry. He didn't mind rabbit; it tasted like chicken actually. Although, the one time that Spike had found and fed off a wild boar

had been nice. He missed spare ribs. "Rabbit's good. I can watch these if you want to wash up. The water's not too bad today, it's almost warm."

A sudden image of Xander standing under the falls all wet and glowing had Spike half-hard and heading for the river. "Ta pet, back in a few." Xander watched Spike walk away and grinned. It was amazing how human the vampire was starting to look with his hair un-gelled and the natural colour growing back in, not to mention the tan he'd gotten. He looked like one of the surfer boys that spend all their free time at the beach. If Buffy could see him now, she might just change her opinion of him; he was way better looking than Angel.

Not that Xander thought Angel was good looking, or Spike for that matter. Sure Angel was buff, and Spike had that compact, well-muscled look going for him but just because he noticed didn't mean anything. Nope, it didn't mean a thing.

Spike came back a while later in his boxers; he hung his wet clothes out to dry as well before joining Xander by the fire. "You were right, the water wasn't bad. Of course I don't feel the cold the same as you do." Spike was trying not to think about the fact that he had just wanked off - again - to the image of Xander naked. He needed to erase the image from his mind or it would drive him batty.

"So, Barney. What do you wanna do tonight? Poker?" Spike looked at Xander with comically big eyes and a pout on his face. Xander thought he looked almost cute. "Why do you keep calling me Barney? And you better tell me this time or I won't bring you dinner again!" Xander chuckled, he'd been calling Spike 'Barney' for a couple days now, it was fun to confuse him for a while but he figured he'd better explain himself. He wasn't that fond of fish, and he wanted Spike to bring him dinner.

"You know, Barney. Rubble? From the Flinstones cartoon?" At Spike's continued silence Xander went on. "Short, blonde, caveman. Come on! You have to know who I'm talking about." Spike was still getting past the short remark. He knew who Barney Rubble was, he just wasn't happy about being compared to him. "I'm not short!"

Xander laughed and handed him a rabbit. There was no point in arguing with Spike. If he said he wasn't short, then so be it. "Hey, does this mean I can call you Fred then? You do have yer own bowling shoes after all." Xander almost choked on the mouthful of food he was swallowing. He hadn't expected Spike to remember that. "Sure Barney, whatever makes you happy."

Part Four

A few days had gone by since the river incident. Spike was being more annoying than usual and Xander was at his wits' end. The blonde wouldn't help with the cabin, which was slowing him down considerably; he was short-tempered and spent all his time hunting in the woods or laying in the sun - naked. That in itself was enough to keep Xander away from him. It was almost as bad as the week after Spike had run out of cigarettes. How a vampire could go through nicotine withdrawal, Xander wasn't sure, but Spike had been no fun whatsoever that week.

"Stupid, stubborn vampire. I mean what the hell crawled up his ass and died? It's not like I don't have bad moods, but do I take it out on him? Nooooo. I just put my anger into my work; why can't he? It would get done faster." Xander continued to mutter to himself as he hacked away at the tree he was cutting down. He wondered what Giles would say if he knew that he was using his fighting axe to cut down trees. It didn't matter. He would likely never see Giles again.

He'd probably grow old here and die, having to depend on Spike to care for him in his old age. Just the thought of Spike taking care of him made him snicker. "Not likely; he'd probably find a way to eat me just to get out of it."

Xander dragged the log back to the building site and finished prepping it. He would have liked the help with this now that the walls were tall enough to need a ladder, but he refused to let Spike's bad mood slow up his work. He wanted a home, damn it. He was tired of sleeping in a damp cave.

It took almost an hour but after a lot of cursing, and a few minor scrapes and bruises, Xander had the log in position. He jumped down and headed for the river to wash up. He was thirsty, dirty, and hungry enough to eat a horse. He hoped Spike brought something back for dinner, he really didn't want to eat raw carrots and strawberries for dinner - again.

They had gotten in a routine of washing their boxers in the river every morning and leaving them there to dry, forcing them to go commando in their jeans all day, but it left them with something clean to wear while their clothes dried so it worked. Xander stripped out of his jeans and shirt and waded into the deeper part of the river. He ducked under the water and scrubbed at his hair. He found that using the sand on the river bottom to scrub with left him cleaner than just using water.

After he was clean, he washed out his clothes on some rocks and then lay out in the sun to dry before donning his boxers and heading up toward the waterfall. He filled the three glass jars with water and then headed back home. He was not in a good mood; he just wanted to eat and go to sleep.

Spike had been in a foul mood since the river episode. The last thing he needed was to start lusting after Xander. It was bound to happen; a demon had certain needs after all, and Xander was the only other body available. If that was all it was, it wouldn't be bothering him, but no, he had to develop *feelings* for the boy. They were *friends* and friends did not entertain lusty thoughts about each other. Not to mention that Xander was not into guys, or vampires for that matter. Bug people,

mummies, and vengeance demons were okay but not vampires. He wondered if that had anything to do with Angel; there had to be a story behind that somewhere.

He had been spending as much time away from Xander as possible - hunting, walking, swimming in a pond he had found a few miles away, and of course wanking off. He fantasised about every woman he had ever had the hots for, and every woman he had slept with - all four of them, if he included the Buffy bot.

It was ridiculous really; a vampire of his age having only bedded three actual women and one robot woman, but that was Dru for you. She didn't mind sharing him with Darla after Angelus took off, but that was it. He was forbidden to touch another woman, not that he had much interest at the time. He was happy enough with his princess, and Darla was no shy virgin before she was turned; he'd learned a lot from her.

Then there was Harmony, not too bright - but a pretty face, and Spike needed someone. He had never been a solo vampire before and he was lonely. Then there was his burgeoning obsession with the slayer that resulted in the bot. He still had to chuckle at himself for that brilliant plan, 'cause nothing says 'I love you' like having a sex bot designed after your intended. He was lucky Buffy hadn't staked him.

There had been a few guys over the years, Angelus obviously, Penn - when he came home the odd time, and a few minions here and there, but that had been after Drusilla's accident. She was far too weak for intimacy, but she still refused to allow him to take another woman to bed; therefore he made do with a couple of the more attractive male minions he had sired.

But now, this thing with Xander was getting out of hand. He couldn't help but look at him; they both paraded around in nothing but their boxers at night, and Xander had filled out nicely - much better than any of the men he had shagged in the past. Plus there was the human factor. Spike had never shagged a warm body; the bot was the closest thing he'd ever had to human. He had been turned a virgin, so he didn't even have memories of warm flesh to relive.

Last night Spike had stayed away until he was sure Xander would be asleep, and then he left again as soon as he woke up this morning. He felt guilty for leaving the boy without dinner last night so he made sure to kill something on the way back to the cave tonight. A family of boars was close enough for Spike to grab one of the little ones; he knew the boy had enjoyed the last one he'd brought home. It was a peace offering of sorts, 'cause Spike was sure he would be difficult to live with until he got past this.

Xander got back to the cave and saw Spike roasting a pig over the campfire. His stomach rumbled its approval of his choice of meal. He wished he had a cooking pot, he'd love a stew sometime soon. Roasted meat and vegetables were good, but he was quickly tiring of them after this long. Variety would be nice. Then again, he'd give his left nut for a pizza about now.

"Hey Spike, how was your day?" Xander didn't wait for the blonde to reply he just continued to talk, as he'd been doing all day since he was alone. "Me? I had a great time! I dragged trees around all by myself, then I worked on the cabin, you know the cabin that *we* are going to live in - again by myself. I've got the cuts and bruises to prove it. I hope you didn't work too hard today, you know, strain yourself or anything." Xander hung his wet clothes out and drank the water from one of the jars. He re-stacked the pile of firewood that had begun to look like a beaver's dam, and then sat down near the fire to wait for dinner.

Spike took a good look at Xander; he did have a few cuts and bruises. It wasn't anything serious, but he still felt guilty. He should have been helping the guy. As he had pointed out, it was for the both of them, so he shouldn't leave all the work to Xander, especially now that it was getting harder. It was definitely a two-man job; the roof would be going up soon, and there was no way Xander could do that alone. He'd likely kill himself.

Dinner was eaten in silence, Xander had obviously decided he had nothing else to say to Spike, and Spike didn't want to say anything to set the boy off so he remained silent as well. Eventually, the meal was finished, the bones were buried - so as not to attract predators, and the skins had been stretched out to dry. Spike was acquiring quite a large sum of furs and leathers. He didn't know if this world would get snow, but he wanted to be prepared, and eventually the clothes they had would wear away and they'd be left naked. Not something he was willing to think about right now.

"Look Xander, before you go off to bed all pissy with me, I'm sorry. All right? I've been a complete wanker these past couple of days." Spike had to snort at his choice of names for himself, truth was he had wanked himself silly trying to get over thoughts of Xander.

Xander snorted and gave Spike a black look; he wasn't buying an apology this easily. He had no idea what set the blonde off in the first place, and he wanted an explanation. "You're sorry? And what? I'm supposed to say 'that's okay Spike. Feel free to treat me like shit, ignore me, and leave me to do all the work on our home. I don't mind.' Is that it? 'Cause it won't work. I want to know what the hell crawled up your ass and died!"

Spike thought about replying 'Angelus, but technically he was dead before he crawled up my arse' but then he thought better of it. That was the last thing he needed to get the boy started on. "Look pet, I've just had some things on my mind. I'll find a way to deal with it that doesn't interfere with the work on the house, alright?" Xander rolled his eyes in frustration; this wasn't working. "I thought we were friends now, Spike? Are we, or has the last six months been all in my head?"

"We are friends, pet. What does that have to do with this?" Xander stood and began to pace. "Then why won't you tell me what's bothering you? Is it me? Did I do something, 'cause if I did you have to tell me what it was so I don't do it again." Spike shook his head. How was he supposed to answer this? The truth? Not likely! 'Yes pet, it was you, I saw you having a wank in the river the other day and since then I've wanted to shag you silly.' Yeah, he could see that going over well. Not.

"It's not you, it's me." That was as far as Spike got in his explanation before Xander burst out laughing. "God, Spike. You sound like you're breaking up with me." Xander put one hand on his chest - over his heart, and the other on his brow. Then he replied in a high falsetto voice "Please, Spike. Don't leave me! What ever shall I do without you."

Then he batted his eyelashes at him and stepped closer to the blonde. He grabbed Spike and pulled him close, so that their noses were almost touching before he continued in a low husky voice. "Isn't there *something* I can do to make you stay."

Spike pulled abruptly away and turned his back. He could still feel Xander's warm hands on his skin, his hot breath on his face, and he was going to have a hell of a time explaining the erection he was sporting if Xander noticed. "Ha bloody ha, Harris." Xander chuckled and put his hand on Spike's bare shoulder. "Look, whatever it is, we can deal with it, okay? I want to help."

"Fine. Whatever, Spike. I'm going to bed. You going to be here in the morning? Can you stand being around me or am I going to have to work alone again?"

Spike was getting angry. He hadn't wanted to fight with the boy, that was why he had been avoiding him so much.

"Damn it Xander! I told you, it's not you!" Xander spun around to face Spike, a look of hurt and anger on his face. "Of course not. It's you, right? Come on Spike! You've been avoiding me, sneaking out first thing in the morning, not coming back until I'm asleep, you don't talk to me, and you don't even look at me. If it's not me, then what the hell is it?!" By this point, Xander was right in Spike's face, his hands clenched into fists at his side. He was breathing hard and shaking in anger. Spike just wanted to either run like hell or kiss the man silly. He should have run.

Xander was shocked when Spike sunk his hands into his hair and pulled his face down to kiss him. It was a good kiss and he found himself automatically responding to it. Of course once he realised who it was he was kissing, he pushed away and stared at the vampire with a mix of confusion and sorrow. Spike didn't stick around to see what Xander would do, he ran off into the night.

Xander crawled into his makeshift bed and touched his kiss-swollen mouth. He was still in shock over being kissed. He was sure he would freak out once the situation had sunk in. Spike had kissed him. Why Spike had kissed him was the question. "Is that why he's been so moody? He likes me? Apparently the demon magnet is still working." Xander lay down to sleep, he would just ignore this, hopefully it would all go away.

Part Five

It had been two weeks. Two weeks since Buffy died saving the world. Two weeks since Xander and Spike disappeared into a portal. Two weeks since Anya had locked herself inside her and Xander's apartment and refused to come out or let anyone in. Two weeks since Dawn had lost the only real family she had left in the world. Two weeks since Giles had been sober. He'd crawled into a bottle scotch and hadn't come up for air once yet. Two weeks that Willow had spent every spare minute she had looking for a spell to bring Xander home.

It had been one week since the funeral. One week since Willow and Tara held a sobbing Dawn between them as she grieved. One week since they had finally tracked down Dawn's father and told him the news. One week since they learned that he would be arriving today to take Dawn back to L.A. with him. One week since they had contacted the council to come and take Giles home to England. They had sent a plane ticket; Giles would be leaving tomorrow.

Willow and Tara had done everything they could. They packed Giles' things for him and arranged to have them sent overseas. They had helped Dawn to pack and to gather the things of Buffy's that she wanted to take with her. They had gone by Xander's apartment everyday and tried to get Anya to come out. She wouldn't, but sometimes she would talk to them through the door. She would ask if they'd found him yet. It broke Willow's heart every time she had to say no.

"Dawn, hurry up and get your things, sweetie. Your Dad will be here any minute." Willow tried her best to sound cheerful but she knew she was failing miserably. In one way, it would be a relief when Dawn was gone. She deserved a better life than she had here on the hellmouth. Also, everywhere she looked there were reminders of Buffy. On the other hand, Willow didn't want her to go. She was all they had left of Buffy, and Willow wanted to protect and care for her the way Buffy would have. In the end, the decision was taken from her when Hank Summers said he was coming back to take Dawn home with him.

"I'm coming. I just don't want to forget anything, you know?" Dawn was both happy and sad to be leaving. She remembered her father even though in truth she had never met the man. She remembered how much he loved her and the fun they had together before her parents split up. She wanted that, again - for real this time. But she would miss Willow and Tara so much. They had been so good to her; they treated her like she was more than just Buffy's little sister. When she talked, they actually listened to her. Just like Spike did.

That was another reason she was glad her Dad was coming. Spike and Xander were gone, and she felt like it was her fault. Willow and Tara told her it wasn't, but she didn't believe them - really. It was her blood that had opened the portal, her blood that had caused them to be sucked into some, most likely hellish dimension. Having to watch Willow frantically search for a way to bring them back was tearing her up inside.

Willow pulled Dawn into her arms and held her. "Hey, don't worry, Tara and I will be here until school starts up in the fall. If you think of anything you forgot, just call us and we'll send it to you. Okay?" Dawn nodded her head and sniffled slightly. She could smell rosemary. Willow always smelled of rosemary, it made her smile.

Tara came in from the kitchen at that moment carrying a basket. "I made you something to eat on the drive. I, I hope it isn't too much?" Dawn took the basket from her and smiled. "I'm sure it'll be fine. Thank you." A lone tear slid down Tara's face and Dawn flew into her arms.

"Oh God, I'm going to miss you guys so much." Dawn sobbed against Tara's chest and she felt Willow come up behind her. By the time Hank showed up the three girls were clinging to each other and crying in earnest.

Reluctantly, Dawn pulled away and wiped her eyes with the back of her hand. "I, I guess this is goodbye then." Tara and Willow nodded solemnly, and Hank thanked them for being such loyal friends to Buffy and for taking such good care of Dawn. The girls promised to stay in touch and to call often. Then the car pulled away, and Willow and Tara watched it drive down the street until it was just a speck in the distance.

"Goddess, Tara. That was so hard. How are we ever going to get through this again tomorrow when Giles leaves?"

Tara held Willow and did her best to comfort her lover. "I don't know sweetie, but we will. We have to."

The apartment was a mess. It looked as though a hurricane had torn through it. One had. Hurricane Anya to be precise. Clothes were scattered throughout the apartment, cupboards and drawers had been emptied of their contents, and the linen closet had been emptied from one end of the apartment to the other. And Anya still didn't have what she was looking for. She knew it wasn't here; he had it with him when he was sucked through the portal.

The ring. Her ring. Her *engagement* ring. The symbol of Xander's love for her. She wanted it. She needed to have it, to prove to herself that he had really asked her to marry him, that she had really said yes. She told him to give it to her when the world didn't end. Well, the world was still in one piece, and she wanted her ring.

She kept hoping that this would be the day Willow and Tara had good news when they stopped by, that this was the day they would tell her that they had found a way to bring him home. It never was. Every time she asked, the answer was the same. Which meant still no Xander and still no ring. Why had she told him to wait? She should have taken the ring. At least she would then have proof that it wasn't all a dream. That Xander really did love her enough to want to spend the rest of his life with her.

For a demon that had spent over a thousand years torturing and maiming men, that was a rare gift. One that had been cruelly taken from her by the fates. Well no more. She was Anyanka, damn it! She handed out the pain, she caused the universe to open up and suck people into oblivion, and she did not sit by and let the fates crap on her head. Not any more anyway. Xander was gone, the only good thing her humanity had given her had been savagely torn from her life and she would suffer for it no longer!

"D'Hoffryn! I call you. Hear my plea." There was a bright flash of light and then D'Hoffryn stood before her. He took in the mess surrounding her, the rumpled filthy clothing she wore, the unwashed state of her body and made a face of disgust. "Anyanka, what have you allowed yourself to become?"

"I want vengeance. I want the world to feel my pain. Take me back, please. I promise to do a good job for you from now on. Please, just take this pain away from me." Anya fell to her knees and sobbed brokenly into her hands. D'Hoffryn looked down at her with softened eyes. "Stand my child, all will be restored."

In an instant Anya was transformed once again into the demon Anyanka. All the humanity that had been thrust upon her had fled and she cried no more. She smiled beatifically at her mentor and they disappeared in flash of blue light. Rupert Giles had many regrets in his life. He regretted his foolish youth and the repercussions it caused. He regretted never having children now that he knew what joy they could bring him. He regretted that he hadn't made the effort to understand his father better before he had passed away, and he regretted never telling Buffy how very much she meant to him.

His slayer was gone. He had failed her. In the end she had given her life to save the world. He always knew she had it in her, even when she was nothing more than a whiny sixteen-year-old girl who wanted to blow off her destiny for a date on Friday night. She had potential then, and he had done his best to bring it out of her, to mould her into the best slayer she could be. But somewhere along the lines, he fell in love with her. If he hadn't, if he had done what any other watcher would have done - destroyed the key, she would still be here and the world would still be spinning.

Not only did Buffy suffer for his ineptitude, but Xander had as well. Heavens knew where the boy had wound up and his only company was a chipped vampire that he could barely tolerate. Giles felt no remorse for the loss of the vampire, he was a demon after all - the thing he was trained to abhor, to help his slayer annihilate.

It was his love for Buffy that kept him from doing what he knew in his heart was the right thing. He allowed himself to believe that everything would work out, that no one would be hurt. He was wrong, and the world would pay for his mistake. That was why he had climbed into a bottle of scotch and hadn't looked back. He couldn't stand to look at himself or the children. Let Mr. Summers come and take Dawn to L.A. Let the girls ship him back to the Mother country. Nothing mattered anymore. His reason for living was buried in Restfield Cemetery.

~!~

It had been two days since Willow and Tara took Giles to the airport and said goodbye. He had managed to get on the plane without causing a scene. After the plane had taken off, they went back to the Summers' house and began the unpleasant task of boxing up the rest of Buffy's things. In exchange for their work, Hank was letting them stay on in the house until they could get a dorm room come fall. Besides that, neither woman liked the idea of strangers going through Buffy's things; there would be a lot of things to explain.

Tara screamed when a bright light flashed in the room. Willow ran into the bedroom just in time to see Anya hand Tara a bunch of papers and a key ring. Then she disappeared again. "Baby? What's all that stuff?" Willow walked to her girlfriend who was still trembling slightly. The sight of Anya's demon face had startled her quite badly.

"I, I think it's the papers for the Magic Box, and some keys. She's a demon again isn't she?" Willow gathered her lover into her arms and rocked her gently. "Yeah, sweetie. She is." There really wasn't any more to say. Anya had obviously given up on Xander. She had made her choice. Willow would not follow her lead, however. She would find a way to bring Xander home if it was the last thing she ever did.

