

# Three Inches

by  
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## Part One

“So... tell me again where the slayer is?” Spike snarls between angry drags from his cigarette.

“God, Spike. I thought Xander was slow but you are even...” Xander flinches slightly but only Spike sees it. Willow frowns for a second then goes on with her tirade as if speaking to a nearly deaf child: “Buffy. Is. In. L.A. With. Dawn. Visiting. Their. Father.”

“Yes, I did get that. Willooow.” He drags out her name in mockery. “But I want to know why!” he yells a bit too loudly.

“Because... because he is their father?” Xander chips in and Willow looks at him, forehead scrunched up. “I really

don't think that's the reason for their visit." She finally says.

"Anyway, interesting bloke this father is... nothing in mind but shagging the ... DUCK!" Spike shoves Willow out of the way to get to "Huh... shagging the duck?" Xander.

The next moment the two boys are on the ground in a tangle of limbs, Spike's elbows on either side of Xander's head and his hips resting between Xander's spread thighs, Xander's arms around his waist.

Brown eyes stare up into midnight blue ones which are twinkling with mischievous laughter.

"Eeep?"

"Wish I had time right now pet." Spike grins, gives Xander a loud wet peck on the forehead and is back up on his feet in the next moment. He launches himself into the fight against... erm... around ten fledglings with a joyous yell. Xander just stares after him. What the hell just happened?

Willow's scream for help rips Xander from his reverie and he is up on his feet and running over to her. A vampire

attempts to drag her away but Xander manages, after a bit of struggle, to dust him. Of course, Willow's immobility spell helped.

He looks over to Spike who fights against seven fledglings at once. They are teaming up in pairs now, systematically attacking him from at least two different sides and the Master vampire struggles to keep them at bay.

Another vamp falls to dust but with him also goes Spike's current stake. When the blond grabs for another tucked in the waistband of his jeans in the small of his back, he exposes his chest and one of the vamp gets a kick in that makes Spike double over, going down on his knees screaming like a wounded animal.

"Wills, it's a trap, they only want Spike. Fuck, run!" he calls to her and shoves her away.

"And what are you going to do?" she cries out, tears making her eyes glisten like a dark green lake in the midday sun. "I..." Xander's subconsciousness, his white knight, fights against the flight instinct, encourages Xander to help his injured ... comrade.

His heart starts to pound even faster, his hands getting

sweaty as always when he knows he is close to making a right, but pretty dumb decision.

“I’ll help him.” he says gravely and takes a step in Spike’s direction but Willow clutches onto his arm.

“Wait!” She screams and her eyes lose focus before they fade to black. The previously inviting green sea after sunset, suddenly dangerous and bottomless.

Spike’s scream of frustrated rage makes Xander shudder down to his bones or maybe it’s Willow, draining the energy from his body, making him feel cold inside.

There is a loud slapping sound and what can only be categorized as a whoosh, the flash of golden light and then... eerie silence.

Xander turns around expecting to see the blond vamp, smirking and lighting a cigarette in an after battle habit, but there is no Spike.

There is nothing but slowly fading clouds of dust and something on the ground that reflects the moonlight. Xander walks over there, dreading what he might find, or more, might not find with every step until... yes, the

buckle of Spike's belt, silver alight.

Xander kneels down and grabs for the clothes, duster, jeans, t-shirt, button-up shirt, boots... everything's there but no Spike.

The loss he feels is unexpected but it feels kinda right. Spike was their ... comrade, fighting on their side even if his motives weren't from the depth of his soul.. erm., weren't to do good just because it was good to do good but... anyway.

"Scoobies got you in the end, hm?" he whispers to the dust on the satin shirt. "But I never thought it would be Willow finishing you off."

"Oh god... Xander... I didn't mean to! I was just trying to ... I really didn't want this to happen... I mean..."

"It's ... Wills, I know you didn't do it on purpose." But you won't get my absolution for what you did. He thinks grumpily.

"I just wanted them to explode, not... him! Xaaander..."

"I want to go home." The brunette says and stands up,

taking all the clothes with him.

Half an hour and listening to several redundant excuses later, he is in his basement. The packed duffel bag waits against the bed, as it has for days now, tomorrow night he would – finally - sleep in his own first apartment.

He lays Spike's clothes down on the recliner he used to tie the vamp to when he was newly chipped. Heavily he slumps down on the edge of the bed, staring at said recliner, remembering how Spike bitched about it...

“Bloody hell!”

Huh? Xander shoots straight up the bed, frantically looking around to find out where the voice came from.

“Spike?” he whispers and in his head he mocks himself... I can hear dusted vampires.

“The last time I checked I would have said yes but right now I'm not so sure, mate.” He hears the tiny voice again, so low but unmistakably Spike.

“Here whelp, on the bloody bondage chair!” Xander jerks around, staring at the chair in horror.

“Oh my god!” Xander squeals and gets down on all fours, crawling over to the chair.

“What the bloody hell happened?” Spike yells, a high pitched, desperate tone in his voice.

“I... oh god... Spike... damn, you’re cute!” Xander grins and then realizing what he said he blushes a pretty dark shade of red.

“No, I am not cute! I am ...”

“About three inches tall.” Xander says in awe.

Spike groans in despair, drags the edge of the duster’s collar tighter around himself in an attempt to either hide or protect his tiny frame.

“... tell me I’m dreaming Harris... please, I beg of you!”

## Part Two

Slumped in defeat, shivering from shock, if that is possible for a vampire, Spike sits and looks up at Xander, as if the boy had all the answers to his questions. Xander is still staring at the little Vamp in awe.

“Wow.” he says at last. “You’re not dead.”

“Wish I were though. Well, technically I am, but final death would be better than this.” He shrugs his tiny shoulders in a helpless gesture. The boy feels a sudden pang in his heart at Spike’s admission. It sounded so honest and he doesn’t doubt the vamp means it.

“Come on...” Biting his tongue, he catches himself just before letting a casual insult slip from his lips. “Spike. It’s only for a while.” He frowns inwardly at his white knight, who encourages him to say something reassuring. “Erm... I bet Willow can fix this and if she can’t, Giles will...” He trails off, realizing how much doubt underlies his words.

“Red did this?” Spike fakes surprise, little scarred eyebrow cocked.

“She just wanted to...”

“The hell she just! You and I, we both know there is something coming up on the horizon of her future and it’s not the bloody sun,” he spits, and Xander can’t help but nod. Yeah, Willow has gotten kinda overboard since...

“Be a mate and give me something to cover up?” Spike interrupts his way of thinking and Xander nods, getting to his feet. “Yeah, sure. I’ll get you something... erm... a handkerchief?” Xander holds up the clean but wrinkled piece of white fabric.

“Anything will do right now.” Spike murmurs uninterestedly and takes it from the large, slightly unsteady hand that holds it out for him. He struggles with the handkerchief, which for him is as big as a 7 by 7 feet blanket. Xander looks away from the expression on Spike’s face. Big bad is near tears.

Finally Spike is tucked into it safely. “Better?” Xander asks and flinches, waiting for the snarky answer. To his surprise Spike’s only reply is “Yes.”

Spike turns away, he doesn’t want to see the look of pity in the youth’s eyes.

On Spike's back there is a large red stain; blood is seeping through the handkerchief.

"You're injured, Spike." Xander states, voice hoarse, from seeing the red stain spreading further.

"S nothing." Spike shivers and it's the last straw for Xander, he has to do something. This indifferent, tame Spike makes his skin crawl. It doesn't feel right.

"I don't think so," he says, and lowers his hand down to the chair directly in front of the three inch Spike. "You up for a lift to the kitchen?" he says, and grins at the frowning blond. "Come on Spike, get on my hand. I won't let you fall. I promise." Words uttered without thought but they both get the honest meaning behind them. This is Xander helping and comforting Spike. And it feels good – to both of them.

Spike still looks suspicious, but nevertheless, climbs on the big calloused hand.

"OH!" Spike exclaims and Xander looks down at the blond. He looks like he took a spin in the tumbler, the hair tousled and his skin smeared with dust, the wrinkled white handkerchief now with red stains on his side where

the blood has already made its way around, but over all that now: A look of pure bliss on Spike's face.

“What ‘Oh’?” Xander asks, smiling because Spike is. He lifts his hand up, carefully cupping it around his tiny weight, using his other hand to make it even safer for Spike.

“This is – bloody hell – like a big, pulsing electric blanket! All warm and soft and...” He stops himself, ashamed by his poncy eruption about a warm hand.

The youth holding the small vampire in his hand, chuckles a bit, making Spike bounce up and down on his palm, against his efforts to keep his hands still. “It’s okay, Spike. I’m glad that not everything of this state you are in is bad.” And where did that come from? “I think we’d better get some blood in you, so you can heal before you get blood stains on your ... electric blanket.”

Slowly Xander makes his way over to the kitchen. “Hope you don’t get travel sick.” Xander jokes and Spike laughs for the first time, despite the spell and his injury.

“I won’t puke on you, you git!” he replies and looks up into Xander’s concentrated face, the tip of the youth’s

tongue poking out through his lips.

“So, here we are.” Xander says finally and lets the back of his hand rest on the counter so Spike can climb down, which he does, even if he only reluctantly leaves the surrounding warmth. Xander gets out a very sharp, pointy knife and a blood bag, lays both on the counter while he searches for a cup on the shelf. Fascinated, Spike stares at the blood bag, nearly as high as he is himself. Xander sets the cup down besides Spike, comparing their height and finding the vampire isn’t even able to look over the rim without effort.

“Erm...”

“Can I pour the blood into a bowl and swim in it?” Spike asks, eyes as big as... well saucers his size.

“Erm...”

“Always wanted to swim in blood!” Spike says dreamily.

“Spike... it’s pig’s blood.” The blond’s face contorts into a mask of distaste. “Ah yes. Right. Never dreamed of swimming in pig’s blood.” The hopeless expression slips back into his eyes and Xander takes the knife.

“Tell you what Spike... you only need a tiny amount of blood. Only a droplet or two and the bag is way too big and it would all go to waste and ... ouch.” Spike jerks around just in time to see Xander put the knife back on the counter and then his nose is filled with the smell of fresh human blood. Involuntarily, Spike moans.

Xander holds out his ring finger, a tiny droplet of blood welling up from where he pierced himself with the pointy knife tip. “I swear you are drooling,” he says smiling and looks how Spike slowly comes forward.

“You won't pull back, will you? You're not teasing, right? It's all for me?” Tiny blue eyes look up, surprise, mistrust and want mirrored clearly.

Xander wants to point out that he wouldn't go to all this trouble, just to tease the bleached blond, wants to joke how Spike would burst before he himself would even feel dizzy from blood loss. But he doesn't. "You want me to ... pour it into ... something?"

Spike looks up, slightly bouncy from excitement, despite his injury, game face to the fore that just looks cute now it's all so small and not frightening at all. Of course, Xander wouldn't say that out loud.. Thoughtfully – a look

that really doesn't go with the game face – little Spike nods and looks around searchingly. Finally Xander produces a spoon from one of the drawers and puts it down on the counter top. He lets the two big droplets of blood drip onto it before sticking the finger in his own mouth and isn't that just kinda strange? Spike, in the meantime, is on his knees, his hands cupped, he dips them into the ruby fluid and up to his mouth where he greedily slurps it up.

Xander watches the tiny figure closely, the look of pure bliss on the blood-smearred face, blood-smearred hands and arms up to the elbows, blood stains that are not getting bigger anymore on the make-shift tunic.

Eventually, when the spoon is all shiny again, Spike staggers to his feet, swaying as if drunk and looks up at Xander, eyes content, like a summer sky blue. "Ta, m..." Mate, Xander guesses Spike wanted to say but lets out a quick burp instead that makes the youth chuckle and Spike smiles nearly ... shyly?

"Would give a virgin for a hot long soak in a tub." Spike sighs sleepily and Xander frowns just for a second before he raids the cupboards again, getting out a small oval lasagne dish, the rim about an inch high.

"You think this'll do?" Xander asks holding it out for Spike's inspection. The blond's eyes light up. "Sure, yes that would be..." Just in time he catches himself again from showing a bit too much enthusiasm than would be good for his big bad reputation. "...good."

Without another word, Xander turns on the water and waits for it to warm, testing it with the inside of his elbow for the right temperature, then filling the dish. He sets it down and grabs the two empty packs of cornflakes, sets them up so Spike will be shielded from any curious looks, giving the little big bad a bit of privacy.

Spike has watched what Xander's doing with half narrowed eyes, not sure what surprises Xander has for him next. To show he cares for the not-so-big-bad is enough for Xander Harris, passionate vampire hater, in one day and it already confuses the hell out of Spike's brain. While he thinks about the unexpected changes in the boy, staring at the make-shift bath tub, he hasn't even realized that Xander has gone to the bathroom and came back with a bar of soap and a dry washcloth as a towel substitute. "Think this'll do best," Xander says and sets the soap down beside the lasagne dish. "You can take as much as you like from it and we don't risk you choking on bubbles." The 'we' Xander used rings loud in

both their ears and Spike nods curtly once, before he disappears behind the cornflake packets. Seconds later, the splatter of water and a deep contented sigh can be heard. Xander grins to himself. Mission accomplished. *Huh? Which mission?*

Twenty minutes later, Xander has set up the highest drawer of his bedside cupboard as a make-shift-crypt for Spike with the help of a small dark blue towel and several handkerchiefs, partly folded as pillows, some as blankets. He also made himself ready for bed, slipping on a comfortable t-shirt and boxers. He finds Spike, tucked into the washcloth, sitting on the edge of the counter, legs hanging down, staring down at the floor with a far away expression on his face. To Xander he looks like someone about to commit suicide, sitting on the edge of a high building, getting up the courage to jump.

"Will it kill you?" he asks carefully, so as not to startle the vamp, even though he must have heard Xander like a human hears an elephant storming towards him.

"Don't think so." Comes the mumbled reply. "But it'll hurt a lot." Spike chuckles. "Was waiting for you to give me a lift," he says, cocking his eyebrow in a suggestive manner, to lessen the effect of him needing to ask for

help.

"Well, come on then. Time for good little vamps to go to bed!" Xander jokes and regrets it as soon as he hears Spike growl.

"You know I didn't mean it like that!" he relents. "It's just a saying. I was not making fun of you." No, Xander really wasn't. He would never make fun of someone for something they are not responsible for. He knows how much that hurts, hearing others joke about something you aren't able to change. Like your drunken parents. Or your clothes, when you don't have money for new ones.

Spike has already climbed onto his hand again, so he makes his way over to the bed, setting the vamp gently down in the drawer. Spike wonders again what happened to the Harris he knew, when he takes in the nearly lovingly set up sleeping arrangements.

"I'll push the drawer nearly closed, so you can feel..." safe, he wanted to say but instead continues. "...on your own. If you need anything, wake me." I'm just here, beside you. He clamps his mouth shut and tells his white knight to shut up too, Spike is not the damsel in distress; he is a shrunken vamp for god's sake! He climbs in the

bed and pulls the covers up over his shoulders, turns his back to Spike.

Some seconds later: "Harris?"

"Mhm."

"Thanks... mate. I... I am in your debt."

"Night Spike."

"Yes, right."

### **Part Three**

Barely four hours later Spike wakes, with a start. Scared, he presses himself deeper into his covers and into a corner of the unfamiliar room. He finds himself naked, which isn't unusual for him when in bed, but he can't see his duster and the white blankets remind him of the initiative. He clamps his mouth shut to stop himself from

screaming, holds his hands over his ears to block out the penetrating rattling above him.

When the alarm clock starts to let out its furious cry, Xander can't believe it. He feels as if he hasn't slept at all. Groaning, Xander turns over and grabs the angry clock which is rattling and jumping all over the surface of the bedside cupboard, vibrating from the loud ringing sound emitting from it.

Eventually he turns it off.

Blessed silence.

The old-fashioned alarm clock is the loudest Xander could find, as he always has problems waking up in the morning after the late night patrols. Not everybody has slayer or vampire constitution.

Vampire!

He sits upright suddenly in the bed, looking at the nearly closed drawer.

God. Spike!

Carefully, he knocks on the drawer. "Spike? It's Xander. Are you okay? I forgot to tell you about my alarm clock. Sorry." There is no answer but Xander doubts Spike is still asleep after the alarm went off. He must be scared.

"I'll open the drawer now. Alright?" Again there is no answer so Xander just pulls the drawer slowly open.

The room around Spike starts to move, the ceiling sliding back slowly, the wood making a gnashing sound that makes him shudder.

"Hey Spike, it's Xander." The youth says again, voice low and gentle. And when Spike sees the oversized finger tip, his memory of the last night comes crashing back to him. Brown caring eyes look at the tiny figure intently and Spike groans in despair.

"It wasn't a dream, was it?"

Sadly, Xander shakes his head, indicating that this is the reality, that Spike really was the victim of a bad spell that made him 3 inches tall.

"You okay as far as..." Spike nods and slumps back down, hugging the handkerchiefs around him.

“I’ll go shower, back in a few. I still have to go to work.”  
With that Xander goes into the bathroom, closing the door behind him, leaving the vamp alone in his misery. For just a moment Spike considers his possible day time activities in this ...state he is in. No. He wouldn’t stay here, couldn’t be alone. Who knows what may happen to him if the witch or the watcher’d come to get him? He looks at one of his white blankets thoughtfully then rips into the fabric.

Under the shower Xander considers what to do with Spike. He dreads to take the vamp with him to his work but also he can’t leave him here on his own. Wills has a key to his apartment and if she came by and found MiniSpike she could be tempted to try all kinds of stuff to... oh god, does he really think that badly of good old Wills?

Sadly, he has to admit to himself that yes, he does and that Spike is right with his assumption that something is coming and it won’t be the nice kind of coming for sure.

In the end, he eventually says to himself, Spike can still decide for himself. We’ll see what he says.

Out of the shower and dressed, back in his bed-/living-room/kitchen, still rubbing at his hair with a yellow towel to dry it, he stops short. Spike stands on the bedside table, a handkerchief around him like...

“Are you going for Arabic rich man or religious sacrifice?” Spike’s lips quirk up.

“Usually I am the one doing the sacrificing and I don’t have the turban, do I?”

Xander goes over and takes one of the little torn off pieces of fabric. “Hm... could make you one! Just look over there and tilt your head...”

“Oh no mate! Not the hair! Never the hair!” Spike yells in mock-shocked voice.

“Thought Deadboy was the one oh-so-sensible about the sticky things on his head.”

“Comes with the ... “ Heritage. Spike nearly says, but stops himself just in time. “... poofiness,” he concludes lamely.

“Yeah, right.” Xander frowns, thinking about his job again

and what Spike will think of him after he knows what Xander does. Not that Xander cares about Spike's opinion about his life or job or whatever. And whether it's just because Spike is the only non-oestrogen laden ...person in Xander's proximity.

Well, there is Giles but Xander doubts Giles has room for oestrogen or testosterone when he is saturated by all his British stuffiness and his staid watcher-esque behaviour and Ripper really isn't friend-material.

"Xander? Is there any chance you could...um, what I mean is, I don't want to be..." Spike takes a deep breath and tries again. "Would you allow me to accompany you on your lengthy, but necessary, sojourn to the place of your employ, thus enabling me to make use of such facilities, as may be needed, without being placed in the ignominious position of having to ask for.." Spike trails off when he sees the look of shock on the youth's face. "Wot?"

"You did this thing..."

"Thing?"

"Called me by my name."

“So?”

“And I didn’t understand one word of what you said.”

“Erm...I was asking if you..”

“Shit.. I'm late for work!” he suddenly exclaims after he takes a look at the alarm clock just behind Spike.

“Harris, I need you to...”

“Spike...” Xander searches through Spike’s duster until he finds what he searches for: the pack of cigarettes.

“You really think now is the moment to start smoking?”

“HUH?” Xander takes out the cigarettes and stuffs them back in the duster pocket, he lays the pack down besides Spike and then gets Spike’s clothes together in another duffel bag, grabs them and slings them around his shoulders onto his back. He hurries to make a quick clean up of the bathroom and living room/kitchen area and then stands before Spike. “Get into the pack.”

