There’s Always a Sneer in Vegas
by StillRose

Summary

It’s been seven years since Angelus killed Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Seven years after Angelus opened a portal to hell on Earth. Humans are food, slaves or on the run. There’s hope only in small band of resistance fighters. However, that’s a hope Xander Harris no longer has. It’s been six months since he was taken in a raid. At first Xander thought he was lucky the demons didn’t know who he was; but then that was before he became property to an Azora demon.

Notes

While this an explicit work there is more to it than just hot scenes. This is an epic story with twists, turns and lots of surprises. There are notes peppered through the chapters on various subjects I researched to help build the details of this story. This has been a labor of love taking me countless hours to write. If you like, please leave a comment or kudo. They feed my muse.

Also, I am not the greatest editor. I do my best. However, if you find a grammar/spelling mistake I do welcome comments pertaining to those as well (for editing purposes).
Chapter 1

There is always a sneer in Las Vegas. The mountains around it sneer. The desert sneers. And arrogant in the middle of its wide valley, dominating those diligent sprawling suburbs, the downtown city sneers like anything.

-- Journeys
Jan Morris

Xander was beyond nightmares but, if he wasn't, right now would rank up there with showing up naked to class on Career Day. Of course that presumed there were still schools and that Career Day hadn't been replaced by 'Handy Survival Tips Day.'

Still, being bound naked, oiled with your cock at full mast and being part of the growing 'pot' of a poker game was bad. It was downright scary when one of the players was the Master of Vegas. It was undeniably nightmarish though, when the Master of Vegas was William the Bloody, a.k.a. Spike.

Xander would have groaned, but it would only have come out as a soft puff of air. It’s hard to groan when your voice has been stripped away.

'Bottles' are made mute after their first ‘tapping.’

Xander tried to force those hated words from his memory. It was better to concentrate on what was at stake; namely himself.

Don’t think about it, Xander thought and focused his eyes on his master’s ‘hand.’ Two smooth grey tentacles held five cards out in front of the large dark grey blob that was Xander’s master. His master had two pair; a pair of red queens, a pair of aces and the two of diamonds.

Least I’m probably staying in the pan and not going into the fire, Xander thought while glancing across the table toward the Master of Vegas. Sapphire blue eyes met Xander’s khol lined brown eyes. A blond eyebrow arched and a triumphant combination of a sneer and a smile flashed across Spike’s face.

Xander swallowed reflexively. Oh ghod! Xander thought. It may be getting hotter in here.

A slight loosening around Xander’s penis forced Xander’s attention away from Spike and back to his master. The Azora demon was slightly relaxing its tentacle which was serving as a living cock ring. The end of the grey tentacle was sliding smoothly down Xander’s hardened cock.

Xander closed his eyes. This was just one of many tortures in his life. Xander knew his master was about to ‘tap’ him or milk him. While that would finally give Xander some relief he hated it more than his forced runs twice a day or the sensory deprivation punishments in ‘the Tank.’

Xander could feel a bead of precum forming at the tip of his penis. Another one of his master’s seven tentacles reached out to taste his ‘bottle’s’ first offering of the night.
“Oi!” Spike’s voice boomed across the table. “No sampling the dosh!”

Xander heard the odd series of clicks and gurgling that were his master’s language. Xander opened his eyes.

“Semen’s thicker but not too different from blood,” Spike replied to the Azora demon. “When I win this ‘bottle,’ I want all of it. I want every last drop; blood and all.”

Xander’s master gurgled another response and then withdrew the one tentacle while tightening the other. Xander nearly winced as the base of his cock was squeezed tight. However the end of the same tentacle continued to stroke and fondle Xander’s dick.

For the second time that night Xander wished he could groan or even better, curse. Xander shot another look at Spike.

Thanks, you dumb blond, Xander thought, as the heavy drop at the end of his penis grew heavier. Ya think there’s only one tentacle Azoras use to drink?

Xander looked down at his cock just as the precum began to dribble down. Sure enough his master had positioned his third tentacle to be ready to catch any stray drops.

Ah, yes, Xander thought bitterly, Dom XanMan. It’s a fine year. First bottled in 1981 and aged twenty three years before it’s first ‘tapping.’

Xander looked back at Spike. He was surprised to see the vampire’s gaze was not fixed on his cards or the large pot of booty in the center of the table. Nope, Spike’s eyes were looking at Xander’s cock.

Great! If the Blond Boobshell wins he’s gonna suck me off before he ‘sucks me off,’ Xander thought.

A genuine full on Spike sneer formed on the vampire’s face before gold tinted blue eyes suddenly focused on Xander’s master. Xander sucked in his breath. Spike’s pissed... and not in the English way, Xander thought. Well… ok… maybe in the English way too but definitely in the American way and that’s so n...

Xander’s thoughts were suddenly interrupted when Spike’s eyes once again met his. Spike narrowed his eyes and seemed on the verge of growling.

Hey! Xander thought, don’t blame me! I’m the one fed a strict diet of natural libido ‘enhancers’ and not allowed to play happy with Rosy Palms and her magic fingers in the weeks between ‘milking’... otherwise known as a series of tentacle rapes... and can I just say; Ew? And of course that would be would be a big ‘FU*%ING NO’ I can’t cuz they fuckin’ took away my voice and now you wanna blame me for the chubby with...

“Mate,” Spike’s voice purred dangerously and interrupted Xander’s borderline hysterical thoughts. “There’s no cheating of any kind at the Slayer’s End casino.”

“Grxnrl’kr,” Xander’s master gurgled as his third tentacle retreated while the end of his fourth tentacle ceased to torment Xander. Xander looked at Spike who smirked back at him before focusing his attention back on his cards.

How the hell did he know? Xander wondered and began to really look at the master vampire.
“I’ll raise you a pair of seer’s eyes,” Spike said, as he slid a small box into the center of the table. The box lid was open and Xander could clearly see two green eyes nestled in the box’s silk liner.

Xander swallowed his bile and continued to study Spike. The vampire didn’t look any different than Xander remembered from Xander’s high school days. However, Xander wasn’t sure. More than the memories of Xander’s first ‘tapping’ and more than punishment time in ‘the Tank,’ Xander tried to repress his memories from ‘Before.’

Remembering the time Before meant remembering Buffy. Remembering the time Before meant thinking of Angelus. Thinking of the time Before meant remembering thinking Buffy could beat Angelus and shattering the Orb of Thesulah against the wall of Willow’s hospital room to stop her from restoring Angel’s soul. Remembering the time Before meant remembering that Xander had been wrong, wrong and way wrong.

Xander shook his head to free himself of the creeping memories. The deep gurgling rumbling from Xander’s master quickly reminded him, ‘Bottles don’t move when on display.’ It was a reminder that Xander had been given often. It was a reminder usually followed by punishment when Xander was returned to his master’s vault.

Xander resumed his study of Spike while forcing his body to be still and not shudder. If Spike lost, then Xander was going to be spending some more time in ‘the Tank.’ Maybe this time it would be the visit that finally rendered Xander as glassy eyed and empty as the few other ‘bottles’ Xander had seen at his master’s dinner parties or poker nights.

A slight tilt of Spike’s head recaptured Xander’s attention. It looked like Spike was listening to someone. Who or what is he listening to? Xander thought.

Xander scanned the casino room as much as he could without moving his head. The poker game had drawn quite the crowd. All demons present seemed focused on the game. All the humans present were focused on pleasing their demon masters or being drained dry.

Xander kept his focus away from the humans. He watched the demons.

A sharp dressed demon with green skin, a long nose, small red horns sprouting from his forehead and red eyes caught Xander’s attention. It would have been amazing if Xander hadn’t noticed the strange demon.

The smiling green demon was in the back of the room and held a tall glass with a pale red liquid in it. The glass was in front of the demon’s mouth as if he was about to drink; but his lips were moving slightly as if he was whispering something.

“I’m out,” snarled a pale demon from the poker table. The demon had long antler horns and yellow eyes.

Xander’s master let out a series of clicks and placed a yellowed scroll on the table next to Xander’s collar. The green demon appeared to whisper something behind his drink. Spike smiled.

“I’ll call mate,” Spike said as he placed a stained glass bottle with a silver stopper in the middle of the table.

The green demon appeared to whisper again and then this time took a long slow sip from his glass.
No cheating my well oiled ass! Xander thought as he looked at Spike.

Spike returned Xander’s gaze with an arrogant smile Xander remembered from Before.

Laugh it up you Billy Idol wannabe! Xander thought. I remember how you looked the many times Buffy beat your ‘not-so-arrogant-now’ ass.

Spike’s head tilted and he arched his eyebrow. His eyes narrowed as he looked at Xander. For a moment Xander thought Spike was reading his mind and he paled.

“Xrxlge snik,” said Xander’s master as it laid its cards on the table.

Xander took some small satisfaction when Spike paled as he saw the Azora demon’s cards. Spike’s smile faltered and he shifted in his seat.

“Pair a queens and aces, eh?” Spike said. “That’s a right canny hand.”

“Nxgrl urk,” Xander’s master said.

Spike folded his cards into a small pile and laid them face down on the table.

“That’s really quite a good hand,” Spike said, before turning the small pile face up revealing a five of spades.

“Qxkr’rgl,” said the Azora demon. Xander knew all too well that meant his master was well pleased. Once again the grey tentacle began to stroke Xander’s cock. Another tentacle began to twine up Xander’s leg. The tip began to burrow between Xander’s butt cheeks and tunnel towards Xander’s hidden pucker.

Xander struggled to remain absolutely still while keeping his ass relaxed. Milking time was near.

“Too bad the hand ain’t quite good enough,” Spike said, as he slowly fanned out the small pile of cards in front of him.

The coiled tentacle stroking Xander suddenly stilled as Xander’s master studied Spike’s hand. A pair of black kings and the other two aces were spread out in front of the smiling vampire.

Spike scooted his chair back and stood up. He grabbed Xander’s collar from the center of the table and moved towards his new prize.

The coils around Xander’s cock and leg quickly retreated. Xander gasped and closed his eyes at the sudden release of pressure from around his hard dick. Xander almost came but the feel of the collar closing around his neck stopped him. Spike had said he wanted every drop of Xander and Xander didn’t want to risk punishment from Spike. Azora demons found non physical punishments for disobedient bottles. They didn’t do anything that might put their bottle’s ‘flavor’ or ‘potency’ off.

Xander was pretty sure Spike had no problem with physical punishments. That probably just increased the ‘flavor,’ Xander thought.

Xander opened his eyes as the sudden smell of whiskey, smoke and leather surrounded him. Spike’s blue eyes were inches away from Xander.
Spike smiled and then shook his head.

**FUCK!** Xander thought, as his new master morphed into his demon face.

Then Xander felt a strong cool hand wrap around Xander’s still blood engorged penis. Xander’s eyes widened as Spike smiled grotesquely around his fangs.

Suddenly Xander found himself longing to be back in his former master’s vault or at one of his master’s parties. Xander even began to think of the Tank less as a punishment and more like an asylum as Spike started to firmly stroke Xander’s cock.

Xander hissed as Spike rubbed a thumb over Xander’s slit. Spike chuckled and did it again. Xander fought the increasing pressure in his balls as hard as he had the night he was first ‘tapped.’ Yet Xander knew it was no use as Spike leaned close and sped up his pace.

A tingle shot up from the base of Xander’s spine. Xander gasped and started twitching his hips slightly. Xander started to cum as he began fucking Spike’s hand with as much movement as he dared.

*Oh ghod… Oh ghod…* Xander silently chanted through his orgasm as he spurted hot liquid over Spike’s sinful fingers. Spike’s hand continued to stroke and caress Xander until Xander’s breath slowed and his hips stilled.

“Looked like you needed that, pet,” Spike whispered, before he backed away and snapped his fingers.

Xander watched dazedly as a well endowed naked woman with a collar quickly brought Spike a napkin. Spike made a show of wiping Xander’s cum off his hand and then throwing the napkin down on the table in front of Xander’s former master.

Xander heard the Azora’s gurgle of distress. Two vampire minions with Spike’s infamous sigil on their uniforms suddenly approached Xander. Each took an arm and began to lead Xander away from the table and towards the back of the room.

Xander risked turning his head to shoot a parting glance at his old master. *Guess you’ll have to get drunk on someone else’s spunk,* Xander thought.

Then Xander looked straight ahead. As Xander was marched through the crowded casino he held his head high and dared to stare at the other demons. Many growled, snarled or hissed at him. The green demon with the red horns winked and held up his glass in a silent toast.

The minions halted in front of an elevator. *Going up?* Xander wondered, *Or going down?*

**Author’s note:** The title is a paraphrase of Jan Morris’ quote. I really liked the quote. It made me think of Spike. I did some research on Jan Morris (I didn’t know who she was) and she turns out to be a fascinating person as well as an acclaimed author. Her Wikipedia entry is [here](http://example.com).
Chapter 2

Lorne was waiting for Spike by the time Spike had made it to his office. Spike dismissed his perfunctionary security detail with the wave of his hand. They closed the burnished cherry doors behind them.

“Well that went well,” Lorne said with a hint of sarcasm.

“Wot?” Spike asked as he fished his cigarettes from his coat before sitting behind his large oak desk.

“Spike, lemon drop, could you not smoke?” Lorne asked as he looked disdainfully at the cigarette Spike held in his hand ready to light. “You know those cancer sticks are hell on the pipes.”

“My office,” Spike smiled and said as he lit his cigarette, inhaled deeply and then let out a large cloud of smoke.

Lorne coughed and shot a dirty look at Spike.

“Now, what’s got yer knickers in a twist?”

“Rubbing in Vr’xkl’s loss like that? You think that’s really the way to influence the fiendish and win over the demonic?”

Spike smiled, “I’m the Big Bad.”

“Spike, snookums,” Lorne said as he slid a crystal ashtray across Spike’s desk, “We have enough enemies. Would it hurt to not make any more?”

Spike took another drag of his cigarette and leaned back in his chair, “Yer just upset about the ‘boy.’”

Lorne averted his eyes and took a sip of the ever present drink in his hand.

“Better keep those soft feelings in check,” Spike warned as he leaned forward and tapped his fingers on the lid of the box containing the seer’s eyes. Another of Spike’s minions had brought the rest of Spike’s poker loot to his office earlier.

“Remember what soft feelings got Doyle,” Spike continued and inhaled another deep breath of smoke.

Lorne winced and slammed his drink back. “There’s nothing about Doyle I’ll forget,” Lorne said as he continued to avert his eyes from the small wooden box.

Spike rested his cigarette against the side of the crystal ashtray and then reached for the scroll won from the Azora demon.

“We got what we wanted,” Spike said as unrolled the parchment. “We’ve finally found the Manuscript of Steganographia signed by Trithemius.”

“Can you read it?” Lorne asked as he moved to stand behind Spike to look over the vampire’s shoulder at the yellow parchment. The script was indecipherable and unfamiliar.

“No,” Spike sighed. “But I think I know of someone who can.”
Lorne looked up as if he could see into Spike’s private suites the next floor up.

“Harris?” Spike laughed as he saw where Lorne was looking and suggesting. “I doubt he can read anything but comic books. At least that’s all I remember him reading.”

“You know him?” Lorne asked as he moved out from behind Spike and sat down in the leather chair across from Spike’s desk.

“Don’t play coy, mate,” Spike answered. “Those hoo doo powers of your already told you that.”

Lorne flushed a dark green and said, “Yes, but they didn’t tell me how, lemon drop.”

Spike just smiled and picked up his cigarette for another drag.