"Come on, let's take a break for a while, huh? I have some new spell books I want to look through." Tara nodded and allowed her girlfriend to lead her downstairs. They made a pot of tea and sat at the counter poring over the texts. She knew that if there were any way to get Xander and Spike back home, Willow would find it. Her determination was just one of the things she loved about her so much. Her compassion was another.

Part Six

"Hey, Spike. How long do you think we've been here?" Xander looked up from the bench he was carving. The cabin was finally finished, now he was working on furnishing it. Spike scratched his head and thought a moment.

"'Bout a year I'd reckon, why?" Xander frowned. It hadn't seemed like a year. Once he had starting work on the cabin, the time seemed to just fly by.

"No reason. I was just curious. What do you think of this so far?" Spike strode over and looked down at the intricate carving the boy was doing. He had a real talent for woodworking. "Looks good, pet. Where's it going?" Xander shrugged. "I don't know yet. Maybe by the fireplace, what do you think?"

Spike thought about it for a minute. "Nah, that one would be better on the porch. We'll need something bigger for the front room. Something I can stretch out on. Plus it would be a bonus if it was cushioned." Xander chuckled. They had finally found a use for Spike's fur collection. They

had used them for bedding and to upholster a couple of chairs to sit on. Spike wasn't too comfortable having bare wood on his back.

Things had been pretty good since the kiss. Spike came back the next morning and started helping Xander with the cabin. They didn't talk for awhile but then they fell into the easy banter they had developed, and neither one had mentioned the kiss. Spike had finally put his lustful thoughts behind him and had moved forward. Sure he still thought Xander looked good, and he'd shag him in a heartbeat, but he could live with the fact that it was never going to happen.

Xander himself had entertained a thought or two concerning the blonde. He just wasn't ready to accept that he and Anya were through yet. He knew in his heart that after this long, she would have moved on with her life. She probably left Sunnydale all together. But Xander just wasn't ready to let go yet. He figured at some point it would become an issue and he and Spike would have to come to a decision. It was obvious that Spike had no gender hang ups, and forever was a long time to go without ever having sex.

Actually, Xander hadn't been all that surprised by the kiss. Yeah, it was a shock but Spike had always seemed to grab onto whatever was available and make the best of it. He stayed with Drusilla, took up with *Harmony*, of all vampires, and then he fell for his mortal enemy, the slayer. But seeing as how his only associates were humans, and Willow was very much gay, Dawn was very much a kid, he himself was involved with Anya and Giles was ... Giles, it left Buffy. Plus she was his equal in strength and ability. Neither had ever managed to defeat the other. So being here - stuck with only each other, it made sense that Spike would turn his affections toward him.

Xander missed physical contact. Not just in the sexual way either. He was an affectionate guy by nature and he showed it. He was always hugging one of the girls, or walking arm in arm with Willow and Tara. He missed being touched, feeling someone else's skin next to his. Also, it had been a really good kiss, and even though Xander had never been with another man, he was open-minded enough to at least consider it.

The place they now lived had a similar climate to that of California, so they didn't get snow. There had been a hell of a lot of rain the one month and the river had overflowed its banks. Thankfully Xander had chosen a spot on higher ground for their home so the water didn't damage it. And the garden was further away from the river than the house was so it had survived, as well.

"Hey, Xander? Would you teach me how to do that?" Xander looked up from the design he was carving into the back of the seat. "Do what? Carve or make furniture?" Spike rolled his eyes at him. "Both. I figure it'll give me something to do."

"Sure. Tomorrow we'll go out and pick a nice tree for you to start on. How about after I teach you this, you show me how to hunt. I can throw a mean spear but my stealth leaves much to be desired." Spike snorted in amusement. He already knew that. The boy always lost at hide-and-seek; he could hear him coming a mile away. "Sure pet, sounds like a plan."

Spike went inside the cabin and looked around. They hadn't officially started living here until two days ago. It was still pretty bare, other than the beds and the fireplace. Spike looked at his bed and smiled. That had been a surprise, Xander had built them each a platformed bed with split log sides. Inside the bedframe he had stuffed the two old canvas tarps with straw overlaid with reed mats. He'd used rawhide strips to sew them shut. They were surprisingly comfortable.

The cabin only had two rooms. A bedroom and a large common room. That was where the fireplace was, so it doubled as a kitchen. Xander had put their beds on opposite sides of the room and said that at some point when they had more skins, they could make a curtain to hang up to give each other some privacy. Spike wasn't sure how he felt about that. He would miss seeing the boy in his bed, but maybe it was better to take temptation out of the picture. "You know what we need Spike? A shed. Someplace to store all that crap that landed with us." At the present all that crap was still piled in the back of the cave they had been living in. "What the hell for? Leave it where it is."

"Some of it might come in useful. That big steel drum for example. I think if I could cut it in half, lengthways, I could make a bathtub out of it." Spike snorted. That was one thing the brunette had complained about several times in the past. A hot bath. "And just how do you plan on filling it?"

Xander shook his head. "I'll take it down to the river and set it up there. Think about it, I could build a fire around it to heat the water and then climb in and soak for an hour. It would be great!" Spike actually liked the sound of that.

"Sounds good. I'll help."

"You know, I've missed a birthday, Christmas, New Years, all those big holiday-type days and I never even realised it." Xander shook his head sadly. Being here with Spike, these things just didn't seem important. They had their own way of life here, a simpler way. They spent their days working, hunting, and playing cards or swimming. Xander had started building a dock for the pond last week; it would be finished soon as well. He found he really enjoyed making things with his hands, he just wished he had the proper tools - weapons really weren't meant for woodworking.

"Well, happy birthday, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, and all that rot. There? Feel better now?" The words were sarcastic but the teasing look in the vampire's eye made Xander smile. Spike really wasn't a bad guy once you got past all that 'Big Bad' bluster and bravado. He wondered what kind of man he had been before he was turned... Was William anything like Spike? Or was he the complete opposite? Xander had wanted to ask that more than once, but didn't want to alienate his only friend on this world. Maybe someday, a long time from now Spike would be comfortable enough to talk about it.

"Well, words are good and nice but I want presents, damn it!" Xander pouted at the vampire and Spike walked over and tapped his protruding lip. "You know, some bird is going to come along and poop on that lip if you keep pushing it out like that." Spike walked past Xander and picked up

some of the discarded wood pieces and took them around to the woodpile beside the cottage. 'That or some big vampire just might decide to nibble on it.' He thought. The boy had no idea how sexy he looked when he pouted. Spike had always been a sucker for big brown eyes and pouty lips - reminded him of Dru in a way. She would pout and turn those big brown eyes of hers on him and he would give her anything.

"Hey Spike! I'm going to go down to the pond and swim for while, you wanna come?" Spike came back around the building and grinned. Xander was always taking off to swim; the boy must've been a fish in a previous life. "Sure pet. Sound fun. Let me grab my shorts and we'll go." Spike ducked inside the cabin and emerged with his boxers in hand. They were looking rather worn and he wasn't expecting them to hold up much longer. He had been surprised they had lasted this long. Xander's weren't in any better shape than his were.

"We seriously need to find a Wal-Mart on this world, or I'm gonna be wandering around naked in no time." Xander's eyes got really big at that statement and he blushed. Truth was he had been wondering what they were going to do when their clothes became unwearable. He just hadn't really thought it would come down to nudity. "You could always make yourself some fur underwear. Or leather shorts."

Spike snorted. An image of him and Xander running around dressed like the cavemen in those old 50's B-movies flashed into his mind. He snorted again and then began to chuckle as the image of cave-Xander chasing after him with a club came to mind. "What's so funny, Barney?" That only made Spike laugh harder.

Eventually, Spike stopped laughing and after explaining the source of his amusement to Xander, he too was laughing his ass off. They headed off toward the pond, still laughing.

~!~

"Hey Spike? Is this what I think it is?" Xander held up a green leafy plant that he had pulled out of the ground. They had gotten tired of swimming and decided to start Xander's stealth training in the woods near the pond. Spike came out of the trees and looked at what Xander was holding. He sniffed at it and then smiled. "If you think it's pot, then yeah."

Xander dropped the plant and stepped back from it. Spike chuckled at him. "What's a matter pet? Think you're gonna get busted for possession? Not likely." Xander smiled sheepishly and lowered his eyes. He had almost forgotten that he and Spike were the only people on this planet, or so it seemed. "Shut up Spike."

Spike picked up the plant and looked around, there were a few more scattered throughout the area. He hadn't gotten high in ages, especially since the implant. He needed to have his wits about him at all times. Now though, he had nothing to worry about, so why not? He was sure he could fashion a pipe of some sort out of all those bits of metal back in the cave.

"Spike, what are you doing?" Xander watched the vampire pick up the discarded pot plant. He saw him looking around, and he too spotted the other plants in the area. He groaned. "Spike, you are not smoking that."

Spike spun around and gaped at him. "Why the bloody hell not? It's not like I'm going to get in trouble for doing it. Who's going to catch me? You? So what?" Xander had no answer for that so he merely shrugged and shook his head. "Whatever, Spike. Let's head back, I'm hungry."

Part Seven

It was several days later while Xander was sitting by the fire that Spike came in with a metal pipe and a pouch full of dried pot. Xander looked up to see what he was doing and frowned at him. "If you're going to smoke that, do it outside." Spike looked at him sceptically. "You don't want any?" Xander sat up in shock. "No! I don't get high, Spike. It's illegal."

Spike actually laughed at him. "Says who? I don't see any cops here, Xander. It's a natural substance; the Indians got high all the time. It's not like some big bad demon is going to jump out and eat you all up while you're under the influence." This was all true. Half the reason Xander had never tried it was he knew that he was likely to get eaten by some gross demon while he was too stoned to notice. That was why he never drank much either - drugs and alcohol on the hellmouth equalled easy pickings. But here, there was no one but himself and Spike, no reason not to try it at least.

"Fine. Why not." Xander watched as Spike stuffed the pipe and lit it from a stick in the fireplace. Spike inhaled deeply and passed it to Xander. Xander looked at it suspiciously and then shrugged his shoulders. He did what Spike had done and then coughed so hard he thought he'd puke. That was not fun! Why the hell did people do this?

Spike thumped Xander on the back and got him some water. He couldn't help but laugh at him, he should have warned him not to inhale so deeply. He wasn't used to it like Spike was. "Sorry bout that luv, should have warned you to go slow. Try again, just easy this time alright?" Xander scowled at the pipe that Spike held out to him but took it anyway. He'd be damned if he was going to look like an idiot in front of the vamp.

Once Xander got the hang of it, it wasn't so bad. They smoked for a bit until they were well and truly stoned. Then they lay side by side on the fur rug near the fireplace. "Hey Xan? If you could have anything you wanted right now, other than to get home of course, what would you wish for?"

Xander grinned and sat up on his elbow. He looked at Spike seriously before speaking. "Hmm, I don't know. There are a lot of things I could really use here, tools, clothes, a real bed. But I guess I'd have to say... Chocolate. Yeah, chocolate would be awesome. The pure kind, no nuts or caramel or anything. Just 100% pure milk chocolate." Spike rolled onto his side to face him. "Why?"

"I love the way it melts when you set it on your tongue, how it sticks to your fingers and you have to lick them clean. I used to hide Hershey bars in the freezer, then if I was having a really bad day, I'd thaw out a couple and take my time eating them. I'd slowly suck on each square until it dissolved in my mouth. By the time I was done, I always felt better. There's just something about the way it tastes, the way it feels in your mouth, it's almost as good as sex." Spike swallowed hard. He couldn't believe he was getting hard from listening to Xander describe the way he ate chocolate. "How about you, Spike? What would you wish for?" Spike knew what he wanted more than anything right now, but somehow he doubted that was what Xander wanted to hear. He wasn't that far gone. He was stoned enough, however, to let slip what he said next.

"Paper and pencils. I miss writing." Xander looked shocked. He had expected Spike to make some lewd comment, or say something about booze or smokes. Not paper and pencils. "You write?" Spike lay back and closed his eyes. "Used to, was a poet before I died. Still wrote afterwards, when the mood struck. There is just so much here I could write about, the sun, the sky, the river. It's beautiful here, nothing like the world I grew up in. In London, it was polluted, the air itself stunk, the streets were slimy and there was shit everywhere. If I could find something of beauty to write about there, imagine what I could do here."

Xander was stunned. He had many assumptions about the man William had been but this, this soft-spoken poet lying beside him was not one of them. He liked the idea of Spike as a poet; it was better than anything he had come up with. He wanted to ask more, but Spike looked like he had fallen asleep. Xander closed his eyes and joined him. The first thing Xander noticed when he woke up was that a small rodent had climbed into his mouth and died there. After repeatedly trying to push it out with his tongue he realised it was his tongue that was fuzzy and tasted like roadkill. The second thing he noticed was that Spike was sleeping curled up around him, and that he was holding the vampire in his arms. It actually felt kind of nice, and despite the foul taste in his mouth he fell back asleep.

When Spike woke, he heard the steady thump of Xander's heart in his ear, which made sense since he was curled around the young man with his head on his chest. He snuggled deeper into the boy's body and just lay there enjoying the smell of his skin, the warmth of his arms around him. It was the nicest morning he could remember in a very long time.

"Hey, sleepyhead. I know you're awake." Xander's voice startled him and he sat up abruptly. He hadn't known the human was awake. "I didn't know you were awake. How long have you been up?" Xander chuckled and stretched before answering. "Dunno, ten minutes maybe. You looked so comfortable I didn't want to wake you."

The truth was, Xander was enjoying the contact too much to wake him; he knew as soon as Spike woke up he would pull away and most likely make some excuse to leave. "Oh, well I'm going to... find something to eat." And that was that, Spike was up, in his jeans and boots and out the door in no time.

Xander got up and headed down to the river. His mouth still tasted nasty and he felt sweaty and gross. He stripped off his boxers and sank into the water. He rinsed his mouth repeatedly thinking that if he really could have anything he wanted - a toothbrush would be at the top of his list. Last night had been fun, but this morning he felt awful. It was like a hangover - sort of.

Once Xander was done washing, he rinsed out his boxers and climbed out of the water. He shook himself off a bit and reached for his pants. Which of course he had forgotten to bring with him. He had two choices, put on the wet boxers or run back starkers and hope Spike was still hunting. He looked at the wet cloth in his hands and then looked up toward the house. He decided to run for it.

Spike was just coming back toward the house with a rabbit when he saw Xander run into the house - naked. He shook his head and replayed the image. Yep, he had been naked. He wondered why the hell the boy was running around in the altogether. He shrugged his shoulders and went inside.

"Xander? What the hell are you doing running around starkers?" Xander came out of the bedroom buttoning his pants. He blushed and then admitted that he'd forgotten to take his pants down to the river with him and didn't want to put on his wet shorts. Spike chuckled at him and handed him the rabbit. "Well, here's brekkies. I'm going down to have a wash my self."

Spike left Xander to clean the rabbit while he washed up. He couldn't remember a lot of what they had talked about last night, but he did remember admitting to the boy that he had been a poet. So much for his image. He needed some time to come to terms with the fact that Xander knew the truth about him, that he had been a foppish, bookish poet, and still was deep down. In the long run, it would probably be for the best; he could be more himself now, and less the Big Bad.

~!~

The following day, Spike decided to go out on his own for awhile. He wanted some time to think without interruptions, he had a lot on his mind the past couple days. Xander understood the need for alone time; he himself had planned on spending most of the day out scavenging for new plants for his garden. He was still hoping to find some corn and peppers.

By the time Spike made it home that evening, he had come to the decision that he would let Xander get to know the real him. He had no need to keep up the image he had so carefully crafted to hide his true self from Angelus and Darla. Only Dru had known the man he really was, and it was that part of him that had drawn her to him in the first place. Perhaps Xander would accept who he really was, maybe even like him better for it.

Spike looked around and didn't see the boy anywhere. He listened for his heartbeat - nothing. He went back outside and walked to the river, Xander wasn't there either, but his shorts were still sitting out on a rock to dry which meant that Xander hadn't been back since he'd left that morning. Spike started to worry. Xander was never away from the house this long.

Spike shifted to his vamp face, and scented the air. He caught a faint trace of Xander's scent and started tracking him. His appearance may have been altered but at least his senses were still in working order. The trail led him into the trees and he scanned the surrounding area for a heartbeat. He found it and dashed off in that direction.

Spike smelled blood and ran faster. When he found Xander, he was lying at the base of a tree - out cold. His arm was hanging limply and he had a few cuts and scrapes. His shirt was torn and he had a pretty big cut on his abdomen. Spike was certain that his shoulder was dislocated. "Damn." Spike crouched down and tried to wake the boy. He was unresponsive.

After cursing for several minutes, Spike scooped Xander into his arms and carried him home. It was probably a good thing he was out cold, otherwise all the moving around would hurt his arm and cause Spike's chip to go off. He put Xander in the bedroom and carefully stripped off the boy's shirt; he would have just cut it away, but seeing as it was the only shirt the boy owned, he didn't.

"Alright Xan, I'm going to set your arm now. It's going to hurt like hell and if you wake up screaming and see me on the floor, well you'll know why." Spike really hoped that Xander stayed out for this; he had only set his chip off the one time since they had been here and that had been an accident. He really didn't want to do it again. That was just one more reason he liked it here, he didn't have any reason to try and hurt anyone. Xander had been surprisingly decent to him, and as the time had passed, they had become friends. Good friends.

Spike set Xander's shoulder without a twinge from the chip. He was grateful in a way, but it made him more concerned for Xander. He took the boy's shirt down to the river and wet it. He picked up Xander's shorts as well before heading back to the house. He needed to clean out the cuts before they got infected.

Xander didn't stir at all while Spike washed his cuts and changed him into his shorts. He tucked him into bed and then dragged a chair over beside the bed to watch him.

A few hours later, Xander began to moan in his sleep, his brow was sweaty and he smelled of sickness. Spike pulled back the makeshift blanket and looked at the large cut on the boy's stomach. It was likely infected. He placed a hand on Xander's forehead and whistled softly; the young man was burning up.

With no medicines available, Spike did the only thing he could think of, he leaned over Xander and began to lick at his wound. Vampire saliva carried certain antibodies or something like that. Angelus had explained it to him a long time ago, how it was possible to keep several humans alive

and feed from them exclusively without them getting sick from it. Right now, Spike just hoped it would be enough.

Xander moaned and brought his hands down to Spike's head. He tangled his fingers in his hair and Spike chuckled. He could feel the boy growing hard and wondered who he was dreaming about in his delirium. Probably his girl, he thought. He ignored the weak pushing on his head and the gentle thrusting Xander was doing and continued to clean the boy's wound.

Once he was sure it was clean, he disentangled Xander's hands from his hair and sat up. Xander protested the loss of his mouth on his skin weakly. "No, come back." Spike smiled at him softly. He was hard as a rock himself, and felt for the boy. It wasn't nice to be teased after all. But he wasn't about to take advantage of the boy while he was delirious. He was about to go outside and have a quick wank when he heard Xander moan his name. He spun around to see that the boy had climaxed in his sleep. And said his name while he'd done it.

Part Eight

Spike was confused. He had never even suspected that Xander thought about him in that way. He had spent most of the night and the following morning sitting in the chair beside the boy's bed, thinking. The only time he left was to take the boy's ruined shorts down to the river to wash them.

Xander's fever had come down slightly and Spike had managed to get a few sips of water into him at one point before the boy passed out again. Spike had briefly considered climbing into bed with him and using his own cold body to cool the boy down. He didn't, however, for several reasons.

The first being that he didn't want to take a chance of falling asleep in case Xander took a turn for the worse. The second was that he no longer trusted himself to not take advantage of the situation. He had clearly heard Xander say his name as he'd climaxed. Of course, that brought up another reason not to do it. What if Xander didn't really want him? Spike wasn't sure he could go through that kind of rejection again; it was the main reason he had been able to put his attraction for Xander behind him - well, mostly behind him. He refused to allow himself to be hurt again.

He knew he would have to wait and see what Xander remembered - if anything - when he got better. Spike was sure he would get better. His arm was going to be sore for awhile; his shoulder was almost black from the bruising, and the cut on his stomach would take some time to heal up but otherwise he'd be fine. And once he was, Spike was going to hurt him for getting himself into this mess in the first place. He'd figured out that Xander had fallen out of a tree. What he wanted to know was what Xander was doing *in* the tree to begin with.

Spike pulled back the blanket and looked at the wound again. It looked better, but he could still smell a bit of infection in it. He made sure Xander's bits were covered before leaning down to clean the wound again. He tried to ignore the painful swelling in his pants as he remembered the way Xander had held his head last night, the way he had moaned his name.