“Are you kidding?” Wide, blue eyes stare in utter

disbelief at Xander.

“I am not coming back here and I have to take you with me and I don’t want to crush you, so you have to get into the pack that offers at least some protection and I’ll put it into my shirt pocket.” Xander indicates his chest, just over his heart.

“You’ll take me with you?”

“If you get into that pack in the next three seconds: yes. Otherwise: no.”

“Bossy git!” Spike hisses and climbs into the pack, which Xander takes and puts, as promised, in his chest pocket. “Ready?” The youth asks, when Spike pushes open the lid of the cig pack so he can see where they are going.

“Yep. Off we go.” And Spike grins, then shuts the lid again to keep himself safe from the rays of the barely rising sun. “Not so stupid this boy,” he murmurs to himself, before he settles down on the bottom of the pack and lets himself be lulled to sleep by the boy’s movements and his slightly faster than usual, but regular, heartbeat.

Xander is scared and excited at the same time, none of the scoobies know about his job or that he's going to move. It's not that Xander wouldn't tell them. They just didn't show any interest and he is still disappointed in them. At least Wills could have asked once in a while how he is doing. They are too stressed by their own life. College and all. He understands. Really. It just... well yes, kinda hurts.

The bleached blond may find it kinda comfortable right now but as soon as he is restored to his old self he'll be back to his bad ass attitude and Xander can already hear the snarky comments and the mocking laughter.

Whatever. Doesn't mean a thing to him. And his white knight insists on helping the Minivamp... just can't help it.

The journey to work takes him about half an hour. It's near the docks but not quite in the docks district. Close to the city's core but not quite in the center. As usual, he stops for a second before he enters the big grey building, strains his ears for unusual voices or signs of a fight, he looks up to the emergency bulb and finds it not lit up, meaning everything should be alright. So he steps inside.

"You stink of vampire, toyboy. Got yourself turned have you?" Broum has him by the throat, nearly lifting him off

his feet, his back to the door. Spike is awakened quickly by the suddenly increasing heartbeat. It pounds like it wants to beat its way out of Xander's chest and the boy reeks of shock and confusion, and just a bit of fear.

"Let me go, I have not been turned! I came from out there!" Xander indicates the sidewalk, on which the sun shines down with all the power of her early morning rays.

Fuck, Xander knows, has always known there was something off about Broum and his wife Garld, suspected they were demons of some kind, even if their appearance – two middle-aged average people – gives nothing away.

"So what, you did the nasty with one of that bunch?" Broum frowns at him.

"Didn't think you were that..."

"What, so dumb as to do that? I didn't." Xander shoots back, on defensive mode.

"Actually I was going for 'Didn't think you were that audacious'."

“Oh.” Garld chooses that moment to appear from the back of the shop, grinning widely until she comes closer to him and also smells ‘vampire’ on him.

“Oh boy, what did you get yourself into this time?” she asks concerned and Xander has to chuckle. These two are the parents he always wanted to have.

“Well since I now know that you know... I have to erm... you know I am friends with the slayer?”

Broum and Garld start to laugh, then Garld tugs at his arm, whispering. “Of course we know that. We are informed about your life.” She says and sniffs at him again. “Soooo, you wanna tell us why you reek like a vampire? An old one nonetheless?” She smiles warmly.

“Erm...” Xander makes a gesture as if writing something down and Broum nods, and goes over to his desk, getting notepad and pencil. Xander takes it, writes down a few sentences and gives it back. Broum takes it and reads it, clamps his hand over his mouth so as not to laugh out loud. Garld takes the notepad from him and reads it too. Her eyes dance with laughter, but she contains it better than her husband and makes an encouraging gesture.

“Well, I have a vampire with me, Willow... you know Willow?”

“We don’t know her but we know about her.” Garld says with a frown.

“Well, she did a spell and it went wrong. A ... friend, the vampire, his size was decreased down to about three inches.”

“And where is he now?” Garld asks, getting this curious where-is-the-cutie-look. Uh oh.

“Erm here.” Xander points to his pocket and then looks around, searching for a place away from the eyes of potential customers and without direct sunlight.

“Can we use your office?” Xander asks Garld and she nods, turning and going there, the two men hot on her heels. Garld sits down on her chair and Broum takes the one in front of her desk.

Xander turns away from them, getting the pack out and opening the lid. Alarmed, the vampire stares at the youth in full gameface. “Spike,” Xander says, taking a deep breath before continuing. "... we're at my work place. My

boss and his wife want to see you. They're demons too..." He trails off when he hears the low snickers from Broum and Garld.

"Can't say I like it. But don't have a choice, do I?" Spike murmurs, displeased.

"Okay then." Xander says and turns around to the desk. He carefully sets the pack of ...Spike \*snicker\* down and the vamp climbs out elegantly.

"Name's Spike," he says and tries to be as cocky as always, as nonchalant and cool as he appears when he is in his normal size. Broum takes in a ragged breath and hisses "William the Bloody" under his breath.

Garld just squeals as foreseen... "God, aren't you the littlest cutie?"

## **Part Four**

The male occupants of the room groan in unison.

"But he is cute... and little... isn't he?" Garld asks and looks from one to the other with a frown. Then, suddenly, she remembers something and pulls open a drawer and gets out... Dawn.

Xander's frantic head shaking doesn't even make her reconsider it. Spike growls, more out of confusion than anything else, when Garld presents Dawn to him.

"You have a doll looking like Dawn?" Spike exclaims, irritated.

"Yes! And oh my god. She fits perfectly doesn't she? Just the right size, don't you think?"

Spike looks at the doll more closely. "She's a bit too tall." he eventually says uncomfortably, subtly trying to look taller than he is.

"Oh wait I have to get the other ones!"

Spike's eyes widen. "The other ones?"

Xander's hands come up to hide his face. "Oh god."

Spike turns sharply. "You, whelp, will tell me immediately what is going on here!" he says, with an authority one wouldn't think he still possesses.

Garld comes back and then Spike is as speechless as Xander.

"How... I mean... I just.. and..so fast!" Xander trails off, stunned by the accuracy of the figures.

Broum just chuckles and relaxes back into his chair, determined to watch the scene going on.

"You're not doing some obscure voodoo shit are you?" Spike growls redundantly, because he already knows there is no chance of danger from these two. M'reit demons just aren't any danger as long you don't come between them and their children. And Spike hasn't seen any children, so he considers Xander and himself safe.

Garld laughs. "No voodoo. William." She smiles at him and holds up the doll of the watcher. "You think I've got him right?"

"Name's Spike!" Spike snarls, vehemently, then cocks his

head, taking in the doll. "He is a bit fatter around the middle." He says, smirking and makes a step towards the doll, grabbing its waistband. "Are these anatomically correct?"

"Oh no!" Garld pulls the doll back out of Spike's reach.

"No they aren't or no I am not allowed to check?" Spike quirks.

"There is no need for you to check it, even if you did, it's not like you could compare and really..." Xander trails off when Spike just looks at him, an eyebrow cocked, lips in an amused smile.

"God, tell me you haven't seen Giles' ... delicate bits!" Xander cries, holding his hands a few inches away from his ears so he can clamp them down and block out everything Spike might say next.

"I was chained to his bath tub, wasn't I? Haven't seen a second bathroom in old Rupe's flat." Spike bites his own lip when he revises the sentences he just said. Damn, had he really admitted to being chained to a watcher's bath tub?

Broum takes in a hissing breath. "Can't help saying it, but these 'friends' of yours, toyboy, sure have dubious methods." He says, an angry tone underlying his words.

"I.. he.. we.. it was for his own good." Xander stutters, feeling weirdly embarrassed under the disapproving stare of his boss. Spike snorts and Garld tries to chase away the uncomfortable tension between the men by showing off the other dolls.

"Here is Willow – the witch." she says, and presents a red haired doll that looks pretty much like Willow, but the eyes don't seem right somehow, Xander thinks. Too dark and too hard somehow, not the friendly light in them like from the Willow he has known since he was little and remembers so fondly, way more like the woman Willow is today and maybe the eyes aren't so wrong at all. Xander frowns and watches as Garld lays the Willow doll on the table and Spike kicks it.

"That's for making me.. little!" He kicks it again, then: "Can we have a pyre? It's not like it's the real witch, but it'd sure be great to see her burn." He grins evilly, eyes sparkling and Xander feels oddly amused by the words, even though he knows he should feel repulsed by the idea.

It's kinda like when your kid learns their first bad word and yells it out loud in a family meeting – everybody laughs and even though you know you should really talk to it and tell it why it's wrong to say something like that, you can hardly suppress the smile when you do.

Garld pulls out a Buffy mini, a little Anya doll, even Cordelia in smaller than life size and Spike just stares and you can practically see the drool forming, with one wicked idea chasing after another.

"Wow, Garld – these are so great, thank you so much." Xander finally manages to say, taking the Cordelia doll in his hand and stroking back the long dark brown hair, tracing the plastic face with a soft smile that makes Spike want to puke.

"So, Lady, where is mine? Maybe I can use the clothes and get out of the white – it makes me sick-er." Spike looks expectantly at Garld, whose gaze darts to Xander and then to her husband.

Xander feels ill suddenly – he'd never thought about Spike when he asked Garld to build the dolls for him as gifts for the Scoobies for Christmas. He'd given her

photos and descriptions, even a newspaper article with a photo of Cordelia, slime drenched with the headline: Sewer system of L.A. has unexpected dangers.

Never had the thought of giving Spike a gift come into his head, there where no pics or anything of Spike when he sorted through the material he could maybe use, so he didn't contemplate the vamp for one second. He swallows hard.

"Erm.."

The telephone on the counter in the store rings and Broum stands up, gives Xander a strange look, as if he's figuring out something new and unpleasant about the youth, then he drawls: "Well, toyboy, looks like you'll have to find a new present for Spike here, looks like the surprise is spoiled." Broum leaves the room with a pointed glance to his wife, satisfied by the deep flush on Xander's face.

"Oh! William – " she giggles. "I mean, Spike – I just finished Cordelia last night and wanted to start with your mini-version.." she frowns then smiles apologetically. "With your plastic-mini-version today. I am glad you're here – now you can help me with everything and you

won't be too bored whilst Xander and Broum do their stuff."

Spike smiles at her – he'd get clothes his size and he'll even choose them, get them handmade exactly like he wants them to be, so it doesn't matter.

Doesn't matter if the whelp hadn't ordered a doll of him. Would be creepy even to see himself in plastic. Yes. Glad, the whelp didn't attempt that. Big Bad is unique. And as long as there – who was he kidding – it did twinge a bit but he had to admit, Harris and himself, they weren't on the best terms and all he'd give Harris for Christmas was a new improved, especially deep piercing, insult. But at least he'd have thought about the whelp, he'd have been creative and would have invested time and that has to count for something – doesn't it? He looks up and glares at Xander.

"TOYBOY!" The deep baritone voice has Xander up and moving in less than a second, or maybe it is more that Xander finally has a reason to leave Spike, who has forced him into an unexpected conscious analysis with the accusing look he has given him.

As soon as Spike is alone with Garld, his shoulders slump

and he looks up sadly into the warm grey eyes of the woman that, like many others, doesn't look at all like you'd imagine a demon.

"Sssh, William. Give him time, he's learning." she whispers and cups her hand around Spike's small back. Spike lets himself lean into the touch and sighs when warmth envelops him.

"What do you say, let me measure you and let's decide on some fabric and then you can go to sleep while I sew your new clothes together, agreed?" She reaches in one of the drawers under the desk, grabs the tape measure and shoves the half-finished plastic mini-figure of a darker, broader man to the back, as far as it goes, hoping Spike hasn't noticed the movement.

Upon seeing the tape measure, Spike leers at Garld, suggestively raising eyebrows and biting his lower lip.

"How do you want me, baby?"

Garld laughs, her eyes twinkling. "I want you in the best clothes you can get around here." she says, and makes a gesture for him to get out of the pieces of handkerchief he has folded, not without some talent, and knotted around himself as a makeshift toga.

She does flinch, when she takes in his naked form and Spike grins at her, not in the least embarrassed about his unclothed state, sure of his looks and effect on women.

Garld however flinches because of what she can see are the signs of malnourishment, there are still bruises and scratches on the mini-vamp's body, which can only be from the fight Xander wrote down about earlier, which was the cause of the shrinking. The skin seems a bit too white and too thin and the bones are better defined than the muscles on the tiny vamp's body.

"I am sure we can get you some blood around here which you can have before you go to sleep. You must be hungry." Spike looks at her, not really expecting that as an reaction to his body and for the first time in a while he glances down and *really* looks at himself, taking in his rib cage, his drawn-in belly and outstanding hip bones, knobbly knees. Oh.

"Blood'd be good. The fight.., was injured.., must have been more injured than I thought. Lost a lot of blood an' all." he says, trying to justify his appearance and Garld nods curtly.

"Good, then let's get this over with fast so you can get some blood. Wouldn't do any good to draw this out longer than necessary."

Xander stands in the door jamb, watching Garld and Spike, who are unaware of him. They are pretty involved in their measuring, Spike actually giggles when Garld tickles him with her fingernails accidentally, or more often now, on purpose. He just wants to tell Spike that he has to make some deliveries and will be gone until noon, just so the vamp knows, but now he doesn't want to disturb the easy companionship and good mood the two are in, so he turns away and leaves without saying anything. He grabs the boxes from the counter and doesn't meet Broum's curious gaze before leaving the shop.

Somehow this all went wrong and he wants the old Spike back, the one that's not vulnerable and who's snarky and annoying and strong and confident and who doesn't need help from him, isn't dependent on him, 'cause really – this is too much responsibility and he's already managed to piss off Broum and to shift out of Garld's attention span.

He climbs into the delivery van and turns the key in the

ignition, shudders when Cher cries out 'if I could turn back time' and decides no radio for him today, shuts it off and concentrates on manoeuvring the van out through the narrow gateway.

Maybe if he brings back some lunch, they'll be okay with him again.

## **Part Five**

It's 1 pm when Xander arrives back at the shop. In the back of the van sits a big old-fashioned sideboard which he collected from a customer who wants it restored to its original state. He takes the bag with the Chinese food he bought on the way and goes inside Broum's shop.

"Hey, I'm back and I brought lunch with me!" Xander calls out to Broum who sits behind the selling counter, sorting through papers. The demon looks up and smiles at Xander. "Oh, great. I'm starving – I could eat a human." he says. Xander stops short, suddenly unsure whether it's a joke or not. Broum just starts laughing. "No worries, toyboy. We don't eat humans. M'reit demons aren't a dangerous species."

Xander blushes. "Sure, knew that, would've never thought you were and..." He stumbles and feels stupid again. He knows that Broum and Garld aren't dangerous,

aren't demons who would be on Buffy's slaying agenda... well, wouldn't be at the top of Buffy's slaying agenda. He sighs inwardly. Why does it get so complicated now? Colliding loyalties and all.

Garld comes out of her office; almost noiselessly she pulls the door shut behind her. "Oh nice, Xander, is that Chinese I can smell?" She grins and grabs for the bag in Xander's hand. Xander laughs and lets her have it. "Yeah, Chinese. Thought we could eat together, if you want and..." He stumbles and looks down.

Garld narrows her eyes at him. "Don't be silly, boy, course we want!" She sends a hard look at Broum who in turn rolls his eyes at her. "Gotta sit down and talk, toyboy." Xander shrugs helplessly. "'K."

Garld starts unpacking the bag, little white Chinese food boxes quickly take up most of the space on the small office table. They sit down and each of them grabs what he likes and starts eating. Xander seems miles away, nobody talks and the silence is uneasy. They often eat together and talk about business or personal matters, not that personal like demon heritage or so, but...

Garld kicks Broum under the table. "Ow!" He scowls at her. She shows her fairly human looking teeth and he gives in. "Toyboy... Xander, we gotta talk about a few

things. About demons and death and slayers and the good side and bad side of being a slayer or demon hunter and..." Garld sighs and rolls her eyes. Broum pauses and looks at her, irritated. "What?!"

"You're getting it all wrong! He's done nothing wrong!" Garld reaches over and puts her hand on Xander's. The human has sunk down on his chair as far as possible and looks thoroughly miserable.

"Look, Xander, you've done nothing wrong in the past. But your past is past and you asked for a chance to prove yourself here. You meant by your work. And you do magnificent work. But Broum and I, we want you to, well, think about your views of life, your values."

"Ah hem." Slowly Xander nods.

"We thought you knew that we are demons. You didn't, did you?"

"I... no... I didn't think about your origins at all. You've been just normal people to me. My boss and his wife."

"And now, Xander, what are we now? Not normal people anymore? Demons?" Garld's voice stays warm and friendly but her eyes show her concern.

“I... don’t know. You’re demons but you’re good to me, you care about me more than... a lot of people I know and everything, but the last few years with the slayer, we fought demons, still fight demons and mostly don’t have the time to ask if they’re good or bad or whatever. I can’t just... I can’t just throw everything overboard and be a new person overnight...”

“We understand, Xander, we do understand. It’s hard for you but since you brought William with you, we see that you’ve already started to differentiate between demons. That’s great.” Garld smiles at Xander who shyly smiles back. “And about William... what are you going to do now?”

“I keep him, of course!” Xander says eyes wide. Broum starts laughing and Garld soon follows.

“Course you keep him, toyboy. We want to know what you wanna do so he becomes his old size again.”

“Oh, oh, right. I, erm, I wanted to settle in tonight and talk with Spike. About the circumstances and everything. I wanted to ask Willow if she can make Spike big again, but I’m not so sure about her. Maybe Giles could help but I can’t imagine a reason why he should help Spike at all. Maybe Spike knows someone who could help...”

Garld and Broum listen and nod to Xander's suggestions. When he stops talking, Broum says: "That sounds okay so far. I know some people and I will ask around a bit, too. I'll tell you if there is any news."

"Thank you. Thank you both. For the help and the clothes for him and everything."

"You're welcome, Xander. It's all right." Garld smiles at Xander.

They rest of the meal goes by in the easy companionship they shared before. After they finish, Xander puts the empty boxes in the trash, the boxes with leftovers in the fridge.

"I'll go and look after Spike now. Call me when you need me."

"Sure, toyboy. Don't forget your work over the cute little blondie!" Broum yells after him and starts laughing. Garld slaps her husband on his arm, but starts laughing too, when Xander turns around and looks at them horrified: "Cute little blondie?!"

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

To see Spike sleep, cuddled into what might have been Garld's sewing basket on a shelf, half under a piece of drapery, affectionately put there to protect him from the midday sun which was just a warm glow behind the heavy blinds at the window, makes Xander's heart ache but produces a tingling feeling in his belly. Once again he thinks about how close Spike came to 'really dead death' and finds himself again feeling happy about Spike still being here.

"Spike?" he calls out to the sleeping vampire who is awake instantly. Three-Inch-Spike sits up and stares at the gigantic Xander with wide eyes. This time recognition sets in almost without hesitation. No frightened panic this time, just ocean-deep disappointment.

Encouragingly, Xander smiles at Spike but the blond just rolls his eyes at the youth. "So, through with work? Ready to go home to the basement of doom?"

"No and no and furthermore: won't go there ever again!" Spike is stunned for a moment, then: "What do you mean? You're not going there again? We're not going there again? I'm not going, well getting carried, there again?" Ah, back to the panic. Great, Spike.

Grinning, Xander sits down on Garld's stool and is now pretty much eye-to-eye with Spike in the sewing basket on the shelf. "I moved out."

"Oh what! That's great! Wait, on second thought: You idiot!" Spike springs to his feet and starts to pace in the basket. Xander thinks he would look just like the old Spike if there wasn't the screaming yellow nightgownish-y thing Spike wears and of course his size. "How could you! I mean where are we gonna stay! Can anyone be sooo stupid?! Give up a roof over the head and..."

There is a lot of more cussing from Spike and Xander gets a little sad but otherwise... he never shared his plans with anybody. The last person coming to mind there is Spike and all. He watches Spike ruffling through his hair until it stands up in all directions.

"Shut up, you... chick. I've got an apartment. Here. Right over your head." Spike lifts his head and looks at the shelf above the one his basket stands on. "Well, a bit further above your head. Second floor of the building. Apartment. Two rooms, plus bathroom and kitchen."

