

# Theories

by

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## 1 Xander's Announcement

"It's okay Xander, she wasn't right for you anyway."

"We still love you Xander, and none of us liked her very much either."

"You'll get over her soon Xander, and then you'll find someone even better! "

That last was from Tara, though Xander was still staring at Willow, a little surprised by what she had said about not liking Anya.

The Scoobies were all gathered at Buffy's house, watching movies and gorging on junk food. It was the fifth hour of the 'Help Xander get over the evil ex-demoness who broke his heart' party, and festivities

were in full swing. Willow and Tara were curled up together on one end of the sofa, with Xander sprawled out on the other end. Buffy was sitting in one recliner snuggled in Riley's lap. Dawn was sprawled out on a pile of pillows on the floor. Surprisingly, even Giles was there, perched gingerly in the other armchair. Pizza boxes and candy wrappers were scattered everywhere, it was in fact almost exactly like their normal research sessions, only missing the sniping commentary from the bleached blond vampire who had not been invited on account of not being very good at cheering people up. Plus he said he didn't want to come to such a girly party anyway. Anya was missing too, but that was the whole point of needing the party in the first place. Xander grinned happily at his friends, not minding their fumbled attempts to comfort him.

Truth was, he wasn't all that broken up. "S'okay." Xander took a big swig from his soda and grabbed a candy from the pile in his lap. "I'm actually not that upset about it."

A round of 'awww, isnt he brave' sounds met that last

remark.

Xander pushed on with what he had to say. "Actually, I am glad for the chance to move on and try new things, meet new people."

Willow looked expectantly at Xander, "Do you already have someone new in mind? Who is she? "

Xander shook his head at his friend, "Nope, no one special in mind. I'll let you know as soon as I have a new, inappropriate crush picked out. And who knows, the next object of my affection may not even be a she. I've been thinking about trying out the whole gay thing, 'cuz you know, my track record with the ladies hasn't been so great..."

Dead silence and frozen stares met his comments, and Xander actually began to worry that his friends had been frozen in time. "Um, hello? Guys? Snap out of it."

Giles was the first to 'snap out of it'. "Ex-excuse me, Xander? Would you mind repeating what you just

said? Because it sounded an awful lot like..."

"Yes, Giles, I did say that I thought I might be gay."

"Ah, yes, and what exactly has brought you to that decision?"

"Yeah," Buffy interrupted, "Is there some boyfriend you've been hiding from us?"

"No, no boyfriend, no sneaking around behind your backs, nothing like that. It's just," And now Xander suddenly wished the soda in his hand was a beer, he wasn't usually this open with anyone, and it was making him uncomfortable. "It's just that ever since high school, when Larry came out, it's kinda been in my mind that I might be..."

"But Xander, you've never, I mean, usually you're all into the girls." This last a tentative interjection from Willow.

Xander reached over and squeezed his best friend's hand, "Yeah I know Wills, but now since you've got the

whole liking girls thing covered, I figured it was time to explore other options."

Willow and Tara both blushed bright red, and the room broke out into hysterical laughter.

It took a few minutes for everyone to recover, but when the laughter had mostly died down Xander was able to gasp out, "No seriously guys, it's just a hypothesis at this time. If it makes you all more comfortable we can just say I'm bi, until the theory has been tested."

This brought a few more giggles and Xander relaxed back into the embrace of the couch, glad that at least this little revelation wouldn't cost him his friends, not that he had thought it would, but still... Shaking off the last of his fear he grabbed the remote, "Okay guys, what's next, Aliens? Die Hard? Oooh, I know, what about Tomb Raider, Angelina Jolie is cute!"

Buffy grinned at him, "Oh come on Xander, wouldn't you rather watch Indiana Jones? Harrison Ford is awfully sexy."

Xander blushed slightly at that, but managed to look miffed as his friends laughed at him, "I'll have you know that I prefer blondes." The reference to Anya sobered the group up and Xander was about to apologize until he noticed the evil gleam in Willow's eye. Oh Shit, Xander thought, payback's a bitch.

"So Xander," Willow began sweetly, staring at him with big innocent eyes, "You prefer blondes. Does this mean we should fix you up with Spike?"

The room erupted into laughter intermingled with the occasional 'Oh gross!'

Xander pretended to actually consider the option, then made a face. "No thanks, I'm afraid necrophilia just isn't my thing."

The produced a pissed, 'Hey!' from Buffy, as the rest laughed loudly.

"Seriously Buffy," Xander continued, "Isn't it weird, with

you know, the whole body temperature thing?"

Buffy looked embarrassed and Riley came to Buffy's rescue, threatening a laughing group with evil things before he and Buffy retreated into their own little world, kissing and making little noises at one another. Finally Dawn made gagging noises and threw a pillow at the couple, and the group happily settled down for the next movie.



A few days later found them all together again, this time including Spike, spread out around Giles' living room, hunkered down over ancient books researching yet another upcoming apocalypse. Xander was so absorbed in trying to make out what exactly the two demons in the picture were doing that he didn't notice the evil grins that Buffy and Willow shared.

"So, Xander."

"Yeah Buff, what's up?"

"Willow and I were just wondering, theory been tested yet?"

Xander felt himself blushing a deep crimson.

Spike noticed too, "Bloody hell, Whelp, you look like a bleedin lobster. What've you got your panties all in a bunch about?"

Buffy and Willow started laughing, "Actually we were wondering who managed to get him out of his panties."

Spike looked confused and Xander tried to replace his look of mortification with one of not caring-ness. "For your information, no, the theory has not been tested yet."

The girls just laughed some more.

Spike seemed to finally catch the gist of the conversation, "Lay off the whelp, you two. Bloody hell, he's just been dumped by the bint, give a man a chance to recover."

To Spike's surprise, Xander managed to look more mortified, and the two women broke into even more hysterical laughter. "What the 'ell has gotten in to you two? Yo Rupes, I think these two have been put under some sort of curse or something."

Giles looked disapprovingly at the group, "Oh no, I am not getting in the middle of this. Leave me out."

Spike stared at the watcher before turning back to the Witch and the Slayer, who were now just lying in a heap on the couch gasping for air. The Whelp, he noticed, was trying to hide behind his book.

Willow was the first to regain her breath, "It's good to know you care about Xander, Spike." She began to grin evilly, "Because we were all thinking, seeing as how Xander had mentioned that he prefers blondes, and with you being so cute and available and all, that you two

would make a lovely couple."

What the redhead had so innocently suggested didn't quite all sink in at first, and Spike began to preen from the complement, "Well, yes, I am quite shaggable..." Suddenly Spike trailed off and turned a look of gaping astonishment on the innocent looking witch. "What did you just say?"

Buffy smiled, "Just that you and Xander would make a lovely couple. Didn't you hear the big announcement, Xander's gay, or so the theory goes."

Spike was dumbfounded, he looked from Buffy, to Willow, to Xander who was trying to hide again, and back to Buffy. "He..he's what?!"

Xander sighed and threw down his book, glaring his best evil glare at the again hysterical girls. "You are both so dead." He turned to the more-pale-looking-than-usual Vampire, "I'm gay Spike, probably."

The Vampire scooted back away from the boy,

"You're...gay?" the last word came out more as a squeak than anything else.

Xander frowned at the blonde. "Yeah, so what?"

Finally Spike seemed to find his voice, he stood up and angrily gestured at the grinning girls, "And what, exactly did they mean when they said we'd make a good couple?"

"Relax blondie, they were just teasing you."

Spike stomped across the room, "Well they can bloody well stop it, because I. AM. NOT. A. POUF!"

The whole room was staring in silence at the outraged Vampire.

"But Spike," came a tentative query from Willow, "we thought, I mean, being a Vampire and all, that gender wasn't really an issue..." the redhead trailed off.

Spike threw up his hands in exasperation. "Do you lot

believe everything you read? Sure for some it's not, but for some of us it is! And I'll thank you to not go spreading rumors like that about me, my reputation in this town is damaged enough, what with me hanging around with you lot, I don't need every demon and his brother thinkin' I'm a bleeding fairy!" With that impassioned speech the angry Vampire stomped out of the house and into the night.

The Scooby gang stared at each other. Buffy spoke first, "Well I don't believe it, is Spike actually?"

Willow nodded, "I think he's homophobic!"

Xander met their stares with his own best evil smile, "This is gonna be so much fun!"

## **2 Spike's Dilemma**

Spike pounded his fists into the demon in front of him, reveling in the satisfying smack of flesh and crunching of bone. For the last month, the gang had been tormenting him relentlessly about his supposed feelings for the Harris boy, and he was on his last nerve. The truth was, he liked the Whelp, just not in the snuggle bunny sort of way. The few weeks he'd spent living in the boys basement had formed a fledgling friendship between them, and now he couldn't even joke with the whelp or suggest a game of pool without one of the girls giggling that he was making a pass at the brunette.

As for the reason Spike avoided any mention of his supposed exploits with other men... SNAP, with a satisfying crunch Spike broke the demons neck, his enjoyment of the moment overshadowed by the dark path his thoughts had almost wandered down. Nope, not going there, not ever again.

Spike shuddered to himself, then turned to see what the rest of the Scooby gang were up too. Xander was just finishing off the last of what looked like quite a fight, judging from the number of bodies piled in front of

him. Buffy was teasing and tormenting a group of demons, while simultaneously kicking the shit out of them, and Spike almost felt sorry for them, but he'd been on the receiving end of the Slayer's bizarre sense of humor one too many times this past month to feel too sorry. Red and her girl were standing in a circle, Giles watching over them, chanting. Spike wandered closer to the fray, absentmindedly grabbing a fleeing demon and passing it back to the Slayer, as he watched the Witches work. He watched as a giant fireball began to form in front of them, and noticed that the Slayer and the Whelp had herded the rest of the demons into a group, making a nice fat target. Spike chuckled to himself amused at the fate awaiting the clueless bunch of slime, when suddenly he realized where in the graveyard they were.

"Oh bollocks."

He tried to yell out a warning, but it was too late. The magic fireball sped towards its victims, the Slayer and the boy leaped out of the way, and Spike watched helplessly as the pack of demons, and his crypt they were standing in front of, went up in flames.

"Oh Spike, I'm so sorry."

"Yeah, we're sorry Spike, we...we just didn't realize."

Spike shrugged off the Witch's heartfelt apologies, they had been doing it for the last hour, mostly tearfully too, which normally would have caused the blond to immediately forgive them, but he was still smarting from a month of teasing and so was stringing out the apologies for as long as possible. Mostly he was too busy picking through the charred, sodden remains of his former home.

Xander picked up what was once probably a magazine and tossed it aside in disgust. "The problem with magic fire is that it doesn't know that stone's not supposed to burn."

"Yes, well, be that as it may, the sun will be up in an hour, and we had best figure out what Spike is going to do till he can find a new place to live." The Watcher's tone clearly said he was hoping that the Vampire would

not decide to stay with him.

Tara quietly murmured, "We destroyed his home, I suppose he could stay with us."

Spike perked up at that, "Really? In the girl's dorm? Can I watch you do spells?"

Tara blushed and stammered, but Willow didn't give into the Vampires wheedling tone. "No way Spike, as sorry as I am that we destroyed your crypt, staying in our dorm is not an option."

Spike tried to appear crestfallen and pouted.

Xander wandered over to the group, handing Spike a few soggy but un-burnt tee shirts and a couple of c.d.s he'd found. "Don't worry guys, Xan-man to the rescue. Blondie stayed with me before, I'm used to him, he can stay with me this time."

Buffy opened her mouth, an evil glint in her eye, but to Spike's surprise Xander interrupted her. "Shut it

Buff. No more teasing. Gods knows I've enjoyed tormenting Spike just as much as you all have, but we just destroyed the guy's house. He deserves a break. This is the official start of the no teasing Spike moratorium." Xander turned to look at Spike, who was doing a good impression of a stranded fish. "What? Like I want to listen to you bitch for the next week? No thanks."

The group began walking back towards the town but Spike was still staring at Xander like he'd grown a second head. Xander grinned and grabbed Spike by the elbow, pulling him along. "Come on roomy, lets get home, I smell like charred demon and you're not much better. Home, shower, food, bed, then tomorrow we'll try to find you a nice new dank crypt."

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Spike paced the small confines of the basement

restlessly, switching an unlighted cigarette from hand to hand. Just what did the whelp mean by bringing him here? And what was with the sticking up for him in front of the gang? I think I've made it bloody clear that I'm not interested in him, what the hell game is he playing? Spike heard the shower shut off and threw himself down on the couch trying to look casual and not at all wiggled out, as a dripping Xander, wearing boxers and an undershirt, emerged from the steamy bathroom, toweling his hair dry. "Your turn!" the brunette sing-songed.

Spike grumbled to himself and stomped towards the bathroom; he froze when a hand suddenly grasped his arm." What?"

Xander smiled and thrust a pair of sweatpants and a tee shirt into Spike's arms, "Just thought you'd need something to wear, after. Your clothes are kinda slime covered."

Spike glanced down at himself, finally noticing his beslimed state. "Yeah, well, thanks mate."

Xander smiled and released the vampire, who brushed past him and into the bathroom, hurriedly shutting the door behind him.

Xander pulled out the couch bed and made it up, then tossed his clothes into the washing machine. He heard the shower running and knocked on the door.

"What?" came the snarky reply.

Xander nudged the door open and stuck his head in the door, "Gimme your clothes, I'm gonna start a load of laundry."

Spike's wet head shot out from behind the shower curtain and glared at Xander, "Just what the bloody hell do you think you're doing in here!"

Xander laughed at the glowering vampire, "I'm just grabbing your clothes, you do want them washed don't you?"

Spike grumbled and disappeared back behind the shower curtain, "Just don't go peekin', you big pouf."

Xander laughed and grabbed the pile of clothes, "Like I'd look at your skinny ass. I like real men, thanks."

Xander laughed at the injured "Hey!" that followed him as the bathroom door slammed shut.

Xander was munching his way through a TV dinner and idly watching the boob tube when Spike stomped out of the bathroom. "There's a mug of blood in the microwave."

Spike grunted and detoured to the kitchenette, grabbing the mug and blowing on it. They sat in silence, watching the early morning programs. Finally Xander sighed and turned off the T.V.,

"Well, that's it for me, time for good little boys and bad little Vampires to be in bed."

Spike looked up from the chair he was slouched in,

"I'm not getting into bed with you."

Xander sighed and rolled his eyes. "It was an expression, paranoid much?"

Spike just grumbled and wouldn't meet Xander's eyes.

Xander sent up a prayer to whatever deity dealt with the stubborn undead, and turned a serious face to his reluctant roommate. "Look, Spike, seriously, we have to talk." Spike turned to look at him. "Spike, I know that we've been teasing you a lot lately, but seriously, calm down. I'm not going to make a pass at you. I won't try to seduce you. We're friends, that's it. I'm just offering my friend a place to stay while he's homeless."

Spike still looked suspicious, but started to relax. "I'm your friend?"

Xander scoffed, "Of course we're friends, why'd you think we weren't?"

Spike rolled his eyes, but seemed much more at

ease. "Right then, well, give me a blanket Whelp, its on your head if I freeze to death while I sleep."

Laughing Xander tossed a blanket to the Vampire and settled himself down. "Night Spike."

"Night Whelp."

### **3 Confessions**

Xander awoke disoriented, unsure of what he was hearing.

"n...no, no, stop, please stop"

Was that Spike? Xander rolled over and looked to where the Vampire was asleep in the chair. The blond was thrashing slightly, moaning and whimpering in his sleep. Xander levered himself up out of bed and

approached the sleeping Vampire carefully.

Spike cried out, "no, please, no, Angelussss"

Concerned now, Xander placed a hand on Spike's shoulder and shook him gently, "Spike, Spike wake up, its just a dream."

The contact must have spooked the dreaming Vamp, because the next thing Xander knew, Spike had vamped out, and he was flying across the room, slamming into the wall with a loud 'Oomph!' as the breath was knocked out of him.

Apparently he was hurt enough to set off the chip, because one minute Spike was half awake, looking around confusedly, and the next he was on the floor, clutching his head as he screamed in pain.

Xander crawled gingerly over to the blond and pulled him into his lap, stroking Spike's hair and rocking him gently as the pain-wracked vampire whimpered brokenly. Xander was really scared now; he'd never seen

Spike react like this before. He began making soothing noises, trying to calm the vampire.

"Shh, Spike it's okay, it's just me, just Xander. You're safe; you're here in the basement, nothing's wrong. It's okay."

The soft babble seemed to calm Spike and eventually he stilled and looked up dazedly into concerned brown eyes. "Are...are you okay? What happened?"

Xander smiled and released the blond, letting him sit up and lean against the couch.

"I'm fine, you were having a nightmare, must have been pretty bad. When I tried to wake you up you lashed out, and it set the chip off."

Spike groaned and rested his head in his hands, "Gah, I feel like I've been hit by a truck."

Xander tentatively placed a hand on the Vampire's shoulder and squeezed gently, "It must have been pretty

bad, wanna talk about it?"

Spike stiffened and tried to shrug the hand off, "It's nothing, just a bad dream."

"Spike, you were screaming in your sleep. It wasn't nothing."

Spike growled and turned his back on the boy.

Xander eyed the stiffly set back and tried another approach. "You know, I'm not exactly a stranger to nightmares, myself."

Spike shrugged his shoulder and continued to stare off into space.

"Did I ever tell you, when I was a little kid, my dad used to beat me?"

Spike stiffened and turned surprised eyes on the human.

Xander barreled forward with his story. "For as long as I

can remember, he hit me. The littlest thing would set him off. No matter how hard I tried to be good, how hard I tried to please him, nothing worked. All I wanted was for him to be happy with me, I wanted him to love me, take care of me, be a real dad, but he never was. I used to show up to school so bruised, I'm still surprised that no one ever called Child Services."

Spike was wrapped up in the story, hardly blinking as he stared at the human bearing his soul to a soulless Vampire. "Wh...what happened?" Spike barely breathed the question.

Xander smiled a sad smile, his eyes filled with an old pain. "Well, once Buffy moved to town, and Willow, Jessie and I started helping her, I started to believe I was worth something. Saving the world once or twice does that for you. Anyway, when I was about seventeen I hit him back. Something in me just broke, and for the first time I got angry, really angry at him. So I hit him back. And he just stopped. He never bothered me again after that. But I still have nightmares about it sometimes. The worst part about them is the feeling of

total helplessness, I know that I'm not helpless now, but in the dreams I still feel like I'm five years old and unable to fight back."

Spike drew in a deep breath and looked at his clenched hand. Slowly, in a monotone, he began to speak.

"Angelus hated me. When I was first turned, he almost staked me, but Dru wouldn't let him. Unfortunately Dru was too sick to take care of me proper, so Angelus took over as my sire. I wasn't much as a human, but when I got vamped, I got cocky, thinking I was king of the world. I wouldn't listen to a thing Angelus said, wanted to be my own man. Angelus couldn't let a whelp like me show him up, so he set about breaking me of it."

Spike smiled a sickly smile at Xander, "Angelus' forte was torture, he was good at it. Not just physical torture, but mind games too. Anyway, he found out that I was a..." the next word was mumbled and Xander couldn't hear it.

"Spike," Xander touched his clenched hands gently, "You

don't have to tell me if you don't want to."

Spike sighed, "He found out I was a virgin, alright? Breaking in virgins was one of Angelus favorite games, its even better when his victims a Vampire cuz Vampires heal up and return to their pre-turned state."

Xander stared at the Vampire in shock. Finally he did the only thing he could do, he wrapped his arms around the blond and drew him against his chest, stroking a hand through the blond locks. "I'm sorry."

"S'alright," Spike shrugged, but didn't extract himself from Xander's embrace. "It happens, pretty common among Sire and Childe actually. Anyway, that's why I wigged a bit when the girls started teasing, s'not you, I just don't like being reminded, and decades of being forced turns a guy off some things, ya' know?"

They sat like that for what seemed like hours, Spike allowing himself to be comforted, Xander content to just stroke his hand through blond hair and whisper the occasional soothing comment. Finally Xander shifted

slightly, a groan escaping his lips as his leg reminded him that when a limb falls asleep, it hurts.

Spike sat up, blinking as if he hadn't realized where he was.

"Okay blondie, floor times over, I think my butt fell asleep."

Spike laughed and offered a hand to pull Xander up off the floor.

Xander glanced at the chair Spike had been sleeping in, then over to the bed. "You know, the mattress is old and sucks, but its queen sized, plenty of room and a little more comfortable than that chair. Just friends and all, you know."

Spike grinned at that, but then looked away in embarrassment, "Nah, chair's fine, better than the stone slab I've been sleeping on, at any rate."

Xander shrugged, "Suit yourself. I'm going to bed

though."

They settled themselves in and Xander was just drifting off when he heard Spike whisper, "Thanks Whelp."

Xander fell asleep with a smile on his lips.

#### **4 Xander's Proposal**

A week later found Spike sprawled on Xander's couch, listlessly channel surfing and waiting for the whelp to get home from work. In the week since Spike's nightmare, they had grown a lot closer. They laughed and joked more than they fought now, and Spike found himself enjoying the time they spent together. Xander had never mentioned that night and the conversation they had, but the next Scooby meeting, when one of the girls had started in on teasing Spike about his supposed feelings for the boy, Xander had firmly put a stop to it, telling the gang that a month of teasing was enough, Spike was part of the gang and deserved the same treatment as the rest

of them. That had gotten them some shocked stares, but Xander remained firm and the gang let up on him. Spike smirked, remembering their dismayed looks when they realized that they actually had to be nice to an Evil Vampire.

A clattering on the stairs jerked his attention up as Xander came barreling down into the basement, grinning like a maniac. "Spike, Spike guess what?"

Spike eyed the bouncing whirlwind in front of him and smiled in spite of himself. "What?"

"I got a **promotion**! And a raise! I've been working really hard and I guess I've been doing a good job cause the foreman called me in and said I was being promoted and I'd be getting a raise!"

Xander's babble finally wound down and Spike stood up, patting the whelp on the back, "Congratulations Whelp! Knew you could do it. We should celebrate, just as soon as you relearn how to breathe."

Xander beamed at him and nodded. "Right, celebrate. I'm gonna go jump in the shower. Will you call the gang and tell them to meet us at the Bronze in like, an hour?"

Spike grumbled at having to be phone messenger, but relented after only a few half-hearted protests, not wanting to really spoil the boys mood. While Xander was in the shower he called Willow and told her to inform everyone else, then set about trying to find his cleanest tee shirt and jeans.

Eventually Xander emerged, and went to riffle through his closet. "Did you call everyone?"

Spike glanced up from the couch, where he was polishing his boots, "Yup, everyone will be there, party hats and everything."

Xander looked surprised, "Party hats? Really?"

Spike snorted in disgust, "No, not really. Do you really think I'd hang out with the lot of you if you started

wearing bloody party hats?"

Xander laughed, then he eyed Spike appraisingly and ducked back into the closet. He reemerged with a button up shirt in a deep wine red in hand. "Here." He thrust the shirt at Spike, "Wear this over that tee shirt."

Spike took the shirt and lifted an eyebrow in question.

Xander flushed slightly, "Anya bought it for me, it's too small, and not my color, but I think red will look okay on you."

Before Spike could respond, Xander had grabbed his own set of clothing and disappeared back into the bathroom.

Spike slipped the shirt on, wishing for a minute that he could see his reflection, Must admit, the Whelps right, it does fit. And red is my color. Grinning to himself he sprawled back out on the couch and waited for Xander to finish. Twenty minutes later Spike was getting impatient. "Bloody 'ell Whelp! Its a party, not your bloody wedding, get the fuck out of there!"

As Spike's voice quit echoing about the [apartment](#) Xander finally appeared. Spike took one look at the boy and was immediately mollified, "Where'd you get them clothes?"

Xander gestured to the form fitting black slacks and silky plum button up he was wearing. "Do you like the outfit? I bought it a while ago, I just haven't had the chance to wear it before and I figured since tonight was a special occasion..." Xander trailed off, still smiling.

Spike suddenly realized he was staring and shook himself out of it, after all that teasing from the gang, it wouldn't do to start thinking that the whelp was actually good looking. Spike grinned at Xander, who had started to look a little nervous, "Well, you clean up okay, I'll give you that."

Xander reached out and adjusted the collar on Spike's shirt, "That color looks good on you. And it fits, keep it."

Xander met Spike's eyes and suddenly Spike could smell the nervousness radiating off the boy, oh bollocks, what now?

"Spike, I, um, wanted to talk to you about something."

The vampire swallowed, his mouth suddenly inexplicably dry, "Yeah? What?"

The sound of the phone ringing cut off whatever the boy was about to say, Xander turned and picked it up. "Hello? Yeah, we're on our way. No we don't need a ride. Calm down already, it's my party; I'll be late if I want. Fine, see you there."

Xander smiled ruefully at the Vampire, "Guess we had better get going, the natives are getting restless."

Spike nodded, grabbed his duster, and followed the boy out of the basement. Whatever the boy had been about to ask, it had made him very nervous. Spike just hoped the boy wasn't about to push their newly found friendship too far.

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They arrived at the Bronze and the group grabbed a table. Willow offered to grab the drinks and dragged Spike along with her, citing the need for Vampiric strength to carry everyone's order. When everyone got settled, they began demanding to know the reason for the celebration.

Xander bounced happily in his chair as he related his tale. "So I've been really liking this construction crew I've been working on. Everyone is really nice. Except for this one guy, the head carpenter. He always comes in drunk and is really mean and stuff. Anyway, one of his helpers was out sick so I was assigned to work with him, which really sucked. We had to cut up a bunch of wood for the day, and I noticed that he'd done the measurements wrong. I tried to tell him it was wrong, but he kept yelling at me to just do it, and then we would have had wasted tons of wood. So anyway, finally he said he

would do it himself, but he wasn't being careful with the saw and I had to like, knock him out of the way 'cuz he almost cut his hand off. After that he took off for a break and I went to talk to the foreman. I told him what had happened, and some of the other guys backed me up. Well, anyway, I guess the foreman hated the carpenter guy too 'cuz then he fired him and promoted me to head carpenter!"

Appreciative gasps followed that announcement and Xander beamed.

"The foreman said he'd noticed what a good job I had been doing, and that with my experience I was the best guy for the job! I got a raise and a bonus too!"

Congratulations were offered, and the group talked excitedly amongst themselves till Buffy finally asked the important question, "So, promotion boy, what're you gonna do with the bonus?"

Everyone quieted down, Xander smiled, "Well, first off I'm gonna buy everyone a drink."

Cheers followed. "Then," Xander took a deep breath, "Well, I've been saving for a while, thinking that someday Anya and I would get our own place. Of course you know how that turned out."

The required chorus of sympathetic noises followed.

"But anyway, I really don't want to live in the basement of doom forever, and now with this bonus I have enough for all the down payments on a new place, plus enough to buy some furniture, you know, so I don't have to sit on the floor for a month."

Everyone started congratulating and hugging Xander again, and Giles made a speech no one listened to about the importance of adult responsibilities.

Spike hid his face behind his drink, trying to hide the disappointment that was surely showing in his eyes. The whelp had learned to read him too well since they'd been roommates, and he didn't want to spoil the boy's moment. The truth was he hated the basement

apartment, but had really begun to enjoy living with someone. Spike wasn't solitary by nature, and to actually have someone around again, a friend no less, made his unlife much more tolerable. With the boy getting his own place, he'd be on his own again, and that possibility held no appeal for him. A light touch on his arm jerked Spike out of his brooding, *Getting as bad as my bleeding Sire*, and Spike looked up into the concerned eyes of Willow. "Yah, Red, what?"

"Spike, are you okay? It...it's just you don't seemed so thrilled for Xander, and I was just wondering..." She looked really unsure of whether it was all right for her to be concerned about his feelings. While it would be fun to play with her a bit, Spike decided to go easy on the girl.

"Thanks Red, but I'm fine. I'm actually glad I won't have to sleep in the bloody chair anymore. Damned uncomfortable it is. I just have to get off m'lazy arse and start looking for a new crypt to haunt."