He almost bit through his tongue when Xander's fingers threaded through his hair again. He ignored the fur blanket-covered erection that was poking his cheek and concentrated on cleaning the wound. Once he was satisfied that it was clean, he pulled away from Xander gently so as not to wake him, and left the room.

Spike paced back and forth in the next room. He was going insane. He had accepted the fact that Xander was not interested in him, that they would never be more than friends, and now he wasn't sure what was going on. He really wished he had a cigarette. A cigarette and a good stiff drink. Everything would make sense if he only had a cigarette and some whiskey.

~!~

In the next couple of days, Xander started to get better and Spike took care of him. Since the second application of Spike's spit seemed to take care of the infection, he hadn't had to put himself in any more intense situations. Xander did wonder about his nakedness though. Spike had simply replied that he had had a fever so he had undressed him. He ignored the blush that had crept up Xander's face and helped him to sit up in the bed.

Spike brought Xander food and water and kept him company. They played poker - Xander now owed the vampire \$2,458.00 - and talked a little. Xander told Spike about his grandfather on his mother's side of the family. He had died when Xander was 11, but Xander still remembered spending summers at the old man's house. How he had an old barn in his backyard full of woodworking tools and that they had spent hours in there making things. He also told Spike how after the first summer, he had never brought any of his projects home with him again.

Spike grit his teeth and listened to the sadness in the young man's voice as he spoke of his father's drunken rage that had broken the bookstand he had made, how Xander had cried when he had found out it was unfixable. That Xander had sworn he would never bring another thing that he and his grandfather had made home again.

Spike told Xander about growing up in London as a boy. How his father had been killed in a carriage accident and how he and his mum had moved in with her sister and her husband. That the couple had been childless and his uncle had taken a shine to him, sending him to private school and making sure he had a good education. He could have done anything, but all he wanted to do was write poetry.

He had told Xander about his love for Cecily, and how she had spurned him. That had it not been for his utter humiliation, he never would have been out the night Dru had found him.

Xander told him about Cordelia and their in-the-closet relationship. How she was embarrassed to be seen with him and would belittle him publicly, while groping and molesting him privately. He told Spike about the love spell he had Amy put on Cordy that backfired. Spike laughed his ass off when he got to the part where Dru had saved him from Angelus and then offered him immortality.

"Oh, pet. You're bloody lucky she didn't turn you. If I hadn't staked you out of jealousy, your mates would have souled you when they re-souled Angelus and you'd never have gotten laid again." Spike started to laugh again and Xander had a sudden flash of his hands in Spike's hair, pushing him towards his crotch. He shook his head and cleared the image away.

"I think I might take a nap, I'm feeling kinda tired all of a sudden." Xander scooted back down in the bed and closed his eyes. He turned on his side with his back to Spike. He couldn't look at the vampire right now, not after thinking about him like that.

Spike left Xander alone to get some sleep and went outside. He had gotten the drum from the cave last night and was working on turning it into a bathtub for Xander. He just need to fold over the edges so the boy wouldn't cut himself getting in and out of it. He thought Xander might appreciate a nice hot soak after being stuck in bed for a few days.

~!~

Xander relaxed back in the hot water and sighed. Spike had done a great job on the tub. It was so nice to feel hot water again. He had been slightly embarrassed when Spike had scooped him - naked - out of bed and brought him out here, but this more than made up for it.

He kept thinking about Spike for some reason, the way he had been the last few days, he seemed different, less Spike-ish. Not that Xander was complaining - it was nice to have a real conversation with him, to learn a bit about what his life had been like. He liked being able to actually tell Spike stuff. Of course it probably helped that Spike didn't look like the big bad master vampire he had known back in Sunnydale. His hair had grown out, and only the tips were white-blonde now. The rest was a golden-blonde colour with streaks of sun-bleached blonde throughout. He was tanned, and he smiled a lot more. Overall it was a striking effect. Spike looked beautiful.

And that was the bane of Xander's existence. He was becoming more and more attracted to the blonde. Not just physically. The more Spike opened up about himself, showed Xander who he really was, the more Xander liked him. Xander lightly probed at the gash on his stomach. He was grateful that it hadn't been infected. He felt stupid for having fallen out of that tree; he still wasn't sure how it happened. One minute he was up in the tree enjoying the view, the next he was falling - hitting a lot of branches on the way down. The last thing he remembered was a sharp pain in his shoulder as he hit. He'd woken up sometime later in his bed with Spike sitting in a chair beside him.

Spike had told him how he had found him and brought him home. That he'd had to set his shoulder and had cleaned him up. When Xander discovered he was naked, Spike had just shrugged his

shoulders and told him he had had a fever so he undressed him. Xander wasn't sure, but he thought there might be more to the story than that. Not that he thought Spike had molested him while he was out cold or anything, it was just the way Spike dismissed the question. And then there were the dreams. Xander remembered having erotic dreams about Spike licking him. He could feel Spike's cold mouth on the skin of his belly, his silky hair tangled around his fingers. He was getting hard just thinking about it. Which was not a good idea as Spike had said he'd be back to get him out of the tub shortly. "I'm falling for Spike, what the hell am I going to do?"

Spike was just coming down the hill to get Xander out of the tub when he heard the man's softly spoken confession. He stopped dead in his tracks. He wanted to throw himself at the boy and tell him he felt the same way, but he was also wary of getting hurt again. He decided it was time for them to talk. But first he needed to get Xander out of the tub.

"'Ello, luv. Enjoying your bath?" Xander jumped and turned around to look at the smirking vampire. "Yes, actually I am. Thanks Spike, this is great!" Spike bowed dramatically. "Your wish is my command. Now, is sir ready to get out of the tub?" Xander blushed, but nodded. This was no easier now that he realised he was falling for Spike. If anything, it was harder. Xander groaned at his choice of phrases.

Spike helped him out of the tub and scooped him up into his arms. Xander covered his parts with his hands and closed his eyes. He had tried to tell Spike he could walk, but the vamp refused, stating that he was still too weak to walk that far, especially uphill. Xander knew it was pointless to argue so he gave up.

Once he was back in bed - boxers on, Spike brought him some water and fruit. He pulled his chair up beside the bed and sat down. Xander sipped at his water and looked at Spike. It was obvious the blonde wanted to talk, and it was serious by the look of things. "What's up Spike?"

"Xander, we need to talk." Xander swallowed and nodded his head. Those words had never led to good things. No one ever said 'we need to talk' followed by an offer of cash and prizes. "Okay, about what?"

Spike leaned forward and looked in Xander's eyes. "What do you remember about the last few days?" Okay, this wasn't what he expected. What did he remember? Not much. "Not a whole lot. I remember falling out of the tree and then waking up in bed in a lot of pain. I remember you taking care of me. I remember..." Xander blushed but continued. "I remember having these... dreams."

Spike looked at him curiously. "Dreams, pet?" Xander blushed and nodded. "What kind of dreams?" Xander lowered his head and spoke so softly Spike almost didn't hear him when he spoke. "I dreamt that you were... licking me." Spike chuckled and brought Xander's face up to look him in the eye. "Not dreams, luv. I was licking you." At Xander's startled expression, Spike continued. "Your wound was infected, vampire spit's good for that sort of thing." Xander

scrunched up his nose and then his eyes grew very large. He remembered grabbing Spike's head, pushing it lower. Was that part of a dream, what happened afterward?

"Relax, luv. Nothing else happened. I cleaned your wound and then I covered you up. That's it." Xander believed him, but he also knew that Spike was aware of what he had thought happened, which meant that he knew what Xander had dreamt. He was going to die of embarrassment, that was it. And, oh God. He had been naked! That meant... Xander covered his face and groaned.

"Hey, I'm not telling you this to embarrass you. I like you Xander, have for a while now in case that kiss way back when didn't tip you off. I just thought that, since it's obvious you kinda like me too, we should talk about it before it gets too awkward." Spike looked over at the miserable young man and frowned. It was obvious the boy was having a hard time with this.

"I'm not gonna push you, luv. I just wanted you to know that whatever it is you feel for me, I care about you and I won't push you to do anything; it's your choice." Xander looked up at Spike and gave him a shaky smile. "Thanks Spike. I'm going to need some time to think about all of this though. Is that okay?" Spike chuckled, and then pecked him on the mouth. "Take as long as you need, pet. I'm not going anywhere."

Part Nine

It had been a very hectic month for Willow and Tara. After Anya showed up that day and handed Tara the papers for the store, they had agreed to keep it open, so they were both working there. Willow had spoken to Giles and he said that he wasn't planning on coming back to California but that he would remain part owner of the store if they wished to keep it open.

Between work, packing up the house, and trying to find a spell to locate Xander and Spike, the two girls had very little time for anything else. They didn't know how they were going to manage classes in the fall.

It was after sundown and Willow was just coming home from the Magic Box. Tara was in the kitchen washing the dishes. "Tara? Sweetie, are you home?" Willow was sorting the day's mail as she wandered toward the kitchen. "I'm in the kitchen." Tara called back to her. "How was work?"

Willow sat down at the counter and picked up a banana to snack on. "Horrible. I never knew suppliers could be so bitchy. I don't think we should deal with that occult bookstore in Santa Monica anymore. The woman yelled at me for ten minutes straight about some Tabitha Chronicle

or something that she says we ordered and never paid for. I know I never ordered anything called a Tabitha Chronicle. It sounds so... Bewitched.

Tara chuckled and put a plate in the dish drainer. "I think she was talking about the Tarmithia Chronicle, and we did order it; the slip got lost under the register. I found it yesterday while I was cleaning and sent a check off."

Willow took a bite of her banana and chewed it slowly. "Oh, then maybe you should call her tomorrow and let her know that. If it helps, you can tell her that your business partner is certifiably insane. I think she'd believe you."

"That's okay. I'll still love you when you lose your mind." Willow smiled sadly in remembrance of those hectic weeks after Glory had taken Tara's sanity. She was glad she was able to get Tara back. If she had to deal with that on top of losing both Buffy and Xander, she didn't think she'd be sane anymore either. "Oh hey! We got a letter from Dawn."

"Why don't you read it to me while I dry these?" Tara picked up a dishtowel as Willow opened the envelope. She unfolded the paper, cleared her throat and began.

"Dear Willow and Tara. I'm writing you because Dad says I spend way too much time on the phone and that the art of written correspondence is lost on me. He can be so lame sometimes. I miss you guys a lot but I like it here in L.A. Dad's apartment is like on the thirtieth floor of this really swanky building. We have a doorman and everything. He calls me Miss Summers. Isn't that way cool?"

I was going to look up Angel and Cordelia but then I thought maybe it was better if I didn't. I don't want to do anything to remind him of Buffy; he's already been hurt so much, you know? Besides, I remember Cordelia from when she dated Xander and she was kind of a bitch. Hey, I can swear on paper, it's not the same as saying it you know."

Tara smiled and winked at her girlfriend. It was an ongoing joke between them. Tara had told Dawn that a lady never curses. And then she told her if she was really angry that she should just write down every bad word she knew. By the time she was finished she would have forgotten what she was so mad about. After the first time she did it, she presented her list to the two witches who wrote down the ones she had forgotten. They'd all laughed about it afterwards and Dawn wasn't angry anymore.

"The malls in L.A. are so cool, but Dad insists on going shopping with me. He says he wants to know where his hard-earned money is going, I think he just wants to make sure I buy things that don't show any skin. There are a lot of trappy girls in L.A., and he doesn't want me to be one of them."

I hate to ask this, 'cause I know you would call me if you did, but have you guys found anything to help get Xander and Spike back yet? I mean, I was thinking, since it was my blood and all that

opened the portal in the first place it might help to find them. If you think it'll help I'll be happy to give you some. I miss them.

How is Anya? Has she come out of the apartment yet? Tell her not to give up, I know that you guys will find a way to bring them back, you're the best witches in the world.

I went to see Faith at the prison. I know you don't think I should talk to her after everything Buffy went through with her, but I wanted to. She's changed. She really is trying to be a better person. We talked for a long time while I was there. She wants to know if you'll come see her, Willow. She said she needs to apologise to you, and that she wants to do it in person.

I'd better go now. Dad wants us to do happy Daughter/Daddy things today. Like I said before, he can be so lame.

Love Dawn."

Tara put down the dishtowel and pulled Willow into her arms. She petted her hair and cooed to her while the other woman cried. She didn't know how much longer Willow could take the pressure of constantly looking for Xander. She knew that her lover felt guilty, that because she had ordered Xander to fetch Spike, he had been sucked into the portal. It wasn't her fault, but nothing Tara said would convince her.

Willow didn't know how she was going to tell Dawn that Anya was gone now as well. Not dead like Buffy, in another country like Giles, or even sucked into another dimension like Spike and Xander, but gone back to being a demon, wreaking vengeance of the male population once more. She chose to abandon them, to give up on Xander and go back to what she had been before. It wasn't going to be easy.

"Come on, why don't we go out tonight. See a movie or something, maybe it'll help you relax." Willow shook her head at her lover's suggestion. "I can't. I'm sorry Tara, but I just can't, not while Xander is lost out God knows where with no idea that any of us even survived. I have to find him." Tara wiped Willow's tears away and kissed her. "It's okay, I know. Let me help, we'll look together."

~!~

Rupert Giles sat in the living room of his one bedroom flat with a bottle of scotch in his hand and open books all around him. They were his watcher diaries, and Buffy's patrol journals. He had been reading and rereading them everyday for the past month. Somewhere in here he would find the thing he had overlooked, the thing he should have taught her that would have saved her life. It had to be here, everything they ever did was in these books and until he found his mistake he refused to train another slayer, or to mentor a young watcher-in-training. He would only get them killed, or worse.

The council had tried to persuade him to take a research position at their headquarters, to get back on the horse, so to speak. He had refused. He told them his judgement was not to be trusted, that he was fallible. He had failed his slayer and the world. The council said they understood his position and would contact him in six months; perhaps by then he would have regained his sense of duty. In polite terms they told him that they believed he was a fool and was ignoring his duty. In a way they were right.

Trisha, the new slayer, was 'sweet sixteen' but there was nothing sweet about her. She was - for lack of a better word - a bitch. She and her watcher, a younger version of Travers himself, had stopped by one day to chat. They were going to be heading for Sunnydale once her training was complete and they wanted to get all the information they could on the hellmouth. Giles had answered their questions, but he could tell they wouldn't heed any of his advice.

Not that he cared anymore. He was done with destiny and world-saving. He was old and tired. At least he felt that way. All he wanted out of life now was the answer to the question that was plaguing him - how had he failed his slayer? After he knew that, he would cheerfully curl up and die.

~!~

Trisha O'Leary was a pretty young girl with strawberry blonde hair and hazel eyes. She wasn't tall but she wasn't exactly short either. She was well built and very muscular for a girl her age. She was training to be an Olympic runner before she was called to active duty. As far as she was concerned, Buffy Summers had ruined her life.

She had heard the story from her watcher, how the slayer had taken her own life to save a girl that wasn't even real. How even now, that girl was living a normal sixteen-year-old's life in Los Angeles with her 'not really hers' father. Something that Trisha should have been doing. But instead she was forced to leave her home, her family, her friends and her boyfriend Tommy. All because Buffy decided a fake girl deserved a life more than she did.

She couldn't believe the things she had heard about this slayer either - sleeping with a vampire, working with another one, keeping witches on her team and an eleven-hundred-year-old ex-demon. Who had ever heard of a slayer having a team, and to align herself with the very things she was sworn to destroy? It was appalling. No wonder she had been the longest-living slayer - she had others do her job while she cavorted with vampires! Trisha was disgusted by her.

Her watcher, John Leeds, was a stuffy, uptight British man, but he had the same feelings toward the previous slayer as she had, so they would get along just fine. Besides, he might be stuffy and uptight but he was only twenty-four and he was cute. If she had to leave Tommy back in Ireland, at least she had found a cute replacement. It would only be a matter of time before she had John right where she wanted him - between her thighs.

Part Ten

It had been three weeks since Spike and Xander had their little talk. Spike was true to his word and never pushed Xander about it, in fact he didn't even mention it. Not once.

Xander had spent the time coming to terms with the fact that if he did this - got into a relationship with Spike - he was admitting to himself that he and Anya were truly over, no matter what the outcome. If they got rescued, if they were stranded there for the rest of their lives, what he and Anya had together was over.

Surprisingly, the fact that Spike was both male and a vampire wasn't even bothering him. Okay, the thought of being penetrated was wiggling him out somewhat, but he was open-minded enough to try it at least once before passing judgement. It had to feel okay, otherwise people wouldn't do it, would they?

Xander finally decided that he was ready to let go of the past and make a new life for himself here, a life that included having a relationship with Spike. Now he just had to find a way to broach the subject with the vampire.

They were lying outside by a fire smoking the last of the pot when Xander decided to bring up the subject. He rolled onto his side and looked at the relaxed stature of the blonde vampire. He hardly resembled the Spike from Sunnydale anymore; Xander realised that he was a bit disappointed by that.

Snarky Spike had been a part of his life almost as long as Buffy had been, even though for the most part he had been trying to kill them all. It wasn't that he missed the homicidal killer part of the vampire, he just sorta missed the Spike that always had a good comeback for any insult Xander could think up for him. It was sort of a challenge, to see if he could ever stump the blonde menace.

"Hey, Spike? You still awake, man?" Spike rolled over so that he was facing Xander, mere inches separated them now. "Yeah luv, I'm awake. Why, you want something?" Spike had pretty much given up on Xander coming to a decision anytime soon so, when Xander leaned forward those few inches and kissed him, he was shocked.

Shock soon turned to disappointment as the kiss ended all too soon for his liking. Xander bit his bottom lip as he looked at Spike. He waited to see what the vampire's reaction would be. When Spike smiled at him, he relaxed and smiled back.

"So, came to a decision, did ya?" Xander laughed weakly and then looked at Spike seriously. He wasn't sure how to say this part so he figured he'd just blurt it out and let what was going to happen, happen. "I'm not ready to sleep with you, Spike. I don't know when I will be either. I was hoping we could just take things one day at a time and see where it goes. Is... is that okay with you?"

Spike nodded and smiled; it had taken guts for Xander to admit that he wanted to try at all, so Spike was okay with whatever pace Xander set. "I told you before Xan, I'm not gonna push you. Whatever you're ready for." Xander smiled and lay back on the soft grass. "Do you think you could kiss me?" Spike leaned over him and whispered in his ear, "That, I think I can manage." And then he did.

~!~

Things had been going well for the new couple. They were still taking things slow, they hadn't made love yet but they were enjoying the anticipation. Xander was getting used to the feel of a man's body in his arms, to the feel of hard, defined muscles under his hands as they touched. It was a different experience but one he was enjoying nonetheless. Plus he found that touching a man took a lot of the guesswork out of the equation. He already knew what not to do.

Spike's lessons were coming along well, despite his inherent fear of wooden objects and the lack of proper tools. He was more interested in the decorative aspect of wood carving than the practical, and Xander found he had a real flare for design. He figured within a month or two, Spike would be able to add all of the decorative touches to any furnishings Xander built.

Xander's training was not coming along as well as he'd hoped. He was still making too much noise when moving through the trees. He had tried several times to sneak up on an animal, the way Spike would show him, but he always made noise and alerted the animal to his presence. It was irritating him to no end. He was beginning to think he should just leave the hunting to Spike and stick to fishing and gardening. He was much better at those things anyway.

His garden was finally complete. Spike had come back from hunting one day without any meat, but he had half a dozen pepper plants, and ten stalks of corn. The only thing he wished for now was some butter and salt to put on the corn. But he would have to do without.

Xander was just heading to the river to clean up from weeding the garden, when Spike came back from taking a walk. "Hey Spike, I'm just heading to wash up, wanna do some more stealth training when I'm done?"

The vampire wasn't sure that Xander would ever get the hang of it, but he enjoyed the time they spent hunting together so he was fine with it. "Sure luv, give me a holler when you're ready." Spike headed inside the cabin and flopped down on his bed. He was enjoying the kissing and touching they were doing but he was beginning to think it would never progress to the next level. They

hadn't even brought each other off yet. Spike was spending a lot more time with his hand than he would have liked, but he wasn't going to screw things up by pushing Xander.

Xander stripped off and stepped under the waterfall. The water was cool today, bordering on cold. It felt good on his hot skin, after spending hours in the sun working on his garden. He scrubbed the dirt from his body while his mind drifted to the night before.