“The boy’s damaged but not broken,” Lorne offered trying to get his friend and only ally to reveal more. “He’s not been trained to be like most demon slaves.”

Spike nodded and said, “I noticed.”

“Spikey, what are you planning to do with him?”

“Well first thing,” Spike said as he ground out his cigarette in the ashtray, “I’m going to fix him up proper as my new pet.”

Lorne paled. “You’re not serious.”

“Deadly,” Spike said with a sneer.

“Listen my blondie patootie, don’t you think your grand sire Angelus sour-cakes is going to have something to say, not to mention do about that?”

“Countin’ on it,” Spike replied.

“You just looking for another reason to hate him or is this some sort of perverse game?” Lorne asked in exasperation. “You know any pet you take Angelus is just going to….”

“Not this one,” Spike interrupted.

“Why not?”

“Cuz he gave Harris to me years ago.”

“What?” Lorne said nearly standing up out of his seat.

“Well, ok,” Spike smiled as he once again leaned back in his chair, “his soul was in control at the time. He offered me the slayer’s donut boy as a ruse…”

“The slayer?” Lorne asked.

Spike nodded. “Buffy. The one who shagged Angel, made his soul go poof and then ended up on the wrong side of his blade.”

“The boy was her….”

“Friend. Donut boy. Puppy. And Angel thought he could fool me by dragging the boy around by the neck and offering him to me. Just because it was the soul doesn’t make the offer less binding or
valid.”

Lorne sighed and then shook his head, “Look, sweet cheeks, you think Angelus is going to just accept that logic? I gotta say, Angelus is one demon who I wouldn’t put past using the old non compos mentis logic to rescind the offer and pluck your pet awa…."

“Ah,” Spike as he leaned forward and raised as finger in the air, “but combine that offer with a claim…."

“Again. You. Can’t. Be. Serious!”

Spike arched an eyebrow.

“The boy…man can’t even talk!” Lorne exclaimed. “Even if you are serious and can some how convince him to accept the claim, how can you do it?”

“So the talking isn’t part of the training?” Spike asked with the first hint of wavering confidence.

“Oh, believe me lemon drop,” Lorne said, “If that one had been able to talk, his master would have had to shove one of those tentacles down his throat to keep him quiet.”

“Is it from a spell or physical damage?” Spike asked.

Lorne sighed, “I don’t know.”

Spike leaned back and thought for a moment.

“Find out,” Spike finally ordered.

“What?”

“Find out,” Spike said again. “I wanna know everything about what Azoras do to their bottles. Find out how they took his voice, how they trained him, even what they fed him.”

“Spikey,” Lorne said, “assuming for the moment I wanted to subject myself to the cafeteria of thoughts and emotions of an Azora demon expounding about his bottle collection, what makes you think Vr’xkl is going to want to share with your floor manager after the performance you put on tonight?”

Spike grinned and said, “Because. A: My floor manager could chat up a Fury out of her True name and b: Vr’xkl’s going to want an ‘in’ to help him find a way to get his manuscript and bottle back.”

Lorne shook his head, sighed and then said, “For you, lemon drop, I’ll see what I can do.”

Spike grinned then looked back at the scroll in front of him.

“You really think that may lead us to the Key?” asked Lorne.

Spike shrugged and said, “Not sure, but Angelus believes it does.”

“You know he’s gonna find out you have it.”

Spike nodded then said, “Yeah, especially since he ordered me to get it.”

Lorne blinked in surprise then said, “You going to be able to get it translated before you give it to him?”
Spike shook his head then said, “But then again, I’m not givin’ it ta him….”

“Spike!” Lorne shouted. “You can’t openly defy him on something like this! You’ll lose all that you’ve gained since….”

Spike held up a warning finger then growled, “’M not givin’ him the manuscript until I can get it copied and before I discover it’s not in quite the top condition as we thought.”

“Spike, lemon drop. This. Is. Dangerous!”

“But fun,” Spike grinned.

“Don’t leave me to sweep you up with a dustbuster. You know how I hate menial labor,” Lorne warned.

Spike laughed then said, “Trust me.”

“I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t,” Lorne said soberly then added, “but just because I trust you doesn’t mean I don’t know your history with plans.”

“Right,” Spike reluctantly acknowledged then said, “but this time it’ll be different.”

Lorne grinned and shook his head then said, “I know this is gonna make my head hurt more than a six martini lunch but, why claim the human?”

“Harris. Xander Harris,” Spike said.

“Ok, why claim Xander if it’s not just to piss of Angelus?”

“I told you,” Spike answered, “he used to be the slayer’s donut boy.”

“That was one slayer and seven years ago of which the last six months the bo…Xander has been forced to ejaculate at demon parties and games to keep his master well buzzed.” Lorne shuddered then began to mutter. “Really, if the Azora would just try a good Sea Breeze I thin….”

“Trust me, Lorne,” Spike interrupted. “Harris is a white knight. I don’t know how or where he got captured…for the moment. But, I do know he knows about the resistance and the way inside.”

“And you think claiming him….”

“Lorne,” Spike interrupted again. “Sometimes the less you know….”

“The more I worry about you,” Lorne said. “You don’t fool me, Spike. I know what you are gambling with every day.”

“Don’t use your hoo doo on me.”

“Hey,” Lorne said as he held out his hands wide out to his side, “I gotta be me and this is what you pay me the big bucks for.”

“I don’t pay you, Lorne,” Spike grumbled.

“Sure you do,” Lorne said and grinned. “If you just bother to read your paper work you’d find out you pay me quite a bit actually.”

“If I read my bloody paper work I’d be as mad as a box of frogs.”
“Well if the amphibious metaphor fits….”

“Lorne!” Spike growled.

Once again Lorne held up his hands, this time as if in surrender then said, “Now what?”

“Now,” Spike pushed a small button on a console on his desk, “I get some thing from the stables.”

“Spike!” Lorne exclaimed.

“Wot? You want me ta go up and see Harris without having din din?” Spike sighed then said.

“Lorne, I’m a vampire. The Big Bad. I…”

“I know. I know. I just…”

“Why don’t you go check the numbers. See how we’re doing? I’ll eat and then start workin’ on Harris.”

Lorne nodded and then stood. He walked to the door, paused and then turned around to look at Spike.

“If you are planning on claiming Xander,” Lorne said, “don’t you think you should use his first name?”

Spike sighed then ordered, “Out.”

Lorne turned and exited Spike’s office just as two minions were leading a frail and terrified middle-aged woman into Spike’s office.
Chapter 3

The minions who had escorted Xander away and into the elevator had shoved Xander into the lavish penthouse suite with a wall of windows. Then they had left. At first Xander hadn’t been sure what to do, but Xander wasn’t left in confusion for long. Too many trips to the Tank had influenced Xander more than he cared to admit and soon his training took over and Xander assumed proper form. He stood up straight with his eyes fixed on a point on the far wall. He stood as still as possible.

Xander stood there until he realized just what it was he was seeing; lights. Xander was seeing lights and not just party or fluorescent lights. Xander was looking at neon lights, headlights, star lights and even moonlight. Xander stared out at the lights and nearly wept. How long had it been since he’d last seen anything but the inside of his master’s vault, a game room, dining room or a casino?

The realization of what he was seeing nearly made Xander collapse to his knees in shock. Instead he found the temerity to stumble forward until he was right in front of the windows. Slowly Xander raised his hands and reached out to touch the glass as his eyes drank in the sight of a world beyond walls.

Fear of smudging the windows, thus leaving evidence of his poor form, kept Xander from actually touching the glass. Yet, he held his hands as close as he dared until he could almost feel the cool smooth surface.

For a moment Xander was tempted to just slam his hands against the glass hard enough to push them through. Pain and punishment almost seemed to be worth it just to feel the night air on his skin and to smell the small snatches of desert mingled with the city scent.

"Probably shatter proof," Xander thought bitterly. "And what does a vampire even need with a panoramic view anyway? Even Spike’s not that stupid to stand here and watch the sun rise. Xander had no answer to his question.

Slowly, Xander lowered his hands and continued to stare. "Maybe this room is just for midnight snacks and romantic rendezvous?"

Xander laughed. His laughter was a quiet series of puffs of air escaping from a quaking diaphragm. "Wonder if I’m a desert wine or a cheese wine?"

Xander wanted to clench his fists, but he knew if he did he would squeeze so hard his blunted nails would leave half-moons indents in his palms. Bottles weren’t allowed to damage themselves. Bottles that did, were put in the Tank.

Xander took a deep breath. "I can’t do that again, he’d thought. "I won’t make it back. I’ll slip away into the dark …I’ll slip away…slip away into the terror….I’ll slip….the thick tasteless dark...and I’ll...

Raw fear had slammed through Xander as Xander's thoughts spun out of control. The room had begun to shrink and get darker. The air was thick and difficult to breathe.

"Bottles are still. Bottles are quiet." Xander heard the voices in his head and he began to tremble.

"NO! NO! I’ll be good! I’ll be STILL! I’ll be QUIET!" Xander frantically thought and then took perfect form.

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The sound of a door opening behind startled Xander. *How long had he been standing there? How long had he held form?*

“Nice view,” Spike’s voice drifted across the room. “Much nicer than when I left.

Xander remained still. He listened and could hear Spike moving around the room. He heard a rustling of leather, the crinkle of paper, the ‘snik’ of a lighter and then the sound of a deep inhale. Xander smelled smoke when Spike exhaled.

“Lorne tells me you can’t talk,” Spike said.

*Lorne?* Xander wondered. *Who’s that?*

Xander heard Spike take a few more drags on his cigarette.

Lorne said the boy ain’t broken, Spike thought as he studied his new pet. However he is damaged. Time to start figuring out how bad. I have plans for him.

Spike moved closer to Xander. He’s like a soddin’ statue all still and quiet. Not the Harris I knew, Spike thought. Course, the Harris I knew would have never just stood there while I tossed him off in front of a room full of demons.

Spike smiled and raised the hand that had done the tossing to his nose. Spike inhaled deeply. Sweet pet, Spike thought. Too sweet. Spike cocked an ear and listened. Back-up was in place. Spike didn't think he'd need it, but Lorne did. Just because Spike had nixed the idea didn't mean Lorne hadn't already put the plan into play.


Spike took a long drag on his dwindling cig and exhaled a cloud of smoke.

Xander fought the tickle in his throat from the second-hand smoke. *Bottles don’t cough when on display,* Xander thought.

Xander heard Spike moving again. He thought he heard Spike’s cigarette being ground out. The vampire moved again and it sounded as if he were getting closer to Xander. Xander kept his breath even and focused on remaining quiet and still.

“Imagine, Harris the babbler, a mute,” Spike observed and then laughed. “Looks like, though, I don’t have to imagine it.”

Xander remained still. Xander’s breath was slow and even.

Spike moved again. He walked around Xander as if he were examining a piece of art from all sides. Finally he stopped, behind Xander.

“Course, I’d never thought I’d see the Slayer’s Donut Boy stark naked and absolutely still either. Not in my presence. Course ya weren't completely still with me earlier, was ya pet?”

*Shut up!* Xander thought angrily but held still.

Xander’s thoughts were interrupted by the sudden feel of a cool finger tip slowly tracing down Xander’s spine. Xander almost flinched.

“Hmmmm,” Spike mumbled. “Thought for sure that’d get ya.”
Xander wanted to laugh at Spike’s naiveté. Much worse had touched him in more intimate places and Xander hadn’t moved.

Spike’s finger continued a slow journey down Xander’s spine. Too Xander’s horror he began to feel tiny goose pimples well up in the Spike’s path.

“Not totally unresponsive,” Spike said.

Fuck off, Spike! Xander wanted to say but kept his eyes focused on some point on the window.

Spike chuckled when his finger slid into the small hollow at the top of the divide between Xander’s ass cheeks.

“Tell me, pet,” Spike purred, “Have you ever had anything up yer bum?”

You know I have, you bastard, Xander thought. Xander flushed angry and embarrassed, but remained still.

Spike’s finger reversed course and started to trail back up Xander’s spine.

“Pet,” Spike said, “I know you can’t talk, but you can nod or shake yer head.”


Spike smiled at the blink. It was a small movement, but it was something.

“You can nod can’t, you, Xander? You are capable of the movement, yeah?” Spike asked.

Is this a trick? Xander wondered. Was this a game? What happens if I make the wrong move?

Half remembered stories of Spike’s from Watcher diaries competed with Xander’s fears of the Tank. Which fate was worse? Do I really want to know? Xander thought then nodded slightly, almost imperceptibly. Spike’s finger stopped mid-way up Xander’s back.

“So,” Spike asked softly and very slowly, “You had anything up that arse of your besides tentacles?”

Why do you want to know you sick wacko! Xander silently shouted. What part of your game is this? Humiliate the humiliated? Embarrass the embarrassed? Or I know, how about Harangue the Helpless?

“Pet,” Spike said dangerously, “answer the question.”

Xander shook his head with two quick jerks.


Xander ground his teeth. Turning around was a clean order. It carried none of the nagging doubts about whether the movement was allowed or not. Yet, turning around meant facing Spike and Xander wasn’t sure he could do that. Xander cast another longing look at the lights outside the window then turned around.

Spike smiled and stepped two paces back from his pet. Xander picked a point on the far side of the wall behind Spike and focused his gaze. With his peripheral vision, Xander noted Spike was studying Xander.
Once again Spike moved into Xander’s personal space. Once again Spike reached out a finger and touched Xander. This time the finger traveled slowly down the center of Xander’s chest and over the bumps and valleys of Xander’s well defined abdomen. The finger stopped once it reached the line of dark coarse curly hairs that made up the nest surrounding Xander’s flaccid cock.

Xander focused on his breathing and the point the far wall. What really was the difference between the tip of an unwanted finger and the tip of an unwanted tentacle? What was the difference when both had already brought him off like a cheap whore?

“Certainly kept you in fine condition,” Spike observed.

*Four mile runs every day,* Xander answered silently, *along with a controlled diet. Oh yeah! Bottles have to be healthy. Have to keep the flavor, optimal, you know.*

Spike fanned out his hand across Xander’s groin. Suddenly there were many fingers brushing themselves through Xander’s pubic hair. The fingers took their time mapping out the flesh hidden beneath the springy curls.

Spike hummed and brushed those same fingers over and around Xander’s cock. Slowly, Spike lifted Xander’s penis and stroked it very softly.

Xander tried not to think of a time when he’d had an actual say in who fondled his dick.

“I like that,” Spike said as he rubbed his thumb around the soft spongy tip of Xander’s cock and then curled his hand Xander's penis.

*Once upon a time, I did too,* Xander thought. *Once when I was alone in my room and thought of orgasms as something fun. And beside, since when did you start liking cock, Blondie? Last I knew Dru was dickless.*

Spike stilled his movements then ordered, “Look at me.”

Xander blinked. *Bottles don’t see.* Xander thought.

“Look at me, Xander,” Spike ordered and tightened his hold on Xander shaft.

Xander slowly slid his eyes away from the point on the wall and toward Spike. As soon as Xander’s brown eyes locked with Spike’s blue; the vampire’s hand moved away from Xander’s penis.

Spike smiled then ordered, “Hold still.”

*Right,* Xander thought. *Cuz here I've been Hyper-kinetic Boy this whole time.*

Xander easily followed Spike’s orders. It was easy until he felt Spike remove Xander’s collar.