Willow smiled an understanding smile at him, and then

gestured over to where Buffy, Dawn, Tara, and Xander had congregated on the dance floor. "Wanna dance?"

"Ta, Red, but teenybopper music just ain't my thing."

Willow gave his arm a final pat and headed over to join the dancers.

Spike looked down and noticed his beer was empty, so he left the Watcher at the table and wandered over to the bar. Drink replenished, he proceeded to wander round the club and imagine which of the hormonal idiots packing the club he would drain if he could, and which ones were just too stupid even for food.

An hour later the group was still dancing and Spike was ensconced in a corner playing a game of annoy the humans. This involved tossing rolled up bits of paper at a couple that were desperately trying to neck in a dark corner. A flash of green caught his eye and he looked over to see the Slayer's soldier boy entering the club with two of his initiative buddies. Spike stifled the growl that immediately rose in his throat and melted back further

into the shadows. Riley scanned the club and spotted Buffy and the others and the trio headed over to the dance floor. Buffy greeted her boy toy with a kiss and an animated discussion began, complete with gestures.

As soon as the army goons showed up Xander had shot an alarmed glance over to the table where they had been sitting, before relaxing when he realized Spike wasn't there. Spike smiled at that, strangely pleased that the boy would worry. Spike watched as Buffy obviously explained their impromptu party, watched as Riley nodded, then smiled, then patted Xander on the back. Riley then turned and gestured at the two men who had accompanied him, introductions were made all around. Spike frowned as he tried to remember the others names, oh yeah, Forrest and Graham, gits. Riley then pulled Buffy aside to talk while Graham and Forrest talked with the others. Riley and Buffy rejoined the others and, after more discussion, Buffy left with Riley and company, picking up Giles on the way. Willow and Tara paired off for a slow dance and Xander made his way back to the table. Spike headed over to join him.

"So, what did G.I. Joe want?"

"Hey Spike. Riley and his buddies ran across some demon nest and they wanted the Slayer and Watcher 'expert opinion' on it. Her loss, less party for her."

Xander motioned a waitress over and raised his eyebrow at Spike, the Vampire nodded, and Xander ordered them more drinks. When they arrived, Spike took a sip and then sighed, *might as well get this over with*. "So, Whelp, congratulations. Bloody brilliant idea. Do you good to get out of that dump."

Xander eyed Spike warily and Spike hoped his voice had sounded as casual as he tried to make it.

"Actually Spike, that's what I wanted to talk to you about earlier."

Spike rushed ahead, wanting to make it easier on Xander, "It's okay Whelp, don't you worry about me. I'll start looking for a new crypt tonight if you want. By the time you're ready to move, I'll be gone."

Xander stared openmouthed at Spike for a minute and then shook his head. "No."

"No? What d'ya mean, no?"

"I mean, actually, that I wanted to ask you to move in with me. Keep being my roommate."

Now it was Spike's turn to stare in openmouthed shock, "Y...you what?"

Xander smiled at the flabbergasted Vampire, "I said, I want you to keep being my roommate. Only this time in an apartment that's actually livable, with your own room and everything. We could be, like, the odd couple. You can leave empty blood packets all over the floor and I'll accidentally slip garlic into your bed when I get tired of yelling at you to pick them up."

Spike had to laugh at that. "I dunno whelp, I've seen the way you keep house, seems like I'd be the neat one and you'd be the one finding spiders in your bed."

Xander alternated between shuddering at the thought of spiders in his bed and laughing at the image of Spike as a neat freak. The boy's laughter was infectious and it took them both several minutes to calm down. "So what do you say Spike? As long as you can pay your share of rent, and don't tell me where the money came from, I'd really appreciate the company."

"Don't you worry about me pet, I'm a man of means. I can pay my own way."

"So, will you?"

Even if he had wanted to say no, which he didn't, Spike couldn't have resisted the pathetic puppy dog eyes that he suddenly found turned on him. "Christ whelp! Turn off the eyes! Of course I'll move in with you. Where else am I gonna go?"

Xander beamed and bounced in his chair some more, and Spike tried to ignore the feelings of pleasure coursing through him, at seeing how happy his answer

had made the boy.

Willow, Tara and Dawn wandered over and looked questioningly at the two. "What's going on?" Dawn finally ventured.

"Spike agreed to move in with me. We're gonna be roommates, only we'll have our own nice apartment, not the crappy parent's-basement apartment."

The girls smiled and hugged the two men, offering their congratulations. Tara looked at Spike, "Does this mean, when you find a place and get all moved in, we can have a housewarming party?"

Willow kissed her girlfriend on the cheek, "Good thinking honey. I'm always looking for an excuse to buy Xander embarrassing gifts."

"Hey!" Xander pretended to look offended, "What sort of embarrassing gifts can you give at a housewarming party?"

Willows eyes sparkled, "Lots and lots of things. Toasters, tea cozies, fuzzy bunny slippers..."

"You're too late on that one Red, the Whelp's already got a pair."

Xander kicked Spike under the table, "Spiiiike! You weren't supposed to tell anyone that!"

The girls joined Spike in laughter as Xander blushed bright red, "They were a gift, from one of my insane aunts. I kept them around 'cuz they used to scare Anya."

Spike snorted, "That demon bint's been gone for months now, and that doesn't explain why you were wearing them this morning."

The rest of the evening passed in much the same way, with lots of lighthearted teasing and joking. The girls even convinced Spike to dance a few times, when some not so torturous music came on. As they left the club in the wee hours of morning, Xander grabbed a paper so he

and Spike could start looking for a place right away.

As Spike drifted off to sleep, curled up in that bloody uncomfortable chair, he thought for once that being one of the good guys wasn't so bad after all. Then he mentally kicked himself for the thought and drifted off to sleep with a smile on his face

## **5 The New Apartment**

A week after the party Xander and Spike had found an apartment. It was in an old, renovated house, close to Xander's work and Giles' place, and they had the whole top floor to themselves. It had two large bedrooms, a smallish kitchen, and a large-ish living room. Only one bathroom, but that had a huge claw-foot tub plus a separate shower stall, so it was worth the sacrifice of having to take turns. It had a balcony (that was actually part of the roof, which meant Xander didn't have to yell

at Spike for smoking inside) and it faced North, so it wasn't too sunny for a Vampire. They loved it. The kicker, and the thing that had Xander cursing his evil parents, was that rent was the exact same as he had been paying for the piece of shit basement hed been living in.

Friday morning Xander had signed for the place and picked up the keys. After work he had gone and picked out some heavy curtains and installed them, so Spike wouldn't have to worry about stray sunlight while they were moving in. He'd picked out some heavy black cotton ones for the living room, some deep crimson velvet ones for Spike's room (the Vampire had yet to see them, and Xander wondered if hed say anything) and some dark blue velvet for his room, because he had realized after putting up Spike's curtains that the velvet looked pretty cool. That night Xander and Spike stayed up all night packing, grinning like maniacs and singing along to Spike's sex pistols c.d.s. About an hour or so before sunrise Xander looked around and realized that they were almost done.

"Huh, somehow I didn't expect packing to be that easy."

Spike straightened up with a groan and glared at the brunette, "Easy! Pet, you own more crap than any one human should."

Xander stuck his tongue out, "If you ask me, anyone who's lived for a hundred and twenty years and can still fit what he owns in his pockets is just sad."

"That's a hundred and twenty-six, thank you very much. Besides, helps not to own much when your life demands that you leave town at a moments notice."

Xander laughed and looked at his watch, "Are you about ready to go? The sun'll be up soon."

"Yeah, I'm all set. What should I take?"

Xander pointed to a pitifully small pile marked Kitchen. "Those boxes there, and if you have room, the box of bathroom stuff. That way you can set up the important rooms while you wait for the rest of us."

The two carried the boxes out to Spike's car and Spike ducked back into the basement to get his duster. The blonde Vampire reemerged from the basement, patting down the pockets of his coat and frowning in confusion. "Pet, you seen my keys?"

Xander tried to look innocent. "They're on your key chain."

Spike looked confused, "I don't have a key chain."

A smile broke out on Xander's face, "You do now."

Spike watched as the boy pulled something out of his pocket and tossed it towards him. He caught it reflexively, and then looked at it. A black leather and silver key chain rested in his palm, with the monogram Big Bad embossed on it. From it hung two keys, one he recognized as the key to his Desoto, the other, "Is this the apartment key?"

"Yup. Since you have two whole keys now, you adult

you, I figured you needed something to keep them on."

Spike grinned, "Cheers, mate."

"Consider it a housewarming gift."

Spike frowned, "But I didn't get you anything."

Xander waved him off, "Don't worry about it. I'm just glad you agreed to move in with me, kept me from all that embarrassing begging."

Spike climbed into the car and started it up, "Well then, see you when you get home, roomy."

Xander flashed his roommate a huge smile, "See you then."

After Spike left, Xander went back into the basement and looked around in satisfaction, only a few more hours and I won't ever have to see this place again. Xander threw the last few things in a box and headed for the bathroom, stripping out of his clothes as he went. *Gods,*

*I reek. I'm surprised Spike didn't say anything, I smell like a gor'thak demon turned inside out.*

Xander closed the bathroom door, and turned on the water as hot as he could stand it. He climbed in happily and sighed with pleasure as the achingly hot water soothed his sore muscles. After a few minutes of luxuriating in the heat, he grabbed the soap. Running his hands over his chest, Xander suddenly realized it. He was alone. The brunette smiled to himself and ran his hands lower; *I haven't been alone in the place for weeks!*

Knowing what he knew about Vampire's sensitive noses and keen hearing, he had been oddly reluctant to jerk off in the shower. Spike probably wouldn't tease me, much. But still. Also, the fact that he's the subject of some of these shower fantasies doesn't make it any more comfortable. Despite his acceptance of Spike as just a friend Xander couldn't deny himself the occasional fantasy, *maybe it's because it'll never happen that makes it so tempting, plus he's fucking HOT*, he thought idly to himself as his right hand trailed ever lower.

His left hand stayed at his chest, tugging lightly on his nipples, teasing them gently, and adding in the occasional hard pinch, while his right hand firmly grasped his now hard length. He groaned softly at the contact, and then reminded himself he didn't have to be quiet, so he groaned louder. Hand slick with soap, he set up an easy pace, stroking the length, running his thumb over the head on each upward stroke. Images of Spike flashed through his mind, the blond sprawled indolently on the couch, gesturing wildly at whatever was pissing him off on the TV, the ice blue eyes staring at him through thick lashes.

Xander pressed his forehead to the cool tile and wondered what the Vampires skin would feel like, cool and silky under his hands, how that smart mouth would look wrapped around his cock. A desperate gasp escaped his lips at the thought, and he sped up, gripping tighter around his throbbing cock and pumping faster. He pulled roughly on his hard nipples and recalled his favorite image of Spike, how the blond had looked earlier in the week, when he had stepped out of the bathroom after showering, a small towel wrapped

loosely around his slender waist, hair dripping, water rolling down his pale chest...a few fast, almost violent yanks and Xander was coming all over his hand, crying out Spike's name as his body shuddered with his release.

The brunette leaned against the wall, limply letting the water run over him, *Okay Harris, it doesn't matter how hot the man is, he's your friend and roommate, and that is the absolutely last time you get to fantasize about him. I mean, come on, what if, miracle of miracles you actually get a boyfriend? How would he feel if you scream out an evil undead guy's name during sex?* With a sigh Xander finished his shower and dried off. He made sure the last of the towels and his dirty clothes were packed, before pulling on some clean clothes, and laying down on the couch. *The gang will be over in a couple of hours; I'd better sleep while I can.*

In what seemed like only minutes from when Xander had laid down and closed his eyes, Buffy, Dawn, Willow and Tara were knocking on his front door, all disgustingly bright eyed and chipper. The moving frenzy

commenced. Boxes and furniture were loaded into the pickup Xander had borrowed from work. Giles met them at the new apartment with a box of donuts and coffee, causing Xander to cheer that for once he was not the donut boy. Boxes and furniture were unloaded, and Spike and Dawn stayed to unpack while the others went back for the rest. Three trips later and it was all moved.

Buffy accompanied Xander to pick up his only new piece of furniture so far, a new queen size bed. As they loaded the bed into the truck, Buffy eyed Xander suspiciously.

"And why are we buying a brand new bed? You and Spike celebrating your honeymoon?"

Xander just laughed, "Actually Buff, now that I actually have a living room I figured I could use my couch for the purpose it was intended, and sleep in a real bed for once. Besides, Spike has his own room." Xander looked puzzled, "Actually he doesn't have a bed yet, I offered to buy him one but he said not to bother. Huh, maybe he will wanna share."

Buffy looked shocked and Xander stuck his tongue out, "Puh-lease. As if. Get it through your head Buffster, he's not interested in me, or any guy for that matter."

They finished loading the bed and headed back to the apartment. Buffy turned and look at Xander, "You know, all joking aside, you two have gotten really close. I never thought of Spike as like, you know, a friend type of person."

"I know. It's strange. At first I hated the guy. But after he got chipped, and we had to hang around him, it's like we got to know what Spike is like when he isn't trying to be the baddest thing on two legs. And living together, I've just got to know him more. The more I know him the happier I am that the Initiative thing happened, 'cuz if it wasn't for them, either you or Spike would have killed the other, and instead I've got the first guy friend I've had in years."

Buffy tucked a stray strand of hair behind her ear and glanced over at Xander.

"Do you ever think about what happens when he gets the chip out?"

Xander sighed, "Yeah, but I try not to. I mean, I would hope that he would care about us enough to not turn on us, or turn us for that matter. But I don't doubt that he would start killing again. That's just who he is, he's a Vampire, a killer, it's what he does. But when you think about it, it's what we do too. We're all killers; does it matter if it's demons and vamps or humans? So I suppose in that way we can't judge him too harshly."

Buffy laid a hand on his arm and smiled a too-knowing smile. "It's hard to care about someone like that. And you really do care about him, don't you?"

Xander smiled sadly, not even trying to joke his way out of it. "That's me, unrequited feelings guy." He patted her hand, "Don't worry about me Buffy, I'm grateful for the friendship. I've had such fucked up relationships, everything from my no-good parents to demonic girlfriends, that I'm willing to take whatever I can get that's healthy and mutual. If it wasn't for you and Wills,

who knows what I'd have ended up like?"

Xander was watching the road, so he couldn't see Buffy's expression, but he heard her sniff, and was eternally grateful that they were just driving up to the apartment, as glad as he was for the emotional bonding thing, he couldn't take it if she started crying for him.

He took his time positioning the truck just so, in case she needed to pull herself together. The others, at least those who weren't allergic to sunlight, came downstairs to help carry the bed in. Soon it was in and set up and Xander just took a moment to walk around the apartment and stare. His room had the bed as a centerpiece, a bedside table and dresser, a bookshelf even; he'd just have to unpack his clothes and stuff later. The bathroom was already set up, thanks to Spike and the girls, though he made a mental note to buy a curtain for the tub, and a bathroom rug. The kitchen was set up as well, though admittedly they didn't have much of anything to unpack. Right, buy kitchen stuff too. The living room had a coffee table, couch, and two chairs, even though they were the crappy, beat up set from his

basement. The TV stood on an old stand he'd scavenged from somewhere and the stereo was set in a corner, on account of them not having shelves for it yet. Spike caught Xander's eye as he scanned the room and they shared a conspiratorial grin, both thinking, 'It's ours! All ours!'

Xander wandered over and flopped on the couch next to Willow. "So, what do you all think?"

Buffy picked at the ragged arm of the couch, "Well, you could use some new furniture, but the apartment is really cute Xan. I like it lots."

Xander ignored the dig at his ancient furniture and focused on the complement, "Thanks Buff. If we ever strike it rich and decide to redecorate, you'll be the first person we call."

Willow leaned over and turned her best puppy dog eyes on Xander. "Xaaander, we've been moving all morning, its like, afternoon already. Were hungry! Feed us!"

Xander wrapped an arm around his friend and gave her a hug. "Sure thing Wills, what time is it anyway?" He checked his watch, "3:00pm. Wow! We really have been working awhile. I didn't even notice."

Spike rolled his eyes, "You mean to say that you didn't even notice you'd missed lunch? Blimey, something must be wrong with you."

Giles actually joined in the teasing, much to everyone's surprise, "I tend to agree with Spike, Xander. For you to go more than a few hours without eating is unheard of, perhaps you had better see a doctor."

They all laughed, then got down to the serious business of ordering pizza. Soon they were all happily stuffing themselves and discussing the best way to arrange Xander and Spike's sparse furniture.

During a relatively quiet moment Spike glanced at the rest of the group, "So, when's our party? And how can I be sure you're gonna get us good pressies?"

Willow laughed at the Vampire, "Spike, you don't get to decide what we get you. You get to be surprised, that's part of the fun."

Spike looked affronted, "Why not? I can make you a list."

This time it was Tara who shook her head, "Nope, no list. Don't worry though, we've just helped unpack your entire apartment, I think we have a pretty good idea of what you two need."

Buffy rolled her eyes, "Yeah, like a kitchen. How on earth do you two cook?"

Spike scoffed at what he obviously considered a stupid question, "It doesn't take a lot of skill to microwave a mug of blood or a frozen dinner. Besides, I wouldn't trust the Whelp to do more than boil water."

Xander pretended to be insulted, "Hey! I can cook. I can cook all sorts of things."

Giles eyed Xander disbelievingly, "Really, do tell Xander,

what exactly can you cook?"

Xander sniffed, "Well, I can cook soup,"

"Heat up canned soup, you mean." Spike interjected.

Xander glared at his roommate and continued, "And waffles,"

"Frozen waffles."

Xander glared harder, "And pizza."

"Calling for delivery doesn't count as cooking."

Xander thought for a moment, "Eggs! I can cook eggs!"

"Congratulations Whelp, you can cook something that doesn't come in a can or frozen in a plastic tray."

Xander stuck his tongue out at the Vampire and pelted him with a pizza crust.

"Oi! Watch it, you could hurt a bloke with that."

The girls laughed and Giles smiled, "At least it's not my living room bearing the brunt of the food fights anymore."

Spike threatened Xander with a couch pillow, and then turned back to Willow. "So seriously Red, when's our party?"

Xander shook his head at his roommate; the Vampire really did have a one-track mind.

Willow just smiled at the impatient Vampire, "When do you guys want to have the party?"

Xander thought about it, ignoring Spike's suggestion of 'Right bloody now, hand over the pressies.'

"Next Friday, Wills. That way we can finish unpacking and I won't have to worry about work the next day or anything."

After everyone had left and the sun had set, Spike and Xander headed out to the nearest 24 hour Wal-Mart and stocked up. They returned home, several hours later, with Xander several hundred dollars poorer, but now they had sheets and towels and ice cream, and beer and important stuff like that. The two men kept grinning at each other moronically as they finished unpacking and fixed themselves dinner. They settled down on the couch, they still didn't have a table, and Xander eyed Spike over his frozen dinner.

"So Spike, what exactly are you going to do about furniture?"

Spike rolled his eyes, "I told you not to worry Whelp, I'll get myself set up."

Xander nodded, then gestured around the sparse living room. "As soon as I get another paycheck, we'll see about getting better furniture."

As Xander went to bed that night, in his own real bed, in his own apartment, with his roommate and friend just

down the hall, Xander thought that his life probably couldn't have gotten any better.

## **6 The Housewarming Party**

The next Friday, Xander stumbled through the door, arms full of grocery bags. "Hey, Spike! A little help here?"

Xander groaned in relief as a grocery bag was lifted out of his arms. He smiled at the blonde standing in front of him, "Thanks."

"No problem. What's all this, then?"

Xander led the way into the kitchen, "Snacks and stuff for the party tonight. Mostly drinks, actually."

Spike was digging through the bag in his arms and emerged triumphant with a bottle of J.D. "I thought Red said they'd bring over some food?"

Xander answered without removing his head from the

refrigerator. "Everyone's bringing stuff, we just needed to contribute too." He cracked open a soda and turned to head into the living room. And stopped dead in his tracks. "Um, Spike?"

The smirking Vampire leaned against a wall and took in Xander's reaction. "Yeah?"

"Wh...what's all this?"

"What's all what, boy?"

Xander motioned weakly to the living room, now stylishly furnished with a large black leather sofa with matching love seat and recliner; and a new entertainment center and larger TV. "Are we in the wrong apartment?"

Spike took a swig from the bottle he was holding and shrugged, "Nope. I told you I'd help set the place up. I went shopping last night, had the stuff delivered today."

Sudden Xander's legs wouldn't hold him anymore. He leaned against the nearest wall and slid down to sit on

the floor with a thump. "I'm sorry to ask this, but how many people did you have to mug to be able to afford this?"

Spike snorted and looked embarrassed, "Didn't mug anyone, at least not this week. Told you I was a man, well, Vampire anyway, of means. I had some accounts. Called Angel, got access to them."

Xander turned a shocked look on his roommate, "You called Angel?"

A nonchalant shrug was his answer.

Xander took the answer for the hint it was and changed the subject. He levered himself up off the floor and walked into the living room to carefully examine their new furniture. He flopped down on the couch, put his feet up on the new coffee table and flipped on the new TV. "Ahh, perfect."

An amused chuckle met his actions.

Xander stood up and turned to his roommate. "Did you get yourself bedroom stuff too?"

The Vampire nodded and motioned for Xander to follow him down the hallway. Spike opened his door with a flourish and Xander felt his mouth drop open in shock for the second time that afternoon. Spike had furnished his bedroom with a queen size bed and a large, wrought iron bed frame.

"Wow. That's...wow."

The bed frame was all curves with lots of intricate scrollwork. Idly, Xander noticed that it would be really easy to handcuff someone to that bed, and then quickly changed his thoughts before they could get him in trouble. Xander gestured to the iron bed, matching side tables, and heavy black dresser and bookcases. "Wow Blondie, I didn't know you had taste. I'm not so surprised by the color scheme, however."

What did surprise Xander was the wine red, silky looking sheets and duvet that matched the curtains Xander had

bought for the Vampire, but he wasn't about to mention how sexy the whole package looked, or how sexy the pale, blonde Vampire would look spread out on the bed.

Taking a desperate swig of his drink, Xander quickly headed back out into the living room and away from the dangerous my roommate is sexy as hell and I'm horny thoughts.

"So, what did you do with the old couch and furniture?"

Spike shrugged, "I paid the delivery guys to take them away. I thought of taking it to Goodwill, but figured they wouldn't want that stuff back."

"Cool." Xander turned to his roommate and pulled Spike into a hug. "Thanks for being my friend and roommate, and thanks for all this."

Spike grumbled but didn't protest the hug.

Before Xander could start to enjoy the hug too much, he pulled back and looked Spike in the eye. "If we break up,

we're going to have a heck of a time dividing this stuff up."

The Vampire rolled his eyes and shook the hug off. "Please. As if I'd date a gormy little git like yourself."

Xander smirked, "I'll have you know that I have it on good authority that I'm a very nummy treat."

Another eye roll greeted that remark. Spike walked into the kitchen and gestured at the bags of food and alcohol. "So, what do we do with all this?"

Xander followed his roommate into the kitchen. "What do you think we do? We cook and set up someplace for a bar. You can't tell me that in a hundred and twenty-six years you've never thrown a party before."

Exasperated sigh, "Of course I've thrown a party before, whelp. Demon parties tend to go a little different though. Usually instead of cooking anything you just conk a few of you walking happy meals over the head and leave 'em tied up in a corner for when the guests get

peckish."

Xander shuddered at that. "Right. I'll cook, why don't you play bartender?"

Smirking, Spike grabbed the bags of alcohol. "I suppose I can be in charge of the liquor. What are we charging for a drink?"

"Spike! This is a housewarming party. For us. Where people bring us presents. We do not charge our friends for drinks!"

The phone rang, distracting Xander from his 'about to be smacked' roommate. "Hello? Oh hey Buff. What's up? Mmhmm. Yeah, sure, that's fine with me. See you later! Bye!"

Spike looked up from his task, "What'd the Slayer want?"

Shrugging, Xander returned to his attempt at party snacks. "Oh, one of Riley's friends just went through a bad breakup and he's stuck playing support-o boy. She wanted to know if he could bring the friend to the

party. I said sure."

"Whoever they are, they can come if they bring us a pressie too."

Xander lobbed a cracker at Spike's head and did a little victory dance when it hit. "Riley's friends do not have to bring us presents. Only our friends bring us presents."



Xander opened the door on the first knock and let Willow, Tara and Giles in. They were the first to arrive, and he really hadn't been waiting by the door for people to show up, really. Spike had just treated him to another eye roll and had gone to set up the music. It had taken a ten-minute argument and best two-out-of-three arm wrestling before Xander had relinquished music duty to Spike.

The girls handed over the trays of food and then went to admire the new living room furniture. Giles set down a stack of presents he had been carrying and raised an eyebrow at Xander.

Xander just shook his head. "He didn't steal it or mug anyone. Apparently Angel set up accounts for his Childer, once upon a time. Spike just called Angel and asked for access to his accounts."

Giles looked surprised, "Spike asked Angel for something? That is surprising."

"Yeah, well. We can't say that Spike's predictable, that's for sure."

Then there was another knock at the door, and Xander went to answer, while Giles went to join the others in the living room. Xander opened the door and Dawn jumped into his arms for a hug before bouncing over to the food table. Buffy and Riley followed with bemused smiles. "Sorry Xan, she's had a bit of sugar already."

Xander smiled, "Well, we'll be sure to keep her away from the deserts then."

Buffy glanced over to where the food was set up. "Speaking of which..." Buffy hurried to distract Dawn. Riley slapped Xander on the back in greeting and pulled someone in after him. "Xander, this is my friend Forrest, you've met him before."

Xander smiled and shook hands. "Hey, nice to meet you, again."

Forrest smiled and handed Xander a bottle of rum. "Thanks for letting me tag along, Happy Housewarming."

"Oh, you didn't have to, I mean, thanks." Xander curbed his babble and waved the two men into the apartment.

Casually, Xander made his way over to where Spike was being glommed onto by a hyper Dawn. "Hey Dawnie, wanna go put this on the bar for me?" Xander handed Dawn the bottle Forrest had brought. The teen happily

accepted the alcohol and raced off.

Spike arched a brow at his roommate. "Pet, d'ya think giving the nibblet alcohol was a good idea?"

"Please, like Buffy will let her even try to get it opened. I just wanted to point out to you that Riley's grieving friend is another Initiative boy. You might want to avoid any grrr moments tonight."

"Ta pet. I'll be fine. Thanks though."

Xander nodded and wandered off to mingle with their guests.



Several hours, way too much food, an embarrassing present opening session and several drinks later, Xander found himself slumped onto the loveseat with Forrest,

telling battle stories and comparing demon fighting notes. Giles and Spike had teemed up on Riley in a heated English sports versus American Sports discussion. Willow, Tara and Buffy were huddled together on the couch, doing each others hair and talking about 'shudder' shopping. Dawn was passed out in a recliner, though Xander was pretty sure it was a 'too much sugar' crash and not an, 'I'm underage and I snuck alcohol' crash.

Forrest had just finished a story about why you should never use a grenade on a mucus demon that had them both doubled over in laughter. "So," Forrest waved his hand to encompass the rooms other occupants, "You all seem pretty close."

Xander nodded. "Yeah, fighting the forces of evil nightly tends to pull people together."

Forrest looked wistful, "That's great. The group of guys I work with are okay, but we don't tend to be friends after the workdays done, with the exception of Riley. He's a great guy."

"That sucks. What about that other guy I've seen you two with? Graham."

A shadow passed over Forrest's face. "Yeah. Graham and I aren't talking right now."

Xander quickly apologized, "I'm sorry. You guys have a falling out?"

Forrest smiled, "You could call it that. He and I were dating, but it turns out I was just a convenient body to experiment on, not an actual relationship. He got tired of the guy thing and went running back to his girlfriend."

Xander's mouth fell open. "Oh. Um..."

Forrest noticed that Xander's comfort level had dropped. "Hey, I'm sorry, I thought Riley had told you I was gay. I didn't think it was a problem, especially after..." Forrest motioned to the pile of opened gifts.