He had been lying by the fireplace with Spike beside him. They were talking about the things they missed about home - both of them leaving out the women they had left behind; just things like hot water, cable TV, beer and chocolate. That sort of thing. Spike rolled over and kissed him. It was nice, beyond nice, actually.

Xander had lost himself in the feel of those smooth, silky lips, the gentle probing tongue that sought out his own. He tangled one hand through Spike's hair and rubbed the other one down the vampire's back. He cupped his ass and Spike moaned into the kiss. Xander pulled Spike on top of him; he could feel the other man's erection pressing into his own and he bucked up helplessly. Spike growled, vamped out and moved away.

Xander had gotten somewhat frustrated. He had thought Spike would be happy that he wanted to go a little farther. He knew that his reluctance had to be stressing him. It was stressing Xander, for God's sake. He was a walking erection anytime they touched. He just wasn't ready to go all the way yet. But surely there were other things, fun things they could do?

By the time Xander finished washing, he decided that he really wasn't in the mood to track Spike through the trees today. What he really wanted to do was pin the vampire down and kiss him senseless, touch every inch of him, see the look on his face when he came. Xander smiled and headed home, he had a vampire to ravish.

Spike was awakened by the feel of warm, moist lips on his neck. He hadn't realised he'd drifted off while Xander was gone. Still, it was a nice way to wake up. "Mmm, that's nice, luv." He stretched slightly and then felt a warm, heavy body blanket his own. He groaned and tried to keep himself under control. It wasn't easy seeing as the only thing either of them was wearing was a thin layer of cotton boxer shorts.

"Xan, nice as this is, I think we better stop before things get out of hand." Xander lifted his mouth from Spike's neck and looked at the golden eyes of his soon-to-be lover. "Don't wanna stop, Spike. Wanna touch you."

Xander kissed the shocked male beneath him and felt him slowly respond to the kiss. When oxygen became an issue, he pulled back and looked at Spike seriously. "I'm still not ready to have the actual sex yet, but can I touch you?"

Spike smiled softly and nodded. "You can do anything you like to me, luv." Xander smiled back and then kissed him again. Spike was torn between ecstasy and agony. He was enjoying the curious

exploratory touches, but he was so hard it hurt. When Xander lightly bit Spike's nipple, it was all he could do not to reverse their positions and ravage the young man. He held on by a bare thread of sanity, knowing that that would only serve to scare the boy off, and Spike really wanted him to keep up the touching.

Xander was surprised at Spike's seeming submission to him. He had half-expected Spike to take control by now. He was grateful to him for allowing him to do this at his own pace and knew it must be almost killing him to give up control. It was nice, for once, to just be able to explore without being told where and how to touch. Anya had always been very direct about how she wanted to be pleased. Spike was just lying back and letting Xander do what he pleased. It was very erotic, to have this much control over someone.

"Gods, Xander. That feels bloody wonderful, pet." Xander had worked one of his thighs between Spike's legs and was grinding it into him lightly while he continued to torment his nipples. Spike couldn't remember the last time someone had taken such care to drive him insane with pleasure. Dru had always been more into pain than pleasure, so was Angelus - at least causing the pain, anyway. Harm, well Harm was selfish. It was always Spike who had to take the lead, be the one in control. This was... very nice.

Xander knew what he wanted to do, he just wasn't sure he could. It would be the first time he'd ever have another man's penis in his mouth and he wasn't sure what to do once it was there. He supposed he could just do the things that he enjoyed and see how it went. After all, Spike knew that Xander had never been with a man before, so he probably wouldn't even expect him to go this far.

Xander moved slowly down Spike's chest. He paused to lick and suck at his bellybutton until the blonde was writhing beneath him. He gently grabbed the waistband of Spike's boxers and gave them a tug. Spike looked down at him and raised an eyebrow in question. "I want to see you, can I take these off?"

Spike was beyond words; he merely nodded and lifted his hips. Xander slid the shorts down his legs and then dropped them to the floor. He sat back on his heels and really looked at the vampire. "God, Spike. You're beautiful like this." Xander lowered his eyes and blushed. He couldn't believe he'd just told Spike, Big Bad vampire Spike, that he was beautiful.

Spike sucked in an un-needed breath and felt his chest tighten. No one, aside from Dru in a rare moment of sanity, had ever told him he was beautiful. What's more was that Xander actually meant it. He knew the boy meant it by how embarrassed he was acting now. "Come 'ere, luv." Spike held out his hand and Xander took it, allowing himself to be pulled onto Spike's chest.

"No one has ever taken the time to tell me they thought I was beautiful. Thank you." Spike kissed Xander and the mortal forgot his earlier embarrassment and fell into the feel of Spike underneath him. He picked up on his earlier plans and once again set out to drive Spike over the edge. He

nipped and kissed his way down Spike's chest; he rolled his tight little nipples between his fingers, probed his navel with his tongue. All the while, Spike panted and moaned in desire.

By the time Xander was face to... well by the time he was directly over Spike's cock, he was ready to cum in his shorts just from the reactions he was getting from Spike. He hadn't expected the vampire to be so responsive, so out of control. He leaned in and tentatively licked across the swollen head of the vampire's erection.

Spike's eyes rolled back in his head and he swore softly as Xander's tongue touched his cock. The heat was incredible, he thought he might just lose it right there and then. "Bloody hell, Xan. Do that again?" Xander chuckled and took the tip of Spike's cock into his mouth and sucked gently. Spike groaned and tightened his hands on the makeshift mattress beneath him.

Xander let the tip slide out of his mouth and smiled up at the panting vampire. "Like that?" Spike lifted his head and opened golden eyes. "What do you think? I bloody well loved that." Xander smirked and bent back down to his task. He pulled Spike's foreskin back and took him into his mouth again.

Xander found that he was actually enjoying giving Spike head. The vampire's moans and growls of encouragement were really turning him on, as well. Spike had tangled one hand into Xander's hair and was gently thrusting up into his mouth. "Xan, luv, I'm gonna cum!"

Xander hadn't decided whether or not he was gonna let Spike cum in his mouth, but knowing how frustrating it was to have your lover pull away from you at that moment, he decided he could always spit it out if it tasted nasty. He sucked harder and almost gagged when the salty fluid hit the back of his throat. He swallowed instinctively and was surprised that it hadn't been that bad at all. Spike slumped bonelessly into the mattress and sighed. He felt more relaxed than he had been in years.

Xander crawled up Spike's body and laid his head on his chest. He was still rock-hard and desperate for release but he knew from experience that Spike would need a few minutes to get his bearings. He felt cool arms wrap around him in a strong grip and he was crushed into the vampire's embrace.

Spike was determined that as soon as his body recovered from its current liquid state, he was going to repay Xander for the amazing blowjob he had just received. The young man might not have had any experience, but he certainly made up for it with enthusiasm. He pulled Xander to him tightly and kissed the top of his head. "That was bloody amazing, luv."

Xander smiled and leaned up to kiss the vamp. He squealed when Spike flipped them so that he was now the one on the bottom. "Turn about's fair play innit? My turn to make you feel good." And with over a century's experience under his belt, Spike made Xander feel really good.

Part Eleven

Trisha rolled her eyes as the car passed the 'Welcome to Sunnydale' sign. She was not looking forward to living in this town. From what she had been told, the witches who worked for the previous slayer were still in control of the town. She would have to rectify that immediately; she was the slayer and the town was now hers.

As her watcher drove her through town, he pointed out the highlights. The school - where the hellmouth itself sat waiting to be opened, the Magic Box - where reportedly the witches both worked, Willy's bar - the best place to get information if you had the balls to go in there, and the numerous cemeteries. There were a lot of cemeteries for such a small town.

"This place feels evil, it's almost like it's in the air itself." Trisha shuddered and rolled up her window. John - her watcher, silently agreed. He wasn't any happier with this assignment than she was. He hated leaving London, and to end up here, in the States... well, it wasn't pleasant. The only thing that made this situation tolerable was Trisha herself. She had proven the theory that slayers had certain... appetites that needed to be fulfilled.

John remembered the events of the last few days; he was surprised he could stand, he was so worn out. He wondered if all slayers were as rough during sex as his Trisha was. If so, he could see why the previous one had taken a vampire for a lover - strength and stamina. He still found the thought disgusting, but at least now he could see the why of it.

"Trisha, this is the hellmouth, of course it feels evil. Why do you think the demons are drawn to this place? They can feel the power, the evil, the same way you can." John pulled the car into the driveway of the house that they would share. The council had made all the arrangements ahead of time, purchasing a home in Sunnydale and leasing an old karate school for the slayer to train in.

Inside the house they found the boxes that contained their personal belongings, as well as the books and other items that the council had sent. John sighed and began the tedious job of unpacking. After the energy he had expended the past few days he really just wanted to lay down and rest. He knew, however, that that wasn't in the cards. They needed to get the house set up and then start Trisha on a training and patrol schedule.

~!~

Willow stood at the front door of the apartment. After packing up Buffy's house, the girls had moved into Xander's apartment and taken over the lease. It was either that or move all his stuff into storage and let the apartment go. Seeing as they needed a place to live, and with the shop doing as well as it was, they could afford to live off-campus, so it made sense.

"Tara, hurry up. We need to get going if we're going to make the movie after patrol." Willow checked her watch again and wondered what was keeping her girlfriend.

"Hang on sweetie, I'm almost done." Tara finished pulling on her boot and stood up. She smoothed out her skirt and grabbed her bag. She wanted to look nice for Willow tonight; it was the first date they had been on in a long time. Sure they were going on patrol first but at least they were doing something couply afterward. Tara missed having fun with her lover; Willow had been so down since Xander disappeared.

Tara met Willow at the door and they headed out together. The nights in Sunnydale were never safe, but at least no one had noticed yet that the slayer was gone. If it weren't for the Buffybot, things would be a lot worse.

The girls stopped by the shop to get the bot before they headed out to patrol the closest cemetery. Willow still had a hard time looking at the bot; it reminded her all too well of what she had lost. At least Dawn didn't have to see this; it would have been beyond cruel.

The bot toyed with the stake in her hand. "That's Spike's crypt, he's hot and I love him." She nodded her head and then smiled at her companions. Willow frowned and Tara smiled at her lover.

"I thought I had gotten rid of all the Spike worship." Tara put her arm around her girlfriend. "Don't worry, you'll get it eventually." Willow kissed Tara and smiled at her. "Thanks."

The bot continued to walk on ahead. She stopped and turned back to the two girls. "Where is my Spikey anyway? I mean, I know you don't really like him, but you should see him naked. I mean, really."

Willow groaned and Tara knew that there would be hours of Willow tinkering around with the bot's programs in the future. Well, at least it would keep her mind off Xander. "Come on sweetie, let's just get this over with and go to the movie, okay?"

Willow nodded and they continued further into the graveyard. They heard a noise up ahead and rushed over to check it out. What they saw stopped them all in their tracks; even the bot looked confused.

"Willow, is that..." Tara motioned toward the girl who was fighting a vampire. Willow nodded and continued to watch. "I think so, I mean that man sure looks like Giles did back in high school. What with the tweed and the notebook and all."

The bot watched the fight and then commented. "She's a good fighter; maybe she would help us fight the demons." She started toward the fight and Willow pulled her back. "Not yet. Let her finish first then we'll introduce ourselves."

~!~

Willow was furious. She couldn't believe the way the new slayer had treated them. After everything they had done for this town. "Grrrr, how dare she! That snot-nosed little brat!" Willow

slammed the apartment door behind her and Tara sighed. She wasn't happy about it either, but she was even more disappointed that their night out had been ruined. They never even made it to the movie.

"She's young; give her time to settle in here, I'm sure she'll come around." Tara wasn't so sure about that, but she wanted to get Willow relaxed and in a better mood. "After all, she has spent the last three months with the council listening to their side of things. It's no wonder she's acting that way."

Willow knew that Tara had a point but she was still angry. The fact that she had accused her of trying to control the hellmouth and become the new master of Sunnydale by using a replica of the dead slayer to keep the demons in line really pissed her off.

"She had no right to say that to me! I would never use Buffy that way. I wouldn't, I miss her so much." Tara was across the room and pulling her lover into her arms as fast as she could.

"Shh, I know love. I miss her too. I miss all of them. But you can't let her bring you to this. We have to be strong if we're going to save Xander and Spike." Tara continued to hold Willow as she led her to the sofa to sit down. "We'll give her a few weeks to get used to things here and then we'll try again, okay? In the meantime it gives us a break from the slaying, and we can search harder for a spell."

Willow snuggled into Tara's embrace and then lifted her face up for a kiss. Tara was happy to oblige her. "Thank you. I don't know what I would do if I didn't have you here. I've lost so much, my friends, my family. I love you, Tara."

"I love you too, come on let's go to bed." The young ladies made their way across the apartment to the bedroom.

~!~

True to their word, the two witches left the new slayer alone for the next three weeks to get used to the town. It hadn't helped her disposition any. Trisha was still rude, aggressive and unwilling to believe anything that didn't come from her watcher's mouth.

John, who had the same training as Giles did, was a self-righteous prig. He knew that magic users were not all bad, that wiccans were peaceful and in no way a threat to the hellmouth. He knew a lot of other things about vampires and demons as well. Things that he wasn't sharing with his slayer, like the fact that Angel had a soul and worked as a champion for the Powers That Be.

Every time Willow tried to talk to Trisha about how she had helped Buffy, the other girl would start in on how Buffy was corrupted, sleeping with demons and cavorting with witches. How everyone she touched was tainted by her, sucked into her darkness. That even the boy - Xander -

Willow assumed, had fallen prey and begun dating a vengeance demon. That he was likely sacrificed to Glorificus by his demon mate and the vampire.

Willow had had enough. She knew that wasn't true, that Anya had been devastated when Xander had gone. That it was all just an accident, that Spike had nothing to do with it. She told the girl that as well. That Spike had loved Buffy, and Dawn as well. That he would have sacrificed himself for either of them. That Xander felt the same way.

Trisha wasn't having any of it. As far as she was concerned, her watcher was right. Buffy had been corrupted by these witches; Mr. Giles as well. That they had likely bespelled her to act against her nature, bedding vampires and turning control of the town over to witches and demons.

Willow had finally snapped. She turned around and walked away from the smirking young girl and her watcher. Tara shook her head sadly and went to follow, but not before telling them that if they didn't open their eyes and take a good look at the shades of grey in between all the black and white they wouldn't survive this town, not for long. Then she hurried to catch up to her lover.

Part Twelve

"Bloody hell, Xander! Would you just stop for the night and come to bed?" Spike glared at his lover from the doorway of their home. Xander had been working on building a sauna for the past week. He decided it would be a good project to keep himself busy. Spike wasn't complaining about the work, but he preferred to have company when he went to bed.

"Alright. Just let me wash up and I'll be in." Xander smiled as he walked down the hill to the river to wash up. He knew Spike hated to sleep alone now that they were together. The first thing Xander had done after they finally made love was start building a bigger bed for them to share. It had taken him almost a week to do it, and Spike had spent every night that week lying practically on top of him in his small bunk.

At the water's edge, Xander looked longingly back at the tub and wished he had time for a hot bath instead of a quick wash in the cool river water. It was the one thing he really missed about his former life, indoor plumbing.

Things here were good, though. Better than he had ever thought possible. He had a home - one he had built himself - food and water, recreation, no demons to worry about other than the one in his bed, and Spike.

That was the biggest shock of all. Once he'd given himself over to this new life, he had become happy. He was in love, more in love than he had ever thought possible. More in love than he had been with Anya. That fact had hurt when he first realised it, but then he let it go. He hoped that wherever Anya was, whatever she was doing, she was as happy as he was. The fact that he wasn't jealous by the thought of her moving on with her life, marrying someone else and having a family made him realise that they would never have made it together.

Xander hadn't admitted to Spike that he was in love with him. He didn't know if he ever would. There was a chance that Spike didn't feel the same way. Sure, he cared about Xander, certainly there was some love involved, but perhaps not the depth of emotion that Xander felt for Spike, or what Spike had felt for Buffy. That was the thought that held him back.

Xander knew without a doubt that if they woke up tomorrow back in Sunnydale, surrounded by their friends and family, he would still love Spike, still be *in love* with Spike, and not even Anya could change the way he felt. He wasn't so sure about Spike. What if they did get home? Would he want to forget about what they had together and go back to following Buffy around trying to win her affections? Could Xander take the heartache that would cause him?

These were the reasons why he hoped they were never found. He missed Willow like crazy, and he felt bad for feeling this way but he didn't want to go back to Sunnydale; as far as he was concerned he was home.

Spike waited impatiently for Xander to return. It wasn't so much the fact that he hated sleeping alone - which he did - when he could be wrapped around the warm body of his lover instead, it was that he wanted to talk to Xander tonight.

Pacing back and forth in front of the fireplace, Spike ran his fingers through his long, wavy blonde hair. It still felt strange; he hadn't worn his hair long in almost a century. He was used to the feel of well-gelled locks, not the loose curls he wore now. Although Xander's hair had grown long, as well. Spike liked the look on him; it made him look sexy as hell.

He remembered the way it fell into the boy's eyes the night they first made love. The way the sweat from his body dampened it and made it cling to his skin. He felt himself harden with the memory of finally being inside of his sweet boy, of feeling his boy's muscles spasm around his shaft. He could almost hear the sweet sounds of his pleas for 'faster' and 'harder' and 'more'. Spike was sure he'd never had anyone respond to him as openly as Xander had done that night. He had been so surprised by the amount of pleasure he was experiencing from the act, as if he expected to not enjoy it.

By the time Xander got back, Spike wasn't sure if he wanted to talk to Xander about what was bothering him or shag him senseless. In a perfect world, he could do both. He grinned at the thought, because if this wasn't a perfect world he didn't know what was.

Xander gasped as he suddenly found his arms full of amorous vampire. He almost fell back under the assault but managed to right himself and keep from falling as the blonde in his arms attacked his throat with lips and tongue. Xander chuckled and squeezed Spike to him tightly. "Miss me, Barney? I wasn't gone that long, you know."

"Want you luv, want to touch you, taste you, hear you scream for me." Spike kissed Xander with a passion not known to many. Xander could do nothing less than respond in kind. They barely made it to the bedroom, falling onto the bed in a tangle of limbs, hands gripping and caressing silky skin, lips mashed together.

Spike rolled Xander beneath him and ground their erections together. He was pleased by Xander's enthusiastic response. Always so expressive, his lovely boy was. Spike was desperate to be inside of him, to feel him surrounding him with heat and passion. He loved this boy, *his* boy, like no one else. He wasn't sure what the fates had in mind by stranding them here in this place alone together, but he wasn't about to complain. Not when it had led him to where he was now.

Where he was now, was lying on top of his lovely boy, his hard, leaking shaft just inches from his mouth. Spike nuzzled into the crisp dark hair in front of him, breathing in the scent of his lover, smelling the need and the desperation from the man underneath him. He was just as desperate himself to taste the boy, to feel his hard length as he sucked it into his mouth. To taste the flavour that was uniquely Xander.

Xander arched off the bed as Spike finally, *finally* took him into his mouth. He was so hard and needy he knew he wasn't going to last long, not that he cared. He was always ready for more with Spike. He was amazed by his own stamina when they made love. He had never had such a short recovery time in his life. There was just something about Spike that made him hard, made him desperate to touch and be touched. Something that he knew deep in his heart was love.

Spike stilled as Xander spilled his essence into his waiting mouth. He savoured the taste of his lover in his mouth before swallowing it down. He lovingly licked up every last trace of his seed until the boy was hard and eager once more. Then and only then did Spike begin to stretch and prepare Xander to take his cock.

The aloe vera plant was the closest thing to lube they had, and would soon need to be replaced. Spike broke off a section and squeezed the gel-like substance onto his fingers. Xander moaned and writhed beneath him as first one and then two fingers breached him. "God, Spike. More, please more. Now, please."

Three fingers and Spike was already in game-face, he was so far gone. At least this version of his demon face didn't scare the boy. Although he wasn't so sure that by this point his old face would have scared him either. Xander knew what he was, he wasn't fooling himself. Spike removed his fingers to the protestations of the writhing man beneath him. He quickly arranged them so that Xander's legs were over his shoulders and his cock was poised at his entrance.

"You ready, luv?" The answer was nothing more than a needy whine, but it was enough to tell Spike that he was not alone in his desperation. That Xander was right there with him, hanging on to sanity by a mere thread. As Spike slowly pushed his way into his lover, he was rewarded with an animalistic snarl from the man. "Faster, Spike! Fuck me already!"

