

DISCLAIMER: Joss Whedon is God and owns all. It's still his world, although we like to sneak in the side door and cover Xander with chocolate sauce and whipped cream when no one's looking.

Chocolate Hurricane

by
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Part One

God it was a long day, Xander thought as he trudged from his car to his apartment. Everything hurt, up to and including his left pinky toe. Work was brutal and he just wanted to order a pizza, turn on the TV and watch the Power Puff Girls. The little voice in his head that sounded a lot like Spike told him he was a pansy for watching girly cartoons, but he squashed firmly. Really, that little voice liked *Passions*, so who was it to talk? Anyway, time to sit around in his underwear and relax.

He stopped briefly at the silver-toned [mailboxes](#) just outside the apartment complex to check for bills. There was never any real mail, just bills. Except today there was

one of those weird keys with the tag on it that opened one of the big boxes on the end of the row, the kind that held packages. Mildly interested, Xander struggled with the lock and popped open the box. A small brown cardboard carton sat inside it, addressed to him in neat block lettering, one corner covered in cancelled stamps. There was no return address.

With a shrug, Xander grabbed his box and let the mailbox door bang shut. Dragging his sorry ass up the stairs took most of the rest of his energy, and he dumped everything on the little table right inside the front door. "Hi honey, I'm home!" he yelled, and listened to it echo in the empty space. "Oh yeah. I'm the only one who lives here now."

Calling in his pizza order only took a few minutes, and the removal of the clothes a few more. The couch groaned under his weight as he flopped down and grabbed the remote. Before long he was feeling better, stretched out on the couch and laughing his way through *Totally Spies*. The package he received was completely forgotten until the pizza guy knocked on his door. Xander took it back to the couch along with the pizza, and after procuring napkins and a paper plate from the kitchen, he sat down to open it.

"Alright," he said aloud when he got the box open.

"Dessert." Nestled inside the box was a double layer of Chocolate Hurricane candy bars, his favorite. Wow, he thought they didn't make those anymore. A quick check to the expiration date on each bar proved that they were still good, though, so Xander wolfed down his pizza and unwrapped one of the blocks of candy. An honest attempt was made to savor it, but he couldn't. It was just too good. So he had to have another one. Because that one he could make himself slow down and enjoy. Smooth, creamy, chocolatey taste, and it gave him that little tingle in his mouth that came from all those endorphy things. Bliss. Closing his eyes, Xander leaned his head back against the couch and chewed deliberately, swallowing tiny bits and enjoying them immensely.

Ah, chocolate. Natural mood improver. Maker of chemical happiness. The love of his life. So hard to resist. Xander eyed the remaining six bars. No. Two was enough. The rest could go into the freezer. He wasn't overly fond of frozen chocolate, unless it was ice cream, so he would stuff them in there. That way he'd have to thaw some before he could eat it, and that would make it last a few days, at least. He put the bars in a Ziploc bag and resolutely closed them in the icebox. No more tonight.

Weighed down by a full belly, Xander went back to mindlessly flipping channels on the TV. And promptly fell asleep. When he woke up with a crick in his neck and a trail of drool on his chin, it was ten o'clock at night and he cursed himself, because now he'd never get to bed on time. Especially because he was wide awake. Bouncy wide-awake. Go boogie at the Bronze awake. Too bad there was no one to go with, and dancing by himself brought back memories best left deeply buried. So it was back to the TV.

By midnight, Xander decided he was never going to be sleepy again. He'd watched TV. Lifted weights. Cleaned the bathroom. Come to think of it, it was the bathroom cleaning that really worried him. He had to get out. Of course, the only things open at midnight were Wal-Mart, a bar, or the porn store. After only a moment's deliberation, Xander decided on the porn store. Not only was he unlikely to ever close his eyes tonight, he was hornier than he'd been in a long time.

Part Two

The Emporium Erotique was far enough from most of the usual patrol areas that Xander felt safe there, so that's where he went. It wasn't a chain store, so it was just a bit sleazier than he liked, but it was well lit and discreet and had a wide variety of videos to choose from. Somehow or another, Xander always felt like the girls would be shocked if they knew he and his good right hand spent so much time together watching movies, even after the sex life of Xander reports they used to get from Anya. Okay, and wasn't thinking of Anya a mood killer?

Some twenty minutes later, Xander was still perusing the selections, torn between *Naughty Nurses* and *Bustalicious Beauties*. He had a thing for firm, well-rounded, "Spike?"

Yep, it was Spike all right, looking over his shoulder at Xander with an aggrieved expression. "Can't get rid of you lot to save me, can I?"

"What are you doing here?"

"Injecting mentholatum into tubes of lube. What does it look like I'm doing?"

Eyeing Spike's bulging pockets, Xander said, "Um, shoplifting?"

"Oh, ta, mate. Could you say that a bit louder? I don't think the gentlemen in the peepshow booths heard you back there." With quick, disgusted motions Spike emptied his pockets before the manager took more than one step in their direction. "Now what am I going to do to amuse myself, eh?"

Unaccountably guilty, Xander offered, "You could always come back to my place and watch whatever I rent."

They stared at each other for a moment, and Spike could be no more surprised than Xander was at the gesture. Xander had no idea what had possessed him to ask (and on the Hellmouth possessed could be taken literally) but he didn't take it back. He was even more surprised when Spike shrugged and said, "Yeah, okay. Why not?"

Since there were two of them, they got both movies. Actually, they got three, because Spike insisted that they take home one of the ones he tried to lift, but Xander didn't get a really good look at it. He drew the line on his sudden and inexplicable niceness when Spike tried to insist that he drive. It was almost companionable. Mostly because neither one of them said much. The weird, I'm being decent silence lasted all the way back to Xander's apartment, where Xander wandered into the kitchen to make popcorn while Spike made comfy on the couch. No,

he normally didn't do popcorn with his porn, but Spike was there, so he had to have something to do with his hands besides what he usually did.

Part Three

Popcorn in hand, Xander settled on the other end of the couch from Spike. He would have taken the chair, so they wouldn't have to sit together at all, but the angle wasn't good for the TV there. They popped *Naughty Nurses* in first, but only made it through about the first fifteen minutes before Xander was beset by a serious case of the giggles.

"This is awful."

"Pretty sad, I have to say," Spike agreed. "Try the next one?"

"Yeah."

The next tape was a little better, because it had less formulated plot and more jiggling flesh. Spike certainly

seemed, er, happy with it. Xander couldn't concentrate on it, really. Restless, he munched popcorn and picked at a loose thread on the couch cover. Bounced his leg. Realized that he had a huge cobweb in the corner above the TV. Shifted in his seat. All of which finally annoyed Spike enough that he spoke up.

"What's with you, anyway? This one's much better."

"Sorry." Making a monumental effort to sit still and concentrate on the movie helped not at all. Xander had the urge to burst out laughing. Or maybe make fun of the dialog, such as it was. He would if Spike wasn't there, but he restrained himself. He thought he was doing really well, too, with the restraint until Spike grabbed the remote and paused the movie.

"Look if this one isn't holding your interest we can always put in the one I got."

Blinking, Xander shook his head. Then nodded.

"Whatever you want, Spike."

Tilting his head to one side, Spike studied Xander curiously. "You feeling okay? Because I'm starting to worry about you."

"I'm fine. Oh look. Popcorn is empty. You watch the movie. I'll go get more food. And a beer. You want a beer? I can do that. Maybe some nachos. Or something."

"Pet, you're babbling."

"Am not." Xander stopped to consider. "Not nachos. Hmmm. Go ahead. I'll be back."

Back to the kitchen Xander went, and a minute or so later he heard the movie start up again. Opening and closing cabinet doors, he looked for something else to eat. It wasn't Spike. Really. He wasn't sure what was making him so bouncy and distracted, but it wasn't Spike. Okay, watching porn with Spike was an odd, not to be repeated experience, but usually Xander could concentrate on the *Bustalicious Babes* and ignore anything else. Maybe he just wasn't really in the mood for movies. He wasn't really in the mood for salty snacks either, so he got two beers out of the fridge and, almost as an afterthought, got into the freezer and pulled out a chocolate bar to thaw. Not like he was going to sleep anyway, he might as well have more candy. He'd have to sneak it between movies, though, because no way was he going to share Chocolate Hurricanes with Spike.

Back to the living room with the beers, and he handed one to Spike before settling himself back on the couch. I

will watch this movie, he thought, because I paid for it with my hard earned cash. When he looked at the screen, though, he froze. *That* was not a busty beauty. Neither of the them, thats, whatever, were busty at all. In fact, neither of them were women. "Spike?"

"Yeah?"

Clearing the squeak out of his throat, Xander tried again. "This doesn't look like the same type of movie that was on when I left."

"S'not. It's the one I got."

"Oh." Oh, that was just. Oh, jeez. "Spike? Those are both guys."

"Very good. You must have been awake for secondary school anatomy class."

"Why are they both guys? We were watching girls."

"Yeah, well, you said you didn't care, so I switched it."

"In more ways than one."

Part Four

Xander watched with morbid fascination as the two guys on screen got really, really busy. Okay, he thought, let's break this down into tiny thoughts, so I can process it. Spike rented a gay porn video. No, worse. I rented it for Spike without looking at it. And now I'm looking at it. And that looks like it has to hurt. Or maybe not. Okay, even hornier than I thought, because, look, wood. Xander spared a glance at Spike out of the corner of his eye, and his inner dialog hit the brakes. Hard.

Because Spike was. Hard. The outline of his cock was clearly visible through his jeans. Ignoring Xander completely now, Spike watched the action through half-closed eyes, one hand kneading his thigh. Xander had no doubt that Spike would start rubbing something else any minute. How did he get himself into these situations? And why did the thought of Spike jacking off make Xander want to crawl over there and help him?

With a loud yelp, Xander shot up off the couch and made a run for the kitchen. "Going to get more food," he hollered, hoping that Spike would be far too engrossed in his viewing, er, pleasure, to even notice he was gone.

Pacing around the kitchen, willing his dick to go down, Xander wondered what the hell had gotten into him. That was Spike. Not only was Spike a guy, but well, it was Spike. Watching a porn movie. Rubbing himself. That should produce disgust and contempt, not fiery blushes and sweaty palms.

Must calm down, Xander thought. Casting about wildly for a distraction, he spotted the Chocolate Hurricane he'd pulled out of the freezer earlier. Yes! That would do it. Chocolate frenzy. He ripped the wrapper off the bar and ate it in three bites. The sweet flavor took over his entire body for a few minutes, settling him down considerably, and he was able to breathe again.

Right. It was just Spike. He was just horny and desperate. No big deal. He'd go back out there, and there would be no problem. With one last deep, chocolate scented breath, Xander walked back into his living room. To see Spike sprawled out on the couch, feet planted widely apart on the floor. His jeans were open and he was holding his cock in his hand, stroking in time to the moans and groans coming from the TV. All of Xander's blood rushed out of his head, heading south. Oh god. He thought he might just pass out.

Part Five

"Spike! What are you doing?" It came out as something approaching a shriek, and Spike started violently, then yelped almost as loudly as Xander had.

"Shit. Make me tear it off, why don't you? And what's it look like? Giving myself a hand here, aren't I?"

"In my living room?" Xander vibrated in place, torn between running in circles, gibbering, and melting into a puddle of embarrassed goo on the floor. The tiny oasis of calm he'd attained through chocolate consumption was hit by a tsunami and swept away by gale force winds. Spike. Partly naked Spike, with his partly naked parts hanging out, and what attractive parts, and where did that thought come from? Why couldn't he ever be attacked by trolls or giant mantis ladies when he wanted to? No, it only happened when he had other plans. When

he needed an apocalypse to get out of a situation like this it never came.

And what was really bad was that while he stood there dithering, Spike was still stroking and rubbing and moving his hips. Only now he was looking at Xander instead of the movie and he had that devious sort of smirky expression on his face, like he knew something Xander didn't.

"Don't take on so, pet. Nothing you haven't seen before I'm sure. Come on, it's getting to a good part. Have a sit, and we can watch it and do some male bonding. Isn't that what you human lads call wanking together?"

How did Spike know the movie was getting to a good part? Had he seen it before? Or had he just seen so many gay porn videos that they all started to look the same? And why was the offer to go over there and open up his pants and fondle himself suddenly so attractive? Why was Spike suddenly so attractive? And wait, Spike had asked a question. Searching his head for the little hamster running on the little wheel that actually made his brain function, he reached for coherence and almost found it.

"No. I mean, yes. I mean... shit. Okay. Yes, I have seen manly parts, mostly soft, dangly ones in showers. No, I

don't really call it male bonding, but maybe because I have no guy friends." Without any real thought, Xander had moved forward so he could see the TV again, and this was the good part? One of the guys was licking the other one's butt! Ewww. And yet, strangely not. Look at the movie, look at Spike's cock, look at the TV, look at Spike's... ahhhh! Panic.

Soothingly, like he was talking to a very small child, Spike said, "Come on now. Just sit down here on the couch like you know you want to. Stop listening to whatever those little voices in your head are saying and enjoy the movie, hmm? So I can enjoy it too, right? Otherwise, I'll miss more than I already have."

And Xander sat. Screaming and throwing himself out of a window just didn't seem feasible; laying down and putting his head in Spike's lap and licking him like a lollipop didn't seem like something he should do either, although he had a strong urge to do both. So he sat. And Spike nudged him with an elbow and jerked his chin towards the TV, and Xander started learning all he needed to know about the practical applications of rimming.

Part Six

If rimming could be called practical. Xander didn't think it could. He guessed it didn't have to be, though. Just fun, and the guy getting it done sure seemed to think it was that, at least, the way he was wailing and moaning and wiggling his butt. Kinda seemed like Spike thought it looked fun too, because he was breathing, which was weird enough, but weirder because he was breathing really hard.

"You like that?" After he asked it, he wished he hadn't and clapped a hand over his mouth.

With a disbelieving look out of the corner of his eye, Spike countered, "Don't you?"

"I've never done that." Tilting his head to one side to better see the action Xander added, "I've never done anything like that at all."

"Oh, pet, you're missing out."

"Because I've never done it with a guy? Or because I've never had my ass licked?"

Where oh where did these things come from? Like the filter between his brain and mouth (which was faulty anyway) had completely stopped working. Unholy curiosity kept his eyes glued to the screen when the one guy moved up behind the other guy and oh. Oh holy shit.

Spike nudged him again, and Xander jumped a foot in the air.

"What?"

"You've never been with a bloke? You expect me to believe that?"

Finally, something that allowed him to look away from the TV. But then he had to look at Spike, who was still furiously stroking his naked cock. Dry mouth, wide eyes, damp crotch, and wasn't it funny how some small part of his brain cataloged all of those physical sensations. "It's true. Nevernever."

"Way Anya talked I thought you tried everything."

"So did I. Apparently I was wrong."

Now Spike was looking at him with speculation. Hello, penis? That's not supposed to make you happy, he thought.

"Wanna try it, pet?"

Run. Run away, his mind said. Too bad his body leaned forward. "Um, no?"

"Don't sound too sure, there, luv. I think you do."

"Do you?" There went his mouth again, completely independent of the rest of his body.

"Why not? Two's better than one any day, and you aren't so bad."

"Gee, thanks." At least he could still sound snarky, even if his body language said otherwise. Somehow or another he had wiggled a few inches closer to Spike on the couch, so that their legs were touching. Then more than that was touching, because Spike reached over and casually laid a hand on Xander's crotch. His bulging, trying to get out of his pants crotch. And squeezed. And rubbed. Xander moaned. Half-turning toward Xander, Spike reached out his free hand and grabbed one of Xander's hands, guiding it to his own cock and wrapping the lax fingers around it.

I'm holding Spike's cock in my hand, Xander thought. Of course, then he stopped thinking because Spike stopped squeezing him through his pants so that he could open said pants and squeeze without anything in the way. Wow, he honestly couldn't remember ever making a sound like that before. But then, he could never remember a hand on him feeling that way before. Stroking, squeezing, manipulating him in the sort of confident way a woman never could, because they just

didn't know how it felt. His own hand moved too, and he watched in fascination as it pumped and slid and mirrored whatever Spike did. If that made sense. His hand was wet and where it touched the tip of Spike's cock and he realized what that was, thought about how gross it should be, then raised his hand to his mouth to taste it.

A sound from Spike made Xander look at him over his hand, and Xander's eyes widened, because it was just about that time that Spike lunged. They both went flying back and Xander felt his spine dent where it connected with the arm of the couch. He had his very own Spikey blanket now, except that blankets didn't move and grind and growl. Their cocks rubbed together and it was so hot that Xander had a fleeting vision of Boy Scouts and sticks and "Ugh make fire." Soon after that, though, there was no room for visions of anything but Spike's stubby black eyelashes and fine grained skin, and then the insides of his eyelids as his eyes rolled back with the force of his orgasm. A rumbly snarl came from Spike and then lots more wet and sticky stuff was there between them and Xander thought, "Spike came on me" just before his head came off and he passed out.

Part Seven

Sometime around five in the morning, Xander woke up. In his bed. Warm and toasty and safe, covered with his own quilt, with no vampires in sight. Wow, that was one heck of a dream. His subconscious was known for doing funny things, but he'd never even thought of Spike, well, **that** way before. Wide awake, Xander decided not to go back to sleep for just an hour, and got up to get ready to go to work. Maybe he could get some extra paperwork done before the crew came in.

Showered, shaved, and probably way too energetic for the small amount of sleep he'd gotten, Xander wandered out into the main rooms of the apartment in search of breakfast. And stopped dead. So to speak. On the Hellmouth you always qualified statements like that lest you offend someone who really was. Dead. Like Spike. Who was not actually there, but all the evidence pointed to the fact that he had been.

The popcorn bowl was still on the floor next to the couch, as was a pile of empty beer bottles. An ashtray, one that Xander kept just for certain uncles, was on the

coffee table, full of butts. The whole room smelled of smoke and sex. Sex. There was a washcloth drying all stiff and crumpled on the couch, and Xander didn't even want to contemplate what was on it.

He stood there, body stock-still while his brain did little ice skating school figures. Spike. Sex. Well, hand-body-penis contact anyway. Oh. God. Distantly, Xander could hear the buzzing in his ears, and he knew he was shaking, but he was too far away to do anything about it. What finally jolted him back to awareness was the feeling of his teeth clacking against frozen chocolate. He stood by the freezer, gnawing on a fresh out of the icebox Chocolate Hurricane. Oh yes, that was much better.

The little synapses in his brain fired up again thanks to the cocoa gods, and he started thinking about things more rationally. It wasn't so bad, was it? Not like he'd encouraged Spike really. They had both been horny, maybe even a little desperate, and Xander could blame it on a chocolate high that could have killed an elephant. Yeah. And then, Spike was gone, wasn't he? So he probably didn't want to think about it, either. Or even admit to it. Uncharacteristically nice of Spike as it was to drag Xander to bed and tuck him in, Xander didn't think he'd have to worry about the bleached menace getting

all gooshy on him. Well, not that way. Gushy maybe, like he'd been last night when he came...

Nope, nope, not going to think of that. Or of the way Spike had tasted on his hand when he'd licked it. No, no, no. So it had felt good. So what? It had been awhile since any hand but his own hand ventured south of the border, was all. Really. Okay, starting to panic again. Xander contemplated having another chocolate bar, but a quick check showed that he only had four left. So he would wait. Calling in sick seemed like a really good idea, though, and maybe trying to go and have a talk with Willow. If anyone would understand this whole suddenly wanting to see how the other half lived, she would.