Most had been useful house stuff, but the girls couldn't

let Xander get away without one embarrassing gift. The gift in question was a gift basket full of condoms, different flavors of lube, and a book 'The Joy of Gay Sex'. Buffy had said quite frankly that they were getting tired of waiting for the theory to be tested and figured he needed some encouragement. Xander put opening that gift right up there as the most humiliating moment of his life. At least the gift had been addressed to him and not 'Xander and Spike'.

Xander shook his head, "No, it's not a problem, not for me anyway. Sorry, it's just that Buffy only said you'd just had a bad breakup, not who you broke up with."

Forrest nodded his understanding. "So, is that basket of fun for you and your roommate?"

Xander blushed. "No, that is most definitely not for Spike. We're just friends, that's all. I...I don't have a boyfriend right now."

Forrest smiled. "Well, I'm sure that could easily be changed."

Suddenly there was a soft beeping and Forrest swore and dug into his pocket. He pulled out a pager and glanced at it. Ruefully he smiled at Xander, "Duty calls, I've got to go. Thanks for the party."

Xander nodded, trying to hide his disappointment.

Forrest reached over and brushed his fingers along the back of Xander's hand, "So, can I call you sometime?"

Swallowing hard, Xander nodded. "Um, s...sure, th...that would be great."

Forrest smiled and waved over his shoulder as he left with Riley in tow.

Slightly dazed, Xander wandered over to collapse on the sofa next to Willow.

"Hey Xander! How's the party going?"

"Hmmm? Oh, fine, everything's fine."

Willow looked at Xander and frowned. "Okay mister, spill. What's wrong?"

"What makes you think something's wrong?"

"Your face. You can't hide from me Xander Harris, so you had better tell me, or else!"

Xander blushed a deep red. "Riley's friend Forrest may have hit on me."

This had all the girls immediately focusing their attention on him and squealing happily. Buffy was grinning ear to ear. "I knew you'd like him!"

Willow gasped at her friend. "Buffy! Did you set them up?"

Buffy looked unapologetic, "Nope. Just when I heard that Forrest had been dumped I figured it wouldn't hurt to bring him along, see if he and Xander hit it off."

Xander tried to look upset but couldn't quite hide his grin. "Why Miss Summers, are you trying to play matchmaker?"

Buffy laughed, "Well someone has to, at this rate you'll never get a date!"

"Gee, thanks for your vote of confidence Buff."

Willow dismissed Buffy's matchmaking efforts with a wave of her hand, "So, Xander. You two were talking for a long time, tell us all about him."



After everyone had finally gone home, Xander and Spike collapsed bonelessly onto the couch.

"Ugh! Let's never do that again."

"Oh, I don't know pet, wasn't all that bad. We got some good pressies."

Xander raised his head enough to glare at the Vampire. "You got good pressies." Xander pointed to the Sex Pistols box set Dawn had gotten Spike, and the book of English poetry Giles had found for him. "I got 'how to cause Xander to spontaneously combust through embarrassment' pressies." He waved at his sextacular gift basket.

Spike laughed. "Yeah, that was pretty funny when you opened that."

"Laugh it up Blondie. If I hadn't made them stop teasing you, that gift tag could have read 'To Spike and Xander.'"

Spike shuddered at that, then paused and looked thoughtful. "Hey, speaking of poufs, what was with you and that soldier boy? You two looked pretty chummy."

Xander blushed. "N...Nothing. We were just trading battle stories and stuff."

Spike looked like he would say more, but Xander quickly claimed drunken exhaustion and headed to bed. He didn't want to talk about it anymore, when he wasn't even sure how he felt about it himself.

But as he lay there in bed that night, Xander thought more about Forrest. Thought about how easy he was to talk to, about how they had laughed, thought, with a blush, about his chocolate skin and laughing brown eyes, and the tingle of Forrest's fingers as they brushed over his hand. And most importantly, thought about how different Forrest was from Spike. Xander could admit to himself that he had a crush on his Vampire roommate; fortunately his enjoyment of their peculiar friendship was stronger. Perhaps it was time for Xander to start dating. The longer he stayed single, the harder it would be to hide his feelings from Spike. If he had someone else to focus on, maybe his inappropriate feelings for his friend would fall by the wayside. Hopefully.

## 7 First Date

\*RIIINNNG\*

\*RIIINNNG\*

"Hello?"

*"Hey Xander, it's Forrest."*

"H..Hey! Forrest. Um...how's it going?"

*"Great. I was wondering if you're busy tonight?"*

"Um, t...tonight? Um, no, I'm not. Busy, that is."

*"Cool. Do you wanna go see a movie or something?"*

"Or...or something? Um, movie! Movie would be great."

*"Great. How's about I pick you up at 6? We'll go get*

*pizza first"*

"Um... "

"Bloody hell Whelp? What's got you so worked up?"

"Um, actually why don't I meet you there? Okay, six, see you , bye. " \*Click\*

Spike stalked up to where Xander was practically huddled over the phone, blushing bright red. "I said, what's got you so worked up?"

"Oh, hey Spike, um, nothing."

"Pfft. S'not nothing. You're red as a tomato and you reek of nerves."

"I don't reek of anything! Stupid Vampire guy, shows how much you know."

Spike eyed his friend warily then decided to use his best 'please tell me, you know you want to'

voice. "Xaaaander? What's going on?"

Sighing, Xander wandered over and flopped onto the couch. "You remember Riley's friend, Forrest?"

Sitting down next to the brunette, Spike nodded.

"Well, he just called. He wants me to go to a movie with him tonight."

"S'that all? You're all worked up over hanging out with some guy? He's one of those Army gits, so of course I hate him, but you two seemed to hit it off at the party last week."

Xander blushed again, "No, you don't understand. He asked me out, to dinner and a movie. Like a date. He's gay too."

Spike's eyes widened in understanding. "Oh, so it's that kind of hanging out? Well, so what? You've been on plenty of dates before."

Xander shook his head, unable to look Spike in the eye. "It's my first date with a guy. He mumbled. Telling everyone and saying it's just a theory is one thing. Actually going out on a date is entirely different."

"Right." Spike nodded to himself and seemed to come to a decision. "We may be friends and all that crap, but I'm not the one to help you with this." So saying, Spike stood up and walked over to the phone. Before Xander could ask what he was doing, the Vampire had dialed a number and was speaking into the phone. "Hey Red. You better drop your afternoon stuff and come on over. No, its just this Whelp of yours. He has a date with some bloke and now he's going all strange and nervous." Spike had to hold the phone away from his ear as Willow shrieked something. "Right. See you soon." Spike hung up the phone and came back over to flop down onto the sofa. "So, Red will be over soon, she'll get you sorted out. Passions is coming on. If you must fidget, do it somewhere else."

"Gee Spike, look at you all concerned and fatherly. That last bit almost sounded like Giles."

Spike snorted.

Xander scooted over so he was leaning against the Vampire and rested his head on his friend's shoulder. "Thanks."

Spike grumbled but allowed the brief contact.

Smiling now, Xander headed into his room. He had a date to plan for.

Willow showed up an hour later and calmly took everything into her very capable hands. After receiving an hour-long lecture on first date do's and don't's, including some tips for being 'out' in public, Xander was shoved into the bathroom to shower while Willow picked out his outfit.

With half an hour till his date Xander was prepped, primed, and ready to go. He got halfway to the front door and froze.

"Xander, what is it?"

"I'm sorry Wills, I just don't know if I can do this."

"Xander! Of course you can. Just go be yourself!"

How could Xander explain to his best friend, who had long ago embraced her life style decision, that walking out that door would, for all intents and purposes, set things in stone. No longer just a thing to joke about with his friends and fantasize about on lonely nights, going on this date would place him indisputably in the category of 'alternative lifestyle'. Taking that final step was possibly too much for him to bear.

A loud sigh came from the living room. "Bleedin 'ell, I thought it might come to this." Spike stalked over to where they were standing. "You may want to leave the room Red, this may be too much for you." Spike stood right in front of Xander, practically nose to nose, or nose to chin, the boy was still taller than him, damn it. The Vampire grabbed Xander by the shoulders and gave him a good shake. "Look boy, none of this 'I'm not good

enough' crap. You are a good person. You're funny, smart, loyal, and the best friend I have. In fact the only friend I'll admit to having. Anyone would be lucky to have you. If that bloke doesn't like you than piss on 'im. His loss. An' if anyone gives you any crap about your poofster lifestyle I'll rip their throats out." Spike pulled Xander to him for a brief hug. "Now go, before Red tells everyone I've gone soft, and I lose what little rep I have in this town." With that, Spike shoved Xander out the door. Turning, he scowled at a widely grinning Willow. "Not one word, Red."

The witch mimed twisting a key over her lips and skipped out of the apartment. Spike settled back onto the couch with a sigh of relief. "Thank the bloody gods, thought I'd never get any peace around here."



The walk to the pizza place was a blur. Walking into the

restaurant was difficult, and as he walked up to greet the other man, Xander was shaking with nerves. But once Xander and Forrest were seated and eating, they fell quickly back into their previous conversation of fighting stories and funniest demon moments. Dinner passed quickly and they made their way to the theater. A brief argument ensued over how to pay for things, with them finally settling on Forrest buying the tickets and Xander paying for popcorn and sodas. Xander had a brief moment of mind-blowing embarrassment when he opened his wallet and found that Willow had slipped a condom into it, but luckily Forrest was still buying the tickets and didn't see his brief flush. The movie was funny and had enough action to be interesting, though Xander lost the plot halfway through when Forrest reached over and held his hand. The rest of the evening passed in a blur, and then Forrest was walking Xander home, still holding hands, the two men smiling shyly at each other as they walked.

Much too soon for Xander, they approached his front door. "So, uh, I had a good time."

Forrest smiled, "Me too. Can I call you again?"

Xander grinned, "I'd like that."

Suddenly Forrest was leaning in closer. Xander didn't have time to think before warm lips were ghosting over his. The kiss was brief and Forrest pulled back quickly. He gave Xander's hand a final squeeze before releasing it. "I'll see you soon, okay?"

Xander nodded, "Okay."

Forrest waved and headed out into the night. Dazed, Xander fumbled with his door key and wandered into the apartment. He barely glanced at Spike's note, saying the Vampire had gone out because he fancied a 'spot of violence'. Wandering into his room, Xander stripped absentmindedly and collapsed into bed. He drifted off to sleep, a happy smile on his face. This time in his dreams, pale, cool flesh and blue eyes were replaced by laughing brown eyes and warm lips and hands.

## **8 Bonding**

Spike looked up as Xander rushed into the apartment. "Work go late?"

"Hey Spike. Yeah, we ran late. I've got to hurry if I'm going to meet Forrest in time."

Spike growled softly in annoyance. It wasn't that he resented the boy having a boyfriend, but the two men had gone out every Friday, Saturday and Sunday night for the past two weeks. During the week Xander's time was taken up by work, and an upswing in demon activity had used up the rest of the free time they had. Spike hadn't seen Xander in almost a week and he was surprised to find he missed his friend. "Bloody hell, again? Didn't you two just see each other?"

"Well, we went out to dinner Thursday night, and we did go bowling last night, but it's Saturday!" Xander yanked his filthy work shirt off as he strode towards the

bathroom.

Spike shuddered. Bowling, urgh. "Right then. Well, what are you two up to tonight?"

Xander smiled happily, "We're going dancing at the Bronze. I think Buffy and the rest may be there, you should come."

"Nah, I think I'll pass."

"Oh come on Spike, Saturday night at the Bronze, loud music, plenty of teenagers to taunt..."

Spike tried to ignore the voice in his head shouting that the reason he didn't want to go was because he was jealous of Forrest. *But I'm not!* he argued with his voices. And anyway, if he was jealous it wasn't because Forrest was dating Xander, but because Xander was spending so much time with the other man, stupid voices. "Thanks pet, but no."

Xander paused in his rushing about and frowned at

Spike. "Is everything okay, Spike?"

Spike waved away the boy's concerns, "I'm fine. Go, get ready for your date."

Shrugging, Xander headed into the bathroom and flicked on the shower. He could tell that the Vampire was annoyed, but he wasn't sure why. Pushing thoughts of his roommate out of his head, Xander quickly stepped into the shower and began washing away the dirt and grime of the construction site. He was practically bouncing in place, he was so excited about tonight. They hadn't gone dancing together yet, and Xander eagerly anticipated what it would feel like to press up against Forrests well muscled body and move to the music together. He wondered if they'd go further, soaping himself up Xander fondly remembered Thursday night.

*Forrest had borrowed a friend's car, and after dinner they drove out to Sunnydale Lake and sat in the car, watching the moonlight reflecting off the water. Forrest was holding one of Xander's hands in both of his, lightly*

*stroking it. Gently Forrest had tugged on his hand, pulling Xander closer. Side by side in the back seat, pressed together from shoulder to knee, Forrest had leaned over and kissed Xander softly. Their lips slid wetly together, and Xander had parted his eagerly to Forrest's probing tongue. The kiss deepened and one of Forrest's hands had snuck up to caress Xander's face and thread through his hair. Xander groaned and tried to shift closer to his boyfriend, bringing an arm up to wrap around Forrest's shoulders. They were kissing frantically now, soft pants filling the car. Forrest slipped a hand down and began unbuttoning Xander's shirt. His hand slipped inside and swept across Xander's chest, stopping to tweak a nipple. Groaning, Xander dropped his hand from Forrest's shoulder and slipped in under his shirt, eagerly tracing his fingers over the hard ridges of muscle. Moaning softly, Forrest sucked frantically on Xander's tongue and then broke off, whispering harshly, "Xander, can I touch you?"*

*Xander froze for a moment, wondering if he really wanted this to go further, then Forrest pinched his nipple sharply and all thought of hesitation was driven from*

*Xander's mind. "Yes." He breathed.*

*Slowly, Forrest trailed his hand down Xander's chest and over the prominent bulge in his jeans. Xander groaned and thrust slightly up into the light touch. Chuckling softly, Forrest stopped kissing Xander long enough to reach both hands down and slowly inch Xander's zipper down. Xander flushed, embarrassed now, but Forrest gently eased his erection out and smiled at Xander. "God Xander, you look so hot." Relaxing now, Xander leaned back as Forrest gently stroked him. Forrest's hand was warm and strong stroking up and down Xander's hard length. Forrest leaned in and kissed him again. Xander allowed his hand to wander lower on Forrest's chest until it rested atop the other man's equally hard bulge. "C...can I?"*

*"Yes!" Xander smiled at Forrest's eager exclamation as he began inching the other man's zipper down. Forrest's dark, heavy cock sprang free and Xander realized that the commando was going commando. He tried to hold back the hysterical giggle, but the absurdity of the thought along with the immensity of what he was doing*

*threatened to undo him. Luckily Forrest chose that moment to kiss him again. Then Xander was lost in the feel of warm lips sliding together, tongues tangling, the feel of Forrest's warm hand on his cock and the feel of Forrest's cock hot and heavy in his hand. It didn't take long for either man to come. Xander came first, it had been months since he had been with anyone else and the novelty was too much. He cried out into the mouth covering his own, shuddering and shaking, before pulling himself together enough to finish Forrest off.*

Xander quickly finished the shower and jumped out. He had come home Thursday night in a daze, absurdly glad that Spike had been out. The fact that he had, finally, had sex, sort of, with another man was enough to overwhelm him, he didn't need Spike taking one whiff of him and smirking at him knowingly. Xander wrapped a towel around his waist and headed into his room to dress.

The sound of an action movie in the living room had him

fondly thinking of his roommate. He loved living with Spike. They got along really well now. Some of the best times of Xander's life recently had involved just hanging out with the snarky blond Vampire, watching some movie and making sarcastic comments, or playing pool and drinking beer. Xander paused in pulling his shirt over his head. When was the last time he and Spike had just hung out? His last two weekends had been taken up with Forrest, and the last week or so work and patrolling had kept them both busy. Huh, maybe that's what has him so grumpy. I have been ignoring him lately. It's a testament to the weirdness of the hell mouth that I actually don't find it weird that my Vampire roommate misses me. Xander quickly finished dressing and headed out into the main room.

"Hey Spike?"

The blond barely looked up from the TV, "Yeah, Whelp?"

"What'cha doing tomorrow?"

Spike turned a baleful glare on his

roommate. "Why? You and boy toy need me to clear out?"

Xander shook his head, "No, no it's not that. It's just Buffy had mentioned something about a Scooby event, that's all."

The Vampire shrugged, "I'll be around."

"Cool. Well, I'll be at the Bronze. See you later."

Spike just waved at him distractedly as Xander walked out the door.



They had been dancing for hours when they finally called a halt and went to get something to drink. They settled on a couch and Xander gratefully took a sip of his beer, then pushed his sweat soaked hair out of his face. He

grinned at Forrest, "This is fun."

Forrest grinned right back, "Definitely."

Xander slouched next to his boyfriend, shoulders touching and grabbed onto Forrest's hand, idly stroking his fingers. "Um, Forrest, can I ask you something?"

Forrest set down his beer and wrapped an arm around Xander's shoulder. "Sure."

Xander took a deep breath. "Would you mind if we didn't go out tomorrow? It's just, I've been kind of ignoring some friends, and I feel like I should make the time for a friend bonding day before they get too mad at me."

Forrest laughed softly, "Hey, that's cool, I understand. In fact, Riley was just complaining the other day that we never spar together anymore. This will give me and Riley a chance to hang out too."

Xander smiled gratefully at his boyfriend, "Thanks."

The darker man leaned over and brushed his lips along Xander's. "Of course, this means it could be days before I see you again. I think I should give you something to remember me by."

Shuddering, Xander leaned into the kiss. "Oh yeah."

Smiling, Forrest jumped up and pulled a confused Xander back towards the men's room. He pulled them into the back stall and pressed Xander up against the wall.

"Wh...what did you have in mind?" Xander panted out.

Forrest kissed Xander passionately, pulling back only when they needed to breath. Grinning what Xander thought was a pretty good evil grin, Forrest glanced down to their matching bulges and then back up at Xander. "I'm gonna taste you. Then I want to feel your mouth on me."

Speechless, Xander could only gulp and nod. Forrest slithered down Xander's body and quickly unzipped his

pants. Forrest deftly removed Xander's already hard cock and licked up the length. Groaning, Xander let his head slam back into the wall as his aching cock was enveloped in moist heat. Forrest was skilled and he soon brought Xander to the edge with lips, hand and tongue. Xander tried to hold still, but couldn't resist small, gentle thrusts into his boyfriend's mouth. Feeling the familiar pressure building, Xander tried to gasp out a warning, "Forrest, I'm gonna cum!" Forrest sucked harder and Xander bucked up into his mouth, shooting load after load down his throat. Xander tried to get his breath back as Forrest licked him clean and tucked him away. Forrest slithered up Xander's body and kissed Xander sweetly, allowing Xander to taste his essence on the other man's tongue.

Forrest broke off the kiss and stepped back. "So, gonna return the favor? I need a good memory to get me through the next couple of days too, you know."

Xander grinned and pushed Forrest back against the other wall. He placed a quick kiss on Forrest's lips and moved to crouch in front of Forrest. Xander wasn't sure

he would be able to do this well and didn't want to lose his nerve. Quickly Xander unzipped Forrest's pants, fumbling a little with the zipper before he finally got it down. Reaching in, Xander slowly removed his boyfriend's erect cock. It looked like he remembered it from the other night, as dark as the rest of Forrest, with a purplish head and prominent vein running the length, hot and heavy in his hand. Tentatively Xander licked up the length and then, encouraged by Forrest's groan, began sucking softly on the head. Forrest thrust lightly against him and Xander took the hint, sucking Forrest in deeper. To his disappointment, Xander found he couldn't take Forrest in too deeply without gagging, so he settled for sucking and licking the top half of Forrest's cock and fisting the lower half. Forrest obviously liked the combination of suction and friction, before too long Xander was surprised to find his mouth being filled with thick, salty fluid.

After some more kissing and rearranging of clothing, the two men dazedly made their way back out to the bar. They plopped down on a couch together and happily snuggled. Xander caught Willow waving to him out of the corner of his eye and waved back. He saw

Willow turn to Buffy and Tara and say something. He didn't need to be psychic to figure out what was said, his best friend had taken one look at their rumpled clothing and swollen lips and known. Willow had immediately turned to the others and said, "Theory's been tested."

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Xander forced himself out of bed by noon on Sunday, knowing if he wanted to surprise Spike, he'd have to hurry. Having quickly showered and dressed, Xander grabbed a mug of coffee and left the house. An hour and several stops later, Xander staggered back into the apartment, laden under bags of supplies. He stashed his purchases and stuck a mug of blood in the microwave, before going and changing into a pair of comfortable sweatpants. Once dressed in his best lounging around the house clothing, Xander grabbed the mug of blood and wandered into Spike's room. The Vampire was on his back, spread out over most of the bed, one arm

thrown loosely over his eyes. Xander knew Spike slept in the nude, and thankfully the sheets were still in place. The last thing Xander wanted was to start of their friendly bonding day with an accidental flashing, well, okay, he wouldn't mind the flashing, but Spike probably would.

Knowing the Vampire was already aware of his presence; Xander set the mug down on the side table and took a running jump onto the bed, landing next to Spike with an 'oomph'. They bounced for several seconds before Spike turned and glared at Xander. "Yes?"

Xander just grinned. "Morning Spike."

"Xander, just what the bloody hell do you think you're doing here?"

Xander sat up against the headboard, shamelessly stealing one of Spike's pillows, and handed the mug over. "Breakfast in bed."

Spike sat up and took the mug warily. "What's this about

then?"

Xander leaned over till he was shoulder to shoulder with Spike. "We've both been busy lately, I missed you. Thought we'd spend the day together."

Spike looked surprised and pleased, but a frown quickly replaced the expression, "You mean till your date tonight."

Xander shook his head. "Nope, no date tonight, just us."

Spike's eyes widened, "But there's some Scooby meeting today, right?"

"Nope, made that up to make sure you wouldn't make other plans. It's just us, kung-foo movies, beer, and you beating me yet again at numerous games of poker."

Spike smiled, a honest-to-goodness happy smile and suddenly Xander was positive that he was doing the right thing. Spike raised the mug at him in toast, "Cheers mate."

Spike kicked Xander out of his room so he could dress, and Xander went to make breakfast for them. Spike wandered into the living room, also clad in sweats and a tee shirt, just as Xander was dishing up heaping plates of omelets and hash browns.

"Careful pet, keep this up and I might have to revise my stance on you not being allowed to cook."

Grinning, Xander handed the plate over. "Don't worry, you already admitted I could cook eggs, and the hash browns are frozen." They sat on the couch together and flipped on the TV.

Xander turned to Spike, "What first? Jet Li or Jackie Chan?"

Spike grinned at Xander, "I think Jackie's a little more appropriate for breakfast, don't you think, pet?"

Nodding, Xander popped in the first movie and settled back with his roommate to watch.

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By the time evening rolled around, Spike and Xander were happy lumps draped over the couch. The day had been spent with pizza, beer, and conversation. They had talked more in the last few hours than they had in the last couple of weeks, and that alone made Xander positive he had done the right thing by declaring the day 'Spike and Xander Day'. Probably the only downside was Xander losing \$50 to Spike playing Blackjack, but Xander wasn't thinking about that right now. He was pleasantly drunk, very full, and ready for more mindless movie violence. He looked over and shared a contented smile with his equally happy lump of a roommate. "What movie now?"

Spike waved a hand lazily at the TV, "'Evil Dead' next, pet."

Xander got up and put the movie in before flopping

bonelessly back down on the couch. He reached over for the remote and suddenly realized it wasn't there. He turned to face a smirking Vampire. Spike was sitting against the arm of the couch, his arm raised above his head, remote control in his hand. Xander didn't hesitate, just launched himself towards the smug Vampire, "Mine!"

They tussled for several minutes, falling into the familiar wrestling-for-the-remote pattern of grabbing it away and gloating before having it snatched away again. They were both breathless with laughter when they finally collapsed on top of each other. Xander was the winner of this particular tussle, mostly because he was lucky enough to discover Spike's ultimate tickle weakness, the back of his knees. Sporting a smug look, Xander grabbed the remote and flicked on the TV. The two men lay back together on the couch to watch the movie.

Xander awoke hours later, dimly aware that he had fallen asleep sometime during the movie. He was lying on the couch on his side, his head resting on Spike's chest, an arm thrown around the blonde. He immediately tensed,

but the relaxed, figuring that if Spike had been awake, the skittish Vampire would have moved already. Xander slowly raised his head to see if Spike was indeed asleep, only to meet sleepily blinking blue eyes. "Um, hi?"

Spike blinked a few more times, considered the position he and the boy were in, how uncomfortable he was curled up around another man versus how nice it was to be curled up with a warm body, then gave up. He and Xander were friends, if they wanted to curl up together on the couch, they would. Spike flopped back down and pulled the warm body closer. He dropped a soft kiss on the top of Xander's head then closed his eyes. "Go to sleep, Whelp." Spike smiled when Xander sighed happily and curled up tighter against him.

"Night, Spike."

"Oh, and Whelp?"

"Hmm?"

"If word of this gets out, I will have to kill you."

"Mmmhmmm. I guessed as much. Right, the Big Bad doesn't cuddle, I won't tell if you won't."

Spike chuckled. "Deal. Go to sleep." A soft snore was his only answer.

## **9 The Breakup**

Xander glanced over at his boyfriend and smiled shyly. It was their one-month anniversary. To celebrate, they had decided on dinner and a movie, just like their first date. Unlike their first date, dinner was at a nice restaurant and the movie was something romantic and to be watched back at Xander's place. The big deal, other than it being their anniversary, was that Forrest was going to spend the night. Xander had to admit he was slightly nervous. They had been taking it slow and so this was to be their first overnight stay together.

They were now curled up on Xander's couch, watching the romantic and sappy movie. Xander wasn't paying

much attention to it; mostly he was focused on how it felt to be curled up in his boyfriend's arms. The apartment was dark, except for the light from the TV and a light on in the hallway. Spike had disappeared for the evening, saying he'd be in just before dawn, so he didn't have to walk in on Xander and Forrest being poofy. The movie ended, and Xander leaned in and kissed Forrest, long and slow. They sat for a long time, lips slipping and sliding together, tongues dueling. Eventually Xander stood up and took Forrest by the hand. He pulled the other man up and silently led the way back to his bedroom. Once they were inside, Forrest pulled Xander into a warm embrace, renewing their kiss. Finally, when they needed to breath, Xander pulled back and looked Forrest in the eyes. "Forrest, I'm really glad you're here. I really like you and I want to be with you tonight, but I'm not ready for...um, penetration." Even though he had practiced his speech, Xander couldn't help but blush at that last bit.

Forrest smiled, "I really like you too, Xander. Thank you for letting me know how you're feeling. Don't worry, there are lots of other things we can do that don't

involve penetration." The other man then recaptured Xander's lips and proceeded to show him what they could do.

Before he knew it, Xander was efficiently stripped and laid out on his bed. Forrest stripped just as quickly and raked his eyes over Xander's body before lying down so they were pressed together the whole length of their bodies. Xander gasped at the feeling of all their flesh pressing together. It was the first time he and Forrest had been completely naked together and he was swiftly coming to love it. Kissing slowly up Xander's jaw, Forrest thrust his hips gently against Xander and captured his lips just in time to drink down Xander's gasp of pleasure at the sensation of their cocks sliding together. Moaning happily, Xander quickly grasped the idea and soon they were thrusting against each other, hands and lips touching wherever they could reach. The sensations of their cocks sliding together was maddening and soon Xander gave up all pretenses and just grabbed hard onto Forrest's hips, pulling his boyfriend tight against him and thrusting madly. Xander kissed down Forrest's neck and buried his face in one strong shoulder as he came with a

strangled cry. Forrest continued with his raged thrusts and soon followed, warm cum splattering their stomachs and mingling with Xander's.

Forrest leaned down and slowly kissed Xander, before rolling off him with a groan. "So, was that special enough for our anniversary?"