Spike looks back at Xander with an expression somewhere between curiosity and doubt. "Well, that's great then. Smart boy. Thought of everything, didn't you.

At least about getting a new apartment before giving up the old one. Really smart.”

“Yeah, yeah. Stop it Spike! I didn’t take your brain black-out from two minutes ago seriously. See... you’ve got a way smaller brain now and...” Xander stops suddenly, regretting instantly what he just said, that he reminded Spike of his size, because Spike is watching him with golden eyes and full vamp mask on.

“Hey... sorry, I didn’t mean it... I just...”

“Did you just call me chick???” Spike growls.

Xander, who pretends to be frightened by the enraged vampire, stutters: “I.. didn’t mean chick as in girl... I meant because of your yellow skirt—ehm shirt-y-ish thing and your hair... it’s all fluffy... baby-chicken?”

“You’re soooo going to pay for that!” Spike growls and jumps out of the basket, he stops short on the edge of the, for him, five-floors high shelf. “Later!” he says grimly, not completely covering the sadness in his voice.

## Part Six

Xander busies himself for a moment by getting his duffle bag and looking through its contents. A sad Spike is not a Spike he can handle. He feels for the little vampire and wonders just again if it's because of his size or because it's Spike. They had their differences in the past but lately they grew kinda closer to each other, not that they would ever admit it.

“So, blondie, wanna go see my new castle?” Xander asks and turns around. He is relieved that Spike seems more in control of his emotions again. Spike's always the tough guy, why does he show so much emotion now? Is it the size that makes him so vulnerable or is Spike like this all the time just nobody watches close enough?

“Sure, mate. Can't imagine anything worse than your previous habitation. Wait, have to correct that. At least you had a telly!” Xander relaxes slightly, when Spike is in mocking mood again, things can't be that bad.

The door is shoved open by Garld carefully. “Hey boys, are you decent?” she laughs lightly and Xander feels warmth spread in his chest. Family.

“Wouldn't call this decent, luv.” Spike gestures to his screaming yellow night-shirt.

“He’s right, yellow so isn’t his colour!” Xander agrees and Garld holds up some black fabric, she had hidden behind her back.

“Oh well, what a luck then, that I have some brand new clothes with me, which happen to be just your size!” She smiles and winks at Spike who grins back.

“Really, luv? This fast! Give me, give me!” Spike gets excited like a kid on Christmas morning and Xander can’t suppress the laughter when Garld makes William the Bloody say please.

Without hesitation Spike strips off the yellow night-shirt and starts pulling on the black slacks and the black cotton shirt Garld had sewn him.

“I haven’t finished the jeans yet, the converting of jeans fabric isn’t easy when you do so small sized clothes.”

“Don’t worry ‘bout it, luv. You’ve done great on these already.” Proudly, Spike turns and twists as if posing in front of a mirror. “Don’t you think, Xander?”

Xander bows forward to take a real close look. The trousers and the shirt fit perfectly to the small body and once again Xander adores Garld’s sewing skills. “Yeah, really well done, Garld. Spike looks really ...good. Handsome and smartish.”

Both Garld and Spike stop their movements and stare amazed at Xander, who - after a second realizes just what he said and then blushes furiously.

“Guess, I better believe you, whelp, since I haven’t seen myself in a mirror for over one hundred years. Beggars can’t be choosers, eh?” Spike winks at Xander who fiddles around nervously. “What about showing me this new flat of yours now, mate?”

“Oh, yes, that’s a good idea. You still have to settle in. I cleaned up a bit. Take up your clothes and stuff, but don’t forget about the work that still has to be done. Wouldn’t be good to upset Broum.”

“Course not. I just want to bring up my stuff and give Spike the tour. I’ll be back down soon. Promise.”

“All right boys, until later!” With that, Garld leaves the office. Xander gets together his things, then offers Spike a ride in his chest pocket again. This time he doesn’t need to put Spike in the cigarette pack because the stairway up to his new flat begins in the workshop in the behind.

Spike looks around in the workshop curiously when Xander goes through it to the stairway. There is a lot of different wood, pieces of furniture in varying states of

progress and to Spike's big surprise a lot of wooden toys. He sees doll houses and hobby horses and wooden building blocks, trees and cows and little cars. Spike wonders if Xander is the one building all these things in devoted detail work.

Finally they're up the stairs and Xander fumbles with the keys. Screeching the old brown door opens and all Spike can see is a small hall. It's dark and on the commode there is a layer of dust. Didn't Garld say she cleaned up a bit? Looks like dust wiping isn't her idea of cleaning up. Three doors lead from the hall to other rooms. Xander turns on the light and the small hall is enlightened by a single bulb hanging down from the ceiling.

"At least you've got electricity." Spike comments and Xander snarls at him. "Just shut up until you see everything!" Hearing Xander's tone Spike actually shuts up. He doesn't intend to hurt the boys feeling. At least not as long as he's depending on him with his pure shrunken existence. Xander mumbles a short invitation for the vampire and enters the hall.

Xander opens the door to the left and goes into the room. "Here's the kitchen." Spike looks around and takes in the white kitchen cupboards, the stove and fridge and sink in silver. "Not bad." He says. "Yes, and see here",

Xander turns a bit and gestures to a bit of open space to the right, “is enough space for a table and a few chairs. I could actually invite people over and have dinner with them!” Spike hears the excited tone and decides he likes this side of Xander. “Sure, mate, just one question: Who’s going to cook you that dinner you’re talking of?” Spike grins and Xander huffs. “Well, maybe, ordering pizza would work, too.”

Xander goes back to the hall and opens the middle door. Spike finds himself looking at a bathroom with a huge washstand with a mirror over it. The toilet is hidden behind a half high wall and on the other side is a big tub. It just looks great. “That’s more like it, mate.” he tells Xander, who smiles proudly. Spike notices that the bath is very clean, the same as the kitchen was. He’s sure that’s Garld’s work. She just left some things like dusting for Xander.

From the hall they go through the third door and for a moment Spike is completely taken aback. The room they just entered is huge. To the left two big double doors are open and behind them he can see a big bed and a big cupboard for clothes. The rest of the room is meant to be the living room. It’s sparely furnished with an old couch and a table. A big commode is on one wall, just waiting to have a big TV placed on it. The far wall is completely

covered with a dark red curtain which looks very new and therefore a bit out of place.

“Oh wow, what a curtain!” Xander says. “Garld must have set it up. It wasn’t there when I saw the apartment last time. But wow, it’s great. Great colour.”

“And what’s behind the curtain?” Spike asks.

“Oh, two very, very big windows. You’ve got to see it. The sun shines right in the windows and the sunbeams even reach the bed!” Xander nearly yells, totally thrilled that he could exchange the dark basement against this light place.

“Well, isn’t that just great. Congrats to the new flat!” Spike sneers, not even trying to be nice in the face of the whelp’s enthusiasm. “Sun’s the last thing I want to shine into the bed!”

“Oh.” Spike’s inability to be in the sun hasn’t even crossed Xander’s mind before. He just saw the apartment and loved it from that moment on. He just thought about getting out of the basement, he never thought about anything else, like taking Spike with him. Now, he feels bad about it. “Spike, I didn’t plan on taking you with me.

I'm sorry. I thought you'd find something for yourself. I never thought you'd even want to come with me, since we weren't on the best terms before you went through this, erm, transformation."

"As if I didn't know that. If I weren't like this, I'd never need you, Harris." Spike snarls, surprised he's so hurt by Xander's words. Of course, he would never go with the whelp if he weren't like this. He's not a person who likes to depend on someone. Harris basement had been a place to watch telly and eat the fridge empty. Never anything more than that.

"Since you're here now, until we solved your problems, the curtains just stay closed as long as it's light outside. Okay?"

"Sure." What else should Spike say?

Xander puts Spike carefully down on the table of the living room. "I'll just get my things and put them away. Then we've got to decide where you want to sleep and get you what you need. We've got to talk about how we're going to get you back to your old self. Maybe you know someone who could help with this?"

"Spike shrugs. Got to think about it a bit. Wish I had a fag."

“Actually, I’m pretty happy there aren’t any cancer sticks in your size. Wouldn’t want you to smoke in here.”

## **Part Seven**

From the living room table Spike can hear Xander rummaging around. He’s putting stuff in the kitchen and bathroom, and then he comes through the living room and goes to the bedroom. His bright clothes disappear one piece after another in the big cupboard. The last items from his duffel bag, some comic books and CD’s are put down on the sideboard. The empty duffel bag disappears as the last thing into the sideboard in the small hall.

Xander’s moved in, Spike realizes. No basement anymore. Never again. The vampire didn’t comprehend before exactly what that meant. Another asylum gone. He seems to remember exactly all the times he went to the whelp to watch TV, grab some blood, beer or food, annoy the boy, hang out with him, even, have some good

times with him, bickering about pretty much everything and what's on telly.

Patiently, Spike waits for Xander to settle down on the couch. The shrunken vampire feels strangely exposed on the clear surface of the coffee table. To him the table is the size of a baseball field and he is the only person on it. It makes him feel even smaller.

Xander watches the little creature with newfound amazement. Never could he have imagined Spike this small. The vampire always seemed larger than life. The attitude and the duster always made Xander feel small whenever they met even if Xander was bodily superior. The power and enthusiasm combined in the vampire's supernatural appearance always impressed the youth. Now Xander can only feel respect and empathy for the new friend in need.

The eerie silence in the apartment gives Spike major wiggings. To disturb it, Spike attempts a conversation. "So, when do you expect the rest of the gang here?"

Obviously dragged out of deep thoughts, Xander answers with a distracted: "Who?"

"Your mates? Red, Slayer, Watcher..."

“Oh.” Frowning, Xander ponders how to answer that question. Finally he comes to a conclusion. “Didn’t tell them about this.” Xander gestures to the environment and avoids looking at Spike.

Frowning, Spike paces on the table. As long as he keeps moving he doesn’t feel as much of a target.

“Is there a reason?”

“For what?”

“A reason why you didn’t tell them?”

“They didn’t ask.” Xander says, face emotionless.

Slowly, Spike nods, more to himself than to Xander since the boy seems very busy observing his fingernails.

More long silent minutes go by, neither of them seems to know what to say. Spike curses inwardly about the absence of a telly. Would have at least been a distraction.

Finally, Xander gets to his feet, stands thinking, undecided.

“You need to get back down?” Spike breaks the silence, indicates “back down” with his head as downstairs. Xander nods.

With an intense onslaught of fear, Spike realizes he doesn't want to be alone in the apartment, doesn't want to be alone at all being this size. He feels completely helpless to defend himself.

“Can I go with you?” he asks finally, all the pride he possesses forgotten. Xander crouches down and looks intently at the vampire. “I am gonna kill you if you laugh or make nasty comments. Understood?” Xander says with an icy voice and Spike wonders again just what other sides of the youth are still hidden from him and probably from the rest of the Scoobies.

“Wouldn't dare to, mate.” Spike answers and earns himself a smile from Xander.

Moments later, Xander helps the three-inches-tall vampire climb back into the breast pocket of his shirt and together they make their way downstairs into the backroom with those wooden toys that Spike had seen earlier.

Xander goes over to the big workbench and sets Spike down on it. For some time, Spike looks around wide-eyed. He can't believe what his eyes are seeing. Everything around him is, again, in his size. There are tables, stools, chairs, sofas, beds, kitchen cupboards, dressers and even a tub in different states of readiness. With a look at the youth's worried face, Spike goes over to a recliner in his size. Spike touches the armrest made of dark wood, he feels over the cream-coloured leather upholstery and then sinks down on the chair, delighted.

"Great, whelp, this is a treat!" Spike calls out and Xander lets go of his anxiety. He grins proudly and, suddenly, Spike fully understands. "You made this! You made this recliner and you made all the furniture, didn't you?"

Xander nods enthusiastically.

"They're great! And I'm not saying this because finally something fits me again. This is really good woodwork!" Spike praises and lets his hands glide over the wooden armrests again. "Bloody perfect!"

Grinning like a kid at Christmas, Xander asks Spike's permission to show him more.

“Bring it on, mate. Guess you love having a test person.”

“Never dreamt of it.”

“Neither did I, whelp, neither did I.”

With patience and enthusiasm, Spike sits down or lays down on any piece of furniture Xander presents him. Cupboards and dressers, even deco pieces and mirrors are touched and praised by Spike. Soon, the vampire figures out the different collections made from different wood types. Of course, Spike likes the furniture made from dark heavy wood, mahogany, the most.

After Spike has seen pretty much every piece from the workbench, Xander lets Spike ride on his hand again and shows him various doll houses, tricycles, rocking horses, playpens, wooden play blocks and other items to make young children very happy. Spike is utterly amazed by the devotion and skill he can see Xander had given to every handmade piece. Spike doesn't hold back on praise and Xander's grin is soon so bright, it lightens the whole place.

“So, that's what you do for a living, whelp?” Spike asks the boy, when he is settled back in the recliner on the workbench.

Xander fiddles with a small piece of dark wood, he turns it in his hands again and again. “My old boss from that carpentry company sent me to Broum’s shop to fix the front windows. Broum’s shop was attacked; the complete front area was destroyed. The customer service area, that big oak counter... everything was broken and turned over. I set up the windows first and saw Broum trying to set up the counter again. He couldn’t do it alone so I went in and helped him. He hired me for another week to help him clear out the shop and make it presentable again. After that week, he asked me to work for him, I agreed. That was about six months ago.” Xander shrugs, the abrasive paper in his hands lovingly sweeping over the little piece of wood.

“And how come you make toys?” Spike asks with real interest.

“No big story, Broum’s specialised in restoration of antique or at least old woodwork. We got some toys in from a museum, a dollhouse and a rocking horse from 1927. I loved restoring them, the museum director was unbelievably pleased with my work and I was asked to build replicas of old toys from photographs. Did a good

job. The demand is high, Broum's got orders for the next six months or so." Xander grins proudly.

"And you learned to do this all from Broum?"

"Yeah, he showed me most of it. He's a good teacher."

"Don't hide your light under a bushel all the time, toy-boy, you came with all the talent you needed already. The toys are your passion, all you needed was a little encouragement!" Broum says, a chuckle underlying his rich baritone voice. He makes no secret of him overhearing at least a part of the conversation between Xander and Spike. "This boy here is a genius. What he does with wood is enlightening. I am really glad I could get him to work for me. He's gonna make all of us very rich." Broum continues, patting a bright red Xander on the shoulder. "What are you working on now?"

"A foot stool to put in front of the recliner Spike's sitting in. I still need to do a matching side table and standard lamp with a cream coloured lampshade by Garld for the set." Xander explains.

"Well, the set isn't due until next week, why don't you concentrate on giving your friend here," Broum points to Spike, "a nice place to stay in for the time being."

Interest piqued, Spike sits up. “That’s a bloody great idea!”

Xander’s eyes light up and he nods excitedly. “I’d really love to! I could try some new things, modern things, if Spike wants...”

“Why not talk with him about the interior décor then?” Broum chuckles and leaves the workshop, taking one of the rocking horses with him to the front area.

Xander carefully sets down the piece of mahogany he was working on and then turns to Spike. “So, Big Bad, what’s your desire?” Xander raises an eyebrow and waits for the excited vampire to reply.

Unsure where to start, Spike hesitates for long moments until Xander helps him: “What do you think about deciding on a house first?” Xander puts out his hand so Spike can climb on it, then he goes over to the doll houses. “This one is the typical single house, two bedrooms, kitchen, bathroom. Big front windows and dormer windows. Well, I see why you don’t like this one.” Xander turns to another house, this one’s big with three floors. “Maybe this is more your taste, Spike, this one has a cellar, but maybe it’s too big altogether for just you.”

Xander sighs and then pulls his hand up so he is eye to eye with Spike. “Guess, I’ll have to build you something fitting from the start, what do you think?”

Speechless, the shrunken vampire only nods.

## **Part Eight**

Xander sets Spike back down on the workbench, where the vampire starts to pace, unsure how to react. Xander rummages around in the drawers under the workbench and comes up with a few slim wooden boards. Some have rectangles in different sizes in them; soon Spike realizes the rectangles are cut out to set in windows and doors. The slim boards are going to be the walls, floor and ceiling to his new home. Snorting, Spike stomps his feet, shakes his head. “This is ridiculous! Bloody ridiculous!” Spike spits frustratedly and Xander stops short. He looks at his shrunken friend cluelessly. “What now?”

“You’re gonna build a fucking doll house for William the Bloody! To live in! To bloody LIVE in!”

“It’s going to be good. I promise. I’ve built a few already and not one came down again. I’ll give it special care since it’s for you and unlike having dolls, inside you could really be injured when it’ll come down, which it won’t but well, you never, but I know, I do good work, Broum says so, customers say so...” Xander stumbles in his babble since it seems to make Spike even angrier. The former praise from the vampire feels worthless all of a sudden. Sadly, Xander turns the boards in his hands, unsure how to continue.

“No! You bloody idiot! It’s not your work. You do a fabulous job with these toys!” Spike yells, outraged that Xander doesn’t get the point. “You’re building toys! Toys! Think I ever wanted to live in a toy house – even if it’s the best you can get on the market? I am a vampire. Vampire as in big, bad and bloody!” Frustrated, Spike slumps down on the comfortable mini-recliner. “I can’t believe this is happening to me!”

Xander stays silent and joins the handmade boards together so that a room is formed, one wall missing. In a doll house the back wall is always missing so the kids can set furniture in the rooms or play with the little figures

inside. The youth is unsure how to handle just this situation again. Spike sits on the recliner, elbows on knees, face in hands. Is he crying?

After setting the board that builds the ceiling for the room so that the construction stands on its own, he gently reaches out towards Spike. With his pointing finger he softly pats the vampire on the back. "It's not for forever, Spike. It's just for a night or two, to give you some space of your own while you're this... I mean... while you're this size. I promise, tomorrow we'll go over to Giles' general Scoobie meeting at the Magic Box, we'll get them all to work on it and find a solution. This house only gives you a safe place to sleep in. Can't keep you in the top drawer of the nightstand since the nightstand does not have drawers at all."

Helplessly, Spike shrugs his tiny shoulders. He feels so vulnerable, actually is. Some bloody cat could kill him. At least, the house would be a good hiding place. "But I want a back wall. Not gonna give you a damn freak show!" Spike grumbles and Xander nods quickly.

"Of course! I'm gonna close it all around. Just one door which you can open from inside downstairs so you have a way out at all times."

“Downstairs? So there’s more than one floor?” Like a child, interest piqued again, Spike looks for the first time at the half-ready construction.

“Two floors. Downstairs to sleep. Upstairs two rooms: one living room and one room with only a gigantic tub in. What do you think?”

“Doesn’t sound so bad.”

Xander is relieved to see a small smile back on Spike’s face.

As promised, a couple of hours later, Xander finishes the general set up of the doll house, edition ‘Spike’, just when Garld comes in.

“Hey boys, hope you are playing nice and nobody’s naked this time?” Xander chuckles, Spike grins salaciously.

“I brought you some food, the Chinese left-overs. You’ll take care of William’s other needs later, won’t you?” she addresses Xander directly, who nods quickly.

“Course I will.”

Before Xander can protest, Garld shoves him onto a nearby chair, Chinese food boxes thrust in his hands. Garld turns back to the house and minutes later, girly screams can be heard from Spike. Garld has set up Spike's house with the dark mahogany collection, including the recliner Spike sits on. She even adds a couple of dark red rugs handmade by her to make the bedroom right cosy.

"See there, William. Fine place to stay in for a while. First class hotel with your personal 24/7 Xander-concierge. Any more wishes?" She beams at Spike.

"Telly?" Spike grins.

As if on cue, Broum comes in, carrying a small TV which Xander recognizes from the front area.

"Thought you could use this until you get your own." Broum says, ignoring the surprised, open-mouthed face of Xander.

"Wow, that's... You shouldn't have... I can't really..."

"Course you'll bloody accept this. Boy needs a telly. I

need a telly, bloody boring otherwise, staring at the blank wall in your cosy living room.”