Part Eight

Of course, it was only, like, five-thirty in the morning. So Xander had to wait at least three hours to go see Willow. If he stayed in the house he would eat every bit of chocolate he had left, though, so he grabbed his keys and his jacket and headed out for Denny's. An enormous slam

breakfast would make the world seem right again. Eggs, hash browns, unidentifiable breakfast meat, and he would just hope he didn't meet up with any of the guys from work.

Breakfast didn't make him feel better. In fact, it made him sick as a dog, sitting in his stomach like lead. Wasn't like him at all. Of course, maybe the lead in his tummy was dread. Ooh, that rhymed, kinda. He really, really didn't want to tell Willow about the whole hands on Spike thing. But he had to. Because bad things happened when he and Willow didn't talk, and she could understand. And she wouldn't tell Buffy. At least, he hoped she wouldn't. That would be mean, and Willow wasn't mean by nature.

Checking his watch, Xander realized he had time to stop back by his apartment and take some antacids or something. By the time he got there, he was sweating and shaking and trying not to make an unspeakable mess in his car. He barely made it to the bathroom in time because the lock on his front door stuck a bit, and it picked that very moment to become really stubborn. That's what he got for calling in sick, wasn't it? Karma, no doubt. Nice floor. Cool, tile floor. Once he felt like his eyeballs were no longer trying to crawl out of his head,

Xander got up and brushed his teeth, then staggered off towards the bedroom.

Or at least that's where he thought he was going. So why was he in the kitchen? The last thing he needed on a touchy stomach was more chocolate. But that was really the only thing that sounded appealing. With a fatalistic shrug, Xander pulled out another Chocolate Hurricane and plunked it into the microwave to heat for ten seconds. Wolfing it down actually settled his system down a bit. After a few minutes of digestion, he felt normal again. Wow, somebody needed to do a paper on the effects of chocolate consumption and the digestive tract.

Falling into bed and dying was no longer necessary, so Xander checked his watch (it was seven-thirty, woo and hoo) and decided Willow would probably be up, having seen Dawn off to school. Might as well get it over with.

Willow was indeed awake, even if she was endearingly goofy. But that was good, because maybe she wouldn't be sharp enough to really register what he was saying. She poured him orange juice, and sat down with her cup of herbal something-or-other, and he sat too, pushing the orange juice off to one side with a grimace.

"So," Willow started, "what's with you? You look all serious, and worried, and shouldn't you be at work?"

That little up-twist she put on the end of her questions was so cute. Xander knew there was a reason Willow was his best friend. And he was avoiding the subject, wasn't he? Okay, deep breath, he thought. Just blurt it out. How bad can it be?

"I called in sick. Because I was. Sick. To my stomach."

"Which explains why you're here at not quite eight in the morning."

"Right." Xander fidgeted. He tapped the counter. He swung his leg. Willow just looked at him steadily until he was ready to scream. "What would you say if I told you I had a sexual encounter with a man?"

Blink. She blinked. Was that good or bad? "I would say, welcome to the club? I mean, now we've both had both. Or something like that. Because that would make you feel more at ease, and then I could ask you how you felt about it, because that's probably the real problem."

"Well, it's not so much the guy thing, believe it or not. Although that is odd. But I figure, in the dark you can't tell much of a difference, right, I mean between hands at least and we never got beyond that." Xander trailed off

because Willow was blinking again, and he could see the monumental effort it was costing her not to go into sympathetic woman face and just wait for him to finish.

"What's weirder than that?" she asked.

"The encounter?" She nodded. He continued. "It was with Spike."

Part Nine

Not blinking now, and Xander decided he liked the blinking better than the blank incredulity. Willow had that look. Not the resolve face, which also qualified as that look. More like the "I think I must have gone deaf because there's no way I could have heard that" look. Then it shifted into the "heard it but don't believe it" look. She finally settled on a heartfelt "whoa" sort of expression.

"Whoa."

See? "Yeah. Major whoa."

The questions bubbling up inside Willow were like a physical presence in the room. Xander could feel them. Finally, like a shaken 7-Up, she exploded.

"How did that happen? And when? Are you out of your mind? And what is it with Spike and the sleeping with him urge? I mean, he's not hot. Except in a bad boy in leather way. He's not sexy at all. Except that he is. But he was cuter wearing your clothes."

Not sure which point to address first, Xander jumped up and started pacing. "Other people want to sleep with him? Since when? And I thought I was weird, but if you think Spike in my clothes was hot, you take the crown as the queen of odd."

"Do not."

"Do too."

His next turn brought him back around to face Willow, and she was fighting a smile. Xander answered her with his own sheepish grin. Bouncing in place now, Xander continued with his story.

"Anyway, I felt sorry for him and invited him over to watch a movie because I couldn't sleep and we ended up doing touching of the naughty variety. It could be

because he rented gay porn, but I'm thinking it has to be something more sinister than that."

"Spike rented gay porn and you watched it?"

"Worse, he picked it out and I paid for it."

"Wow." Willow nodded sagely. "Clearly, you're possessed. And what kind of naughty touching?"

"Hands and other manly parts best left unnamed connected."

"Oh? Oh!" Willow blushed and stuttered a bit. "We, we have to see what might be going through town. This could be serious."

"I was afraid you were going to say that."

"I'll get Buffy."

"No!" Xander shook his head violently. "I know, I know, we shouldn't keep things from her. But this is Spike we're talking about, here. She even accused me of wanting to sleep with him, once."

"Ooh, she did, didn't she?" The little crease that meant 'thinking hard' appeared between Willow's brows. "I wish I could just do a spell and see if you're spelled." At Xander's protesting sound, she flapped a hand in

irritation. "I said I wish. I won't. But doing it the hard way means it will take longer. Maybe you should go home, get some sleep."

"Not sleepy." Xander bounced a bit more, just for good measure. He didn't want to just sit around and wait. There had to be something he could do. "There has to be something I can do."

"You can." Nodding decisively, Willow got up and grabbed a pad of paper and a pen. "You can write down everything you've done the last couple of days. Who you saw. What you ate. What you drank. Maybe that will give us some clues. I'll go to the Magic Box and get some books."

With a sigh, Xander sat back down at the table, pushing his orange juice further away and staring dolefully at the paper in front of him. "This seems an awful lot like homework."

With a pat on Xander's shoulder, Willow gathered up her things and made for the door. "That's what you get for calling in sick," she said, and left him sitting there, staring into space.

Part Ten

After Willow left, Xander tried to concentrate on his list of who, what, why and how. He really did. But every time he set pen to page it came back to Spike. Met Spike at adult bookstore. Watched movies with Spike. Put hand on Spike's...ack. The whole mess could be laid firmly at Spike's door, now that he thought about it. That son of a bitch. It had to be something Spike did. Why else would Xander be acting so completely out of character?

God, he was hungry. Xander gave up on his Willow assignment and went to the refrigerator, draping himself over the open door and peering at the contents. Animal, vegetable, fruit. Ah! Score. Leftover pizza. "Come to papa, baby," Xander crooned, and tore open the Ziploc bag. Fragrant pepperoni and sweet red peppers. It was heaven. It was still fresh. It was making his stomach turn over.

Gagging, Xander threw the bag back into the fridge and slammed the door. That was the last straw. No way was he going to let Spike come between him and one of the great loves of his life! Time to march his ass over to

Spike's crypt and demand an explanation. After beating him up.

Too bad he couldn't bust the door down like Buffy always did. But it made a satisfying crash as it bounced against the far wall. Well, it would have been satisfying if Spike had even glanced up from his magazine. He didn't even flinch.

"You know, once in awhile you could sop my ego and pretend that I intimidate you."

Without turning to look at him, Spike replied in a glass shattering falsetto. "Oh, my! What am I to do? It's the great and powerful Xander."

Okay, obviously Spike wasn't treating this with the grave seriousness it deserved. No pun intended. Stomping around to stand in front of Spike, Xander crossed his arms over his chest and assumed his best 'no more butt monkey' stance. "What did you do to me?"

Finally, Spike looked up at him. "What?"

"Last night. What did you do to me?"

Gifting Xander with a cream-licking cat smile, Spike replied, "I should think that would be obvious, pet."

"So not funny. I mean, what did you do to me to make me do, you know, that."

"You're saying you didn't want to? Didn't enjoy it? Because I've got to tell you, I don't think I've ever had anybody pass right out on me before."

The smug tone, coupled with a lewd once over proved too much for Xander, and he lunged. He'd have to work on telegraphing his punches, because Spike was ready for him. Or at least that's what he figured happened. One minute he was swinging like a rusty gate, the next he was tumbling into Spike's chair to land on Spike's lap. To make it all worse, Spike was laughing at him. Made Xander want to squash him like a bug. Which he would do. As soon as he got up.

The problem with getting up was that it felt really good where he was. Really, really good. In fact, it felt so good that Xander tried to get closer instead of further away, and Spike was suddenly very serious and then they were kissing. Their mouths met so hard that their teeth clacked, and Xander had that same desperate surge of lust he'd experienced the night before. His whole lower body throbbed, and he squirmed around until he straddled Spike's legs, so he could rub the aching bulge at

his crotch against the answering one in Spike's tight jeans.

"Oof." All of the air left Xander's lungs when Spike suddenly stood, heaving them both up and out of the chair. Holding on was about his only option, and he did, clinging like Handi-wrap as they blundered across the room and landed hard on the bed. Double oof. Behind his closed eyelids, Xander saw the same little sparklies that he did when he watched fireworks. He wasn't quite sure if it was lack of air or the way he'd landed. Or maybe it was just the way Spike kissed. Hard kisses that rubbed his lips almost raw, and it felt so good, because he didn't have to worry about being too rough or if his stubble was scratchy, because Spike gave as good as he got. So good that he might just explode from it, long before any part of him still in clothes reached the open air. On top of him now, Spike rubbed and nipped and licked and did his best imitation of a bleachy whirlwind. Xander wanted to touch and taste and do all those things too, but it was so hard to concentrate with Spike sucking up a love mark on his neck.

Whimpering, thrashing, Xander scrabbled at Spike's duster until he got the picture and pulled back. "What?"

"Off." Spike looked affronted until Xander plucked at his shirt and belt, "Off! Now."

"Oh. Right." Up on his knees now, stripping off one piece of clothing after another and Xander just looked and looked. How weird was it that he thought Spike was beautiful. No pillowy breasts, no soft belly, no rounded hips. But god, look at those cut muscles. Who knew that was under there? And who knew it would make him hard enough to pound nails?

Seemed it was the same for Spike because he started on Xander's clothes when he was done with his own, and he stared at what he'd uncovered like it was quite a prize. "Hell, pet. Where do you put all of this during the day?"

"I, oh, what?" Was there a question? Xander couldn't remember, helpless under the feel of bare skin against his. Such soft skin. Weren't guys supposed to have rough skin? He did, rough from working out in the sun and wind, but Spike, oh God his skin was like milk. Cool and white and it just poured over him until Xander was sure he would scald it with his own heat. And Spike had nipples. Well, okay, all guys had nipples, he had them too, but he never expected be fascinated by them. The way they felt against his palms, the way they turned into little points that made him want to pull and twist.

Then there was the other part of Spike, the lower part, the one he'd touched last night. There, right there, cradled in the hollow of his hip right next to his own. Just like before they rubbed together, and the friction was unbearable. Last time it had been so fast, too fast for him to really understand how different this was, but he got it now. Then Spike put a hand down between them, gathering both cocks together and pumping in time to the wild thrust of their hips and Xander just went with it. Utterly lost.

There were words, but Xander didn't hear them, or if he did they had no meaning. The whole world narrowed down to the feel of Spike's hands on him, and Spike's tongue in his mouth and his own hands on Spike's hipbones or spine or ass. Rocking together in this urgent rhythm and neither of them stopped to question why or how, and then Xander was just exploding, absolutely losing it, painting stripes of himself on Spike's belly and thighs. Spike's face **twitched**, that was the only way to describe it, and Spike howled, and then Xander was the canvas.

Panting and gasping, they lay there cooling into a sticky mess, but Xander couldn't move. Didn't want to. And with the thought that Spike must surely have some sort of demonic hold on him, Xander finally fell asleep.

Part Eleven

Swimming up from a deep, dreamless sleep, Xander blinked and looked at the rough stone wall in front of him in complete confusion.

"Well, sleeping beauty awakes," Spike said in his snarkiest voice and Xander turned to look at him instead of the wall. And almost threw up. Not because it was Spike. But because moving made his stomach heave. It must have showed; Spike's expression turned from mocking to alarmed. "Oh, now. Don't go heaving your guts up on my bed."

"I don't feel good," Xander croaked.

"Really? I never would have guessed. By the way, any reason you can think of that Red would show up here looking for you?"

The abruptness of the question made his head spin worse, and Xander tried really hard to figure out what Spike meant. "Willow?"

"Yeah, pet. The witch stopped by a few hours back. Said you'd wandered off, and if I saw you to tell you to go by and talk to her."

Moving very carefully, Xander sat up. His stomach clenched, and he felt cold sweat break out all over him.

"So, what? You lied to her?"

"Hell, yes. You've been out almost twelve hours. Thought maybe I'd killed you, except you were still breathing. Didn't want her thinking I did something to you."

Dropping his aching head into his hands, Xander took a minute to wonder how that little man had gotten into his mouth and put that furry coat on his tongue. "You did." The best he could manage was vaguely accusing, when what he really wanted was to yell and yell.

"Well, yeah, but not the way you mean." Back to smug, now, the asshole.

"I think I'm going to be sick."

"No, you're not. Not here, anyway. Come on, get up and get your things on. Sun's down. I'll make sure you get home."

Xander peered at Spike through his fingers, suspicious.

"Why are you being nice to me?"

"You're a nice piece of ass," Spike answered with an exaggerated leer.

"Oh, God."

It was a near thing, but Xander didn't actually toss his cookies until he got back to his apartment. When he came out of the bathroom, Spike was still there, wandering around looking at things curiously. Ignoring him studiously, Xander headed straight for the kitchen and his remaining Chocolate Hurricanes. They sounded so good, and he knew they would make him feel better.

Eating one straight from the freezer, Xander popped a second into the microwave. Oh yeah, physical happiness and mental bliss. That only left him one bar, though, and that was really, really disappointing. By the time he was halfway through the second bar, he felt much better, and Spike was in the kitchen with him.

"So," Spike started. "Red?"

"Mrph?" Xander said around a mouthful of cocoa goodness, and Spike rolled his eyes.

"Why was she at my place, looking for you?"

Melted residue on his lips, and Xander licked it off, trying to ignore the way Spike's eyes followed the movement.

"Because I told her?"

"Told her what?"

"About the thing. Us, parts touching, stuff."

Spike narrowed his eyes, and his voice got very quiet, suddenly. "Oh? And what did you tell her? That I molested you? That I put something in your kibble?"

"No! I mean, I didn't tell her I thought you whammied me, which I do. I just told her there had to be something wrong, because I would never have done that with you, of all people if there wasn't. And she thought so too, so if I disappeared, your place was kinda logical."

Even more quiet now. And that stare actually had physical weight. "This mean I have to worry about another bout with the Slayer?"

"No! I mean, I told Willow not to tell Buffy. I just wanted Willow to help me figure out why..." Without Xander meaning it to, it came out plaintive, his confusion plain. Spike actually smiled at him.

"What's to question, pet? Felt good. You liked it. We were both a little tense, now we're not. It was a bit of fun, that's all."

A bit of fun. Yeah, just a bit. And now that Xander's body had nothing else to concentrate on it seemed intent on reminding him how good it had been. Because he was horny again. Spike's smile widened and shit, he knew!

Confused, miserable, Xander sat at the kitchen table and let his head clunk down in front of him. "Why do these things always have to happen to me?"

Part Twelve

"Just lucky, I guess. You know, pet, aside from the incipient breakdown you look like you're feeling better. Safe to leave you by yourself now?"

"Oh, please," Xander replied, only slightly muffled by the table pressed against his face. "Please, please do."

"Sure you wouldn't rather have another go?"

Xander lifted his head and fixed Spike with the vilest eye he could manage. "Out!"

Looking so happy with himself that Xander wanted to throttle him, if vamps could be throttled, Spike made for the door. "Well, be going then. Oh, and don't forget to look up the witch, luv. She was awfully worried about you."

Then he was gone. Thank goodness. Because if he'd stayed one more minute Xander probably would've decided to have another go. Why he suddenly thought Spike was sex on legs was beyond him, like he'd said before it had to be some kind of whammy. But he was starting to get the idea that it wasn't Spike's doing. Yeah, the jerk was really, really smug about the whole touchy feely thing, but...

But, well, Spike had a tendency to brag. If one of his plans was working, anyway. By now he would have been laughing his ass off and running off to tell the others all about it instead of lying to Willow about Xander being at his place and making sure Xander got safely home. Could be wrong, but Xander didn't think so. If this was really one of Spike's nefarious plans, when Willow had showed up he would have invited her in and showed her Xander's naked self sleeping in Spike's bed and said, "See that mark right there? I did that. The bruises on his hips too."

Okay, and it was about then that Xander realized he was fingering the livid purple bruise on his neck and breathing a little more heavily. "Gah!" No, no. No. Xander got up and threw away a bunch of chocolate wrappers that had missed the trash can, then looked at the clock.

Not quite nine pm. Willow was probably frantic. Check status of stomach. Tolerable. Time to go find Willow and apologize and see if she'd found anything.

Willow was at home. Which meant Xander had to brave not only her, but Buffy and Dawn too. The look on Willow's face was pure relief, which made his guilt at least five times worse. But Dawn and Buffy were cluelessly cheerful, so he knew Willow had kept her promise and not told them. Small favors, indeed.

After a half hour of small talk that he would later have no memory of, Xander and Willow escaped. And the first thing Willow did was yell at him, except that she couldn't really yell, so she just got really frowny and intense.

"Where have you been? I was so worried about you. I even went by Spike's and you weren't there, but he looked like he knew something he wasn't telling me and Xander you have a hickey!"

"Spike lied."

"What?"

Well, now that he'd blurted that out he had to continue, didn't he? Xander sighed. "I was at his place when you came by. We, um, we did that thing again. That bad

touching thing. And I sort of passed out on him. He thought I was in a coma or something. So he lied."

Distantly, Xander thought he was very glad that Willow wasn't angry at him. Because she was angry. Her eyes got really cold, and she got red spots in her cheeks he could swear she was creating enough static to make her hair crackle.

"Ooh! I'm going to hurt him for this. He's done something to you Xander. That's the only explanation. And I always believe him, and what an idiot I am. I'm going now. I'll beat it out of him with a tombstone."

"Whoa, Wills." Xander caught her by the arm as she charged past him. "I don't think it was Spike. Or, I mean, the hickey was Spike, and he did lie to you and he has done **that** with me twice, but I don't think he's the actual cause of it, if that makes any more sense to you than it does me?"

"It doesn't. How can you say that? I'm going to hurt him."

"Will, if it was him, when you came to ask about me what would he have done?"

Her face fell immediately. "Laughed about it and rubbed our noses in it?"

"I'm thinking. So what it seems like to me is that Spike is just along for the ride. Someone else has it in for me, and Spike is just taking advantage of the situation. As long as it poses no risk for him. Which it doesn't. Because I'm defending him, and can you believe I just did that?"

"It does seem un-Xanderlike."