Xander laughed, "Oh, yeah, I think so."

Forrest glanced over at Xander and grinned, "We're just getting started."

~!~

Spike trudged wearily into the apartment just as dawn was breaking. He had spent the entire night out, as he had promised Xander he would, so the boy and his lover could have the place to themselves. The night had started out all right, but just past midnight he had run into some new Master Vampire who had just rolled into town with an army of minions and was trying to set himself up as the new Master of Sunnydale. Spike had spent the night battling the new Vamp and his minions, and while they were all dust, he was bloody, bruised and exhausted. Wearily he trudged into the bathroom, barely scowling at the faint scent of sex permeating the apartment. Stripping off, he climbed into the shower and scrubbed off the night's detritus. He was half asleep on his feet by the time he was clean, and he barely had enough energy to dry off, walk to his room, and flop into bed.

It was several hours later when an aching hunger woke Spike from a sound sleep. He tried to roll over and fall

back asleep, but he hadn't eaten before he went to bed, and his body was reminding him of that oversight now. Groaning, Spike levered himself up and pulled on a pair of boxers and a tee shirt. Groggily, he wandered out into the kitchen and set about heating up a mug of blood. Spike had worked his way through two mugs and was heating up his third when he heard the polite cough. Turning he found Xander's boyfriend standing in the kitchen entryway, dressed in a pair of jeans, bare-chested and looking pretty happy with himself.

"Hi! You're Xander's roommate, right?"

Spike nodded, "Yeah mate. You must be Forrest."

Forrest smiled, "Yup. Nice to know he's mentioned me."

Trying to hide his nervousness at being in the same room as one of the 'army gits', Spike rolled his eyes and gestured to the fridge, "Don't be shy mate. Help yourself."

Forrest nodded his thanks and got a jug of orange juice

out of the fridge, pouring himself a glass. Forrest drank his juice and made small talk, while Spike anxiously waited for the microwave to finish. Finally it did and Spike grabbed the steaming mug out, intending to take it into his room with him. His nervous movements jostled the mug a little too much, and a small splash of blood sloshed over the side and splattered onto the floor.

Time seemed to freeze as Forrest took in the blood on the floor, the empty blood bags on the counter, then finally really looked at Spike. Bollocks, was the only thought Spike had time for before reality hit and Forrest realized just who and what his lover's roommate was. "H...hostile 17! You're hostile 17!"

~!~

Xander was drifting lazily in and out of sleep, content for the moment to lie in the messy bed and relish in the happy memories contained within. Unfortunately peace was not to be the agenda for the morning. He heard Forrest shout something, then a crash, then Spike angrily yelling his name. "Xander, get the bloody hell in here!"

Swearing, Xander pulled on a pair a sweats and ran towards the kitchen. To his horror he saw Forrest threatening Spike with the slender end of a wooden spoon, shouting something about hostiles. Xander quickly insinuated himself between his boyfriend and his roommate and held up his hands in a placating gesture. "Forrest, chill man. I know he leaves bloody

mugs and wet towels all over the place, but its not worth dusting him over."

Forrest gaped incredulously at Xander before regaining his wits and gesturing angrily at Spike. "Xander, get behind me! There's a hostile in your apartment."

Xander tried not to laugh, he really did, but the whole picture, Forrest bare-chested and wielding a wooden spoon in his boyfriend's defense, Spike practically climbing up on the counters to avoid said wooden spoon, switching in and out of gameface and growling, and Xander standing between them, wearing only sweat pants and still sticky from the nights activities, not sure if he should be defending his roommate or his boyfriend. Laughter was a foregone conclusion.

Forrest looked at Xander like he was possessed. "Xander, your roommate is a Hostile. We have to call the Initiative, get him recaptured and neutralized."

Those words stopped Xander's laughter cold. "Now wait just a second Forrest. I know exactly who and what Spike

is. He's my friend and my roommate and he also happens to be a Vampire. A Vampire who you and your buddies chipped, so he's no harm to me or anyone else. No one is taking Spike anywhere. Just put down the spoon and lets talk."

Forrest just shook his head and started patting down his pockets with one hand, looking for his cell. "Xander, he is a hostile and he has to be neutralized. Its for your own good."

Xander crossed his arms across his chest and stared coldly at the man in front of him. "Get out."

Forrest looked shocked. "What? Why?"

"You are insulting my friend and threatening his life. That is not acceptable, so if you're not willing to listen to me you need to leave."

Forrest dropped the spoon. "Xander, are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"Yes, Spike is my friend. He is not the only demon, or 'hostile' I am friends with. If you can't accept my friends, then we obviously aren't going to work out."

Angrily Forrest stomped back into Xander's room and grabbed his clothing. Dressing quickly, he stalked back into the living room. "You're choosing to consort with hostiles instead of humans? You're right, we would never work out. You make me sick." With that Forrest left with a loud slam of the door.

Xander stayed standing in the middle of the kitchen, fists clenched, breathing heavily. He couldn't believe that Forrest had just behaved that way. Who did he think he was, threatening Spike that way?

Once Forrest had left, Spike finally climbed down off the counter and scooted around the fuming Xander, grabbing a towel and kneeling to wipe up the mug of blood that he had dropped when Forrest attacked him.

Xander came out of his anger and confusion enough to notice that Spike was covered in cuts, and had extensive

bruising. Without thinking he ran over and began running his hands lightly over the Vampires injuries. "Oh, gods, Spike, what happened? Did Forrest do this to you?"

Spike shook his head, "No pet. Your soldier boy didn't touch me. Had a rough night last night."

"He's not my soldier boy anymore." Xander wandered into the living room and flopped onto the couch dejectedly. "How'd you get all beat up?"

Spike shrugged. "New Vamp in town. Fancied himself the new master of the hell mouth. Not as old or as strong as me, but close. Plus he had quite a following. Took me all night to get them sorted out. Don't worry, they're all dust now."

Xander turned wide eyes onto Spike. "Didn't Buffy help?"

Sarcastic snort, "She was off with Captain Cardboard. I was patrolling on my own last night."

Xander angrily slammed his fist into the couch cushion. "Its not fair! You risk your life, unlife, whatever, to protect us and this stupid town, again and again, take on another master and his minions all by yourself, and what thanks do you get? You get to come home and almost get staked by my stupid xenophobic boyfriend. Gods, I'm so sorry Spike."

"Pet, it's me who should be apologizing. I wasn't thinking, if I'd eaten before I went to bed, then I would still be asleep instead of up and scaring off your boyfriend. I truly am sorry I ran him off like that Xander."

Xander shook his head, "It wasn't you Spike. You have every right to be here, you live here for gods sake! He had no right to jump to conclusions about you and threaten you in your own home, in our home. Plus he didn't even respect me enough to listen to what I had to say. He just immediately assumed Vampire=evil."

Spike placed a tentative hand on Xander's clenched fist. "He wouldn't be wrong luv."

So quick the Vampire almost didn't see it, Xander turned and grabbed Spike by the shoulders, hard. "Yes he would be wrong. You may have done evil things in your past but you are not a bad or evil person. You are my friend, you take care of me and of the others, we trust you. I wouldn't, couldn't, lo---care about you, be your friend if you were truly evil." Sitting back with a sigh, Xander raked his hands through his hair and looked at the floor, "He was wrong about you but he couldn't trust me enough to give you a chance."

The sight of Xander wiping tears from his eyes caused a painful wrench in Spike's undead heart. 'Pet, I...'

Xander stood up quickly and looked down at his friend. "Spike, look, it's not your fault okay? I just can't talk about this right now. I'm gonna go out, maybe find Buffy or Willow, blow off some steam. If I stay here, you'll have to spend the whole day listening to me bitch about Forrest, and you're injured, you need to sleep. I'll see you tonight, okay?"

With that, Xander turned and walked into his room, closing the door behind him. Nearly overflowing with conflicting emotions, Spike followed suit, heading to his room and his interrupted sleep. It would be hours though, before sleep claimed him.

## **10 Processing**

After showering and dressing, Xander left the house and wandered around town for more than an hour before ending up outside the Magic Box. Shrugging to himself, Xander walked inside. "Hello? Anyone here?"

Buffy's blond head popped out of the door to the training room. "Hey Xander! How's it going?"

Xander wandered into the back and slid down the wall to sit on the floor. "Hey Buff. What's up?"

Buffy eyed the dejected looking man in front of her with a frown. Gracefully she folded herself down into a

comfortable position in front of Xander and tapped him on the knee. "Okay, spill."

Xander sighed. "Not much to spill. Just another fabulous day in the fucked up life of Xander Harris."

At Buffy's glare, Xander relented. "Well, last night was Forrest's and my one month anniversary, and this morning we broke up."

Buffy opened and closed her mouth several times before nodding. "Right. I think you'd better tell me the whole story." She motioned to a large box. "I'm supposed to be taking inventory of these books that just came in, you can help me while we talk."

So they sorted books and Xander talked. He told Buffy everything leading up to that morning's events and gave her a [play](#) by play of the fight that caused Forrest to walk out. When he was finished, Buffy let out a deep breath, "Wow. Well, first off, don't worry about the Initiative. I'll talk to Riley tonight, make sure Forrest doesn't do anything stupid."

Xander relaxed, "Thanks Buffy."

"Second, Forrest was totally in the wrong. You're right; he's being an asshole. He's been in Sunnydale long enough that he should know not all demons are bad. But, Xan, you do realized you picked a Vampire friend over your human boyfriend, right?"

Xander flopped backwards onto the training room mats and looked up at the ceiling. "I know. And what's even worse is that I don't care. I'd pick Spike over Forrest in a second. Actually I'd pick Spike over anyone in a second. Buffy, oh gods, I think I'm in love with Spike."

Buffy reached over and squeezed his hand. "Welcome to the club, sorry, but I left the 'In love with the Evil Undead' club pin and membership packet at home.

Xander laughed weakly. "Doesn't this bother you? I mean, we're talking about Spike here."

Buffy turned back to the box of books, "Of course it

bothers me Xander. But more in an 'I don't want to see you get hurt way' than in a 'Spike is an evil monster' sort of way."

"Oh, well, thanks Buffy. Now I just have to deal with the whole, being in love with someone who is never going to love me back thing."

Buffy glanced at him sideways, "Xander, what makes you so sure that Spike doesn't care about you? I've seen the way you two act together."

Xander blushed, "I know that Spike is my friend and cares about me, it's that he's not ever going to want to be with me in that way."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Buffy...shit, okay, but you can never say anything. Hear this and immediately forget it."

"Alright already."

Xander took a deep breath. "Spike had some...bad experiences in his past."

Buffy stared at him blankly. "Buffy! Bad experiences, around sex, with another man!"

Buffy rolled her eyes at the brunette. "I understood what you meant the first time. Listen to me Xander. I don't mean to make light of Spike's past, but do you know how many people are raped every year?"

At Xander's shocked look, Buffy quickly reassured him. "Not me, or anyone else in the group, as far as I know, but Xander, its unfortunately pretty common, and even though its terrible and scarring, the majority of those people go on to live happy, healthy lives, that include sex. Look, all I'm saying is maybe, if Spike loves you, his past won't always be an issue. It takes time and support, but people heal, Xander. Even Vampires heal."

Xander just shook his head at the blond slayer. "How did you get to be so smart?"

Buffy grinned, "Women's studies class Willow talked me into. I'm all about the women's empowerment stuff now."

"Does that mean you're gonna trade in your Riley for a Tara?"

Buffy rolled her eyes and smacked Xander with a book. "Ow!" Xander laughed and grabbed the book from her before she could hit him again. He glanced down at the book he was holding and froze. "Huh."

Buffy scooted closer and glanced at the book. "What?"

Xander read the title. "Blood, Sex, and Magic: the Rituals of the Vampire."

Xander and Buffy looked at each other with huge eyes. "Do you think Giles knows he ordered this?" Buffy asked with an exaggerated whisper.

Xander shrugged. "Dunno. Do you think he'd get mad if we read it?"

Buffy nodded solemnly. "Yes. But it's research, and he's always telling us how important research is."

Xander nodded, "Right then, we'd better read it, it's for our own good."

Glancing guiltily over their shoulders at the empty store, they lay down side by side on the mats and began reading through the book.



Hours later Xander lifted his head and blew out a breath he didn't know hed been holding. "Wow, that was...kind of squicky. But kind of..."

"Hot, too." Buffy finished for him. She glanced back down at the page they had been reading. "I wonder if getting drained by a Vampire is always that hot, or is it

just turnings?"

Xander shrugged and turned to the next chapter. "Probably just the turnings, that way the Childe's first memory is of sexy type stuff, happy Childe, happy Sire. Huh, what's a Claim?"

Buffy looked down at the page and read aloud. "When a Master Vampire wants to link a human or another species of demon to himself without turning them, he claims them. The Master exchanges blood with the claimant, which establishes a bond. One exchange of blood creates a pet, or slave, under the Vampire's control but still retaining a semblance of free will. The more blood exchanged, the stronger the bond. When a Vampire wishes to take a mate, a special bite is used, one that leaves a scar." At this Buffy unconsciously touched her neck, and Xander tried to politely not notice.

Xander took up reading. "When taking a mate, the blood exchange is paired with sex. Repeated exchanges of sex and blood build a stronger bond. Other Vampires and demons can sense the mark of a Master Vampire and

few will risk a Master's anger by harming its mate. It has been rumored that long mated pairs gain a type of psychic bond, able to sense their mate at great distances. The mate of the Vampire gains some of the Master's strength and speed, while retaining their soul."

"Wow, crazy." Xander glanced over at Buffy, who was looking thoughtful. "Buffy? What's on your mind?" Before Buffy could answer, the bell above the front door jingled and Giles voice echoed through the store. "Hello, is anyone here?"

They jumped up and hurriedly dropped the book back into the box with the others. Giles walked into the training room just as they turned around, trying to wipe the guilty expressions off their faces. "Oh, hello Xander. Buffy, did you finish the inventory on that book shipment?"

"Almost Giles."

Xander quickly excused himself and headed out the front door while Buffy and Giles discussed the book

shipment. Glancing up at the sky, Xander realized that it was almost dark so he hurried back to the apartment. Xander was sure that Spike was still blaming himself for the breakup and Xander needed to let the Vampire know that Xander didn't feel that way. Letting himself in the front door, Xander glanced up and noticed several things had changed. For one, the apartment was clean, spotless actually. Second, something smelled really good, and Xander suddenly realized he hadn't eaten all day. His appetite was quickly squelched though when he noticed Spike sitting in the living room with a packed duffle bag and two boxes, the Vampire looked positively dejected. "Spike! What's going on?"

The Vampire shrugged and looked at the floor. "Figured I'd make it easy for you pet. Cleaned the place up nice, got dinner in the oven. I'll make myself scarce and you can call Forrest and invite him over for a make-up dinner. I'm sure if I'm out of the picture, he'll come round."

Shaking, Xander turned around, locked the front door, dropped his keys on the table, tossed his coat aside and

walked slowly up to Spike. He didn't stop until he was standing right in front of his roommate. He grabbed Spike by the shoulders and pulled him up. Keeping a firm grip on Spike's shoulders, Xander looked the Vampire directly in the eyes. "No."

"No? Pet, I don't understand."

"What if I don't want to get back together with Forrest?"

"Xander...look, I know you're upset about him being all soldier boy, but you'll get over it. You two seemed happy together, you belong together."

"And you belong here. Not in some crypt somewhere."

"Pet, Xan, I don't belong here. I'm just getting in the way. If I stick around I'll end up fucking up your life. You don't need me, you need human friends, human boyfriends, not undead roommates who leave wet towels and bloody mugs all over the place and scare off potential boyfriends."

Xander shook Spike hard, anger, despair and an almost overwhelming fear of being abandoned causing him to be more rough than he normally would be. "No! Shut up Spike! You don't get to decide what's best for me, no one does. Damn it, I do need you here. Who else is gonna watch bad kung fu movies with me and insult my clothing and patch me up after the latest demon beats on me? Who else doesn't mind that I come home covered in sawdust and track mud all over the floor? Who else knows that pizza is one of the four major food groups and who in the hell else knows how to keep me sane?" Xander's rant came to an end and he collapsed forward onto Spike's chest, wrapping shaking arms around the blonde's waist and burying his head in Spike's shoulder. "Forrest was nice and I liked him, but I didn't love him. I don't know if I ever would have. You're my best friend Spike, I want you here, I need you here. Please don't leave me Spike, please don't leave."

Shocked to his core, Spike wrapped his arms gingerly around the shaking boy and held him close. His mind was whirling, Xander wanted him around, him, not that bloody army git. Smiling softly, Spike petted Xander's

hair and tried to shush the shaking human who was squeezing him tightly. "Xan, pet? I may not need to breath, but I do like my ribs intact."

Xander pulled back slightly, a wary look on his face. "You're not gonna go anywhere?"

Spike shook his head. "No, not if you're sure you still want me as a roommate."

Xander nodded quickly. "Yes! Please stay."

Spike looked at Xander. The boy was pale and shaking, his eyes bright with unshed tears. He looked like he would break at the slightest provocation. "Christ, Xan. You look like shit. You've had a hell of a day and I just made it worse. Let's get you sitting down and get some food into you, okay?"

The brunette nodded and meekly followed Spike to the table, allowing himself to be seated. Spike went into the kitchen and pulled the roast chicken and vegetables out of the oven, bringing it to a table that had already been

set with two place settings. Xander watched, slightly awed as Spike carved the chicken and filled their plates. "Wow, you really went all out."

Spike snorted ruefully, "Yeah, well, in my experience when you need to say 'sorry I was such an ass, please forgive me' it usually helps the groveling along when you do something like this."

Xander eyed the plate that was set in front of him. "You lied to the girls when you said you couldn't cook."

"Didn't say I couldn't cook, luv, said I didn't normally need to." Spike watched happily as Xander inhaled the food on his plate. Spike ate more sedately, enjoying the novelty of a freshly cooked meal. He refused to tell the boy that he was actually a good cook, it was just a skill he didn't need often. When Xander had cleaned his plate, Spike refilled it without comment. They passed the rest of the evening in casual conversation, neither mentioning the events of the day. By the time that Spike herded Xander into his bedroom and forced the boy to go to bed, the only signs that anything had happened were

Spike's bags sitting in the living room and the fact that Xander hadn't strayed more than two feet from Spike's side all night. Spike watched sternly as Xander stripped down to boxers and climbed into a freshly made bed. Leaning over, Spike brushed Xander's bangs out of the boy's face and smiled softly. "Get some sleep, eh pet?"

Xander blinked sleepily, reaching up and cupping Spike's cheek briefly. "You'll stay, right?"

"Said I would whelp."

"Good, don't want you to leave. Everyone leaves me. Couldn't stand it if you left." With that, Xander's eyes drifted shut and the boy quickly fell asleep. Spike quietly left and grabbed his bags, carrying them back to his own room. He ignored the stinging in his eyes, telling himself half-heartedly it was just dust left over from cleaning the apartment.

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The next day the girls all came over to watch movies and eat pizza, in a much quieter and subtler show of support than the Xander and Anya breakup party had been. Spike noticed Buffy slip something to Xander and wandered over to investigate. The boy was holding a small round button. A red heart on a white background, with E.U. in black letters centered in the heart. Buffy was wearing one on her shirt as well. "What's this then? Why do you love the European Union?"

Xander looked like he was trying to hold back laughter. Buffy just smirked. "Nothing Spike, Xander and I just started a club, that's all, just stupid human teenager stuff."

Spike eyed them suspiciously but figured it wasn't worth the trouble to pry it out of them at the moment. The Vampire stalked off and Xander and Buffy grinned at each other before following him into the living room to start the movies.

## 11 The Injury

Xander raced around a corner and stopped, stealing a few precious seconds to lean over, hands resting on knees, and take a few deep breaths. Sweat was pouring down his face and he had a cramp in his side. It felt like they had been running for hours. He glanced up through sweat damp locks to see Willow and Tara, red faced and damp, also taking a breather. *At least I'm not the only one not able to keep up with this thing. I guess Witchy powers don't make up for being out of shape. Gods, it's warm for April, I'm glad I left my jacket at home.*

Up ahead Buffy and Spike rounded the corner at the end of the block and Xander figured it was time to run again. The three more normal humans set off again with a groan, gamely trying to keep up with the Slayer and Vampire, who themselves were trying to keep up with their quarry of the night. Some slimy, tentacled demon that had been killing people in a park. So what else is new? Why don't they do something unique for a change,

like hold up a bank or something? The three turned the corner and Xander almost groaned in relief. Finally, trapped in an alley. At least it's just the fighting now, no more of this running all over town crap.

Buffy and Spike flanked the demon, weapons drawn. Willow and Tara blocked off one side of the alley's exit and began chanting, an eerie glow immediately surrounding them. Xander pulled out the sword he was packing and took up watch at the other side of the exit. The demon didn't waste much time. It glanced at all of them, sizing them up, and made its choice. It headed straight for Xander. Oh Shit, was all Xander could think before the demon slammed into him. He felt something wet covering him, then intense pain, then blessed darkness as his head hit the pavement and he faded out.

Spike hefted his axe and eyed the demon warily. He knew these ones, they were dangerous. Sprayed some sort of caustic substance, burned the skin. He'd be hurt by it, but the humans would be hurt much worse. He saw the demon sizing them up and could practically hear

its thought process, Slayer, nope; Vampire, too dangerous; Magic users, nada; Human, easy target. Spike realized what the demon would do just as it did, but he was a split second too slow. Screaming in rage he lunged for the demon, just as it slipped between him and Buffy, sprayed Xander full on with its caustic bile, and as the boy fell, headed out of the alley. Spike barely noticed the lightning the witches threw hit the demon and incinerate it; he was kneeling next to the too still form of Xander. The boy was near covered with the bile, and even unconscious he was writhing in pain. Spike tried to wipe the worst of it off the boy's face, glad that the boy's clothes offered him some protection. Ignoring the worried questions he was being bombarded with he hoisted the brunette into his arms and glanced around, where are we? When he realized Spike almost thanked the deities for small miracles, only half a mile from the apartment, he can make it.

"You, Witches, go get the Watcher, have him bring his heavy duty patch up kit, tell him R'rshak bile and hurry. Slayer, come with me, I'll need your help."

Spike set off running, not really caring if the others understood, just as long as they followed orders. Xander moaned softly as he was jostled, but didn't wake up, for which Spike was extremely grateful. As they neared the apartment, he hoisted Xander further up onto his shoulder and dug one-handed into his pockets for the house key. He tossed it to Buffy who caught it with a nod and put on an extra burst of speed to head up the stairs and open the door. Spike strode through the front door and headed straight for the bathroom.

"Start the shower, warm but not hot. This stuff's caustic, if we don't get it off fast it will eat through him." Once in the bathroom, Spike set Xander down and pulled out his boot knife, efficiently stripping the boy of his clothing, then stripped down to his boxers.

Buffy looked worriedly at Spike, "Won't you get it on you as well?"

"Already do, a little, and it won't hurt me as bad. Besides, someone's got to clean him off."

So saying, Spike grabbed Xander and hauled him into the shower. Quickly but gently as possible Spike washed the bile off of them, hissing as he uncovered the angry red and white blisters that were already forming over most of the boy's body. Xander cried out as the sores were rubbed, but obviously the pain was enough to keep him unconscious. It was enough, however, to set Spike's chip off, sending small sparks of lightning through his brain. The Vampire bit his lip and tried to focus through the pain.

"Slayer, draw a bath, would you? Cool though, it will be better on the burns."

"On it." came her reply, then, "How is he? Is it bad?"

"Yeah. But I've seen worse. Looks like second degree burns all over his chest and arms, some on his face, a few on his back. Just a few bad patches on his legs, his jeans protected him pretty well."

Spike tried to ignore the twinges his chip was sending him as he scrubbed Xander down. Finally, when Spike

couldn't smell the bile anymore, and the bathwater had shut off, Spike gently removed himself and his unconscious burden from the shower. He was pleased to see that the Slayer had already removed the bile-covered clothing and disposed of it. Voices drifted in from the front room, the others had arrived.

"Oi! Watcher! You ready for 'im yet?"

A few seconds later, Giles rushed into the bathroom. He eyed Xander carefully, "Oh dear. It most certainly was R'rshak bile. You did very well Spike, you saved his life."

"No shit. Now do you have anything for the burns or not?"

"We're working on it. There's a salve from one of my books, specially made for this type of demon burn. It won't take long to make, Willow and Tara are working on it now. Luckily we had all the herbs already at the shop. You'd best put him in the bath for now, keep the burns damp until we're ready."

"Right then. Let me know when you're ready. Oh, and have someone fix up the Whelp's bed, clean sheets, cotton and all that."

"Oh, yes, yes, of course. Do you need anything Spike?"

"Nah. I've got blood in the fridge, but I'll eat later. Kind of hard to eat and balance unconscious boy at the same time."

Giles looked perplexed, "Can't he just stay in the bath by himself?"

Spike scowled at the man, "Oh sure, I'll just prop 'im up on the side and hope he doesn't slip down? Maybe he can learn to breath under water."

"Of course, of course, sorry. Why is he still unconscious?"

Spike eyed Xander carefully, listening to his heartbeat and checking his scent. "Well, when he went down, he hit his head pretty hard, that and the pain are probably

keeping him out cold. But his heartbeat's normal, so none's the worry."

Giles finally left to go supervise the making of the salve, and Spike considered his options for a few minutes before shrugging and just climbing in the tub, Xander curled up in his arms. He arranged himself so he was sitting with his back against one end and lay Xander out in front of him, floating on his back, resting the brunette head against his shoulder. That way there was as little friction as possible on the burns themselves.

As they rested in the tub, Spike finally had time to think, and they were not good thoughts. First and foremost on his mind was the way he felt when he saw the demon charge Xander; *I've never been so terrified in m'life. Bloody 'ell, he could've been killed. Almost was.*

A voice that sounded an awful lot like his demon growled angrily. *But if he was, so what, since when do you care about Humans?*

Another voice, more cultured and elegant answered the

demon voice. *Get a clue, Spike, you've been caring about this one for far too long now.*

Spike kept with that thought, as uncomfortable as it was, and worried at it like a sore tooth. *When the boy went down, I was terrified, but also pissed as hell that that piece of slime demon had touched something of mine. Mine? Shit! Ah, Gods, in my head I've already claimed him. Great, just wonderful. Since when does William the Bloody go around claiming humans?*

The thought came to him unbidden, *when he's in love with the human?*

*Damn! Damn, damn, damn, damn, damn!!!* Spike went through every profanity he knew, twice, in multiple languages, before he finally calmed down again. The vampire glared at the unwary human, *this is all your fault, Xander Harris. Your bloody fault for being my friend and making me care about you, making me fall in love with you fer christ's sake! It's bad enough that you're a human, but did you have to be a guy too?* Xander moaned softly and twitched, and Spike

began stroking the boy's hair soothingly. *Ah well, it's not your fault, not really. Fate's a funny bitch sometimes.*

Xander began to stir and Spike yelled out a warning to the others, "Better have that salve ready soon Watcher! He's starting to come around."

Xander was floating. He felt weightless and at peace. Everything was dark and soothing. Is this what being dead feels like? Xander tried to hang on to the comfort of this space he found himself in, but gradually he began to be aware of certain things.

Certain things like pain. It felt like fire was running up and down his body. Faintly he heard sounds, muffled as if coming from far away. A cool hand was stroking his hair, and a familiar voice somehow found its way to him through the pain.

"It's okay luv, you're safe, I've got you."

Spike's voice was what finally brought him back to full consciousness. He slowly opened his eyes, blinking as harsh light flooded them. A ceiling. He was staring at a

ceiling. He tried to sit up but strong hands suddenly gripped his shoulders tightly, "Don't move luv, better if you don't."

Xander tried several times to speak, before finally croaking out, "Spike? What happened, where am I? Why am I floating?"

Spike laughed softly, "S'okay luv. You were attacked by that demon we were chasing. He spit on you."

"A demon spit on me? Okay, that's gross, but how is that bad?"

"R'rshak spit is caustic. Eats through anything, especially skin."