*Is this it?* Xander thought. *Does then mean he’s gonna free me?*

Xander knew slaves collars weren’t removed unless they’d escaped, were sold or their master was ready to kill them in some way. Escape didn't look very likely and Xander didn't see any new buyers around. *At this point, Xander thought, death's just as free as escape.*

“You won’t need that anymore,” Spike growled as he tossed Xander’s leather collar some where into a corner. Then once again, Spike's hands were on Xander. They cupped his chin and tilted Xander's head back until Xander’s long neck was exposed.

I'm sorry I never got to say good-bye Wills, Xander thought. Don't give up. Find the Key. Close the
"No scar," Spike's words startled and interrupted Xander's silent goodbyes. "They didn't cut yer vocal chords did they?"

Xander mouthed, "what," then flinched at the break in form. Xander's heart pounded. How much longer was Spike going to drag this out?

"Pet," Spike said, "I asked you a question. Did they cut yer yammer box?"

No, Xander thought and quickly shook his head. Spike released Xander and stepped away.

Now what? Xander wondered as he debated lowering his head, looking at the ceiling or looking at Spike.

What's the worst I could get? Xander wondered. I'm going to die. All that's left is how? A brutal torture followed by a slow agonizing death or an agonizing torture followed by a brutal death?

Xander lowered his head and looked at Spike.

Once again Spike smiled then asked, "Ya thirsty?"

Xander blinked. What?

"Are. You. Thirsty?" Spike asked again.

Well ain't that a kick in the head, Xander thought. Well in the metaphoric way...not the literal way...which is what I would expect from thinking about a kick in the head when around Spike and...Hey! Babbling...Impatient touchy-feely vampire waiting...what was the question? How do I feel?

Xander shrugged his shoulders.

"Pet," Spike said as he reached out a hand to Xander once again. "Do you want something to drink?"

Spike's thumb began to rub across Xander's bottom lip. Xander fought the urge to pull his lip back. What is he up to? Xander thought. Why doesn't he just get this over with?

Xander swallowed. His throat was a little dry. Xander nodded to Spike. Spike removed his thumb from Xander's lip and then pointed it to a wet bar to the right,

"There's a mini-fridge on the other side," Spike said. "Be a pet and go get a couple of beers."

Xander blinked again.

"Move," Spike ordered.

Xander shifted his focus from Spike then looked at the wet bar. It was about ten steps away. I can do this, Xander thought. Hell, I'm a Harris. I should be able to stumble to a fridge full of beer even if I'm dead.

Once again silent puffs of air bubbled out of Xander. I am a dead man, Xander thought as he began to make his way to the bar.

Xander heard Spike move behind him. Xander didn't stop to turn around to watch. Xander remained focused. He'd been ordered to get two beers and that's what he would do.
The small black fridge was behind the bar as Spike said. Xander bent down and opened it. Four kinds of beer were inside.

What kind does he want? Xander thought. There's so many....so many different kinds. There's so many bottles. There's so many flavors! There's bold and vibrant, mild and sweet, bitter and....

Xander stopped his frenzied thoughts and stood up. Xander looked at Spike. Xander's new master was sitting comfortably in a large black leather chair. He was watching Xander.

"Grab anything, pet," Spike said.

Xander looked bent back down and looked in the fridge. Xander took a deep breath. Grab anything? Xander thought. Too bad there's not a stake in here...or even a steak...or both. One for me..one for you....one for green...one for blue...

Again Xander stopped his thoughts. Hysteria was waiting in the wings.

I wonder part part of me Spike will touch if I just collapse in the corner and start drooling? Xander thought as hysteria put a toe out on stage. Xander shuddered at the possibilities.

Right! No drooling, Xander thought and quickly grabbed the first two bottles he could reach. Xander slammed the door shut and stood up. He looked at Spike.

Spike motioned, "C'mere," with his finger. Xander shuffled out from behind the bar and moved toward Spike. When Xander was in front of Spike, the vampire pointed down.

Xander started to put the bottles on the floor.

"No," Spike said. "Kneel on the floor."

Oh great, Xander thought as he went down on his knees, butt on heels, in front of Spike. Make me beg. How very Angelus of you, Spike.

"Knees wide a part," Spike ordered. Xander frowned. Spike slid a foot between Xander's knees and began nudging them open.

"Unless ordered otherwise, always show what's mine," Spike said.

On display again, Xander thought bitterly as he opened his legs wide so his cock was exposed. Spike slid his foot forward and used the toe of his boot to gently lift and rub Xander's balls. Then Spike moved his toe to lift Xander's penis.

"This is mine," Spike said.

Then take it and let me be, Xander thought angrily. Really, I have no more use for it.

Xander held out the two beers to Spike.

"Open 'em," Spike ordered.

Xander went to stand up to look for a bottle opener but pressure on his groin stopped him.

"They twist open," Spike said. Xander nodded and put one beer on the floor before twisting open the other bottle and offering it to Spike.

Spike took the open bottle and withdrew his foot. Xander twisted the cap off the other bottle and
offered it to Spike.

"No," Spike said. "That's yours."

Xander blinked. Spike's giving me a beer?

"Ya said you were thirsty," Spike said.

OK, Xander thought. Me having a beer with Spike while my Fred and Rogers are hanging out on display. This is getting beyond the Twilight Zone, past the Outer Limits and heading straight for The Rocky Horror Show.

Spike cleared his throat. Xander looked at Spike. The blond vampire was holding the brown bottle of beer to his lips and arching an eyebrow.

Xander slowly raised his own bottle. The smell of hops and alcohol wafted up out of the bottle neck and Xander inhaled. How long had it been since he'd had a beer? Xander thought. How long had it been since he'd had anything but water and the sweet gruel the Azora had fed him?

Xander's mouth watered and he tentatively put the tip of the bottle to his lips. Slowly Xander tilted the bottle up and let the cold liquid spill down the neck and out into Xander's open mouth. Xander's eyes watered as the beer both burned, tingled and sweetened his mouth. Xander swallowed and felt the warm burn all the way to his stomach.

"Good, eh?" Spike asked then took a drink from his own bottle.

Xander nodded then took another drink.

"Long time since ya had a beer?" Spike asked before taking a long swig.

Xander nodded again. Spike grinned and the settled his beer bottle on his knee. Spike watched silently as Xander continued to sip his beer. Xander didn't rush to drink his beer nor did he nurse it. Every swallow seemed to be an art in appreciation, like drinking a beer was something Xander didn't want to take for granted.

Well, Xander thought as he drank his beer and watched Spike watching him. I guess as final requests that weren't...this is isn't too bad. Who knew Spike had it in him?

"I'd a had ya get us a whiskey," Spike said softly as Xander swallowed the last of his beer, "but I wasn't sure ya could take it right now."

How am I supposed to respond to that? Xander thought as he shrugged and put down his empty bottle.

Spike leaned forward and held out the rest of his beer to Xander. Xander shook his head. He could already start to feel the effect of the first beer.

"Wasn't an offer," Spike said.

Xander blinked then reached for Spike's bottle.

"No," Spike said as he withdrew it. "I'll hold the beer, you drink."

Xander sighed then leaned forward. Spike tilted the beer to Xander's lips. Slowly a little liquid spilled out and Xander swallowed. Spike smiled and continued to slowly tilt the beer. Xander swallowed again.
"You eat and drink at my leisure," Spike said.

Do I piss and shi....

Xander started to cough as cold burning liquid went down the wrong pipe. Spike quickly pulled the bottle away from Xander's mouth and watched Xander cough a few more times.

"You OK?" Spike asked.

Xander looked at Spike. Is there anything OK about this? Xander silently accused as he shrugged.

"Pet," Spike growled. "I asked if you are OK and I expect a 'yes' or 'no' answer."

Xander took a deep breath then let it out. He nodded.

"Good," Spike said. "Let's try this again. This time focus on what you were supposed to be doing."

Once again Xander leaned forward and Spike put the bottle to Xander's lips. Once again Spike tilted the bottle slowly and Xander began to drink. This time Xander kept a lid on his wandering thoughts. Xander kept his focus on Spike. The beer went down the correct pipe.

By the time Xander had finished the second beer he was dizzy and flushed. Spike put the bottle down beside the chair and stood up. Xander watched him.

Spike held a hand out to his kneeling pet. "Up," Spike ordered.

Xander tried to ignore the offered hand and stand on his own. The effect of the beer and the prone position took their toll and Xander fell back down in an inelegant heap.

"Take the hand, git," Spike growled.

Xander reached up his hand and grasped Spike's. Spike's hand was cool and strong. Xander easily got to his feet with the help of the master vampire. Once again Spike's blue eyes locked with Xander's brown. Spike arched an eyebrow and Xander shrugged.

"Move back to the window where I found you," Spike ordered as he let go of Xander's hand. Xander moved to where he'd been standing earlier. Gratefully, Xander turned back to look out the windows.

"'S good, pet," Spike said as he move behind Xander. And he is my pet, Spike thought.

"What do you see? Spike whispered in Xander's right ear. Then thought, Bollocks that was a stupid question!

A chill raced down Xander's spine. How can I answer that? Xander thought. Now what's his game?

"Ya see the lights?" Spike asked as he rested his hands on Xander's shoulders. Better, Spike thought.

Xander nodded.

"How about you?" Spike whispered. "Do you see yourself?"

Xander frowned and looked. He saw the lights and the promise of a world beyond doors and walls. Xander shook his head.
"Look again," Spike said as he slipped his left arm around Xander's waist. "Look at yer reflection."

Xander stiffened. This is it, Xander thought as he looked at the window. This time Xander didn't focus on the light.

"Relax," Spike whispered in Xander's ear.

Xander swallowed. He could see an image in the window. There was a pale naked man with shoulder length hair and dark eyes. The man was tall, broad and lean with well defined muscles in his arms, legs and abs. The man looked tense and his cheeks were flushed with drink, fear and shame.

"Do you see yourself now?" Spike asked as his lips brushed against Xander's earlobe. Gonna make him mine, Spike thought.

Xander started to shake his head,"No," then realized the image of the man he was looking at was him. Xander was the pale naked man.

Xander nodded his head slowly.


I like the lights better, Xander thought.

Spike rested his chin on Xander's shoulder. "Yer pretty,pet."

Xander shook his head as best he could.

"Don't argue," Spike said and kissed Xander's neck. Xander's scent and flavor were calling to Spike. The aftertaste of his dinner still tainted his mouth and Xander promised pure sweet blood. "Thought you were a nummy treat when Angel offered ya to me all those years ago...but now?"

Spike slid another arm around Xander and began to stroke a line from Xander's left nipple down to his crotch. Xander started to tremble. First mark you my Pet, Spike thought, and then I'll get you to agree to my Claim.

I love you Willow, Xander thought as he closed his eyes.


"Keep watching. This is a special occasion."

Xander wanted to defy Spike, but he didn't want to make whatever was about to happen worse. Xander just wanted it done. He was tired of hanging on to himself in a life in which he no longer had a say.

Xander opened his eyes to watch the pale naked man in the window tremble while invisible lips were caressing his cheek and invisible hands were exploring the rest of his flesh.

"So yummy," Spike murmured against Xander's skin. NOW, Spike's demon demanded.

Suddenly a searing ripping pain raced down Xander's neck. Xander's mouth opened wide but the room was silent except for the snarling sound of Spike feasting on Xander.

Xander could feel Spike pulling blood out of Xander's body even as he watched some of it escape and make its way down his chest. A bloody path slid down Xander's neck, flowed over his nipple and dripped down to pool against an invisible arm. Looks like it's agonizing torture before brutal
death, Xander thought distantly.

"Fuck! So bloody fucking, good, Pet!!!! So sweet!" Spike said as he briefly lifted his mouth from Xander's neck.

Bastard! Some remaining part of the White Knight in Xander screamed and Xander began to struggle against Spike. The beer wasn't some kind of gesture. It was all just some sick bloody cocktail!

Spike's grip on Xander tightened before Spike returned to sucking greedily at Xander's torn and bleeding neck. Xander began to weaken quickly. The beer and the blood loss were a lethal combination.

Lethal combination, Xander's remaining consciousness laughed then began to cry, Oh Ghod! Willow! Faith! Da..."

Xander suddenly sagged unconscious in Spike's arms. Spike lapped at Xander's neck. He was heady with the taste and scent of Xander. Spike reveled in his prey's submission. Spike almost regretted giving Xander the beer. The alcohol was distracting from the cinnamon cedar taste that was Xander.

Spike nuzzled and lapped away at the sweet blood but some nagging thought kept trying to alert him to something. Spike pulled his lips away from Xander and tried to focus. Xander's blood and scent were surrounding him, so was the sound of Xander's breathing. However, it was the sound of Xander's pounding heart that finally commanded Spike's attention.

Bloody hell! Spike thought as he realized Xander's heartbeat was slowing even as it pulsed more of the sweet treat out toward Spike. Spike's demon howled and struggled. Spike wanted it all!

"LORNE!" Spike roared before his need overcame his sense and he once again lowered his head to feast on his sweet, sweet pet.
Chapter 4


Hands suddenly tugged at Spike. Spike snarled but didn’t release his hold. Someone screamed his name and hands jerked him back.

*MINE,* Spike’s demon roared. *MINE! MINE! MINE FUCKIN’ MINE!*

Spike spun around in full fury and attacked.

“*SPIKE!*” Lorne sputter as the angry vampire grabbed the Pylean demon around the neck and slammed him against the window.

Bodies pushed in beside Xander.

“My lord,” voices cried to Spike.

Spike snarled and looked back at his pet. Two robed figures hover over Xander’s body. Thery weren’t touching him. They bowed to Spike.

“My lord, may we? The figures asked.

“Spike,” Lorne gasped, “The healers…Xander….”

“Lord,” the figures said again.

Spike shook his head and let go of Lorne.

“He doesn’t have much time, lem…Lord,” said Lorne.

Spike focused on Lorne for a moment before looking at the figures and growling, “Do it, but I want the scars!”

Immediately the figures turned Xander’s body on his side so they had clear access to the gaping wounds on his neck. The figures doused the wounds liberally with a thick yellow powder and then began to chant in unison.

The air around Xander began to hum which increased as the chanting grew louder. Spike stepped back from Xander and the healers as he felt the air charge with power. Lorne put a hand on Spike’s shoulder.

The chanting grew louder until it felt like the sound was almost another living presence in the room. There was a flash and the smell of ozone. Flames sparked and flared to life and danced across the yellow powder. The figures began to soften their chanting. As the chanting grew quieter the flames grew fainter. When the chanting died so did the flames.

“How is he?” Spike snarled when the room was quiet.
The figures leaned over Xander. They touched gloved fingers where the wounds on Xander neck had been. In their place were pink puffy scars of two over lapping bites.

“He lives,” intoned the healers.

Spike waved his hand and the healers backed away from their charge. Spike bent down and gently picked Xander up. The smell, the weight and the warmth of the living body in his arms soothed Spike.

_Mine_, the demon purred as Spike carried Xander into the suite’s bedroom. Lorne quickly followed.

Once again the lure of Xander’s scent was too strong and Spike began licking and sucking at the nipple blood had painted. The unconscious man in Spike’s arms groaned.

Lorne quickly turned down the bed.

“Spike,” Lorne said softly, “he needs rest.”

Spike laved Xander’s nipple again then trailed his hungry tongue over the rest of the skin where Xander’s blood had flowed. Spike fought the urge to sink his teeth into Xander belly and bath his face in the sweet blood.


Spike looked up at Lorne. Gold eyes clashed with red for a moment then Spike looked down at Xander. As quickly as Spike had slipped into his demon visage, he slipped out of it. Carefully Spike set Xander down on the bed, then pulled the covers up to Xander’s neck. Spike looked at Lorne.