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

It's late that evening when Xander and Spike are finally upstairs. Xander feeds the vampire just like the day before: dripping a small amount of his own blood into a spoon. Spike's still delighted that Xander is so kind as to share his life's essence with him. Grinning, the red-faced and red-handed shrunken vampire lets out a burp, he is so sated, he's ready to burst.

Xander set up the doll house on a stool from the workshop, just beside the bed. Spike's inside in his living room on the recliner. His feet are propped up on a packet of paper tissues.

The telly sits on another stool from the workshop so Xander can see it from the bed on which he's lying already and Spike can see it from his recliner comfortably. They watch an episode of the new old Enterprise, lazily fighting about who the better Captain is: Archer, Kirk or Picard?

It could have been just another normal night in Xander's basement but, well, it isn't.

Xander feels himself dozing off again and again, so he puts the remote on the floor of Spike's living room. Spike can zap, but he has to get up every time and change the channel by jumping on the button of the remote. Kinda supersedes the use of a remote. After a few times of 'channel jumping', Spike is annoyed and exhausted, he decides to go to bed, too.

Xander sleeps soundly and Spike watches the youth for a few moments. He is bloody thankful that Xander is such a white knight at heart and is helping him. Could have gone completely differently altogether. Tentatively, friendship for the boy builds in Spike's heart.

Friendship, Spike muses, is the most ridiculous kind of relationship; it relies on nothing but trust and sympathy. No all-embracing passion, no mind-numbing love, no insular fervidness of hate – just a stupid 'I like you and you like me'. Too often though, this bond of sympathy is not in the least as strong as those calling each other friends think. Whatever, doesn't stop the heart from making new friends anyway. Which is of the good. Wouldn't want to miss out on a friend ever, would you?

Xander kept his word, putting a back wall to the ground floor of the dollhouse and when Spike jumps down, ignoring the make-shift-ladder, he finds himself safe – at least from the sun and smaller animals. Spike strips off his clothes, folds them and carefully lays them at the end of the bed. Funny, how much worth things can get when they're the only things you have. Been like that with his duster. It'd been with him for nearly thirty years and he plans to keep it quite a while longer. Glad the whelp brought it with him, first from the cemetery to his place and now even to his new place. He crawls into the fine bedding. Tomorrow, he hopes, the Scoobies will find a solution to his problem. Hopefully, they'll handle his problem just like any other problem that comes up: solve it. He dreads meeting them, dreads Buffy's malicious glee as much as Willow's irritating pseudo-penitence. Gonna be a hard time for the boy, his loyalties colliding in open argument. He turns from one side to the other, unable to fall asleep. After a while, he starts listening to Xander's breathing and to Xander's regular strong heartbeat and it calms him. Soon after, he sleeps just like Xander, his newfound friend.

## **Part Nine**

The next morning when Xander's alarm clock goes off, Spike has gotten used to it and there is no mind-numbing

panic anymore. He hears Xander groggily get out of bed and go to the shower. Spike gets up too, dressing in his black slacks only. The vampire climbs up to his living room carefully in case of the sun, though Xander has kept his word. He's left the curtain on one big window closed so the light only shines in Xander's living room but can't reach the bedroom.

Some time later Xander comes out of the shower, very wet and very naked, goes into the living room and then stands there, blissfully enjoying the sun beams warming and drying his skin. He uses a towel to dry his hair and Spike, his tongue wetting suddenly dry lips, watches that delicious body for the first time. Why the hell is Xander hiding his muscular form under those scary baggy and luridly coloured clothes?

The muscles of Xander's arms and shoulders are well defined and they flex with every movement. Atop strong legs sits a very round, tasty ass leading up to a trim waist which splays up into a broad back. Xander's skin looks soft. It's tanned and Spike finds himself wanting to explore every inch of it. Of course, Spike also wants to see Xander's fat cock swell and stand to attention, head purple with need for him.

Spike shakes his head in an attempt to clear away all those tasty images. He is not wondering any more, he always found guys equally as attractive as women, just – why didn't he see Xander like this sooner? *Just wait, whelp, when I'm back to my old self, I'm gonna show you a thing or two about... Wait – is Xander interested in blokes at all? Oh bugger.*

Spike hides when Xander comes into the bedroom to get clothes from the monstrous cupboard. Just when he is fairly certain Xander is at least half decent he makes himself noticeable by turning on the TV. Don't want to make the boy all unsure in his own flat, besides, it spares me the embarrassed babble.

“Oh hi Spike! Up so early? Hungry?”

“Always hungry, greedy vampire and all.” Spike leers. Xander doesn't seem to notice.

“Well then, here's your ride to the kitchen.” Xander holds out his hand, so Spike can climb onto it. The vampire hugs the big warm thumb. This way, Xander needs only one hand to transport him. And Xander's warm skin feels damn good against his own cool chest.

In the kitchen, Xander repeats the bloodletting procedure into a spoon, than gets himself some Choco Pops and milk. Happily, Spike starts feeding and Xander chews spoonful after spoonful of cereal.

“Your back looks all healed again. Does it still hurt anyway?” Xander asks, watching the vampire’s naked torso.

“Nah, [mate](#). All good. I’m back to my stunning self.” Spike answers, one hand sweeping over well built pecs.

“That’s good.” And Xander munches on until his bowl is empty.

“Any chance I can have a shower?”

Xander looks at the vampire, sizing him up, then at the sink.

“Sure, no problem.” Xander stands up and lifts Spike over on the kitchen counter. He turns on the water, gets it to the right temperature: A bit hotter than he himself likes it. He turns the water tap so the water is pouring down on the flat part of the sink where the dishes are normally put on to dry. This way Spike doesn’t feel trapped in the

depth of the sink.

“Well, Spike, have a nice shower. I’ll be back in a few.”  
With that Xander leaves the room, just to come back seconds later with a towel. He lays it next to the sink.

“Thanks, whelp.”

“Don’t worry about it!” Xander grins and disappears through the door.

Spike chucks off the slacks and stands under the water tap. *Bloody genius the whelp is, Spike thinks. Fulfils all my wishes, looks after me pretty good. Feeds me his blood, gets me clothes, even builds me a bloody house! Just my kind of thing. Sure, you’d agree!* Spike chuckles and grabs his hard cock that remembers Xander taking his personal sun bath this morning.

After the shower and a decent wank, Spike manages to turn off the water on the, for him, way oversized knobs of the tap. He rubs himself dry on one edge of the soft towel and pulls his slacks back on.

Xander appears back in the kitchen a while later, offers Spike his hand without any need to be asked.

“I have to build a series of wooden logs today. You can come and watch or sleep some down at the workshop if you want.”

“Sounds good to me.”

“Here we go.”

“Clothes first.” Spike reminds Xander and the youth grins.

“Sure.”

The hours fly by between watching Xander work and sleeping on a light wood single bed Xander made. Garld and Broum come in a few times to talk or bring food. By midday Garld proudly presents Spike his new jeans and a long black coat. She’s even managed to do a pair of boots. Spike is delighted and changes immediately.

“Great job, luv.”

Just shortly after five, Xander finishes work for the day. The youth is pleased with himself. The vampire this size is pleasant company and not quite the distraction he used to be. Way less annoying, also.

Carrying Spike on his hand is already second nature to Xander and so they make their way upstairs. Xander

showers and changes while Spike hones his skill in 'channel jumping'. Then they're on the way to Giles'. This time Spike's safely transported in the cigarette pack in Xander's breast pocket, for it's still light outside.

While Xander's pace grows slower the nearer they get to the Magic Box, the more his heart rate increases. Nervousness makes his hand sweat. Spike becomes jumpier with every step.

Finally, they're at the Magic Box and Xander is hardly through the door before Willow is right in his face. Accusingly, she rams her finger into his chest with every word: "Alexander Harris, where were you?" Protectively, Xander cups his hand over his breast pocket. "I've been to your house and your mom... she's been... in this state again, you know, and she said you moved out and a few insults about you..."

"Oh hey, Willow. Great to see you, too." Xander interrupts her, ignoring everything Willow said and looks around the Magic Box. "Just great, everybody's here!" he calls out, more as information to Spike, than a greeting.

Giles and Anya are behind the counter discussing finances from the looks of it. Tara is reading a book at the big round table. Dawn is fighting with Buffy as usual.

“Hi Xander. Nice of you to come by. They thought you ran away again.” Anya greets him with her blatant honesty. Dawn comes running and hugs him. “I am soooo glad, you’re still here.”

“This is not over, Dawn.” Buffy yells and nods at Xander for a greeting.

Tara waves at him shyly, half hiding her curious eyes behind her hair.

“How was your weekend with your Dad?” Xander asks Dawn and she makes a face.

“Boring. I didn’t like it, him or his girl friend. Can you believe, she’s barely older than Buffy!”

“Dawn, she is twenty-eight!”

“So what? She looks as if she’s your age!”

“Don’t start this again!” Buffy warns, putting her hands on the sides of her hip.

“Sorry to hear you didn’t like it there, crumbs.” Xander distracts the starting fight between the sisters.

“Did you know, Spike left?” Dawn asks him, eyes wide with hope. Of all the people in the room, she was the only one who actually liked Spike, even if in a teenage-crush-y way. Well, and maybe Tara. Who knows, Xander thinks, including himself in the disliked-Spike-category. It’s got to be hellmouth-y how fast things do change here.

“Spike left?” Xander asks, surprised and shoots Willow a look. The witch starts her tirade with a red face: “Yes! Xander, you know, that fight a few nights ago. You went home and Spike brought me home and we sat outside a while after and talked, like really talked. I mean, we always had this, this special bond between us since I was the one he tried to bite when he first discovered he had that chip and he told me, he said he’d had enough of it all and wanted to leave town, start over new somewhere where nobody knows him and I guess he really left, took his things and left – poof – gone. Nowhere to be seen anymore.” She shrugs, palms upward, eyes on the floor.

Xander swallows that big, big lump that formed in his throat the longer he listened to Willow. He can’t believe Willow could lie that blatantly to cover up her mistake, to

cover up that she killed Spike. At least, that's what she thinks. However, the people here are her friends, almost like her family and surely they wouldn't be angry at her for killing an enemy. She didn't even do it on purpose. She might even get some nice words from Buffy for offing Spike. Why does she feel inclined to lie?

## **Part Ten**

“Oh really, Willow, Spike just left?” Xander asks her again, watching her with angry, slitted eyes.

She fumbles but nods. “Yes, that's what he told me, didn't you listen?” She rolls her eyes, looks at Xander as if he's too slow to catch on and confirm her lie.

Xander holds his breath. He's so angry and disappointed. Mentally, he counts to ten before he smiles, then gets out the pack of cigarettes.

“I can't believe you started smoking! That kills people!” Dawn shouts, hands on her hips, a familiar gesture from

Buffy.

“I didn’t start smoking, Dawn. Actually, I’ve got a surprise for you, especially for you, Wills.” With a malicious grin he opens the pack and helps Spike to climb out onto the big, round table.

“See, I found Spike that night in this state. Some spell gone wrong from a really ugly, middle-class witch, he told me.”

“Oh my god, look at him! He is sooo small!” Dawn cries out.

Everybody gathers around the table and looks at the three-inches-tall vampire.

“How’s tricks, folks?” Spike greets, cockily.

“Guess we have to fix this, don’t we?” Xander asks no-one in particular and looks at the Scoobies’ faces one after another. Buffy is laughing, gloating over her former enemy. Giles polishes his glasses furiously. Tara smiles with empathy and Dawn asks Spike all kinds of weird questions like if he lives in a kitchen cupboard. Only

Willow stands at the table, trembling, guilt and panic taking turns on her expression.

“How did this happen, Xander?” Giles asks, retreating from the table.

Xander glances at Willow, unsure what to tell the watcher. Should he tell the truth? Should he tell Giles that Willow has yet again mucked up a spell? Well, she saved them, even saved Spike somehow from those vampires that night. Willow’s eyes are begging him not to betray her.

“I only found him like this. He said it was a spell by some witch he didn’t know.”

“Quite interesting.”

Willow seems to have found her voice again. “I could, I mean, Giles, if we research this maybe we can break this spell?”

Giles ignores her and addresses Xander again. “Is there any further danger from this witch? Did Spike mention her reason for her stay in Sunnydale?”

“I am right here, watcher.” Spike throws in, annoyed to be left out of the conversation concerning him. Otherwise he’s busy fighting off Dawn’s curious fingers and ignoring Buffy’s nasty comments.

With a short look at Spike, Xander answers Giles’ question: “No, I mean, there is no danger from her anymore.” Xander gives Willow a meaningful look. “She was just.. passing through or something. Wrong time and place to be for Spike, I guess.”

“Ah, bloody slayer bitch, take your hands off of me!” Spike yells and Xander barely stops himself from running over to the table, but he walks very fast. He holds out his hand to Spike who climbs eagerly on it, away from the poking fingers of the Summers’ women.

Willow in the meantime has found a big book about magic and carries it over to Giles, opens it and tries to start a conversation about undoing Spike’s shrinkage.

“Maybe, we can start here: ‘Lessening the impact of spells’?”

Calmly, Giles takes the book from her and without looking at the page, closes it.

“I don’t think we need this.” he says and, equally taken aback, the whole Scoobie Gang looks at Giles. Does he want to undo it by himself? Does he know how to without even consulting his precious books? Wow.

“Erm, Giles, I ...” Xander starts but Giles stops him with a small hand gesture.

“Spike is quite lucky. This state allows him to stay undead but he is not a threat to us or any other person anymore.”

For a couple of seconds, there is no sound at all in the entire Magic Box. The room temperature seems to have dropped several degrees from Giles icy voice and calmness. Giles does not want to have the spell undone at all.

“Rupert, you bloody bastard!” Spike cusses, teeth gritted, voice thick with emotion.

“You can’t be serious, Giles.” Xander adds.

“I am quite serious, Xander. Did you think this situation could go on forever?”

“What situation?” Anya asks, aghast. “He has that chip!”

Giles gives her a long look but continues nevertheless.

“A demon fighting with us is just unnatural and...”

“And what? Do you realize what you are actually saying there, Rupert Giles?” Anya utters, with a voice full of threats.

“Anya, I am in full knowledge of – “

“No, you’re not! You can’t be! I’ve been a demon for a thousand years and a few days in a human body do not at all make me an actual human! Nevertheless, I do all the work here, answer every boring question you have about demons I might know, earn money for you and give you and your slayer a place to research and prepare for battle. I tend to your every whim and need when Buffy has beaten you just a little bit too hard in training and I abstain from sex when your body doesn’t ‘feel’ like it – and still you didn’t understand ... WHAT?”

This time, Spike is the one laughing while the others are equally embarrassed and shocked by Anya’s admission.

“Anya and Giles?” Xander squeaks.

“I am a woman, he is a man. So what? Physically that fits pretty fine.” Anya says incomprehendingly.

“I have to sit down.” Buffy says and sinks down on a chair.

Giles calmly retreats to the backroom.

“So can I keep Spike?” Dawn asks, unphased by the Giles/Anya comment.

“No, you can’t ‘keep him’. He is not some pet. He is still a vampire.” Buffy says. “Even if a teenie weenie one.” She starts laughing again.

“Shut your gob, slayer, or...”

“Or what, itsy bitsy vampy? I could kill you by unwittingly stepping on you.”

“Ah, see, slayer is fully in her element again, threatening the disadvantaged ones.” Spike mutters. Unnoticed by the others, Xander curls his fingers around Spike, sending comfort.

“This isn’t getting us anywhere, mate.” Spike whispers, so only Xander can hear him. “Can’t say I didn’t know this was going to happen.”

Xander shrugs sadly. “Guess it’s our cue to leave then. Not gonna waste my time here.” the boy whispers back. Louder he says: “Well then, nice to see you all again. I’ll be around.” With that, Xander starts leaving, holding Spike safely in his hand. He even pauses briefly at the door, but nobody tries to stop him and Spike.

Outside the Magic Box, Xander kicks a stone angrily so it flies across the street. He takes a few calming breaths. They don’t help to pacify him. “I can’t believe that just happened!” he says a little too loudly.

“Again: Did know that was coming.” Spike sneers.

“Willow lies like a, like a ... I can’t even find the right words! And Giles is, is such a righteous ....!” Xander feels as if he can’t get enough air. The conversation about demons with Garld and Broum re-emerges in his head and he feels angry and like crying at the same time. He feels betrayed and like a betrayer, too.

“Hey, whelp, we’ll sort this out somehow even without

that bunch of losers.” Spike offers strength and willingly Xander takes it and runs with it.

“You and me, we two against the world?” Xander croaks. The air smells of uncried tears.

“Well, wouldn’t be the first time, would it?” Spike asks and looks at the boy’s shiny eyes. There is this feeling somehow, the knowing look Spike gives Xander and the so-damn-cool cocked eyebrow, remind the boy of a night without fear, that night where he was pure steel.

***In the basement of the high school:***

*XANDER: Hello, nasty. Less than two minutes. Dumb guy. Little bomb. How hard can it be?*

*Jack: And it just got harder.*

*XANDER: I'm not leaving till that thing's disarmed.*

*Jack: Then I guess you're not leaving. I'm gonna carve you up and serve you with gravy. You piss me off, boy. Now you pay the price. First the eyes, then the tongue. I'm gonna break every one of your fingers.*

*XANDER: You gonna do all that in forty-nine seconds? I know what you're thinkin'. Can I get by him? Get up the stairs, out of the building, seconds ticking away... I don't love your chances.*

*Jack: Then you'll die, too.*

*XANDER: Yeah, looks like. So I guess the question really is... who has less fear?*

*Jack: I'm not afraid to die. I'm already dead.*

*XANDER: Yeah, but this is different. Being blown up isn't walking around and drinking with your buddies dead. It's little bits being swept up by a janitor dead, and I don't think you're ready for that.*

*Jack: Are you?*

*XANDER: I like the quiet.*

Spike watches Xander drift into memory land. He likes that proud grin that settles onto Xander's face after a few moments. That's the core of the boy: pure steel nobody can bend or break. That's what he wants the boy

to see, what Spike wants to discover, explore and, in the end, claim for himself.

“Let’s go home.” Xander says, his voice strong and rich. It makes Spike adjust his stance and smile evilly. With the right coach, the boy could become the knight to the outside world he already is inside.

“Xander!” Suddenly a voice calls out from the shadows of the back door of the Magic Box. It’s Tara who called them, that’s why the voice sounded so strange at first. The shy girl always tries to be as quiet as possible. Spike had spent time thinking about the blond witch before, still she stays a mystery to him and, therefore, she is very precious. Why the hell she stays with that power-greedy, egomaniac bitch, though, he’ll never understand.

“Tara?” Xander asks, carefully.

“Yes, it’s me. And Willow is here, too.”

“And?” Xander asks, not seeing a reason to go over to them just because they’re calling him. Spike smiles inwardly. Stubborn boy, adorable.

“Can we talk? We want to help.” Tara says the magic

words and Xander's feet start to move towards the couple.

## **Part Eleven**

Xander, Tara and Willow hide in the shadows of the small alley. The boy balances the three-inch-vampire on his hand so Spike can watch them all and participate in the conversation. To any passer-by it may look as if Xander sells drugs to some innocent girls, but they're in Sunnydale – nobody cares what happens in the shadows.

"I..., we want to say, we're sorry for what happened to you, Spike." Tara tells the vampire directly. Finally, someone who doesn't ignore him.

"s not your fault, Glinda." Willow tries to make herself even smaller.

"We want to help you." Tara goes on, without reaction to Spike's comment.

“Really? Help me, fix this?” Spike asks sceptically. It’s not easy to accept help from the person that actually got you in trouble.

“Yes, yes, Spike. It’s not right you’re like this and maybe we can undo it again and...” Willow babbles. She is near tears.

“Well, Red, it’s gotta be the least you can do, hasn’t it?”

“Spike, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to... I mean I only wanted to save you. I didn’t want to do this to you, but at least I saved you... somehow.”

“At least you’ve stopped bloody lying, witch.” Spike spits, without accepting her apology.