Xander started to hyperventilate,  
"Ohmygodohmygodohmygod. Am I deformed, am I like the elephant man or something?"

Spike's arms wrapped gently around his chest and pulled him close, and Xander realized vaguely that he was in a

bathtub, immersed in water up to his chin, being held by Spike. It was almost enough to break him out of his panic, almost.

"Shh, luv, no, you're fine, you're fine. Just some burns. We got you back here in time. You're pretty badly burnt, but nothing that won't heal up good as new."

Spike stroked one hand through Xander's hair and made soft, soothing noises. Xander eventually began to relax. Then he shifted, and his arm rubbed up against the side of the tub. The resulting pain almost made him pass out again. As it was he yelped, loudly. To his embarrassment, Giles and Buffy immediately ran into the bathroom. "Oh, Xander, wonderful, you're conscious."

"Xander! What's wrong? Are you okay?"

Xander was in too much pain to worry about the possibility of Buffy and Giles seeing him naked, "I...I'm fine, I just realized that I feel like my skin's on fire, and like I've been hit by a truck. Oh, and Spike's not talking,

but I think I may be deformed."

Giles smiled understandingly, "Rest assured Xander, you're not deformed. You are badly burned though. I'm afraid life will be very uncomfortable for the next week or so."

Xander groaned, "How badly?"

Spike answered for Giles, "Second degree burns on most of your chest and arms, a few on your face and a few big splotches on your legs."

Xander had allowed his eyes to drift shut, the theory being that if his eyes were closed, maybe it would all be a dream, so he didn't see Willow poke her head in the room.

"Oh, hey Xander, I'm really glad you're up. Tara and I just finished the salve, so if you guys wanna get out of the bath, we can get you more comfortable."

Xander cracked open an eye and peeked up at Spike,

"Are you burned too?"

"Just a few mild ones on my hands and arms."

"It's 'cuz he carried you back here when you were still covered with the goo stuff." Buffy interjected.

Xander's eyes popped wide open in surprise. "You carried me back?"

Spike rolled his eyes and tried for nonchalant, "Someone had to, you weren't exactly up to walking yourself, were you?"

Xander just gaped at the blonde, but Spike had turned his attention to the others in the room. "Get a towel ready Rupes. Slayer, help me get him up."

"Hey! I can stand on my own!"

Spike snorted. "Fine, go on then."

Xander tried, he really did, but he couldn't do more than

sit forward before his body inexplicably gave out on him. Spike grabbed him before he could slip back under the water. "Sorry luv, but you've got to depend on us for now."

Giles saw the look of confusion on his face and tried to explain. "Besides being highly caustic, the bile of the R'rshak demon is also a mild nerve toxin. You won't have much control over your own movements for the next day or so, but it should clear up quickly."

Xander would have cursed his bad luck, but he was too busy whimpering in pain as Buffy and Spike each grabbed an arm and lifted him out of the tub. They held him while Giles gently patted him dry, and then Spike scooped him up in his arms and moved into the living room. "Where do you want him?"

Willow and Tara motioned to the couch, where they had a sheet spread out waiting for Xander.

"Um, Spike?"

"Yeah Whelp?"

"Does, um, does this salve stuff have to go anywhere near my, um, private areas?"

Spike eyed him strangely. "No, pet, your dangly bits escaped unscathed."

Xander sighed in relief, "Well, then, can I please put on some underwear? I think everyone's had enough of the naked Xander show for one night."

The gang laughed gamely and Xander supposed that his jokes weren't so funny when he could barely speak through the pain, but it would have to do. Spike detoured into Xander's bedroom and set him gingerly on the edge of the bed and grabbed a pair of boxers out of Xander's drawer. As soon as Spike's hands left him, Xander started to tip back, but concentrated and found he could stay sitting up under his own power if he tried.

"Right then, lay back."

"Wh...what?"

Spike rolled his eyes, "Lay back whelp. You can't do this yourself, and I can. So just lay back and let me take care of things for a while."

"Geez Spike, I always hoped you'd say that to me, but somehow I imagined it would be under different circumstances."

Spike snorted, and began gently sliding the boxers up over Xander's legs. A few minutes and many agonizingly slow movements and pained yelps later the boxers were on, and Spike disappeared from Xander's view.

Xander looked up to see Spike, turned partially away from him, stripping out of a pair of dripping wet boxers and pulling a pair of Xander's sweatpants on. The sight of Spike naked almost blew out the last of Xander's working brain-cells. Good gods. My vampire roommate is hung. This is so not going to help my no-obsessive-thoughts-of-Spike plan. Suddenly Xander was very glad that his body was in so much pain, otherwise the sight

that greeted Spike as he turned back around could have been way more embarrassing than a blushing Xander.

Spike wisely chose to ignore the boy's blush, "Right then, lets go get you fixed up."

Spike carried the protesting boy back to the living room and set him carefully on the couch.

Willow smiled a tear filled smile at him. "Don't worry, Xander, this will fix you up good as new." Xander balanced precariously on the edge of the couch and Willow started applying generous fingerfulls of the salve to his chest, while Spike soothed some on his back. Xander tried hard, really hard not to let them know how much it hurt, but whimpers of pain kept escaping his lips.

Finally, Spike pulled back with a hiss and turned to the group. "Someone else has to help finish him up. The bloody chip thinks I'm hurting the boy."

Tara took Spike's place, and Spike set about anointing his

own burns.

Willow talked as she administered to Xander. "Now, this stuff is made to specifically help these type of demon burns, so it should work pretty fast. Maybe three or four days before the blisters go away. You'll still be sensitive for about a week though. The only catch is that we have to keep the burns moist. So you'll have to apply it every three hours or so, Spike can help you."

"Um, Wills?" Xander managed to gasp out between moans of pain, "This hurts, and...um, it set Spike's chip off. How can he help me?"

Willow looked apologetic. "It will only hurt this bad the first time or two, by then the herbs would have had a chance to start working, so after that it will be tender and sore, but not painful like this is."

The group finished treating Xander and Spike scooped him back up, "Bed time whelp."

Willow followed them into Xander's room, and after he

was arranged to Spike's satisfaction, the Witch placed her hands on either side of Xander's temples and whispered a few words. A look of relief spread over Xander's face as the spell took effect, "Gee, thanks Wills..." was all he managed to get out before he fell fast asleep.

Spike eyed the sleeping human, "What'd you do?"

Willow managed a lopsided grin, "I blocked of the pain receptors in his brain so he could sleep for a bit, after that the shock and his body just caught up to him. Don't worry, it'll only last a few hours, but by the time he wakes up the salve will have had time to work." She motioned to the jar of salve sitting on the bedside table. "Just remember, every three hours.'

Spike nodded and absently followed the redhead out of the room. Shutting the door gently, he simply stood for a minute and took a few deep breaths. Slowly, carefully he lowered the wall he had built up inside his head. The intense emotions: fear; anger; pain he had been feeling came flooding back. He didn't care if the others saw him

loose his temper, but he hadn't wanted the boy to see him so worked up when what Xander had needed more than anything was calm.

Growling softly, he walked back out to join the others. After making sure everyone was okay, he went to the kitchen and got out a packet of blood, some of the good stuff. He microwaved it and took the steaming mug back into the living room. Sinking gratefully into a chair, he slowly sipped the blood. Giles was helping Willow and Tara pack up the first aid kit and clean up all the herbs and stuff. Buffy was pacing the length of the room, obviously deep in thought. He tried to relax, he really tried, but eventually the pacing got to him. "Bloody 'ell Slayer, give it a rest!"

"Yes, Buffy. Spike is quite right. It's not your fault. Please try to calm down."

Buffy turned on her Watcher, "Well if it's not my fault then whose is it Giles? I'm the one they follow, I'm the Slayer, and I'm supposed to keep them safe. Instead they keep getting hurt. Because of me."

Willow and Tara immediately protested and Giles tried as well to calm the pacing Slayer, but it was what Spike said next that finally got her attention. "No Slayer, you're wrong. They don't get hurt. He gets hurt. It's always Xander we're patching up, always him as gets the worst of it. He's the only one of you lot whos just a human."

"Really Spike, there's no need to speak that way of Xander..."

Spike glared at the Watcher, "I didn't mean it that way. That boys better 'en the lot of ya. She's the Slayer; the Witches have their magic. Even you've got years of training and magic to boot. What's he got? Nothing. And yet he's been going out there every night, holding his own, with nothing but luck and courage. He never complains, never gripes about it, but he knows it and you know it." The room was silent, everyone staring at the blonde Vampire, who during his speech had stood up and started pacing furiously. "That demon did tonight what every other demon does, hell, it's what I'd do in their place. Looked at the lot of you,

sized you up, and went for the weakest link. The one without any special protection. He hasn't got magic or Slayer strength or anything or anyone to protect him."

Surprisingly it was Buffy's voice that broke the silence that followed, "But you can protect him, can't you Spike?"

Everyone turned to stare at Buffy, and Spike dropped back into the chair with a tortured groan.

Willow asked quietly, "Buffy, what are you saying?"

The Slayer stalked over to stand in front of the vampire, "Spike can give Xander that protection. With his mark. If he claimed Xander, marked Xander as his, the demons wouldn't see a normal human, they'd see a human under a Master Vampire's protection. That would make them stop and think a moment, and that moment of hesitation would be all we'd need to finish them off."

Willow gasped. "But Buffy, isn't that thing usually done to make human servants?"

Spike shook his head. "Vampires mark humans for different reasons. For minions and human pets it marks them as property of the Master Vamp, makes them easy to control. But I wouldn't do that to the boy. To give him protection and a little bit of added strength and speed, without making him some lackey for me to boss around it would have to be the type of mark given to a mate, to an equal."

Giles spoke up angrily, "Buffy, you don't know what you're saying! To claim Xander, Spike would have to..."

"Care about Xander? You're right, seems strange that William the Bloody would care that much about a human. But you do, don't you Spike?"

Spike raised his head to stare into the Slayer's eyes. "Yes." he gasped out.

Buffy held his eyes for a long time, and whatever she saw seemed to satisfy her. She nodded once, briskly. "It's settled then, if Xander accepts, Spike will claim him." She

looked at Spike curiously, "How long will it take for the bond to be strong enough to protect him?"

Spike shrugged, "Vampires would notice it immediately, but other demons, I dunno, probably two, three blood exchanges tops before anyone would know just by looking at him."

She nodded. Then, apparently satisfied that she'd fixed the problem, wandered over to start packing up the weapons.

Giles walked over to Spike, "Spike, please understand, I know that you can't hurt Xander, because of the chip. But I'm not satisfied that this is the answer, or done with the best of intentions."

Spike understood, it pissed him off, but he understood. "Come by tomorrow. I'll talk to the boy when he wakes up, and if he accepts, then we'll do it tomorrow, you can watch. Make sure I don't turn the boy." That answer seemed to satisfy Giles, and he finally moved off to join the others. Soon they were all packed

up and, thank the gods they had cleaned up after themselves, because Spike really wasn't feeling like cleaning tonight, and then there were the normal rounds of goodbyes and finally he was alone again.

Spike stood with a weary sigh and headed for Xander's room. He stood in the doorway for a while, watching the human sleep, and silently arguing with himself. Part of him wanted to sleep in the whelp's room, watch over the sleeping human, be as close as possible. Another part wanted to run, far away, and not look back.

Finally the overprotective part of him won and he crawled carefully into the bed beside Xander. He lay on his side, close enough to feel the heat radiating off of the sleeping human, but far enough away not to bump into Xander and cause him any pain. He watched the boy sleeping as fierce and contradictory emotions struggled within him.

*Bloody hell, what's wrong with me? Claiming a human, falling in love with a human, I'm crazier than Dru. Can I really do this?* Spike thought of his life here with the

boy. Remembered countless nights spent watching movies and throwing popcorn at each other, countless jokes and teasing remarks. Remembered what Xander looked like first thing in the morning, sleep tousled and not-quite-all-there, stumbling around the kitchen trying to make coffee. Saw again the look of friendship, love and gratitude in those brown eyes, when he thought Spike couldn't see him staring. Spike's undead heart tightened and he felt the unfamiliar sensation of tears pricking his eyes. *Ah gods, I can't give him up, I won't. I love him too much. But it's not that simple. There's other things, other needs he has, hell, even I have. How far am I willing to go with this?*

Gently Spike reached out one shaking hand and traced Xander's lips with a feather light touch. He thought about kissing those lips, imagined how the boy would taste, what those warm lips would feel like against his. *Right, no problem there, kissing him I can handle.* He remembered how it had felt in the bathtub, to be pressed up against the boy, skin to skin. How holding him had felt. Warm and protective. *MINE.* The thought welled up and Spike breathed a sigh of relief. *Right then,*

*this isn't so bad.*

Then, reluctantly, Spike allowed his mind to wander where it hadn't yet. Sex. He imagined what it would feel like to press himself up against that heat. To run his hands over that warm skin. *He's definitely good-looking, great body, easy on the eyes.*

Spike's hand clenched convulsively as he recalled the feeling of running through those dark, silky locks. He let his eyes drift shut and tried to feel what it would be like to rub up against that body, hard length to hard length, maybe even be inside...instantly any budding erection he had died as the face of his Sire flashed into his head. He heard Angelus' cruel laugh, heard the mocking tones, the commands to crawl and beg. Felt the pain and terror as he was violated again and again.

With a whimper he rolled over and pulled the pillow over his head. Taking deep shuddering breaths Spike pushed all the terrible images out of his head and focused instead on the one thing he could hear through his terror. Xander's heartbeat. Eventually he relaxed, and

turned back over on his side to watch the sleeping figure next to him. *Sorry luv. I guess that no matter how much I love you, there are still some things I can't do.* Spike allowed his eyes to drift shut, and finally fell asleep, soothed by the steady heartbeat, unaware of the tears leaking out of the corners of his eyes.

## **12 The Claiming**

Xander groaned as consciousness returned to him. He let his eyes slit open then sighed with relief as his ceiling stared back at him. At least this time I know where I am. Suddenly he realized he wasn't alone. He turned his head slowly to the side. Spike was sleeping next to him. At least I think he's sleeping, hard to tell with no breathing or anything. Xander didn't have time to ponder what the Vampire was doing in his bed because he was immediately hit with the very urgent need to pee. He tried to sit up, only to find he couldn't do more than wiggle slightly. Well, shit. This is going to be embarrassing.

"Spike?" he asked softly.

Immediately blue eyes flew open. "Hello pet. How are you feeling?"

This was too bizarre. "Um, like my skin is turned inside out. Also, I uh, have to go to the bathroom."

To his credit, the Vampire didn't even blink as a red flush stole over Xander's face. He simply stood up, walked around to Xander's side of the bed, and gently scooped the boy into his arms. Xander gasped as he was moved, but then sighed happily at the feeling of the Vampire's cool skin against his hot, angry burns. "Mmmm, you feel cool."

Spike raised an eyebrow at him, "Well, duh?"

Xander smiled, "Your skin is cool and it feels good against my burns."

Spike just looked at him strangely as he strode into the bathroom. "Right then, how do you want to do this?"

"Can't you just set me down here?"

Spike eyed the boy in his arms, "Can you walk? Or stand on your own?"

Xander blushed, "No. But I really don't want you to hold me while I pee. A guys got to have some limits."

Spike rolled his eyes at the human's squeamishness, then deftly pulled Xander's boxers down and set him on the toilet. "Right then, I'll be back in five minutes."

Xander took care of business, and even managed to wiggle and twist enough to pull his boxers back up before Spike came back in. Spike gathered him back up and headed towards the bedroom. "Anything else you need while we're up pet?"

"Um, actually, I am kind of thirsty."

"Right. Sorry, forgot about that."

Spike detoured to the kitchen and filled the largest glass he could find.

Xander eyed it suspiciously, "Just water?"

"Sorry pet. Burns, dehydrated, sodas and stuff'll only make you sick."

Xander sighed and took the glass handed to him, then proceeded to drink half of it down.

Spike chuckled and pried the glass from the human's hands, refilled it, then headed back to the bedroom. The Vampire laid Xander down gently and grabbed the pot of salve. "Sorry luv, this'll hurt a bit, but it's got to be done."

Xander nodded and tried not to whimper too much as the salve was spread over the worst of his burns and blisters. Once the few worst were taken care of though, Xander found that the numbing affect of the salve in combination with Spike's cool fingers felt absolutely wonderful on his raw skin. He let his eyes drift shut and

leaned into the touch, murmuring happily.

Xander heard Spike gasp, and he eyed the Vampire questioningly. Spike's eyes were wide with a mix of emotions that Xander couldn't quite recognize. "Pet?"

"Hmm?"

"There's, um, there's something I need to talk to you about."

Spike set the salve aside and Xander wiggled around a bit till he could look Spike in the eyes. "Okay. What?"

Spike fidgeted, eyes looking everywhere but at Xander, hands worrying the blanket.

Xander was starting to worry now. "Spike? What is it? You can tell me."

Finally Spike sighed and cursed softly under his breath. "Look, I don't know how to say this, so I guess this'll have to do. When that demon went after you,

I...I've never been so scared in my life, or unlife, or whatever. Anyway, I guess I didn't realize how much I'd gotten used to this," Spike waved his hand vaguely, encompassing the apartment. "How much I've gotten used to us." Finally Spike met his eyes, and Xander could see an echo of the pain and fear Spike had felt. He ignored the heavy feeling in his stomach as well as the need to ask a thousand questions, and instead reached over and clasped Spike's hand. Spike stared down at their entwined hands and continued. "I know I can't be everything you need. But...I care about you and I want to protect you. I can give you that much at least." Spike grinned sheepishly at the shocked looking boy, "Maybe some day I can give you more. But for now, if you'll have me, I...I'd like to Claim you."

Xander's world was reeling. Spike cares about me? Spike wants to claim me? "Y...you want to c...claim me?"

Spike nodded.

Xander couldn't make any more words come, so he

simply stared. He knew he was making Spike wait, but his world was slowly reordering itself around him, and he wanted time to experience it. Xander felt like all his dreams were coming true. Well, almost all. *But we can work through that later, he already said maybe anyway.* Xander was planning on saying yes. The word was bouncing around inside his head, just waiting for him to part his lips so it could burst out. But then Spike got tired of waiting, and leaned over. Xander's heart stopped. Spike leaned in and kissed him. Softly, just the lightest brush of lips, but Spike kissed him. It only lasted a moment, then the Vampire pulled away and whispered gently against Xander's cheek, "Please, Xan? I can't lose you, I won't."

Xander's body melted. He flowed into opened arms, curled up against a cool chest, buried his head in Spike's neck, and began chanting softly, "Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes."

Spike curled his cool body around his human's, *HIS human's!*, and began stroking a hand through chocolate locks, holding on as tightly as he dared considering the boys condition. "Mine." he growled softly.

Xander shivered, but not from fear. They lay like that for a while, but eventually Xander voiced the question foremost on his mind, "Spike?"

"Hmmm?"

"When?"

Spike sat up a little and looked down at the fragile human in bed next to him. "In the afternoon, if you're willing. You're still pretty weak, but the blood exchange will help you heal a little faster."

Xander's hand rose and lightly trailed down the side of Spike's neck, causing the Vampire to shudder. "Why not now?"

Spike recovered and rolled his eyes, "'Cuz that bloody Watcher of yours doesn't trust me not to drain you. He wants to be here, make sure you're safe."

Xander froze and stared up at the Vampire incredulously,

"Giles knows? The others know? Spike, you're not doing this because they told you to, are you?" Xander's voice broke on the last word, but he didn't care. The thought that the others had put Spike up to this was too painful.

Spike shook his head vehemently. "No! No, luv, they had nothing to do with it. I decided to ask earlier tonight, when we were in the tub. You were unconscious, and I was thinking over what had happened, and I realized that the second the demon had gone for you, that my first thought was that it had touched something of mine and had to die. You see, in my head I'd already claimed you. My demon considered you claimed territory before my heart ever did, it only remained for me to ask you. After you were cleaned up and in bed, Buffy suggested the idea. She must've seen it on my face or something. She suggested it as a way to help protect you, and the others agreed with her. As far as they're concerned, this is a formal arrangement between friends. But you and I know different, don't we pet?" Spike stroked a cool hand down Xander's face, and pulled the boy closer.

Xander moaned and leaned into the caress, letting his eyes drift close. Spike curled up around his body and continued to gently stroke his face and hair as Xander gave into his body's demands and began to drift off to sleep. Xander was almost asleep when he noticed something, he felt Spike shift against him and realized that despite the words of love and the tender caresses, not to mention the kiss, Spike wasn't showing any signs of arousal. Tenderness and love yes, and didn't that thought send shivers down his spine?, but no arousal. Xander sighed softly to himself, What kind of freaky arrangement are you getting yourself into Harris? But Spike's hands were holding him and stroking his hair, and Xander felt Spike lay a gentle kiss on the top of his head, and suddenly all that mattered was Spike. Xander let himself go and drifted off into a place where he was held and loved and protected, and there was no pain.

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Xander continued to doze throughout the night and into the next afternoon, Spike waking him every three hours to reapply the salve and to bring Xander food and water. Finally, Xander woke up and actually felt like he was truly awake for the first time since his injury. He looked blearily around the room, realized he was alone, then listened and heard the voices floating in from the living room. Two male voices, quietly arguing, and he guessed that Giles was here. Xander tried to sit up, but the movement pulled the tight skin on his back and he gasped in pain. Spike must have heard him, because seconds later the Vampire came flying into the bedroom, "What is it pet? What's wrong?"

Giles came in on Spike's heels, "Are you okay Xander?"

Xander smiled weakly at the men. "I'm fine, guys. I just tried to sit up too fast."

Spike gently pulled Xander into a sitting position, propping him up with lots of pillows. "There you go pet. I'm gonna go get you something to eat. Rupert

wants to talk to you."

Spike scowled at the Watcher but left the room. Giles pulled up a chair next to the bed and immediately began cleaning his glasses.

Xander sighed, "Okay Giles, talk."

Giles put back on his glasses and coughed nervously. "Well, Xander, it's just that I'm not sure that this...Claiming is such a good idea."

"Why?"

Giles looked taken aback, "Excuse me?"

"You say you don't think it's a good idea, I can respect that. You've been around longer and know more about Vampires than I do, so I'd like to know what, exactly your reasons are."

Giles nodded, "That seems reasonable. Firstly, Spike is a soulless demon, and despite the chip and despite how

helpful he seems to have been to us, he remains evil at heart, I honestly don't trust that he doesn't have some plan to use you against Buffy. Secondly, while some research has been done on human-Vampire bondings, there is really no evidence of what being tied to a demon would do to your soul. Thirdly, this Claiming, even if it went no further than the initial blood exchange, would tie you to Spike for the rest of your lifetime. Do you really want that sort of thing, Xander? If you decide, sometime down the road to part ways with Spike, he would always be able to find you, always be able to manipulate you. You must see that this is a ludicrous solution. Surely with more combat training you would be just as safe."

Xander sat for several minutes and mulled over the Watcher's argument. It was a very good argument, unfortunately for Giles, Xander's heart had never listened to reason. "Giles, I really appreciate your concern for my immortal soul, but I hardly think that living on the hell mouth has left it pure and untarnished. Also, I have to say, maybe it's just because I'm younger and more naive than you, but after living with Spike these past months, I

think of him as a friend. And furthermore I trust him." Xander looked Giles straight in the eyes. "I trust him, Giles."

At Giles' slightly disbelieving look, Xander motioned Giles closer. Giles leaned in and Xander leaned forward, until his lips were almost brushing the older man's ear. He spoke quietly, barely breathing the words, mindful of Vampiric hearing. "I love him, Giles. I'm in love with him. Please don't interfere with this."



Spike stomped quietly around the kitchen, furious at the Watcher for trying to talk Xander out of it and scared witless that Xander would listen to reason and refuse the Claim. He finally calmed down and started fixing Xander some soup, listening to the conversation in the bedroom with half an ear. He growled softly as he heard Giles' reasoning, admitting grudgingly that they were all good

arguments, especially the one about the boy's soul. A feeling of warmth spread through him when he heard Xander say that he considered Spike a friend, that he trusted the Vampire. There were several moments of silence, then he heard the Watcher gasp loudly and choke off a reply. Deciding enough was enough, he grabbed the bowl of soup and hurried back into the bedroom. "So, you two finish your little chat?"

Xander nodded at the blonde, "Yup, all chatted out."

Giles looked grim, and didn't say anything. Spike wondered what in the hell the boy had said or done to put that look on the Watcher's face. He'd have to find out, later. He shrugged it off for now and placed a tray with soup and juice on the bed in front of Xander. "Got to get some food in you, whelp. Eat up."

Xander grumbled but obeyed, while Spike flitted about the room, straightening things, picking up clothes and basically just trying to not look nervous. Giles sat silently, seemingly lost in thought, but occasionally shooting Xander speculative glances. Finally Xander finished and

waved to Spike, who by now was pacing nervously. "All finished. Happy, nurse?"

Spike slipped into gameface and stuck his tongue out at the boy, something he knew made Xander laugh. This time was no different. He took the tray from the laughing boy and returned it to the kitchen. Out of sight of the Watcher and Xander, Spike stopped and took several deep breaths, attempting to calm himself down. He was incredibly nervous. He had never Claimed anyone before, and it was very important to him to claim the boy as his own, to do it right. Having to do so in front of the Watcher just made his nerves worse. Sighing, Spike returned to the bedroom and sat down on the edge of the bed. "Right, well, we better get on with it."

Giles looked sour, but Spike only had eyes for Xander, who shot a happy smile his way. Spike arranged himself on the bed so he was sitting against the headboard, and pulled Xander back to lean against his chest. Spike stroked a hand softly through the brunette's hair and laid a soft kiss on the boy's neck. "Ready pet?"

Xander nodded and leaned back against Spike, tilting his neck to the side to offer the Vampire better access. In reality, the mark could be given with little fanfare, but Spike knew that the Watcher in Rupert was expecting some big showy ritual. Spike decided that to keep Giles happy he would have to say something official sounding. Gently holding Xander's head to the side, Spike slipped back into gameface and intoned in his best 'Master Voice', "I William the Bloody, Childe of Drusilla, Childe of Angelus, Master of the Clan of Aurelius, claim you, Alexander LaVelle Harris as Consort." Spike lowered his head and gently slipped his teeth into the thick muscle where neck and shoulder met. Xander's blood exploded in his mouth, a riot of flavors and emotions, imprinting Xander's essence in his mind. The boy tasted like sunshine and life, sweetness with a spicy undertone that Spike knew he would now crave. He swallowed a few mouthfuls, then raised his head and tore into his wrist, holding it to Xander's mouth and urging the boy to drink.

Xander listened, slightly amused, as Spike intoned the formal sounding words. He knew they were for show, for

Giles. The book he and Buffy had read hadn't mentioned any declarations of any kind, just the biting, and sex, but Xander was pretty sure the sex part wasn't going to happen. Then, suddenly Spike's teeth were at his throat, and he had a brief moment of 'vampire, teeth, bad' before forcing himself to relax. Then Spike bit, and all Xander knew was the sharp, bright pain of Spike's fangs slicing through his skin and the sound of his blood rushing through his veins, rising to Spike's siren call. The pull of Spike drinking from him overwhelmed his already overloaded senses. Electricity was thrumming through his body and he was instantly hard. He moaned softly and tried to lean back harder against Spike's cool chest. Suddenly Spike's wrist was at his mouth and, following instinct, he drank. Spike's blood was rich and spicy and dark as it flowed over his tongue. Xander sucked greedily at the wound, whimpering softly. He had never expected anything like this, and he wanted, needed more. Too soon, Spike tore his wrist away and all Xander could do was try to remember to breathe as the powerful blood zinged through his system.