"Yeah. So tell me what you found out."

Part Thirteen

"Nothing, really. I mean nothing helpful. Except, ooh, remember Mr. Lymon?"

"The one Giles swore survived at least ten or twenty vamp attacks because he ate so much garlic? The guy that's like, ninety?"

"Was ninety. He died yesterday, had a heart attack after he decided to train for a marathon." Nodding, Willow sat back all serious, like that really meant something. "What does that have to do with me?"

"Well, it doesn't, I guess. But isn't that odd?"

"This is Sunnydale, Wills. It's always odd."

They sat in silence for a while, Willow as depressed as Xander to judge by her expression. Then Xander's stomach growled. Willow brightened. "When was the last time you ate?"

Shuddering, Xander shook his head. "I don't know. Denny's, I guess."

"Xander, that's bad. You should eat. Come on, I'll make you a grilled cheese or something."

No sense in arguing with Willow when she got all mission woman on him, so even though his gut was roiling at just the thought of food, Xander dutifully followed her downstairs. Buffy and Dawn were still propped up on the couch watching a movie, and they looked up at him.

"Everything okay?" Buffy asked, and Willow nodded.

"Xander needs to eat. Going to make him some food. You two want anything?"

"Nah. We're good. Dawn?"

"We're good," Dawn repeated, and Xander managed a weak smile before escaping to the kitchen. He sat at the

table while Willow poured him some orange juice and started assembling the makings of a grilled cheese. Staring at the orange juice made his throat close up and he pushed it away.

"I'm really not hungry. Maybe we should ask Buffy if she's heard anything. We could use Mr. Lymon as an example instead of me. Then we wouldn't be lying to her, and she could help us."

"Good idea. Here, you finish cooking this and I'll go get her."

Once Willow was out of sight, Xander took the almost cooked sandwich and the orange juice and threw them into the trashcan outside the back door. Just the thought of eating made him queasy as heck, but he didn't want to hurt Willow's feelings. Slightly raised voices sounded in the living room, and Xander sighed, having the feeling that Dawn wasn't happy about the interrupted movie. He should have thought of that, but he was feeling kinda out of it.

"Sorry, Buff," he offered when she and Willow came back into the kitchen, and she just smiled at him.

"Hey, Slayage has to be done, right? So what's this about oddness?"

It only took a few minutes for Willow to explain, and Buffy mulled it over thoughtfully. "I haven't heard anything weird. And who knows about ninety year old men and marathons. But I'll check it out. Anything else apocalyptic?"

"Xander's not hungry."

"Whoa. Serious situation." Buffy slanted a grin at him, and it was nice enough to see her smile that Xander didn't reply with more than a "heh, heh."

"Speaking of which, did you eat that sandwich?"

Oh, he hated fibbing to Willow. But Xander did it without batting an eye. "Yes, mommy."

"Good. You should go home. Get some sleep."

"Yeah, I guess I should. You'll call if you hear anything, right?"

"Of course." The girls said it in chorus, and he laughed.

"See you later then."

Part Fourteen

Halfway home, Xander realized he wasn't going home. His feet were acting out of their own volition and taking him to Spike's crypt. Shaking himself briskly, Xander turned toward his apartment. How stupid would he have to be to go there again? And why did he want to so badly?

Well, he wasn't going to. So there, demon forces of doom. No, he was going to go home and eat something, and maybe put on some of that porn, the girly stuff, and jack off until his hand was raw. Because that was obviously the only way he was going to get his mind off Spike, where it kept turning like a compass pointing north. Okay, he had to think. Who hated him enough to put a spell on him that would make him lust after Spike?

Anya? Maybe. Not that she hated him, not really. But she might do it. Cordy was out. She was earth mother these days, not revenge girl. At least from what he heard. He hadn't actually heard from her, not in a long time. He didn't think it was Spike, even though Spike seemed to be getting the better end of the deal. So to speak. And Willow might do some odd things, but this was beyond

odd, and if she was doing spells again and she did mess up she would tell him. She was compulsively twelve-step that way lately.

A quick check of his surroundings proved that he was indeed almost home. Go me, he thought. Look, I can resist my baser urgings, even when they're magically enhanced. Or at least he figured they had to be magically enhanced, because otherwise he was going bonkers. So what if it wasn't aimed at him? What if it was aimed at Spike? Someone like Dru could easily do this. Why, though? Would it humiliate Spike? Endanger him? Not really. It all made his head hurt.

Home at last. Xander trudged up the stairs and decided to forgo the porn in favor of his last remaining Chocolate Hurricane and a hot bath. Which was a really good plan except that Spike was sitting on his couch, booted feet propped up on his coffee table, watching his TV.

"What are you doing here?" He tried not to let it come out all swoony gothic heroine, but it did anyway.

"Watching the telly. What does it look like?"

Good air in. Bad air out. "No Spike. What are you doing here? In my apartment? Now?"

"Oh that. Well, I was waiting for you to get home wasn't I? Got to thinking you might be home soon; figured you'd be ready for a little more push and pull."

"That's it. I'm going to kill you now."

Spike grinned, that infuriating grin that Xander hated so much that it made his cock throb. Oh, pathetic had a new name. Because Xander wanted him. Spike was sitting there in his t-shirt and jeans, feet spread apart on the table and knees bent just so, and Xander wanted him so bad it made him sweat.

"Come and get me, pet."

The pull was too strong to resist, so he went. "Why?" he whispered just before Spike kissed him, but he never got an answer beyond the feel of Spike's lips under his and the touch of Spike's hands on his body. Touches that catalogued the softness of his hair and the tense muscles in his arms, and oh it all felt so good. Even better when somewhere between the couch and the bed Spike pushed him up against the wall and sank to his knees and put his mouth on Xander's cock. At that very moment he was grateful for whatever magic had brought him this, and Xander knew he really was lost.

Discovering the taste of himself on Spike's lips led to pushing Spike down on the bed and tasting him, inexpert and clumsy and the taste was different. More metallic to Xander's salt. Some little part of his brain thought it was perfectly normal that a vampire's come should taste more like blood than anything else. Never had he ever thought he would put his mouth on another man in any way, let alone this way, but he did, and he liked it. Liked hearing Spike moan, and feeling Spike's hands in his hair and on his shoulders, liked the way the mattress shook when Spike's heels drummed against it. The air was hot, so hot and Spike was feeling it too, because his skin was just as warm and that was weird, but it didn't matter. All it did was make them melt, and run together, and there was nowhere else Xander could think of being that would feel like this. Urgent little noises came from both of them, and they were rough, guy sounds and somehow that was right, like it was supposed to be that way, and Spike pulled Xander up for another kiss with that strength that just blew him away because he felt like a child against it. But he wasn't scared.

Except for the fear that if this was a spell it would all go away as soon as they found out who was behind it. So Xander put that away in the not to think of it box and rode out the feeling of Spike's hands clenching on hips

and his legs rubbing against Spike's and the spine-wrenching pleasure of his orgasm. After which he promptly fell asleep, and thinking became a non-issue.

Part Fifteen

"Wake up, pet. C'mon. Wake up." That was Spike's voice. Why was Spike being so mean? And why was he trying to pull Xander's insides out through his belly button? Curling around the horrible cramp in his stomach, Xander let out a piteous moan. His head throbbed and he was really cold and he shook with every gasping breath. "Xander!" Spike's voice was very sharp. "You've got to wake up and tell me what's wrong."

That made him crack one eye open and look. Spike was a little blurry, but there he was. And he was naked. Nice Spike. Pretty Spike. But he couldn't appreciate it with his teeth chattering like that. And Spike kinda looked worried. What did Spike want? Oh yeah. Tell Spike what was wrong.

"Chocolate," Xander whimpered.

"What? You ate some bad chocolate?"

Shaking his head really hurt, and made him heave, but he didn't actually throw up. Not that Spike hadn't seen him do that before. That would probably disturb him greatly when he snapped out of this. "Chocolate. Freezer. Please?"

Looking dubious Spike hied off to the kitchen and was back a minute later with his last Chocolate Hurricane. "You mean this, luv? It's the only chocolate in the freezer."

Undignified as it was, Xander lunged for the chocolate, actually salivating. Bemused, Spike sat back on his heels and watched Xander tear the wrapper off and swallow two bites without even chewing. As soon as the first bit went down, Xander began to feel better, and between gulps of sanity giving milk-chocolate happiness he sighed with relief. Gradually, he stopped shaking, and the sweat started evaporating, and he could look at Spike again without seeing three of him.

The one Spike he could see now, however, was frowning at him. "You know, I always knew you had a bit of a sweet tooth. But that was a little much."

"Waa dis?" Xander asked around a mouthful of creamy yumminess. He swallowed. "This is nothing. Really. I just haven't been feeling good. But the chocolate makes it better."

"And you don't find that even a tad odd?" Picking up the wrapper, Spike sniffed delicately at it. "Doesn't smell like it's gone off, or like it's drugged." Turning the paper over, Spike frowned again, more deeply. "Haven't seen one of these in a good fifteen years."

Ah, blessedly calm stomach. "Yeah. I hadn't had one in years either. But the date on the label says it's good until September." Not quite sure why Spike was making such a big deal out of his Hurricane, Xander swung his legs over the side of the bed. "Move it bleachboy. I gotta go."

Boy, could Spike move fast when threatened with bodily functions. He'd have to remember that. Really, Xander just wanted to go to the bathroom to clean his mouth out and scrub down a little. He splashed some water on his face at looked in the mirror and was amazed at the haggard face that looked back at him. Wow. Looked like he hadn't eaten or slept in days. Okay, he hadn't eaten. But he'd slept for like twelve hours straight. And that was only the one time. He wondered what time it was now.

Man, did he feel better. Bouncing a little with each step, Xander went back out into the bedroom. There was Spike, still staring at the candy wrapper. Still naked.

"Spike?"

"Mmm?"

"Would you put something on please?"

Looking up finally, Spike smirked. "How about you?"

"No! Clothes. Put on your clothes. Hell, put on mine so Willow can think you're cute. Just wear something."

"You know, pet, I could get insulted here. We do it, you pass out. You wake up sick. Then you get skittish like. Good thing it's hard to hurt my feelings." While Xander was still blinking from that, Spike gestured at the Hurricane wrapper. "So where'd you get the chocolate?"

Part Sixteen

"In the mail."

"Yeah? Who from?"

"Someone who has really good taste in chocolate." Xander frowned. "Why are you suddenly so snooty about my chocolate?"

"Oh I don't know. Maybe because it's the only thing you eat lately, and when you do it seems to make you feel **really** good. Not that I'm complaining, mind, because makes you a horny little bugger too."

Crap, what a time to realize that Spike was not the only one who wasn't dressed. Casting about for his clothes, Xander scoffed. "No harm ever came from eating chocolate."

Spike stood abruptly, and he jiggled in the most fascinating way. So not good. Well, definitely good, but bad. Xander backed up. Spike advanced. "All I'm saying, pet, is that maybe you should look for someone to get you where you're weakest." As if to prove his point, Spike reached out and cupped Xander's nearly erect cock in his hand. The effect was electric; Xander felt it all the way to the ends of his hair. With an Eliza Doolittle squeal, Xander backed away.

"No! No, no, no. It's not the chocolate. It's you. If you would just stop doing things like that."

"But the chocolate is your weakest point. You eat like there's no tomorrow."

"Stop it. It's your fault. If you weren't so, and I didn't like it so much, and damn it, leave my one source of

happiness out of this. And what time is it? Shit! I have to go to work."

Resolute, Xander turned his back on Spike and bent over to grab his pants off the floor. And froze when Spike moved up behind him and rubbed against his ass. "No need to. Told them you were still sick when they called, didn't I? Terrible thing that stomach flu."

The feel of Spike's hand on his hips, guiding their motions as they slid against each other was excruciating. "I am not going to lose my job for you, you jerk."

"Of course not. Oh, just like that, pet."

"Unh." That little strip of skin had a name, Xander knew, but at this point long ago biology lessons were far, far away. His legs gave out at the feel of Spike's cock rubbing there, and he went down, suddenly on all fours on the carpet, and wasn't this just too suggestive a position? Obviously, Spike thought so too, because he groaned and dropped to the floor behind Xander, crowding up behind him and draping himself over Xander's back.

"Wish I could fuck you, pet. Really, really wish I could."

Thinking was impossible. It had to be, because if he was thinking he would never blurt out, "Why can't you?"

He felt more than heard Spike's chuckle. Along with Spike's fingers on his nipples and Spike's pelvis against his butt and Spike was so light, really, and where did he hide all of that strength? "It'd hurt. Even if I was careful, which I wouldn't be. Want it too bad. I'd nail you to the floor."

"Oh." It came out in the barest whimper, because three-D image there, with surround sound, and oh God. Without any conscious effort, Xander's back arched and he pushed his ass back into Spike and his dick was so hard he thought it might just explode. "Oh."

"Yeah." Spike touched him everywhere. His chest, belly, thighs. One hand reached around and grabbed Xander's cock, the other slid into the crease of his ass from behind and rubbed at his opening. Even Anya had never touched him there. Thrilled as much as he was shocked, Xander rocked back and forth into the dual touches and listened to Spike's murmured words. "Yeah, I'd take you just like this, or maybe on your back with your pretty legs over my shoulders and I'd be inside you, stretching you and it would hurt so good, luv." One long finger slid a little way inside, barely there, and it was so alien and strange and the friction was completely different. But it felt good.

Then the world tilted and spun and suddenly Xander was on his back, staring up at Spike, stunned at the speed

with which he moved. "Sad thing is," Spike said, pumping Xander's cock, "the chip doesn't know the difference. So I'll just have to find a different way to take you."

A little afraid now, thank you, because what did that mean?

"Got anything slick?"

"Just l-lotion."

In the time it took Spike to get the lotion, Xander started feeling self-conscious. And uncomfortable. And Spike was back now and just look at him. Smooth muscle flowing under baby fine skin. Cool lotion touched his burning cock and Xander jumped, gasping and Spike soothed him, while at the same time Spike's smile wasn't soothing. It was greedy and hot and big bad wolf, and then Spike was reaching behind him and Xander watched him oil himself with the lotion and it dawned on him what was about to happen. What was left of his brain ran away screaming in panic, but the rest of his body tightened in anticipation and his hips rolled up and when Spike straddled Xander's body all he could do was pant encouraging words.

Slow, tight glide into Spike's body like, by damn he belonged there, and that had to hurt but Spike was just grunting and moaning and pushing ever further. Down

until his ass was flush against Xander's body, until Xander thought the pressure of it might just break him in places he didn't even want to contemplate. Then the large muscles in Spike's thighs tightened, and he moved. And conscious thought went right out the window along with concern for Spike's comfort. The hollows of Spike's hips were perfect for his hands and he gripped tight and pulled and urged Spike on.

Cursing, rising and falling rapidly, Spike rode him. Spike. On him. And oh, oh yeah, Spike was fisting his own cock now and that was maybe the most erotic thing Xander had ever seen. Considering the week he'd had, that was saying a lot, wasn't it, and Spike was a tight arch of pleasure above him and Spike's seed spurted out to land on his chest and Xander was just gone. Flying. Yelling like a maniac. And his brain shorted out about the time his orgasm finished and he thought he heard Spike say, "Well shit," just as he slid into unconsciousness.

Part Seventeen

Spike was still talking when Xander woke up. Well, sort of woke up. More like drifted, because ugh, sick and cold and shivering and... ugh. And the little Discovery channel voice in Xander's head (which sounded disturbingly like Giles) said, "And here we have one of the many disadvantages of sleeping with a vampire. They produce no body heat. So when the sleeper is dying from hypothermia, they can be of no assistance."

So, yeah, chattering teeth and shaking limbs made it really hard to concentrate on what Spike was saying. But he felt distinctly that this time Spike wasn't talking to him. In fact, if he wasn't completely gone, it sounded like Spike was talking on the phone.

"No, I think you'd better come over and see for yourself. Passed right out on me about nine this morning and he's been out of it ever since. Started to wake up about a half hour ago, and he's been taking on something fierce. Mm hmm. No, I didn't. Look, could you just... right. See you soon."

A click that sounded distinctly different than his own clacking teeth came to him, and Xander surmised that Spike had hung up with, well, whoever it was. He really, really needed to throw up. Spike would help him with that, wouldn't he? He had before. The only noise Xander

could manage to produce was a little moan, but Spike heard him because cool hands touched his forehead, and how could the rest of his body be subzero when his face was Mr. Heat Miser? His body heaved, and Spike made a noise that sounded like "eww" and his head was over a trash can and yes that was much better with nothing in his stomach.

"What was that, pet?"

Oh, he must have said something. What was it? Oh, yeah. "Who did you call?" he asked, and was appalled at the sound of his own voice. He croaked.

"Your little witch friend, the redhead. You said she already knew about us anyway, so figured she was our best bet."

"Us?" Now that was a scary, scary thing. Possibly scarier than bug people and tribes of jealous women with axes. Him and Spike. An us. But it could be accurate, considering that he was laying there post barf with his head on Spike's thigh and Spike's fingers running soothingly through his hair.

"She should be here in a bit. We'll fix you, love. Promise."

How could they fix him when no one knew what was wrong? Imagine Spike blaming it on his chocolate.

Chocolate good. He wished he had some now. Chocolate would make everything better, but he was out, he knew he was, and Spike wouldn't get him any more, because Spike thought the chocolate was hurting him He could almost cry. Maybe Willow would get him some more chocolate.

"What is it? You need to upchuck again?"

Only then did Xander realize that he was actually crying, but only because it hurt so much. Tears mixed with sweat and his mouth tasted foul and why did these things always happen to him? Okay, okay, he'd never been dead, like Buffy. Or a demon, like Anya. And he'd never been courted by a cyber demon or turned into a rat or... so maybe things happened to everyone in Sunnydale. But Xander thought maybe more of them happened to him.

And Spike was waiting for an answer. Xander shook his head, which made it spin fast, look at all the colors. "No. Want chocolate."

"Oh, Hell no. Don't even think about it. Besides, you haven't got anymore, have you? If you think you're up to something, I'll get you some broth."

Well, look at that. He did have to puke again. Gee, thanks Spike. The pounding in his head got worse. And much

louder too. It wasn't until Spike gently lowered his head to the bed that he realized someone was actually pounding on the door.

"Took you long enough." Spike's voice again, but far away, way over there next to the door. Then Willow's voice.

"I came as fast as I could. Oh, he looks awful. What did you do to him?"

"Not a bloody thing. He's done this to me before, though. Fell asleep then woke up with the heaves."

"And you said he slept for twelve hours?"

"More like unconscious."

Raising his head took all of the strength he had, but he tried, because Willow sounded really worried. The movement set off a chain reaction of tremors that would make Acme Earthquake pills proud, and sheets Spike had wrapped around him slipped off.

"Spike! He's naked. Why is he naked?"

"Well that was how he was when he passed out, wasn't it? I wrapped him up so he wouldn't be cold, didn't I?"

A whimper from Xander stopped their arguing, and they both turned back toward him. Spike pulled the coverlet back around Xander, and Willow tucked his feet in.

"Xander? Do you know what you ate? This can't still be Denny's."

"Hold on. He was sick with you before?"

"Yesterday morning. After he ate at Denny's. I thought maybe it was bad food. Or maybe nerves. You know, because he and you, and well, I didn't think much of it. But he didn't eat all day, until I made him eat a grilled cheese."