While Spike and Willow talk, Xander watches Tara closely. She doesn’t seem surprised at all that Willow did change Spike’s size. Xander wanders if Willow told her or if Tara figured it out by herself. Does shy, nice Tara tolerate a blatantly lying girlfriend?

“Willow and I are going to do some research and find out how to undo this spell. Since it’s done out of good thought, we should be able to find a solution quickly.”

Tara, unusually, takes the leading part in the conversation. "Please come by our dorm room tomorrow after sunset. Maybe we'll have some results by then. At least, we'll have a lot of guilt-cookies, won't we, Willow?" Tara finishes boldly and Willow takes in an appalled breath. Xander adores Tara's courage; maybe they all underestimate the silent witch.

"Thank you, Glinda." Spike says smiling in relief that someone is going to help him.

"Yeah, thank you, Tara. Good night you two. We'll see each other tomorrow." With that, Xander and Spike are on their way home. The witches disappear back into the Magic Box.

Xander and Spike's walk back to the new apartment passes almost in a comfortable silence – well, it would if Xander didn't chuckle to himself a few times until Spike couldn't take it anymore.

"What's so damn funny, git?"

Still laughing slightly, Xander answers: "Nothing."

"Yeah, sure. For nothing, you're giggling far too much!"

“I am not giggling! Girls giggle, I don’t giggle.” Xander bursts out between fits of laughter.

“Come on, just tell. Make fun of good old Spike.”

“I’m not making fun of you.” Xander says honestly, even if it’s hard to believe with that fat grin on his face. Spike raises an annoyed eyebrow. “It’s just; I never thought I’d ever carry you home!”

“So you imagined me carrying you home?” Spike turns Xander’s words around.

“Yes, I mean, no. Why should I. Well, maybe, it could be..., should I ever be injured in a fight on patrol and should I be in such a bad condition that I can’t walk on my own, maybe you...” Xander drifts off, face bright red and laughter swapped with embarrassment.

“You’ve got some fantasies in that head of yours!” Spike snickers, trying to play it down, even if there is some hope building in the possibility that Xander might be interested in him as a bit more than friends.

“It’s not a fantasy. Not that kind of fantasy. Nothing in a

dreamy way of fantasy kind of thing!” Xander tries to explain helplessly. “Just thought that maybe some night, some fight, I might not be able to walk home on my own and who’d help me then. I just couldn’t imagine Buffy carrying me. Or Willow. Or Giles. So that left you.”

“Yeah, sure.” Spike shrugs, not quite believing Xander’s babbled explanation. Silence stretches out and Spike wonders how little trust Xander has in his so called friends and father figure.

“So, would you?”

“Would I what?”

“Carry me home? If I was injured or passed out?”

Spike takes a moment to think about that. He feels that Xander needs a no-nonsense answer to that question. It’s one of those moments that define a relationship.

“Guess so.” Spike finally says and means it. He always was too loyal, even to people who never deserved his loyalty.

Xander lets out a breath he didn't know he was holding.  
"That's good. Good to know."

The rest of the way home passes in the same comfortable silence in which it began. The whelp's warm hand feels good around Spike. The slow pace and the rhythmical swing of Xander's body are calming the vampire down in a way he can't remember feeling before. He can't remember having felt this safe before.

They arrive at the apartment shortly after 9 pm. Even if it's still early in Scoobie time, Xander claims to be very tired. After some face stuffing at the fridge and some blood letting for Spike, Xander sets Spike down inside the doll house. The youth steps out of most of his clothes, then gets into bed. Spike shrugs out of the duster and shirt and pulls off his boots. He's restless and misses the warmth Xander's hand had provided him shortly before.

Finally, he decides to be bold.

"Xander?"

"Wow – was that my name you said?"

"Git!"

“Guess you want something?”

“Yes.”

“So?” Xander sits up in the bed to have a better view of the little, only half unclothed vampire.

“I just - it’s silly – to hell – what’s sillier than a shrunken vampire in a doll house?”

“A shrunken vampire in yellow...”

“Shut up, git! Can I sleep there?”

“Where?” Xander looks around himself, searching for the place Spike refers to. “Here?” He gestures to the bed, stunned.

“Yes. I mean, on your hand?”

“You want to sleep on my hand?”

“It’s warm. Electric blanket, remember?”

“But, but – it’s dangerous!”

Spike looks at Xander uncomprehendingly. “Dangerous? Dangerous how?”

“I could, I mean, I could – don’t get angry – squash you!”

Spike thinks for a second. “You wouldn’t.”

“You can’t know that! Once I had this dream where I fell off a building and I needed to hold on with all my strength to not fall off and I’d squash you if the dream repeats itself and...”

“You won’t have that dream again. Not tonight at least. You won’t squash me.” Spike answers, his voice reassuring and full of patience. He wants to sleep warm!

“How can you be so sure?”

“I just am. Now let me – take me over there.” Spike smiles over the perfect double meaning of the sentence and hates being small with renewed energy.

“Okay, I’ll do it – at your own risk! It’s your life, unlife you’re putting into my hand – and wow, that’s some trust you have in me!” Xander finishes and stares in wonder at Spike. “You trust me!”

Spike rolls his eyes. “Get over it. It’s not as if I have a choice.”

“But you do have a choice. You could stay in the house.” Xander doesn’t let it drop so easily and Spike grits his teeth. He hates to be seen through so easily. Xander is stunned. The fact that Spike, of all people – hated enemy and long-time idol – does trust him is just too cool.

“Can I go to bed, I mean to hand now?”

“Sure, just...”

“What now?” Spike asks, annoyed.

“Just, say it.”

“What?”

“That you trust me. I want to hear it.”

“No.”

“Please.”

“No.”

“Puppy-eyes-please?” Xander says and makes the puppy eyes at Spike who melts inwardly.

“Damn you, Harris. Yeah, I do trust you, Xander!” Spike says through gritted teeth.

Xander watches the vampire for a moment intently, then with his most earnest voice he says: “I feel honoured, Spike.”

“Bloody hell, boy!” Spike explodes, unable to handle this situation. Xander pulls back abruptly and turns his eyes down. His fingers play with the blanket unsteadily.

“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to...”

“Xander, look at me. I was just surprised, okay?” Spike says, calmly. The big brown almost-manga eyes of the boy look back at the vampire. “It’s just – nobody ever trusted me or said he trusted me.”

If there ever is a moment where the Powers That Be should revoke spells spontaneously – this would be the moment. Spike begs them, from all his heart and non-existent soul, but it doesn’t change anything. He so

wants to pull the boy into his arms and make the hurt and doubts go away, but at his size it's absolutely impossible to do that. All that is left to Spike are words: "Xander, I wasn't mocking you. I was really surprised. You did so much, you still do so much for me. Without you I'd be in real trouble, if not already dust. I thank you for all that and I trust you with my unlife. I didn't know it means so much to you."

Spike pauses and thinks for a moment about people he trusted before. He trusted Cecily not to laugh and she did. He trusted Dru to show him another life and she killed him. He trusted Angelus to care for him and he left. He trusted Dru to be his forever and she disappeared. There was not one person, that didn't disappoint him. "There is no one else on this planet I trust but you, Xander." Spike says sincerely, more to himself than to the whelp.

Without another word, Xander holds out his hand to the vampire whose shoulders are hunched, hands put deeply into the pockets of his jeans.

"Thank you." Spike says louder, looking forward to the delicious warm sleeping place the whelp offers him.

"No, Spike, thank you."

Xander lies down on his side and puts his hand down near his head on the pillow. After Spike himself lies down, Xander pulls up the blanket. The youth drags up one edge of it to cover Spike, too. They're only a few inches from each other, face to face and Spike wishes, for the thousandth time these past few days, to be normal sized again. Mind you, if he'd been normal sized, chances are he wouldn't have been here in bed with Xander at all. Still he feels good where he is and he plans on staying there quite a while longer – especially when he is back to his original size again. He's got way more than three inches to give to Xander.

It doesn't take long until both of them are fast asleep, Xander's fingers curled tenderly around Spike's fragile body.

## **Part Twelve**

Xander wakes up the next morning a while before the alarm is supposed to go off due to him going to bed early the evening before. Like yesterday, the sun shines

through the living room windows. For a delightful moment Xander is completely taken aback by the magnitude of his own apartment. He really did it – moved out of the crappy basement, has a well paid job, has a friend who trusts him. Life is great – finally.

Thinking of Spike gives him a brief moment of panic, but it subsides instantly when he finds Spike still sleeping on his hand which is still on the pillow beside his head as if he hadn't moved at all during the night. The blanket has been pulled down though, but Spike doesn't look as if he is cold. The vampire is hugging Xander's thumb with both arms and one leg thrown over it. Xander's fingers are carefully curled around the small vampire. Xander is happy and relieved: he hasn't squashed the vampire! On the contrary, it looks as if Xander's hand protects Spike from any and every evil in this and any other world.

Spike looks cute, cuddled up into his palm, still fast asleep. Xander wonders if he'd also think that about the normal sized version of the vampire. He remembers how sincerely Spike told him yesterday that he trusts Xander. The youth is still proud over that admission. Who'd have thought?

Some minutes pass while Xander watches the vampire in his sleep until it's time to turn off the alarm before it

rattles loudly. Slowly and carefully, Xander moves, sits up and pushes the stop button on the alarm. The boy holds his hand in front of his chest and watches Spike wake up from the movement. Spike's hair is ruffled and the vampire stretches himself, seemingly unaware of his surroundings.

When Spike opens his eyes, he looks directly into Xander's big, brown ones which express tenderness and joy. Xander smiles at him and for Spike it's like the sun rising.

"Good morning, sleepyhead. Did you sleep well?" Xander whispers at the vampire with a voice still husky from sleep. Spike shudders, as Xander's words are sending butterflies into his belly.

"Haven't slept so well in decades, pet." Spike answers barely keeping himself from purring contently.

"Glad to hear that. Glad I didn't squash you." Xander grins and Spike laughs slightly.

"Told you, you wouldn't."

"So, are you up and ready for another day with me?"

Spike rolls his eyes. If Xander only knew how up and ready he was exactly!

“Would like some breakfast.” Spike says out loud and inspects the little cuts on Xander’s thumb from where he had bled himself to feed Spike. The vampire carefully peels off some of the scab of the freshest wound. Xander doesn’t even feel it, just looks and lets Spike continue. He hopes Spike doesn’t hurt him unintentionally because he doesn’t want Spike to be hurt by the chip. A bit of the scab comes off and there is the slightest welling up of blood. The vampire doesn’t hesitate, he changes and puts his mouth to the little wound on Xander’s thumb. His fangs sink into the wound without Xander noticing it and Spike starts suckling greedily. Xander smiles proudly. He can make Spike happy, he can even nourish him. He can give Spike everything he needs.

While Xander has breakfast, Spike has a bath in a lasagne bowl. Spike didn’t want Xander to eat alone, so the bowl is set down on the table. It’s filled with a lot of bubbles and Spike’s not known for his modesty anyway. While the little vampire washes his hair and scrubs every part of skin he can reach by himself, Xander watches him and chews his cereal. Xander is still fascinated by the grace

and flexibility with which the vampire moves, how the small, fragile body parts work together so fluently and efficiently.

Spike gets nervous under Xander's intense observation. He makes a show of letting the little piece of soap glide over his arms and chest but it seems not to have the wanted effect on Xander. Spike is sure Xander would not watch him so intently in the bath tub if he'd been normal sized. The boy would blush and stutter and take flight instantly. The expression on Xander's face and in his eyes is more one of technical interest and it makes Spike's hairs stand up with unease. He feels like some sort of lab rat and that is so not an experience he wants to repeat.

"Be a pal, give me a hand, well, a finger?" Spike asks and breaks the silence and Xander's stare. He turns over, puts his hands on the rim of the bowl and keeps looking at Xander over his shoulder. Xander watches the vampire's slim back, the movement of the shoulders, the flex of the muscles on Spike's once again or once more well-built body. The human blood diet worked wonders. Spike's ass is only barely coated with foam and for a millisecond Xander has a flash of normal-sized Spike in this position, hollow back, ass in the air, waiting for him to catch on... Huh!?

“Scrub my back?” Spike asks, annoyed to outward appearances but secretly pleased by the delicious little blush that forms on Xander’s cheeks. To his disappointment, it fades as fast as it came.

“Sure, just scream if I overdo it.” Xander says, dipping two fingers of his right hand into the water, catching foam with the tips and then slowly rubbing them over the muscular back in circles, then up and down along the vampire’s spine, just keeping millimetres above Spike’s bottom. Spike lets his head fall back with the first touch of the warm fingers to his water-warmed body. He restrains himself from moaning, but his eyelids flutter shut. Xander puts on just enough pressure and works the kinks out just right. Of course, the vampire delights in these touches also on a more sexual level. Only the fact that Xander would instantly stop touching him if he’d noticed Spike wank, keeps the vampire from trying that.

Fifteen minutes later, Spike is a delightful, moaning piece of butter under Xander’s massage and the boy smiles happily that he’s given Spike so much pleasure. Xander thinks he carries out his new role of a caring and responsible ... man every day a little more; it makes him proud. However, to be responsible means to go to work

on time and that's what he needs to do now – even if he could continue massaging Spike forever.

“Got to stop now. I need to go down, got a job to do, money to earn.” Xander says and slowly withdraws his fingers from the satin skin of Spike's back.

“Don't!” The vampire pouts.

“I am sorry, but I have to.” Spike continues pouting and Xander feels a little helpless. It seems saying no to Spike is getting harder with those pouting lips and begging blue eyes. “Tell you what... the next chance we get, I promise you another massage even longer and better than this one. Okay?”

Spike is eager to agree. Of course, he won't demand the fulfilling of the promise until he is normal sized again. A devilish grin crosses the vampire's face as soon as Xander turns to put the dishes into the sink. Whelp is in for some surprises and, with a little luck, by tonight if the witches are able to revoke the spell.

Xander takes Spike with him to work as he did the day before. The vampire lazily lies in a big armchair and watches Xander's hands work. Now he has had a little taste of what these long fingers are capable of he can't

wait to get them to touch him again. His trousers are uncomfortably tight all the time which annoys him, but he hasn't had any alone time yet to relieve the tension. In the meantime, he enjoys the simmering of lust in his belly and his balls. The exhibitionist in him, though, enjoys being hard right in front of Xander's eyes. He gives a stroke to his hard cock through the fabric of his trousers occasionally and he closes his eyes and dreams of Xander's hands and mouth travelling over his body.

Finally, the long working hours are over. Xander takes Spike up into the apartment and sets him down inside the living room of his doll house. Spike uses the ride on the boy's hand as another opportunity to rub his hard cock against Xander's hot thumb with every step. Xander has barely disappeared through the door to take a shower, when Spike rips open his trousers and falls to his knees. With one hand he holds himself, the other touches his purple cock just once before he instantly comes convulsing, pumping long streams of come on his living room floor. A whispered "Xander" stays unheard.

The vampire cleans himself and the floor with a shred of the paper tissues formerly used as his footstool. He sits down in his armchair and closes his eyes. Giddy with enthusiasm, Xander storms out of the shower only a few minutes later. The boy gets into his clothes and grabs a

sleepy Spike. “Come on, Mini-vamp, we’re going to those lovely witchy ladies now to have you turned back to the Big Bad!” Spike smiles dopily, still enjoying the aftermath of his intense orgasm; he doesn’t even notice Xander calling him Mini-vamp. Suddenly, nervousness grabs his belly with an icy fist: what if the witches didn’t find a way to turn him back and - what if they did?

### **Part Thirteen**

Xander’s footsteps sound hollow as he walks down the hallway to the witches’ dorm room. He only needs to knock once before the door opens. Willow looks at them. Under her eyes are dark circles that tell of a night of research or just of a night without sleep. He grins, images of Tara and Willow, naked, kissing, touching, are swirling in his head for a moment before he recollects why he is here actually. Tara sits on the bed, a big book on her knees. She looks up and smiles at Xander and Spike, who peeks out from his usual transport spot: Xander’s shirt pocket.

“Come on in, you two. We think we have found it. I mean Tara has found a spell to revoke the side effects on Spike’s size.” Willow beams at them and steps to the side so Xander can enter the dorm room.

“Hey Tara, hey Willow. Sounds like good news.” Xander waves at Tara and stands uncertainly in the middle of the room.

“Hello Xander, Spike. Indeed, we have something. Actually it’s quite easy, there aren’t even any weird ingredients needed.” Tara says and pets a space beside her on the bed. Xander sits down. The blonde turns the book so Xander and Spike can look at the words written on the page.

“Here, it’s in this chapter. Simple counter spells to unintended side effects. The spells are not specifically phrased to unshrink someone but they are like universal counter spells.” Tara explains, tapping her finger onto words on the page.

“Nice – that’s written in Latin. Can’t really follow you there.” Xander shrugs.

“It’s totally easy! We just need to try out some and one will have the desired effect on Spike, promise!” Willow babbles and Spike growls.

“Try some of them out? Do I look like some kind of guinea pig, Red? Guess you tried out enough on me

already.” Spike spits. Xander watches Tara looking angrily at Willow. Uh oh, trouble in paradise.

“Cookies?” Willow offers, voice quiet and feeble. She nearly pushes the plate with the chocolate cookies into Xander’s face. Xander takes one, because it’s chocolate, duh! “This doesn’t mean you’re forgiven, Will.” he says, before biting into the cookie.

“It doesn’t? But..., I baked cookies and I..., I apologized, like, a lot.” Willow puts one hand on her hip, the other busy with holding the plate.

“Willow...” Xander tries to warn her. “So not the attitude to have right now.”

Spike would like to join in, but he feels this is a fight Xander has to get through on his own. Willow and Xander have been friends since kindergarten, but the last few months they’ve drifted apart. Spike doesn’t trust Willow but it’s Xander who needs to decide if he still trusts her, if he can uphold the friendship with her any longer.

“What do you mean – attitude! I saved your life! I even saved Spike’s, ehm, existence. I don’t know why you’re complaining at all.” Willow turns away arrogantly and

puts down the plate.

“I’m not complaining about you saving our lives. I’m just questioning the means. Magic is not the solution to everything!” Xander barely refrains from yelling at her.

“The means? What would you have done? Throw yourself into the fight and get yourself killed? Everybody knows you’re completely useless on patrol!”

The words leave Willow’s mouth and the hand she clamps over it comes too late. Xander feels dazed.

“Xander, I didn’t mean to...”

“Oh I think you did.” Xander says apathetically. It’s not that he doesn’t know it. He gets pounded on more often than he pounds, but still, without his distractions, Buffy would’ve sometimes had a harder fight.

Xander helps Spike out of his shirt pocket and sets the little vampire down on Tara’s waiting hand. Spike is in his full vamp-face because he is so angry that Willow hurt his boy with words so much. Under normal circumstances he’d kill her without hesitation. Nobody hurts what is his.

But right now, two things - his size and the chip - are keeping him from it.

Xander shakes himself and sits up straight. An unusual strength seems to come from deeply inside him when he starts speaking then. "Your attempts to use magic are getting us into trouble more often than it is useful. You aren't ready to use magic, you can't control it in the least. It's way bigger than you are able to understand."

"What are you trying to say? I saved our lives. That's all that counts."

"No, it's not. You saved our lives, well great, but it was only luck. You could have shrunken all of us or done something even worse. You didn't know at all what you were doing exactly. You endangered us. You put us in incalculable risk. You made Spike a..."

"What do you care anyway? It's Spike. Vampire. Soulless. Bad. Remember? Ring any bells?" Willow spits and looks ugly with all the anger distorting her face.

"I care because Spike has saved our lives a lot of times and he doesn't deserve to be killed by one of your tricks. He's more reliable than you are since you've been on this

magic trip.”

“I can’t believe you’re saying this, Xander! I’ve always been there for you and that’s the thanks I get for all that.”

“Oh come on, Will. That’s not what this is about.” Xander sighs. The anger seems to have faded away already. There is only disappointed sadness left in him.

“This is exactly what this is about. You’re losing ground!”

“I what?”