Xander's breath was coming in small gasps and Spike

knew that the boy was painfully aroused, luckily, since Spike's blood was fresh in his system, he was also very susceptible to Spike's will. "Sleep Xander. Go to sleep now." Spike used his Master voice and within seconds Xander's heart rate and breathing had calmed and the boy drifted into a deep sleep. Spike was hard himself and hoped that the boxers and loose jeans he was wearing would be enough to hide his arousal from the Watcher. As far as Giles was concerned, the claiming was completed. Spike knew better. Mates were claimed with blood and sex, and until he took Xander, the need would be an ever-present drive in the back of his mind.. Unfortunately, taking Xander that way was exactly what Spike wasn't sure he could do. Until he did, though, the bond would be half completed at best, regardless of how much blood they exchanged, and while most demons and fledges couldn't tell the difference, other Masters could.

But Giles and the rest of the gang didn't need to know that. Licking any stray drops of blood from his lips, Spike eased Xander back onto the bed and scooted over to the edge. He turned to look at Giles, who was silent and

looking decidedly pale. "Everything okay, Watcher?"

Giles nodded, then seemed to shake himself out of whatever space he'd been in. "I thought that you wouldn't be able to control Xander. How is it you were able to put him to sleep like that?"

Spike rolled his eyes. "Because the blood was fresh in his system and he's weak so he's more susceptible to my suggestion. If he weren't injured, and if I had given it a few minutes, I wouldn't have been able to force him to do anything. Once he's at full strength again that won't happen. But Vamp blood is powerful stuff and I figured he'd be better asleep while it works on him."

The two men walked out into the living room. "Will your blood have any effect on his healing process?"

Spike shrugged. "Yeah, probably. The first dose will probably help get the last of the nerve toxin out of his system, a second exchange in a couple of days should help the burns more."

Giles nodded. "Very well. I'll leave you then. I'm sure the girls will be by tomorrow to check on Xander."

"I expected as much." Spike breathed a silent thank you as Giles finally left. He poked his head in the room to see that Xander was still sleeping peacefully and then headed to the bathroom. He needed a cold shower.



Unfortunately, ten minutes in a freezing cold shower wasn't enough to counteract the fresh blood flowing through his veins. The demon was raging to claim his mate through sex as well as blood, so Spike turned the water up to hot and leaned back against the wall, giving in to the demon's demands the best he could. Slicking his hands with soap, Spike's left hand began playing with his nipples, teasing them into hard peaks as his right slid lower to grasp his weeping erection.

As he stroked his aching flesh, Spike tried to imagine past lovers, soft and curvy with large breasts and wet cunts waiting to envelope him; but his mind kept coming back to the brunette sleeping in the next room. He finally gave up and began picturing Xander in the shower with him, Xander's warm, work callused hand stroking him, Xander leaning over to suck and nip lightly on his nipples.

Spike moaned as the fantasy took over, thrusting his hips and ramming his cock into the slick tunnel his hand formed. In his mind, Xander was standing there, stroking him and looking into his eyes, chocolate eyes full of love, trust and passion. It was the look in Xander's eyes that finally pushed him over the edge. Twisting a nipple sharply, Spike bucked up one final time and came hard, hissing Xander's name as he shot over his hand and the shower wall.

As soon as his shaking legs could hold him again, Spike rinsed off and climbed out of the shower. He stared into the mirror, not really noticing the empty room that was reflected back at him. "I've got to figure this out."

## **13 Stalemate**

The girls came over the next day, bringing movies and snacks, and the Scooby gang settled into Spike and Xander's living room for an extended stay.

Xander had slept through the rest of the afternoon and the night after the Claiming, and had woken up in the morning pleased to find that he could stand and walk on his own. His burns were still raw and extremely painful, but he could move on his own, slowly, and that was an improvement. Not that he minded Spike carrying him everywhere, but since Xander had woken up, Spike had been a little skittish around him. That was disturbing and painful, especially since Xander now seemed to have an intense need to touch the Vampire.

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Spike had been there, on the other side of the bed as Xander had woken up. "Morning Pet."

Xander smiled and rolled over, "Hey Spike." Suddenly Xander frowned, "Did you make me sleep yesterday? Like a thrall or something?"

Spike looked sheepish, "Yeah, but it was for your own good. You needed to rest and if you'd stayed awake, Rupert would have had you up for hours asking you questions about the [bond](#)."

"Oh, yeah, the bond." Xander grinned and reached a hand out to grasp Spike's.

The Vampire's eyes widened and he jumped up off the bed quickly. "So, um. You should be able to walk on your own today, why don't you go get washed up and I'll get you something to eat." Spike quickly rushed out of the room.

Frowning, Xander slowly leveled himself up out of bed

and shuffled to the bathroom.

Later on, after Xander had eaten, Spike made sure to apply the salve to his burns, and arranged Xander on the couch, making sure he had everything he needed. Then the Vampire had quickly retreated to his own room. "I'm off to catch some sleep. Creature of the night and all..."

Leaving Xander to flip aimlessly through daytime television and wonder at what was bothering the suddenly skittish Vampire. Finally though, the girls had shown up and he had been distracted by movies and gossip. Still, Xander kept feeling a strong urge to be near to and touch Spike, like an itch in the back of his mind.



Spike quickly shut his bedroom door and flopped onto his bed, thoroughly disgusted with himself. *Way to go, git. Confuse the hell out of the boy, why don't you?* Spike

had lain awake all night, watching Xander sleep and brooding, yes in his own mind he could admit it, brooding over what he was going to do about the claim. His demon, unfettered by feelings of fear, inadequacy and memories of pain, was raging to finish the claim.

The bond, practically its own entity, was thrumming in the back of his mind. New and uncertain, the bond cried out for physical contact and reassurance.

Another part of Spike, just as strong as his demon, and were he human, what Spike would think of as his soul, but now he considered his humanity, the parts of himself that held over from his turning, that made him different from other Vampires, was practically frozen with fear at the thought of sex with another man. As far as Spike was concerned, sex with another man meant fear and pain and blood and torture, everything Angelus had done to him for the first several decades of his existence. The demons drive to claim its [mate](#) through sex and blood just echoed his horrific memories of Angelus' attentions.

Yet every time he reminded himself that sex would never

be a part of his and Xander's relationship, every time in the hours since the Claim, he would flash back to Xander's eyes when he had asked the boy to accept the Claim. The wonder, the joy, and the love that shone out of the boy's eyes took Spike's metaphorical breath away. And a small voice in the back of his mind would ask, 'How could being with someone that feels that way about you ever be a bad thing?'

So Spike brooded, and Spike dozed, listening to Xander watching TV, listening to the flock of women that descended on the apartment, bringing movies and snacks and comfort. Listened through the first movie and all the gossip and giggles, to Xander's heartbeat and Xander's breath, and Spike ached, he ached to touch Xander, just have that little bit of physical connection that the bond so desperately craved. Finally, when he heard the group of young adults in the living room shuffling around, getting ready to start the next movie, Spike cursed to himself and gave in. He was near insane with the need to touch his mate, and he knew that Xander would be feeling it just as badly. As weak as the human still was, Spike couldn't knowingly add to his pain.

So Spike pulled on jeans and tee shirt and stalked barefoot into the living room. He nodded to the girls spread out in the various chairs and on the floor, grabbed a mug of blood from the kitchen, and wandered back in to see the movie just starting. Xander had the couch to himself, lying down on his side so he could see the screen. Spike walked over and gently lifted the boy's upper body off the couch. Ignoring Xander's shocked stare, he sat down and arranged Xander so the boy's head was in his lap. He calmly began running his fingers through Xander's hair, tracing the boy's warm skin with his fingertips.

At Spike's touch, Xander instantly relaxed.

"So, what're we watching then?"

Buffy glanced over at them and smiled to herself. Willow frowned at the two of them, but Tara quickly distracted her girlfriend. Dawn raised her eyebrows, then got a speculative look on her face that Spike didn't approve of seeing on a girl her age. "Braham Stokers Dracula." Buffy said with a smirk.

"Oh, bloody 'ell! Don't you people get enough of this stuff as it is? And that story is crap too."

Xander laughed. "We know, we just like to make fun of it."

Willow nodded, "We keep the volume low and add our own lines."

Spike groaned, he was in for a long evening.



The next two days passed quickly. Xander slept a lot, and he spent most of the time he was awake on the couch with Spike, curled up together like they had during the movie. On the fourth day since his injury, Xander woke up to find Spike standing by the edge of his bed with a tray of breakfast.

"Hey, breakfast in bed! Thanks, Spike." As Xander ate, Spike fidgeted with things and paced around the room. The Vampire looked like he would kill for a cigarette, or a good fight. "Spike?"

"Yeah, Pet?"

"What's up?"

Spike nervously picked up a few books and then immediately set them back down again. "What makes you think anything's up pet?"

"Um, maybe the fact that you're even more ADD than usual?"

Spike scowled and flopped down on the bed. "Ha, bloody Ha pet." Xander passed Spike the empty tray and gingerly got out of bed. "Where are you going?" Spike looked about to panic.

Xander rolled his eyes, "Human, Spike. I need to pee,

and then take care of my oh-so-pleasant morning breath."

"Oh." Spike suddenly found the floor very interesting.

Shaking his head, Xander slowly made his way to the bathroom to wash up. Once he was finished and back in bed, Spike came back into the room and sat on the edge of the bed, where he immediately began playing with the blanket.

"Spike." Xander reached over and grabbed the Vampire's fidgety hands, "is it time to mark me again?"

Spike looked up, shock obvious on his face. "How...how did you know? The bond can't be that strong yet..."

Xander smirked, "Of course not, but I've found that living with you and being your friend has given me the uncanny ability to read you like a book."

Spike scowled a little at that, then sighed ruefully. "Well, I guess I'd better get used to that, as the bond

strengthens, you'll only get better at it."

Xander felt a small flash of pleasure and excitement at that statement, the thought of being even closer to the Vampire he loved sending shivers down his spine.

Spike arranged them as he had the last time, leaning up against the headboard and pulling Xander to lean back against the Vampire's cool chest. Spike wrapped an arm around Xander's waist and the other went up to hold his head gently to the side. Spike placed a small kiss over the old mark before gently sinking his fangs into it.

Xander groaned softly as the gentle suction began. His head was much clearer than the last time and he felt everything much more acutely than before. Every suck at his neck went straight to his cock. His flesh strained against the silk of his boxers and Spike's hands felt like cold fire on his skin. Suddenly Spike's wrist was at his mouth and Xander eagerly drank. The rich elixir of Spike's blood flowed over his tongue and down his throat, sending electricity zinging through his veins. Then the wrist was gone from his mouth and the

fangs were gone from his neck. Xander whimpered in disappointment and leaned back hard against Spike's cool chest. He felt Spike's hardness against his hip, and some deep fear inside Xander melted, Spike wanted him too!

Spike was panting softly in his ear, and at that moment Xander needed to do more than just hold Spike's hand. Turning slightly in Spike's arms, Xander leaned forward, holding Spike's eyes with his, and brushed his red lips against Spike's equally bloodstained ones. Spike froze, eyes wide, panting slightly. Xander could see the struggle behind those cerulean pools, and for a moment Xander wasn't so sure that Spike didn't have a soul. How could any unsouled being have this depth of feelings, of pain and fears and insecurities hidden in their depths?

Suddenly Spike relaxed, he pulled Xander against him tightly and allowed his eyes to drift shut. His lips found Xander's, and they lay there together, letting the lazy slide of lip against lip build a delicious tension between them.

Spike's arms were tight around Xander and Spike's lips were sliding softly against his own, the contrast of cool against warm sending shivers down Xander's spine. Eventually, Xander brought his tongue out to lick gently along the seam of Spike's lips. They parted with a soft gasp and Xander allowed his tongue to dip gently inside, tasting the lingering copper of his blood and an indescribable flavor that Xander figured was simply Spike. Xander kept his touch light: gentle brush of lips, soft sweep of tongue, just barely penetrating the soft cleft of Spike's lips. He knew Spike was scared, and the last thing he wanted to do was push too far and scare Spike off.

Spike couldn't believe he was kissing Xander! He couldn't believe how good it felt. He knew Xander was holding back, going slow and part of him was extremely grateful, but mostly his body was thrumming with excitement at the feeling of Xander's lips sliding against his. The bond flared at the contact and Spike threaded his fingers through Xander's soft, sable waves and pulled his human closer, deepening the kiss. Xander's warm tongue eagerly slid deeper into his mouth, the flavors of their

blood mingling on their tongues as they intertwined. They kissed long and slow and deep, learning the shape of each other's mouth. Xander tasted fresh, of sweetness and sunlight, his mouth was hot against Spike's and Spike knew he would quickly get addicted to this as well.

Eventually, after kissing for what felt like hours, Xander shifted a little and Spike felt the boy's hardness against his thigh. The feel of it brought the awareness of where this could lead crashing down and Spike reluctantly pulled back. "Xander," he gasped, "Xander luv, I...I'm sorry...I can't..."

Xander nodded, his lust-glazed eyes meeting Spike's and letting the Vampire know he understood. The brunette leaned forward and placed a quick, chaste kiss to Spike's lips. "I know. Thank you Spike." The Vampire nodded and slipped out of the bed and out of the room.

Xander twisted back around and settled himself on his back, wincing as the movement pulled at the tight scabs that had formed over the burns. Xander heard the

bathroom door open and close, then the sound of the shower starting. He smiled to himself, Spike was taking a cold shower because of him! Xander let his hand slip down beneath the covers and engulfed his straining flesh with a soft groan. It took only a few hard strokes and the image of a wet, naked Spike to bring himself to an intense climax. Feeling happy and drained, Xander wiped himself off with the sheet and allowed his tired, healing body to drift back to sleep. For once he didn't worry about Spike smelling that he had jacked off, from the faint sounds coming from the shower, Spike was doing the same.

The hot water was pounding down on Spike's back and running in rivulets through his hair and down his chest. His fist, warmed by the water and the fresh blood and slicked with soap, was running up and down his dripping length. Spike's eyes were shut tightly as he remembered every second of Xander's warm lips on his. Vaguely Spike was aware that he was moaning softly, but he couldn't help it, those long slow kisses they had shared were the most erotic things the Vampire had felt in ages. Spike whimpered softly at the memory of

Xander's tongue tangling with his and the heat of Xander's body against his. Arching up, Spike gasped as he shot rope after rope of sticky cum over his fist and the shower wall.

Slumping against the tile, Spike allowed himself a few minutes to recover before rinsing off and climbing out of the shower. As he dried off, Spike smirked at the lingering scent of Xander's pheromones permeating the apartment. Seems like he wasn't the only one with a little tension to work off. Spike pulled back on the sweat pants he had been wearing and wandered back into Xander's room. The mortal was curled on his side, snoring softly. Spike smiled gently and crawled into the bed, spooning up behind the sleeping boy. He placed a soft kiss on Xander's neck and whispered; "Mine," then allowed himself to relax into the heat of the warm body next to him. As he drifted off, Spike thought that he hadn't felt so relaxed in weeks. Things were definitely looking up.

## 14 Movement

"Come on Boy! You can do better than that! Get back into position." Spike's voice echoed off the walls of the training room.

Xander groaned, picked himself up off the mat and took a defensive position. It had been two weeks since his injury and after a week of bed rest and three doses of Vampire blood, Xander had been deemed healed enough to start a training regimen. It seemed that Spike was determined to see that Xander could fight well enough to hold his own on patrols. Currently, Spike was teaching Xander how to throw an opponent. Mostly the lesson consisted of Xander getting thrown around the room.

Xander braced himself and nodded to Spike. The blonde rushed Xander, reaching for him, and Xander grabbed Spike's wrist, using the Vampire's forward momentum to toss the Vampire over his shoulder. Unfortunately Xander didn't let go in time and fell after Spike, they landed on the mat together, limbs hopelessly tangled.

Blue eyes blinked up at him, "Your executions better, but we still have to work on the follow through."

Xander grinned sheepishly at the blonde before letting his head fall down and rest on Spike's chest. Cool fingers came up to stroke through his sweat-dampened locks. "Tired pet?" Xander groaned softly. Spike chuckled, "I'll take that as a yes."

"I thought the bond was supposed to make me stronger and stuff. I don't feel any stronger."

Spike sighed. "I know pet. But you are getting stronger. I can feel it when we spar. Also you're healed already." Spike extracted one of Xander's arms from the tangle of limbs and held it in front of Xander's nose. "See?" Spike trailed a finger down the new, pink skin that was all that was left of the burns. Xander shivered at the touch and pressed himself closer to the cool body beneath him. Spike gasped softly and Xander raised his head to see Spike's eyes, wide and wondering, staring up at him. Slowly, so as not to spook the Vampire, Xander lowered his head until his lips brushed

against Spike's. Spike barely hesitated before parting his lips and deepening the kiss. Xander eagerly followed suit, parting his lips and allowing his tongue to enter Spike's cool mouth. This was only the third time they had kissed, the second being the third blood exchange, which had played out exactly like the second: a make-out session followed by cold showers. Since then they would cuddle on the couch while watching TV, but otherwise Spike hadn't been risking physical contact, including having returned to sleeping in his own bed now that Xander was healed. The most physical contact they got was during their sparing sessions.

Xander sucked softly on Spike's tongue, shivering as Spike's hands ghosted up his back to cup his face.

Spike was slowly becoming more relaxed as they kissed, taking some initiative to move his hands over Xander's body. Spike's hands ran through Xander's hair and down his back as they kissed, before suddenly grabbing Xander and flipping them so Spike was on top. Xander gasped into the kiss, and Spike took the opportunity to sweep his tongue through the boy's mouth. He levered himself up

on his forearms and looked down at the wide, dilated eyes of the boy beneath him. As he moved up, their lower bodies came into contact, causing their erections to brush against each other. Spike hissed at the contact, surprised as pleasure raced through him, his body aching for more.

Just at that moment, the bells over the shop door jingled. Spike pulled away from the dazed looking boy and smiled ruefully. "That's a very effective technique for distracting your opponent Xan, however I don't think it's one I want you using in a fight." Spike stood and reached a hand down to the boy. "Come on, pet. The gang's here, we should clean up a bit before the meeting."

Xander nodded and returned Spike's smile before heading off to the bathroom to clean up. Spike began tidying up the equipment and mats theyd been using, lost in his own thoughts. *Well, fuck. This proves it then. We kissed without the influence of the bite and I liked it just as much. So it's not just the blood exchange turning me on. I really do want the boy.* He chuckled to

himself. *Well, between the chip and working for the white hats, it's finally happened. I've turned into a great bloody poof.*

Xander wandered out of the bathroom, buttoning up his shirt. His hair was wet and the damp, curling ends fell into his eyes as he focused on the buttons. Spike felt his chest tighten at the sight. *Mine.* He quickly walked over to the boy and brushed the hair out of his eyes. One hand captured Xander's chin and lifted until Spike could look him in the eyes. Spike brushed his lips over Xander's, then batted the boy's hands away and finished buttoning up the shirt. "You go on and say hi to the girls, 'kay pet? I'll just wash up and be on out in a few."

Xander's happy grin sent shivers up and down Spike's spine. The boy happily bounced out into the main room and Spike headed into the shower to take care of his aching erection.

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Spike eventually wandered out of the back room, freshly showered and dressed, and flopped down on the couch next to Xander. Xander didn't look up from the conversation with Willow he was involved in, but he automatically moved his leg so their thighs were pressed together. "So, what's on the violence menu for tonight?" Spike asked the gathered Scoobies.

Buffy looked up from the magazine she was reading, "Rumor has it there's a new Vampire in town, possibly a Master. He thinks he's one anyway, there's been a rash of new fledges. Giles thinks he's trying to take over the hell mouth."

Spike snorted, "Well of course. They all try to take over the hell mouth, it's in the bloody rule book or something."

Giles threw down his book in disgust. "I cannot identify this supposed Master from the vague description you have given me Buffy. You will have to patrol and try to get an actual look at him."

Buffy rolled her eyes and tossed down the magazine, "Fine, I'll go patrol. Anyone else up for it?"

Willow and Xander declined, preferring to stay at the Magic Box and research, but Spike agreed to go with Buffy and see if they could find this new Master Vampire. Before leaving Spike leaned over and whispered in Xander's ear. "Don't you go walking home alone, eh pet? I expect to find you nice and safe when I get there."

Xander rolled his eyes, "Yes mother." Willow giggled and Spike mock scowled at the two before following Buffy out of the shop.



Xander was curled up on the couch, watching a late night movie when Spike stumbled into the house, covered in

neon blue slime and grinning widely. Xander raised an eyebrow at the bouncy Vampire, something he had been practicing in secret. "Did we have fun tonight?"

"It was bloody brilliant pet! We never ran into the git we were looking for, but I offed a couple of his childer! Then he sent some of his pet demons after us. If you think I look goopy, you should see the Slayer, covered in blue slime head to toe!"

Xander grinned at the image. Spike headed to the bathroom.

Half an hour later a damp Spike flopped down on the couch, dressed only in a pair of sweat pants. Xander was immediately hard as the half naked Vampire reminded him of earlier that day in the training room. Slowly, Xander leaned over until he was leaning against Spike's chest. Spike's arms immediately came up to encircle him. Sighing softly, Xander relaxed against the Vampire before tilting his head up. Capturing Spike's eyes, the brunette leaned the extra inch forward and captured the Vampire's lips with his own.

Spike deepened the kiss without hesitation, his body hyper aware and aching after the fight and his and Xander's kisses earlier in the evening. Their tongues twined together, and Xander's hand drifted up to lightly caress the side of Spike's face before beginning to gently trace down Spike's neck and over his chest, moving lower. Spike broke off the kiss with a gasp. "Pet..."

Huge chocolate eyes looked up at him. "Spike, do you trust me?"

Spike stared into the boys eyes, losing himself. "Of course luv."

A bright grin broke across Xander's face. "I really wanna do something for you. All you have to do is remember to say stop if it gets too much for you, okay?"

Dumbly, Spike nodded.

Xander dropped a quick kiss to the Vampire's lips before pushing Spike back into more of a reclining

position. Moving slowly, Xander brought his hands down to Spike's waist. Holding Spike's gaze, Xander pulled the sweatpants down and off, exposing Spike's semi-erect cock. Xander's breath caught in his throat. "Gods Spike, you're beautiful."

Continuing to move slowly, giving Spike every opportunity to stop, Xander lay down between Spike's spread legs, at eye level, and mouth level, with Spike's cock. Tentatively, Xander licked up the length. Spike gasped, and Xander did it again. He continued to lick up Spike's length, until the pale cock was full and weeping. Xander looked up to see Spike's head was thrown back, his eyes were wide and unseeing, and he trembled all over.

"Is this all right, Spike?"

"Y...yes." Spike managed to gasp out.

Smiling, Xander blew across the leaking tip, causing Spike to moan. Eyeing the huge piece of flesh in front of him, Xander felt only one thing, an empty ache. He needed

Spike inside of him, any way he could get him. "Gods Spike, you don't know how long I've wanted to do this." Leaning down, Xander took Spike into his mouth.

Spike cried out as wet heat enveloped him. "Oh, gods, Xander!"

Xander grew impossibly hard as Spike cried out his name. He began to thrust against the couch as he suckled on Spike's cock, tongue playing with the foreskin, gradually moving his mouth lower and lower until he could feel the head pressing against the back of his throat. The brunette swallowed around the hard flesh in his mouth until it became too hard to breathe, then he backed off and suckled on the head while he caught his breath.

Spike was moaning and writhing beneath him, hands in a death grip on the couch cushions.

"Spike, do you want me to stop?" Xander already knew what the answer would be, but with Spike's skittishness, he figured it was a good idea to check in anyway.

"God, NO!"

Xander laughed and recaptured Spike's cock, trying to memorize the taste of the Vampire. Deep and earthy, salty, clean, Xander catalogued the flavors as he worked his mouth up and down the length. Spike whimpered and thrust up into Xander's throat. Xander relaxed his throat muscles and let Spike thrust, worrying that if he held the Vampire down, it would bring up memories neither of them wanted at the moment. Spike was panting and making soft whimpering sounds in the back of his throat as he thrust up into the wet heat of Xander's mouth. Xander groaned at the erotic picture the Vampire displayed and ground down into the couch a little faster, seeking friction for his own aching erection. As Xander's throat vibrated with the boy's groaning, Spike's thrusts became ragged and Xander drew back a little, wanting to taste the offering Spike was about to give up. Xander sucked hard and Spike came with a howl, arching up off the couch, voice echoing around the apartment. Xander groaned deeply as he drank down Spike's cum, barely noticing as his own orgasm shook him. Panting, the two men collapsed back

onto the couch, Xander releasing Spike's softened flesh and nestling his head in the crook of Spike's hip.

Xander closed his eyes and relaxed, relishing the scents of Spike and sex. Eventually Spike's cool hand found its way down to stroke through his hair. "Mmm, pet, that was...amazing. Thank you."

Xander lifted his head and grinned at the sated blonde. "Yeah, it was. Thank you, Spike. Thank you for trusting me that much."

Spike looked embarrassed and averted his eyes. Unable to contain his silly grin, Xander dropped a gentle kiss onto Spike's softened flesh and then sat up and helped Spike get dressed again. Then they curled up on the couch together and let the late night movie lull them into a light doze.

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Spike woke up late the next afternoon, feeling very satisfied. He stretched and flopped back down into bed, not yet ready to face Xander. Last night had been wonderful, the good fight, the amazing blowjob, and then the cuddling afterwards. The last had been perhaps the best part. Spike loved simply curling up with the boy, loved the simple pleasure of just touching and being touched. It felt safe, a feeling Spike had not gotten from a lover, or anyone for that matter, in far too long. Even though he was attracted to Xander, Spike was reluctant to move their relationship further and risk losing this precious feeling of safety.

Spike stretched again and frowned when he noticed that his pillow felt funny. Rolling over and lifting it up he found a book underneath. Not just any book, Xander's book, the book, "The Joy of Gay Sex." Spike sat up and gingerly picked up the book turning it over in his hands. When had the boy snuck in here and left it? They spent most of the night curled up around each other on the couch, and Xander had been asleep when Spike had carried the boy to bed then retreated to his own waiting

bed and much needed sleep. Spike decided that Xander must have snuck in here earlier this morning and left it. Shrugging to himself, Spike sat up against the headboard and opened the book. Well, it's one way to tell if I'm going to be able to handle a full relationship with the boy or not. Settling himself, Spike began to read.

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Xander was sitting at the table, sipping coffee and reading the newspaper when Spike wandered out of his bedroom. The blonde was wearing black sweat pants and an older black tee shirt and reading as he walked. Xander greeted the Vampire and turned back to his paper.

"Xan, what's frottage?"

Xander spit his coffee out all over the table. "What?!"

Spike sat down at the table and handed the flustered brunette a napkin. "I said, what is frottage?"

Xander blushed bright red. "Um, its um, rubbing."

Spike frowned, "Yeah, that's what your book says, but I'm not sure I get it."

"Uh, ummm...what's not to get?"

Spike shrugged, "Well, it just doesn't seem that interesting. What makes it better than just jacking yourself off?"

*Oh gods, I'm dead aren't I? Spike the 'I won't ever have sex with men' Vampire let me give him a blowjob and now is asking me about sex positions. I must have gotten killed on my way home from the Magic Box last night and now I'm in some weird hell dimension.*

Spike tilted his head to the side and eyed the wide-eyed boy staring blankly at him. "Pet? Are you okay?"

Xander seemed to shake off whatever weird mood had hit him. "Sorry. Um, actually it's very different and very good. Plus it's handy because you don't have to be naked to do it and you can do it almost anywhere."

Spike looked surprised and thoughtful.

Xander was getting really weirded out, so he decided to change the subject. "Um, Spike? Tomorrow's Monday, do you think I'm strong enough to go back to work? It's just, I've been out for like two weeks and my boss is starting to get impatient..."

Spike frowned. "Well, you're healed enough. Do you feel rested enough to start work again?"

Xander nodded. "Yeah, I feel fine. As much as I've enjoyed the break, I'm actually ready to go back."

"Well, I guess there's no reason for you to stay home then. I'd like to do one more exchange before you go back though, can't hurt to have the bond a little stronger,

what with the new baddy in town and all. Let me get something to eat and we'll mark you again."

Xander nodded and returned to reading the paper, trying to ignore the instant hard-on he got at the very thought of Spike biting him again.