"He ate chocolate." Oh, chocolate. Just the mention of the word made Xander squirm hopefully. He missed chocolate. it would make everything better, couldn't they see that?

"Will? Chocolate? Please?"

Part Eighteen

"Xander, you can't have chocolate when you're this sick. You're all dehydrated. We need to get you some fluids and stuff."

"No. Chocolate." Xander was resolute. If he couldn't get them to give him chocolate, he would crawl to the store and get some himself. Time to get out of bed. Except he couldn't get up. So, okay, he'd roll. Just as the edge of the bed and a hard landing on the floor seemed imminent, Spike caught him.

"Whoa, pet. Don't go wandering off."

"Why is he so determined to get chocolate?"

"S'what I've been trying to tell you." Heh. Spike sounded really frustrated with Willow. It was kind of nice to hear him snark at someone else for a change. "He got some dodgy chocolate in the mail. Chocolate Hurricanes as a matter of fact, and that's all he wants to eat. Last time this happened it made him feel better."

"That's just weird."

"What is it you kids say? Well, duh."

Xander reached out and poked Spike in the leg. Well, he tried to, but he was so weak it came out more like a tiny love tap. "You want something pet?"

"Mm hmm. Chocolate. Be nice to Willow."

"So you think someone sent him poisoned chocolate in the mail?"

"No. It's not poisoned. I'd smell it. But I think it may be witched."

No. No way were his Hurricanes causing this. Cracking open one eye, Xander focused all of his ire on Spike in a nasty glare. Which went completely unnoticed.

"Well it wasn't me! I wouldn't do this."

"Never said it was. But it bears looking into, don't you think?"

"Yes. Of course. It's just everyone thinks if there's magic, and it's bad, that it's me. And it's not. Me, I mean. Oh, this is bad. He's really sick."

And he was. Heaving again, here, but nothing left to come out, just dry spasms of his stomach. Cool hands, Spike hands, brushed his hair off his forehead and settled him back on the bed when he finished.

"Yeah, he really is. If he had any more of the stuff, I'd feed it to him, just until we found out what was wrong. He's much healthier on it than off."

They were quiet for long minutes, both Willow and Spike thinking hard. The only sound Xander heard was his own harsh breathing. Then Spike spoke up again.

"Pet? Can you answer me a question?"

"Umm hmm."

"When was the last time you checked your mail?"

"Three." Xander hoped Spike knew that meant three days. He couldn't get his tongue to work, really, and it was kinda scary. His whole body really hurt and his head was just going to explode any minute.

"Right. Three days. Where are his keys? I'm going to check the ruddy mail."

"Oh, good idea. Maybe there's more. And if there is, I can you know, examine it. With science."

"Be right back." Leaving. Spike was leaving. Xander protested. At least he tried to. Oh that was just pathetic. Little hurty noises escaped him and he edged toward the side of the bed, and that was the best protest he could manage. "Said I'd be right back, and I will, pet. Don't worry. Try to get some water in him."

"Okay." Yep, Spike left him. Asshole. And Willow left too, but she was back soon, with a sport bottle full of water.

"Come on, Xand. Try to drink some water for me?"

Scared Willow. Xander heard it in her voice. That was of the bad, him scaring Willow, so he tried really hard to drink the water. He got two sips down his raw throat before his stomach rebelled.

"Oh, Xander this is bad. Very, very bad."

"M'sorry."

"No. It isn't your fault. This is someone playing a nasty trick. We'll find them. I promise."

"Paydirt." It was Spike. He was back. Fighting his reluctant eyelids, Xander looked to see what he was so happy about. A package. Small and brown with stamps on it. Familiar looking. Xander whimpered.

"Please?"

"Hold on, luv. I'm getting there." The sound of ripping cardboard and packing tape was very loud, and Xander could practically smell the chocolate.

"Spike! We can't give him that. What if it's really bad for him?"

"Oh, yeah, and shivering withdrawal with a side of the heaves is good for him? Here pet, I've got your chocolate right here." Oh, good Spike. Nice Spike. Chocolate right under his nose, and Xander snapped at it, like a rabid dog. The chocolate came with him when he pulled his head back to chew, and he guessed that Spike was afraid he'd draw back a bloody nub if he didn't let go. That was okay. Not a Hurricane, but something he hadn't had in almost as long. His second favorite childhood candy bar, a Caramel Tornado bar. Oh, yum.

Holding out his hands for another bar, Xander practically growled at Spike, who laughed and put another unwrapped chocolate in his hands. Scarfed it down too, and within minutes, Xander felt almost human again. He sat up on the edge of the bed and arranged the covers around him carefully.

"Thanks, Spike."

"No problem, pet."

Wills?"

"Yeah?"

"Make sure you take one of those chocolate bars with you when you go, so you can test it. If you leave it here, I'll eat it."

Nodding, Willow smiled at him. "Are you willing to believe it's the chocolate now?"

"Looks like I don't have much of a choice."

Part Nineteen

"Glad to see you're facing up to it, pet."

"Are you? Because if the chocolate goes away..." Xander trailed off, leaving the rest unsaid. Spike smirked at him.

"Oh, I don't know. That might be the original reason, luv, but do you really think you could give it up?"

"I don't mean to interrupt, but well, okay I do." They both looked at Willow. "But you seem a lot more normal now, Xand. Thanks to the chocolate. How long will this last? And you only have six bars left. We need to find a way to fix this before you run out again. Next time there might not be another box in the mail."

That was a nasty thought. But possible. Glancing at Spike out of the corner of his eye, Xander saw the he was frowning too. "It lasts for a while as long as I don't, um, exert myself. Maybe five or six hours? Maybe more. I'm not sure. It makes me really energetic."

"Yeah. Real energetic."

"Shut up, Spike."

Brow furrowed with deep thoughts, Willow pondered. Her pondering look was really cute; he'd always thought so. In a non-sexual way. Which kinda made him a little panicky. If the chocolate made him generally horny (and he still had to fight his endorphin-happy brain to believe it was his beloved chocolate doing this) then shouldn't he be jumping Willow too? Or rather, even more than Spike? But he looked at Willow and saw best friend. He looked at Spike and boing! Instant embarrassing tent in bedcovers. Xander shifted a bit to hide it, and Spike bared his teeth in a feral smile.

"Maybe Little Red here should go talk to Buffy. Slayer needs to know about this. And you don't need to be out amongst 'em, just in case you go loopy." Turning to Willow, Spike nodded seriously. "I'll stay here with him. Make sure he's no danger to himself or anyone else."

Eyes big, Willow looked from Spike to Xander and back again. "Ooh, do you think he might be dangerous? That would be bad. I definitely need to talk to Buffy then. Maybe she's heard something about other weirdness too. And I can take a bar with me, and test it, like Xander said."

"Good idea. You just run on ahead. I'll stay here and protect the boy."

"Right. You'll be okay, right Xand?"

Oh, sure, he wanted to say. Just leave me here with the unbelievably sexy vamp. "Yeah. I'll be fine. Just hurry up and figure it out, 'kay? I'm counting on you guys. Spike and I will stay here and," and here Spike snorted. Shooting him a dark look, Xander ploughed on. "And comb the newspaper for weirdness happenings. Research, and all."

"Okay, I'll go talk to Buffy, and find out. Things. To help you." Bouncing over, Willow hugged him suddenly. Over her shoulder, he saw Spike's lips draw back in a silent snarl. Xander goggled. And gently pushed Willow away.

"Sure, Wills. I know I can depend on you."

"It's nice to hear you say that again. I was afraid you never would."

She sounded so sad, and it made Xander sad too, to think how far they had grown apart in the last few years. "I always knew, Wills," he said gently. "Even when I seemed worried. It's just, like you don't really trust me now, because I'm under the influence, so to speak. It wasn't you we didn't believe in. It was the magic."

"It was still hard." Shaking off the mood, Willow got determined girl look. "Okay, I'll be back as soon as we have something. If things go bad between now and then you'll call right?"

"Right."

Fixing Spike with a deadly look, Willow repeated, "Right?"

"Called you the first time, now didn't I?"

"Yes, you did. Okay, I'll be back." And then Willow was gone. Leaving him with Spike. Who stared at him like a hungry lion stares at a big juicy steak.

"My, my pet. What will we do to amuse ourselves while we wait?"

Part Twenty

"You going to try to convince me you don't want to, pet?"

"No." Shaking his head, Xander got to his feet and extricated himself from the sheets. "I'm not going to tell you that. Because you'd know better. But I'm not going to do it. Whether I want to or not. What I am going to do is take a shower. And brush my teeth. And you are going to start going through the last couple of days of newspapers. Got it?"

Said quietly, with none of the manic energy that characterized their interactions lately, it seemed to get through to Spike. He gave Xander a long, measuring look, then nodded. "All right. We'll play it your way. Go on, have your shower."

"Thanks."

The thanks were as sincere as everything else had been. Xander knew very well that Spike could have pushed the issue. He wanted Spike badly. And it showed, since he was kinda uncovered. One little push, and it would tip

the balance. And no offense to Spike, but Xander had expected him to push.

Escaping to the bathroom, Xander took a long, hot shower. He washed away the sickly sweat and grime and other, less mentionable bodily fluids, and scrubbed his hair until he was sure his scalp was red. Much better. Then he brushed his teeth. And shaved, which he needed pretty bad. Refreshed, he headed back into the bedroom to get some clothes.

And Spike was there. Sprawled on the bed, naked, reading the morning paper. Drooling would be bad, because he just got clean. Jumping Spike would be bad, because he would just crash, and he only had so much chocolate. Squeaking maybe? Squeaking was good.

"Spike?" And look, it really did come out as a squeak.

"Could you not be naked? Sorta makes my resolve not to touch you difficult to maintain."

"Hmm? Oh, sorry. Waiting for the shower, you know?"
Slow, predatory movements as Spike uncoiled from the bed and came to him. "You leave any hot water?"

"Yes? I mean, yes. I think so. Maybe. What are you doing?"

Sniffing him was what Spike was doing, leaning in and taking a long, leisurely nuzzle at his neck. His everything stood at attention and took notice. Then Spike latched onto Xander's throat and sucked hard, bringing up a bruise, and Xander moaned and swayed closer to him. "Just checking to make sure you got good and clean, pet. Here, you read the paper. I'll bathe."

Shaking now, damn him, and Xander went and sat on the bed, staring sightlessly at the newspaper. When he could almost think again, Xander realized that the sheets were different. And the trash can by the bed was empty. Spike was taking care of him. And wasn't that a scary thought? Because the only person he could remember Spike taking care of before was Dru. Well, and maybe Dawn. But not the same way.

And why was Spike doing all this anyway? It wasn't like he was the one eating the chocolate. He wasn't being magically impelled to do all this. Thinking like that wasn't getting anything done, though, and it wasn't helping with his little below the waist problem either, because scary as it was it was also kind of warm and gooshy and, okay... clothes. Must put on clothes.

Sliding into a pair of sweat pants, Xander moved from the bedroom to the living room. That might help with the

bed plus Spike equals hard-on equation. Maybe. Then he started concentrating on the papers, desperately hoping he'd find something and that it would capture his interest long enough for him to forget that there was a wet, naked Spike in his bathroom.

By the time Spike got out of the shower, Xander really was engrossed in the local news. Mr. Lymon wasn't the only person recently to kick off under odd circumstances. And only in Sunnydale would any death except exsanguination be considered odd. So, Mr. Lymon and his heart attack from marathon training. A fifteen year old boy that tried to fly and broke his neck jumping off his house. A middle aged housewife who crashed her car doing ninety in the elementary school parking lot at midnight. And a twenty something guy who was found partially eaten in the lion cage at the zoo, along with a chair and whip. Weird.

A shrill noise at his elbow made Xander jump a good foot in the air. The phone, he told his pounding heart, just the phone. "Hello?"

"Xander?"

"No, it's Bob. Of course it's me, Will. What's up?"

"Who's Bob? Anyway, Buffy isn't home yet. So I can't tell her. But I tested your candy bar. I only used a really small piece in case you need it, you know, if we can't get you fixed before you go into withdrawal."

"That's very kind of you, Wills. Anything?"

"No. Nothing but chocolate. And stuff, like preservatives stuff. No weirdness at all. I thought even if it wasn't drugged that maybe it had some kind of weird spore, or maybe spawn or something."

"Stomach doing flips now, thanks."

"Oh! Sorry. But I thought maybe it was more like implanted demony than charmed. Maybe. Except that it wasn't. So as much as I hate to admit it, I think Spike was right. Nothing **in** the chocolate. So it has to be a spell **on** the chocolate."

Conjured by Willow's mention of him, Spike came out of the bathroom just as she finished her sentence. Which was good, that she was finished he meant, because otherwise Xander would have lost track of her completely. Vampire skin. Shining with little drops of water. Completely bare, from the almost delicate looking neck to the surprisingly attractive feet. Yep. That meant everything in between was bare too. Like shoulders,

strong and square. Or like the chest, with its pale nipples, cutting away into a ridged belly that made Xander want to lick it. Hips and thighs and knees, oh my, and Spike was oblivious, apparently, drying his hair with Xander's favorite towel.

"Xand? Are you there?"

"Unhhh?"

"I said Buffy should be here soon. Have you found anything in the newspaper?"

"Newspaper?" Think, Xander, think. "Oh. Oh yeah. Lots of weird stuff. Like people are suddenly deciding to try extreme sports, the domestic edition."

"Like what?"

Xander explained, or was pretty sure he did anyway, but his attention was firmly fixed on Spike. Because Spike had turned his back now, and walked back to the bathroom to throw the towel on the floor there. The flex and release of the muscles in Spike's back and ass fascinated him. Mesmerizing. Willow talked for awhile after he finished, so he figured she was suitably impressed with him as research man, but he really had no idea what she was saying.

He just kept saying, "uh huh," and watching Spike and it was killing him, this utterly painful need. Spike turned around, and for a moment the most serious, dangerous expression crossed his face. Then he looked pointedly at Xander's crotch and grinned. And why wouldn't he? Xander looked down himself and there was his hand, rubbing at his cock through the soft fleece of his pants. Bad hand. Maybe his cock and Spike's were magically connected or something too, because Spike's began to fill and rise and gah.

"Xander?"

"What!"

"Are you okay? You've been really quiet. You're not sick again are you?"

"No. Not sick." Unless you counted sick in the head. Because, still Spike over there, not someone he should be this crazed over, right? Over there quickly became over here as Spike did that slinky hip walk thing across the room and sat down next to him on the couch. No preliminaries, and no gloating. Just Spike's lips and teeth attacking the skin beneath the ear that didn't have the phone attached to it, and Spike's hand pushing his aside and massaging his aching cock. Every bit of breath in his

body went out with an explosive whoosh, and Xander fought to get more of that maddening touch.

"Are you sure? You sound kind groany."

"Nope. Not groiny. Groany! Not. Really."

"Okay. Oh, Buffy's here. Hold on while I fill her in, 'kay?"

"Okay." It came out really weak, but Willow didn't seem to notice. He heard her set the phone down, heard the murmur of voices in the background, but couldn't concentrate on them. Not with Spike pinching his nipples and sucking that same spot on his neck that he'd bruised before. "Stop it, Spike."

A punishing nip just under his jaw. "No." And he raised his hips as Spike pulled off his pants and Spike slid off the couch to kneel between his legs on the floor. It would be bad if he came right then, just from looking. But Spike, on his knees, naked, holding Xander's cock loosely in his hand. Bad. Yes, because if he did that Spike would have no reason to do what he was doing now, which was put his mouth right there, and suck. Gently at first, then harder when Xander squirmed and gasped. Mouth and hand met on Xander's throbbing flesh, up and down, and how did Spike know how to do all of that stuff, anyway?

Desperately keeping one little part of his mind detached to listen for Willow, Xander let the rest of his brain go, and off it went, rabbit-rabbit into Spike! Sucking me! Pulling back suddenly and putting his hands under Xander's knees and giving a good yank, and Xander was balanced precariously now, just the small of his back on the couch. The rest of his weight rested on Spike's upper arms, where his thighs draped over them. That little strip of skin again, the one he could almost remember the name for (perennial? peregrine?) was brought to his attention again, this time because Spike was licking it. Licking it. Broad rough sweeps of a sandpaper tongue, and little lightening bolts went off in Xander's ass, and that was crude but that's how it felt.

Then lower. Spike's tongue was lower, in places that tongues should probably never go, but it felt too good to argue. Circling and circling, then pressing in and Xander wailed as his whole body shook but he wasn't quite done, and neither was Spike. Spike leaned his weight into Xander's legs and Xander felt the strain in his thighs as they spread even further and he had a free hand didn't he? Yes, he did and he couldn't decide. Spike's hair or his own cock? Maybe both, and he stroked Spike's hair and face and neck. Whatever he could reach. It must have felt good, because Spike moaned too and pressed harder

into Xander's body and Xander bucked into the touch and then there was his hand, pumping up and down on his own cock like there was no tomorrow.

Distantly, very distantly, Xander heard, "Xand? Buffy has some news. Some really big news. We're going to come over and tell you in person type news. We'll be over in a few minutes, okay?"

Affirmative noises were of the good, so he made one, for Spike and Willow both. And Willow hung up, which was really good too because just about that time Spike bit hard into Xander's thigh and groaned as he came, and Xander just exploded. All over his hand, and all over his belly, and all over Spike. His last coherent thought was that they would have to have another shower before the girls showed up, and then he blacked out completely.

Part Twenty-One

The slow rise to consciousness wasn't accompanied this time by chills or shakes. Just a bone deep exhaustion. Xander felt like he would never move again. He wanted to, he really did, because he could hear them. Buffy, angry with an edge of fear. Sometimes she really was such a guy, because fear made her mad. Willow was worried again, and incredulous. As a matter of fact, that's what she kept saying, "How could you?" and he could

hear both Spike and Buffy defend themselves, which was weird, because Buffy hadn't done anything to him.

And Spike, well, Spike had taken advantage of him, but he'd be a big, fat liar if he said he didn't like it. Spike's voice was snarky defensive, all sneer underlaid with something Xander couldn't quite place. Maybe he could if he wasn't so very tired. So tired. If there was any doubt about the chocolate in his own mind (and let's face it, there had been) it was gone now. The need for it was absolutely desperate. But he just couldn't move, couldn't even lift his head.

"Spike?" Oh, that was a weak attempt. But he figured if anyone could hear him over the shouting it would be Spike. "Spike? Please?"

"Shut up, you lot. Xander?" It worked. Spike heard him. Spike was there, touching his face and his hands were so cold. Like ice. Making a little protesting noise, Xander turned his head as much as he could to get away, but it was like swimming through syrup.

"Hurts."

"You hurt him!" That was Willow, and now she sounded mad too, and it was making his head pound. "I can't believe you did that to him Spike."

"Hurts. Please, Spike? Chocolate?"

"Right, pet. Be right back. Get off, will you? I need to get his chocolate."

If his eyelids weren't made of lead, Xander would crack them open and look, because it sounded like there was a really undignified scuffle going on. But those little weights tied to his eyelashes were really heavy. So he just stayed there, waiting, mouth open like a baby bird. Finally, finally he felt warm, gooey chocolate against his lips, and he ate it down as Spike fed it to him, bit by bit. Mmmm, soft, silky caramel. The surrounding chocolate was a little grainy, as only truly American chocolate could be. It melted against his tongue and when it reached his stomach it was better than a whole bottle of Pepto Bismol. Instant calm.

"Better now?"