Spike sank his balls deeply into Xander and began to piston in and out of him hard and fast. If Xander wanted to be fucked hard, by God that's what he'd get. One hand on the mattress holding him up and the other fisting Xander's cock roughly. Spike came with a snarl and lunged for Xander's neck.

He didn't bite. He had never bitten Xander in all the time they had been together. But the urge to do so was getting harder and harder to ignore. He wanted to claim Xander as his own, to sink his fangs deeply into his flesh and drink his passion-laced blood. He buried his face in Xander's neck and breathed in deeply; he could smell the blood just below the surface, the adrenaline and the scent of Xander's seed.

Spike pulled carefully out of Xander and lowered his legs to the mattress before rolling them both on their sides. He kissed his boy until he was breathless and then reluctantly pulled away. He didn't get far before Xander's hand shot out and caught his wrist, tugging him back into bed. "Spike? What's wrong?"

Spike sighed and snuggled back into Xander's arms. "Nothing luv. M'fine, really." He could tell Xander wasn't buying it but he really didn't want to talk about it. There was no way Xander felt the same way as he did. He knew that this was just an inevitable occurrence as far as the boy was concerned. Sure he liked him, but there was no way he could love him, not Spike, not a vampire. If they weren't stranded here, there was no way Xander would even consider being with him.

"Bullshit. I'm not buying it, Spike, something is rattling around in that sun-bleached head of yours and I want to know what it is. Or are you gonna start acting like Angel and go all cryptic on me? 'Cause I got to tell you, the broody thing? So not a turn-on." Xander shifted until he was sitting up against the wall, Spike reclining against his chest.

"Just thinking about stuff, luv. That's all. It's nothing to worry about. Don't you ever just think about stuff?" Spike didn't turn his head to look at Xander so he missed the pained expression that drifted across his face. "Not while I'm fucking you, I don't." Xander hurriedly got out of bed and grabbed his pants - what was left of them anyway. He looked back at Spike and froze.

Spike looked so dejected, head hung low, his hands over his face. He looked like someone who had lost his best friend, or his only friend. Xander sighed and went back to him. "Spike, this isn't working."

And there it was. The sentence Spike had been waiting for since this crazy affair of theirs had started. He knew someday Xander would put an end to this, but he hadn't expected it to be this

soon. He was trying so hard not to break down in tears, not to beg for him to give them another chance, that he almost missed the next sentence Xander spoke.

"I wish you would tell me what's the matter so I can try and fix it. I don't want to lose what we have." Xander ran his fingers through his hair and tried to figure out how they had gone from screaming in ecstasy to not speaking in a matter of minutes. He thought that being in a relationship with another man would have eliminated these emotional stresses. Men were supposed to be easy to figure out, but apparently not Spike.

"How do you feel about me, Xander?" The question, spoken so quietly and with such pain, had Xander back on the bed and pulling the unresisting vampire back into his arms. This was a question that he had been dreading. If he answered honestly, he could end up losing Spike, and if he lied he could end up losing Spike. It really depended on how Spike felt about him.

"How honest do you want me to be here, Spike? Do you want me to tell you the way I really feel, that I think - no, that I *know* I'm in love with you? That I've never loved anyone as much as I do you? That it's going to tear my guts out when you tell you me you don't feel the same way? Is that what you want to hear, 'cause if you want the truth, that's what I'll tell you."

Anything else Xander might have been about to say was stopped abruptly as a cool, hungry mouth latched onto his. He was pulled into a fierce grip and his mouth was plundered possessively. He finally had to fight his way free to draw in much-needed oxygen. That was when he noticed that Spike was staring at him, golden eyes looking at him with such emotion that it made his chest tighten. "I love you too, Xander. I love you too."

And then they were kissing again, and this time it was slow and sweet, about love and acceptance, heart and home. And when Spike entered Xander this time, it was with a purpose, with a goal in mind other than mutual pleasure. He was going to claim him, finally make him his.

"Gonna claim you Xander, make you mine." Xander shuddered under the onslaught of feeling. He was overjoyed, ecstatic that Spike loved him as well, that he wasn't going to lose what they had found together. When he felt the sharp prick of fangs at his throat he turned his head and sighed in bliss. "God, Spike. Love you, love you so much."

Part Thirteen

Willow looked up from her textbook when she heard her lover squeal. It wasn't something that Tara did very often, usually being quite soft-spoken and quiet. "Tara?"

"I found something! A spell to see them, to see Xander and Spike! It - it won't help us get them back, but we would at least know if they're okay." Tara was practically bouncing she was so excited. After six months of running into dead ends and growing increasingly worried and frustrated this was like a gift from the Goddess herself.

Willow rushed over to where Tara was sitting and took the book from her hands. She read and reread the spell before smiling so widely that her face hurt. "Oh my Goddess, Tara. I'll be able to see if they're okay. We need to do this now, as soon as we can." Willow put down the book and ran for the bedroom, Tara right behind her.

"Honey, we need to order some of those ingredients. We don't keep them in stock at the store." Willow turned around and faced her girlfriend as she continued to hop on one foot while putting on her jeans. "I know that, but we can special order them tonight and they'll get here that much faster."

Willow's enthusiasm was catchy and soon Tara was flying around the room as well trying to get changed as quickly as possible so they could head out.

The drive over to the Magic Box was filled with enthusiastic conversation. Willow was so excited by the idea of finally knowing that Xander was okay, Tara had to drive.

After e-mailing the rush order to their suppliers, the two girls were headed back to their - well Xander's - car when they were approached by a tall, pale-skinned, floppy-eared demon. As the girls automatically clasped hands and began to draw power for a spell the demon stepped back and held up his hands in a gesture of surrender.

"Oh, hey. I don't want any trouble. I - I'm a friend of Spike's." Tara and Willow looked at each other and then at the demon. Willow gestured for him to continue but they didn't let go of the other's hand. "I know that Spike used to help the slayer and the rest of you, and well... I was hoping you could tell me what happened to him? See, we usually play poker once or twice a week and he hasn't shown up for the longest time..."

The demon actually looked sort of sad, Willow couldn't help but feel bad for him. She was missing her friend too. "Um, well... Do you know what was going on about six months ago?" The demon nodded and Willow continued. "Well, Spike sort of... got sucked into a portal. With Xander. We've been looking for a way to bring them home."

"Oh, okay. Well um, I'm Clem by the way. If there's anything I can do, you know, let me know. Spike's a bit rough around the edges but he's my friend. If I can help I will." Willow looked at the demon and then smiled. "Thank you Clem. I'll let you know." As Clem walked away, Willow and Tara were just about to go to the car when Trisha and John showed up.

The slayer grimaced in distaste at the two girls. "I knew I was right not to trust you. Standing out here in the street making conversation with demons. Disgusting." She actually turned up her nose at the two flabbergasted girls. Her watcher merely smirked and made a mental note to get all the

available information on these two that the council could dig up. He knew that the demon he had just seen was basically harmless, but he still didn't trust the two witches.

Come along Trisha, if we hurry you might just catch up with the demon before it gets away." John turned his back and headed off in the direction that Clem had taken. Trisha took a second to sneer at the girls before joining him. Willow turned to her girlfriend, a look of utter bewilderment on her face. "What do we do? I mean, he's a demon right? But he seemed... nice. We can't just let her kill him, can we?" Tara shook her head. She knew that not all demons were bad, and this one had seemed pretty friendly, harmless even. "No we can't."

Clem stopped dead in his tracks as he felt the presence of the slayer. He had never met Buffy, but from what Spike had told him, she was pretty fair. He raised his hands in defence and turned around, hoping to talk her out of slaying him like he had with the two witches a few minutes earlier. Unfortunately for him, it wasn't Buffy standing behind him. Clem groaned internally at his misfortune. He knew the other slayer - Faith - was insane. She wouldn't care if he sprouted wings and a halo; she would still kill him. He was so screwed. He tried his most charming smile and waved one of his floppy hands at her. "Hey, you must be Faith huh? Nice to meet you."

Willow and Tara caught up just as Trisha was about to attack. They grasped hands and before Trisha knew what was happening, the demon in front of her disappeared. She spun around angrily and glared at Willow and Tara. "See? I knew you were both evil, saving demons. I don't know what kind of spell you put on the last slayer, but it won't work on me. You just stay the hell away from me!"

Before Willow got a chance to respond, the girl had grabbed her watcher and they both high-tailed it out of sight. Willow sighed in frustration and headed back toward the car. Tara sympathised, she knew how much Willow wanted to help protect Sunnydale; she felt she owed it to Buffy, to Giles, to Xander and Spike. "Um, sweetie? Where exactly did you send Clem?"

Clem opened his eyes and looked around. He was surprised to find himself in Spike's crypt, the last thing he remembered was the crazy slayer coming after him and then Spike's witch friends showing up. "Cool. I don't think Spike would mind me staying here, keeping an eye on the place for him." Clem grinned and looked over at the comfy chair and TV set up in the corner. "Oh yeah, this is going to work out just fine."

~!~

It took several days before the two frustrated young witches finally had all the ingredients necessary for the spell. They were the longest days of their lives. Willow was not a very patient person when it came to things like this. They set the spell up inside the back room of the magic box. They needed a personal item of both Xander and Spike. For Xander they had chosen one of his loud tropical print shirts, and for Spike, they had raided his crypt and with some help from Clem, finally decided on an old Sex Pistols cassette tape.

The items were placed inside a large crystal bowl, covered with an assortment of herbs and some rather nasty-smelling liquid - Tara hoped Xander wouldn't want the shirt back, she was sure the smell would never come out. As for the tape? Well, they had planned to just buy Spike a copy on CD if he complained.

Willow placed a large round mirror on the floor and held the bowl above it as she began to chant. Tara joined in a few seconds later and then there was a bright flash. Both girls gasped as they looked at the scene reflected in the mirror. It was Xander, Willow was sure of it. He looked happy, smiling and laughing at some blonde that she couldn't see very well. Tara reached out and put her arm around Willow to steady her as they watched Xander lean in and kiss the mysterious blonde.

"Wow. Um, who do you suppose that is? And where is Spike, shouldn't we be able to see Spike as well?" Willow looked at Tara questioningly. Tara gasped and felt her knees weaken as she watched the picture rotate as if on wheels. It came around to the side and then it was Xander who she couldn't see and the mysterious blonde became very visible. Willow gasped as well. "Spike?"

It didn't make sense. Xander and Spike? Spike and Xander? No matter how she twisted it around in her head it didn't make any sense to Willow. She had known Xander since they were children; he had never given her any reason to suspect he liked other guys. And Spike? Spike was the self-proclaimed God's gift to women; he had never tweaked her gaydar either.

"Xander and Spike?" Tara spoke out loud what Willow was trying to deny she had seen with her own eyes. "Wow, I mean, I know he came through for us all in the end but don't they hate each other?" Willow could only nod her head as she watched her best friend grab Spike's hand and drag him toward a small log cabin. Spike didn't seem all that reluctant to go.

"They do. They did, anyway. How... Why..." Tara squeezed Willow's hand and nodded sympathetically, then something about the whole situation sunk in. "Oh my Goddess, sweetie, Spike is in the sun." Willow looked as if someone had just smacked her upside the head with a brick.

"He is. He's in the sun, like Angel told me about when he was in Pylea. Wow, he must be so happy." The scene in the mirror changed to one of the inside of the cabin, the girls blushed as they realised what was starting to happen. Willow reluctantly ended the spell before things got too steamy. There were some things she was not ready to see, and Xander and Spike getting groiny was one of them.

Tara helped Willow clean up the spell and then pulled her into her arms. She rocked slowly back and forth as Willow cried silent tears. "Hey, at least we know he's alright, they're alright." Willow nodded against Tara's chest, Xander was alive - he was alive and safe. Alive, safe and from the looks of things happy. It was a balm to her soul. She still wasn't giving up on finding a way to bring them home, but at least now she knew he wasn't in some horrible demon dimension.

Part Fourteen

"God, it is good to be home!" Xander flung himself down on the bed and groaned as Spike settled himself on top of him. He wrapped his arms around his lover and sighed in contentment.

"Well, if I remember correctly, it was your idea to go away in the first place. 'Let's go explore, Spike. See what else is out there, Spike.' I was perfectly happy right here." Spike buried his face in Xander's neck and began sucking lightly on the salty tasting skin. He really hadn't minded the impromptu trip; he just enjoyed giving Xander a hard time about things. Speaking of which...

"Spiiiiike, you have got to be kidding me. I'm exhausted." Xander whined as he felt Spike grind into him. One thing was certain, no matter how tired he might be, his body always responded to Spike's attempts to seduce him. He felt the vampire chuckle against his neck, right before he felt twin pricks of pleasure/pain. For some reason, having Spike bite him always got him hot.

"Not that exhausted, luv. Come on, we'll shag and then you can take a nap while I heat up the bath, okay?" That would practically guarantee him acquiescence. Xander had done nothing the past month but bitch about how he missed the tub. He knew his boy would do anything for a hot bath. "Just lie back and let me take care of everything."

Just laying back and letting Spike do all the work sounded like something Xander could do. As he felt Spike's hands begin stroking his skin he moaned in approval, oh yeah this was definitely a good idea. Sleep could wait - at least for a little while.

Spike smiled as he felt Xander surrender to his touch. He was always so open, so responsive. He could see now, why Anya had fallen for this man. A demon - whether she was without her power or not, she was at heart, still a demon - who had spent over a thousand years dishing out punishment and torture to millions of men, had fallen in love with this puppy-eyed mortal. Spike didn't understand it, not until he found himself in the position of having Xander's love and attention.

Now, now he understood what had changed Anya's opinion. Xander wasn't just a good guy, he was more than that. He loved completely, gave everything he had to the one he loved and more. There was nothing about Spike that Xander didn't accept. Not his demon, not his blood lust, not his history of viciousness. He accepted that that's who Spike was, who he had been in the past. He also accepted Spike the way he was now, without all the fronts and bravado. He could be himself - the bookish, soft-spoken man he once was, as well as the Big Bad Master Vampire he had become.

Spike was brought back from his thoughts by a particularly unmanly squeal from his lover. While Spike's mind had been occupied, his hands had been moving on autopilot. He grinned and began to pay attention once again to making Xander squirm; it was his favourite pastime after all.

Spike knew all the right places to touch, where to lick, suck, nibble and stroke to reduce Xander to a mass of needy whimpering flesh beneath his skillful hands. Not that Xander ever complained, especially when he did that thing with his tongue.

Xander lay flat on his back, his feet planted on the blonde's shoulders as Spike took his time stretching and relaxing his guardian ring with his tongue. He was sure he could cum just from this sensation alone, and would if Spike didn't have one hand wrapped firmly around his swollen cock, preventing his orgasm.

"Spiiiiike, please." The vampire relented on his torture, and moved into position. He claimed Xander's lips as he slowly sheathed himself inside the hot body of his lovely boy. No matter how many times he had done this, it always felt like the first time. Xander was warm and real and alive around him, holding him, pulling him close, closer than he ever thought possible. Spike was forever ruined for others of his kind; he would never be able to tolerate a cold body ever again.

Spike moved slowly within Xander, wanting to draw this out, make it last forever. He couldn't, it wasn't possible, not with the boy moaning his name and thrusting up toward him on every stroke. Difficult to hold back as his teeth elongated and his blue eyes bled to yellow. Impossible to prolong the moment when Xander tilted his head back and offered his throat with a breathy "Fuck, yesss. Do it."

~!~

Spike whistled as he made his way toward the river to fill the tub for Xander's bath. If someone had told him five years ago that he'd get sucked into another dimension with the slayer's donut boy and would end up arse over tit in love with him, he would have laughed in his or her face. Now though, he couldn't be happier about it.

It was hard to believe that they had been here for almost five years. It was even harder to believe that the last three and a half they had been lovers. In over a century of bloodshed and violence, Spike had never been as content as he had been these last five years. It was as if he had finally found what he had been looking for since the night he clawed his way out of the grave. Home.

As he filled the large tub and built up a fire around it to heat the water, Spike reminisced about his past. He had thought himself happy and in love when he was with Dru. After Angelus had been souled and had run off, Darla hadn't stuck around for long. Soon it was just the two of them, they spilled blood across the continent together, eventually heading to the States when Spike heard that the latest Slayer lived there.

Dru had still been strong then, crazy yeah but still strong. Spike remembered how they had celebrated the death of his second slayer; blood had flowed like wine. They had spent hours carving into each other's bodies, and revelling in the pain. They were good times, but then Dru had wanted to go home, back to Europe.

After Prague, everything fell apart. Sunnydale had been nothing but a curse for him. He'd gotten injured so badly he spent months in a wheelchair; his insane Grandsire made a reappearance and took his princess away from him. He made a deal with the slayer, of all people, to get Dru and get safe passage out of town, and after all of that Dru had left him for a bloody Chaos demon. He should have left it there, but no, he had to come back to Sunnydale and then kidnap Red and Xander.

Love spells, magic rings, hot poker torture and military experiments. That's what his life in Sunnydale amounted to. He had been so lost after escaping the Initiative; he had fallen in love with his mortal enemy. Buffy - even the sound of her name would have had him swooning at one point. Pathetic tosser that he was. It never would have worked, she would never see him as anything other than a demon; the best he could hope for would be friendship, anything more than that and he'd merely be a substitute for the vampire she couldn't have. It would have been enough for him then, but not now.

Nope, now he knew what it was to truly be loved by someone. Someone who he loved in return, and wasn't that a kick in the head? He was in love with a human, a male human, a friend of his former object of affection. On the up shot though, they were good together. There was no pressure on them here, no demon/human issues, no pressure from well-meaning friends, no threats of bloody violence from interfering, souled-up, nancy boy Grandsires with a guilt complex a mile wide, and no labels about sexual orientation to embarrass either one of them. Since when did who you shag have anything to do with your masculinity?

~!~

Xander closed his eyes as Spike kissed him and slipped out of bed. He was tired, more so after the sex than he had been before. He knew, however, that sleep would not come easy; he had things on his mind, things that were both troublesome and exciting at the same time. They had been here for five years, and as far as he could tell he hadn't aged a bit.

Sure he looked different, he had lost weight, gained muscle and his hair was a lot longer. But his face hadn't changed; not really. There was no sign of grey in his hair, he didn't feel the strain of five years of hard labour, and despite all of that he just had this... gut feeling. One thing he knew for sure after growing up in Sunnydale, it was to trust your gut.

He listened to Spike whistle as he strolled away from the house; it brought a smile to his lips. Only Spike would whistle along to the Ramones. Of course now that he'd heard it, Xander found himself

humming along now as well. Not a bad idea that, being sedated. It was the only way he was going to get to sleep before Spike came back to tell him his bath was ready.

Xander wondered if Spike had noticed anything about his not ageing. And if so, why he hadn't said anything. Was it because he thought it might scare Xander to know he wasn't getting any older, that he could possibly be immortal in this world? Or was it that Spike simply hadn't noticed? Being an immortal creature himself, it might have slipped his notice.

~!~

Xander relaxed back against Spike's chest. It was a bit of a squeeze, getting them both into the tub, but well worth the effort. The water felt wonderful, and having Spike to use as a cushion was definitely a bonus. Xander sighed in contentment as Spike began to work the muscles of his neck and shoulders. "Mmm, that feels good."

Spike chuckled and kissed Xander's neck. "Next time you get to be the cushion, and I get the massage." Xander nodded his agreement; he never passed up an opportunity to touch Spike's smooth silky skin. Tanned and toned was not a look he would have ever pictured on the vampire, but it worked for him; he looked like a bronze God, whereas before, Xander would have described him as a marble statue brought to life.

"Hey Spike, serious question. Have you noticed anything... strange about me?" Xander tensed slightly as he waited to hear whether Spike had noticed or not. He was pretty sure his gut feeling was right, but he would feel better having it confirmed. Spike continued to rub his skin, but Xander could tell it was just a mechanical action now, his mind was obviously pondering Xander's question.

"Strange how, luv?" Spike was beginning to worry, if Xander was sick, he should have been able to tell. In fact the only time he had smelled off at all had been after that fall from the treetops he'd taken. Xander hadn't been hurt or sick since. He smelled exactly the same as he had since they'd gotten here, well except that he always smelled faintly of Spike himself now, as well.