An hour later found them in Xander's bedroom, taking up their now familiar positions on the bed. Once settled, Spike dropped a light kiss onto the mark and bit. The brunette hissed softly as Spike's fangs sank into his flesh. The sound of his blood rushing through his veins was thunderous and each pulse of blood leaving his body seemed to harden his cock a little more. By the time Spike's wrist was at his mouth, Xander was whimpering and grinding back against the cool body behind him.

Xander drank hungrily, getting every drop of Spike's blood he could. Finally the wrist was wrenched away from his mouth and Spike's voice, hoarse and thick, whispered in his ear. "Xan? D'you think you could show me that frottage thing?"

Xander almost sobbed in relief. Turning in Spike's arms, Xander captured the Vampire's cool lips in a passionate kiss. Spike kissed back and started to scoot down the bed and onto his back. Xander wasn't going to let the blonde run any risk of negative reactions though, so he quickly flipped them, pulling Spike fully on top of him. Spike looked down at Xander in surprise. "But...I don't..."

Xander shifted and spread his legs so Spike settled in between them. Then he thrust up against the Vampire's cool body. Spike gasped in surprise as their cocks rubbed together, hard flesh cushioned by the soft layers of sweatpants. The hesitant Vampire quickly caught on and set up his own rhythm. He lowered his head and recaptured Xander's lips in a deep kiss.

Spike couldn't believe the sensations running through his body. How could something so simple feel so good? Xander's hands were digging tightly into his lower back and the boy was hungrily sucking on his tongue. Spike groaned and thrust harder against the warm body beneath him. Realizing he hadn't yet

dropped his game face, Spike sucked Xander's tongue into his mouth and slit it open on a fang, quickly following suit with his own tongue. Their mixed blood filled his mouth and Xander moaned brokenly, plundering Spike's mouth for his share of the coppery mixture. Spike's thrusts grew faster and more ragged as the blood pushed him closer to the edge. He grasped Xander's shoulders and held the brunette impossibly close, struggling to get as much friction as possible. Xander responded by tightening his hands on Spike's back and hooking a leg over the Vampire's thigh. The two thrust raggedly against each other, their pants and moans filling the quiet apartment.

"Oh, yes, Spike!" Xander came first, arching and shuddering underneath the cool body blanketing him.

Spike watched in awe as passion swept Xander's features, and knowing that he had been the cause pushed the Vampire over the edge. Spike buried his head in Xander's shoulder as his orgasm wracked him.

Xander's hands were threading their way through Spike's

hair when Spike finally raised his head to look Xander in the eye. Xander smiled sheepishly, "Hi."

"Hi yourself. Are you okay pet?"

"Mmhmm. More than. You?"

"Yeah, that was, wow." Spike leaned down and brushed a gentle kiss over his boy's warm lips. "We need showers. Do you want first or second?"

Xander shrugged, "You go, I'm just gonna lay here and bask."

Grinning, Spike slipped off the bed and headed for the bathroom. "Hey, Spike?"

Spike paused in the doorway. "Yeah pet?"

"So tell me. Is frottage better than jacking off?"

Spike laughed. "Much better pet, much better."

## 15 Trouble

Xander hung a foot off the ground, struggling against the Vampire that had his throat in a viselike grip. They had finally found the new Master Vampire, and he was stronger than any of them had anticipated. Over two hundred years old, the new Master had easily brushed aside their feeble efforts to stop him. Willow and Tara's spells had been easily deflected, and Buffy's attack had been brief and futile. Xander, of course, immediately found himself in the midst of the worst of the fighting and way over his head.

The Vampire sneered at the struggling mortal in his grasp, ignoring the fighting going on around him. Suddenly the Vampire's eyes widened and he pulled Xander closer. "Consort?" The Vampire buried his face in Xander's neck and breathed deeply. "No, only half claimed." The Vampire pulled back and smiled at the mortal. "Your Master's going to have to do better than a half formed Claim if he wants to protect you,

human." Laughing, the Vampire tossed Xander aside. "Kill him." He gestured towards where Xander was huddled on the ground, then waved his arm to encompass the rest of the Scoobies fighting around him. "Kill them all." The Vampire strode off into the night and the group of minions and demons they had been fighting attacked full force.

Spike had been too far away from Xander to hear what the Master Vamp had said to Xander, but he saw the casual way the boy was tossed aside. His demon roared at the insult and he fought harder, trying to get closer to where Xander lay, stunned. Finally, Spike was able to reach Xander, in time to help the mortal off the ground. "You okay, pet?"

Xander nodded, "Yeah Spike, I'm fine, just a little bruised. Let's go help Buffy."

Spike followed Xander back into the fray; slightly troubled by the odd look he had seen in Xander's eyes.

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The gang trudged wearily back to the Magic Box, all of them sporting numerous injuries. The fight had been hard on all of them, and they hadn't even gotten close to the Master Vamp. They all collapsed wearily into seats while Giles and Dawn fussed around them with the first aid kits and Buffy relayed the tale of their encounter.

Spike headed straight to the little kitchenette to heat up some blood. Once it was done he grabbed a wet washcloth and headed over to Xander. The boy was slumped into a chair, a distant look on his face.

Spike knelt in front of the brunette and began wiping blood and grime off his face. "It's okay luv, we'll get 'im next time, yeah?"

Xander shrugged, "Yeah, they'll figure it out, I'm sure."

Spike eyed the boy curiously; "We'll figure it out,

pet. We're a team, yeah?"

"Sure Spike, whatever you say." Xander stood up and headed out the door. "I'll see you guys later, be safe, yeah?"

Worried now, Spike quickly followed Xander out the door.



The walk back to the apartment was tense and silent. Several times Spike tried to get Xander to talk, but after the third brush off, he let the boy have his space.

During the walk home, Spike wracked his brain to figure out what set Xander off, but for the unlife of him he couldn't figure it out. Luckily he didn't have too much longer to wait, for the brunette rounded on him as soon as the apartment door was closed.

"Spike, why did you lie to me?"

"What pet? I haven't lied to you!"

Xander paced back and forth in front the blonde, "Why did that Master say I was only half Claimed?"

If possible, Spike felt himself go pale, "Wh...what did he say pet?"

Xander got right up into the Vampire's face. "He said I was only half Claimed Spike! He said you would have to do better than a half formed Claim if you wanted to protect me. You told me you Claimed me, you told me that you wanted to Claim me! You told the others that I was protected. You lied to all of us."

A defeated look settled on Xander's face and he turned his back on the Vampire, the better to hide the tears welling up in his eyes. "Is it me, Spike? Do you not really want me? Because you should have thought of that before this all got started!"

"Oh gods, Xan. No, that's not it at all. I do want you."

Tears coursed unchecked down Xander's face. "Then what is it Spike? Why am I not good enough? Why is it that no one wants me?"

Spike rushed forwards and enfolded the brunette in his arms. "Hush luv, hush. It's not you, you're perfect. You're more than I could ever have hoped for. It's me. I'm a bloody coward."

Xander looked confused. "What do you mean?"

Spike stepped back and looked at the floor. "I'm scared Xan. A full claim involves sex as well as blood, and not just that stuff we've done, but penetration. I'd have to take you pet, and I'm scared to take you like that. All I've ever known of it was torture and pain. It's hard for me to believe that it could be good, that you would want it."

Xander placed a shaking hand on Spike's shoulder. "It doesn't have to be like that Spike. It would be good."

Blue eyes flashed at him. "How do you know? Did you and that Army git..."

Xander cut Spike off before he could go further. "No, I never let Forrest take me like that. I wasn't ready and honestly, I didn't trust him enough to want to do that with him. But I know it would be good between us."

Scared and angry, Spike's voice was louder again and he was pacing back and forth. "You can't know that Xan. What if I hurt you? What if I can't? Just because that bloody book of yours says..."

"It's not because of the book, Spike! I know it would be good because I love you. I love you and nothing that we do together could ever be bad!"

Spike froze. Wide blue eyes stared unblinking at Xander. "You...you love me?"

"Yes Spike. I love you. I'm in love with you."

"How...how long?"

"Since we were living together in my basement."

"That long?"

Xander flopped down on the couch with a sigh. "Yes, that long."

Spike sat down beside him. "Oh." There was a long pause then, "How? Why?"

Xander groaned and closed his eyes, leaning his head back on the couch. This would be easier if he didn't have to look at Spike when he said it. "From that first night when you had the nightmare and we stayed up talking, I thought of you as a friend. I hadn't told anyone about my father in a long time. Willow knew some of it, but no one else. I hadn't had a guy friend in a long time, not since J...Jessie died. I think after that night you let me see more of the real you. You were smart and sarcastic and dark and yet so caring with Dawn and the girls and I just sort of fell for you. I thought it was just physical

attraction at first, I mean, look at you. But when we moved in together here I started to realize that it was more than that, and when you almost left, after Forrest and I broke up, I realized that I didn't want to be apart from you. That's when I knew for sure."

Spike was silent for several moments, and Xander kept his eyes closed, unwilling to see any negative response from the Vampire. Eventually a cool hand reached over and grabbed hold of his. "Thank you."

Xander opened his eyes and looked at the blonde. "Thank you for what?"

Spike smiled shyly. "For what you said. I don't think anyone's ever just loved me before. Angelus loved that I was his; Dru loved me because I took care of her. No one's ever just wanted me."

Xander smiled. "Well, you deserve it. You're amazing Spike."

Spike looked embarrassed but pleased. He stood and

pulled on Xander's hand "Come on whelp, it's late. Let's go to bed."

Pulling Xander along, Spike led them first to the bathroom, and began stripping them both. Xander got the idea and began to help. Soon their filthy clothing was removed and they were ensconced in the heat of the shower. Spike took his time, exploring every inch of Xander with soapy hands. They kissed softly as they explored each other's bodies. Spike kissed down along Xander's jaw line and sucked softly on his neck as he gingerly slid his hands down Xander's back and cupped the boy's ass. At his tentative grasp, Xander moaned and bucked forward into Spike's hip. Spike moaned softly as their erections rubbed together. Xander reached a hand in between them and gently stroked their erections together. "Spike, can I?"

Spike nodded and Xander leaned back against the shower wall, pulling Spike to lean against his chest as he began a rough stroke of their cocks. Spike groaned softly and buried his face in Xander's shoulder, hands grasping tightly to the boy pleasuring him. With adrenaline from

the fight still running through their veins, and emotions from the discussion still high, it wasn't long before Spike came, bucking into Xander's fist and whimpering his release. Xander followed quickly after, groaning deep in his throat as the stress of the day drained out through his cock. They collapsed against the shower wall, letting the heat of the water soothe them both. Finally Spike sighed and pushed away from the wall. "Come on pet, best get out before we prune."

Xander allowed Spike to lead him out of the shower and dry them off. Xander immediately headed for his room and was surprised when Spike steered them towards the Vampires room. "Huh? Spike, what?"

Spike smiled softly, "I wanna do this right pet, and that includes the setting."

Xander stood by Spike's bed, trying not to notice the black satin sheets. "Do what right?"

Spike held Xander close and whispered in his ear, "Claim you, luv."

Xander gasped and Spike took advantage of the boy's shock to capture Xander's mouth in a deep kiss. While the brunette was distracted Spike maneuvered the boy onto the bed and arranged him comfortably against the pillows. He pulled back and admired the view. "You're beautiful, luv." Xander blushed and Spike chuckled. "Stay right there luv, back in a mo'."

Spike went into Xander's bedroom and grabbed the lube out of the boy's bedside table. He then got a damp towel out of the bathroom and took a few moments to calm himself down while he desperately tried to remember what that sex guide book of Xander's had said. Use lots of lube, go slow, start out with fingers, right I can do this. Xander is mine and I want him. The past doesn't control me anymore, Angelus doesn't control me anymore.

Feeling more confident, Spike headed back to his room and Xander. The boy was where he had left him, spread out on the bed, doing his best to look relaxed. Spike set the supplies down and crawled up on the bed, curling up

around the warm body of his lover. "You all right, luv?"

Xander smiled, "Yeah, just fine."

Spike eyed the boy seriously. "Are you sure you want this, Xan?"

Xander nodded, "Please Spike, I want you."

Spike smiled and leaned in for a kiss. The brief brushing of lips grew more passionate and soon hands were roaming everywhere as tongues dueled. Spike rolled on top of Xander and settled between the boy's legs, bringing their cocks into alignment for a few frantic thrusts. Not wanting to end it too soon, Spike reluctantly pulled away and began to kiss down Xander's neck and chest. He stopped to lick at Xander's hardening nipples, pulling a hard nub into his mouth and sucking softly. Xander gasped and arched up into his mouth, hands coming up to thread through his hair and keep his head in place. Spike paid thorough attention to the nipple before moving on to its twin. By now, Xander was moaning and squirming beneath him. Spike thoroughly

laved the nipple with his tongue, sucking and nipping at it, before finally releasing it with a soft 'pop'. Xander moaned his disappointment, but let go of Spike's hair so the Vampire could move lower. Spike kissed down Xander's chest, dipping his tongue into the boy's bellybutton, and running his fingers through the trail of hair leading to Xander's leaking cock. Spike allowed his fingers to explore Xander's erection for several minutes, learning the weight and feel of it, before leaning over and licking gently from root to tip. Xander tasted salty and musky and...Xanderish, Spike leaned down for another taste.

"Spike! Stop!"

Spike looked up at Xander in surprise. "What's wrong pet?"

"Nothing, it's just, I'm really close, and the thought of you sucking me..."

Spike smirked, "Got it pet."

Xander relaxed back down onto the bed. Spike sat up and spread Xander's legs; getting his first good look at his boy. The sight made him even harder. Spike reached over and grabbed the tube of lube. "Okay, pet?" Xander nodded and Spike slicked up a slightly shaking hand. Gingerly, he reached down and brushed a finger against Xander's hole. The brunette gasped and Spike stilled.

"Go on Spike, please."

Spike nodded and gently circled the hole, before sliding the tip of his finger inside. The Vampire gasped, Xander was so hot! He slid his finger further in, until it was all the way inside. "Luv...you're so hot!" Xander moaned and pushed against the finger invading him. Spike began to move gently in and out, slicking up Xander's passage.

"Now two!" Xander panted.

Spike obliged, slowly sliding a second finger into the boy's heat.

"Oh gods, Spike! You feel so good! This feels so good."

Spike bit back a moan at the sight of his fingers sliding in and out of his boy. He could hardly believe that soon he would be inside Xander.

"Spike?"

"Yeah pet?"

"Your fingers, crook them kinda forward and up."

Curious, Spike did and brushed against a spot that felt different. Xander arched and screamed. "Gods! Yes! Do that again!"

Spike did and watched in amazement as pure pleasure washed over Xander's features. "Xan, luv. What's that?"

"Um...my prostate. It...it's like a G spot, for guys." The brunette managed to pant out.

"Oh, well, that's bloody useful." Spike grinned and gave

the spot a final massage before returning to loosening Xander's passage. Spike had worked a third finger into the boy and was thrusting in and out when Xander finally began to beg. "Please Spike, need you. Please...in me, now."

Wordlessly, Spike nodded and removed his fingers. He knelt in front of Xander as the boy grabbed a pillow and positioned it beneath his hips. Xander noticed the shaking of Spike's hands and took the lube from the nervous blonde, squirting some out and lubing up Spike's cock himself. "Spike, are you sure you're okay with this? We can stop if you need to."

Spike shook his head, hissing his pleasure at the feel of Xander's slick hand on his aching cock. "No, I'm...I'm fine luv. I want this, I want you."

Xander nodded and lay back down, spreading his legs and locking his eyes with Spike's, silently sending the blonde his love and reassurance. Spike positioned himself over Xander and pressed the head of his cock against the boy's opening. "Xander?" Spike gazed into

deep brown eyes and found only love and trust.

Spike took a deep breath. "Xander, I love you," and pressed forward.

Xander gasped. "I...I love you too Spike." Then groaned as he was breached for the first time.

Spike sank slowly, inch by inch into Xander's heat. He was shaking and could hardly keep his arms firm enough to hold himself up. Blue eyes remained locked with brown, and he saw Xander's eyes widen as he slid the rest of the way in. Spike gasped at the intense heat that was surrounding him. It felt amazing.

"You feel amazing, love. So good."

Spike held himself as still as he could, giving them both a chance to get used to this. He shifted slightly and Xander gave a little half gasp/half sob of pleasure that Spike felt to his core. Good Gods. Is it possible to cum from sound alone? If he makes that sound again I may find out. To keep that from happening, Spike leaned down and

captured Xander's lips in a soft kiss as he began a gentle thrusting motion. Xander moaned into his mouth and thrust up against him and they soon found a rhythm together.

Xander's hands dug furrows up and down Spike's back while Spike's hands were busy tweaking the boy's nipples and tracing his warm flesh. Spike sucked greedily on Xander's tongue, causing the boy to moan and thrust harder against him. Spike took the clue and began to increase the pace, almost overwhelmed by the heat and slick tightness that surrounded him. Xander whimpered as his cock was ground between their bodies and he tore his mouth away to suck in some much needed air.

"Spike, faster, harder! I'm so close!"

Spike pulled back and used the new angle to thrust harder, feeling his cock graze that spot inside the boy with every thrust. Xander's eyes were closed and he was moaning and writhing beneath the blonde. "Xander, look at me."

Xander opened passion fogged eyes and met glowing yellow ones. Spike morphed into game face and stared at the boy. "Mine!"

"Yours!" Xander shouted as Spike leaned in and bit down on his claim mark, drinking hungrily the passion laced blood that welled to the surface. Xander cried out as his orgasm slammed into him. Some instinct overrode the tremors wracking his body and he leaned up and sank his teeth into Spike's shoulder, greedily swallowing his mate's blood.

Xander's bite pushed Spike over the edge and he screamed his pleasure as Xander sucked on the wound he created. Dimly, Spike felt the faint, wavery feeling of 'Xander' in his head snap into sharp focus and he knew the bond had solidified.

Xander felt his orgasm going on and on. The pulling feeling of Spike drinking from him just intensified the orgasm. Suddenly Xander felt something in his head snap into place, like a spot he hadn't known was hollow was now filled. Finally, Xander let go of Spike's shoulder

and relaxed back down onto the bed as the last of the tremors ran through his body. He hissed as he felt Spike's fangs slide from his flesh and felt Spike's tongue cleaning the wound. Once he was satisfied that no more blood remained, the Vampire collapsed onto Xander with a groan. Xander wound his arms and legs around the lithe body covering him and held on. "Spike, that was...so amazing. Thank you. I love you."

The tousled blonde head came up off his shoulder and dazed blue eyes met his. "I love you too Xander." Spike leaned in and kissed Xander softly. "Thank you love."

With a groan, Spike pulled out and they curled up around each other on the bed. Xander rested his head on the Vampire's cool chest and sighed happily as Spike's fingers began to thread through his hair. "Spike? That feeling, during the claiming, it felt like something snapped together in my head."

Spike grinned. "That was the bond love. It's official now, no getting out of it."

Xander smiled happily. "Good. I don't want to go back, you're mine and I'm yours." Xander raised his head and met Spike's eyes. "I love you Spike. I want to be with you, always."

Spike blinked back tears and placed a soft kiss on his mate's mouth. "I love you too Xan."

"I know Spike, thank you." As they drifted off to sleep in each others arms, Xander realized he could feel it, feel Spike's love for him in the back of his mind. It was perfect.

## **16 Confrontation**

Xander woke slowly, feeling sore, sleepy, and happy. Eyes still closed, head resting on Spike's cool, unmoving chest, he replayed the night in his mind. It had started out so badly: a difficult fight they had barely walked away from, the shock and betrayal he had felt when he learned that Spike's claim was not complete,

and not least the feeling of utter worthlessness when it had occurred to him that maybe the claim was incomplete because the Vampire didn't really want him. Unconsciously Xander shifted closer to the cool body holding him, caught up in the memory of the emotional roller coaster of last night. Then the argument with Spike, and the claiming...Xander rubbed his growing erection against Spike's hip and sighed happily. Spike wanted him, had claimed him officially, had overcome decades of abuse to make love to him...suddenly the world tilted and Xander was on his back, looking up into bright blue eyes.

"You're thinking too loud luv."

Xander smiled up at the blonde. "Well, if someone wasn't snoring so loud, maybe I'd be able to sleep."

"Oi, I don't **snore**! Do I?" At the brunette's grin, Spike mock snarled, "You're gonna pay for that boy!" Spike mercilessly dove for all of Xander's most ticklish spots, not giving up till Xander was begging for him to stop. Finally they collapsed together in an exhausted

heap. Spike idly stroked his hand through Xander's hair and mused over the change he could already feel between them. "So luv, what do you want to do today?"

Xander yawned and stretched before settling back down with his head on Spike's chest. "More of this?"

Spike chuckled. "Always, love. But I'm hungry. Let's go get a shower and something to eat and we'll spend the rest of the day in bed, at least until the meeting tonight, okay?"

Xander smiled and held onto Spike tighter. "That sounds wonderful." Spike purred softly and sent a pulse of love and contentment through the new [bond](#) to Xander.

Xander gasped and raised wide, wondering eyes to Spike. "Th...that was the bond?" At Spike's nod, Xander grinned happily. "I could feel it Spike! I could feel what you were feeling!"

Spike couldn't help but smile back; his boy's grin was infectious. "I know love, and that's just the beginning.

Some day we'll probably be able to read each other's thoughts."

Xander's eyes got impossibly wide and he had a wondering look on his face as he got up and followed Spike into the bathroom. Spike started the shower and pulled the unresisting brunette under the warm spray. "Okay whelp, what's on your mind?"

Xander concentrated and sent feelings of love, contentment, joy and wonder to Spike before voicing his question. "Spike, how long will we be together? I mean, I guess I mean, how long will I live?"

Tracing Xander's already beloved face with a finger, Spike thought over his answer carefully. "Dunno pet. The oldest consort I've ever met was around 80 and looked barely 30. The thing is, consorts are usually turned well before that, so there's no telling how old you could live to be."

Xander processed that bit of information and Spike braced himself for the worst. Suddenly the bond was

flooded with love and happiness. Brown eyes that practically glowed with joy met worried blue ones.

“Spike, all my life, while my parents either ignored me or beat on me, while my teachers figured I was too stupid to bother with, while my girlfriends who were supposed to care about me just used me instead, and especially this last year when the girls and I grew apart, the only thing I wished for was someone to love who would love me back, forever. I just realized that my wish actually came true!” Xander threw himself into Spike’s arms and held the Vampire tight. “Do you think that there are good wish granting versions of Vengeance Demons out there?”

Guileless brown eyes bored into his and Spike swallowed back tears. “I dunno pet, maybe there are.”



The two men slowly made their way through the darkening night to the Magic Box and the Scooby

meeting. They knew that the new threat to the Hell Mouth was very real and they were reluctant to break the loving, playful mood that had been their day so far. Their hands were clasped tightly as they walked, and they amused themselves by sending feelings back and forth across the bond. They had just turned onto the block the Magic Box was on when Spike froze, growling. Before he could even question what was wrong, Xander was overwhelmed with fear, anger, rage through the bond. He tried to fight it, but Spike's emotions were overwhelming him. Xander was lost in a maelstrom of emotions and feared ever getting out of it when Spike squeezed his hand a little too hard and the chip went off, knocking Spike out of whatever had overtaken him.

Next thing he knew, Xander was being cradled in cool arms, and soft kisses were being rained down on his face. "I'm sorry, pet, so sorry luv. Are you okay?"

Xander suddenly realized they were sitting on the sidewalk and he quickly stood up, reaching down to pull Spike up as well. "Yeah, I'm fine. Just scared. What the hell happened, Spike?"

Spike pulled out a cigarette and lit it, inhaling deeply.  
“Angel’s here. At the shop I think.”

Xander stepped closer and embraced the agitated blonde. Slowly Spike relaxed into his embrace. “Do you want to go home, Spike? We can skip the meeting, call and tell the gang we’ll just patrol on our own tonight.”

Spike shook his head. “No, love. We’ve gotta go, this new Master is too powerful for only part of the gang to take on alone. It must be pretty desperate if they called in the Great Pouf. They need us, besides I’ll deal. Just give me a minute to collect myself, yeah?”

Xander kissed Spike softly and stepped back, giving his Vampire space. “I don’t like Angel either, but does it make it any easier that he’s Angel and not Angelus? It’s been a really long time, I mean...”

Spike snorted, “It’ll never be long enough...” Tumultuous blue eyes met his, “Xan, luv, when was the last time Angelus and I were hanging out together?”

Xander thought hard, and suddenly got a very bad feeling. “Right after he lost his soul, you and he and Drusilla were all together.”

Spike nodded. “And did our Angelus come back as a ‘normal’ evil Vampire...”

Xander suddenly looked sick. “N...no, he was even crazier than ‘before’, and...and you were in that wheelchair...oh gods!”

Spike pulled Xander close and buried his nose in the soft sable locks, breathing deeply to calm himself. “And I was in the wheelchair and couldn’t fight back.”

Xander grasped Spike tightly, suddenly overwhelmed by a blinding rage. Angelus had hurt what was his, and he could barely see through the need to dust the other vampire. It was Spike’s turn to soothe Xander, and they stood in the street for several minutes before either of them moved. Finally Xander pulled back and looked Spike in the eye. “We’ll go and play nice, but if he so

much as makes a move towards you, he's dust."

Spike chuckled at his mate's fierceness. "Sounds good to me luv. You get to explain to the Slayer though, why you staked her boyfriend."

"Deal."

Hand in hand they walked to the Magic Box.

The gang was sprawled around the shop when they arrived. Angel, sitting at the research table, pouring over a book with Giles barely glanced up as they entered, before glancing away again. But Spike knew the moment Angel realized about him and Xander. He drew in a breath to speak to Giles, froze and looked back up at the two of them, before rushing over and grabbing Spike by the lapels of his duster. "Spike, what the hell do you think you're doing?"

"Nice to see you too, peaches. What makes you think I'm doing anything?"

“Don’t lie to me boy.”

The girls were yelling at Angel to back off, and Giles was pleading for peace in the background. Spike smirked at Angel. “Now, see, you’re worrying the kiddies. Let go and let’s play nice.”

Angel let his demon come to the fore and shook Spike hard. “I don’t know what you hope to gain by this, but so help me, if you try to hurt them...”

Xander had fallen to the floor, pushed casually aside by Angel as he had rushed Spike. As he picked himself up, Xander was barely aware of Buffy and Willow, yelling at Angel to calm down, barely aware of Giles pleading with the Vampire to listen to reason. All he could see was Angel holding Spike up off the floor, shaking him, and Spike’s trademark smirk firmly in place, despite the fear and rage thrumming through the link. Almost without thinking, Xander walked over to Angel, pulling the stake out of his coat pocket. Before anyone even noticed him moving, he had imbedded it firmly in Angel’s gut.

Angel broke off his rant and looked down, dumbly, at the stake protruding from his stomach. “Wh...what?”

Spike’s smirk broke into a grin. “Serves you right, threatening me like that in front of my mate.”

Xander pushed up into Angel’s face. “Listen to me Angel. Spike and I are bonded. Everyone knows, everyone’s okay with it. If you so much as think of laying a hand on my mate again, I will dust you and worry about making it up to Buffy later.”

Xander grabbed Spike’s arm and pulled his lover toward the table, pushing Spike into a chair and sitting on his lap, thereby placing himself between Spike and any further threats from Angel. Spike wound his arms around Xander’s waist and looked smug. Willow and Dawn stood staring at them with shocked looks on their faces, though Xander thought Dawn looked a little smug about him staking Angel. Giles had collapsed in his chair and put his head in his hands, mumbling something about ‘damn territorial Vampires.’ Tara ran out of the room to get the first aid kit. Buffy calmly walked over and took

Angel by the hand, patting his arm soothingly as she led him back to the table, seating him as far away from Xander and Spike as possible. Tara handed the first aid kit off to Buffy before joining Willow and Dawn in going back to researching.

Angel gaped at Buffy. “You...you know about them?”