“You always tagged along with Buffy and everybody, but now we’re all something special and you aren’t. You feel useless and that’s why you’re trying to make me feel all bad about using magic. I’m a powerful Wicca, Buffy is the Slayer, Spike is the Superfighter, Giles the Brainy... And what are you, Xander?” She actually has the nerve to look at him pitifully.

Tara holds Spike back from leaping at her girlfriend. Silent tears are running down her face. She is not surprised, but it still shocks her to have Willow say all these things which Tara had seen in her aura already. Blackness is winding around Willow’s red-golden light

like a big dangerous snake, and it is getting bigger with each passing day, eating away at Willow's core.

"I don't need any superpowers, Willow. I fight for good because it's the right thing to do. It's not some ego-gig for me. I'd rather die before I'd put one of you at risk. Buffy understands that. I'm sorry you didn't get it." Xander speaks evenly with a strong voice he doesn't use often. It's the core of him, his white knight talking.

"Stay a loser if you like that. I don't care. I don't care about Spike at all. Magic is more effective than one fighter can be. To hell with you. I won't help you. There's the door, you know how to use it. Good-bye." Willow's eyes sparkle with blackness. It frightens Xander so much – he is afraid for Willow. She needs to be saved and soon – before she does something she'll regret forever.

Tara stands up suddenly to Xander's surprise. She sets Spike down on Xander's shoulder but the vampire quickly climbs back down Xander's arm into the safety of the boy's hand. Spike hugs Xander's thumb and looks up into the boy's brown, sad eyes. He wishes he could hug him for real. Spike is very proud of Xander. He stood up to Willow in a spectacular and knight-y way. Xander pets the vampire's back tenderly.

Tara speaks with a commanding voice Xander has never heard from her before. “It’s time for you to go, Willow. I will help Spike and Xander.”

“What? Tara?” Willow’s surprise over the fact that her girlfriend is standing up to her is clearly written on her face. Tara doesn’t say anything, she gestures to the door and it opens. “You... you can’t throw me out of my own room!” Willow gasps.

“It is, or rather it was, our room. I can’t throw you out but I can ask you to leave for a couple of hours. I won’t need more time to get my things and leave. You can have the room all to yourself again when I’m gone.”

“I... Tara... why are you – you don’t have to leave! I only had a fight with Xander... it doesn’t change anything between us...” Willow stutters uncomprehendingly.

“I want to leave.” Tara says and for a second it looks like she’ll lose her poise. While tears are running down her cheeks, she keeps on speaking determinedly. “You’ve changed, Willow. Magic changed you. You are not the person anymore I... I fell in love with.”

“No. No, Tara, that’s not right... you can’t...”

“Please leave now, Willow.”

“You don’t have anywhere to go.”

“I’ll find a place.”

“But you are lost without me.”

“I will manage.”

“You will manage?” Willow squeaks. There are tears gathering in her eyes and she gestures wildly, but the words normally accompanying are missing.

“Please go now, Willow. Don’t make me...”

“You can’t make me go.”

Without further comment Tara raises her hands and gestures as if she was sweeping the floor with a broom. Horrified, Willow watches helplessly as her body begins to float, only an inch above the floor, then moves toward and then through the door which closes behind her silently.

“You’re going to regret that, Tara!” Willow screams from outside and pounds at the door. Tara draws a circle with her hands in the air, and after a soft golden glow, there is only silence left.

“We’re safe here. She’ll give up soon. She is not very patient.” Tara says, before she collapses on the floor, sobbing into her hands. Only seconds later, Xander is there to hold her while she cries. He puts his hand over Tara’s and Spike hugs both their thumbs, providing as much comfort as he can give.

## **Part Fourteen**

Tara’s sobs subside quickly. Too quickly. “Not the time to cry.” The blonde sniffs and rubs at her nose with the back of her hand. Xander finds her a tissue. She smiles at him and then at Spike. “We need to unshrink you. I could use some help carrying my stuff outside, superpowers come in handy there,” she tells Spike and grabs for the hand Xander reaches down to her. He pulls her to her feet.

“You sure, you’re strong enough to go all witchy?” Xander asks her. Tara laughs softly and he blushes. “It’s totally adorable how much you care for Spike.” Spike beams. “I can do this. I’ve been trained in White Magic all my life. White Magic runs in the family, at least all the females of my line have the ability to use it in their nature. My mom had already anchored me to the Balance when I was very young. Sadly, she died when I was seven so she couldn’t teach me more. The males in my family do not tolerate anything supernatural and well, yeah, you were there when they came to retrieve me.”

“But I don’t understand why you’d think you were something bad or demon-y when your mom gave you the clues already.” Spike puts in. Xander nods.

“My mom, when she told me about these things, she never used words like witch or magic or demons. She just told me, I was something special and that I had something inside me that can help to keep the world in balance. She never talked about good or evil – it was always about Balance. I didn’t know enough... then she died – and when I got older, my dad and my brothers belittled everything and everyone the slightest bit different from themselves or their ideas of how the

world should be. I hated it.” Tara shudders in memory of that time.

“So why is it, Red goes round the bend with magicks and you don’t. She using black magic?” Spike leans back against Xander’s thumb, crosses his arm’s in front of his chest.

“No, it’s not black magic. It’s power that comes with magic and she..., she was never anchored, she never had a real tutor. Giles is no help to her at all. She didn’t take me seriously when I tried to tell her about the Balance. It’s as if I am always beneath her.” Fresh tears run down Tara’s face and Xander quickly gives her another paper tissue. Spike cringes when he hears Tara’s last words. He knows exactly how the blonde has been feeling all along. Xander doesn’t know what to say at all so he stays quiet and awkwardly pats her on the shoulder in an attempt to take away the pain.

Tara pulls herself out of the mourning she feels. “Let’s do the spell now. I don’t want to be here longer than necessary.” She grabs for the book and opens it to the page she showed Xander earlier. “I don’t think we need to try out spells. This one is a powerful spell that interacts and relies on healing energy. That should do it.” Tara nods and gets a piece of chalk. She draws a circle on

the floor, just big enough for one normal sized person to stand in. "Put Spike in there." She says and studies the text in the book.

"In there? In there! Like right now? I mean. Are you sure? Is that the right spell? Spike needs to agree. No ingredients? Draw a circle and, yay, Spike's back? Isn't that dangerous? What if something goes wrong? What if Spike..." Xander rattles down every thought in his head.

"Don't get your knickers in a twist, pet. Good ol' Glinda'll fix me up fine. Now gimme a kiss for luck and set me down there." Spike rolls his eyes, annoyed. He is very, very nervous but a man doesn't need to show everything, does he? Tara giggles.

"Euww Spike, no kissing, but I'll cross my fingers for you." Xander kneels down and sets the little vampire in the circle. Suddenly, he feels like he should give Spike a kiss to say good-bye. How nancy is that? He gets back on his feet and takes several steps back from the circle quickly. It's time Spike is Spike again –the vampire being small, is making him think weird thoughts.

Tara sits down cross-legged close to the circle. She holds up her hands in front of Spike. She bows forward and looks directly into the vampire's eyes. Spike feels as if Tara can look inside him down to his core, maybe she

can. Whatever she sees, it makes her smile so Spike is relieved.

“I’m going to start now. Try to relax your body and concentrate on your original size. It shouldn’t take long until you feel the spell working, okay?” she says and Spike nods.

“Thank you, Glinda.”

Xander watches in amazement. Tara starts chanting words he doesn’t understand. After a moment Tara’s hands start to glow golden. The golden glow gets bigger until it’s completely woven from one hand to the other, surrounding the circle with Spike in the middle. It swirls around the shrunken vampire and seems to completely fill him. Tara keeps chanting easy, joyous words and the glow starts pulsing. In wonder, Xander stares while with each pulse of the glow Spike grows a few inches. Tara’s hands work in rhythm with the pulse, fingers clenching and unclenching, until finally Spike is big again. A last push from Tara’s hands and then she slowly curls in her fingers, making fists. The glow pulls back in synchronicity with that motion until it’s completely gone. She looks up at Spike, signalling the spell is over and blushes heavily. Spike is as naked as the day he was born.

Happily, Spike jumps in the air, testing and stretching his limbs. Everything seems to work just as it did before the whole mini-vamp incident so he sweeps the blonde witch into his arms and hugs her tightly, then twirls her around. “Thank you, Glinda. Thank you sooo much.” he yells effusively. Tara laughs, pleased that he is so happy.

Xander watches the display of joy with a little twist of jealousy in his gut that Spike is hugging Tara for so long. He feels left out. He is happy for Spike, sure, but now he is only Xander again to Spike. Expendable and unimportant. And Spike should put on some clothes. Not everybody needs to see that muscular, flawless body.

Xander brushes away the dark and the weird thoughts and does what the voice inside tells him. “Hey Tara, wanna stay at my apartment tonight?”

She glances shyly at him and after a moment’s consideration nods. “If it’s not too much trouble.” Xander shakes his head, waving her doubts away.

“Look, mate, I’m all back to my Big Bad self!” Spike jumps to stand before Xander, grinning widely. Xander does his best to look directly in Spike’s eyes and not at the various interesting body parts that definitely need some clothes – now!

“Congrats, buddy.” Xander utters, seemingly untouched by it all. Spike frowns, not sure what’s making the boy so sad, but then remembers the fight he had with Willow. Red’s gonna suffer for that one! He shrugs and turns to Tara.

“Start packing, Glinda. I’m big again and can help carry all the stuff you want to take with you.” Spike hesitates when Tara tries to look everywhere but at him. “What’s the matter, pet?” Spike looks down at himself. “K, I can see why me being starkers gets you all riled up.” He grins an exaggeratedly lascivious smile at her, tongue over teeth and all, then laughs when she blushes almost purple. “You’ve got a way of complimenting a man, girl.” he tells her, laughing. “Got something for covering me up?”

Xander sighs, long-sufferingly. He hadn’t thought about bringing Spike’s clothes. Damn. Tara searches around in her dresser and finally she drags out a pair of black sweats and a grey T-Shirt. Spike looks worriedly at the items. “So sorry, that’s all I have.” she says looking repentant.

“Come on, Spike. It’s only for a few minutes, just get into them so we can leave.” Xander mutters, hating to be

around a naked Spike without knowing why exactly that bothers him so much.

After hearing Xander's grumpy words addressed at Spike, Tara hurries to get her most important personal belongings and some clothes packed.

After a long look at Xander's unhappy, slouched posture Spike gets into the offered sweats and t-shirt. Looking up at Xander, he finally sees that expression again in the boy's face that he's gotten so used to over the last few days: that big, shining smile... which quickly transforms into a hearty laugh at Spike's expense. The sweats only go down as far as Spike's calf and sit very low around the waist. The t-shirt is so tight and short it shows off a nice strip of belly skin including the belly button. "You're the dream model for every gay poster!" Xander quips and seems unable to stop laughing.

"You think so Harris?" Spike asks, devilishly and puts his hand to his hip, thumb disappearing in the sweats, pulling them down even further, showing off even more of that soft, hairless skin and that perfectly formed six-pack. Spike grins at Xander, eyes burning with lust, looking at Xander from under his lashes, teeth gently biting his own bottom lip. "Wanna fuck me, Xander?" Spike whispers, a seductive drawl to his voice.

At least, that makes Xander stop laughing.

## Part Fifteen

Xander stops laughing abruptly and pales. “*Wanna fuck me, Xander?*” echoes in his head accompanied by the instant answer: “Yes”. Which, of course, Xander is not ready to deal with at all. Denial is a good thing and so he flips the switch in his head and starts hating Spike wholeheartedly again. Not only is Spike not in the least thankful for all the caretaking Xander has done – no – he actually has the nerve to make fun of Xander only seconds after he is back to his old self – which is an evil bastard vampire thing to do.

Xander wishes he could just leave. Go home to his new apartment, sit in front of the TV and drink until he either pukes or falls asleep. He’s deeply hurt, deeply embarrassed and very confused. He needs alone-time which - of course - is the only thing he can’t have right now, because he offered Tara a place to stay and Spike’s

clothes are still in his apartment which means, the vampire is coming with them, too. Just great.

“Xander, would you... if y-you dd-don’t like m-me coming w-with...” Tara stutters and stops talking completely when Xander looks at her, dark emotions still on his face.

“What – no, Tara. I don’t mind. Just get your stuff and let’s get out of here!” Xander tries for a grin, but it gets stuck when his gaze is drawn to Spike. The vampire stares at him and the echo of that dreadful question starts up in Xander’s head again. Blushing, Xander turns away, nearly knocking over Tara in the process as she holds out some bags for him to carry.

However, finally, they are ready to leave. Willow is nowhere to be seen, still, Tara can’t shake off the feeling of being followed. Xander leads off, Tara and Spike follow him. Spike wishes for his duster and a cigarette. He feels naked without his usual armour out in the dark streets of this damned town. Xander holds himself stiffly, the anger over Spike’s betrayal pulsating inside him. What the fuck had all this been for if everything’s back to the beginning?

“You need to talk to him.” Tara whispers, so only Spike can hear it. “Take it slow – he’ll get it, eventually.” Head

cocked to one side, Spike stares at Tara for a few seconds, then continues watching Xander's feet stomping forward. He doesn't know what to say. When he was three-inches-small it had all been easy, at least, easier to admit. He had depended on Xander to help him continue his unlife in that form. He'd never have managed on his own. But now, back on his own two feet, he doesn't need help from pseudo-friends... A memory is triggered by that; Xander admitting that he trusts Spike for whatever reasons. Maybe, Glinda is right.

The rest of the way they go in silence. Tara wonders where they're going. There had been the fading of a certain darker pressure from Xander's aura over the last months and she'd assumed that he was getting on with his life and getting out from under the clutches of his parents. Now, she's curious to find out more about Xander. After all that's happened, she still feels like an outsider with the Scoobies. Like Spike, she just can't get into that circle as a fully accepted member. She is still just regarded as "Willow's girlfriend". Whether on purpose or not, too often Willow would break into the rare talks one of the Scoobies would have with her and she'd regress to the smiling listener. Especially fierce were those interruptions when Xander was involved. Only Dawn was letting her in fully, though Spike had sent

a lot of understanding her way, with his eyes and with his aura.

“We’re here.” Xander says and opens the gate to the backyard. After making sure the gate is securely closed again, Xander leads his companions over to the back entrance and through the workshop. Xander purposely switches just two of those ceiling lights on and keeps the workshop dimly lit. Vampire eyesight still allows Spike to see most of it; the ready and half-ready doll houses, the workbench, the pieces of wood that would be formed to build perfect furniture; while Tara has to concentrate on not stumbling. Spike takes everything in with big eyes. He had only been here when he was shrunken and now it was difficult for him to get used to the new dimensions. Xander moves quickly through the workshop, not wanting them to see a lot of the stuff standing around.

Again, Spike wonders about Xander’s attitude. The boy is exceptionally gifted. His ability to build such wonderful pieces of furniture without an apprenticeship of many years is impressive and nothing to be ashamed of. He shakes his head and presses his lips together tightly. He’s got to talk some sense into the boy. Can’t have him running around like some loser, when he’s so talented, kind and loyal.

Xander opens the door to the apartment and goes in, turning on the lights and calling out the room names whilst pointing to doors. He doesn't sound completely mad anymore, pride for his workshop, for his apartment creeps into his voice. Way better, Spike thinks and is startled when Tara starts giggling suddenly while crossing the threshold. Xander turns sharply. "What's so funny?" he barks, immediately hurt by her laughter. "Magic", she says between helpless giggles. "It tickles!"

Grimacing, but not angry anymore, Xander asks "Magic?"

Tara's eyes still dance with laughter. "Yes, Magic. It's so easy and so effective. It prevents anybody with the will to hurt you from entering here. Very effective and so pure." She giggles again. "I want to get to know the witch who did this, please."

Xander shrugs, "I could ask Garld. Guess she's behind this." He smiles, genuinely pleased by the concern Garld must feel for him to have set up a magical barrier to protect him. Spike had entered after Tara without hesitation and nothing had happened, Xander thinks, maybe the vampire really had changed... or perhaps the barrier would only react to physical hurt and, with the chip, Spike couldn't do any physical damage so he could

enter without restrictions... He'll ask Garld as soon as he gets the chance.

"Let's put this stuff in the living room", Xander says and leads the way.

"Wow – these curtains are... impressive." Tara says and stares in awe at the dark red velvet, then goes over to touch it. She shoves the curtains apart and looks outside through the big windows. "The view is great. You can look over a huge part of Sunnydale. Isn't that Restfield? Can you see Spike's..."

"So, where'd you leave my duster?" Spike asks, interrupting her, not meeting Xander's eyes.

"Bedroom cupboard", comes the short answer from the boy, who then turns angrily and disappears into the kitchen. Great.

"Don't you dare to leave!" Tara mouths at Spike and tries a Willow-look. It doesn't fit her. He shrugs and goes into the bedroom in search of his clothes. The first thing he finds, though, is the doll house Xander made him which had been his home for the last couple of days.

Tara follows Xander into the kitchen. “Why don’t we eat something together? I mean, I’d like to spend some time with you, you, my friends, to... to - not be alone for a while, you know?” Tara says, so fast the words blur into each other and she nearly rolls her eyes at how ridiculous she sounds even to herself.

“He can stay.” Xander sighs deeply. “I wouldn’t throw him out, you know, just couldn’t do that to him. Even back to his normal size he’s helpless and the baddies outside are just waiting to get him. I mean, that’s what brought us here. The vampires that attacked us the night of the shrinkage – it was a trap. They were only trying to kill Spike.” Opening the fridge and staring into it without really seeing anything, Xander thinks about that night, thinks about how sad he felt, being sure Spike had been killed. He likes the guy, can’t deny that. “If he just wasn’t such a jerk!” Xander complains and Tara giggles.

“It isn’t easy for him either – adjusting to this.” Tara says and shoves Xander away from the fridge. “You’ll get a cold standing in front of an open fridge too long.” she chides him, not meaning it seriously, and starts sorting through the limited offer of food inside the fridge. “We only moved in a couple of days ago”, Xander apologises for the lack of choice of food. Grinning over the “we” Xander used, Tara closes the fridge door. “Don’t worry.

Let's just order Pizza."

"And ice cream." Xander says and hugs her softly. "Yeah, and ice cream, a lot of ice cream." Hesitantly at first, Tara hugs Xander back and tries not to think too hard about her own problems.

In the other room Spike sits on the bed and looks in astonishment at the doll house. He can't believe only a few hours ago he fitted perfectly in that miniature world. It seems like a dream, a bad dream. However not everything was bad. Things were easier, that's for sure. Xander could read every wish from his eyes and, if not, Spike could tell him without hesitation. Now, everything is complicated. The intimacy they shared is nothing more than friendship – Spike should have known.

Reaching inside the doll house Spike takes out the chair. He caresses the smooth leather and the dark wood. Really fine craftsmanship. Xander can be proud, Broum can be proud to have such a talent working for him. He sets the chair back and starts to hunt for his clothes. Finally Spike locates them, T-Shirt, Shirt, jeans, duster, his socks and boots. The clothes are neatly folded, albeit a bit dusty and crinkled-up – it would do. Better than what he was wearing right now for sure.

Chewing on his bottom lip, Spike's thoughts swirl and circle until they focus on one sentence: He wants Xander. He gets out of the ridiculous short shirt and puts on the black shirt. It stretches tightly over hard muscles and a sudden memory of drinking Xander's blood rushes through him like a lightning bolt. He sucks in unneeded air. Bloody hell, boy, you're a nummy treat. Always knew that.

So he wants Xander, nothing wrong with that. He slides out of the sweats and puts on his jeans. Nice boy, nice body, nice home, good job. He wants Xander. Socks on and boots laced, Spike gets up agitatedly. He was sure, on some level Xander wanted Spike too, he just didn't know about it yet. No problem at all, Spike would make him see. He'd persuade him to see the rightness of them being together. He shrugs on his red button up, leaves it open. First thing's first – he needs to stay tonight, and probably for a lot of nights, here in Xander's lovely apartment with the enormous heavy curtains that fit so well with the dark doors and heavy drawers and cupboards. Spike sighs. He needs a reason to stay. Think, Spike, think. You're good at this. Damn, there they are already back.