“Bloody hell that was close!” Spike whispered.

“Tell me about it grumpy crumpet,” Lorne said as he rubbed his sore neck. “No more Pets for you.”

Spike moved away from the bed and said, “I need a drink.”

Lorne nodded then headed for the door. Spike followed and shut the door quietly behind him.

The healers were still in the outer room. They were kneeling on the floor waiting for further orders.

“You did well,” Spike said to the figures. “Go and claim what you want from the blue stables.”

Lorne winced and the healers rose. They bowed to Spike then left. Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne frowned at Spike.

“I gave from the blue stable,” Spike said defensively.

“And when they’re done what’s left will be ready for the red stable,” Lorne sighed. “But then I guess you’ll be needing replacements as you’re already down one.”

“For which I’m glad,” Spike said as he made his way to the bar to pour two whiskeys. “If I hadn’t dined, and dined _fully_, Xander wouldn’t have made it tonight.”

Lorne sighed again. This wasn’t an argument he wanted to have.
“So what happened?” Lorne asked changing the subject from the stables.

“Must be some diet the Azoras feed their bottles,” Spike said as he handed Lorne a drink. “Xander’s blood was rich, healthy, and flavorful.”

“You know I didn’t need to hear that while trying to enjoy a drink,” Lorne said.

“Sorry,” Spike grinned.

“No you’re not,” Lorne replied. “Continue.”

“Well let’s just say, I know why Xander was Vr’xkl’s favorite bottle,” Spike said.

“This going to be a problem?” Lorne asked as he sipped his drink.

Spike shook his head. “I think once whatever ‘enhancers’ the Azora fed him have worked their way out of Xander’s system, his blood won’t be so ‘intoxicating.’”

“Are you sure?” Lorne asked. “Cuz if we have to go through tonight’s theatrics every night we might as well be selling tickets. The snarling master vampire losing it over his newly acquired Pet….”

“OK!” Spike growled. “You warned me.”

“I prefer, ‘I told you so.’”

“Don’t push it, green bean,” Spike warned.

“You’re just jealous. I have more pizzazz then you,” Lorne chided.

“That’ll be the bloody day.”

“Most days around you are bloody.”

Spike shot Lorne a look and then laughed. “Can’t argue with that.”

“You could,” Lorne smiled, “but instead you are going to explain to me again why you had to start in on Xander tonight.”

Spike sighed. “The sooner he’s my Pet, the sooner I can Claim him.”

“Claim? As in claim with the capital ‘C’?” Lorne asked.

“That was the plan,” Spike said. “Still hasn’t changed. Even less chance of it now.”

“You really think you can convin….”

“I’ll find a way,” Spike growled.

“In the mean time?” Lorne asked.
“He’s my Pet. The scars prove it,” Spike said.

“You know it’s not that easy,” Lorne scoffed. “Demon clientele. Remember?”

“I’ll take care of the other,” Spike said.

“After what Xander’s been through with the Azora, you think that’s gonna help convince him?”

“I’ll take care of it,” Spike said again and finished his drink.

“Spike, lemon drop, are you sure about this?”

Spike looked at Lorne and sighed. “Even if he wasn’t important to my plans I’d be tempted.”

“Why?”

“Cuz, after tossing him off and tasting his blood? Gotta say he’s what most demons want. He’s the kind of human you want to shag silly or feast on nosily…maybe even at the same time.”

“OK, TMI,” Lorne said.

Spike laughed. “You sure you’re a demon, green bean?”

“Hey,” Lorne sputtered, “no reason to be rude.”

Spike laughed then set his glass back down on the bar before moving back towards the big leather chair. Spike sat down.

“I still don’t see why you had to mark him tonight,” Lorne said softly.

“I need him out in public as soon as possible,” Spike said.

“Why?”

Spike arched an eyebrow.

“Spike…”

“Look, the more public his status as my Pet, the harder it will be for Angelus to take him away without provocation and it will be more convincing when I Claim him.”

“If you can Claim him,” Lorne tried to counter.

“No,” Spike growled, “when I Claim him.”

Lorne sighed. “You’re still not telling me everything.”

“Do I ever?”

“Not until you need me to help bail you out,” Lorne answered.

Spike snorted. Lorne smiled.
“So what’s next in your master plan Master Spike,” Lorne asked.

“First thing tomorrow I want the appropriate staff needed to help Xander get ready for his public debut as my Pet,” Spike said then added, “also, find me a swim coach.”

“A swim coach?” Lorne questioned.

“Yeah. If I remember right Harris swam or something back in school. He’s pale and needing to be outside. Can’t let him walk around but….”

“A swim coach slash body guard can escort him to your private pool and not only get Xander fresh air, exercise, and bronze skin, but it will also get you a sunshine warmed Pet to nestle against,” Lorne said.

“It’s the simple things,” Spike grinned.

“Getting what you need by tomorrow afternoon…you know you are asking for miracles here,” Lorne complained.

“That’s why I’m asking, you,” Spike replied. “Anybody else would fail miserably and I’d have to kill ‘em horribly.”

“Sweet talker, you,” Lorne replied.

Spike laughed.

“So while I’m losing beauty sleep, what will you be doing?” Lorne asked.

“Watching Xander,” Spike said.

“Spike, sweet cheeks, are you sure that’s a….”

“It’ll be OK.” Spike said. “No nibbling, I promise. And believe me, it’ll be less harmful right now then trying to keep me away.”

Lorne nodded, finished his drink the said, “See ya tomorrow.”

Spike nodded.

“I’ll let myself out then,” Lorne said as he put his glass down on the bar before walking to the suite door. Spike watched Lorne leave.

After Lorne left, Spike got up and went into the bedroom. He quietly stripped down and then eased himself into the bed next to Xander.

Xander’s breathing was deep and even. Xander looked paler then before but his heart beat was strong and regular.

Spike sighed then raised the hand he’d used to yank off Xander. Spike stared at the hand for a moment and even in the dark bedroom he could see the red stain of blood.
Spike smiled and brought the hand up close to his face. Spike breathed in deep and smiled. The scent of Xander’s blood and cum still lingered.

“Mine,” Spike whispered and then slipped two fingers in his mouth. He lay back and let his tongue chase the combined flavors of Xander around. Spike nearly moaned. He began to suck on his fingers, trying to draw out every possible taste from the flesh.

Spike fell asleep sucking on his fingers and curled next to Xander.
Xander wasn’t really sure exactly how long it had been since the grey demon with tentacles had first wrapped one of it’s appendages around his cock at the slave auction. He’d thought it had been about three days. It was hard to tell, when he was in a windowless, white padded cell with only a drain in the middle of the floor to break the monotony.

Sure the guards came in once a day to escort him to a grey tiled room where they secured him in leather cuffs, cleaned him, shaved his face and made sure he used the bathroom. Then it was a lovely run on a treadmill until Xander thought his heart would burst. Then another round of cleaning, scrubbing, peeing and defecating in the grey room before being returned to the padded cell.

Xander put up with it because he was biding his time. He wanted them to think he was cooperative; a good boy. He planned to lull them into a false sense of security and then he’d make his escape.

Xander waited until what he thought was the fourth day in the padded cell. He didn’t think he could survive a fifth. He waited for the twelfth meal of the same sweet gruel with a bottle of water they had served the eleven previous meals. Only this time when they sat the tray down Xander grabbed it, lunged and threw it at the first guard.

Xander threw a punch at the second guard and kept charging through the door. The guards grabbed for his leg. He nearly stumbled, but he kept his feet and he kept going. Xander knew the grey tiled room was down the long hall to his left. He ran to his right.

The sound of booted feet following spurred him to run faster. For the first time he was grateful for the grueling sessions on the treadmill. The right hallway ended in an intersection. Again he could go right or left. Xander chose left and kept running. He got about half way down the hall before he began to wonder about his choice. At the end of the hall was a large door; a very large door. It looked like the inside of a vault door.

“No!” Xander panted. He could still hear boots pounding behind him. The guards were getting closer. Xander kept running for the door. It couldn’t be locked.

“IT can’t be locked, Xander thought, not with the guards still inside!"

Xander reached the door and tried to throw the handle. It wouldn’t move! It was locked. Xander spun around. The guards were charging down the hallway. Xander ran back down and began to try opening the series of doors lining the hallway. One by one they were locked. Xander grew frantic as the guards got closer.

Xander gave another door a tug on another door. The door seemed to give a little Xander tried again and it popped open like the lock had given. Xander rushed inside only to find he was in another padded white cell. Standing still and silent in the corner was a pale naked man with shoulder length hair. He was staring glassy eyed at some far point on the wall.

“Oh my ghod! Xander thought as he realized he was staring at another captive. NO!

Hands grabbed Xander and jerked him out of the room. Xander struggled but while the guards seemed human like, they were too quiet, too strong and too blue to be. Quickly they subdued Xander and shut the door. Quietly they began to march Xander down the hall.
“Hey,” Xander said. “Can we talk about this? Really? I mean I wasn’t trying to escape. I just was going a little stir crazy. You know? I mean if I just had some comic books are som…."

“Bottles do not leave the vault unless they are wanted,” the guards said in unison. “Bottles are still. Bottles are quiet.”

“Still…quiet…got it,” Xander said. “And I can do those things but not day after day in a white room. C’mon!”

Xander was surprised when the guards didn’t march him back down the hall towards his cell. Instead they marched him past the intersection and down the hall he hadn’t run down.

“Ok? So you taking me some place new?” Xander said. “Cuz I can be down with that. Maybe the TV room? You got one of those? I think you’d like it. Maybe we could do a Babylon 5 marathon?”

“Bottles are still. Bottles are quiet,” the guards said.

“Right,” Xander said. At the end of the hall Xander could see a large tank with a small set of stairs leading to the top.

“What’s that?” Xander asked quickly growing concerned.

“Bottles are still. Bottles are quiet,” the guards said again.

“Look, I’m sorry about throwing the tray and the punch. Really,” Xander said.

The guards marched Xander up the stairs to the top of the tank. There was a small belt on a hook by the lid of the tank. The guards picked the belt up and secured it around Xander’s waist.

“Look,” Xander said. “I promise. Still and quiet. See?” Xander shut his mouth with an audible snap and looked at the guards. The guards reached for a line with a clip at the end hanging over the tank. They clipped the end to the back of Xander’s belt. They locked the clip. They lifted the lid of the tank.

“Oh no!” Xander said. “Look, did I mention I don’t like large tanks? Childhood fear.”

The guards grabbed Xander and picked him up. Xander started to scream and struggle.

“Bottles are still,” the guards intoned as they lowered Xander into the tank. The line belt grew tight on Xander’s waist as he hung in mid-air in the yawning darkness of the tank.

“What’s down there?” Xander yelled.

“Bottles are quiet,” the guards said. The line dropped a bit farther and Xander’s feet touched the bottom of the tank. Xander looked up at the guards. The opening was at least three feet above his head.

“So this is just a time out? Right?” Xander asked desperately.

A warm thick liquid began to fill the bottom of the tank.
“Hey!” Xander shouted.

“Bottles are silent,” the guards said.

“Yeah, well this bottle doesn’t have his swim trunks!” Xander yelled.

“Bottles are silent,” the guards said again.

The liquid was rising quickly. Xander started to scramble around the tank looking for a way to climb out.

“Bottles are still,” the guards said.

“Maybe, but I’m not a bottle you over grown pair of smurfs!” Xander shouted angrily as he reached behind the belt and struggled with the clip. The liquid was up to Xander knees and it was getting hard to move.

“Bottle are sil….”

“I get it!” Xander yelled.

“Bottles are silent,” continued the guards.

“La la la! Can’t hear you!” Xander shouted as he gave up on the clip and once again stumbled around the tank searching for a foothold.

The liquid was up to his waist. There was a feel of buoyancy to it.

“What is this stuff?” Xander yelled as he slipped and fell. The liquid kept him slightly afloat. He could feel it lift him up slightly from the bottom of the tank.

“Bottles are still. Bottles are silent,” the guards said as they began to close the lid to the tank.

“HEY! NO!” screamed Xander as the lid closed and he was suddenly plunged into total darkness.

Frantically Xander tried to “swim” in the still rising thick goo-like liquid. It was too thick and too heavy.

“Please!” Xander screamed. “You can’t leave me here! Please give me another chance! I’ll be still! I’ll be silent! I’ll be good! Don’t fuckin’ leave me here!”

The heavy liquid continued to rise and Xander could feel it surround him. It was up to his chest. Xander tried to control his breathing. The sound of it was loud in the tank. The sound was almost louder then the pounding of Xander’s racing heart.

“WILLOW! Willow, help me!” Xander cried when the liquid reached the bottom of his chin. The liquid was too thick and covered too much of him He couldn’t move his arms or legs. Xander panicked when he realized all he could do was wait for the goo to cover him.

“They won’t do that,” Xander gasped to the dark. “I wasn’t bought just to be drowned…they…”

Thick tasteless liquid seeped into Xander’s mouth. He spit it out and cried in raw terror,
“WILLOW!!”

Xander tilted his head back trying to keep the goo from covering his mouth.

“Oh ghod! Help me!” Xander spat some more goo from his mouth. “Bu…Buffy! I’m so…”

Xander spit again.

“I’m sorry… Faith…Dawn….” Xander took a deep breath and the good covered his head.

Xander could still hear the pounding of his heart. It was all he could hear. He thought he might be crying but he couldn’t feel any tears running down his cheeks. All he could feel was the warm liquid covering him completely.

A convulsion ripped through Xander as he fought to hold his breath even as his body fought to breathe. Xander felt a small bubble escape from between his lips.

I don’t want to die, Willow, Xander’s mind screamed as he continued to fight the urge to exhale and inhale. Who’ll help you? Who’ll help take care of Dawn? Who’ll bandage up Fai…?

More bubbles escaped. This time they escaped from both Xander’s nose and mouth.

Buffy! Xander thought, wait for me….

Xander’s mouth opened and the liquid filled his mouth. Xander tried to blow it out but all he managed was to suck it deep down into his lungs. Xander convulsed and thrashed and then he was still. His eyes flew open.

All he could feel was the warm liquid. All he could see was darkness. All he could hear was his heart beating.

Xander was still. Xander was quiet.

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Xander sat straight up and screamed. He’s scream was long and silent.

“Pet,” Xander heard Spike say from somewhere next to him.

Xander flinched then froze.

“Pet,” Spike said again.

Xander frantically tried to control his panicked breathing.

“Xander,” Spike said. “What’s wrong?”

Bloody hell, Spike thought. Bad question.

Xander didn’t respond. He wasn’t even sure how to try and answer the question.

“Xander,” Spike tried again. “Look at me.”
Bottles are still. The voices from Xander’s dream demanded. However, Spike had given him an order.

Xander took a deep breath and slowly turned his head to look at Spike. He couldn’t control his trembling.

“Bad dream?” Spike asked softly.

Xander nodded almost imperceptibly.

“How about last night?”

Xander frowned. Last night? What happened last….

Memories flooded Xander’s overwrought brain and his mouth fell open in a giant “O.” Quickly Xander raised a hand to his throat. He felt for the wounds and only found scars. Xander’s eyes widened into two more “O’s.”

Please! Please, NO! Please! Xander thought.

“Shhh, pet. It’s still beating,” Spike said as he put his hand on Xander’s and moved Xander’s fingers until they were over the pulse point in his neck.

“See? You can feel the pulse,” Spike said.

How can I see and feel my pulse…MY PULSE! Xander thought. I can feel my pulse! I’m not a vampire!