Buffy nodded. “Yup. We’ve kind of been in on it from the beginning. It’s okay Angel, really. Spike’s one of us now, we trust him. Plus, Xander’s happy, so we’re happy.” As she talked, she efficiently removed the stake and bandaged Angel’s wound.

Xander finally came up for breath after thoroughly kissing Spike and looked over to Buffy. “Why didn’t you guys give him a heads up? Coulda saved on some of the drama.”

Willow smiled apologetically. “We figured it wasn’t our story to tell. Plus, we’re used to it by now, so with all the crazy stuff going on, we just kinda forgot about it.”

Angel looked at them all as if he suspected they were possessed. “You all know? You’re all okay with Xander sleeping with Spike? How do you know Spike’s just not using Xander?”

Spike and Xander glared at Angel but surprisingly it was Giles who defended them. “Actually, they are bonded. Xander is Spike’s Claimed mate.

Angel’s jaw dropped. “Claimed? You Claimed a mate?”

“Hey!”

“Oi! Hold on just a bloody minute, mate!”

Giles held up a hand and both Spike and Xander shut their mouths. “Angel, please, this does not concern you. Xander’s claiming does not have anything to do with the current problem we are facing. Can we return to the issue at hand, please.”

Everyone looked contrite and settled down to the books on the table. Angel kept shooting glares at the two men

curled up together in a chair, but kept his objections to himself.

Hours later, they'd reviewed all they knew about the Master Vampire: old, smart, powerful, had a lot of followers. They reviewed what they'd tried against him: basic magic, Buffy, an up front attack. Nothing had worked. Then they began brainstorming possible tactics. Nothing seemed plausible.

Buffy sighed. "The problem is we've fought him and his guys a couple of times now, he knows how we fight, he knows our tricks, we can't get close to him."

Xander was sprawled across Spike's lap, the Vampire's hands idly tracing patterns on his thigh and stomach. His head was laid back, resting on Spike's shoulder and he lazily stared at the ceiling as the conversation went on. At Buffy's comment, he snorted. "Yeah, the only one of us who got close to him was me, and that was just so he could laugh in my face. I wasn't even important enough to kill."

Giles stilled and looked directly at Xander, obviously thinking hard. Then he turned to Angel. "Angel, please humor me. When Spike and Xander came into the store, what could you tell about them?"

Angel frowned, "I could smell their scents all over each other."

Spike smirked and kissed Xander on the neck.

Giles pressed on. "Couldn't you sense their bond?"

"Not right away, no."

"Why is that?"

Xander felt Spike tense beneath him, feeling uneasy, Xander tensed as well.

Angel flushed. "I assumed that Spike was using the boy. I wasn't paying attention to anything else."

Xander relaxed, only to get a sinking feeling as Angel

continued. “Also the bond is very new, it is still difficult to sense.”

Buffy stood up and gestured widely. “What do you mean it’s too new? Why couldn’t you sense it?”

“Buffy, please sit down.”

“But Giles...”

“Buffy, please, listen to Giles.” At Angel’s reprimand, Buffy scowled and sat.

Angel glanced over at Spike and the two shared a long look. Angel turned back to the group. “Consort Bonds...take times to cement. Even with regular blood exchanges it takes time. If I had not been so angry, if I had paid more attention, I would have sensed it right off.”

Buffy calmed. Willow looked at Giles, “Giles, what does this have to do with anything?”

Giles stood up and began to pace. “This Master is very powerful, but also very arrogant. He knows about Buffy’s strength, he is prepared for that. He knows about our magic, he is prepared for that too. He knows all about our group. He has seen Xander, but he doesn’t see him as a threat. Perhaps we can use that to our advantage.”

Spike tightened his arms around Xander. “How, exactly?”

## **17 Showdown**

The walk home from The Magic Box was completed in much the same way as the walk there had been, quietly holding hands, the bond thrumming with emotions. But where the walk to the shop had been playful, the walk home was tense with anger, fear, and apprehension.

When they reached home, Spike silently drug Xander into the apartment and straight into Xander’s bedroom, tumbling them down onto the bed. Spike wound himself tightly around his lover and buried his face in Xander’s neck. “I don’t like it love, I don’t want you to do this.”

Xander sighed and stroked his hands soothingly along Spike's back and arms. The proposal of Giles' strategy and the ensuing arguments had taken up most of the night. After hours of rehashing the plan and arguing about details, with Spike voicing every reason he could think of not to put Xander in danger, it had still come back to the original idea, Xander would be the crux of the attack and in the most danger. The meeting had finally broken up an hour before sunrise, so they could go home and rest up for the battle to come.

"I know beloved, but we've talked and talked about this, and there's no other way around it."

Spike stilled and looked up at Xander. "What did you call me?"

Surprised, Xander reviewed what he had just said.

"Beloved, I called you beloved. Is...is that okay? I can come up with something else."

"No! No, love, I love it. It's perfect." Spike's smile was

watery as he leaned over and kissed Xander gently. "I've never been anybody's beloved before."

"Well, you're my beloved. Guess you'll just have to get used to it."

That earned him a soft chuckle, "Guess I will, love."

Spike buried his face in Xander's neck and breathed in his lover's scent. He was terrified. Terrified of not being able to protect his lover, terrified of losing Xander after just finding him. Xander's soft, wavering voice broke through his brooding. "Spike?"

"Yes, love?"

"Make love to me? Please?"

"Of course love, of course."

Slowly, gently Spike began kissing and tasting his boy, removing each article of clothing and exploring each bit of exposed skin with mouth and fingers. Xander

trembled beneath him, shivering as Spike's cool breath ghosted over him. Soon Spike had them both naked and he wound his body around the warmth of Xander, capturing his mouth in a bruising kiss. They thrust slowly against each other, hands exploring every inch of skin.

Finally Xander thrust the lube into his hand and Spike obeyed the unspoken command, thoroughly preparing the writhing brunette. Even though Xander was still a bit stretched out from earlier in the day, they were both new to this and needed the ritual to calm them, center them into the moment and each other. When Spike entered Xander it was with a feeling of awe and wonder that Spike hoped he'd never lose.

They drew it out as long as they could; long, hard thrusts alternated with short, shallow ones. For a while Spike simply pressed the head of his cock against Xander's prostate and rocked into him, the intense pressure of his hips causing bruises to bloom on the inside of Xander's thighs. Finally, Xander's begging won out and Spike slipped his fangs into his mate's neck, drinking down the taste of Xander's passion as the boy exploded into

orgasm. Spike rode out the shakes and shudders, waiting till Xander was coherent enough to sink his own, blunt teeth into Spike's shoulder and drinking in Spike's own essence as the Vampire finally let go and emptied himself into his lover.

They lay panting, twined together, reluctant to leave each other's arms. Spike listened to Xander's breath return to normal as he idly traced his hands along his lover's sweaty skin. "Love?"

"Yeah Beloved?"

"Thank you."

Curious brown eyes met his. "What for?"

"For everything, but mostly for taking a chance on me, on us."

Tear filled eyes blinked several times. Finally Xander graced him with a small, shy smile. "I love you."

Spike smiled and pulled Xander close. "I love you too. Sleep now, love. We've got a busy night tonight."

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Twilight found them gathering back at the Magic Box, loading up on weapons and rehashing their plan one more time. It was a relatively simple plan, as plans went. Once they found the Master, they would attack as normal, Buffy and Angel taking on the brunt of the physical assault, Willow, Tara and Giles attempting to get at the Master through magic. Spike and Xander were to fight side by side. If it looked like they still weren't able to get close to the Master, Xander was to allow himself to be separated from Spike and work closer to the Master. Hopefully he wouldn't be noticed until it was too late. The stake Xander had was bespelled, he didn't have to get a heart shot, just sink the stake in somewhere, and Willow's spell would do the rest. At least that was the plan. But they all knew how their plans usually turned

out, so all they could do was hope for the best.

Buffy hefted the sword she had chosen for the fight and looked around at the gathered group. "Everyone ready? Okay, let's head out."

They found the Master in the third cemetery they checked, waiting for his new minions to rise. The gang got there just in time to see them rise. All thirty of them.

"Holy crap!"

"You can say that again luv."

"I would, but I'm too scared."

Standing in the graveyard, under the full moon, the Master stood surrounded by a rather large group of assorted demons, watching as his newly risen minions gathered before him.

"Well, come on guys. So there's a few more than we thought, stick to the plan." Buffy grabbed Angel's hand

and sprinted towards the group of demons.

“Easy for her to say.” Xander quipped as he followed Spike towards the gathering minions.

Behind him, he could hear the Witches and Watcher setting up the first of their spells, but the only sound Spike was focusing on was the sound of Xander’s heartbeat, strong and steady beside him. With a holler, they slammed into the group of fledges. Spike lost himself in the familiar rhythms of battle, keeping one eye on Xander at all times. They had been sparing together often of late and so it was easy to fall into now familiar patterns of fighting side by side. Spike tore through every fledge he could reach; they were so new that their strength was laughable, but still, thirty against two was a rather uneven fight. Luckily, he and his boy seemed to be holding their own for now. He was just finishing tearing the head off his fifth fledge when he heard a short cry and scented Xander’s blood. Turning with a roar of anger, Spike pulled up short at the sight of the cloud of dust settling around Xander.

Xander wiped the blood from the side of his mouth and grinned at Spike. “No worries, he just slapped me, now he’s dust.” Spike grinned back and grabbed the nearest fledge, tossing him into the small group trying to advance on the magic users. The group went down in a tangle of limbs and Spike launched himself towards them, trusting Xander to fend for himself for a few minutes.

Xander watched the blonde Vampire launch himself towards the downed fledges with loud war cry. He laughed and pointed the fledge he held in a headlock towards where Spike was fighting. “See him? He’s my mate. Pretty hot, huh?”

The fledge nodded quickly, obviously hoping that by humoring Xander he’d get to live, or un-live, whatever. Xander staked the fledge and dusted his hands off. “Right, who’s next?” Glancing around the battlefield he saw that Spike had deterred the group heading towards where Giles and the girls were casting. Willow screamed something and pushed her hand, palm outwards, towards a small huddle of demons. A fireball streaked out of nowhere and hit the demons head

on. Xander felt his mouth drop open in shock. “Wow, cool!”

Hearing Buffy’s battle cry, he looked to the other side of the battlefield where Buffy was taking on several different demons at once. She had a slash on her thigh, bleeding slightly, but it didn’t seem to be hampering her. Angel had a few bruises and spots of blood on him, and seemed to be steadily working his way towards where the Master stood; doing something complicated with his hands that Xander guessed was magic related. Before he could decide where to help, he was bowled over as something heavy slammed into his back. He went down and was immediately pinned. Trying not to panic, Xander gasped for breath and slammed his head back, luckily hitting something that hurt his assailant. The pressure on his back eased and Xander squirmed onto his back, snaking his hand down to grab the knife he’d strapped to his side. The demon sitting on his chest was smaller than him, but bulky and way stronger, plus the slime was gross. Xander said a silent prayer that steel would hurt this thing and stabbed it in the side. By the howling and the rolling around, Xander guessed that steel did hurt it.

He quickly scrambled to his feet and grabbed his axe off the ground, beheading the thing before it attacked him again.

Xander didn't have long to enjoy his victory; suddenly Buffy's voice was ringing out across the battlefield.

“Stop! Everyone stop right now.”



They were at a standstill. Most of the Master's army was dusted, but the Master had a trick up his sleeve that none of them had anticipated. Somehow, somehow, he had Spike and Angel working with him.

They stood about thirty feet apart in the graveyard. Angel and Spike stood in front of the Master, faces blank and stiff. Giles, Willow, Tara, Xander and Buffy stood huddled in a group, whispering harshly.

“Giles? What’s wrong, what’s he doing?” Willow's voice was thready with fear.

“Yeah Giles, why are Angel and Spike helping that guy?” Buffy whispered harshly.

Giles was scrubbing furiously at his glasses. “I have no idea what is going on, did either of them say anything about a change in plan perhaps?”

They all shook their heads.

Xander eyed Spike’s still form. Something seemed off. Closing his eyes, he concentrated on the bond, opening it up as much as he could and reaching out to Spike. *RAGE, PAIN, FEAR, HELPLESSNESS* slammed into him hard. He wasn’t aware of falling until he was on the ground, being held by Buffy. “Xander, what’s wrong?”

“I tried the bond.” Xander tried to regain his breath as Buffy helped him up. “They aren’t helping that guy, they’re being controlled somehow.”

Giles drew in a sharp breath.

“Do you know what’s going on G-man?”

Giles nodded. "I believe so, it sounds like a very rare power that only some of the oldest Vampire’s have been rumored to have. It’s called Necromancy and it gives them the ability to control other, weaker undead. The Watcher’s council believed it to be extinct.”

“Not looking so extinct from here!”

“H...how can we stop him?” Tara's eyes were wide and anxious.

No one had an answer to that.

The Master’s cruel laughter rang out over the graveyard.

“You can’t defeat me Slayer. With these two under my control I am undefeatable!”

Giles eyed the Vampy trio curiously. “It is strange that he

hasn't done it before, in our previous altercations. Perhaps it is a drain on his power to control two Master Vampires. If so, then perhaps we can distract him enough to break his hold on Angel and Spike."

They were all silent, desperately trying to come up with a plan. Suddenly Xander remembered their secret weapon. "Wills? What exactly was this magicked stake thingy supposed to do?"

Willow blinked at him for a moment while she processed the change of topic. "Um, it drains life-force. So, theoretically if we stake the Master with it, his magic would get drained, making him vulnerable."

Xander fingered the stake, the beginnings of a plan forming. "Does it work only once?"

"N...no, you could stake lots of vamps with it, but if it doesn't stay in the vampire, it only drains a little before the spell peters out."

Squaring his shoulders, Xander nodded. "Right, do you

trust me?”

The girls nodded. Giles placed his hand on Xander’s shoulder. “Of course we do, but what do you have in mind?”

“Just follow along. Willow, Tara, will you throw one of those fireball thingies at the Master?”

Her eyes were filled with questions, but Willow just nodded and grabbed Tara’s hand as they started to chant. Xander tucked the stake back into his sleeve and turned to Buffy. “Go threaten him, and be ready to grab Angel.”

Buffy nodded and walked towards the Master. About halfway between the two groups she stopped and waved her sword in the air. “It’s gonna take more than the three of you to take us down. I’m the Slayer, this is my town!”

As Buffy pointed her sword at the trio, the Witches let the fireball fly. They watched as it zipped across the space and slammed into the Master’s shield, a foot in

front of where Angel and Spike stood, dissipating harmlessly.

As soon as the fireball hit, Xander put all his fear for Spike and devotion to the blonde Vampire in the front of his mind, opened the bond as wide as he dared and let out a choked cry, stumbling towards where Spike stood. "Master, no!"

Xander came to a halt just feet from where Spike stood. He fell to his knees and reached out a trembling hand towards his bond mate. Vaguely he heard the girls behind him, shouting at him to get away from the Vampires but Xander ignored them, concentrating instead on the Master Vampires in front of him. Tears formed in his eyes and began to trickle down his cheeks. "Spike, Master, please..."

The Master looked at him with interest. "Ah yes, I almost forgot. A consort, how interesting." The Master placed his hand on Spike's head, and Xander felt something *darkcoldslimy* brush across the bond before withdrawing. "Fully bonded I see." The Master eyed him consideringly.

“Well, it would be handy to have a human servant to assist us, very well, come here boy, approach your master.”

Whimpering in fear, Xander crawled towards Spike. The shield the Master had erected around him pulled and stuck to his skin but it let him pass. Xander crawled up to Spike and knelt in front of the blonde, grabbing on to Spike’s jeans and burying his face in the Vampire’s thigh.

The Master eyed the scene and laughed, “Too bad Slayer, looks like I have one more of your allies under my control.” The gloating Vampire paced around in front of Xander and Spike. While the Vampire gloated, Xander very carefully and very clearly formed a picture in his mind, trying to let Spike know what was about to happen. He pushed the image through the bond along with a pulse of love, then sprang into action. Leaping up, he shoved the stake into Spike’s side. Blue eyes went from glassy to wide with pain and shock, but they stayed locked on his as Spike began to topple over. Spinning, Xander staked Angel in the shoulder and pushed the brunette to the side as he faced the Master. The Master

was fast, but Xander had the element of surprise on his side, that and the famed Scooby luck. The Master turned right into the stake, taking it deep in his gut. Xander pushed it in as far as he could and stepped back.

The Master looked down at the stake in his gut, eyes wide with surprise, then he looked at Xander, grinning. "Do you really think you can kill me boy? You'll have to do better than this." He grabbed Xander by the throat and lifted him into the air. Xander grappled with the hand locked onto his throat, trying desperately to breathe, to get away. Suddenly the Master froze, his eyes wide. "Wh...what is happening to me?" He began to shake, and Xander could see the shimmering force shielding them from the Scooby gang begin to collapse. "You'll pay for this boy." The Master snarled as he flung Xander aside. Dazed from adrenaline and lack of air, Xander bemusedly watched the scene play out before him as he flew through the air. He saw Spike and Angel struggling to right themselves, Buffy stepping up to the Master as the shield collapsed, raising her sword in the air, then everything fuzzed out as he slammed into

something solid and fell to the ground. Then all he knew was darkness.

## **18 Epilogue**

“Come on Spike, please?”

The cool body next to him remained motionless.

“Spiiiiike! Come on, I did it last time, it’s your turn.”

Finally the blonde rolled over with a groan. “All right already pet. Good Gods, you’re a brat.” Spike stumbled out of bed and stood looking down at Xander from beneath a white blonde tangle of hair. “Fine, you got me up, now what do you want? Think hard, ‘cuz I’m not getting up again.”

Xander grinned at his mate, “Chocolate please. And a soda.”

Grumbling, Spike stomped off to the kitchen.

With a happy sigh, Xander snuggled back under the covers, glancing at the movie that was currently on the TV. He and Spike had been holed up in their apartment for the last three days, recuperating from the battle with the Master. Neither of them had been hurt that badly, but after all the ups and downs of the last month or two, they both needed the rest. After Xander had staked the Master, Willow and Tara's spell had quickly gone to work. By the time Xander was flying towards his close encounter with a mausoleum, the Master's magic was all but useless. Buffy had taken no chances and quickly beheaded the ancient Vampire. Once he was dust, the rest of his army quickly dissipated.

Besides Xander's latest concussion, there were numerous cuts and scrapes and two very weak and pissed off Vampires. Spike and Xander had limped home, made sure they were stocked up on blood and food, moved the TV and their movie collection into Xander's room, then locked the door and climbed into bed. Now, after 24 hours of sleep and lots of food, they were simply taking advantage of the alone time. Spike stomped back into

the room, still grumbling to himself about having to be the one to go get the treats. Xander shrieked as a frozen pint of peanut butter and chocolate ice cream landed on his chest. “Best enjoy it pet. That’s the last of it.”

Xander groaned. “Are you sure?”

“Yup, checked everywhere.”

“Damn. We’re gonna have to leave the house tomorrow then.”

Spike climbed back into bed and curled up next to his mate. “Yeah, ‘fraid so. But for now it’s still just us, whatever shall we do with ourselves?”

Grinning, Xander scooped out a spoonful of ice cream and dangled it in front of Spike’s lips. “Hmmm, I wonder...”

Spike snatched the spoonful of ice-cream out of the air and Xander swooped in to capture Spike’s cool lips, invading Spike’s cold mouth with his tongue, chasing the

flavor of the chocolate as it mixed with the familiar flavor of Spike. Xander pulled back and licked his lips. “Mmm, yummy. Chocolate Vampire.”

They finished off most of the pint that way, alternating spoonfuls of ice cream with passionate, teasing kisses. Finally Xander pulled back and arched an eyebrow at his lover. “I wonder where else this would taste good.”

Spike met his arched eyebrow with a smirk and a leer, tossed the sheet aside and lay back with his arms behind his head. “Where indeed, luv?”

Grinning, Xander spooned out the last of the ice cream and carefully set it on Spike’s stomach and cock. To his credit, Spike hissed at the cold, but his erection never faltered. Setting the spoon and carton aside, Xander slid down the bed and began eating the ice cream off of his lover with small bites and licks. Soon much of the ice cream had melted and Xander settled between Spike’s legs and began placing long licks up the length of Spike’s cock.

Spike moaned and dug his hands into the sheets, trying not to thrust up into Xander's mouth. His boy's hot tongue laved every inch of his hard length then moved down to clean all the melted ice cream off his balls. Spike growled as one after the other his testicles were sucked into the hot, wet cavern of Xander's mouth. He was so caught up in the sensations Xander's mouth and tongue were causing that he didn't notice Xander's tongue move down and begin circling his hole. Spike took notice when the hot tongue breached his entrance and he sat up with a gasp. Xander sat up quickly, an apologetic look on his face.

"I'm sorry Spike! I forgot. I guess I just got caught up in what I was..."

"Xander."

"Yeah?"

Spike took a deep breath. "It's okay love. It just surprised me, is all." Slowly, Spike lay back down and spread his legs. "It felt good. Will...will you do it again love?"

Shocked brown eyes stared deeply into his and Xander opened the bond wide, checking Spike's real feelings. Feeling love, trust, arousal, and only a little bit of nerves, Xander kissed Spike deeply then settled back between the Vampire's legs. Eagerly he began licking and sucking every inch of Spike he could reach, starting back at Spike's still rampant erection, before moving slowly back down to his small, puckered opening. Xander slowly circled the opening again and again, teasing Spike with small licks across the entrance. Only when Spike was gasping and pushing down towards Xander's tongue did he finally relent and press the tip of his tongue inside.

Xander took his time, slowly breaching Spike with his tongue, letting the Vampire get used to the feeling and listening to his lover's gasps and moans to guide him. Once Spike relaxed into it, he seemed to really enjoy it, and Xander lost himself in the taste of his lover and the breathy little moans Spike was making as Xander rimmed him. Xander hummed happily as he thrust his tongue as deeply as he could into his mate. Spike was writhing on his tongue, moaning almost continuously as Xander ate

him out. By the time Xander's tongue was getting tired, Spike seemed pretty incoherent, so he was surprised when the blonde shoved the tube of lube into his hand.

Xander gave a last lick to Spike's balls and sat up. "Spike, beloved?"

The blue eyes that met his were fogged with lust. "Please love. Touch me."

Nodding, Xander opened the tube and slicked up his fingers. Gently circling Spike's saliva slicked entrance, Xander slowly slipped the tip of his finger inside. Spike moaned and pushed back against the intrusion, and Xander's finger slipped all the way inside. Xander gasped as his finger was held inside Spike's body. "Jesus, Spike! You're so tight. You feel so good." Slowly he began to pump his finger, getting his lover used to the motion. When Spike remained relaxed, Xander crooked his finger and searched for Spike's prostate.

"Ohjesusfuckngod!!!"

Xander laughed. “Liked that, did you?”

Spike’s face was awash in pleasure. “Hell yes. Do it again!”

Grinning, Xander pressed and rubbed the spot until Spike was a squirming, babbling mess.

“More, pet. Please, more!”

Xander leaned over and kissed Spike deeply while he gently added a second finger. Spike took the second finger easily and Xander resumed finger fucking his lover, gently scissoring his fingers for a bit before scratching the spot that made Spike do...

“Bloodyfuckinhellyes!”

That.

Spike’s body was easily accepting Xander’s fingers, practically sucking them in as Spike undulated on the bed, babbling and moaning. Just when Xander was about

to try a third finger, strong, pale hands grabbed him by the shoulders and hauled him up till he was nose to nose with the flushed and panting Vampire

“Love, I have to tell you something, and it’s very important that you listen.”

“Of course beloved, what is it?”

“Make love to me, right now.”

“Spike...are you sure?”

“Xander, if your cock isn’t inside of me in the next ten seconds, I’m going to have to rip your spine out and beat you to death with it.”

Xander grinned at his worked up lover. “Well, I guess that’s a yes.”

Before Spike could say anything else, Xander swooped down and captured his lips in a passionate kiss. As his tongue laid claim to Spike’s mouth, Xander reached

down and snared the tube of lube, squirting some out and slicking his cock. He tossed the tube aside and positioned himself at Spike's entrance. Xander pulled back till he could look Spike in the eyes and opened the bond to its fullest as he began to slowly push inside.

Tight, cool, slick, Spike's body seemed to pull Xander in. Their eyes remained locked until Xander was seated fully inside his lover, but it was almost redundant. Xander didn't need to look into Spike's eyes to see how he was feeling; Xander could feel it through the bond. He could feel every inch of himself as he slid into Spike, feel how their heat and coolness combined, feel the tight grasp of Spike's walls all around his cock. Xander moaned. "Oh gods, Spike."

Spike's body was thrumming with pleasure, the sensation of being filled almost overwhelming, Xander's heat radiated out from his very core, warming Spike from the inside. Nothing, nothing had ever felt like this. Spike wrapped his legs around Xander's waist and pulled his mate down till they were chest to chest. He placed light, tender kisses over Xander's face. "Xander, love, need you

to move.”

Xander’s world became focused on his lover’s body. All he was aware of was Spike’s strong, cool body wrapped around him, of the feeling of Spike’s channel as he thrust, of Spike’s lips on his as their tongues mimicked the movements of their bodies. They moved together, Spike meeting Xander’s every thrust with one of his own. The head of Xander’s cock was brushing that wonderful spot with every thrust, and Spike’s cock, hard and leaking, was trapped between their bodies, providing just enough friction. Spike’s nails dug furrows down Xander’s back and he buried his face in his lover’s shoulder, sucking on his claim mark. “Please love, oh bloody hell please. I’m so close Xan, please love, please.”

Spike’s begging finally got through and Xander lowered his face to Spike’s neck and bit hard, opening the scar he’s placed there just days earlier. Spike arched beneath him, screaming Xander’s name as his body shook with the force of his orgasm. His cock shot stream after stream of come over their chests and his ass clenched tight around Xander’s cock, which continued to thrust in

and out of his body. Spike's orgasm seemed to go on forever, wave after wave of pleasure rocking him, until he finally collapsed bonelessly back onto the bed, completely sated.

Vaguely he was aware of Xander, still hard inside him, burrowing into his neck, begging softly. "Please Spike..." Sleepily, Spike sank his fangs into his lover's shoulder, taking a few mouthfuls of blood. Xander's thrusts turned ragged and frantic as he fell over the edge and came screaming Spike's name. Eventually Xander stopped shaking and he collapsed on top of Spike with a groan.

Xander rained kisses over Spike's face and neck, licking up the last traces of blood and then sharing them with Spike before finally pulling back and smiling dazedly at his mate. "Wow."

Spike chuckled. "You can say that again love. That was amazing."

Concerned, chocolate eyes met his. "Are you really okay Spike? I didn't hurt you, did I?"

“Hell love, I’m more than okay! I can’t even begin to tell you how incredible it felt to have you inside of me.”

Xander’s smile was blinding. “I love you so much Spike.”

Spike pulled his beautiful mate in for a kiss. “I love you too Xander.”

Xander sighed happily and cuddled into Spike, touching as much of his lover as he possibly could. “So, do you think we might actually get a week or two without some new bad guy coming to town and trying to set off another apocalypse?”

“Hopefully pet. But if not, we’ll take ‘em on. Hell, this Master guy was about as bad as I’ve seen, and we got him in the end.”

“Yeah, but barely.” Xander shuddered. “I don’t ever want to see another Vampire gifted with Necromancy again. That was too scary even for me.”

Spike stroked his hand through Xander's tangled hair. "Love, about that. Did you ever think for a second that Angel and I had double-crossed you lot? Gone over to the other side."

Xander raised his head, a look of surprise on his face. "Of course not! I never doubted you Spike, never."

Spike kissed his lover softly. "Yeah pet, but how can you trust me so completely? It wasn't so long ago I was happily on the other side of the fight, you know. Even before we got together, you trusted me, invited me into your home when I had nowhere else to go, and trusted me as part of your little gang of do-gooders. I know you; you're a suspicious little brat. How come you trusted me?"

Xander just smiled. "Let's just say, I had a theory about you."

The End