"Look – I..", he begins, but is completely taken aback by Xander's reaction. The boy stops, rooted to the floor, one

weak hand pointing vaguely at Spike. Xander's jaw agape, his eyes roaming over Spike.

“Guess you like this better? At least you're not laughing your bloody ass off this time.” Spike mumbles and knows he won't get an answer. Things would go easier than he thought. Xander already has the hots for him, he just can't admit it. Spike will help him with that. What are friends for anyway...

## **Part Sixteen**

“Good to see you back to your old self again.” Tara says, a half-mocking twinkle to her eyes which Spike hasn't seen before. “How about we order some Pizza and watch some TV?” she asks Spike and he agrees without hesitation. Xander can't believe he's such an idiot, standing there on the threshold, unmoving, staring at Spike dumbly. He feels heat creep into his cheeks – great - embarrassment is his most hated emotion. It feels so... embarrassing! He'd roll his eyes at himself if he wasn't

still transfixed by the sight of the ex-mini-vampire all big and bad again. Whoa, he can't remember Spike ever looking so manly, strong, proud, predatory, sexy... Sexy somehow does fit, even though he doesn't think that is an attribute *he* should use to describe the undead. Whatever, Tara and Spike are talking movies and he's gonna help them decide now.

"No video-store around here and isn't that great. Let's stick to the Xander collection: Star Trek it is." he interrupts the discussion and isn't Tara thankful. Spike wanting to watch "Legends of the Fall" is just too scary. Spike shrugs, but internally pouts. There goes his chance to have Xander melting in his arms from a romantic movie. Sceptically, he looks at Xander – maybe that wasn't such a good plan. He can't imagine Xander melting from a romantic movie, Xander would rather fall asleep in his arms and drool on his shirt. Still, that'd mean Xander in his arms... no, Spike, bloody stupid plan.

They discuss, decide and then order Pizza and some spicy chicken wings, too. Spike stretches out on the bed and watches TV, well, he zaps through the channels quickly without really seeing anything. His mind is on his time as three-inches-Vampire again – and he does not mean that one time when he'd tried ice-bathing in Canada – how terribly strenuous and frustrating a simple thing like

zapping was. Gives you some perspective, this experience, but still, one he could have lived without.

Spike is bored and he doesn't know how to proceed. He can't court Xander like some chick – and he can't just clap him on the shoulder, smile and then fuck him in the alley. Spike sighs audibly and puts his hand through his hair. Oh bloody hell!

Xander watches, amused, out of the corner of his eye, how Spike discovers the chaotic mess of hair on his head. As a little vampire Spike just looked cute all... spiked up, really, but back to his normal size and in his old clothes, in his bed with his hair all messed up he looks... sexy. And there it is again, the little word a man shouldn't think about another man, at least, not about men without their own TVShows. Though Spike is sexy enough for a few TVShows, maybe even his own channel and... this goes somewhere beyond Xander's ability to control or deny it. Spike is sexy. He has to admit that. Bad, dark vampire with bed-hair and eyes that could make you burn inside, make you...

"Xander?" Tara looks concerned at the boy who'd tuned out their conversation about decorations a couple of minutes ago and, from there on, started turning a nice

shade of red before paling again quickly. “Xander, are you okay?”

“Huh?” Xander starts, looks around unsure and doesn’t meet Tara’s eyes. “I just... I... sorry, Tara, I zoned out on you. What were you saying again?” Unhappily, Xander stares at his toes.

Spike, of course, uses the moment to go by them, brushing against Xander - as if - accidentally. “Hope you’ve got half-decent gel in your bathroom, pup!” Spike says and disappears from the room.

“Pup?” Xander squeaks and Tara smiles.

“Xander, look, it’s okay if you like...”

“Pizza?” He feels his heart speeding up. He’s not gonna have this conversation.

“No, not what I meant and it’s not here yet, anyway.”

“I could look...”

“No. You listen to me, now.” Tara juts her chin out and puts her hands on her hips. “It’s okay if you like, ahm, like men.”

“Oh – that – no. Not me. I am a boobs man.” He stares pointedly at Tara’s heavy breasts. “Look, like boobs. Yours are – wow – big.” Xander keeps staring and Tara blushes purple. “Nice boobs.” Xander nods convincingly to himself, than looks at Tara’s face. “Oh, oh! I... sorry. I didn’t, you know, mean it. I mean, your boobs are nice but you like boobs, too, look we’re like sisters, we both like boobs?” Xander puts his hands in front of his face and mumbles “Oh my god.”

“They’re semantics.” Tara giggles.

“What? Would say that, they’re way too, you know, big, to be semantics.” Xander gestures weighing heavy breasts with his hands.

“No, I mean, it’s semantics, if there are boobs, a pussy or a cock.”

“Oh, don’t let Spike hear you call his cock semantics.” Xander nods, eyes wide. “Actually, don’t ever call a man’s best friend semantics, at all.”

Giving up, Tara shakes her head, smiling desperately. “It doesn’t matter who you love. The love is what matters.”

There are tears gathering in her eyes and then, suddenly, there is Spike and he holds Tara in his arms, hugging her just enough. Otherwise she might have fallen to pieces at their feet.

“I didn’t...” Xander stumbles. Seeing Spike holding her, caring, makes him feel warm inside. “I know, don’t worry. She’s strong, will be back on her feet in no time. Won’t you, luv?” Spike murmurs and strokes Tara’s hair while she continues sobbing into his shoulder.

There’s a ring at the door and Xander uses the opportunity to leave the emotion-laden situation. The Pizza Boy stands outside the gate, waiting patiently for Xander to come. Jorge’s Pizza –another one of those many shops Xander worked for when he was still undecided whether he was good at anything at all – they have new uniforms. Xander grins.

“Nice jacket!” Xander comments, takes the Pizzas and the box with the chicken wings. There is a gratis bottle of “the cheapest wine in the world” because their order was over 25 dollars.

“Thanks, it’s a lifesaver.” The boy grins over the 5 dollars tip and runs back to his dirty brown car. The little golden

crosses all over the red jacket sparkle in the light from the street lamp.

The Pizzas smell delicious and Xander hurries back up the stairs. Spike and Tara are sitting on the floor on a blanket and Tara smiles, listening to Spike who is telling some tale about an especially exciting fight. When he enters with the Pizzas, chicken wings and the wine, they both jump up to help him set everything down. Knives and glasses are fetched from the kitchen and, smiling at each other, they clink glasses filled with “the cheapest wine in the world” before they start to eat. The wine doesn’t taste that bad...

Taking a break after three quarters of his huge Pizza, Xander watches Spike, transfixed, while the vampire eats a chicken wing. Spike is totally fixated on the food, his lips and teeth work frantically to get all the flesh and the crispy skin. His fingers are greasy and from time to time his tongue darts out, licking the grease from his fingers. Spike moans softly, delighted by the taste of the spicy chicken and Xander feels this warmth spreading inside him again which focuses in his groin, making his cock jump slightly. Oh my god, he is turned on by Spike! As if on cue, Spike throws the bones back in the box and sticks his index and ring fingers in his mouth to clean them off. His eyes snap up and blue eyes meet the intense gaze of

brown ones. Fuck, Xander thinks, gasping for air when his cock jumps again violently, leaving him without any chance of denial.

Spike doesn't avert his eyes. He stares at Xander, sinks into eyes full of swirling emotions. For a few seconds he's unsure how to handle the situation, then a wave of pheromones assaults his senses. He swallows, then intensifies his gaze, telling Xander everything about desire and lust with his eyes. Xander just can't look away. The blue of Spike's eyes darkens and there is so much promise in Spike's look, Xander is interested, excited, curious and scared all in one.

Tara feels the tension and watches the men staring at each other. Their auras are pulsating for and with each other. She wouldn't go so far as to say these two were made for each other, but they'd fit very well. If Xander can overcome his inhibitions. However, Spike has to be careful, Xander's feelings are strong, his heart loves deeply but his self-esteem is fragile. A partner like Spike, so dominant and confident, sometimes is too much and a person like Xander can easily get lost in the shadows.

## **Part Seventeen**

Tara wakes up first. There is a cool, pale foot on her shoulder. She sits up and looks at the unfamiliar

surroundings. Ah, Xander's apartment. The sun shines into the living room, the curtain isn't fully closed, but there is no danger to Spike here in the bed.

That first long eye contact yesterday evening had finally been broken by Xander who fled to the bathroom. Spike had looked at Tara who smiled at him supportively. He shrugged and ate another a slice of Xander's Pizza who, of course, noticed it when he came back and the name calling started. With it, a lot of laughter filled the air. Spike and Xander entertained Tara, mocking each other vividly while (for an bystander obviously) flirting with each other. There is so much familiarity to their banter; Tara wonders why they'd never noticed before.

Since the TV stood in the bedroom, they'd wandered over there after the meal and watched some stupid comedy shows. The stress-free entertainment, laughter and light-hearted banter had done all of them good. Their full to bursting bellies had soon made them all tired and finally they'd fallen asleep on the bed together. Stranger things have happened... really.

Tara nearly can't suppress the laughter when she looks at the other part of the bed. Spike has curled into Xander's body, his head under Xander's chin. Xander has in turn

put his arms around the vampire, one long leg stretched over Spike's. They were just too cute.

Spike wakes up when he notices Tara's warm hand putting his foot under the blanket. He decides to continue feigning to be asleep. He doesn't want to leave the warm embrace of Xander's body. Too soon Xander is going to wake anyway and he bets the boy's going to throw him out in full panic mode.

Tara leaves the bed, grabs a bag in the living room, then goes to the bathroom. Minutes later, the shower springs to life and he can hear her muffled sobs. He feels for her, he's experienced all kinds of heartache himself already and it's really nothing you would wish someone like Tara go through at all. Seeing her suffer makes him want to console her. Just like seeing Xander makes him want to fuck him, have him. He feels his cock stirring with these thoughts and sighs. Xander groans in his sleep, disturbed. Not long and he'll wake, just a few more minutes.

After making herself halfway presentable, Tara comes back into the living room and sees Xander groggily move his hand to Spike's hair, fingering the short strands before opening his eyes with a start.

Spike enjoys the short moment of cuddling before Xander fully wakes up. Xander's heart runs a thousand

miles a minute. Spike hesitates, should he “wake up” too or keep on faking sleep. Better to keep still and silent – even if he inwardly cringes from this cowardice.

A man is in his double bed. Could happen, he doesn't have a couch and the bed is big enough. His hand is tangled in short blond hair. Could happen, he likes blond, could be any girl's hair. Somebody is curled into his body. Could happen, could be any girl's body. Except it isn't.

Spike, a very manly vampire is in his bed and he's got his hand in Spike's hair and it's Spike's strong, sexy, undead body his arms are wrapped around.

Whoever said “deal with a situation you can't deal with one fact after another” has never, ever been in such a situation!!!

At least, they aren't naked and he doesn't feel sticky and hey, Tara was there, too. He remembers that much. Good. Three friends sharing a bed, no big deal at all. Everything's great. He's even done that with Willow and Buffy once. Wow, he'd had hundreds of wicked fantasies after that. Just why isn't he cuddled up to Tara? And why is Spike cuddling with him? And why does he like it? He could cry, really cry over so much betrayal. His own body is betraying him by liking this, this... cuddling with Spike!

He remembers Tara's words from the evening before: It doesn't matter who you love, it's the love that matters. Just great, she's got an evil plan, trying to set him up! But Spike is a demon, he is undead, and he is a man – isn't it weird, that the manly parts are only placed third in the panic-scale?

It's not that bad, really. You can have a lot of fun with a man. At least, millions of girls and women chose a man to be with, they can't all be wrong, can they? A man doesn't want to talk relationship in the middle of the night or after sex. Oh, sex, he's not entirely sure how that's supposed to work. He can imagine the kissing part - but where does he leave his hands if there aren't boobs to seek out? He's gotta ask Spike --- actually, that is the last thing he wants to talk with Spike about.

Slowly, but not unkindly, Xander untangles himself from Spike. All the time he keeps his eyes shut. He doesn't need even more proof of how sexy bedhair!Spike is.

At a secure distance with his feet on the floor and his back to Spike, he can open his eyes and greet the day. Tara is in the living room, watching him curiously. He wants to say good morning to her, but "I am not freaking." is what comes out of his mouth. Tara smiles her big, understanding smile. "Of course not. There's

nothing to freak out about.”

“There isn’t?” Puzzled, Xander stares at her.

“You fell asleep. You’re not responsible for what your body does when you sleep.”

“Right!” He grins. “My body is responsible, not me.”

Faking sleep is getting harder and harder for Spike over the conversation of Xander and Tara, he bites his lip to prevent himself from chuckling.

“Yeah, your subconscious is in control of your body and tries to fulfil the wishes and desires you deny yourself when awake.”

“Yes, my subconscious has all the control, making me do things I don’t allow myself to do when awake... hey! That is not a good thing!” Xander stares at the giggling Tara.

“That is not fair. You’re an evil girl, Tara!” With that, he - half joking, half in earnest - flees from the living room into the bathroom. Why are things so complicated? Or better, why is it so hard to admit certain things to oneself?

“You’re a mean girl, Glinda.” Spike says, as soon as Xander leaves the room.

Tara smiles cheekily. “Thought you were asleep.”

“Of course you did.” He grins, not taking her seriously.

“Harris’ getting his knickers all in a twist over some bit of man on man snogging.”

“Guess William felt the same... confusion about it once upon a time.” Tara replies and keeps on smiling evenly. Spike swallows hard on being brought back to a series of memories he’d buried deeply inside him. In addition, he is shocked that Tara has so efficiently shut him up and made him understand what Harris is going through this moment.

“Ah, bloody hell. It’s not as it was then. Liking a bloke was... unthinkable. You couldn’t meet a girl without some stupid chaperone. William was, I was, we’ve been stupidly romantic – Angelus taught us what’s what.”

“But you’ve been a demon – you didn’t mind the...” Tara trails off when Spike’s expression hardens.

“I am still a demon, nothing’s gonna change that.” Spike

jumps up from the bed, his inner turmoil obvious. He shrugs on his duster. "Rape and torture isn't anything a demon enjoys - if it's done to it." He makes to leave, carefully avoiding the sunlight in the living area of the room, when Xander comes back.

"Where're you going."

"Out."

"Geez... sunlight?"

"Sewer entry in that work space of yours."

"You'll be back?"

"Not my friggin' mom you are."

"Why do I care anyway? It's not like you're worth it, is it?" Xander shrugs, not able to keep his disappointment of Spike leaving from making ugly words come out of his mouth.

Without another word Spike stalks down the stairs, swallowing repeatedly to get the mix of anger, disappointment and hurt down his throat that's making his eyes sting. Finally, at the sewer entrance he rips open

the lid and jumps in it and for a moment he feels like Jesus when he found out he could walk on water. Then the absolute frustration catches up with him and releases itself in a primal growl from the depth of his chest.

Broum sees the vampire hovering over the open entrance of the sewer tunnel and flinches at the growl that rises from the vampire. He's still William the Bloody and, for him as a demon, a real threat. The chip wouldn't prevent any damage. However, he never counted himself a coward, so he speaks: "Nothing comes in, nothing gets out. It's a spell to prevent us, this, from damage."

"Lift it!"

"Can't. Had someone set it up. You'll have to wait until nightfall if you don't wanna burn."

"Is that William?" Garld yells from the shop and comes through the door only seconds later. "Oh William – why don't you stay here for a while – I have so many questions. Oh, I got some blood for you, too."

Just barely, Spike catches himself before remembering how Broum and Garld had taken him in and supported Xander. He can't go anywhere anyway and it's his chance

to get away from Xander and Glinda for a while since both of them think he's gone already.

"You don't happen to have some booze, too?" He grins and goes over to Garld, then puts an arm around her. "William the bloody at your service."

Broum grins and follows them into the shop.

## **Part Eighteen**

"Thought, you were gone." Xander squeaks, when he finds Spike, Garld and Broum sitting in the small kitchenette downstairs.

"So did I, mate." Spike flips and shrugs, demonstrating disinterest by turning away.

"I'm going." Xander says, unsure why he feels so relieved that Spike's still around and, at the same time, is bothered by Spike's presence. "I mean, I work. I'll be

back, I mean, at work in the back... urgh” Frustrated, he turns and flees into the workshop.

“S got his knickers all in a twist. Didn’t do a thing to him.” Spike says to Garld and Broum who look at him amused. “Not planning to do anything to him anyway. I’m out of here as soon as the sun sets.”

“Course you are. Someone could think you’re all tamed and kept on leash, couldn’t they.” Broum fills Spike’s shot glass again.

The vampire downs it without hesitation and holds it out again. “Tamed! Pffft.” he scoffs.

Garld grins at Broum evilly before speaking: “Someone could think you’d a pet human at your beck and call – domestic luxury. Gotten into the slayer’s inner circle – gotten impunity...”

Broum bites the inside of his cheeks to keep from laughing. His wife is evil when she wants something. Spike downs another shot clearly thinking deeply about the options this situation offers him. “Maybe –there’s just one failure in your plan. Boy’s not going to want me staying here.” Spike says and rolls his eyes at Garld. She didn’t think she could get him this easily, did she?

“Boy has been awfully quiet and lonely before this”  
Broum holds up his hand, pointy finger and thumb showing three inches “thing. I rather like him all freaked out rather than depressed. I can find things for you to do, get some money for yourself, have an excuse to be around...”

“Nah” Spike holds out his glass, gets it filled and then drinks the whisky down before setting the glass on the table forcefully. “I’m going to go tell him the good news. Thanks for the liquid courage.” Spike winks at Garld and stands up and leaves for the back room in one fluent movement.

When Spike comes stomping through the door, Xander can’t help but feel threatened. Spike’s impressive when he’s determined, all hard edges and sharp movements. Before Xander can react at all Spike has pressed him up on the workbench, his slim hips between Xander’s thighs, his hands on the work bench, wrists touching Xander’s hips. Xander’s breath stutters when Spike leans in, eyes straying down to Xander’s lips before meeting Xander’s eyes again.

“Tell you something so you listen closely, alright?”  
Xander swallows, hard, throat suddenly gone dry,

reduced to nodding dumbly. “I’m staying. I’m staying here, I’m staying with you.”

Xander’s eyes open wide in disbelief – he’s just not sure whether Spike’s staying feels like a good or a bad thing. “You... what makes you say that... I mean...”

Spike interrupts him with a hard frown, eyes going to slits for a second. “You want to know why?” Spike asks, voice like a sword, blue eyes burning.

Xander’s heart finds a way to beat even faster, he can feel his palms getting wet and his body starts shaking. Fight or flight – a life altering moment. He nods, barely.

Spike smirks, eyes flickering gold for a fraction of time. “There is exactly one reason and only one reason. Never,” Spike growls when Xander’s eyes look down. Xander adjusts, staring, sinking into the emotional swirl of gold and blue. “Never let anybody tell you differently. I stay because,” Spike grabs Xander’s hips roughly, yanks Xander against his body, lips only an inch away from Xander’s so the boy feels Spike’s breath puffing over them. “Because you – are – mine. Mine. Understood?”

Xander whimpers, overwhelmed, eyes full of scared relief and it’s enough of an answer for Spike. He leans in and

puts his lips to Xander's mouth, tongue demanding entry roughly and getting it. Xander moans into the kiss and his arm comes up – involuntarily – to cup around Spike's neck and pull him deeper into himself. Hardness grinds against him and for a second he feels like he might panic but then he feels his own hardness wanting just the same and that must be okay then. Spike has a strong grip on his hips and it feels just right, not too hard but hard enough and he wonders just when exactly he decided it was alright to be Spike's.

“I want to taste you.” Spike murmurs in the kiss, takes away his tongue that feels so incredible – cool – against Xander's. Xander complains with noises, not with words and Spike's tongue comes back, stroking inside his mouth like a hard shaft could ... – all thoughts leave when Xander feels Spike's fingers opening his pants, pulling down his zipper, they find their way under his boxers and close around Xander who arches upwards. “Let me taste you, luv.” Spike nearly begs and pulls his mouth from Xander's hot lips. “Okay, okay, yeah.” Xander breathes in time with each thrust of Spike's fist and lets his head fall back, turns it a little to the side, trusting, baring his throat to the vampire.