Xander smiled.

Spike chuckled, “Want a Pet, not a minion.”

Xander’s smile fell at Spike’s words. A part of Spike was a disappointed at the loss.

“Oi!” Spike said. “Don’t be ungrateful. You can still go back to being kibble.”

Not bloody likely, Spike thought, but no need to tell him that.

Xander went pale and looked away.

Oi! Spike thought. Bollocked it up again.

“Hey,” Spike said gently. “I say you could look away?”

Xander turned his head back and looked at Spike.

“Yer dream? Wasn’t about last night then?” Spike asked.

Xander shook his head.

“Time Before?”
Xander shook his head again.

"Time with Vr’xkl?"

Xander frowned.

"The Azora demon."

*He had a name besides Master?* Xander wondered then nodded.

"Well it’s over now," Spike said. "Yer mine. He can’t touch you any more."

Xander nodded and looked down. That’s when he realized that not only was Spike in bed with him: Spike was naked!

Xander forgot all about being still and started crab walking in a tangle of sheets and blankets until he fell off the bed.

"What the…," Spike growled and looked over the edge of the bed to see a naked Xander tangled in bed clothes on his ass.

"Bloody hell, Xander! Get back up here," Spike ordered while hiding his amusement.

Xander shook his head and pointed at Spike. Spike looked down and grinned. *Pet’s wigged cuz I’m starkers.*

"Get used to it," Spike purred and smiled at Xander.
Xander shook his head.

“Up,” Spike ordered, “won’t ask again.”

Xander stared at Spike a moment before slowly untangling himself from the bedclothes and standing up. Xander stepped forward and gingerly sat down on the bed.

“Oh fer…..lie down, pet,” Spike said.

Xander swung his legs up onto the bed and found a fixed point on the ceiling. Xander stared at the point.

“Not with the staring again,” Spike sighed. “Hey, look at me.”

Xander blinked. *Nope,* Xander thought. *I have a rule; no naked males…especially naked vampire males before Fruit Loops and hey…all out of Fruit Loops at the moment.*

Spike grabbed Xander’s chin and turned his head toward him.

“New rule, pet,” Spike said, “unless ordered otherwise, you keep your eyes on me at all times when we’re in the same room. Understand?”

Xander remained still and tried to focus on a point on the ceiling just behind Spike’s head. Spike growled and pinched Xander’s right nipple; hard.

*OUCH!* Xander mouthed and reflexively tried to slap Spike’s hand. Spike’s eyes flashed gold and Xander froze.

*Oh shit!* Xander thought. *Tell me I did not just do that!!!* Xander thought.

“NEVER strike your MASTER,” Spike snarled and grabbed Xander’s wrists. Xander flinched as Spike slammed them up over Xander’s head. Xander nodded frantically.

“Too late for that,” Spike growled. *Fuck! Pet has to learn what will and won’t be accepted! If Angelus had….*

Xander closed his eyes. Spike growled and thought, *Gonna have to…buggered… no help for it. Can’t let ‘im go in public actin’ up.*

“Don’t make this worse, Xander,” Spike warned.

Xander’s eyes flew open and looked at Spike.

“Do you understand the rule about striking your master?

Xander nodded.

“Do you understand when I ask you a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ question I expect an answer?”
Xander nodded. Please Spike, Xander thought. I’m way too old for pop quizzes. Whatever you’re gonna do...just do it.

“Do you understand you are going to be punished and why?”

Xander swallowed and nodded. Whipping, caning, or evisceration...should be a nice break from the Tank, Xander thought.

“Good,” Spike said. “Now, you keep those hands right where I put ‘em and don’t you move!”

Spike took an unneeded breath. Gotta make a point with him. Sparin’ him now will just get his back stripped later, but still....don’t want ‘im any more terrified than he already is.

“I know yer good at keeping still, pet,” Spike said as he suddenly thought of a fitting punishment for Xander’s crime. “So I don’t want to see any more an’ a tremor outta you.”

Xander swallowed but otherwise remained still. Spike leaned down and began to kiss and lave Xander’s nipples.

Xander blinked. This is punishment? Xander thought and blinked.

Spike continued to kiss and fondle Xander’s nipples. Xander fought to suck in his stomach as Spike’s kisses turned into tiny nibbles. Xander’s eyes widened as he felt his nipples harden into tight little nubs of flesh and a warm stirring started in his groin.

Spike sat up and smiled. He laid the palms of his hands over Xander’s fleshy nubs and began to rub little circles on them. Xander was suddenly thankful he couldn’t talk. Otherwise, he was afraid he’d be starting to groan. As it was, he fought to keep from panting or letting the burn in his crotch grow.

“’S good, pet,” Spke said before he rolled off the bed.

Xander didn’t move but he kept his eyes on Spike. Now what? Xander wondered. Is that it? Was that my punishment?

Spike began to rummage through a drawer in the nightstand next to the bed.

“Found it!” Spike said as he pulled out a metal chain with two little clamps on each end.

Oh no! Xander thought. I don’t think I like where this is going.

Spike smiled and crawled back onto the bed. He looked a Xander and arched an eyebrow as he dangled the chain in front of Xander.

“You’re mine to play with, pet,” Spike said. “You’re mine to punish. And sometimes...sometimes I’ll do both at the same time.”

Then Spike bent down and attached the first clamp to Xander’s right nipple. Xander hissed, but held still. However, Xander nearly jerked straight off the bed when Spike began turning the little screw that tightened the clamp.

Pain quickly replaced the pleasure that had peaked Xander’s nipple. Xander fought the urge fight
Spike and jerk the clamp off.

“Easy, pet,” Spike said as he noted Xander’s growing tension. “Breath deep. Focus on just accepting yer punishment and not making it worse.”

Spike picked up the second clamp. Xander focused on his breathing and watched Spike. He tried to quell his growing fear of what was to come.

Spike attached the second clamp on Xander’s left nipple. Again Spike turned the screw so the clamp bit down hard on Xander’s tender flesh. Xander took a deep breath and held still. *Bottles are still,* he thought.

Spike sat back and then gently tugged on the chain lying on Xander’s chest. Pain and pressure radiated from Xander’s nipples and strangely traveled to his groin. Only, by the time the sensations reached there the pain and pressure had turned into an odd pleasure. Xander almost panicked more at the sensations in his cock then the pain in his chest.

Spike looked at his pet. He could smell faint pheromones coming from his pet and see Xander’s cock grow a little interested. Spike saw Xander’s pink and pinched nipples and felt his own heat in his groin.

“Now, that I have your attention,” Spike said as he sat back, straddled Xander’s waist and loosely held the chain in his hands, “there are some things we need to ‘discuss.’”

Xander blinked.

“First, you are my Pet. You’re the Pet of the Master of Las Vegas,” Spike said sternly. “Today will be your first day in public as my Pet. You will act accordingly. Which means you will show me obedience and attention. If you misbehave, you will be punished.

Xander’s eyes began to tear as the pain grew.

“Because I’m your master, I can punish you when, where and for what ever I wish,” Spike warned.  

*Oh joy!* Xander thought. *As if you’re not on enough of a power trip.*

“However,” Spike said. “I won’t. I’ll punish you when you deserve it and I’ll make sure you understand what you are being punished for.”

Xander blinked and a stray tear drop leaked from his eye. Spike reached out and gently brushed the tear drop away.

“Shhh, pet,” Spike whispered. “Just a little longer.”

Xander gasped and nearly let another drop fall. How long had it been since anyone had comforted him or even cared about his pain? Let alone comforted him while he was being punished. For a moment Xander thought he’d do anything just for another tender touch.

*Oh Wills,* Xander thought. *I really am going crazy if I’m feeling grateful to Spike for touching me gently while he’s punishing me.*

“Now,” Spike continued, “when your punishment is done, and this includes all punishments unless
otherwise ordered, you will kiss my hands.”

Xander nearly started to shake his head. You can’t be serious! Xander thought.

Once again Spike must have sensed Xander’s tension because he arched an eyebrow and tugged on the chain. Pain and pleasure warred. This time Xander’s cock twitched in response.

“You will kiss my hands, Xander,” Spike said.

Xander blinked.

Spike smiled and took another long look at his pet. Xander was long lean, nude and if Spike wasn’t mistaken a little turned on by the pain and pleasure combination.

Something to think about for the future, Spike thought as he casually reached down and stroked his cock in anticipation.

Oh Ghod!, Xander thought. He’s getting off on this! Why am I not surprised? He got off on Dru! But the surprise is….why am I….

“OK, pet,” Spike said. “Now comes the worst part. Remember, keep still.”

Spike reached own and unscrewed the first clamp. The pain of blood rushing back to his nipple clashed with the pleasure of release. Xander took a large gulp of air. Bottles ARE still, Xander thought.

“Good, pet,” Spike crooned and he leaned back down over Xander. Softly Spike peppered the area around the bruised nipple with little kisses. He was careful not to touch the hypersensitive nub.

Xander panted and focused on staying in control even as his dick thought control was over rated. Spike continued to pepper Xander’s chest with little kisses. He traveled his way across Xander’s chest to Xander’s other nipple still in bondage.

So yummy, Spike thought and then gave into the temptation to quickly lick Xander’s still clamped flesh.

Xander would have screamed if he had a voice.

SPIKE, you fuckin’ BASTARD! Xander panted. What the fuck?

“Warned ya, pet,” Spike said unapologetically. “Sometimes play and punishments are the same thing.”

Then Spike undid the second clamp. Xander felt more pain, more pleasure and this time more tears. Once again Spike gently brushed the tears away.

“’S OK, pet. So good ya are. So proud of ya,” Spike softly crooned before placing tiny kisses around Xander’s left nipple.

Xander let the words and the kisses relax him. It was so easy to just give into the tenderness. As bad as the clamps had hurt, the gentle touches and words were soothing.
I'm sorry, Buff, Xander thought. I should be stronger....but it has been so long...even the care from a vampire is better than.... Xander couldn’t finish his thought.

Spike finished kissing Xander and sat up. Blue eyes met brown eyes. Spike smiled.

“You’re allowed to move now, pet,” Spike said. “Punishment’s, over.”

Xander nodded and then sat up. He started to lean over to kiss Spike’s hands.

“Pet,” Spike said.

The one word froze Xander. He looked at Spike.

“’S ok to pick my hands up.” Spike said. “’S ok to touch me when you want to please me.”

Xander swallowed then nodded. *I'm not all that keen on touching you or pleasing you, Xander thought, but I don’t’ want any more punishments.*

Carefully Xander picked up Spike hands. Again he noted how cool they were. They were also smooth and soft. *Like silk,* Xander thought.

*How could someone who has done such monstrous thing have such soft hands?* Xander wondered. *And why am I noticing or making with the caring?*

Xander first brought Spike’s right hand to his mouth. Xander could smell tobacco and blood. *My blood,* Xander thought.

Very gently, Xander placed a delicate kiss on Spike’s middle knuckle. Then Xander lowered Spike’s right hand and raised his left hand. Again Xander placed a delicate kiss on the back of Spike’s hand.

Xander lowered Spike’s hand then looked at Spike. Spike’s eyes were dark and dilated.

“Perfect, pet,” Spike whispered then cupped Xander’s cheeks. “Just perfect.”

Spike gently pulled Xander forward. Xander’s mouth parted slightly in surprise as cool lips covered his own.

*Spike! Xander thought. Kissage!*

Teeth nipped and teased Xander’s lips into parting more. A cool tongue, tasting of tobacco and whiskey, swept inside and started to stake out a claim in Xander’s mouth.

Xander trembled in confusion. The kissing was so good. The kissing was so bad. What was he supposed to do?

Spike felt Xander tremble and he could smell the fear. He sighed into Xander’s mouth and slowly made a retreat from his recent claim. *Too soon for gentle intimacy,* Spike thought. *Still, might help with what’s to come.*

Spike sat back and released Xander.

“”M not gonna apologize for kissing you,” Spike said. “I’m the Big Bad and your master. Kissing’s
just one of many things I can do ta ya.”

Xander nodded.

“I am sorry though it frightened ya. ‘S supposed to be nice. Ya did good. Should have been a treat,” Spike said.

*I'll just take a Twinkie next time,* Xander thought still reeling from the mouth-on-male-mouth kissing and the whole tender Spike scene.

“Now, we need to talk,” Spike said.

*Hardy har har!* Xander thought and tilted his head.

“Oi! Right,” Spike said. “Well I’ll talk and you listen.”

*Uh, that would be a big DUH!* Xander thought.

“Today I’ll be showing you around the casino. Later I’ll take you around the city.”

Xander’s eyes widened and he blinked. *You’ll take me out? Outside?*

“I want everyone to know I’ve taken you as my Pet,” Spike continued.

*Woof,* Xander thought and unconsciously rolled his eyes.

“Pet,” Spike said in a low growl to cover his amusement.

Xander focused back on Spike.

“Being a Pet is very different from being an Azora’s bottle or even a slave.”

*OK,* Xander thought. *And that means?*

“In a bit there’ll be some blokes and others up here to get you ready.”

*Ready?*

“You will behave. You will do everything they ask and you will not fight or hesitate,” Spike said sternly.

Xander swallowed.

“Some of them will have human slaves to assist them. If you do anything to warrant punishment, I will punish you, one of the slaves or both,” Spike warned.

Xander nodded. *OK. Got it. Best behavior.*

“And you won’t know which choice I’ll make until I make it,” Spike said. “Understand?”

Xander nodded again.

“Right. Now we have a couple of more things we have to do before getting out of bed,” Spike said.
We do? Xander thought and tried not to start crab walking off the bed again. His dick lost all interest.

Spike noted the rise in Xander’s heart rate and the smell of fear. Sorry pet. Demon clientele, Spike thought. I know yer not ready for this but….


Please Spike, Xander thought as he swallowed and did as he was told. Don’t. I can’t. Please.

Xander looked at Spike. He didn’t want to notice Spike was still half hard from administering Xander’s punishment.

“Roll over on your other side, pet,” Spike said softly. Stay with me, pet. Spike thought.

“It’s all right if you close yer eyes or stare at the wall.”

Xander closed his eyes and tried to keep from trembling. Spike, I’ll be whatever you want me to be… just please. I’m so tired of this… Don’t.

A cool hand began rubbing a gently circle on Xander’s back.

“Shhh,” Spike said. “Relax, Xander.”

Oh c’mon, Spike! Xander thought angrily. Try something original. ‘Relax and enjoy it,’ is so clichéd.

Spike took another unneeded breath. Any other demon would just take. I gotta be a bleedin ponce about this!

The soothing hand stopped left Xander’s back and the mattress gave as Spike got off the bed. Xander heard Spike rummage through the nightstand drawer again.

“Ah, here it is,” Spike muttered. Xander heard a squishing sound and trembled.

Lube, Xander thought and squeezed his eyes closed tighter. Why does it come back to this? Why can’t they just kill me or leave me alone?

Spike watched Xander’s tense form as he spread the lube on his cock. While Spike couldn’t help but enjoy the sight of Xander’s nude form and firm ass, he knew this was going to be a one sided bag off. Spike let his eyes wonder down’s Xander’s body even as Spike’s fingers slid over his cock.

Lorne’s right, Spike thought as Xander trembled again. Boy’s not broken but he’s close. Have to be careful. I need Xander, not “broken Xander.”

Spike gave his dick a few more tugs and then crawled up in bed. He slid in behind Xander. Another tremble raced down Xander’s body.

“Easy,” Spike said as he pulled Xander close so they were front to back. Xander felt Spike’s lubed erection press again his backside.