"Mmmmm." Spike's hand was back, resting briefly against his cheek, soothing now rather than hurty.

"Much."

"Then tell them that."

Blinking against the light, Xander opened his eyes. Buffy and Willow were there, as Spike moved away and lit a cigarette. They had identical expressions of solemn

concern on their faces, and oh that was bad. Because those were "one of us is in dire trouble" Scooby looks. Usually reserved for apocalypse and or death type situations. Might as well take it like a man, which meant sitting up at least.

Flailing, Xander reached out for something solid, and managed to push himself to an upright position. The dizziness passed really quickly, and there was no nausea this time, thank god. Good chocolate. Happy chocolate. Wonder if there's anymore chocolate? Whoa, everything was really fuzzy around the edges.

"Okay. So what's this news Buffy has for me?"

The simple question had a remarkable effect on the other inhabitants of the room. Buffy looked guilty. As in really, really. As in Angel at his worst kind of guilt. By contrast, Willow's look turned angry. At Buffy, if the sidelong glare was any indication. When Xander turned a questioning face to the undead one, Spike just snorted and said, "Don't look at me, pet. For once I had nothing to do with it. Ask the Slayer."

"I did. Buff? What's going on?"

"Well, it's really sort of... I mean, I had no idea it was magical. I mean, there was nothing sinister about it,

really. We just thought, you know, you'd been so down..."

Okay, now his head hurt again. "Spit it out, Buff."

"I sent you the chocolate. I mean, we did. Me and Dawn. As a surprise."

Part Twenty-Two

"You. Sent it. The chocolate."

Buffy got that look, the one with the big eyes and the scrunchy nose and the quivery lip that still had the power to make him all forgivey. Except that he felt like he'd been run over by a Mack truck. Xander looked at Spike.

"Could I have another one please?"

Crushing out his cigarette, Spike walked over and looked down at him. "Only got five left, pet. You really want to chance it?"

"Well, no chills or puking, that's true." Xander held out a hand. It shook badly. "But still not normal. And Buffy's cute little pout doesn't account for the fuzzy feeling this time. I think if I'm going to hear the rest, then yeah, more chocolate."

His vamp (his? since when his?) tilted his head to one side and studied Xander for a moment, then nodded sharply and headed for the kitchen. Buffy started to speak, but Xander held up a hand. "Not yet, Buffster. Willow, could you get my sweatpants?" Now was as good a time as any, he supposed, to realize that he was on the bed, not the couch, and wearing boxer shorts instead of dried, um, yeah. Why was Spike doing this stuff? Spike wasn't supposed to be nice. And he wasn't, except for when he was. Willow came back with his sweatpants and he slid them on, teetering dangerously as he stood. God he felt weak.

After what seemed like at least an hour of uncomfortable silence, Spike came back with half of a Caramel Tornado. At Xander's raised eyebrows, he just shrugged. "Let's see if that'll do, right? Need to conserve, just in case. What?" he asked as Willow and Buffy both turned confused looks on him. "Makes sense, doesn't it?"

"It makes sense, Spike. Which is why they don't get it, coming from you."

That made Spike relax, back on familiar ground, and he gave Xander a two-fingered salute. "Whatever. Going to get me some blood. Back in a bit."

"Wait!" All three heads swiveled back to Xander. Buffy and Willow were starting to look like they were watching a really intense tennis match. "There's some in the fridge. You don't need to wander off. Just in case, like you said."

"Right. I'll just get it out of the fridge then, shall I?"

"Right."

Once Spike was out of the room, Buffy made another try. "Xan? I know the chocolate makes you do all sorts of weird things, and Willow explained that some of those were, oh, really weird, but Spike?"

"The chocolate?" he shot back. "That you sent? What's up with that?"

Arms crossed, shoulders hunched, Buffy moved a little ways across the room. "Dawn and I saw a flyer at the mall. The chocolate of the week club. It said, 'give someone you care about something they've always wanted.' And it had a list of all of these chocolate bars. I

remembered that you said that Chocolate Hurricanes were your favorites, once, and Dawn thought it was really you. So we sent in the order."

"The thought was great, Buffy, but I gotta tell ya, I never thought chocolate was dangerous to anything but my blood sugar."

"I'm sorry, Xander."

"I know." Silence again, and wasn't that excruciating? They all heard the microwave ding, then Spike wandered back in, looking for all the world like he belonged there.

"So, if you ordered it by mail, where did you send the money?" Spike asked.

"Oh. Right. What kind of address was it Buffy?" Willow looked all action woman again, happy to have some direction for their quest.

"It was a PO Box. But maybe I still have the flyer attached to the check stub. Trying to account for every penny spent, after all." She sounded so rueful that they all smiled at her, except Spike, who rolled his eyes.

"So, what about the others then? The flying squirrel boy and the marathon guy? You think they got subscribed to the chocolate club too?"

"Spike! That's awful." Willow looked like she wanted to hit him, but he did have something there, so she didn't. "But maybe he's right. Buffy, we should go back to the house and get the PO Box, so I can try to trace it. While I'm doing that you can check on the four people in the paper, try to find out if they got the chocolate too."

"Cool. What do I do?" Xander wanted to do something, anything but sit there and wait for them to find something out. He hated being the useless one, which he knew wasn't fair, because this wasn't his fault and it really wasn't a butt monkey situation. But it still felt bad and wrong and he was bouncing in place with his agitation without realizing it until Spike's hand landed on his shoulder to hold him still.

"Looks like that half a piece did it, pet. You really want to go out like this? When you know what will happen next?"

Oh, gee, thanks for reminding me, he thought. But Spike was right. Who knew what he would do when either a) the chocolate wore off, or b) the Spike lust got so bad that he just jumped him in public. Which had appeal, but it shouldn't and that made his decision for him. "He's right. I guess I stay here."

"No!" Willow shook her head violently. "No. You can come with us. You don't need to stay here. Alone. With Spike."

Before he could even open his mouth to answer, Spike moved, and Buffy and Xander were both frozen in shock as he pushed Willow up against the wall and got right in her face. "He stays with me. And you should be glad it's me he's got a thing for, shouldn't you, rather than skydiving or stock car racing? I have a chip in my head, now don't I? I can't hurt him. I just help out when it gets too much for him. And he's only got four and a half bars left, and at least three days until the next shipment. Instead of arguing with me, how about you go figure out how to cure him?"

As if finally shaking off the shock, Buffy moved too, and yanked Spike off of Willow. "Stop it. Both of you." To Willow she said, "Spike has a point. We don't have to like it, but it's true." To Spike, she said, "You stay here. Keep an eye on him and your hands off him. We'll be back. Willow?"

Reluctant, Willow followed Buffy out the door, leaving Xander with one strangely wistful look. Leaving him with Spike. Again.

"Alone at last," Xander quipped, trying to make the butterflies in his stomach fly far, far away.

"Yeah. So why don't you tell me all about the whole give someone you care about something they've always wanted thing, pet."

Part Twenty-Three

"I have no idea what that's about, Spike. Because it's not like I've always wanted my very own bleached vampire, who I don't even like. Have I told you that?"

"What was it I said last time you asked that? Might have done." With a smile that came across just this side of Angelus, Spike held up his coffee mug. "By the way, pet, I really do need to go get some blood."

Oh man, if he blushed any harder Xander thought he might spontaneously combust. "Thanks for playing along."

"Any particular reason you didn't want me to leave you alone with the hens?"

"Many reasons. Huge amounts. At least five of which concern them asking questions about the things you and I have been doing. So not into talking about that."

Fiddling with the tie on his sweatpants, Xander stared at the floor. And the wall. And any place but Spike's ever-widening grin. "Can you get delivery? On the blood, I mean. I don't think I should go out, and you're supposed to stay here."

"Suppose I could. If I had the dosh."

"Jeez, Spike. You'd think after a hundred years you'd get a savings account."

"Not much on banks. Got any cash?"

"Yeah." Well, that made Spike lose the smile, at least. Now he just looked surprised. Xander got his wallet, and counted out enough bills to get Spike a small supply.

"Here. I'm going to go do laps around the living room or something. You call."

Still looking a little shocked, Spike looked at the money in his hand, then back at Xander. "I can think of several ways to work off your energy, luv. And they don't require running. Not unless you want them to."

It was a valiant effort, but Spike wasn't quite managing the right amount of smarm to pull that off. Boy, if Xander had known it would throw him off balance that hard, he would have offered to buy blood before now. "Thanks for the kind offer. But I have to make this one last a while. And if we do that, I go off into la la and then wake up puking on your Docs."

"Good point. I'll get the blood."

"Right."

"Right."

There, that was settled. Going to the living room now, Xander thought. As soon as his feet would move. They seemed about as content as the rest of him to stand there and stare at Spike. Who was staring back with the weirdest look on his face. Why on earth the bespelled chocolates decided that Xander had always wanted Spike was beyond him. But he did now, that much was certain. Down boy.

"Going."

"Calling."

"Kay."

"Good."

Feet finally obeying his command and moving, but they moved toward Spike instead of away, which was bad. Spike looked almost bewildered, and that Xander understood. Sympathized with even. He also looked almost as edible as a Chocolate Hurricane. Slightly more edible than a Caramel Tornado. Before Xander even knew what he was doing they were kissing, his hands on Spike's shoulders, Spike's hands on his ass. Swarming up Spike's body to wrap his legs around those lean hips and Spike braced them both and just stood there holding him, not even straining. It felt so good, and little noises came out of Xander's throat and he thought he could just do this forever.

Little sparkles danced behind his eyes, and Spike broke the kiss before he passed out due to lack of air. Gasping, Xander rubbed his pelvis against Spike's lower belly, feeling the hardness of his belt buckle and the rough rasp of his jeans beneath the thin fleece of his pants. Ready to just keep humping until he came, not even waiting to get their clothes off, and Spike gnawed on his collarbone and oh, God. "Unhhhh," was all he could say, and he pressed closer, harder, please.

Grunting, Spike pulled back to look at him, desperate and needy, and they were kissing again, teeth rubbing against lips they kissed so hard. The tiny pain made it just that much better, and Xander started a rhythm that would take him on the most direct route to orgasm, rubbing harder and faster, until he just wanted to explode. Which was why suddenly flying through the air and landing on his ass on the bed came as such a rude shock.

"Spike?"

"Can't, pet. You have to conserve chocolate." Spike looked as amazed to say it as Xander felt to hear it.

"It hurts, Spike."

Two steps forward before he stopped, and then it was so, so reluctant. "Sorry, luv. Just going to have to hurt for a bit. I'm going out there," Spike pointed to the living room, "to call for blood. You're going in there to take a cold shower." Pointing to the bathroom. "And no wanking."

Part Twenty-Four

The shower wasn't just cold. It was frigid, and Xander directed the spray right where he needed it the most. Outwardly, it helped; nobody's penis could stand up to that kind of freezing deluge, he figured. Inside, deep in his belly, it didn't help at all. The want was still there. The chocolate made him crave Spike with a relentless energy. Having Spike made him crave the chocolate. Xander didn't delude himself into thinking it would be just anyone he wanted. Neither Willow nor Buffy had made him desperate and shaky and hot, and he'd been in love with both of them at one time or another. Leaning his head back and arching his lower body into the stinging spray again, he thought, "Why me? And why Spike?"

"Pet? You trying to drown yourself or something?" Speak of the devil. Which was not Xander's first thought. That would have been aahhhh! Because Spike scared the shit out of him, calling out from just beyond the shower curtain. He jumped, and lost his footing on the slick tile, and with a panicked cry Xander started to go down.

Strong hands shot through the opening in the curtain and caught him before his head clunked into the wall of the shower, and Xander sort of dangled there, feet scrabbling for purchase. Then Spike gave a mighty heave,

and everything went all blurry as Xander flew out of the bathtub and landed so that he was standing sandwiched between Spike and the bathroom sink.

"You okay?"

Not quite able to catch his breath, Xander fought the adrenaline rush and tried to answer. "No. You scared a year off my life. Okay, maybe that means next to nothing to you, but I only have so many. Years, that is. What the Hell?"

"You were in there near a half hour. Thought maybe there was something wrong."

"There is!" With a gesture at the part of his anatomy that was shaking off the effects of the cold water with amazing speed, Xander yelled, "It's you. And this. I told you, it hurts."

"And I told you we can't. Don't fancy getting staked for getting you off."

"You didn't worry about that before."

"Slayer didn't know before."

"That's bullshit." They stared at each other, Xander resentful, Spike wary. "Why won't you? You want to."

"Yeah. Ever stop to wonder why?"

Something about the look on Spike's face made Xander pause. "You think it's the spell?"

"No. And that's the problem, isn't it?"

Part Twenty-Five

"Oh."

"Yeah. So maybe we ought to think about holding off a bit on the shagging, because if it's not the spell, well then, I've gone completely 'round the bend, right? And if I'm insane I might be dangerous."

Shaking off his befuddlement, Xander deliberately stepped forward and rubbed his naked form against Spike's clothed one. The soft t-shirt Spike wore made a good towel for the water droplets still dotting his skin. Felt good too. "I don't want to think about it, Spike. I just want to fuck."

How come he never knew how much fun it would be to turn the tables on Spike? To be the taker of advantage, not the takee. Spike looked like a cartoon character, all bulging eyes and dropped jaw. This time it was Spike who backed away and Xander that prowled after him, and it was just too damned much fun.

"Pet, we can't. You'll go all sleepy again, and then where will you be?"

Hitting the bathroom wall stopped Spike in mid-backpedal and Xander pressed up against him, nuzzling his neck. "Asleep. For at least eight hours. Maybe more. So you can have blood without the eww from me, and the girls can get a line on who's doing this, and you can come up with a way to convince me that you aren't sleeping with me because you like me. Come on, Spike. You were the one pushing me before, sucking me, riding me. Don't you want to do it again?"

"Yes?" Woo-hoo, go Xander, you made Spike squeak, he thought. "But I can't. Wouldn't be right. It was okay when I was doing it just because you were so easy. Now I like it a bit too much, thank you. That's always trouble." A mighty shove from Spike sent Xander reeling away, and once again he slipped on wet tile. This time Xander didn't even have time to cry out, he just went whoosh, and he

tried really hard not to think about the sound his head was going to make when it connected with the sink.

He flailed. Spike lunged. They hit the floor together, with Spike somehow twisting so that he was on the bottom. There was a tremendous smack as something hit the sink, but it wasn't Xander's head. It was Spike's hand, which was cupped protectively around Xander's skull. Every bit of breath in Xander's lungs whooshed out, and Spike made this really odd grunting noise, and they both just stayed there. Stunned. While Xander whooped for air, Spike cursed. Fluently. Inventively. And just about that time there was a knock on the front door. Cursing even more loudly, Spike climbed to his feet, politely not sticking sharp knees and elbows in Xander's tender spots, and went to answer the door. So much for the grand seduction.

When Spike came back from the living room, Xander was still there on the floor, mournfully contemplating the ceiling. "What was that?" he asked.

"Blood delivery."

"Oh. Goody."

"Come on, luv. Get up."

"Nope. Gonna stay here. Eventually the tub will overflow and the bathroom will flood and I'll drown. Yeah, and then the dastardly scheme of whoever made me want to screw Spike's brains out will be thwarted. I love that word. Thwart. And Buffy and Willow. They'll be sorry. And they'll miss me. And they'll make your unlife miserable because you wouldn't make the beast with two backs with me so I didn't drown myself. And because when I did drown, you couldn't give me mouth to mouth. So there."

Spike's face appeared upside down over his, all wide blue eyes and framed by hair that stood up in agitated tufts. "You did hit your head, didn't you? Thought I caught you in time. It's not fair that I'm going to take the blame for this."

"Shut up and help me up, Spike."

Once on his feet, Xander reached into the bathtub and turned off the shower. "I need to get some clothes on. And I need more chocolate."

"Why?"

"The clothes or the chocolate?"

Whenever Xander got to thinking that Spike was just too human to be a vamp Spike would do something like

growl. Like he just did, sounding like a big cat or something. Not human there, nope. "The chocolate, pet." Said in an infinitely patient and patently false tone.

"In words of one syllable? It hurts. No Spike, more hurt. Eat more. No more hurt. Got it?"

With a martyred sigh, Spike started stripping off his clothes. "You only have so much left. You should at least sleep a while before you have another go at the chocolates. So I guess I'll just have to help."

"I'm deeply grateful, Spike. But I wouldn't want to put you out."

A ghost of a normal leer appeared on Spike's face. "Right. Then you'll just have to put me in. "

Part Twenty-Six

"My usual response to that would be ha ha. But at this point, Spike, it sounds like a plan. I'll just grab the lube."

Yes! Speechless Spike once again. Xander was proud. The bleached wonder was in mid-shuck with his jeans, and he looked so cute with his pants around his knees, wobbling a bit as he almost gave himself whiplash looking up Xander.

"You don't mean that."

"Why not? Trust me, at this point I'm hurting so bad that nothing you do to me could set off the chip. And just the thought of you doing the doing puts me somewhere between whoeee and boing! So, me? I'm listening to the chocolate. Who am I to argue with it? Bedroom?"

Gaping, Spike stared at Xander for long moments. Several expressions flitted by before he settled on oh, right, shag. Then it turned into oh, shag! Spike almost killed himself trying to finish pushing his jeans off. Apparently he'd put on his boots in anticipation of blood run. Timber! Luckily, Xander didn't mind a little laughter with his sex, because Spike's bare ass shining up at him while said vampire tried to untie those bootlaces sent him into hysterical giggles.

A sound somewhere between a growl and a snarl issued from Spike and the Docs went flying. Finally sans all that pesky clothing, Spike sprang up off the floor in one of those humanly impossible moves and drove a shoulder into Xander's midsection. Woof. There went all the air once more, and again he had a fine view of Spike's butt. From where his head dangled down Spike's back. And why didn't that feel silly, because he was tall enough that

it should have been really awkward for Spike to carry him that way. It wasn't. But it was hot.

They landed on the bed with a flop and a bounce, and Spike latched onto him fiercely, kissing him until he couldn't think straight. Octopus man, that's what Spike was, because he had at least eight arms, all with hands attached. And they all did really naughty things to Xander and he just wanted to explode. His own hands seemed big and clumsy and useless, but Spike didn't seem to mind. Praised him in fact, "Good pet you are," for holding onto the lube through the entire move from bathroom to bedroom.

Then one of Spike's many clever hands was between his legs, skating down his cock and rolling his balls before sliding down to the opening of his body. A single finger slid inside, slick and hard and way too big to go there, but it felt good too, and Xander could see why Spike liked it. Especially when he turned and twisted that finger so it touched right there, and Xander yelled and flailed and Spike laughed.

"Just like that, luv. Open up for me."

Somewhere in there Xander lost track of the fingers. He had no idea how many were in him, as long as they stayed there, and he would have to think that because

then they were gone. Turn over. Spike wanted him to turn over on his stomach, so he did and he was on his hands and knees and Spike was behind him and ow. Okay that was much bigger than fingers, but it must have been a good ow. No pained bellowing from Spike. Full. Xander was full, and it burned like crazy, but it was what his body demanded. It felt right.

When he started to move so did Spike. Xander pushed backwards and Spike pushed in and they started moving in a rhythm Xander's whole self understood on some cosmic level. Back and forth, in and out, opening him up until everything in him was laid bare. Moans were coming from Spike on every thrust, and broken words about how tight he was, how right, and he wanted to agree but could only gasp for breath.