"Strange as in we've been here for about five years now, and I don't feel any older. Am I getting older Spike? 'Cause I don't think I am." Xander felt Spike's hands drop from his shoulders and then arms tightened around his chest. He gently pried them loose and turned as much as he could in the tub to look at Spike.

"I'm right aren't I, Spike? I'm not getting any older." Xander could see the realisation in the vampire's crystal blue eyes. Spike honestly hadn't realised Xander wasn't ageing. Xander didn't know whether to laugh or cry. On the one hand, he no longer had to worry about growing old and dying, therefore leaving Spike all alone here, but on the other hand, he was now looking at eternity. Eternity with Spike, here, alone. What was the down side again?

Spike was having similar thoughts himself. Eternity. With Xander. He was overwhelmed with happiness. This was the one thing he had tried not to think about, the day Xander left him, when he would be alone here with nothing but a lifetime's worth of memories to keep him company and drive him insane.

"Forever." It was whispered, barely audible, but Xander heard the awe in the voice. He looked into Spike's eyes and saw joy. He barely managed a breath before Spike's mouth was upon his, sealing them together with bruising force. "Mine, forever mine." Spike growled against Xander's lips before claiming them again.

"Forever." A whispered promise, but one Xander was more than happy to make and one he had every intention of keeping. He barely had time to register Spike lifting him out of the water before he was being carried back to the house, being kissed the entire way.

Part Fifteen

The Magic Box was closed for the night. Three people - well, two witches and one demon sat around reading through the newest batch of spell books Willow had ordered. They were all searching for a way to locate Xander and Spike so they could bring them home.

Clem had become a good friend to the witches; he had a lot of contacts in the demon community and was able to get books and scrolls that otherwise would have been impossible. Willow still couldn't understand how such a gentle being as Clem could be friends with such a brash vampire as Spike. Then again, she never understood how Xander had dated Cordelia, either.

"Hey, I think I found something." Clem held up his book and Willow came around the table to look at it. She read the passage several times, her Sumerian being a bit rusty, but she was pretty sure that with this spell they could open a portal to Xander and Spike.

"I think you're right. Oh my God! If this works, we can bring Xander home!" Willow was smiling so hard it looked like her face would split. Tara looked over the book and frowned when she came to one of the spell ingredients. This might work, but it wasn't going to be easy getting what they needed.

"Sweetie? You do realise we need the blood of the slayer for this to work, right?" Tara chewed her bottom lip as she watched her lover's face harden. Sweet Willow had just been replaced with determined Willow. She wouldn't want to be Trisha when faced with this version of her usually sweet girlfriend.

"I know. And one way or another, I'll get it." Clem looked up from his chair at Willow and was awed by the power and fierce determination he could sense in her. This was not a girl to mess with; he was glad they were friends. He could understand why Spike had allied himself with these humans; they were fiercely loyal to those they considered friends.

"Um, not to sound like a bad guy here, but I could probably get some of my poker buddies to help out on that front. You know, rough her up a bit, make her bleed." Even for a demon, Clem sounded apologetic for making the suggestion. Willow just couldn't understand how a demon got to be as sweet as Clem.

"Thanks, but we'll handle that part ourselves. I'm actually looking forward to it." And there was scary Willow. Tara wondered how many of her girlfriend's alter-egos were going to make an appearance tonight.

"Er, okay. I need to get shuffling off, now. Meeting a couple of Vergishtas for a game of gin later." Clem smiled and stood up. Tara walked him to the door and smiled at him. She knew the real reason Clem was leaving. Willow was scary when she got like this.

"Thanks again for all your help. We'll be sure to let you know when we have everything ready. I assume you want to be here to see Spike when we do the spell?" Tara was watching Clem with a hint of a smile on her face. She was pretty sure the floppy-skinned demon's interest in Spike was more than just a passing acquaintance. It was sort of sad really, seeing as how Spike and Xander were together. She liked Clem and didn't want to see him get hurt.

"Oh, yeah. That'd be good. Maybe I'll see you before that, though. You never know." Clem hugged Tara tentatively and smiled when she hugged back. She was such a sweet girl.

After locking up again, Tara went back to Willow; she wanted to make sure her lover didn't do anything she'd regret later. And killing or even maiming Trisha was something that - eventually - she would regret.

"Why don't we go home. We found the spell and there's no way we can get everything we need tonight, so let's get some rest, okay?" Tara gently pried Willow away from the books and led her to a chair; she then quickly straightened up the shop so it would be presentable for business the next day.

Once they were in the car and on their way home, Willow suddenly squeaked in delight, almost causing Tara to run off the road. "Ooops. Sorry, sweetie. I just remembered the letter Dawn wrote. She said that Faith wanted to make things up to me, that she's trying to redeem herself. If she helps me bring Xander and Spike home I'll forgive her for anything."

"But isn't she in L.A.? In prison?" Tara worried her bottom lip with her teeth as she saw a spark flare in her lover's eyes.

"Yeah, but that's nothing I can't get around." Willow smiled as she thought of several spells she could cast to break Faith out of prison, or even better, break herself in so she could get the blood she needed and then get out. Yes that was definitely a better idea.

~!~

Faith was surprised when she got the call to come to the visiting room. The only one who ever visited her was Angel, and then one time B's kid sister had shown up. The kid had balls, that was for sure. She was even more surprised to find her ex-watcher on the other side of the glass.

Faith sat down and looked pensively at Wesley before picking up the telephone receiver. "Wes. Long-time-no-see. What brings you to my dark little corner of the world?"

Wesley looked at Faith, trying to decide whether he was right in coming here. In the end, he didn't have much choice. It was this or take his chances. "Angel, or perhaps Angelus."

Faith looked shocked. She hadn't expected to hear that. "Angelus? You sure?" She watched as Wesley pulled off the classic Giles manoeuvre, rubbing the lenses of his glasses, cleaning away imaginary dirt.

"No, I'm not. But I don't want to take any chances. Darla is back, and she's with child. Angel's child. If she gives birth..." Wesley cut off his own words; he didn't want to finish his thought. Faith did it for him.

"You think seeing his kid will make him perfectly happy. What do you want from me, Wes? You want me to kill Angelus if he shows up? Or you want me to off the mother, keep the kid from being born?" And there was the rub. She knew that he had no idea what to do, and was looking for an easy out. "I won't do it, Wes. I've changed. Whether you want to believe that or not, I won't kill Angel's unborn kid. Wouldn't be right."

"That's not what I'm asking. At least not yet. We don't even know what the child will be; it could be good or evil, a great champion for the powers that be or the bearer of eternal darkness. The point is I need someone I can trust to keep everything from falling apart until we know. I need you Faith. Angel needs you." Wesley knew he was playing an unfair game. Using Angel to get Faith to see things his way.

"Alright. You win. But I won't kill him, either of them, unless I have to. Angel didn't give up on me; I won't give up on him either. You have a plan to get me out?" Faith quirked an eyebrow at Wesley as he smiled at her. It was a truly wicked smile. Something that up until this moment she hadn't thought him capable of. Seemed like the world was changing while she was locked away.

Wes chanted a few soft words and the glass between them faded away into nothing, Faith didn't waste any time crossing over the non-existent barrier to his side. A few more words and everyone around them was still, completely unmoving.

"Hurry, this won't last for more than a few minutes." Wesley grabbed Faith's hand and began quickly pulling her down the hallway and out of the building. Once they were outside they sprinted toward his motorcycle and rode off.

Faith was impressed. This Wesley was confident and sure of himself. A long way from the man she had first met in Sunnydale and then tortured in L.A. If she had known he could turn out like this, she might have gone a little easier on him back then, maybe steered him around the curves herself.

~!~

Willow was not happy. She had driven all the way to L.A. only to learn that Faith had somehow escaped the day before. She was tempted to just drive back to Sunnydale and hunt down Trisha for a pint or two, but her conscience got the better of her, so here she was on her way to Angel Investigations to tell them in person about Faith.

Imagine her surprise when she walked into the old hotel to find Wesley, Angel, Cordelia, Gunn, Fred and Faith in the lobby. Not to mention the very pregnant woman standing at the foot of the stairs - the very pregnant woman who looked like Angel's sire, Darla.

"What the hell is going on here?" Willow wasn't taking any chances, with both Faith and Darla in the same room. She pulled a lot of power to herself and was ready for just about anything.

"Ooooh, check out wicca chicka. Red's come into her own." Faith gave Willow a quick once-over and grinned her approval. This was not the shy little girl she knew from before.

"Faith. Angel? Explanations please?" Willow wasn't sure what was going on here, but she didn't have the warm fuzzies about it. Faith may have changed, she was willing to let that go, but that didn't explain the fact that the pregnant woman had just gone into game face.

"Willow, good to see you. Follow me, we'll talk in my office." Angel didn't even look to see if she followed. He simply walked away, confident in his assumption that she would.

~!~

"So, let me get this straight. Darla is back, she's pregnant - by you - and Wesley broke Faith out of prison. Why exactly did he do that?" Willow was now pacing the floor of the small office. She didn't like the implications of this one bit. Vampires were *not* supposed to have children. This couldn't possibly be good.

"I'm not sure. I think he's under the impression that I'll turn into Angelus again. You and I both know that isn't going to happen. I'll never be that naive again, I know what would happen if I were ever truly happy again. I can't be." Angel sighed and wished he could get up and pace, as well - the office just wasn't big enough.

"Okay. I get that. But I'm still having trouble with the whole undead pregnancy issue. I mean how is that even possible? Um, no offence, but your sperm are dead. Even if Darla were alive this shouldn't be possible. Not even with magic. I know, I looked." Willow smiled a bit sheepishly at that admission. "Buffy was worried after, you know? 'Cause you guys weren't safe and all."

Angel smiled. He had always wanted that with Buffy. A chance to be Mr. and Mrs. Normal American. A home in the suburbs, a regular 9 to 5 job, a couple of kids running around the house. It was his dream, one that would never be fulfilled. "Why don't you tell me why you're here in L.A.?"

Willow filled him in on everything that had happened since they'd last spoken. How she had finally found a way to open a portal to bring Spike and Xander back home, but that she needed the blood of a slayer to do it. Angel listened intently, especially when she got to the part about Spike being in the sun, and that he and Xander were together.

"Ask Faith, she just might surprise you. She has changed, Willow; she's not the same girl you knew." Angel got up and left the office, Willow followed close behind.

As they entered the lobby, Darla cried out in agony and dropped to her knees. Angel ran to her side, as did Cordelia and Faith. The baby was coming. Willow watched as Angel picked Darla up and carried her to his room. She was curious, but not enough to follow. Wesley and Cordelia went after Angel, and Willow slowly approached Faith. "So, Dawn tells me she came to see you."

Faith smiled at that. "Yeah, kid's got a pair. She reminds me of B." Faith grinned as Willow nodded. "She's a good kid; I told her not to come there, though. It's no place for a kid like her to be. Gives the other inmates ideas, ideas that I have to beat out of their heads. So, what's the real reason you're here?" Never one to beat around the bush.

"You want forgiveness? I want something from you in return. You do this, we're squared away. Clean slate." Willow waited to see if Faith would ask or if she would have to tell her straight out. After a few minutes' silence, Faith finally asked what she needed to do.

"Bleed for me." At Faith's shocked expression, Willow explained about the spell and why she needed the blood. She told Faith about the new slayer and her watcher. How they were going to be dead inside of a year at the rate they were going, and how if she really had changed, she could do a lot of good in Sunnydale right now.

Their conversation was brought to a screeching halt as Wesley came down the stairs - ashes on his hands and a stricken look on his face. He addressed the room with a shaky voice. "It's a boy, and he's completely human. Darla is dust. She... she staked herself to save the child." Faith reached for him and drew him to a chair to sit before he collapsed.

~!~

Willow drove home as fast as safety would allow. She had Faith's blood in a cooler on the front seat beside her and was looking forward to finally seeing Xander again. She missed him so badly. She could hardly believe he'd been gone almost a whole year.

Part Sixteen

Spike opened the door and slipped into the sauna as quietly as possible. He knew Xander had gone in a few minutes before him and he was trying to sneak up on him. It was nice and steamy inside the small building; he could just make out his boy's form through the steam.

Xander was reclined back on the bench, one leg on the floor and the other bent at the knee. His arms were folded behind his head and his eyes were closed in relaxation. He was gloriously naked.

Spike had shed what passed for clothes these days before slipping inside, so he too was au naturel. He crouched down and then slowly crawled toward his lover on all fours. He felt like a big cat on the prowl; the soft growl that he could feel erupting from his throat gave credence to that thought.

Xander had been looking forward to this all day; he had worked on his garden, hunted with Spike, fixed up the roof and then gone off for a bit of fishing by himself while Spike cleaned their kills. They had gotten really good at pioneer living, drying out meats and fish for storage, wearing skins for hunting - so as not to crush their dangly bits - and even making some clay pottery.

The only thing Xander wanted was to lay back and soak up the steam before jumping into the cool river water. It was extremely refreshing, and something he did as often as possible. Though he usually didn't get much time alone in here; Spike seemed to have a penchant for shagging in the sauna - something about seeing him all sweaty and naked - not that he minded.

Xander was just beginning to wonder if he was actually going to be left alone this time when he felt a strong cool tongue begin licking its way up his thigh. He smiled to himself and spread his legs further to give the vampire more room. "Mmm, that feels good."

"Gonna feel even better in a minute, luv." Spike continued his task of licking his way up Xander's thigh, when he reached the apex, he blew cool air over the tip of the rapidly growing erection he found there. He chuckled when his lover gasped and the cock twitched and bumped his chin.

Spike nuzzled into Xander's groin and breathed in the musky scent of his mate. He growled low in his throat, then began laving the boy's balls with his tongue. He licked and kissed his way up to the head of his cock before swooping down on it and sucking hard. Xander arched up into his mouth and screamed.

When Spike released his flesh, Xander was panting and extremely aroused. "Holy fuck! Damn near made that the shortest blowjob in history." He shook his head to get the sweat out of his eyes and looked at the smug, satisfied look on Spike's face. He watched somewhat warily as Spike got that evil glint in his eye, the one that usually meant trouble for him.

Spike tugged on Xander's hands and sat him up on the bench - back against the wall. He then used his superior speed to seat himself on Xander's lap - impaling himself on his lover's thick shaft in the process. He leaned back against the broad chest and listened as his mate panted harshly in his ear.

"You alright, luv?" Spike rolled his hips and chuckled as Xander jerked beneath him.

"Stop. Gonna cum if you move again. Shit, how... " Xander was walking the razor's edge; he was so close to orgasm that it wasn't funny. All it would take was one movement to send him over the edge.

Spike petted Xander gently to calm him down. He didn't want this to be over before it had started. He had been wanting to do this all week, so much so that as soon as he saw Xander enter the sauna he went and prepared himself to save time. Plus it was always fun surprising his boy. "I wanted to surprise you, Xan. Do you like?"

"Mmmm, yeah. I like, I like very much." Xander peppered kisses all over the blonde's shoulders and neck. He ran his hands through Spike's hair and then used it to tug the vamp's face to his for a kiss. "I think it's safe to move now."

No sooner were the words spoken then Spike slowly began to roll his hips again. He wasn't looking for fast and hard; no he wanted a long, slow fuck. And he was determined to get his way. Every time Xander tried to up the pace or the pressure, Spike would simply stop moving and tighten himself around his lover until Xander gave in to his demands.

"Slow love, I want this to last." Xander nodded his understanding and let Spike move the way he wanted to. Any way with his lover was good, - slow, fast, gentle, hard. It didn't matter as long as they were in it together. As Spike tilted his head back to rest on Xander's shoulder, he sighed in pleasure. Then as Xander nudged his head to the side and began trailing light kisses and nips along the column of his throat he let out a rumbling purr.

Xander grinned into Spike's neck; he loved it when he made the vampire purr. The only thing better was when he made him growl. That in mind, Xander sank his teeth into Spike's neck and bit down hard.

Spike faltered in his slow up-and-down movements and howled. His boy had bitten him - and drawn blood. He turned his head and saw the crimson-stained mouth and growled before taking it in an aggressive kiss.

Xander tore his mouth away after a minute or so to breathe. He used Spike's state of distraction to his advantage - knocking them both to the floor, Spike on all fours and Xander still inside him. He thrust forward once, hard and fast. Spike growled and pushed back. Xander needed no further encouragement. He slammed into his lover over and over, and as his orgasm threatened to overtake him he wrapped one fist around his lover's steely cock and tugged fiercely.

Spike came with a howl; he tasted his own blood in his mouth from where he'd bitten through his lip. Seconds later he felt the warm rush of Xander's seed flood his body as his mate's teeth found his neck once more.

Xander slipped free of Spike's body and slumped to the floor. He panted harshly and closed his eyes. That had been good. Very good. He felt Spike drape himself over his chest and he lazily wrapped his arms around him and pressed a sloppy kiss to his head.

"You cheated." Spike tried for indignant, but the tone sounded more like a cross between amused and proud. Yeah, he had wanted slow and gentle - but only until he wanted hard and fast. His boy knew that biting always put him on edge. He was proud of him for being a sneaky bastard; he was a demon after all.

"Yep." Xander didn't sound the least bit sorry about it either. "Was good though, eh?" He chuckled at the throaty growl he got in reply.

"We need to get you out of here before you pass out, Xan." Spike stood and pulled Xander to his feet. "Come on luv, I'll take you down and toss you in the river, ought ta perk you right up."

"Uh uh. The Swedish bikini team couldn't perk me up right now. Ow!" Xander scowled and rubbed his ear where his lover had flicked it. "Shouldn't that have set off your chip?"

Spike just grinned. "Must make allowances for when you deserve it. Not good form to talk about scantily clad women in front of your lover, pet. Lucky for you I'm not the jealous type."

Xander laughed as Spike led him out of the sauna. "Only because there is no one here for you to be jealous of." He shook his head at his lover's indignant look.

~!~

Willow looked up when the shop door opened. She was startled to see Faith but smiled and welcomed her in anyway. It had been just over a week since she'd been in L.A. and she hadn't really expected the slayer to come to Sunnydale, even though she had issued the invite.

"Nice place. Feels real... mystical." Faith eyed the various jars and whatnot lining the shelves. She hadn't been too sure she was ready to make this trip, but from what the redhead had told her, the town needed a slayer, one who was experienced with the darker aspects but could recognise the balance. She wanted to be that slayer.

"Thanks, we like it. It pays the bills, and hey, I never run out of spell ingredients!" Willow scrunched up her nose in thought. "Well, at least when I remember to place the orders on time." She grimaced as she remembered coming back from L.A. a week ago only to find out that they were short a few key ingredients that they should have had on hand. She had almost yelled at Tara

in her frustrated state until she remembered that it was she who was supposed to have sent in the order.

"Oh, yeah, I wondered about that. You know, whether you had done the spell to get Xander and Blondie back yet." She picked up one of the books and began flipping through the pages. She looked up at Willow and grinned. "Wood nymphs, huh?"

Willow blushed and took the book. "I ordered it for the spells." Faith winked at her and smiled. Willow frowned at her but then shrugged her shoulders. "I'm not saying I didn't look at the pictures, just that they weren't the reason I ordered the book."

Getting right to business, Faith asked, "So, where does this Trisha usually patrol? Thought I might check her out tonight, be all covert-y."

Willow frowned. "I'm not sure. She seems to just sort of pop up. But I can locate her for you when the sun sets." Faith nodded and headed for the door. Willow stopped her before she left. "Where are you going?"

"Just thought I'd walk around a bit, take in the sights. See what's changed, you know? Maybe get a room." Faith looked a bit uneasy and unsure of herself.

"Okay, will you come back later? You could... you could stay with Tara and me. There's a spare room." Willow smiled reassuringly. She wanted to give Faith a chance to prove herself; extending an invitation just seemed like the right thing to do.

"You sure? I won't be putting you out?" Faith looked Willow over, searching for any signs of mistrust or hostility. She didn't find any, so she relaxed.

"Not at all. We'd be glad to have you." Willow nodded enthusiastically. "So will you stay?"

"Sure Red, I'll be back here in a couple hours." Faith walked out into the sunny afternoon and felt better than she had in ages. She made her way to Buffy's grave and took a minute to clear the leaves from the headstone.

"Hey, B. You have good friends, you know. I hope you've found peace, God knows you deserve it. I just wanted to tell you that I'll take real good care of your family for you. Willow, man, she's something. Forgave me straight off; I hope Xander will. He's gonna be a tough sell, though... I hope you believe that I've changed; I have. I'm gonna make you proud, B. I will." Faith wiped the lone tear from her face and walked away.