Please… Spike… I don’t… Xander thought.
“Now, we gonna do this Xander. We’re gonna do this often,” Spike said softly. “But I know things are a bit much right now. There’s a lot ya have ta learn so I’m gonna give ya some time, eh? I’m gonna give ya choice for awhile. You can keep your back to me and stare off, close yer eyes, or you can roll over and participate. ‘S up to you.”

Choice? Xander thought bitterly.

Spike gently tapped Xander’s leg and said, “Slide it forward a bit, pet.”

Numbly, Xander did as he was told. Spike wrapped his arm tighter and Xander’s waist and pulled him closer. Spike slipped his cock in between Xander’s legs and underneath Xander’s ballsac. Spike thrust gently.

“Keep your legs tight around me,” Spike whispered. “Make a nice warm little nest just for me.”

Again, Xander did as he was told.

“M…good, pet,” Spike murmured as he thrust again. Xander could feel the slick cock sliding under his and between his legs.

What’s he doing? Xander thought in confusion. This isn’t what I expected. Is this a trick? A game?

Spike nuzzled his face into the side of Xander’s neck. He licked Xander’s scarred flesh. Xander stiffened.


Spike’s gentle thrusting grew a little harder and faster.

“Yer so bleeding warm,” Spike muttered against Xander’s ear, “taste like cinnamon and cedar.”

Cinnamon and cedar? Xander wondered.

Spike’s cock was pushing insistently between Xander’s legs. The friction against his scrotum was having an effect. Xander bit his lip.

Only a matter of time now, Xander thought, he’ll move his hand down, claim ‘his’ other penis and… I’ll be just a bottle again. Xander dreaded being forced to orgasm for another’s pleasure, again.

“Oh pet,” Spike panted and kissed Xander’s neck as he thrusted faster. “‘S good. Wanna know what’s it like ta be buried inside ya….don’t wanna break ya…gotta…do this…gotta…demon customers…gotta…but wanna…”

Then why don’t you? Xander thought angrily. You’re the Master! I’m the Pet! If you “gotta” and you “wanna,” why don’t you?

Spike’s arm pulled tighter around Xander’s waist. Spike’s hips no longer thrust but pumped quickly and powerfully. Human teeth bit Xander’s shoulder and Spike let out a long groan.

Cool thick liquid spurted between Xander’s legs and he could smell the musky scent of sex. Spike held still for a moment then began to pepper Xander’s neck with kisses again.
That’s it? Xander thought dazedly. No rape? No forced ejaculations?

Spike relaxed his hold on Xander then said, “Gonna need a cig soon, but don’t wanna let go of ya.”

He meant it, Xander thought. He really meant it! Was my choice to…or not…to…well…. Why? For how long?

Xander lay stunned. Spike lay holding Xander and soaking up his heat and the scent of him. Fear’s fading, Spike noted and placed another soft kiss on the back of Xander’s neck and rubbed his hand up and down Xander’s arm.

“I’d offer a pound fer yer thoughts, but I know you can’t tell me ‘em,” Spike said softly. Who’d have thought I’d miss yer babble, Harris?

Wouldn’t know where to begin if I could, Xander thought honestly.

Spike sighed. One more thing we need to do, yet. Spike placed one more kiss on Xander’s neck and then scooted off the bed. He grabbed his pants and slid them on before walking to the other side of the bed.

Xander heard and felt Spike move. Xander opened his eyes and before long Spike’s leather clad legs were in front of him.

“Sit up, pet,” Spike said.

Xander sat up.

“Spread yer legs.”

Xander started to tremble again. Bastard! Xander thought. You lied!

“Easy, Xan,” Spike said. “Just this one last bit and then were done for today.”

Xander slowly spread his legs. Spike reached down and swiped a finger through his thick spill coating Xander’s leg.

“Open yer mouth,” Spike ordered.

Fu…What?! Xander thought and stared at Spike. NO! That’s so of the NOT EVEN!

Spike noted the sudden flare of fire in Xander’s eyes. There’s still some Scoobie left, Spike thought with some satisfaction.

“Pet, we have a lot ta do today and I don’t really have time to spend it punishing you and if I have to I’m liable ta get just a bit peevish. Now open yer mouth.”

Xander slowly opened his mouth wide. Spike slid his finger inside.

“Now, lick it clean and we're done,” Spike said.

Xander looked at Spike. Spike arched and eyebrow. Xander closed his lips around Spike’s finger. Tentatively, Xander reached out his tongue and caressed Spike’s flesh.
A salty, musky and slightly smoky flavor filled Xander’s mouth. It wasn’t unpleasant but it was a shock. Like the beer from the night before, the taste was a welcome change from the sweet gruel Xander had been fed as a ‘bottle.’

Xander licked and sucked Spike’s finger as ordered. *Who’d have thought that after all this that I’d enjoy tasting spunk?* Xander thought as he hungrily licked at the finger chasing the smoky flavor.


“‘S OK, pet,” Spike said. “You didn’t do anything wrong. In fact you were doin’ it all too right.”

Xander blushed then was angry. Spike was throwing Xander off and he didn’t know what to expect or even what to feel. *I hate you, Spike,* Xander thought falling back on the familiar.

“Now for that fag,” Spike said as he moved back to the other side of the bed for his coat.

Xander looked around. *Fag?*

“Oi! Cigarette, ya git!” Spike said noticing Xander’s confusion.

*Oh,* Xander thought and nodded.

“Ya want one?” Spike asked as he rummaged through his coat.

Xander emphatically shook his head.

“Right,” Spike said as he flipped open his lighter and lit the cigarette hanging out of his mouth. Spike took a deep breath and then exhaled smoke.

Xander coughed and then pinched his nose. Spiked rolled his eyes.

“Don’t like smokin’, eh?”

Xander quickly unpinched his nose. *Was that OK? Wasn’t even thinking!* Xander panicked and then remembered to shake his head.


Xander nodded. *Who’s arguing?*

“Suppose you’ll be wantin’ me ta get one of those noisy air filters?

Xander started to nod then froze. *Is he asking me what I want?*

“Ya want an air filter for our rooms, pet?”

*Our rooms?* Xander started to panic again. Spike arched an eyebrow. *OK, XanMan,* Xander thought. *One freak out at a time and you’ve already got several queued up. Just answer the damn question before Spike gets those clamps again.* Xander nodded.
“I’ll tell Lorne,” Spike said.

*Who is this Lorne?* Xander wondered.

“Well,” Spike said as he somehow pulled on a t-shirt over his head without taking the cigarette out of his mouth or burning the shirt, “I’m gonna go get some brekkies.”

Xander’s stomach rumbled at the mention of food.

“Well I’d better see about finding you something too, eh?”

Xander nodded. *As long as it’s not what you’re having.* Xander thought.

“Right, so here’s the deal. While I’m gone ya got forty-five minutes ta do yer human stuff and get cleaned up,” Spike said as he pointed to the bathroom adjoined to the bedroom. “Now normally you only get ta touch yer meat and veggies when ya have to use the loo. Remember, yer dangly bits are mine.”

Xander nodded. He would have had some silent snark in mind about getting to hold his own dick while peeing, but his brain was still wrapped around the concept that he’d actually get to wash his own body.

“However,” Spike continued. “I’m real proud of ya. Ya did well just now. I also know part of ya was a least a little interested sometimes. So, if you want to play the skin flute while in the shower, I’ll give ya my permission.”

Xander blinked. Xander blinked again. Xander blinked a third time. *I can….I can…. I can….* Xander couldn’t even complete the thought. He had no desire to do what Spike was giving him permission to do. Xander had long ago learned to hate the part of his body that his former master had literally taken so much pleasure from. Yet, the concept he could treat it as his own, even for a little while was staggering.

“You OK, pet?” Spike asked concerned about Xander’s return to total stillness.

Xander nodded, shrugged and shook his head.

Spike sat down on the bed and cupped Xander’s chin in his hand. Spike studied Xander.

“Yer OK, Xander,” Spike said softly. “The world’s gone to shite and fate’s a twisted bitch, but yer still here Xander. You are still here.”

Then Spike leaned close and whispered very softly against Xander’s ear, “Hang on Xander. Hang on.”

Spike leaned back and looked at Xander then said again. “Yer OK, pet. Yer just overwhelmed.”

Xander finally nodded. *Why do you care, Spike? What do you want from me?*

“You go take your shower and do what else you need to do. I’ll be back to get you in forty-five minutes, K?”

Xander didn’t know if it was OK or not, but he nodded. Spike smiled and rubbed his thumb across
Xander’s bottom lip. He really wanted to kiss him again, but Spike knew that would be too much. *Don’t wanna break him*, Spike reminded himself.

Spike let Xander go and stood up. He pointed at a digital clock on the nightstand. It read 3:15.

“Forty-five minutes,” Spike said again and then left Xander alone.
Chapter 7

Lorne was waiting in Spike’s office by the time he returned from feeding in the blue stables.

“The Anne bint is breeding,” Spike said as he closed his office door and strode to his desk.

“Afternoon to you too,” Lorne replied.

Spike glared and sat down.

“I’ll see that she’s moved to the green stables,” Lorne sighed.

“There was a time you’d be happier to hear about a bird being up the duff,” Spike said.

“And I’m sure there was a time when you were more genteel with a phrase,” Lorne replied, “but that was a long time ago; long before humans were chattel.”

“Humans always were and always have been chattel, mate,” Spike growled, “just different masters now ’s all.”

“So why don’t you tell me why you’re in such a sunny mood, lemon drop. Bad wake-up?”

“You know some days I think don’t I like your nosy mojo,” Spike sighed, “and other days I know it.”

“Yes, but you always love my Mojitos,” Lorne said. “Now spill.”

“Pet had a bad dream.”

“Is he OK?” Lorne asked anxiously.

”Not sure,” Spike sighed and looked at Lorne. “I need to know what they did to him.”

“I’m working on it, pop tart,” Lorne said.

“You learn anything?”

“I already told you what I learned. Bottles are fed a gruel three times a day containing ‘enhancers.’ Helps with the bottles' libido and flavor,” Lorne said. “Which reminds me. You’ll want to gradually introduce him back to solid foods. Keep his meals simple and easy to digest.

Spike arched an eyebrow.

“Right,” said Lorne, “for the time being I’ll take care of ordering food for him.”

“What about training? Any ideas how they got them to act so much like a soddin’ statue?”

Lorne shook his head.

Spike growled.
"What’s going on Spike?" Lorne asked.

Spike studied Lorne for a minute and then sighed, “I need your help.”

“With what?”

“Xander.”

“Xander?”

“Lorne,” Spike said, “you were right. He isn’t broken but he’s close.”

“What do you need from me?” Lorne asked gently.

“I need you to help me keep him from going over the edge,” Spike said.

“Why?”

“Lorne, I need him. I need Xander, not a broken Xander. I need Xander the white knight, original Scoobie and all around bloody hero.”

“That’s what you need for your plan?” Lorne asked.

Spike shook his head. “The less you know about what I’m thinking, the better your chances are not to end up as Angelus’s next set of luggage.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Lorne replied.

“Well I bloody hell won’t!” Spike retorted angrily.

Lorne sighed.


Lorne locked his red eyes with Spike’s blue. He studied the vampire carefully.

“On a couple of conditions,” Lorne finally said.

“WOT?”

“I have conditions,” Lorne said.

“And ya could also end up with yer ruddy head in my desk drawer for a week,” Spike threatened.

“I could use the long rest,” Lorne said with a smile.

Spike growled and showed fang. Lorne examined his manicure.

“Fine!” Spike said and shifted back to his human face. “What are yer conditions?”

“One,” Lorne began, “you aren’t setting Xander up just to tear him down when needed for your
plan. I won’t help you keep him from going insane now so you can drive him insane later.”

Spike frowned then nodded. “Making Xander insane wasn’t part of my plan.”

“Good,” Lorne replied. “Then the second condition; I want you to swear that whether that human upstairs accepts your Claim or not, whether your plan succeeds or not, you will take care of him. You will take him as a Pet in more than just name.”

“Lorne….”

“Swear it!” Lorne said as he leaned over Spike’s desk and tapped his finger on the box containing the seer’s eyes, Doyle’s eyes. “Swear it.”

Spike looked at the box then looked at Lorne. He sighed and placed his hand on the box as well.

“I swear,” Spike said solemnly. “I swear that I will provide Xander with all the protections and benefits of a Pet. I will protect him with my life, status, and any means necessary. Xander is my Pet.”

Lorne nodded. Spike arched an eyebrow.

“Now sing,” Lorne commanded.

“You can’t be serious!” Spike sputtered.

“Sing, Spike, or the deal is off,” Lorne warned.

Spike sighed. He took a deep breath and then began to sing, "I've loved, I've laughed and cried, I've had my fill; my share of losing. And now, as tears subside, I find it all so amusing. To think, I did all that, and may I say --- not in a shy way, ‘Oh no, oh no not me, I did it my way’….”

Lorne held up his hand. Spike stopped singing.

“Well?” Spike asked.

Lorne grinned and replied, “I think it’s time we go up and see your Pet.”

***

It took a few moments after Spike left before Xander moved. Spike was gone. Xander was alone. He looked around the room. For a moment his vision blurred and everything seemed to fade to white.

Xander closed his eyes and breathed deep.

I’m Spike’s, Pet, Xander thought. I’m not a bottle. I’m not a bottle.

Xander opened his eyes and took several more deep breaths. The room was large and open. There were windows along one wall and a desk along the other. There was even a sofa and padded chairs in the corner. Bookshelves also dotted the wall space around the room.

Spike reads? Xander thought. And why isn’t Spike in ashes?
Xander stood up and shuffled to the window. The hot afternoon sun shone down on the city below. Xander gasped and reveled in the sight of daylight and blue sky. Xander raised his hands and this time touched the glass.

Xander soaked in the cool feel of the glass with just a hint of the sun’s heat behind it. Xander watched the city bake below.

*Spike said he’d take me out,* Xander thought. *If he can take the sunlight in his rooms, can he withstand it outside? Will he take me out at night or the day or even both?*

Xander rested his forehead on the glass. Briefly he let himself half imagine and half remember what it felt like to have sun warming his skin.

*Why?* Xander wondered. *Why is he doing this? What does he want?*

Xander took another breath and forced himself to look away from the window. Xander looked back at the clock: it was 3:20.

*I need to get moving,* Xander thought. *I don’t need any more ‘punishments.’*

Slowly he turned away from the windows and made his way to the bathroom. The bathroom was almost as large and lavish as the bedroom. There was the standard fare of sinks and a toilet, but there was both a large shower stall and an even larger garden tub.

Xander began to tremble. *I can’t,* Xander’s mind screamed as memories of times spent in the Tank crept forward. Xander took a step back out of the bathroom.

Xander looked at the clock. It read 3:21. Xander looked back at the tub and shower.

*He told me to get cleaned up,* Xander thought. *I’ll be punished if I disobey or worse, he’ll punish one of the other slaves. I doubt they’d get off with some kinky clamps and tiny kisses. I’m not even sure why I did.*

Xander took a step back into the bathroom. He looked at the toilet. *OK,* Xander thought. *Let’s start with what I can do and go from there.*

Xander fixed his gaze on the toilet and started to walk slowly toward it. Xander tried to focus all his attention on the porcelain seat and not to see the tub in his peripheral vision. One, two…six steps later and Xander was in front of the stool. He lifted the lid and averted his eyes from the small pool of water.