Anything that intense can only be maintained for a short time. Anything that bright burns itself out too fast. And this was no exception. A single touch of Spike's hand to his oversensitive cock had him yelling his head off, and coming like there was no tomorrow. And maybe there wasn't; this just might kill him. The orgasm went on for what seemed like forever, and Spike wasted little time following him to the end, growling deep and low into Xander's back. Just like every time before, Xander could feel himself spiraling down into sated unconsciousness.

The last thing he felt before he passed out was Spike's fangs sinking into his shoulder.

Part Twenty-Seven

When Xander came back to his senses he was relieved that there was no shaking and puking. The horrible weakness that had assailed him last time was there, though, and someone had set an anvil on his back. Well, maybe not an anvil, but there was a heavy, dead weight there. Lungs and kidneys compressed, and it pushed him into the bed in a way that made him very conscious of his full bladder. Too bad he was too weak to move. Eventually, Xander became aware of voices.

"Does that look like keeping hands off to you?" voice number one asked. "I think I should just stake him."

"No! That might get dust in some really hard to remove places," said voice number two. "Besides, that's Spike. He's all defenseless-y. And naked. That would be bad to stake him when he's asleep. And naked."

Oh. So Spike was the weight on his back. Literally dead weight. And it made sense in a twisted, ever since the chocolate came in the mail kind of way. Also explained why even though he hurt all over, his ass and shoulder throbbed agonizingly. His shoulder. Where Spike bit him. Wiggins.

"Maybe we should at least cover them?"

Oh look, there was a voice number three. Not Buffy, or Willow. Tara. Like everyone had to witness his humiliation. He could only hope they didn't bring Dawn.

"Good idea." And the bedspread drifted down gently to cover the fact that Spike was not just on him, but... well. Anyway, Xander thought really hard about just trying to go back to sleep. But despite the lack of tremors and nausea, he still had the craving for his chocolate. It burned in his belly, cramping it up like he was a starving man. Could be, come to think of it. Man could not live by chocolate alone, and hey he'd needed to lose ten or fifteen pounds anyway, right?

"Unnh."

"Xander? I think he's awake. We need to move Spike."

"I'm not touching Spike. He's naked under there."

"Willow! Get a grip." Buffy sounded so harried that Xander wanted to laugh. "I'll move Spike. It's nothing I, well, I can do it. You be ready to cover Xander up with the other blanket. Tara? Could you go to the kitchen and get the chocolate? It should be in the fridge."

The sound of much shuffling and rearranging came to him, and then the weight was gone, and a light blanket settled where the much heavier Spike had been. "Uhn," Xander said by way of thanks. Bathroom, he thought. Now. Then chocolate. Right. Making feeble swimming motions toward the side of the bed was the best he could do, though, and he cursed the chocolate, cursed Buffy for sending it, himself for eating it, and Spike for sucking his blood.

"Buffy! He's hurt."

"What? Where?"

And ow! Suddenly Xander could say more than unhh.

"Quit it! That hurts. Bathroom. Chocolate. Now."

Whoever it was prodding at the puncture wounds on his shoulder stopped, and Buffy manhandled him out of the bed and off he went. He came back at least five pounds lighter, and Tara almost drew back a bloody nub where her hand was when she offered him a Caramel Tornado.

After two chocolate bars (which only leaves you two, the little voice in his head said) he felt almost human, and was able to take in his surroundings.

Buffy stared at him. Willow stared fixedly at a still naked but fully covered Spike. Who was still asleep. And poor Tara stared anywhere but at any of them. Making sure all of his private parts were private once more thanks to his handy dandy blanket, Xander cleared his throat.

"So. The us keeping hands off each other thing? Didn't work so well."

"I'm thinking it's not the hands we're worried about here." Serious Buffy kick-butt tone, and Xander laughed a little. Nervously.

"He bit you." That came from Willow, who still stared at Spike with an expression Xander couldn't quite read.

"Yeah? I mean, yeah."

"Yeah," Buffy mimicked. "Hey, maybe the chip fried his brain and that's why he's not waking up."

Panic. Why did that make him panic? But it did, and Xander threw himself at Spike, shaking him hard. "Wake up, Spike. Come on, you jerk. Don't do this to me. Wake up." None of it woke Spike up, although he did smile in

his sleep. Weirdo. Xander wasn't going to be satisfied until Spike spoke to him, though, so he kept shaking. Until Buffy put a hand on his shoulder to pull him away. Right over his shiny new bite marks.

"OW!"

At Xander's pained yelp, Spike's eyes flew open and he snarled, lunging up off the bed and taking Buffy down in a flying tackle. They hit the floor in a flailing tangle of arms, legs and blond hair. Xander goggled at them. So did Willow. And Tara too. There was much pounding and kicking and yelling. Only when blood actually started flowing did the frozen spectators move to do something about it.

"Willow! You and Tara get Buffy. I'll handle Spike." Not so bright to get between Slayer and slayee, especially when the slayee was Spike, but Xander couldn't let this go on anymore. Somehow he got the feeling Willow and Tara felt the same, because they sprang into the fray as well, and after a lot of oofs and grunts and unintentional bruising, they pried Buffy and Spike apart. Grabbing Spike around the middle, Xander hauled him around to the opposite side of the bed from Buffy, babbling all the while. "Okay, that's enough of the fighting okay? Stop struggling, will you? You're going to do some damage. I

mean we're both still unclothed, and I happen to be feeling a draft. Spike? C'mon Spike, calm down."

Finally, Spike seemed to realize who was holding him, because he just sort of went limp. Growly noises came from deep in his chest, and Xander figured his face was probably bumpy, but he relaxed. No way was Xander going to let go until he heard something more human come out of Spike's mouth, though.

"You in there now? 'Cause I gotta tell you, you're scaring me."

"She hurt you."

"Um, she hurt you worse. You all done playing manly vamp?"

Spike seemed to sag a bit more in his arms. "Yeah. Don't feel so good."

"Me neither. Must be because, oh, I don't know, someone sucked my blood?"

"Oh!" They turned to look at Willow. "You drank Xander's blood. I wonder if you're infected by the chocolate now too."

Rubbing her scraped knuckles, Buffy glared at Spike, who glared back. "If he is, can I stake him so he won't be any more of a danger?"

"Buff. Quit." Not that he could blame Buffy really, but Spike was all stiff and grr again. "Spike? Feel like you've been run over by a truck? Like you're really hungry but if you eat you'll ralph?"

"Yeah."

Xander sighed. "Tara, would you go get the rest of the chocolate? Willow, you and the Buffster go wait in the living room while the mosquito and I get dressed, okay? We'll be out in a few."

All three girls looked like they wanted to protest, but Xander just stared at them with his no more butt monkey look until they grudgingly filed out of the bedroom. Only when the door shut behind them did Xander let Spike go, and then only to turn him around so they were face to face. "Okay, Spike. You have about five minutes while we get dressed to explain why you bit me, why it didn't make the chip go off, and why the wrath of God wouldn't wake you up but Buffy giving me what amounted to a love tap sent you off the deep end."

Part Twenty-Eight

They fumbled into their clothes, and Xander was amazed to see Spike's hands shake. He had no illusions that it was nervousness; he was pretty sure it was the chocolate need inducing the tremors, but wow that must be strong magic to have that effect on vampire physiology. And Spike hadn't answered his question.

"You have two minutes now."

"That's all I need, isn't it?" Finally winning the war with his jeans, Spike shrugged into his t-shirt and glared at Xander. "It's your fault."

"What?" That raised his voice. In both volume and range.
"What the heck does that mean?"

"Well, you're the one who's supposed to be getting what he always wanted right? So looks to me like you've always wanted a vampire to bite you, maybe so you'd know what it felt like. Only reason I can explain the compulsion, because it's not like I wanted to."

That snarky speech was much less impressive than it could be, because Spike swayed where he stood, and his speech slurred just the tiniest bit. Pressing the advantage was mean, but Xander knew Spike would be feeling worse by the minute and would have to tell him the truth eventually just to get his chocolate.

"Yeah. And it's not like you wanted to fuck me either. I mean, it wasn't like you practically attacked me when I mentioned it. And that still doesn't explain why you tried to make Buffy into a floor mop."

"I don't feel good, pet."

"So you said. You tell me what I want to know, we go get you feeling better."

"That's just wrong. Have I withheld your fix? Have I? No. Taken care of you, I have. Least you could do is return the favor." Looked like Spike was going for his trademark pout, but his teeth started to chatter and that kind of ruined the effect. Guilt was not a word Xander usually used in the same sentence with "Spike" but the last few days were full of new experiences, so why not this?

"Okay. Come on." He put an arm around Spike and started out to the living room. The instant, heavy lean into him told him more than anything else could how

much Spike needed a Tornado bar. Well, that and the feverish heat of Spike's skin, and didn't that feel weird? Even more guilt. The girls were waiting for them, and Xander accepted a single chocolate bar from Tara. He hoped that would be enough, like it was for him when the whole mess first started, because he really wanted one in reserve, just in case. Half expecting Spike to grab it and shove it into his mouth fully wrapped, Xander handed it to him gingerly. Spike took it, sniffed it curiously, then handed it back. "What? You need to eat it, Spike."

"Not what I'm craving. Why don't you eat it, then you feed me."

A chorus of horrified exclamations burst from the female section of the room. "No! Absolutely no way," from Buffy. And "Are you crazy?" from Willow. Tara's quiet, "That might be the only way," went almost unnoticed. Almost.

"What do you mean, Tara?" Not that Xander really wanted to hear it, but he knew he had to ask.

Obviously still not completely comfortable being the focus of the whole room, Tara swallowed and crossed her arms over her chest. "Well, look at the difference between how Xander reacted to the chocolate and how

Spike did. It, it's obvious that Spike is in withdrawal of some kind." Here she gestured to Spike, who was starting to shake visibly. "But the chocolate didn't make him violent, or ravenous like it did Xander." Looking earnestly at each one of them in turn, Tara shrugged. "Maybe Spike has to have his filtered through Xander."

"Oh! Or maybe he just needs it in blood. Like hot chocolate, only with blood, not milk. We could even put marshmallows in it."

Death-ray glare at Willow and she pretended not to notice. "You are not putting my chocolate in pig's blood."

"What, you'd rather we tap one of your veins and stick a straw in it for him?" Now it was an equal opportunity "die" stare as Xander trained it on Buffy.

The point became a little more urgent just about then, because Spike's legs went out from under him and he crumpled to the floor. "Spike." Xander squatted next to him, and pale usually described Spike, but now he was practically transparent. "Okay, somebody give me something sharp."

More no and crazy and general mayhem flew at him. And Tara was still the voice of reason, because she said, "He

might be able to bite you. Just don't give him a place with a major artery."

So that was exactly what Xander did. Just handed over the fleshy part of his arm like he'd never had a problem with bloodsucking fiends and like Spike had never tried to kill him and like he wasn't scared half to death. But Spike took care of him, and he had to take care of Spike, and this was something he could do so he did. And Tara must be right because the game face came out right away and Spike sank his fangs into Xander's arm, and then there was blast off.

Connected. They were connected, that's how it felt. He'd slept through this last time; passed out cold and missed it. But this pulling, this drawing out of himself and into Spike, it was like nothing else before, ever. Every time his heart beat Spike seemed to suck and it became a rhythm, something hard and urgent and throbbing, and that wasn't the only thing hard. Not for Spike either, because he was humping air, his hips snapping in time to his swallows, and it hurt, it burned like the time Xander got his wisdom teeth out and they put the anesthesia in his arm and it burned just like that except in instead of out. But it felt so good, too, straight to his cock, making him squirm and making Spike moan, and Xander thought he could come from just this and...

Blinking, Xander stared up at Buffy from where he landed a few feet away. "That's enough," she said. "You did your good deed. But if you do anymore of the deed right now, you'll both, uh, finish. And then you'll need chocolate and he'll need Xander blood and we'll be back where we started, right? "

Part Twenty-Nine

Speechless, Xander shook his head to try to clear it. A quick look told him that Spike was just as dazed. The face was back to human, but bright blood smeared Spike's lips and trickled down his chin. That's my blood, Xander thought. In Spike. It made everything in him surge, and Spike knew it, he could tell by the way Spike's eyes widened. Like a pair of magnets they drew towards each other, Xander reaching out to wipe at the beads of blood at one corner of Spike's lips.

Which was when Buffy knocked his hand away, breaking the spell again. "Okay, am I the only one disturbed by the fact that Spike can bite again? And maybe it's just me,

but the sweaty male hormone thing is kind of making me oogy." With a sheepish sort of grin, Buffy offered a hand to Xander and he took it, letting her haul him to his feet.

And right on cue, there was snarly Spike again. Growling vampire was a sound that raised the hair on the back of Xander's neck, no matter how many times he heard it. This was worse, or maybe better, because he had a feeling that Spike was doing the "possessive vampire" growl. Mine, hands off. Time to put himself between his vamp and his bud. "Spike, that's enough. She's got a point." A louder rumble here. "No, not that way. I just mean if we do that now, and you know, and that too, we'll be right back where we started."

"And what's wrong with that, I ask you?"

"Lots," Buffy said. "Lots and lots."

Brave Willow stepped forward into the direct line of Spike's evil-dead stare. "The problem Buffy has with it is personal, so, um, I can see why you'd ignore that. But, Spike, you've fed off Xander twice in one day. And Xander hasn't had anything to eat but chocolate in almost three days. If you keep going he's going to collapse."

"Not to mention the fact that there's only two candy bars left," Tara added quietly.

And whoo, Willow's words turned out to be prophetic, because Xander was lightheaded in the extreme. The room did a sickening whirl and tilt and his knees went, just like Spike's had a few minutes ago, and the floor got close again, quickly. Buffy was closer, but Spike got there first, planting an elbow in Buffy's midsection and catching Xander before the ow-splat. They did a dancing bear shuffle to the couch where Spike helped Xander stretch out. Then he turned to Tara and held out his hand.

"Chocolate bar."

Tara handed Spike the Tornado bar she'd gotten for him before all the blood-sucking started, and he unwrapped it and broke off small pieces, feeding them to Xander. Who was pathetically grateful, because it made him feel normal again. Mostly. Sort of? After three days of this Xander knew something the girls didn't, though. The more chocolate he consumed, the more he wanted Spike, and the harder it was to resist. That was his third piece of candy since they woke up, and sudden plasma deprivation notwithstanding, it probably wouldn't be

long before he was humping Spike's leg like a horny puppy. So they needed to settle some things, and fast.

They were all looking at him. Unnerving, that. Buffy looked concerned, and a little pissed off, like she usually did when one of them was in trouble and she couldn't immediately slay. Willow chewed her lip, and her eyes were all big and doe-ish and she was really worried about him. Tara just looked tired, and kinda sad. And Spike, well his look could etch steel, which caused a sort of sproing and Xander raised one leg to hide it.

"So, we can talk about the whys and wherefores of the biting later. What did you guys find out? Any leads on where this stuff is coming from and whether our extreme sports housewife and flying squirrel boy were getting chocolate in the mail too?"

Part Thirty

"Oh! Yes. I mean according to Buffy the customer satisfaction telemarketer. Right?"

"Uh huh. Everyone I called on said that a family member was subscribed to the chocolate of the month club, but they weren't in the mood to talk about it, if you know what I mean. Didn't seem to make the connection though, so I told them they could return the unused portion for a refund."

Nodding, Xander turned to Willow. "So what did you find out? Anything on the PO Box?"

"Not yet. But I did search the hospital records. They've admitted six people in the last two days for withdrawal symptoms. They think there's a crystal meth dealer in town or something. Because no one seems to equate a reaction like this with chocolate, you know?"

"Oh yeah. I know. So what you're saying is that we're no closer to finding out who did this?"

Looking a bit crestfallen, Willow shook her head. "Nope. Sorry Xand."

"You lot slay me. So to speak."

All of them, including Tara, looked at Spike irritably. "Oh yeah," Xander said with a snort. "You've been so helpful."

"Well, I'm about to be real helpful, luv, so listen up. You people make everything so difficult. Personally, I blame it on the watcher and all of his esoteric bullshit."

"Helpful means getting to the point."

Flipping a two fingered salute at Xander, Spike continued. "So you have a PO Box, yeah? And you say this is still an ongoing scam. People are still ordering, and now thanks to the Slayer, returning the stuff, right?" They all looked like those little nodding toys. "So why don't you just stake out the post office and watch the box? Then you can follow whoever empties it home and have a nice chat with them about poisoning the townspeople."

Dead silence. And Xander had to bite his lip to stop grinning about all the bad puns flying around the room. He counted three in the last five minutes. At least. And didn't everyone look stunned at Spike's idea? No doubt he did too, but it was so simple it was genius. Buffy spoke up first.

"I hate to admit it, but I think Spike has a plan."

"I'm good at plans. Just don't have the patience to carry them out, most of the time."

"That's really a good idea, Spike." This from Tara, accompanied by a small smile. "I think that would be a good job for me. And Willow. Together."

That got her a fuzzy, affectionate look from Willow, and Spike smirked impartially at both of them. "Only if you stay on opposite sides of the room. Then you won't be so distracted that you miss something important."

"Says the vamp who forgot we were all here and tried to do the nasty right in front of us," Buffy said.

"I'd do that even without the chocolate, given the right inducement. And he is." With a pat to Xander's knee Spike sat back and looked smug. Xander blushed and Buffy frowned. And Willow and Tara planned their stakeout. They decided to leave right away, as they weren't sure how long Spike and Xander would have before it got to be too much. Too much being said with a stammer and a sideways look. When they left, Buffy went with them, saying she would wait outside the post office and then help them tail the suspect home. With a pointed glance at Spike, she said she was sure she could leave them alone, because Spike seemed concerned with Xander's welfare, and surely he wouldn't want to dangerously weaken their friend by draining him any more, now would he?

The only reply she got was a deep-chested growl and a show of fang. Smacking Spike lightly on the arm, Xander shooed the girls off. "Go. Find antidote to chocolate. We'll be as close to fine as we can get under the circumstances."

The girls left, full of purpose and ready to stomp the magical candy maker. And Spike, well he just sat there next to Xander, staring at him in a way that reminded him of large, carnivorous animals.

"So. Wanna play Scrabble?"

Part Thirty-One

"Scrabble. That what you're calling it these days?"

"God, you have a one track mind, don't you?" Pushing at Spike's encroaching hands, Xander moved to sit up. Head still swimming, even though he felt better, and Spike caught him as he reeled alarmingly.

"Can I get you something to help, luv?"

"Like what? [Protein shake](#)? T-bone steak? Enchanted chocolate is the only thing on the menu for me these days, and we only have one bar left. And now we both need that, so it might be best to conserve." Xander didn't mean to sound so peevish, but even with the most

recent chocolate high he felt a little weird, and dammit, he wanted Spike again. Always. Whatever.

"You could have some of my blood. Probably fix you right up."

"What? No! Absolutely not. Although the prospect is more than vaguely intriguing. But no. We have no idea how much you've taken from me today and I am not turning for you, Mister Vampire man." No defensiveness in Spike's posture, which Xander half-expected, just downcast eyes and a nod. Then a mumble that Xander didn't quite catch.

"What?"

"Said I feel bloody useless."

"Well you are. You're a parasite, Spike." It was meant to be a joke, because Xander really was a lot more mellow than he would expect to be about Spike munching on him, but Spike took it personally. Or at least it looked like he did, because he stiffened up like a real corpse and moved away from the couch, radiating disapproval. Or maybe hurt, and as many times as Xander had said nasty things to Spike and gotten them right back in return, he shouldn't feel guilty, but he did. "I was joking bleachboy."