Part Seventeen

"Oh my God! Tell me you didn't!" Willow, Tara and Faith were sitting around the kitchen table in Xander's apartment sipping hot chocolate and talking. Faith had been in Sunnydale for just over a week now and was doing her damndest to get Trisha to see the light.

"I sure did! I tell ya, it was nasty." Faith shuddered, then continued. "I mean, it was just... yuck. But I took pictures." That said, she cracked up laughing as both Tara and Willow choked on their drinks. Faith smiled and reached for her bag. "Wanna see them?"

"NO!" Both witches were adamant in their refusal to look. "What are you going to do with them?" Willow was curious as to why exactly Faith had taken pictures of Trisha and her watcher in a... compromising position."

"I faxed copies to Wes. He still has some contacts in the council. By tomorrow morning, John Leeds will be back in merry ole England, with a career full of musty books and very little human interaction to keep him busy." Faith looked like the cat that ate the canary. She was actually quite proud of herself; the old Faith would have simply resorted to violence to get her way.

"Damn, you're good. But who says the next guy they send won't be just as bad?" This time it was Tara who asked the question that was on her mind. "I mean, she seems to be very good at manipulating people."

Faith seemed to think this over for a minute before she grinned at both witches and held up a fist full of Polaroids. "I can always threaten to post these on the Internet and send the web address to her family." At Willow's look of approval she burst out laughing. "Damn Red, you have changed."

~!~

It was barely light out when John was awakened by the sound of someone pounding on his front door. He rolled Trisha away from him and got out of bed. After slipping on his pyjama bottoms and robe, he made his way down stairs to the door. "Who is it?"

"Stephan Hawkes. I'm from the council. Open the door." John sighed and tightened the belt on his robe. He wasn't expecting a visit from the watchers this soon; it had to be trouble. Or maybe they had finally come to do something about that Faith girl. She was causing him all sorts of trouble with his slayer.

John opened the door and was greeted by three very large men. They certainly didn't look like watchers. "Who are you?" John was already stepping away from the door as he asked. If he could get upstairs and wake Trisha, they might stand a chance against these guys.

"I told you already," the largest of the three answered. "I'm Stephan Hawkes. This is William Pryce and Eugene Milburn, my associates." He pointed to the other two men, and then grinned nastily at John. "We're here to escort you back to London, Mr. Leeds. It seems you've been a very bad boy."

John sputtered and once again tried to make for the stairs when Eugene caught hold of his arm and held him in place. Stephan made tsking noises and reached into his jacket pocket. "He pulled out a sheaf of fax papers and presented them to John. "I'm sure I don't have to explain what these are."

John looked at the pictures of himself and Trisha making love and hung his head in shame. It was clear to him that he had no choice but to follow these men back to England. He could only hope that his career wouldn't be completely ruined. "I'll just pack my things and say goodbye to Trisha."

"You have five minutes. After that, William here comes after you." Stephan stood by the front door, while Eugene went outside to cover the bedroom window and William took up position at the foot of the stairs.

Trisha woke up as John came back into the room. She watched as he pulled a suitcase out of the closet and began to pack. "What are you doing?" She got out of bed and walked toward him.

"For God's sake, Trish! Put some bloody clothes on, we have company." John continued to pack as Trisha pouted but did as she was told. Once she was dressed in her t-shirt and track pants she wandered over to John again to see what he was doing.

"Why are you packing? Should I get my things?" A trip away from Sunnydale sounded like fun. She hated this place; the vampires never stopped coming, and the number and varieties of demons was overwhelming.

"I'm going back to England. You are staying here." John was angry with her for putting him in this position in the first place. If she hadn't seduced him he would still have his career as watcher to an active slayer; now he wasn't sure what would become of him. "There are three very large men waiting downstairs to escort me,"

"What? Why?" Trisha wanted answers, if she was going to lose her watcher and be left here in demon central, she wanted to know why.

"Because they know. They have pictures, Trisha. Pictures of us... together. They will be sending you a new watcher, preferably a woman." Hopefully, he thought to himself, she wouldn't try to seduce her as well.

~!~

Wesley Wyndam-Pryce hadn't felt this useful in ages. He hadn't thought about his place in Angel Investigations in ages, just doing what he always had. Now it was painfully obvious that he was nothing more than a fifth wheel. Cordelia and Angel had formed a little family of their own with

Angel's son, Gunn and Fred had started seeing each other and were becoming quite seriously involved. He was still pulling his weight in the research department, but he knew that Fred could research just as well as he could, and did when he wasn't available.

They had Lorne to read them and give them advice; Charles was a more capable fighter than he, Angel was capable of spell casting, and Cordelia was some kind of super-demon now. What was left for him? Not a lot as far as he could tell. So it was with great relief and pleasure, even, that he accepted the offer from the council of watchers. It was merely temporary, but it gave him a chance to make up for the past mistakes he'd made with Faith. He would make sure that Trisha didn't follow in her footsteps.

~!~

"Wes! Hey man, come on in." Faith opened the door of the apartment and ushered him inside. She was happy to see him. He had been the biggest supporter of her returning to Sunnydale, telling her that he had complete trust in her ability to protect the town and its residents.

"Faith, it is good to see you. How have you been?" He smiled as she hugged him briefly before heading for the kitchen.

"Five by five. You want tea? We have herbal - yuck - and Earl Grey." Faith moved around the kitchen, putting on the kettle and getting some eggs from the fridge. "So what brings you to Sunnyhell? Checking up on me?"

Wesley followed her into the kitchen. "Earl Grey if it's no trouble. I can't stand herbal tea, and I'm here because the council has asked me to step in and take over temporary duty as Miss O'Leary's watcher."

"Cool. You want eggs? I make a pretty mean omelette." Faith began cracking eggs into a large mixing bowl. She wasn't sure why she was so pleased about Wes being here, only that she was. She hoped the council didn't replace him too soon.

"Oh, yes. That would be good. I left quite early this morning and didn't have time to eat." Wes took a seat at the table and watched as Faith moved around the room, fixing tea, making toast and cooking eggs. He was amazed at the changes in the young woman. Once again he felt the burden of his failure. He knew that in some ways, it was his fault that she had turned away from her calling, had gone bad. It was something he could never truly atone for.

"Hey, ease up. You're gonna give Angel a run for king of brood if you keep that up." Faith smiled at Wesley's startled expression. She knew he was thinking about the past; Sunnydale had bad memories for both of them. "We have a clean slate here. A chance to make up for things. I know we can't forget the past, but we can make sure it doesn't repeat itself."

"You are a wise and remarkable young woman, Faith. Thank you." Wesley took the cup of tea she held out to him and smiled. Maybe things would be good here this time.

~!~

Trisha was less than pleased with her new watcher. First of all, he was friends with the other slayer, Faith. Second of all, he was also friends with the witches. The very ones that had corrupted the last slayer. She was currently standing in the back room of the Magic Box watching the older slayer go through her training routine. She had to admit - somewhat begrudgingly - that the girl was good. Way better than she was.

"Now Trisha, show me what your watcher had you do in the way of training." Wes wasn't expecting to see much. From what Faith had told him, she had been very lucky so far. If she had ever had to face Spike or Angelus she would have been killed easily. It was lucky for her that no new master vampire had yet tried to claim the Hellmouth.

Trisha glared at him but did as she was told. Both Faith and Wesley watched as she went through her stances; they could both see that she needed a lot of work. "Sloppy. It's a wonder some fledgling hasn't made a meal of you yet." Wes stepped in and directed her movements.

For the next hour Trisha worked harder than she had since becoming the slayer. She sparred against Wesley and was appalled at how easily he took her down. If she couldn't hold up to a regular human being, even a well-trained one, what chance did she have against a master vampire? She was beginning to think that she might have been wrong in her assessment of these people.

Willow and Tara brought in lunch and tried to make Trisha feel welcome. They could see the similarities between her and a younger Faith. Willow was determined not to let Trisha go down that path. She thought that maybe, if they had been better friends to Faith back in high school, she could have been saved as well.

By the end of the day, Trisha was exhausted. She had watched Faith and Wesley fight, amazed at the ease in which Faith bested the man when she could barely get a hit on him. She made a decision right then and there to give these people a chance. If she was going to live, she needed their help.

~!~

Willow was ecstatic. The shipment she had been waiting for had finally shown up. She bounced around the front of the shop waiting for the others to arrive. Wesley and Faith were moving their things into the house the council had set up for Trisha, and Tara had gone to collect Clem. It was only a matter of minutes before she could finally bring Xander home.

The front door opened and Tara and Clem arrived. Clem was still nervous about being in the same room as two slayers, especially one that had tried to kill him, and he had heard things about the

other one - things that made him doubt his own sanity in coming here. Tara had assured him that Faith was different now, and that Trisha was learning that things weren't always black and white. Still, if it weren't for the fact that he missed his friend, he wouldn't be here. "Oh good, you're back!" Willow rushed over and kissed Tara soundly on the mouth. Clem smiled and turned away to give them some privacy. Tara hugged her lover and stroked her back softly. She knew Willow was excited, but if she didn't get a hold of herself they wouldn't be able to do the spell. Willow's power was unpredictable when she wasn't concentrating.

"Honey, you need to get your focus. Why don't you go in the back and meditate until the others get here. I'll keep watch for them." Tara gave her girlfriend a gentle shove toward the training room. Willow nodded her head and left. She knew Tara was right.

By the time Wesley arrived with the two slayers, Willow was calm and focused. Tara helped her to set up the spell and draw the doorway to the next world. It was the one part of the spell that made her nervous. They couldn't just drag Xander and Spike back through the portal, someone had to go through and retrieve them. Willow was that someone. Tara finished brushing the blood and herb mixture onto the wall. It was in a large oval shape from floor to ceiling. Willow set up the altar and lit the candles. All that was left was for Willow to picture where she wanted to go and then chant the words that would open the doorway.

They had decided it would be best if Willow focused on the outside of the cabin they had seen when they looked in on the two men before. That way she wouldn't accidentally walk in on them doing things. Willow kissed Tara goodbye and began to chant. The doorway opened and with one last smile to the group of people watching, she stepped through.

Part Eighteen

Willow shielded her eyes and looked around. It was bright and beautiful, hardly a cloud in the sky. She saw the cabin up ahead and began walking toward it; her only thoughts were of seeing Xander. When she reached the small structure, she hesitated at the door. She didn't want to just walk in, so she knocked.

After a few minutes she called out. "Xander? Spike? Is anyone here?" When no one answered she pushed the door open and stepped inside. She looked around the large front room, smiling at the fur rug in front of the fireplace. Xander was a romantic, who would have figured? Or maybe it was Spike. Willow giggled at the idea of a romantic Spike. Vampires and romance just didn't mix - as far as she knew.

A look inside the bedroom made her blush as she realised that there was only one bed. That meant that whatever was going on between the two was more than just a casual thing. Xander wouldn't share his bed with Spike if he wasn't serious about him. Willow let out a frustrated sigh. "Where the hell are you, Xander Harris?!"

Not wanting to stand around waiting, Willow went back outside. She walked around to the back of the house and saw a fairly large vegetable garden and some animal skins that were stretched out to dry. She wrinkled her nose at the thought of having to actually skin something and then continued around to the other side of the cabin.

She gasped as she saw the waterfall off in the distance. It was beautiful and she was drawn to it. As she walked down the hill toward it, she saw the sauna and the bathtub. She opened the door to the sauna and smiled. Xander had to have built this; he had always liked working with his hands.

At the river's edge, Willow closed her eyes and tried to picture Xander's life here. He surely had accomplished a lot in a year. A home, a garden, sauna and bath. It looked like he had given up hope of ever going home and had settled in. Willow began to cry at that thought. He should have known that she would never give up on him.

After taking a few minutes to collect herself, Willow headed back towards the cabin. She was beginning to think that she'd never find Xander. For all she knew, a bear could have eaten them.

~!~

Spike and Xander were just heading back from a swim in the pond. They were laughing and chasing each other around. Xander was complaining that it wasn't fair that Spike didn't need to breathe and could always sneak up on him underwater and pull him beneath.

"Yeah well, doesn't bother you so much when I'm sucking you off, now does it?" At Xander's glassy-eyed look, Spike chuckled. "Wait till we get home first luv; last time I took you outside, you got poison oak."

Xander grimaced at the reminder. His days of sex in the great outdoors were definitely over. It had been pure hell waiting for the rash to go away. Plus no sex for a whole week, 'cause Spike didn't want to take any chances on catching it. "Right. Home. Let's go."

Xander grabbed Spike's hand and began pulling the vampire toward the house. Spike just chuckled and allowed himself to be pulled along. He wasn't about to turn down a chance at sex.

As they rounded the top of the hill Spike grabbed Xander and pulled him into a soul-searing kiss. It was almost enough to make Xander give sex outside another go. He was just about to tumble Spike to the ground when he heard someone shout his name.

"Xander! Oh my God, I thought I'd never see you again!" Willow flew toward her friend and jumped into his arms. Spike stepped back from the pair as Xander twirled her around in a circle. When he stopped spinning he was smiling so wide, Spike thought his face might split.

"It's Willow! Spike, look. It's Willow!" Spike smiled at his lover and then burst out laughing as Willow noticed his nudity and blushed furiously. It didn't get any better when she realised that Xander was naked, as well. Naked and still hugging the stuffing out of her.

"Eeep! Um, Xan? You're kinda naked there." Willow stumbled as Xander pushed her away and immediately hid behind Spike. Of course that was when he realised that Spike was naked as well. He tried to cover Spike and only succeeded in embarrassing Willow further when she saw where his hands were now.

"Er, maybe you should close your eyes and let us run away now. We'll put something on and then we'll talk, okay?" Willow giggled and nodded her head. Xander grabbed Spike again and they took off for the cabin. Willow couldn't help but peek at them as they took off down the hill. "How the hell did I miss that?" She muttered at herself. Two gorgeous naked men and she hadn't even noticed. "Man, I really am gay."

~!~

Once inside the cabin, Spike pushed Xander up against the wall and kissed him desperately. He knew as soon as he had heard Red scream his lover's name that they had been rescued. Only thing was, he didn't want to be rescued. He liked it here. But if Xander wanted to leave, he would follow. Even if it meant a life in the dark again, skulking around cemeteries and drinking stale blood from a bag.

Xander gently disengaged himself from Spike's lips and asked him what was wrong. He knew that kiss wasn't about passion; Spike wasn't hard. And if Spike wasn't hard, he was worried. Then it struck him. Willow was here and that meant that they could go home now. Back to Sunnydale and the scoobies and demons and the hellmouth. Xander grimaced at the notion; he really didn't like that idea.

"Spike, hey, relax. We're not going anywhere. This is home, you and I - here. Okay?" Xander smiled when he felt his lover sag in relief. He pushed him away gently and then took his hand. "Come on, let's get something on before we give Wills another free show." Spike chuckled and followed Xander into their room.

Willow waited on the bench outside for the two to come out. She had so many questions she wanted to ask, especially about them being together. They had been kissing when she saw them; really kissing like she and Tara did when they were seconds away from tearing each other's clothes off. She wanted to know how that had happened.

Spike walked out first and Willow finally noticed how different he looked. Gone was the fishbelly white pallor; his hair was longer and sun-bleached a beautiful shade of blonde. He was smiling - not sneering or smirking - at something Xander whispered in his ear and he looked happy, like he was in love.

Xander did too. Willow knew what 'happy Xander' looked like, and this was definitely a happy Xander. She felt bad about what she was going to have to tell them. About Buffy, about Anya, it wasn't going to be easy.

Xander stopped a few feet in front of Willow. He squeezed Spike's hand and then took a deep breath. "Willow, I'm not going back. I'm sorry you spent all this time trying to locate us only to find out it was wasted effort, but I am home. I'm happy here, and I don't want to leave."

Willow's eyes filled with tears. "You're staying? Why? Xander, we miss you! So much has happened, I... I tried so hard to find you." Willow broke down in tears and Xander moved in to hold her. He hated seeing her cry, especially since it was his fault; but he had to tell her the truth. He wouldn't leave his home and Spike. Not to go back to a place he wasn't really needed and where his lover would be stuck in the dark again.

"Shh, hey, calm down and tell me what's happened. How is the gang? The Buffster still kicking demon ass? Is Anya okay?" Xander looked imploringly at Spike as Willow began to sob harder. He didn't know what he said wrong, or how to fix it.

"Oh Xander, I'm so sorry. Anya went back to D'Hoffryn. She left her share of the shop to Tara and me. She was so broken after you disappeared." Xander nodded and kissed her forehead. He was kind of relieved that she was a demon again. At least she would be safe now.

Willow struggled to sit up and then took Xander's hand. She turned sad eyes to Spike before speaking in a low pain-filled voice. "Buffy's dead. She threw herself into the portal to save Dawn." A shudder ran through her body as she described how she had looked up to see Buffy suspended in the portal's centre before it collapsed, sending her body hurtling to the ground.

Spike and Xander listened as Willow told them everything that had happened since they'd been gone. How Dawn was in L.A. with her Dad and seemed to be happy there. She told them about Trisha, and that Faith and Wesley were now training her to be a good slayer. She talked about her and Tara taking over his apartment and how they had Clem crypt-sitting for Spike. That brought a smile to Spike's face. Willow returned the smile. "He's really sweet, you know? How does a guy that sweet survive in Sunnydale?"

Spike chuckled. "He made be 'sweet' as you say, but he can defend himself - don't you worry yourself about that." Now that he knew Xander had no intention of leaving, he was more relaxed about Willow being there. One thing had been bothering him since she had begun her tale. "Red, how long have we been gone?"

Willow looked at Spike strangely before answering. "Just over a year, why?" She saw the look that passed between Spike and Xander and knew something was up. "What's going on, guys? Why are you looking at me like that?" Xander stroked a hand down her back and Spike cupped her cheek in his hand and looked her in the eye. "It's been about ten years for us, luv."

~!~

"Now do you understand?" Xander and Spike had spent the last hour answering questions about their life here. He was hoping that Willow would see why they didn't want to leave now that she knew how happy they were. "Do you see why I can't go back?"

Willow sniffed and wiped her eyes. She did understand. Why go back to Sunnydale when you had all this? Xander could live forever here; no demons to fight, no parents to avoid, no worries about impending apocalypses. She would miss her best friend, but she understood. "Yeah, I do. I'm going to miss you so much!" Willow threw her arms around Xander and wept. Xander held her close and tried to ignore the wetness on his own cheeks.

Spike watched the pair of humans crying all over each other and grimaced. He just knew that it would take weeks to get his mate out of a funk after she left. Of course, there was always another option. One that would solve both their problems. "Er, Willow, luv? This spell, can you do it again?"

Willow nodded and turned her bloodshot puffy eyes toward him. "Of course, why?"

"Well, I was thinking. You could bring that lovely girl of yours with you sometime and come back to visit. Hell, you wouldn't lose much time back home seeing as things move faster here." Spike shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly. Xander smiled at his lover. "Spike! That's a great idea! And she can bring chocolate!" He jumped up and pulled the vampire into his arms and kissed him. Spike melted into the kiss and almost forgot they had an audience. Xander must have too, seeing as how his hands began to wander...

Willow cleared her throat and the two men broke apart. "Do you guys need to be alone?" Xander blushed and Spike laughed. Willow bounced as she thought about Spike's idea. She could visit, often. This was great!

Part Nineteen

Willow walked back into the Magic Box and took in the small group of people waiting for her. "How long was I gone?" She wanted to know what the time difference was between dimensions.

"N-not very long. Fifteen minutes maybe. Did you find them?" Tara was worried seeing as Willow had come back alone. She hoped that nothing had gone wrong.

"Wow, I was there for hours." Willow closed the portal on autopilot. She was still thinking over everything she had learned. Ten years. Xander and Spike had been there ten years. They'd been lovers for over half of that time and they were mated. She didn't know exactly what that meant but she figured it was something pretty serious from the way Spike had said it.

Everyone had questions. Willow did her best to answer them, but in the end she just couldn't pay enough attention - which was why she didn't see the sad expression that flickered across Clem's face. It may have only been minutes here but it had been hours there and she was exhausted. "I'm sorry guys, but I really need to go home and lay down. I'm too tired to think anymore."

Tara put an arm around her waist and led her toward the door. "Faith? Would you mind locking up for us tonight?" At Faith's nod, Tara smiled and led Willow outside. She drove them both home and then helped Willow into the apartment.