*OK,* Xander concluded. *Tub’s definitely out. If Xanman’s freakin’ over bowl water then a long soak is out.*

Then Xander did what he hadn’t done….well he didn’t know how long it had been since he’d done it. Xander touched his own penis. He took it in hand and relaxed. A stream of urine started to add to the toilet water. He couldn’t help but smile.

*Look ma…well OK, maybe not ma,* Xander thought ecstatically, *but I’m peeing! I’m doing it all by myself! I’m a big boy now.*

Then bitter tears formed in Xander’s eyes. *No one should be so grateful to hold their own dick,*
Xander thought as he shook his penis and finished peeing. He closed the lid and flushed the toilet. He couldn’t help jump back at the sound of the rushing water.

Xander swallowed and then turned around. He managed not to see the tub and he focused on the sink. Quickly he crossed the room and then froze. Above the sink was a wall of mirrors. Xander was frozen by the image. The image that froze Xander wasn’t the reflection of the tub behind him which Xander absolutely, positively, did not see. No, the image that froze Xander was the man in the mirror.

The reflection in the window the night before had been almost insubstantial, but here, in the bathroom mirror, his reflection looked solid and more alien. Xander took a step forward and stared. The brown eyes were familiar but the rest was a stranger.

Xander raised a hand and touched his hard stomach. No twinkie bump, Xander thought. He slid his hand up to his reddened nipples. He touched them gently. They were a bit sore, like he thought they would be, but a part of his brain still couldn’t connect the image to the sensations. Xander tilted his head to the left and then to the right. The stranger mimicked him move for move.

A distant memory of learning about a boy named Narcissus flitted through Xander’s mind. Willow’s reading voice said, Narcissus was a youth who fell in love with his own image reflected in a pool and wasted away from unsatisfied desire.

Xander jumped back from the mirror. No POOLS! Xander’s mind screamed. The stranger in the mirror looked terrified. He was pale and shaking. Slowly Xander stepped forward and reached a hand out to the stranger.

The stranger’s hand was cool, like the surface of the window. Tears started to stream down from the stranger’s eyes and Xander could no longer stand to look at his pain. Xander turned away. For a moment he panicked, wondering where he should look.

….get cleaned up, Spike had said.

Xander looked at the shower. Can’t let him hurt someone else, Xander thought as he took even and measured steps towards the shower. Have to get wet. Have to get clean. Xander tried not to think of the drying spunk in between his legs. Feeling it was bad enough.

Xander reached out and opened the door on the shower stall. It opened easily. He shut it and opened it again. Xander repeated the process several times until he’d actually worked up enough courage to step inside.

Quickly Xander threw open the door and moved to the back of the shower. He stood in the shower stall and stared at the drain. He waited for the thick liquid goo to rise. There was nothing. Xander counted to ten. Still there was no goo. Xander swallowed and reached for the door. He shut it and jumped back again. The drain remained dry. Xander counted to ten again.

I can do this, Xander thought even as his heart beat so fast he was sure Spike would come back at four and find it on the floor and Xander lying beside it in a heap. OK, Xander thought. So not the image I need right now.

Xander stood as far away from the shower head as he could and still reach the faucets. He turned the cold water on and spray shot out. Xander jumped back. Again he watched the drain. The water swirled and went down.
Not rising, Xander thought. It’s going down.

Cautiously Xander stepped into the spray. Water hit him in the face and sluiced down his body. Xander was used to cold showers. The blue meanies, that’s what he’d begun to call the guards, always sprayed him down with cold water.

Xander turned a circle in the water. He watched the drain. The water didn’t pool at his feet.

Soap, Xander thought. I need soap. Xander looked around. He found a pale yellow bar that smelled of sandalwood. Xander reached for it and took it in his hand. He marveled at the cool slick feel of it and the rich scent.

I can get clean, Xander thought. I can really get clean!

Suddenly Xander was a flurry of motion. Over and over he turned the bar in his hands until they were covered in a rich lather. Xander took the soap and then first began to scrub at his face. Over and over he washed his face and didn’t care if soap got in his eyes. Then almost in a stupor he began rubbing the soap over his arms. He scrubbed up and down until his arms were lathered. Then Xander rubbed the soap over his chest. He ignored the slight ache in his nipples. Over and over he scrubbed. He even stuck a finger into his bellybutton and scrubbed there.

Next Xander bent down and lathered his legs. When his legs were white with lather he stood up and rinsed. He watched the lather flow with the water down the drain. He still held the soap in his hands. Xander looked at his crotch.

I can get clean, Xander thought. Xander lathered his hands again. He put the soap down and then very slowly he began to wash his cock and balls. Gently Xander ran his fingers down and around his penis. He lifted it and slicked the flesh underneath. He lathered his balls and then slid his hand up and back over his perineum. There was nothing sexual or erotic about his touch. It was almost as if he were touching the stranger in the mirror’s body. Yet, there was something so clean about it.

Xander lathered his hands and washed his backside with the same care and detail. I am not a bottle, Xander thought. I am not a bottle.

When Xander watched the last of the lather wash down the drain, he looked around. Still not quite clean, Xander thought. He spied a bottle of shampoo. He washed the strangers shoulder length brown hair. He rinsed.

Clean, Xander thought. Xander turned the water off. He opened the shower door. He stepped out. He grabbed a large green towel folded over a towel rod. Gently, Xander dried his arms, legs and torso. He grabbed another towel and soaked up the water clinging to the long hair. When he was done he looked back at the mirror.

The stranger stared back, but he was a little less scared and a little bit more familiar. Xander walked out of the bathroom. He looked at the clock. It was 3:55.

Author's notes: Mojitos are a type of cocktail first invented in Cuba. Spike of course is singing an excerpt from My Way first made famous by Frank Sinatra. In cannon Spike sings along to Sid
Vicious's cover in Lover's Walk.
Chapter 8

It was 4:07 when Spike walked into his bedroom. He immediately jumped back and choked back a yelp.

"Bloody Hell!" Spike growled as he quickly recovered, "not with the soddin' statue business again! RELAX!"

Xander blinked at Spike. Spike growled again and moved further into the bedroom. The green-skinned and red-eyed demon from the night before followed.

"Well maybe if you didn't growl and shout at him, lemon drop," the demon said, "the boy could relax."


The green demon walked up to Xander then cast a look a Spike. Spike rolled his eye and nodded.

"My name is, Lorne," the demon said as he offered his hand to Xander.

This is Lorne? Xander thought and blinked. This is Lorne, and he's offering to shake my hand?

Xander blinked again and looked at Spike.

"Go on," Spike sighed and waved his hand.

Xander blinked again.

"Lorne," the demon said again. "And please, I've heard all the Lorne Greene jokes my well-dressed self can stand."

Right, Commander Adama, Xander thought as he slowly held out his hand and clasped Lorne's.

"It's a pleasure to meet you Xander," Lorne said as he gently but firmly shook Xander's hand. "Spike has told me so much about you."

He has? Xander thought and couldn't help frowning.

"Well as much as Spike will ever tell me anything about anyone from his past," Lorne said as he released Xander's hand and slid to Xander's side so they could both watch Spike. "He told me you met back when you were in high school and that Angel introduced you two."

"It wasn't the bloody prom!" Spike snapped.

Parent's night, Xander thought. And Angel didn't introduce us. He grabbed me around the neck and offered to me to Spike! And I don't care what the soulless bastard has to say now or then...he meant it!

Lorne frowned. "Hmmm...I seem to have hit a nerve."
"Lorne," Spike growled.

"Right," Lorne said. "So, Xander, do you know what Spike has planned this morning?"

_Oh yeah, cuz Spike and I? Bosom buddies!_ Xander thought and then nearly started to laugh a bitter dry heave. _Bosom buddies. Yep, after this morning I think I can say that....well if I could talk that is._

"Pet," Spike warned. "Answer the question."

"Wait? So now I have to answer Pa Cartwright's questions too?_ Xander thought and blinked at Spike.

"Spike," Lorne said. "Have you told him to answer _my_ questions? Or is he just supposed to answer yours? Not nice to play tricks."

"I'm not trying to trick the prat!" Spike said. "I just wan...oh bloody...Xander, you are to answer _my_ questions, _Lorne's_ questions, _and_ anyone I specify to be your handler at the time. Got it?"

Xander nodded his head. _Great...handlers!_ Xander thought. _You gonna hire someone to walk me too?_

"And will you PLEASE RELAX!" Spike shouted

Xander jumped. _Relax? What the hell does that mean you peroxide addled freak! You fuckin' RELAX!_ Xander shouted in his brain and then started to tremble. _He tells me to relax and I can't...who's he going to punish? I'm sorry...please don't...not because..._

"Xander, cup-cake," Lorne quickly intervened. "Why don't you just sit down on the bed."

_Oh ghod! Not again!_ Xander thought.

"Now look what ya did," Spike growled as he heard the increase in Xander's heart rate.

"Xander," Lorne said, "I'm not going to...join you. I mean as cute as you are, cup cake, you're not my type. I tend to run towards the tragically doomed and half-breed sort."

Xander blinked. _Half-breed?_

"And besides, even if you could tempt me with those dark chocolate eyes of yours," Lorne said, "you _are_ Spike's Pet." _And once again I wonder, what does that mean?_ Xander thought. _Dark chocolate?_

"Pet," Spike said. "No one touches you without my permission and if I do give them permission to touch you, it won't be for a game of slap and tickle. _I don't_ share."

_OK, _Xander thought as he found himself sinking down to sit on the bed. _I don't know whether that scares me more or relieves me._

"See," Lorne said. "Things are getting better already. Xander's _relaxing._"

_No, _Xander thought, _Xander is freakin', he's just not doing it on his feet._
"Now," Lorne said, "back to my original question. Do you know what Spike has planned this morning?"

Sorta, Xander thought as he nodded.
Lorne frowned and looked at Spike.

"Told the git some folks would be up to get him ready," Spike said.

"Well did you tell him what they would do to get him ready?" Lorne asked.

"Don't bloody have to," Spike muttered and looked away from Lorne.

"Spike, lemon drop, if you want Xander to relax you have to be a bit more forth coming."

Hey! Xander thought. You could also stop talking like I'm not here! I mean...I know I'm just a Pet, but ignore me too long an you know I might just whizz on the carpet or something.

"Fine," Spike growled and then walked over to Xander. He grabbed Xander's chin and looked him in the eye. "Yer gonna get measured for your collar, your chastity belt, and your clothes. You'll also be getting yer piercings."

Xander blinked. Chastity belt? Piercings! FUCK. I'm not some action figure you can just... Xander paused for a moment. Clothes? Since when do slaves wear clothes? And I'm NOT an action figure!

"I think a haircut would be in order," Lorne also said.
Spike slid his hand from Xander's chin, up along his cheek and buried it in Xander's hair. He stroked it gently. Xander couldn't help but lean into the gentle touch. Spike smiled.

"Just a little, Spikey," Lorne said. "How about mid-neck? Cutting it will help keep it healthy."

Spike continued to run his hands through Xander's hair. Used to do this for Dru, Spike thought. He wanted to pull away but the heat and damp silky softness kept him trapped. Spike leaned down and sniffed Xander's neck. Smells good, Spike thought and snaked out his tongue to lick Xander's neck.

Xander jumped and scrambled back. He ignored the slight hair pulling.
Spike grabbed Xander's ankles and hauled him back.

"Where do you think yer going?" Spike growled.

Away from the bitey teeth! Xander panicked.

"'Nother rule, pet," Spike said, "you will not pull away from my touch! Got it?"

Xander nodded slowly.

"You didn't pull away from that bag of shite, Vr'xkl, and you aren't goin' to pull away from me," Spike ordered.

You didn't have a Tank! Xander thought and then panicked. Oh ghods! Do you, Spike? Do you have
Spike smelt the fear rolling off Xander before he felt the trembling man lean in and press his body against Spike. Xander frantically began rubbing his head against Spike's hand. Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne sighed and mouthed, 'Comfort him.'

I'm not some nanc....Spike thought and then began to run his hand through Xander's hair.

"Shhh, pet," Spike said softly. "'S all right. You wouldn't be Xander if you weren't a little annoyin' now and then."

I'll be whoever you want me to be, Xander thought as he stilled and let Spike touch him.

Spike squatted down so he could look Xander in the eyes. Xander kept his head low and still. Spike gently slid his hand from Xander's hair back down to his chin. Spike once again raised Xander's chin so they were looking at each other eye to eye.

"Pet," Spike said softly. "I was with Dru for over a hundred years. I've done the 'balmy bit.' I really don't wanna go that road again. It's bloody exhaustin'. Now, my great poof of a sire gave ya to me. He gave me donut boy Harris. That's who I want for my Pet."

Howz the song go, Spike? Xander thought. You can't always get what you want.

"So, take a deep breath," Spike said.

Xander took a deep breath.

"Let it go."

Xander exhaled.

"And let's go out and get the measurin' done, yeah?"

Xander briefly wondered what would happen if he shook his head 'no,' but he was still too scared to find out. He nodded his head.

***

Just how many colors do demons come in? Xander wondered as a demon as orange as the measuring tape wrapped around Xander's neck muttered numbers to the kneeling and naked old man on the floor. The old man simply repeated the numbers. Remembering, Xander thought. He can't write them down. Seems even Spike and his minions obey Angelus's rules forbidding humans to read or write. 'Cept for the rumors about....

"Oi!" Spike said. "Make sure it won't choke or rub 'im."

"Oh no Massssterr Spike," the orange demon hissed. "Hissss collar will resssst ssssmoothly around hissss fine neck."

"It better or my hands will be wrapped smoothly and tightly around yours," Spike hissed back.
The demon put some more slack in the tape around Xander's neck and then bowed to Spike. Spike stalked over to the bar and poured a drink. Next the demon measured Xander's torso, arms and legs. He slithered upright again and looked at Spike.

"Sorta looks like a weird gecko, Xander thought.

"Which sssside doessss he dressss on, Masssster?"

"Fuckin' Hell!" Spike yelled. "How should I bloody well know? I've only seen him buck naked!"

The gecko demon bowed again. Spike looked at Xander. *How much more pawin' does he have ta do?* Spike wondered.

"Pet, you dress to the left?"

*Dress? To the left? Is that like some variation on the Time Warp?* Xander wondered and shrugged.

"Oh fer....does your tadger...johnson...one-eyed Willy hang to the right or the left when you dress?" Spike asked as he pointed to Xander's cock.

Well ignoring that wasn't a 'yes' or 'no' question and that it's been....who knows _how_ long since I last wore pants, Xander thought, *I'm not entirely sure how to answer that question Master Grouchy.*

"You can use yer hands," Spike sighed.

Xander raised his right hand. *At least that seems right,* Xander thought.

"Very good," the gecko demon said. Then he slithered back down and tapped the inside of Xander's thighs with his little nubby hands.

Spike bit back a growl. *Has to touch him to measure him. Gave him permission,* Spike thought.

Xander widened his legs, and then he widened his eyes as the demon began to measure him...down there. Xander cast panicked eyes at Spike.

"Measurin' ya for the belt. Want it to fit properly, don'tcha?"

*I don't want it to fit at all!* Xander thought. *I mean I don't _want_ one!*

"Sssss," the demon said as its thin forked tongue suddenly flicked in and out. "Can sssssmell your claim, Massssster."

Xander flushed. *Oh ghod! He can smell Spike's jizz?* Xander thought. *I showered!*

"Keep your mind on your work, Keppler," Spike warned in a low growl.

"Keffer, my Lord," the demon said. "Sssssorry to offend. Jusssst your Pet'ssss ssssscent issss only made better by yourssss."