"Yeah. Whatever." Rummaging through his coat, Spike pulled out a crumpled pack of cigarettes and lit one. And studiously ignored Xander.

With a sigh and a roll of his eyes, Xander tried to get up. And tried again when his head went all funny. Then tried one more time and made it to his feet. Okay that wasn't so bad. He could do it. Of course the space between he and Spike looked to be at least the size of the [Grand Canyon](#), even if it was only about eight feet. If he stretched out on the floor he'd only have to crawl two feet to reach Spike's boots. Not a bad idea. But that would mean sitting back down, which would mean bending. Even troll hammers and beatings from Buffy didn't make him feel this weak. His legs finally decided for him and he sat rather suddenly, on the floor instead of the couch. And that finally made Spike look at him.

"You trying to kill yourself?"

"No, I was trying to make my way across the great wasteland that is my living room and kill you. So why don't you make yourself useful as well as ornamental and come help me up."

The speed of the Spike mood swing had to be off the charts, because the idiot was grinning again. "So, you think I'm pretty do you?"

"Not at the moment. Smug is a bad look for you. Pouty works much better. The floor is hard."

"Upsydaisy then." And just like that Spike was there in front of him and the world spun and back on the couch Xander went.

"Thank you. And I take it back. You are good for something. Now make yourself good for something else. I'm feeling all hot and kinda fever-y. You're nice and cool. Cuddle with me?"

"You're a closet sap, pet."

"No, I just don't see any sense in trying to do anything when I feel this gross. We can't do anything but sit and wait for the Buffster and Willow, and I can't get up, so snuggling is good."

Slipping onto the couch beside him, Spike draped himself over Xander's prone form and, well, snuggled. "Got a point there. But if you tell anyone I cuddled with you...."

"My lips are sealed."

Part Thirty-Two

"Should we wake them up?"

"I don't know. They look cute."

"But what if they did that thing, you know? We don't have enough chocolate."

"They still have clothes on. I think we're safe."

"You can do it with your clothes on, Will."

"Well, yeah, but there's no shaking, puking, or... or bleeding. So I think they just fell asleep. It kinda looks like they're cuddling."

Why was it, Xander wondered, that every time he woke up lately someone was talking about him? Or maybe it was that way all the time, they were just usually talking about him somewhere else. Talk, talk, talk. That's all they did these days. And all he did was have sex with Spike. Hey look, a new full time job.

Despite the fact that Buffy, then Willow, then Buffy and so on were talking, he was disinclined to move. He was

cool and comfy and not quite as loopy as he'd been before. The first real sleep he'd had in days.

Someone poked him in the ribs and he grunted. And poked the ribs under him. Somehow Spike had gotten beneath him as they slept. His mattress shifted and snuffled, and then licked his neck, making him jump. "Spike! Stop it. The girls are back. We have to get up."

"I am up, pet, but I don't think it's the way you mean."

"Oh man."

With a heave and a groan, Xander levered himself up off Spike and the couch, and landed in a heap on the floor, blinking up at Buffy and Willow owlshly. Those little stars that usually appeared in cartoons circled around his head for a minute and he almost went horizontal, but Spike caught his shoulder, and he stayed upright. "So what did you find out?"

"Are you feeling better?"

That from Willow, who looked permanently worried these days. Maybe he wasn't looking too good. Xander knew he hadn't been yesterday, and if his looks reflected how much worse he felt, then maybe she should be worried. His barometer these days was Spike, and Xander glanced over his shoulder to check the expression he was

getting. Frowny concern with just a bit of bemused goofy. Must not be that bad then.

"We didn't do the wild thing, if that's what you mean."

"More's the pity."

"Shut up, Spike. I'm still way too weak, though. And I feel like I have the flu. I hurt all over."

"Well at least you didn't compound the problem with having sex with the undead again."

Sarcasm dripped from Spike's voice when he answered Buffy. "Yeah, love. You should know first hand how that compounds things."

"Okay children, play nice. What did you come up with? Anyone make a mail run?"

Now Buffy was all serious looking, and she and Willow shared an uneasy glance. Then Buffy seemed to stiffen her resolve and drew herself up. "Someone emptied the PO Box, yeah. No one we knew, but we followed him."

"Him?"

"Yep," Willow chimed in. "We think he worked for a messenger service."

"Oh that's wonderful, isn't it?" They all looked at Spike.
"Did you happen to see who he delivered it to?"

"Um, maybe? I mean it isn't conclusive. He could've just been meeting someone there. I mean it's just right downtown and kind of convenient, especially if you need that kind of stuff, which the person doing this would, you know."

"Willow. English," Xander said at the same time Spike said, "Spit it out, Red."

"He went to the Magic Box, Xand."

Part Thirty-Three

"The Magic Box?" Xander tried for incredulous. Winced when it came out flat and unsurprised. Why not? Why the Hell not? It just figured that Anya was involved somehow, wittingly or unwittingly. He hoped for the unwitting, but wasn't too confident about it.

"So the little demon wench is in on it?" Spike asked. "Good on her!" Incredulous was something he could manage after all. Xander turned to Spike and stared. Hard. Spike's look was more surprise shading toward defensive. "What? She needs to get her feet back under her on the path of evil, doesn't she?"

"You continually amaze me, Spike." Buffy shook her head. "So anyway, Xand, we didn't charge right in, because if it is Anya you need to be there. And if it's not, she's going to be supremely pissed at us for suspecting her."

Nodding, Xander tried to get up off the floor. And couldn't. He thought he might just cry. "Help me up here, Buff?" When Spike moved to lever him up, Xander waved him away. "No, Spike. At this point you touching me, or vicey versy, is of the bad." Touching Buffy wasn't bad though, and that told him how far gone he was. Once upon a time just the thought of Buffy touches made him hard. Now it was the shape of Spike's cheekbones, or the way his nailpolish made his fingers look. Argh. So of course, he had to snark. "Besides, I'm mad at you right now."

Deeply affronted, Spike snorted inelegantly. "Why? Because I have to cheer for the demon doing what comes naturally?"

"There's nothing natural about demons."

"Oh yeah? Most demon types were around long before you lot even came down out of the trees. So, who do you think we find unnatural?"

No way was Xander going to admit Spike had a point, so he just shook his head and tried to stay on his feet. "I guess we go see Anya, huh?"

Sympathy woman face firmly in place, Willow nodded. "I guess we do. It's dark out now, too, so Spike can come along, because, you know, he's infected too and if we can get the antidote that would be good, so he won't have to eat you anymore. Eat from you! I mean."

Stifling a laugh, Buffy nudged Willow in the ribs. "Stop while you're ahead Will." She gave Spike a hard look. "Behave. I'll help Xander stay upright until we get there, but once we go in I'd better give him to you so my hands are free. Keep *your* hands above the waist. Got it?"

Spike sneered, but he obviously got the point, because he trailed along meekly behind them as they shuffled out the door. They must have been an odd sight, Willow

bounding along making encouraging noises and Buffy holding Xander up so he could walk. And him with baby head, thinking if he could just stop and take another short nap. Tara walked beside Willow, making calming sounds. And then Spike, slouching along behind them with his hands in the pockets of his coat, cigarette dangling from his mouth. Of course, in Sunnydale no one would notice them, seeing as how none of them had horns, or three eyes or something.

By the time they got to the Magic Box, Xander was ready to collapse. The prospect of seeing Anya again was daunting enough. Add to it the idea that maybe they were going to have to confront her about something unpleasant and, well, he could just go back home now thanks. If he could walk on his own, which he couldn't. Buffy handed him off to Spike with a heavy warning glance, and Xander sagged back into him, no longer playing manly man for Buffy's sake.

"You going to live?" It was a whisper against his ear, low and worried, and Xander nodded.

"I think so. Just so tired. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

That surprised a chuckle out of Spike, and got him a tiny biting kiss right where his neck met his shoulder.

"Wouldn't know what to do with you if you didn't. Don't worry about it."

"Do you think. I mean, Anya wouldn't do this deliberately, would she?"

"Well, we'll just have to see, won't we? Buck up, pet. Soon be over now."

One last check to make sure they were all ready, and Buffy headed inside, looking as normal as possible. Willow followed, less able to look normal, and Tara went in too, just looking worried. With one last almost hug, which was kinda nice, Spike hauled Xander inside as well, and he tried to brace himself for whatever sort of confrontation followed.

Part Thirty-Four

"Anya? Anya, are you here? We need to talk to you."
Buffy played cautious woman, walking in slowly enough that she could get a full view of the shop. They all trooped in after her, and one by one they stopped dead,

mouths dropping open in shock. The shop looked like a candy factory, with box after box of brightly labeled bars stacked in the corners and the research table covered with a paper cutter and piles of mailing labels.

The new shipment looked to be Toffee Tsunami bars, and Xander's mouth watered. He could really use one of those right about now. He only realized he was leaning towards the nearest box making hungry little noises when Spike tightened his grip and said, "Whoa there, tiger. Let's us find out what's going on first, yeah?"

Spike had a point. There was no sign of anyone, human or demon, just the chocolate. But, oh the chocolate. Creamy, gooey chocolate wrapped around crisp, buttery toffee. Let Buffy handle the kick-ass, if there was any ass-kicking required. He just wanted chocolate. Chocolate that Spike wasn't letting him have, so clearly it was time for some misdirection. Bracing himself for balance, Xander wiggled his butt against Spike suggestively.

The girls had spread out, checking around for any sign of habitation, but he and Spike were still just inside the door, and no one was really paying them any attention. So Xander rubbed again, which caused Spike to groan. "Know what you're doing, and it's not going to work. So just hold still."

"But Spike. I want."

"Oh, I want too. But no. Now behave or I'll drop you on the floor on your bum. Slayer told me to keep my hands above your waist."

"She never said anything about my hands." Knowing that Spike wouldn't actually make good on his threat and let go, Xander wormed a hand between their bodies and massaged the bulge in Spike's jeans. "Look, your hands are still being good little Spikey hands."

Growling against Xander's neck, Spike arched into the touch, and they swayed in place. Checking to make sure the girls were still occupied, Xander began to work at Spike's belt buckle, trying for quiet and managing not loud enough to be really noticeable. The zipper was a bit louder, but Buffy was talking at that point, something about, "can you believe all this," so no one but Spike noticed. And boy did he notice. Hard, hard flesh under those jeans, and even at the rotten angle Xander got his hand around it and Spike moaned a little, scraping his teeth over Xander's shoulder in response. Forget the chocolate, Xander thought. I have a Spike.

Still using one hand to hold Xander upright, Spike slid the other hand around Xander's belly, up to his chest, scratching lightly over Xander's nipples. His arm was

beginning to ache from the weird position, but Xander couldn't give up the feel of Spike's cock in his hand, so he shifted sideways just enough to get more comfortable. Ever helpful, Spike shifted with him, rolling his hips and making affirmative noises. "Touch yourself, pet," he said, and pinched one of Xander's nipples hard enough to sting. And Xander did, moving his free hand to his own crotch to rub and press, feeling his zipper rasp painfully against his engorged flesh.

God it felt good, and Xander got lost in Spike, and the two of them were so wrapped up in each other that they didn't hear the door to the training room open, or anything else until Buffy shouted, "Ewww!"

Everything snapped back into real time, and Xander hit the floor as Spike let go of him and turned his back on the room to stuff himself back in his pants. Willow, Tara, and Buffy all stared at Xander with varying degrees of embarrassment. And then there was... Clem? Looking really mortified, looking anywhere but at Spike and Xander actually, and shifting his armload of boxes around uncomfortably.

"Oh hey, everyone," Clem said brightly. "Want some chocolate?"

Part Thirty-Five

It came out of four mouths simultaneously, like a chorus. Xander had a feeling the only reason Spike didn't join was that his back was still turned. Clem gifted them with a nervous smile and shuffled over to the table to set his burden down. "If you don't want some chocolate, can I get you some tea? For some reason there seems to be an awful lot of it here."

Still trying to wrap his mind around *Clem*, and still smarting from being dropped on his butt after all, Xander stayed silent and let Buffy do the talking. Which she would do any minute. The talking, that was. Sure enough, she was the first one to shake off the stun.

"Clem? What's going on here? Where's Anya?"

"Anya? Oh, um." Clem's face drooped even more than usual, and his shoulders sagged. "I guess this means you're not here on a social call. I got more visitors in Spike's crypt, you know? Is this about the chocolate?"

Because she told me it was harmless. It is, isn't it?
Because it's really good chocolate as taste goes. Well, the
caramel ones were a little grainy, but."

"Clem! Anya? Where is she?"

Xander winced, because ouch, Slayer tone, and Clem
didn't really deserve it. But they did need to know.
Subdued, Clem shook his head. "She's not here. I guess
I'd better get the boss, hadn't I?" And with that he turned
and shuffled back into the back room, leaving them all
staring at after him.

This floor, Xander thought, was even harder than the one
at his apartment. Soon he'd be able to tell where he was
in Sunndydale just by the feeling of the floor under his
ass. When he thought it was Anya they were facing, the
floor seemed like a good place to be, for groveling
purposes. But if it was someone else he wanted to be
standing on his own two feet. Or at least on Spike's own
two feet. "Help me up, doofus."

"Shit. Sorry, luv." If his legs got any weaker they'd just
have to rent a block and tackle to move him around with.
Spike didn't seem to have the same weakness problem,
maybe because his chocolate addiction came neatly
packaged in what was already his food. More like an
energy bar with a chocolate coating. The thought made

him laugh aloud, and everyone looked at him curiously, except Spike, who laughed with him as if he knew. And maybe he did, their sense of humor was eerily similar.

Loud throat clearing at the back of the shop made them all swing around and look. This time it was Willow who got her mouth to work first. "Halfrek?"

The vengeance, er, justice demon smiled benevolently. "You might as well call me Hallie. I mean, we're getting to be practically old friends aren't we? So, what can I do for you? That I'm not already doing, that is."

"You could start by telling us what it is you *are* doing. What's the deal with all of this?" Good old Buffy, always ready with the snark, and always willing to take charge.

"Well. I should think that would be obvious. I'm fulfilling a wish." She studied her nails modestly, then fluffed her hair. "And this wasn't an easy set up, let me tell you. Very complicated. A nice test of my abilities."

Shaking off the Alice in Wonderland feeling, Xander finally strung two words together. "Okay, what the heck? And where's Anya? Does she have anything to do with this?"

"Anyanka is on vacation. In England. She's visiting a Mr. Giles, I believe. I told her I'd watch the store while she

was gone. It's been rather amusing, and I needed a place to work."

More gaping, and Spike almost dropped him again. "You'd better put me in a chair, bleachy. I can only take so many more bruises."

Grumbling under his breath, Spike hauled Xander to a chair and plopped him down on it. And stood behind the chair with his hands on Xander's shoulders. Which was a nice show of support, actually. "So Anya doesn't know about this?"

"Oh, goodness no. I can't imagine what she would think if she knew. Why doesn't everyone sit down? And maybe Clem can get us some tea."

"I don't want tea," Buffy shouted. "I want answers. What kind of moron would make a wish that would bring all this on?"

Did all vengeance demons look like social workers? Because that's what Halfrek looked like with that sympathy-smug expression on her face. "You, Buffy. You're the one that made the wish. Don't you remember it?"

"Me? I never made a wish. Did I?" Buffy looked at Willow and Tara for support, and got uncertain shrugs in reply.

"I can't remember, Buffy," Willow said. "Maybe?"

"It could have been an offhand comment," Tara added.

"Okay, me? I'm more concerned with what she actually wished for. Anyone else find that of interest?" Spike's squeezed his shoulders lightly and Xander realized he'd raised his voice more than was strictly necessary. But his head was starting to hurt from trying to keep it all straight and he wanted chocolate. Or sex. Dammit.

"Oh for. Let me see, I think the direct quote was..." Hallie stopped for a moment and closed her eyes, one hand going to her temple. When she spoke again, the voice that came out was perfectly Buffy, frighteningly accurate. "I just want all of my friends to be happy. I wish everyone could get what they really want." Opening her eyes again, Hallie crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot. "It hasn't been easy you know. I had to come up with some plan that would start with your friends and work its way out to everyone. The chocolate scheme was a stroke of genius if I do say so, myself."

"Yeah? How do you figure that one?" Spike asked. That odd look that seemed to pass between Halfrek and Spike happened again, but she seemed content to let it go in favor of explaining.

"Well, let's start at the top, shall we? Buffy wanted to become closer to her sister. The chocolate of the month club gave them a secret to share. Something to draw them together as conspirators. Not long after that, they started sharing other secrets, doing more together. They were both happier."

"And what about me and the boy, here?"

"Oh." She looked momentarily nonplussed. "Well, I have to admit I didn't see that coming, William. But, you know what they say about fine lines. And really, Xander needed someone who could be devoted to him, and well, you devote very well. He needs to feel useful and manly, and having sex with you does more for him in that arena than Anya did. As for you, you wanted your bite back, didn't you? And you need someone to care for. Someone who needs your devotion, as it were. All in all, I'd say it's a good match."

"Willow? Tara? What do they get out of it?"

Back to Buffy now, and that superior look was on Hallie's face. "Each other, of course. Just what they needed to get over their awkwardness with one another.

Researching a friend's problems. And of course, poor Anyanka. I did it as much for her as for anyone, you know. Thanks to your wish I was able to get her out of

town to see that nice man she likes so much, and she's making money. Every bit of cash that comes in from the chocolate, after expenses of course, goes to her. Your Mr. Giles will be happy with Anya, once he gets used to the idea. I gave Clem a job, which makes him content, simple soul that he is, and that accounted for most of your friends and family. So then I started on the 'everyone' part."

"You mean all of the other chocolate addicts? But some of them have died!" *Go Will*, Xander thought, *get all defend the innocent*. It was good to see.

"Well. Sometimes what people really want isn't actually good for them, now is it?"

Struggling to his feet, Xander pulled himself to as much of his full height as he could while listing the way he was. "Yeah, well that's all great, but the chocolate has this nasty side effect of making us really tired and weak. What do we have to do to lift the curse?"

Halfrek gave him a look. "Not all wishes are answered with curses, you know. I could have taken the easy way out, and not even answered at all. But you were all so desperately unhappy. It hurt. As for how to stop the effects of the chocolate, physically, you simply have to

admit that you're happy. That you now have what you really want."

Stunned silence greeted that absurd pronouncement. Wavering, Xander tried to stay standing, but lost the battle and tipped ass over teakettle. Spike came to the rescue one more time, catching him as he fell. They ended up with Spike sitting on the floor with Xander mostly in his lap. Looking up into Spike's concerned face, Xander said, "Oh, you've got to be kidding."

Part Thirty-Six

"Well, if that's all, I have a business to get back to."

"No. You can't do that. You have to stop. If you want to send out chocolate, fine, but no more spells. I can't see how people are happy when they die. And it sure isn't giving their friends and family what they want is it?"

Frowning, Halfrek considered Buffy's words. "Well, you do have a point. Are you satisfied with the results of your wish as is? If I terminate the contract now, everything that has happened stands, but no one else is affected."

"Yes. That's fine. Just make it all stop."

Heaving a sigh, Halfrek made a dramatic, I Dream of Genie motion, and Xander's ears popped from a palpable

change in the air pressure. Magic leaving the room, he figured. "There. I'll leave the last shipment for dear Clem to send out. It's perfectly harmless now. I'll just be off, then."