Unaware of that display of trust, that invitation, Spike follows with his mouth to where his eyes are fixated

already. Unable to process the feeling, expecting the biting pain, Xander cries out when his hardness is engulfed in cool, wet silk. His head snaps forward, looking down into blue eyes burning with lust and want and need, sharp cheekbones that stick out even more now Spike's mouth is working, sucking, licking on him.

Involuntarily, Xander thrusts forward, he can't help it, but Spike doesn't draw back, doesn't pull away, just takes him in deeper. Xander's hand tangles in the short blonde hair and instead of pushing Spike back as intended, because that can't be comfortable to take him inside this deeply, he holds Spike's head and arches upwards, burying the vampire's nose into his black crisp curls and comes, shooting down Spike's throat, one, two, three-four times.

Xander is still trying to get his bearings while Spike zips him up.

"Your taste is delicious, Xander." Spike purrs and kisses him again. Xander can taste himself in Spike's mouth. "Spike, I..." Xander starts between kisses and Spike calms him. "Ssh, boy, you're mine. Nothing that can change that and you won't want to because you know it's the truth." Spike whispers and looks intently into Xander's eyes. Beneath the obvious worry and fear Spike can see

curiosity and longing. It won't be long until Xander will understand too, that he belongs to Spike now.

"I have to think about this." Xander says and tries to put some distance between them. Spike takes a step back, lets Xander jump down from the work bench. "I can't just... turn gay!" The boy squeaks, embarrassment reddening his face. Spike chuckles. He had thought about a thousand arguments Xander might come up with at this point of their relationship like vampire, undead, soulless, tried to kill him and his friends, tried it often, everything – but not the issue of being straight, gay, bi or whatever.

"This is not funny in the least, Spike!" Xander yells and gets into Spike's face, grabs the lapels of the vampire's duster and shakes him. Spike's hands automatically go to Xander's hips, pulling the boy flush against him and suddenly Xander's arms are over Spike's shoulders, holding the vampire in an intimate embrace. Xander stares down into Spike's face, the blue eyes sparkling with challenge and lust. Spike grinds his still hard shaft against Xander's body and moans, lips falling open, irises darkening. The sense of power Xander possesses over this supernatural, mighty creature brings headiness. Then there is a flash of memory... Spike's lips which were just minutes ago wrapped around his cock, giving so much pleasure to him, are now waiting for him. The tip

of Spike's tongue peeks out, wetting lips for the inevitable just before Xander – carefully – takes his own to Spike's mouth to seek out a completely new world of sexual entertainment.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Unnoticed by the kissing couple, Garld and Broum are watching them through the left-open door. “See, they're kissing again and this time Xander initiated it!” she whispers at her husband who glares, teasing her.

“Wouldn't call the things they did before 'kissing' even if lips were definitely involved.” Garld hides her giggles in her hand and Broum rolls his eyes. “You're a bad girl, Garli, even in your old age.” Broum whispers in her ear, using that voice and Garld smiles, eyes twinkling.

“You should know. The older the better.”

Broum growls at her and grabs her, pulling her away into the office. “Your office now. Or do I have to pull you by your hair?”

## Part Nineteen

A couple of days later, they help Tara move her stuff to another dorm. She shares her room with a shy girl who has more technical literature than cosmetics and Spike approves, after some not so subtle sniffing around.

Amilia, so Tara says the shy girl is called, is totally freaked out by the gay Billy-Idol-Wannabe and flees as fast as she can.

Spike in the meantime has managed to move his few personal belongings into Xander's apartment and come to an arrangement with Garld and Broum. Just a bit of neighbourhood patrol and shop/house protection, something Spike actually *likes* to do.

There hasn't been anything happening between Spike and Xander since that incident on the workbench. Spike explained it away with Tara's presence, but now she's gone and Xander still hasn't made a move or let Spike make one. Xander busies himself with all kinds of stuff and they're practically never alone. He even manages to

go to Buffy's house and lets her stomp over him a few times for helping Spike regain his normal size. It has taken all of Spike's self control (and remembrance of the chip) to not lash out at her. Xander stank of resigned disappointment all night. He didn't let Spike make it better.

Tonight though, Spike will get more of his nummy treat. No excuses allowed.

The walk back from Tara's new dorm room is silent. Both of them are strung tight with expectations and Xander clears his throat twice, but doesn't manage to start a conversation. Spike's terrible at waiting. He wants to just fuck the boy into the ground and ask consent later. All this emotional crap is pretty redundant when the facts are clear. Xander is *his* and Xander will want him just as much as he wants Xander. Spike has learned a few things about humans and he knows they tend to get rather *loud* when they're disagreeing. He doesn't want Xander afraid – he wants him insane with lust and precome-dripping-hard for him *all the time*.

Going up the stairs with Spike behind him feels like the last walk a man takes, the walk towards execution. Xander's body hums with excitement and lust but he's so damn scared at the same time that he's shaking. Spike

can't and won't ever be some kind of one-night-stand. Spike is an all consuming tasmanian devil that brings chaos to everything until you don't know which way is up. Saying *yes* to Spike is saying *yes to Spike for forever*. He's not sure he wants to be a vampire – ever – but maybe he's thinking this through a bit too far already.

Xander sticks the key into the lock and opens the door, goes inside the apartment and towards the drawn curtains without switching on any light. It's dark outside and he likes to see the stars and the moon just as much as he likes to feel the sun on his skin. Spike's behind him, breathing on his neck, before Xander lets go of the thick velvet material. Xander shivers and stops breathing while his heart hammers out a staccato of longing. He stares at the moon while Spike continues just breathing on his skin.

Spike stands close enough to soak up Xander's heat, but he doesn't touch him at all. He listens to Xander's pounding heart and the blood flowing fast through the boy's veins. He inhales the boy's scent deeply; fear and longing coated with desire. It takes every bit of will power from Spike to wait for Xander's resolve.

*Now or never*, Xander thinks and he starts breathing again, pants actually, hitched and fast. "Come here." he

finally says, voice supernaturally low, and fumbles for Spike's hand without looking.

Spike closes in, hands on Xander's hipbones, his already hard shaft grinding into Xander's backside. He's not letting the boy go again, not after this. He's said yes and Spike'll make sure he won't regret it. Spike breathes, his chest expanding against Xander's back, matching the fast rhythm of the boy's panting. Slowly, Spike dips his head to the side, kisses Xander's neck and flicks his tongue out, tasting skin sweet like chocolate. Xander moans, a short helpless, lusty noise from the back of his throat.

After that, things get out of control and Xander is as frantic as Spike to get skin on skin. They pull off each other's clothes and curse when buttons don't open fast enough. Soon, they're on the floor, the carpet is scratchy on Xander's knees and elbows. Xander is hungry for Spike's mouth and the vampire revels in the warmth spreading from the body above him. They're naked and rubbing against each other, seeking friction and fulfilment and there's this point, which Xander wants to get closer to, but doesn't know how and his helplessness frustrates him, makes him bite hard at Spike's lips and push down on Spike's shoulders even more.

A warning growl from Spike and another, shortly before the vampire flips them so Xander's back is on the carpet. Xander's breath catches, his lust-darkened eyes fixing on golden ones above him, supernatural features highlighted by pale moonlight. "Take me, please. Take me," Xander whispers and Spike hears the desperation in it, hears the want to give up choices.

"You're mine." Spike states, this time it's even more true than two days ago. "Mine forever." he repeats and holds the boy with just enough force to make Xander feel safe, bound.

"I need you... I want to..." Xander doesn't feel ashamed anymore, doesn't feel wrong or gay. Everything is brand new and he doesn't know how to voice what he wants, that's all.

"Oh, we'll get there. Don't worry, pet." Spike smiles, and nips at Xander's collarbone with human teeth, making the boy shudder under him. His hand sneaks out and finds lube in his duster's pocket. The click of the cap is unnaturally loud and there is fear *ice-cold* in Xander's belly but Spike feels that, soothes him. "Going to make you feel good, pet. Don't worry. Trust me."

“I trust you.” Xander whispers and makes Spike look at him. “I trust you.” he says again because he *needs* to say that. Spike *needs* to know that. The smile Spike gives him is beautiful and the kiss that follows takes away every thought from his mind but *more*.

Xander wants more and Spike offers everything and they’re both taking all they can have.

Fingers find *that* place and beg to be let in and Xander’s moans and breathy whimpers ask them in. Two fingers soon become three and Xander hasn’t felt this vulnerable and protected at the same time ever before. He claws on Spike’s shoulders when the vampire finally settles between his spread thighs and guides himself inside.

For a second, it nearly hurts. It’s a slow burn that grows to unknown pleasure with each following stroke. Sometimes Spike hits him so deeply inside that Xander explodes in delight and groans frantically, wanting more of that exactly. He holds onto Spike and urges him on, with kisses and bites and scratches and heels digging in, Xander makes the vampire pump harder and stronger inside his body until they’re both losing control completely and unload their lust.

The moon creeps from its hiding place beneath some clouds and lights up the room, showing stunned awe on

both their faces. It's Xander who wraps his hand around Spike's neck, plays with the hair there, then pulls Spike down and kisses him – slowly.

Spike pushes his tongue deeply inside Xander's mouth, tastes true devotion and satisfaction for the first time in his whole existence and his non-beating heart feels warm.

They make it into the shower with each other's help. Carpet burns are a bitch, even with vampire healing, and Spike kneels down to make Xander's ass cheeks feel better. His cool hands are soothing even under the hot stream of water. Spike's tongue is wicked and Xander shoots his load against the tiles after only a couple of minutes.

All the pulling on Spike's hair has gotten all the gel-stuff out of it and when they're lying side by side in bed, the TV's light flickering blue over them, Xander plays with the natural curls at the nape of Spike's neck until the vampire falls asleep – or pretends to by stopping all movement and *breathing*. Not long after that, Xander's eyelids can't withstand gravity any longer and he barely wonders for a second why it doesn't feel weird to fall asleep with an undead, manly body curled around him.

Waking up doesn't feel weird either, does feel good actually and the smile Spike directs at him is genuine before it gets dirty. Xander has no time to get embarrassed because Spike engulfs his morning wood deeply in his mouth and makes him pant. Fingers come to make it feel even better and Xander spreads willingly for his lover's hardness, welcoming him deeply inside him – body and heart. The kisses they share this morning are just like the thrusts – slow and intimate.

Xander gasps the moment Spike touches his hard shaft and comes when he feels Spike pulsating inside him. He shudders, taking in the golden eyes and the distorted face of the *vampire* that has imbedded himself inside him in *nearly* every possible way.

There is work to do and Xander leaves after a thousand goodbye kisses, fearing to lose this intimacy with Spike. He doesn't need to worry. As soon as he's back in the early afternoon - after enough teasing from Garld and Broum to last a lifetime about his smile – Spike drags him back into bed and continues where they stopped that morning.

~\*~\*~\*~\*~

Neither of them is surprised when the desperate call comes from Giles the next afternoon, asking them to bring Willow to a coven in England where she can learn control of her magic abilities. However, they are surprised over the fact that Willow asked for help. Looks like Tara had indeed been right with her decision to abandon Willow. Only this way has the redhead realised at the last moment, how important Tara is to her.

## **Part Twenty**

Giles pulled some strings and so it comes that Spike, Xander and Willow are sitting in a closed-off first class compartment of a plane going to London. Well, Willow isn't so much sitting as hanging in the seat, sleeping (*sedated*) and unmoving (*bound tightly*).

Xander keeps staring at Willow as if she'll wake up any moment and open her mouth, spitting filthy things at them for separating her from Tara. Everything had been fine just an hour before take-off when Willow had

suddenly panicked, overreacted and started throwing around curses and threats. While Giles distracted Willow with counter spells, Tara moved in and sedated Willow with a syringe the classic way. Seconds later Willow was out and everybody felt palpably relieved. Tara seemed sad and hopeful in equal amounts and kissed the sleeping Willow on her forehead. "You're gonna be okay. You'll learn to balance and anchor yourself. When you're back we'll make a fresh start. You'll see, it's gonna be perfect. Promise."

The compartment has two pairs of seats facing each other. Spike chooses the seat across from Willow, legs sprawling, carelessly blocking the space between the seats. When Xander tries to step over them Spike pulls him onto his lap.

"Spike, let me up!" Xander complains half-heartedly. He hasn't stopped smiling since *that night* and he can't contain it now either.

"You're gorgeous when you smile like that, pet." Spike says and his fingers find their way into Xander's shaggy brown hair. Spike pulls him down for a deep kiss.

"Stop it. What if Willow wakes up?" Xander struggles to get up from the vampire's lap, but the strong fingers

keep holding him down by his hip. “Or they could see us through the window!”

Chuckling, Spike indicates with the fingers of one hand to the window. “That little thing? They’re lucky if they manage to look at the right window at all!” he says and yells “OW!” suddenly. Xander had used his distraction to bite his other arm in an attempt to loosen his grip.

“What the hell, whelp!” Spike scowls and grabs the youth even harder, while his hand goes to the bite to rub it. At that moment, Xander leans forward and connects *hard* with the vampire’s elbow.

“Ow!” Xander whines and touches his lip. “Damn, it’s bleeding.” Xander mumbles and darts his tongue out to catch the droplets slowly building at the corner of his mouth. “Spike, you don’t have a Kleenex, do you?” Xander asks and lifts his gaze, meeting golden eyes, blazing with lust staring at him. “Erm, Spi-ke?”

Spike grins, evilly. “There’s something I’ve got to tell you, Xanny-boy.” Spike winks at Xander, and then smirks, leaning back while holding onto Xander’s hips harder. Spike pushes up, grinds his crotch against Xander’s a few times until he feels an answering hardness from the boy. “I don’t know why or how or when, but I’ll bet it’s got something to do with Glinda making me all Big Bad

again.” Confused and a little bit scared, Xander keeps staring into the vampire’s true face. “See, she didn’t just make me Big again,” Spike breathes, eyes closing to enjoy another hard grind against Xander’s hard cock, “she made me all Bad again too.”

Xander gasps. For a few seconds his thoughts run in all directions screaming and he can’t think, can’t say anything. The first thing that comes out of his mouth eventually is: “Tara’d never do that.”

“Well, not intentionally, you’d think, but doesn’t matter, does it? I can hurt you now, I can hurt people again.” Spike smirks again and lifts one hand from Xander’s hip to rub his thumb against one elongated tooth.

“Yeah, nice. But – do you?” Xander pauses. He calculates his chances to get away from the vampire, chip or no chip, and comes to the result ‘zero’. No chance. He’s always gonna be Spike’s now. And he always knew that one day the vampire would find a way to lose the chip. He isn’t that naïve. “Do you *want* to hurt people? Do you want to hurt *me*?” The second part comes out more hesitantly than Xander intended.

Spike seems to really consider Xander’s question. He slides back into the human face and holds his body still, his head cocked to the side. “No and no.” he finally

admits before his face falls back into a smirk, eyebrow cocked and blue eyes sparkling. “Only in a good way, that is. Only if you want me to.” He grins and drags Xander down into a kiss that makes the boy forget about the conversation.

Spike, though, grins into the boy’s neck when Xander licks the skin of his shoulder. He really doesn’t want to go back to his old ways, but it’s a relief to know he’ll be able to defend himself and his own again. And, of course, he’ll claim Xander soon, even turn him when the time comes, and nobody’ll touch his boy again without his permission. He makes a note to thank Glinda when they get back.

However, now he’s in an aeroplane (almost) alone with Xander and he’ll not waste this opportunity.

Xander is eager to please him and thankful, with little moans and gasps, for what he receives. Spike makes sure Xander gets more than he hopes for every time. He makes Xander stand up and pull off his clothes as soon as they are high up in the air and the “seat belt” sign goes off. Spike drinks in the sight of Xander naked in front of him, his cock hard and shining with drops of liquid at the top already. Spike smiles and undoes the buttons on his own jeans, he’s as hard as Xander is and his cock strains

forward as soon as the fly is open. “Come here, luv. Turn around, sit on my lap.”

Xander struggles to comply. He’s still wet from the sex in the morning, but facing Willow with Spike’s cock up his ass?

“Come on, luv, ‘s going to be sooo good.” Spike manages to work his thumb into Xander’s ass and works the boy’s cock with the other hand until Xander can’t withstand anymore. Xander needs more to fill him. To be one with Spike has already gotten comfortable and *needed*.

Xander feels achingly empty when Spike pulls back his hands and uses them to hold onto his hips to guide him backwards, guide Xander onto his hardness. They both sigh when Xander is completely seated on Spike’s muscular thighs, the vampire fully sheathed in the human. They rock into each other, Spike talking dirty and Xander answering with moans and groans. He has closed his eyes against the sight of Willow, sedated and bound, on the seat across from them. Kink goes a long way, but not this far.

They’re close to the finish line when Xander feels Spike bite his shoulder, human teeth slowly morphing into vampiric ones and sinking deeply into the muscle there. Xander cries out and comes with the first pull of blood.

Hot white streams shoot from between his own and Spike's tangled fingers, one missing Willow's shoe only by an inch.

It doesn't hurt; Xander hadn't been expecting pain anyway, but somehow he's still surprised. His body is consumed by a burning hotness, that shoots through him, fills every fibre of his being, body, mind and heart with a sense of completeness that's so strong, it's nearly overwhelming.

Spike recognises the taste of Xander's blood immediately from the times the boy had offered him a spoonful of it when he'd been three-inches-small. It's delicious, addictive even. Still, he doesn't drink much, just enough to get a full taste and a nicely filled belly. Spike comes shuddering only moments after Xander; while he imagines, one day, turning him as his childe, his mate, forever.

## **Epilogue**

It takes Willow the better half of a year to get her magic abilities under control. Tara has been in contact with her all the time, using all kinds of media like letters, calls and internet video conferences. She comes back balanced, anchored and more in love with Tara than ever before. Tara has never stopped loving Willow with all her heart and when the redhead returns, Tara takes the witch into a strong embrace and gives her a passionate kiss to the surprise of everybody watching.

Over the months of Willow's absence, Tara has become friends with Garld who proves to be the talented white witch and has the ability to set up the protection spells on the shop and Xander's apartment. Together with Garld, Willow and Tara are three witches, able to form a strong triangle, that helps stabilise Willow and, later on, the Hellmouth against bad spells and rituals.

Spike and Buffy agree on a truce and they each patrol one half of Sunnydale, helping each other out sometimes with the big nasties. In the first week, Spike finds and destroys the group of vampires that tried to trap him and who had been planning to try again. Still he's a bit thankful for their attempt. Without it, he'd never have found his nummy treat.

Spike never moves out of the apartment. He adds to the household by patrolling and with the money he wins in dubious poker games. Xander doesn't mind. He loves the way things like the old wooden chest or the rows of books appear suddenly and fill the apartment with a homey atmosphere. The Scoobies come to visit - after Tara had made even Buffy understand that Spike and Xander now belonged together - and Dawn hangs around a lot, eating pizza and watching videos with them. Xander is happier than ever before. One night with the moon shining through the enormous windows, Spike claims Xander and promises him *forever* whenever he's ready for it.

Forever comes faster than they thought. Despite Spike's efforts to keep Xander safe in Sunnydale, the boy is injured in a car accident in the middle of the day. An old woman not paying attention and Xander crashes against a street light trying to avoid hitting her car. There is something wrong with his legs and Spike really can't concentrate on what Giles is trying to tell him on the phone. Xander is weak in the bond and in pain, he looks pale and fragile on the hospital bed, but he smiles when he sees his mate.

Xander had talked to Willow, Tara and Giles ages ago about the worst case scenario and they'd promised to

help him bind his soul to his body even after his natural death. The only rule had been to make sure that the slayer and her watcher witnessed Xander's consent if possible. Grimly, Buffy and Giles agree when Spike gathers the boy up from the hospital bed.

Spike takes Xander home and makes him *completely his* under the pale light of the moon. Xander awakes with a smile on his new face and love shining from golden eyes. "Forever starts with three inches." Xander lisps through his new set of teeth and Spike laughs, loud and drunken with joy.

The End