"So, they're really happy there?"

Willow smiled. "Yeah, they are. They're really in love, too. I mean serious, forever kind of in love." Willow smiled as she remembered the kisses she had seen them share. "And wow are they hot together! Did I tell you they were naked when I got there?"

~!~

"Do you think she'll come back, Spike?" Xander had been thinking about Willow a lot since she'd left. It had been two months or so and no sign of her. He was starting to worry.

Spike sighed. Yeah it had been his idea for the witch to come and visit, but if he'd known it would send his lover into a fit of Angel-like brooding he'd never have suggested it. "Time's different there luv, only a year went by in ole Sunnyhell, after all. Don't fret, she'll come back." She would, Spike had no doubt of it. He knew keeping Xander all to himself was selfish, but he didn't like the idea of sharing him with the witch. He was possessive by nature, and this place was perfect for him - not another soul in sight. No one to occupy his boy's time or thoughts except him. Spike decided that Xander had spent enough time worrying about the redhead and set out to distract him.

They were sitting on the front porch, just enjoying the sunset. Spike eased down off the bench and knelt between Xander's open thighs. "Enough thinking, luv." Spike licked a wet stripe from knee to thigh and then nipped Xander playfully.

"O-okay, thinking bad. Spike good. Good Spike, nice Spike." Xander babbled and closed his eyes as Spike took him into his mouth. He felt the vampire chuckle against his rapidly-swelling length; it felt good. "Oh, God do that again."

"Mmm?" Spike felt Xander shudder as he hummed around his cock. He thought of all the wicked things he could do to his lovely boy while he was in such a state of wanton need. He pulled off Xander's cock with a loud 'pop'. "You wanted something, luv?"

Xander opened his eyes and glared at Spike. He couldn't form words right now - lucky for Spike, or the vampire would quickly realise what a mistake he'd made.

Xander moved faster than Spike had expected him to. He pinned the smaller man beneath him and spread his legs wide. He'd learned early on that his lover liked it a bit rough every now and again; good thing seeing as he had nothing to prepare him with. Xander spat on his palm and coated his shaft and Spike's pucker quickly before pushing inside.

Spike howled and his eyes bled to gold. Fangs elongated and pricked his bottom lip as he ground his teeth together. He'd almost forgotten how powerful Xander was for a human; they didn't play this rough very often and it had been awhile since the last time. The boy selfishly preferred to bottom. So much so that Spike went out of his way to annoy him into taking him hard and fast, or sneaking up on him and literally impaling himself. But that was half the fun - taking what he wanted.

Xander wasn't thinking about anything except the cool, snug channel encasing his swollen flesh, the golden-eyed stare of his mate burning holes into him, the tiny drops of blood that were welling up on that luscious full bottom lip. He leaned forward and licked them away, smiling as his lover groaned with lust.

"Fuck, so hot Xan. Love it when you taste me. Harder pet, fuck me!" Spike was in heaven; he had his lovely boy buried deep in his ass, pounding him into the floorboards of their front porch. He didn't need anything else as long as he had this. "Xander, fuck. Gonna cum luv, want to feel you cum with me."

Xander sped up his thrusts; he pounded furiously into his lover. He could feel Spike begin to tremble, knew it wouldn't be long and he wanted to cum with him. "Yes, God yes. With you, always with you." Xander leaned closer to those ivory fangs, wanting to feel the connection of his lover inside of him while he was inside his lover. Spike bit down without hesitation and they both stilled and then cried out their completion. It was perfect, exactly what they both needed.

~!~

Willow was nervous. It had been a week since her trip into the other dimension and she and Tara were planning a visit. They had packed clothes and swimsuits, toiletries, foodstuffs, chocolate for

Xander and Jack Daniels for Spike. Wesley was going to remain at the shop to keep watch over the portal while they were gone.

"I'm sure it'll be fine sweetie. They did say we could come visit." Tara was trying to reassure her lover while she herself was a nervous wreck. She had never travelled by plane before, let alone a portal to another dimension. She hoped she didn't get travel sickness.

"I know, it's just ... if you had seen them together, you'd understand. I feel like we'll be intruding on them sort of. They have everything they need there. What if..." Willow trailed off, tears in her eyes.

Tara comforted her lover. "Shh, of course Xander still needs you. You're his best friend." Tara pressed a gentle kiss to Willow's quivering mouth and then wiped the tears from her face.

"Willow shook her head sadly. "I'm not anymore. Spike is." She attempted a smile and it fell short of the mark. "That's okay though. He should be; I mean they've been all each other had for ten years. It was bound to happen. Wasn't it?"

Tara nodded her head and hugged Willow again. There was nothing she could say to make this better. It was something Willow needed to come to terms with on her own. It was right that Spike and Xander were best friends as well as lovers. She had always suspected that Xander and Anya would have broken up sooner or later for that very reason. For as much as Xander loved Anya, she wasn't his best friend. Tara viewed Willow as her best friend as well as her lover; she hoped that one day, Willow might feel the same way for her.

"We should go. I'll get the bags. Can you call Wesley in?" Willow moved toward the pile of luggage as Tara walked toward the door to the front of the shop. A few seconds later she returned and relieved Willow of some of the bags.

The spell was cast and the two girls joined hands and stepped into the portal.

~!~

The first thing Willow noticed was that it was sunset; the second thing she noticed was that Xander and Spike were in a tangle of naked flesh on the front porch. Judging by Tara's blush, she assumed she had noticed them as well. She didn't want to interrupt them, they seemed like they were... busy.

Tara turned away from the sight of the two men making love. It was too intimate, too personal. She knew that she would be mortified if this had happened to her. She tugged on her lover's hand and they walked a few feet away. "I-I wasn't expecting that."

Willow giggled. She couldn't help it, for all the things she expected Tara to say, that wasn't it. "Well, neither was I. Not that they don't look good together, but I just didn't expect to actually see them." Willow frowned as she thought of something. "I always thought Spike would be a top."

"Maybe they switch off?" Tara couldn't believe they were standing there calmly discussing Spike and Xander's sexual preferences. It was just too surreal. "Um, maybe we shouldn't talk about it. In fact, I think we should forget we even saw them... doing that."

Willow nodded but grinned wickedly, this wasn't something she was liable to forget anytime soon. "You're right. We didn't see anything. You think they're done yet?"

Both girls jumped as a deep baritone voice chuckled and then answered. "Yeah, we're done, you can come on over now." Spike grinned as he took in the blush staining the blonde witch's face. He'd always liked that one; she was still scared of him when no one else was. "Xan'll be out in a mo', he just needs to stop blushing first."

That made Willow smile and Tara blush further. She could only imagine how embarrassed he must be. Getting caught like that by your childhood friend and her girlfriend. It sounded like a bad soap opera plot. "We brought presents, do you think that'll cheer him up some?"

~!~

Xander was inside the cabin pacing. He could have died of embarrassment when he rolled off of Spike and saw Willow and Tara - their backs to them - standing about thirty feet away from them. It didn't help any when Spike chuckled and told him what they were saying. He managed to drag Spike inside and they both put something on before the girls noticed they were gone.

So now here he was, hiding inside the house while his lover went out to greet the girls and likely embarrass him further. He should just get over it and go out there, it wasn't his fault that they had shown up when they did. At the sound of Tara's question, Xander's ears perked up. "Presents? Well hell, what am I doing in here!"

With a slight blush staining his cheeks, Xander opened the door and was immediately jumped by a squealing redhead. He hugged her fiercely and then kissed her on the cheek. He then turned to see his lover and Tara both smiling. "Did I hear something about presents?"

Tara smiled again and nodded her head. She opened one of the bags and pulled out two brightly wrapped packages. Willow took the one for Xander and handed it to him while Tara presented the other one to Spike. Spike looked taken aback for all of about ten seconds before grinning widely and tearing into the paper. He saw the four bottles of Jack and whooped loudly before grabbing hold of the blonde witch and spinning her around in circles.

Xander laughed at the startled look on Tara's face. Then he repeated his mate's actions and tore into his present as well. He could have cried when he saw the box of plain Hershey's chocolate bars inside. Willow always knew how to make things better. He grabbed his friend and hugged her tightly. "Thank you, this is great!"

~!~

That night they had dinner outside and looked at the stars. It was a perfect night for stargazing; the sky was clear and the stars were shining brilliantly. They shared stories about things that had happened in the year - or ten - that they had been apart, Willow and Tara laughing at Spike's tales of teaching Xander to hunt.

Everyone was silent as Willow talked about Buffy's funeral service, Dawn's moving to L.A. and the way Giles had crawled into a bottle after the battle, never to come back out. Spike shook his head sadly; he had known Rupert was in love with the girl; he had been the only one the vampire took as serious competition.

"He loved her, what did you expect him to do?" Spike took in the shocked faces of the others and snorted. "Oh, please. Don't tell me you didn't know. It was bloody obvious to anyone who bothered to look."

Willow thought about it for a few minutes before gasping as she realized Spike was right. "Oh my God, he did. How did we miss that? I should have seen it. It's so obvious now. Oh, poor Giles." Tara wrapped her arms around the distraught redhead and just held her.

"Eh, don't be so hard on yerself, Red. You wouldn't have noticed because you all thought of Rupes as a father figure, yeah? Figured his love and concern for Buffy was that of a parent. I only saw it 'cause I fancied myself in love with the girl. Had to feel out the competition." Spike sighed and snuggled back against Xander's chest. He hated this, going over things in the past. One thing a demon knew for sure, it was that you couldn't do sod all to change the past, so no point in reliving it.

Xander held Spike a little tighter; he knew this wasn't as easy on Spike as it looked. After Willow had left the first time, they had talked about Buffy being dead, what that meant to them both. It was hard, hearing his lover grieve, knowing that if things had gone differently, they might never have found each other. Spike had made his peace with Buffy's death that night and hadn't dwelled on it since. They had moved on and wished Buffy peace and happiness. Now it was all being dredged up again.

"Hey, why don't we all go for a swim? It's a nice night, plenty of light to see by and the water should be nice and warm." Xander was trying to get everyone back in a better mood. If the girls were having fun, maybe Spike wouldn't be so moody. "Come on, it'll be fun. We can skinny dip!"

Part Twenty

The rest of the visit had gone well. After the first night, they all just decided to let go of all things Sunnydale and have fun. They swam, they played hide and seek - Spike winning, of course; they helped Xander in the garden and went for long walks. Spike and Xander gave the girls their room and slept in front of the fireplace every night.

It had been fun, and they were all saddened when they had to leave, but Willow had promised to come visit again in a few weeks' time - Sunnydale time. Xander kissed both girls goodbye and then leaned into Spike's embrace as they walked back through the portal.

Spike kissed him gently on the neck and then turned him around so they were face-to-face. "You ever think about going back, luv?" Ever since the first visit, Spike had been worried about that very thing. Here they had each other, but there, Xander had friends and family, food he didn't have to catch and kill, and all the conveniences of modern technology.

"Nope. Got everything I need right here. I'm happy here with you, Spike. I love you." Xander kissed his mate softly and held him in his arms. He felt Spike relax into the embrace and smiled. "But maybe Wills and Tara might decide to stay here next time. Do you think they would?"

Spike chuckled. He had already come to that conclusion himself. He was pretty sure that they would end up with neighbours eventually; the girls really seemed to like it here. "It's possible, pet." He saw Xander smile and knew he was up to something. "What's going on in that head of yours?"

"Well, I could use a new project, and the girls would probably appreciate some privacy next time they visit." Xander laughed as Spike groaned. "Oh come on, you know you like to watch me work, getting all sweaty and dirty."

"That I do, luv, so where you planning on building their house? Not too close I hope. I still want the option of shagging you in the sunlight without Red and Glinda watching." Xander blushed and Spike laughed. "Come on, plenty of time for that later. I want to sleep in our bed tonight, and I want to be holding you while I'm doing it."

~!~

Things in Sunnydale were going along well. Trisha had begun to take her calling very seriously, especially after Faith told her about everything she had been through. She didn't leave anything out, so the younger Slayer knew how hard Faith had worked to get to where she was now. It made her see how selfish she had been.

A day trip to L.A. with her watcher, the older slayer and the two witches also helped. They had met up with Dawn for lunch, and after meeting the girl that Buffy had died to protect, she understood. She might have been a key, but now she was just a girl. A girl who deserved to have a life as much as anyone else.

Dawn had been thrilled to learn that Spike and Xander were not only okay but that they were together. She smiled all through Willow and Tara's tale of their vacation with the boys. The idea of Spike in the sunlight made Dawn happy. She had always liked the vampire; he had been a friend to her when no one understood what she was going through, and Xander had been her secret crush as long as she could remember. "So tell me more about Xander being naked."

Wesley choked on his tea, Faith smirked, Trisha smiled, and Tara and Willow burst out laughing. It was no secret to them that Xander had been the feature of Dawn's adolescent fantasies. "What do you want to hear about first? How he spun me around in circles the first time I saw him? Or how about how he and Spike were... never mind. That's an R rated tale. Oh! I know. I'll tell you about skinny dipping in the pond."

Dawn's eyes lit up and she leaned closer to Willow; she didn't want to miss a single detail. Willow smiled at her lover and then began the tale. "We were watching the stars when Xander suggested it; of course we both thought he was joking at the time. Turns out he wasn't. See, their clothes had long since deteriorated beyond the wearable point - which would explain why they were naked both times when I got there."

The whole table had fallen silent as Willow continued her tale. "Anyway, they were wearing these... skins. You remember the unit you studied on Native Americans? Like that. Turns out they only wore them for hunting or building and stuff. So when we got to the pond, they both stripped off and dove in. Tara and I just sort of stared for a minute - shock will do that to a person, you know. Then we jumped in too - we were wearing our suits. Xander built this long dock, it stretched out to almost the middle of the pond so it was really deep."

"But did you guys get naked with them?" Dawn was beginning to get impatient. She wanted to hear the good stuff; the stuff that Spike would have told her and Buffy would have staked him for if she ever found out.

Willow giggled as Tara blushed. "Not that first night. We stayed fully clothed in our swimsuits. The next night though, after Spike shared some of his present with all of us, we all got naked. It was fun."

Dawn laughed as Tara continued to blush. Faith gave the girls both an approving look and waggled her eyebrows at Wesley. "Maybe next time they go we should tag along."

Willow covered a laugh at Wesley's stunned expression and squeezed Tara's hand under the table. She really did miss Xander, and they had such a great time while they were there. It was nice to just relax without the pressure of the hellmouth on them. They could just enjoy being outside at night without constantly looking over their shoulders for danger. She missed it, and totally understood why Xander wouldn't come back to Sunnydale. If she had spent the last ten years in a paradise like that with her lover, she wouldn't want to leave either.

~!~

The next couple of weeks went by and Willow became more and more depressed. She wasn't happy at school anymore, her grades were slipping and she'd fallen behind in her duties at the shop as well. Tara finally confronted her about it. "Willow, we need to talk. You haven't been acting like yourself lately. I'm worried."

Willow sighed and slumped down in her seat. She knew it was only a matter of time before Tara brought this up. She had tried really hard not to let her depression show but it wasn't working. "I'm sorry. I just... What are we doing here, sweetie?" At Tara's confused look Willow continued. "We run the shop and go to school. We aren't needed to help patrol - there are two slayers here; Wes does all the research and Giles-y things, plus he knows magic. So, what do we do here?"

Willow got up and started to pace. "With Buffy, I always knew what my place was, I was her friend and I was the magic user of the group. Giles did the book thing, Buffy slayed, Xander kept us all going - always ready to cheer us up or throw himself in the line of fire. People came and went, but the three of us were steady. She's gone, Xander's gone, there's a new group of world-savers, and I don't feel like I belong anymore."

"You want to go back, don't you? To Xander and Spike, to a simpler way of life? I understand." Tara really did understand; she had never felt like she belonged with these people. The only person she truly felt that she belonged with was Willow. Xander had always tried to make her feel welcome as well, and Spike, well Spike scared her. But not anymore. It's kinda hard to be scared of someone when you've seen them reduced to helpless giggles by a man in a fur bikini bottom.

"I do. We won't go if you don't want to, but don't you want to? I mean, do you remember how beautiful it is there, how bright and sunny the days were, how clear the night sky looked... We could have forever, you and me. I want that, I want forever with you." Willow turned pleading eyes on her lover. "I learned something from watching Xander with Spike. He's not my best friend anymore, too much has changed and it's for the better. You are my best friend, Tara. You have been there for me through the worst year of my life, you've never once complained when I spent every spare minute looking for a way to bring Xander home. You had every right to, but you didn't. I don't think I could have done it without your support. Thank you."

Tara was overwhelmed. She had hoped, prayed that someday Willow would feel this way. She felt the tears run freely down her cheeks and smiled happily at her girlfriend. "I'll follow you anywhere. If this is what you want, then it's what I want too." The two kissed softly and then Willow pulled away with a smile. "We have a lot of packing to do. We have to pack up all Xander's clothes - Spike's too; we'll need blankets and cookware, utensils and tools, books... How are we going to carry everything?"

~!~

It had taken longer than they had hoped but eventually they had everything in line. The shop and the apartment had been turned over to Wesley; their belongings as well as Spike and Xander's had been packed up. They packed several books on horticulture and some volumes on frontier survival. Wesley had suggested they purchase handheld woodworking tools, and Faith reminded them to pack more whiskey and chocolate.

Finally they were ready to go. They hugged and kissed everyone and then stepped through the doorway; their belongings followed behind them by way of a binding spell. They were really leaving Sunnydale and the hellmouth behind.

~!~

Xander and Spike stood back and surveyed their work. The cabin was good, the same basic design as their own. The garden wasn't quite as big as Xander's but it would be eventually, plus he had supplemented theirs with a few wild herb plants that he didn't have in his own. "Do you think they'll like it, Spike?"

"I'm sure they'll love it pet. And if they don't, we'll just call this my place for the day you eventually get sick o' me and throw my arse out." Spike had meant it as a joke, but apparently Xander didn't find it very funny.

"Not gonna happen. I love you; that doesn't stop. And if Willow and Tara don't want to stay, if they never come back, this place comes down. I'm not giving you any options to leave." Xander kissed Spike soundly and then threw him over his shoulder and headed home.

"Oi, pet! I can walk, you know." Spike wasn't really complaining but he needed to make a token protest about being thrown around like a sack of potatoes.

"I know, but this way is more fun. Besides, you need to save your strength for when we get back; I want to be fucked through the mattress." Xander chuckled as Spike began to growl.

It didn't long to get back to their cabin and as soon as they were inside, Spike struggled free of Xander and dragged him into their bedroom and pounced on him. "Gonna fuck you through the mattress now Xan, as requested." Xander moaned in approval and let Spike position him on the bed. Foreplay was a waste of time as they were both more than ready.

Spike gave Xander a cursory preparation before entering him in one smooth stroke. He pulled his mate's legs off his shoulders and encouraged him to wrap them around his waist instead. After giving him enough time to relax into the stretch, Spike began to move.

Xander moaned and thrashed beneath him and Spike watched with unblinking eyes; he took in every flash of emotion that crossed his lover's face. Xander's words still echoed in his head - 'I love you, that doesn't stop'. He believed him. For the first time in his life, Spike believed that he was

loved forever. That he would not lose this love to another, or to the passage of time. He had forever with Xander, no matter whether the girls came to stay or not. Xander was his, forever.

As his climax approached, Spike bit into his wrist and offered his blood to Xander. Without hesitation, Xander accepted and Spike sunk his fangs into his mark on his mate's neck. As they exploded into orgasm, Xander heard Willow calling his name.

Spike chuckled and rolled off of his mate. "Chit's got a lousy sense of timing, luv. Come on, let's get presentable and go out to meet them." Spike reached out for his 'butt-flap' as Xander liked to call it and put it on. Xander did the same after cleaning himself up.

They were both surprised to see the amount of stuff the girls had brought with them. They didn't figure this was just a visit; it looked like they were here to stay. Xander smiled hopefully at his childhood friend. "Planning on staying awhile?"

Willow smiled back a bit sheepishly. "Would forever be too long?" She felt Tara slip her hand into hers and gave it a squeeze. She watched as Spike and Xander exchanged an amused look. "Did I miss something? What's so amusing?"

Xander chuckled and slung his arm over Willow's shoulders. "Come and let me show you lovely ladies what Blondie and I have been up to since you left." The foursome walked off toward the girls' new home. Spike and Tara shared a smile at their lover's happy chatter. Things were going to be just fine.

The End