She started to make another snappy finger gesture, but Xander stopped her when he yelled, "Wait. What am I supposed to do? I still feel like crap."

"Yeah. The boy here's not the only one who's hooked on this stuff. The others never ate any, but what about us?" Spike didn't really sound panicked, but Xander was. Panicked. If the chocolate was impotent now, what was he going to do when his last bar wore off?

"As I said, you'll just have to admit that you have what you want. Otherwise, the fever will become progressively worse, until eventually you die. Ta ta, now."

Poof. Gone. Xander stared at the spot Halfrek had vacated, absolutely flustered. Clobbered. Maybe even flobbered. Admit that he was happy? Fucking Spike? Wanting to fuck Spike? Wanting to be bitten by Spike? Of course, maybe the idea wasn't so off. They did say insane people were happier than sane ones because they didn't know they were nuts.

"Xander? You okay?" Buffy crouched down in front of him, putting a hand on his shoulder. "I'm so sorry, Xander. I should never, ever make wishes. I know better. We'll figure out a way to fix you."

You know, Spike growling over his prone body was getting to be a habit, albeit an extremely odd one. But there it was, a possessive grrr sort of sound. "What if he doesn't need to be fixed? Make him sound like a spraying cat or a naughty puppy. Not that I mind the naughty puppy part, but that's beside the point. What if the demon bitch is right? What if he just has to admit he's okay with it all?"

Wide-eyed and open-mouthed, Buffy hit the side of her head with the flat of her hand. "What? Did I hear that right? How could he possibly be happy with you, Spike? He hates you! Blood sucking, evil fiend, remember? The only reason he did *anything* with you was the chocolate. And then you probably pushed it, so he didn't really have a choice."

Xander opened his mouth to say something, anything, he wasn't sure what. Spike moved before he could, lifting Xander up so he could slide out from under him and setting him gently back on the floor. "Right. Always willing to jump in and accuse me," he said. "Always

bashing me over the head with my mistakes. Bugger it. You're right. I'll leave him alone. Just make him right, whatever it takes." With a swirl of smoke and leather filled air, Spike left almost as quickly as Halfrek had. All Xander could do was flop back on the floor and stare at the door, wondering why the heck this stuff always happened to him. And feeling sick as a dog.

"It'll be okay, Xand," Willow said. "You'll see." It would be nice to believe that, Xander thought, but he wasn't sure anything would ever be all right again.

Part Thirty-Seven

Two days. Two days since Spike left and the girls took him back to Buffy's house. They figured it would be easier to keep an eye on him that way, and they could try all sorts of anti-curse magic without having to go to three of four places to gather supplies. Mostly they just tiptoed around Xander, talking in hospital whispers. Obviously the situation was Very Bad.

And did he really need to listen to Willow and Buffy's hushed conversations to know that? The ache was no longer an ache. It was a huge, throbbing pain. His head was going to explode. Either that or his cock would. The shivering was back, and the teeth chattering, and the horrible burning fever. He had no more chocolate. He had no Spike. He was going to die.

The really funny thing, the thing Spike would get a huge kick out of, was that Xander had caved after the first day. After an endless night of sweating and freezing, of shaking and dry heaves, he'd asked Buffy to go get Spike. Please, please, make it stop and go get Spike, in fact. She and Willow both told him no. That it would be okay. That they'd make it better soon.

But it wasn't. They tried spell after spell and nothing made it better. Tara just looked at him with those big sympathetic eyes. Dawn sat with him the first day, after Buffy filled her in, but after that she quietly disappeared, and Xander couldn't blame her. Misery may love company, but it got a little old for the company. Especially Dawn, because she had this thing about everyone dying.

The smell of incense made him Xander want to throw up, but there was nothing to come up, and he was miserable.

It was very possible, from the feel of it, that he had a few broken ribs from all of the heaving. The weakness was the worst though. Sitting up wasn't an option anymore, let alone standing. Even lifting his head just seemed like too much of an effort. Why did all of this have to hinge on Spike? Why did Buffy have to make the wish a two-parter? It wasn't like he couldn't admit that he needed to be needed. He could. Would he bitch about being useless man so much if he didn't know it would make him happy to have someone that wanted him, just him, in ways that even Anya hadn't? If the curse would go away by admitting what he really wanted, then gee, yeah, it would be gone like that.

But no, he had to be happy. And he'd tried to tell himself that he was. That everything was fine, and he didn't need Spike. He'd even tried to tell himself that he was happy because Spike obviously *did* want what was best for Xander, because he'd left, and that was glad making. Since he was still sicker than a plague victim, it obviously wasn't working.

Floating on a new wave of pain, Xander listened to the latest chant and hoped for at least unconsciousness. Briefly, yesterday when no one was watching, he'd tried masturbation, because sex had helped in that regard before. But it looked like solo sex wasn't happening

either, even though he felt like it might just fall off. Maybe he could get Buffy to bash his head in like a baby seal.

"Hey, Xander. How are you feeling?" Looked like Dawn was back, and she hunkered down so she was right on level with his face so he didn't have to look up.

"F-fine, kiddo." Oh, yeah, that was convincing.

Dawn thought so too, if the look on her face was any indication. "I went by Spike's crypt. He's there."

"Hey, that's great."

"He's really sick."

"Kick a guy when he's down, why don't you?" Forcing a laugh out through clenched teeth, Xander curled up a little tighter in his ball of agony. "They won't go get him."

"I tried to get him to come, but he said he wouldn't unless you asked. I'm not sure he could have though. He looked kinda like you. All weak and oogy."

"Th-thanks."

"Can't you at least try, Xander?"

"Sure, just let me play slug and ooze across the floor."

"God, no one ever even tries!" She ran off, doing that sort of Dawn snuffle, and it could get worse than it was. Wasn't that nice? The silence from the other side of the living room was deafening, so the latest attempt must have failed. Figured. And now he had guilt on top of the ow. Because Spike was sick because of him. Because Spike wouldn't even be affected by all of this if it weren't for him. Even though Halfrek said Spike needed something too, and she was trying to help everyone, not just Buffy's friends. So okay, maybe Spike would be in the mix anyway. But not this way, not if it wasn't for him. Maybe it was time to try again.

"Buff?" That came out almost soundless. Louder, Xander thought, you've never had any trouble managing loud.
"Buffy?"

"Xander! What's wrong?" Buffy and Willow came over quickly checking him over, cataloging his symptoms with a look that had become all too familiar.

"D-don't know, Buff. Maybe I'm just under this c-curse. And dying?"

"We're trying, Xand." The reproach in Willow's voice made it worse upon worse, and wasn't he just girly man, because he was all weepy for like the third time in an hour.

"I know. But. I want Spike. Please? Just to t-talk to him?"

"Xander."

"No, Buff. We did it your way. Now mine? Please?"

"Xander, you can't mean it. Buffy's right. You two would be awful for each other."

"But what if we aren't? P-please?"

The girls exchanged a look, and Xander knew what was coming. More assurances that they would fix it. More convincing him that he didn't need a bleached moron in his life to make him happy. He could recite it himself by now. Which was why Tara's voice breaking into the mix was such a surprise.

"I think we should get him."

Wow. A vote for the side of Xander. And didn't that cause a stir. Buffy won out for volume, because Willow was stuck in huh mode. "That's nuts, Tara. Crazy. They hate each other. There's no way. We all think it's wrong."

"But it doesn't matter what we think, does it?" Tara had that quiet certainty in her voice, the kind she got when she knew she was right, and she wasn't going to let it go.

"We're Xander's friends. We love him and want him to be

happy. What makes people happy isn't always what's best for them, just like Halfrek said. Sometimes we have to put aside what we think, and let our friends do what they want to do."

"I hate to admit it, Buffy. But she may have a point."

Crouching down next to Xander, Buffy put a hand on his forehead. She frowned. "I think it's dumb. But Tara's right. It's not my call. Is that what you want, Xand?"

"Yeah, Buff, that's what I want. But Dawn said he w-won't come unless I ask."

"Dawn! Get your butt down here."

Dawn came back into the room cautiously. "What?"

"You went to see Spike? How could you do that?"

The sisters stared each other down. "This is partly my fault, Buffy. I had to try to make it right."

If he strained, Xander could see both of their faces, and Buffy's expression softened from big sister ire to something like sympathy. "You did good, Dawn. It's partly my fault too. And we do need to make it right. Let's go get Spike."

Part Thirty-Eight

Before Buffy and Dawn left, Xander made them move him upstairs to a bedroom. No way was his talk with Spike going to be performance art. Some nervous giggling happened on Dawn's part, and much "That's icky," on Buffy's part, but they hauled him up there anyway. Willow sat with him while Tara went down and cleaned up the magical supplies, and when she tried to talk to him about it he just shook his head and told her he'd tell her everything, just like he always did, but after.

Not only was he not quite sure what to tell her yet, because he hadn't quite made up his mind what to tell Spike, but he was afraid Spike wouldn't come. Terrified, in fact, that adrenaline heart-pounding feeling, and hey if he hyperventilated maybe he'd finally pass out. The wait went on and on, and Xander had pretty much decided to give up and throw himself out the window when Buffy called out, "Got him!" from downstairs. The relief was

more crushing than the worry, and Xander felt like he might expire any minute.

And lo, Buffy did have Spike with her, dragging along between she and Dawn, looking almost but not quite as bad as Xander felt. Well, vamp, you know. It would probably take the curse a lot longer to kill one of those than it would a human. Except Spike's cheeks were gaunt, and dark circles shadowed his eyes, and he shook hard enough to make things clink inside his coat. Buffy eased Spike down on the bed, and Dawn helped him slip off his duster, and the girls left without another word. Just worried glances on the way out the door.

"You came." It came out more accusatory than relieved.

"They said you asked." That came out petulant, and Spike stared at the pattern on the bedspread instead of looking at Xander.

"I did."

"Well, I came then."

"Right."

"Yeah."

The ceiling was as interesting to Xander as the bedspread was to Spike. Nothing at all like the ceiling of the basement of doom, no cracks or water damage. Not like the more vaulted ceiling in his apartment. And certainly not like Spike's crypt. Amazing how each one had its own distinct personality. Amazing the ways he tried to avoid the talk he needed to have. Might as well get it over with.

"You look like you're going to fall over. Why don't you get horizontal? This may take a while."

That got Spike to look at him finally. "Why?"

"What?"

"Why should this take a long while? Either you are or you aren't."

"What?"

"What are you, a parrot? Either you're wanting me, or not. You're happy, or you aren't. Pretty straightforward, pet."

If Xander could move, he'd smack the heck out of Spike right about then. It wasn't that easy. There was the whole never done that with a guy thing. And the whole evil dead thing. And if that wasn't enough there was the

whole bite me even with the chip thing. And the dying thing. That was not of the good.

"Come here, Spike."

"Why?"

"Do you have to make everything so fucking difficult? Because I can't come to you, that's why. And since you're still upright, I'd say you can still topple over close enough for me to reach."

With a minute shrug, Spike toppled. Not very graceful or smooth, just sort of plonk and roll. But he was near enough now for Xander to touch. Close enough to see each individual eyelash, and the smooth, almost poreless skin stretched tight over Spike's cheeks. "Better?"

"Yeah. I figure there's only one way to get conclusive evidence."

Their noses rubbed. "Yeah? What would that be?"

"This." And Xander moved just enough to bring their lips together. Wasn't much of a kiss at first, what with the chattering teeth and shaking parts and all. But it got better. Much better, because Spike made a noise low in his throat, one of those not human noises, and deepened the kiss. And oh, it felt good. Like lemonade on a super

hot day. Like lotion on a bad sunburn. Jeez, even his similes were lame these days, but it felt so damned good. So good that he stopped shaking for the first time in two days.

Pulling away, gasping for air, Xander rested his forehead against Spike's chin. "I don't want to want this." Even to his own ears his voice was small and miserable, and Spike put a hand on the back of Xander's neck and tilted his head up.

"Then just tell me you'll be happy without me."

"I can't. And how can you take this so well? You can't stand me."

"Don't mind you so much, these days. And I've never denied being love's bitch, have I? When I fall, I fall hard. Ce... Halfrek knows that, I suppose. But it's up to you, isn't it? You tell me you're better off without me, I go."

"Kiss me again?" Because, yeah, if Spike kissed him he didn't have to think. Those kisses made everything else go away, and there it was. The brush of Spike's lips over his, and the taste of Spike on his tongue. Cigarettes and blood and longing. Closer together, both of them moving to get more contact, and his head didn't hurt anymore. But his cock still did. So sensitive it was painful, and he

rubbed against Spike frantically, burning it all away with the unbearable friction.

In between kisses Spike talked to him. The words meant nothing. He couldn't make sense of them, but the tone infected him with its urgency, and he clung tighter, kissed harder. The touch of Spike's hands on his body healed something in him, made the pain go away, and Xander arched into the feel of them. Into the ones that rubbed along his back and kneaded his ass. He had to breathe, or he would keep kissing Spike forever, locked away from tough decisions and whys and hows.

When Xander pulled back for air, they stared at each other, both wild with it, that thing between them, both needy and wanting things they shouldn't. Then they came together again, devouring, insatiable. Too much, too long apart and suffering. They moved with a violence born of despair, of almost lost it, and it wasn't enough. Wouldn't be enough even if Xander could crawl inside Spike's skin. And in that moment, with Spike's lips on his and Spike's tongue in his mouth and Spike's leg between his, Xander made his decision. Magic or no, stupid or not, he had to have this.

Pulling away from the kiss, panting, Xander shoved at Spike's shoulders. Spike looked at him, a terrible

disappointment in his eyes that changed to shock when Xander tipped his head back and offered his throat.

"Please, Spike. Now."

A low, possessive hum came from deep in Spike's chest, and his face rippled as he darted forward and sank his fangs into Xander's neck. That same electric charge hit him, like a fork in a light socket, and Xander couldn't hold it in. He wrapped himself around Spike and humped furiously, screaming as he came harder than he ever had in his life. He was only dimly aware of Spike's triumphant shout, and they collapsed together, so profoundly relaxed that they were both asleep in seconds.

Part Thirty-Nine

Xander woke up slowly. Cautiously even. Waking up was a bad thing lately, and he was in no rush to go through it again. Something heavy and boneless rested against his right side, which was mostly asleep. His left side, which was not mostly asleep, was sore, and he felt weak as a

kitten. But when he tried to stretch, his arms moved just like they were told to, and his hands didn't shake.

And he was hungry. Starving, in fact. Eggs. Bacon. A mountain of toast. Or maybe just leftover pizza. Or, depending on what time it was, fresh pizza. Commanding one of his hands to move, amazed when it did, Xander whacked the spiky blonde head that rested in the hollow between his neck and shoulder.

"Mrphgmuph?"

"Hey, bloodsucking evil one. Get up. I have to pee. And I'm hungry."

Oh, that was just too cute, the way Spike looked at him while waiting for his eyes to focus. Confused, then aware, then sort of amazed. "S'that it then? No more fighting it? Just like that?"

Xander sighed. "Do we have to make a big emotional thing about it now, Spike? You here. Is good. Me hungry. We'll iron out all the details later, okay? Now move before I make an even bigger wet spot."

Once again, Spike showed astounding celerity when confronted by those pesky human bathroom things, and rolled off to the other side of the bed. Momentarily diverted by the pull and flex of muscle as Spike stretched,

but the need for relief and refreshment overcame that and Xander headed off to the bathroom out in the hall on shaky legs. Not as shaky as they had been, though. This was just a haven't eaten in days, been fed on by vampire shaky. Which was good. And when did he ever think he would be saying that, even in his head?

"Xander! Are you okay?"

Willow and Tara came down the hall towards him, and it occurred to Xander to look down and make sure he was wearing pants. He was. Sweats, to be exact, and while they were stained with all sorts of unmentionable things, at least he was decent. "Yeah. But I have to go. Is there food?"

Ducking into the bathroom then, and Xander realized just how long it had been since he went to the bathroom. Ew. While he was there he cleaned up a little, and drank about five huge cups of water. Much better. Voices still sounded out in the hall, and he knew he had to go back out there, but he didn't really want to. Hearing Willow's surprised, "Spike! You're naked!" finally pulled him out the door.

Spike was indeed naked, wandering down the hall toward the bathroom with supreme indifference to his nude state. Shaking his head and biting back a silly grin,

Xander intercepted him and handed him the towel he'd grabbed. "Put this on, will you? I'm off in search of clean clothes for both of us. You need to bathe."

"You could wash me, luv." Spike leered, and Xander hit him.

"No, Spike. Food first. Sex later."

Squeaky noises issued from the Willow-Tara end of the hall, and Xander shoved Spike into the bathroom before going in search of cloth type coverings. Forestalling the questions he could see bubbling up in Willow's head with a raised hand, Xander asked, "Clothes?"

"We brought some from your apartment yesterday," Tara replied. "I'll go get them."

"Thanks. Will? Food? Then I promise we'll have a babbling question answer hug fest, okay?"

Relieved smile from Willow then, and she nodded before bounding off down the stairs in search of edibles. Tara came back with clothes, and before long both Xander and Spike were not so naked and much less grimy. They headed downstairs and Xander zeroed in on the kitchen like a cat who hears an electric can opener. French toast. Willow was making him french toast. He wanted to kiss her toes.

"You look better." Dawn passed him a glass of orange juice and grinned at him. "Does this mean everything is good?"

"Everything is on its way to good. Still definitely of the odd, but then it's Spike we're talking about."

The vampire in question just shot him the finger without removing his head from the refrigerator, where he rummaged for his own breakfast. Triumphant at last, he backed out, butt wiggling, and Xander laughed out loud.

"That's a sound we weren't sure we'd hear again. And can I just say that I'd never thought I'd see the day when we kept blood in the Summers fridge?" Buffy sat down across from him at the table and looked him over carefully. "You okay?"

"Yeah. I'm okay. Weird, still working on getting it all straight in my head, but okay. Are you? Okay with it?"

"No. But it's not my deal. It's yours. My fault, yes. My deal, no. As long as you can put up with it, and he doesn't kill you, which you know, distinct possibility if he can bite you, then I'll let you handle it. The minute he hurts you, he's mine."

"You'd have to wait in line," Willow said, with a dark look at Spike. "I have a shovel with your name on it Mister."

"Good thing I want what's best for him, isn't it? And since the biting thing is a feature of the wish, then it wouldn't let me do it if it was going to make him unhappy, now would it?" They all stared at him, amazed at the simple logic of that statement. All except Xander, who munched happily on his french toast and studiously ignored the sight of Spike dipping a piece into his blood.

"Xan? Are you sure? I mean, can you really do this?" Because it was Willow, he didn't get upset. Neither did Spike, but he did stop chewing and looked at Xander as intently as everyone else.

"Well, it's better than dying." Ouch. Spike could do hurt really well. Who knew? Time to make his position clear. "I can't say that I understand it. Or that I even want it." And here he looked Spike right in the eye. "But it feels good. And right, funky as that sounds. So yeah. I'm doing this. And that's it, okay? Xander has spoken. No more second guessing."

The relieved look only lasted a few seconds before being taken over by a smug grin, but Xander saw it there on Spike's face, and it made him think he finally did something right. It was going to take a lot of adjusting on everyone's part, but he could do this. He would. No matter where it took him in the world of odd.

"So," Xander said, polishing off the last of his breakfast.
"Anyone got any chocolate?"

The End