"And you'll be dead if you mention it one more time!" Spike shouted.

"Lem...Lord Spike," Lorne interrupted. "Perhaps you would like to bathe before feeding your pet?"
"What?" Spike snarled.

"I can continue to watch as Kemper..."

"Kef... Keffer," the orange demon corrected again.

"Right," Lorne said. "With your permission I can order your Pet's breakfast, you can shower and Kem... Keffer can finish his work."

Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne looked at Spike. Xander watched them both.

OK, Xander thought, another Rocky Horror Show moment.


Keffer bowed again. Spike stormed past him. He paused briefly to touch Xander's shoulder then headed on to the bedroom. While Keffer was once again running his hands and tape between Xander's legs he could hear the shower start. Xander flinched.

"You OK, cup cake?" Lorne asked as he held a cell phone to his ear.

Xander nodded. Lorne turned his back a moment to finish ordering his breakfast. He missed Xander's second flinch as Keffer quickly ran his forked tongue over the tip of Xander's penis.

You snake... reptile... FUCK! Xander thought and looked at Lorne. Lorne turned around and smiled then frowned.

"You sure you are OK?" Lorne asked.

This time Xander shook his head and pointed at Keffer.

Lorne sighed. "I know you aren't comfortable with this Xander, but Kettler is almost done."

"Kef... Keffer," the demon said as it finally slinked away from Xander's personal space. "And I am finissshh." 

Xander glared at the demon. The demon ignored Xander and bowed to Lorne.

"Good," Lorne said. "Give the measurements to the others. Have them wait to knock until after Master Spike feeds his Pet."

Keffer nodded and then slid out of the room. His human slave opened the door for him and then followed him out. Xander looked at Lorne, Now what?

"Now," Lorne said, "why don't we get you comfortable?"

Oh please, Xander thought.

"Breakfast will be here shortly," Lorne continued. Xander's stomach rumbled.

"Did Spike feed you last night?"
Xander shook his head.

"I'm sorry, Xander," Lorne said. "I should have reminded him. He doesn't mean to starve you."

Xander blinked.

"Look," Lorne said, "when you get hungry just make an eating motion with your hand, OK?"

_Eating motion?_ Xander thought then slowly raised his hand to his mouth. He bit at an imaginary sandwich.

"Good!" Lorne said. "Just like that. I'll tell Spike and will be sure he tells any future handlers. OK?"

_OK, Xander thought. Why do you think there's anything 'OK' about any of this? And why do you think I have a choice?"

"Did Spike give you anything to drink last night?"

Xander nodded.

"Well that's better," Lorne said. "Where did he give it to you?"

Xander pointed over by the black leather chair. Lorne nodded. He then grabbed a large pillow and placed it on the floor by the chair.

"Why don't you come wait for Spike here," Lorne said as he stood by the chair.

Xander sighed and moved over to the chair.

"You need to kneel," Lorne said gently. Xander looked at Lorne and then went to sink to his knees.

"Wait!" Lorne said. Xander froze. "Kneel on the pillow. You're a Pet. There should always be a pillow to kneel on by Spike unless he orders otherwise."

Xander moved to the pillow and knelt. He automatically adjusted his knees to be open the way Spike had ordered them last night.

"Th...that's g....that's good, Xander," Lorne forced himself to say. The last thing he wanted to do was instruct Xander on how to be a good 'Pet,' but the consequences of Xander behaving any other way would be bad; very bad.

There was a knock on the door.

"That will be your breakfast," Lorne said and moved away to answer the door.

_Breakfast?_ Xander thought. _It's nearly five in the evening!_

"Nice," Spike whispered. Xander jumped and looked up.

_Fuck!_ Xander thought. _Where did he co...Oh! Right! Vampire._
Spike smiled and sat in the chair. He smelled of sandalwood. He was dressed in another pair of black jeans. This time he wore a black t-shirt to go with it.

"Didn't mean to scare ya, pet."

*There's a solution to that, Xander thought. It involves a stake and a dustbuster.*

Xander studied Spike. He was not only clean, he looked like he was glowing. *Glowing?* Xander thought. Then he realized he was just seeing Spike in the sunlight. *Why isn't he ash?* Xander thought.

"Sumthin' a matter, pet?" Spike asked.

Slowly Xander raised his hand and pointed to the windows, then he pointed to Spike.

"Wha...OH!" Spike laughed. "Magicked windows. Angelus's lawyer mates came up with 'em. Kinda nice to sit in the sun every now and then. Well nice in that I don't go 'poof."

*Magi...Angelus has lawyers?* Xander thought and lowered his hand. *What would Angelus need lawyers for?*

"Here we go," Lorne said as he carried a tray over to Spike and Xander. He sat the tray down on the stand next to Spike's chair. The smell of food wafted to Xander and he found his mouth watering. He leaned forward unconsciously.

"Spike," Lorne said as he removed lids off the dishes on the tray, "Xander has an eating motion he'll use when he's hungry. Show him Xander."

Xander looked at Spike. He raised his hand and mimed eating a sandwich.

"Bloody brilliant, pet!" Spike exclaimed.

Xander blushed.

"So," Lorne said. "This means you have no excuse to forget to feed him again."

"Wh...Oh! Look, Xander, I didn't mean...well look ain't apologizing. Big Bad here, but I didn't mean to starve ya. Yer my Pet. I'll make sure ya get what ya need, yeah?"

Xander nodded absently. He stared at the plate of food where steam was rolling off what looked like scrambled eggs. Next to the plate was a banana and next to the banana was a glass of milk with a straw in it.

"Spike," Lorne prompted.

"Right," Spike said as he picked up a spoon and scooped up a spoonful of eggs. "We're gonna go slow with this, pet. Lorne says ya gotta build up ta solid foods again."

Then Spike offered the eggs to Xander. Xander focused on not shaking or just lunging for the eggs. He opened his mouth and closed it around the spoon. Xander inched his lips forward and cleaned the spoon of eggs.
Xander broke the rule about watching Spike. It was just too good. He savored the texture, the feel, and the TASTE of the eggs. He wanted to cry, he wanted to swallow and he wanted to kiss Spike's feet. He settled for chewing slowly and then swallowing. He opened his eyes and looked at Spike with blurry vision.


Author's notes: Lorne Greene was a Canadian actor and broadcaster who also played the roles of Commander Adama in the original Battlestar Galactica TV series and Ben "Pa" Cartwright in Bonanza. He narrated several nature shows. I also remember him for doing ads for kitty litter.
Chapter 9

Xander was in too much of a contented haze from his first real meal in longer than he cared to think about, to pay much attention when the other assorted demons and slaves entered the suite. Xander was still chasing the sweet flavor of the banana around his mouth when Spike ordered him to stand and move back to the center of the large room. Xander was still remembering the cool, thick feel of milk sliding down his throat when another vampire approached him.

When the vampire reached for Xander's throat, Xander paid attention. He shot a panicked look at Spike.

"Oi! I'll do the honors," Spike said from around the cigarette he'd lit after he'd fed Xander. The unfamiliar vampire backed away and handed a metal band to Spike. Spike put down his cigarette and walked over to Xander.

"Yer new collar is made of white gold,\," Spike said as he stood in front of Xander. Xander blinked. "Nothin' but the best for my Pet."

*A collar worth more than my Dad drank in a year is still a collar,* Xander thought, even as a stray melody threatened to bounce around his consciousness.

*'Band of Gold' is not going through my head,* Xander thought as Spike slid the cool metal around his throat.

The fit wasn't snug and the collar itself felt surprisingly light. The stupid melody was going through Xander's head as his eyes met Spike's. They were only inches apart. Xander flushed when Spike locked the collar in place. Then Spike leaned forward and whispered a word Xander couldn't make out against the collar.

"Lock's magicked. Only I can unlock it," Spike whispered as he traced a finger over the little ring on the front of Xander's collar.

Then Spike pulled back. Once again he locked gazes with Xander. An unbidden heat flared through Xander and he swallowed.

"Mine now, pet," Spike said softly. "Never lettin' ya go."

*I belong to mysel...* Xander's silent vow was interrupted by the whisper of a kiss across his mouth. Xander's eyebrows went up, even as Spike lightly licked and nibbled at Xander's lips.

Xander stood frozen. *Spike kissage! Oh ghods... Am I supposed to kiss him back?* Xander wondered. *Will I be in trouble if I don't...?*


*Taking advantage is right,* Xander groused internally even though he began to relax. Spike was touching him only on the lips. Xander expected he'd feel cool where Spike touched him but it was just the opposite. Heat danced where Spike kissed and Xander didn't want to think about what that meant.
Xander also tried to ignore that Spike was good. Spike was very good at the light and teasing kisses and Xander felt his blood rise in answer to those masterful touches. A part of Xander just wanted to close his eyes and melt into those tender mercies. It had been so long since he'd felt this *human*.

*No, Xander thought, and forced himself to remain passive and stiff. I will not be seduced into being his Pet.*

*Gonna remain passive, pet?* Spike thought in amusement as he noted Xander's response. *I'm prepared to 'up the ante.'*

Xander began to silently rant, *He's a vampire... he's Spike and well he's a he* and the last time I remembered breasts and curves were part of my fant...

Spike slid the tip of his tongue between Xander's lips. Xander was glad he couldn't groan. The unexpected pleasure of Spike's tongue sliding against his short-circuited Xander's thoughts.

Spike finally used more than his lips to touch Xander. He snaked his hands through Xander's thick hair and gently manipulated Xander so he could get a better angle for a deeper kiss.

*I can't watch,* Xander thought as he sighed into Spike's mouth, closed his eyes and fought to keep his hands at his side.

Spike swept in and took control of Xander's mouth just as he had taken control of Xander’s life. Spike sucked on Xander's tongue tasting milk, banana, eggs and that cinnamon-cedar flavor that was Xander. Someone moaned. Some functioning part of Xander hoped it was Spike and not one of the other demons present.

Spike capitalized on his need not to breathe and continued to show Xander just what someone who'd been around over a hundred and fifty years knew about kissing and the art of seduction. Xander started to grow dizzy and hungry for something he didn't want to name.

Just as Xander's hand began to curl with the need to touch, Spike retreated. Xander opened his eyes at the sudden loss and reacquainted himself with a regular air supply.

Spike smiled and it was like Xander had never seen Spike before that moment. Spike’s eyes danced a cerulean blue, his lips were stretched easily across straight white teeth, and somehow he seemed both predator and protector. Spike slid his hands out from Xander's hair and cupped his chin.


Xander swallowed. He felt flushed and in way over his head. Spike took a few steps back and did the proverbial 'rake his eyes' over Xander. Xander couldn't help but look down at his own body. He was shocked and embarrassed to see his 'flag' at half mast.

*Enhancers have to still be in my system,* Xander thought, and then glared at Spike. Spike smirked and walked back to his chair, sat down, and resumed smoking his cigarette.

For a moment the room was quiet. All the demons were either still enraptured by Spike's show of mastery or just soaking in the atmosphere rich in pheromones. The slaves had their eyes on their masters or the floor.

"Uhm," Lorne said clearing his throat. "Let's continue shall we?"
Suddenly the room shuffled to life again with movements and murmurs. The other vampire in the room bowed to Spike and then approached Xander again. His assisting slave held a flat, square wooden box in his hands. The vampire opened the box and there were a set of long needles and a surgical clamp and other things Xander didn't want to see.

"May I, Master Spike?" the vampire asked as he looked over his shoulder. Spike nodded. The vampire picked up a pen and drew a dot on each side of Xander's left nipple. He then reached out and caressed Xander's left nipple with a cool wet piece of cotton. Xander gasped and jerked back.

"Hold still, pet," Spike barked.

Xander snapped his eyes back to Spike and froze. Xander swallowed. He smelled the alcohol from the cotton.

Piercings, Xander thought as he remembered what Spike had said earlier. Oh gh... He can't be serious! He can't mean to pierce my nip...

The vampire sprayed a cool liquid on Xander's nipple. Xander bit his lip but otherwise held still. He focused on Spike. Xander gasped as the demon clamped Xander's erect nipple.

Spike, Xander pleaded with his eyes.

"Do it," Spike ordered.

Quickly the vampire picked up a needle and then pierced it through Xander's flesh. Xander hissed at the sharp pain while the vampire inserted a curved metal ring through Xander's pierced nipple. The vampire fiddled with the metal ring for a moment and then stepped back.

Spike once again raked his eyes over Xander. Xander seethed and looked at what had been done to his body. A white gold metal ring hung from his nipple and was beaded at the bottom with a blue stone; a sapphire.

The color of Spike's eyes, Xander thought bitterly and then shot another glare at Spike. Spike ignored Xander and looked at the other vampire. Spike nodded his approval.

The vampire moved back to Xander and then began to rub down Xander's right ear with an alcohol swab.

Oh you fuc... Xander flinched and his thoughts shut down as the other vampire pierced Xander's ear. Once again the vampire stepped back so Spike could inspect the vampire's handiwork. Once again Spike nodded in approval.

Then the vampire picked up a small ointment jar.

Now what? Xander wondered and continued to glare at Spike. The vampire opened the jar and scooped out a little of the gray cream inside. He began to rub the ointment over Xander's nipple. A soothing warmth spread thought Xander's abused flesh.

"This needs to be applied twice a day," the vampire said. Xander blinked. The vampire was talking to him! "This will speed up the healing time by a factor of three."
Xander looked at Spike, then at the vampire who was now applying the salve to Xander's ear.
Xander nodded slightly.

"Don't forget," the vampire said. "Your master will not want any infections or delay in playing with your new pretties."

*Playing with my 'pretties'?* Xander thought and shot a look at Spike. Spike smirked and blew out a puff of smoke.

*If only vampires could get lung cancer!* Xander thought.

"All done, my lord," the other vampire said as he closed the ointment jar and turned to Spike. "You should be able to change rings in a month, if you desire."

"Thank you," Spike said. "I am pleased. Feel free to choose something from my blue stable this evening."

The vampire bowed and exited. On the way out he left the jar of ointment on a table near Spike.

Xander fumed about his piercings all the way through having his haircut. He tried to forget about it. His feeling of outrage and helplessness were too similar to his thoughts as a bottle. Memories of Xander's first tapping threatened to come crashing through to his consciousness.

It was hard to fight both the memories and the odd sense of betrayal Xander felt by Spike's callousness in getting him pierced. Up until then, Spike had moments where he almost seemed to care about Xander as something more than property. Now, Xander felt almost like a thing all over again.

Once Xander’s haircut was done, Keffer slunk into the room. Xander glared at the demon and tensed.

*Stay away from me,* Xander thought to what he knew was no avail.

Keffer slithered on his belly to Spike. He flicked his tongue over Spike’s boot and then slithered over to Xander and rose up. Keffer snapped one of his nubby fingers and his slave approached holding a stainless steel device.

“Your chasssssity belt,” Keffer said then motioned for the slave to set the device on the floor.
“Sssstep each leg inssside the belt.”

**NO!** Xander thought and backed up.

“PET!” Spike yelled.

Xander froze and looked at Spike. Bumps, ridges and fangs were all the threat Xander needed. He looked around at the human slaves in the room and then bowed his head. He stepped forward and into the belt.

Keffer slithered down, picked up the belt and slid it up over Xander’s legs. *Don’t you touch me!* Xander thought helplessly and then looked at Spike.

“With your permisssssion my lord, Sssspike,” Keffer said as he approached Xander’s crotch.

Xander couldn’t help the sigh of relief that escaped as Keffler slunk away and Spike took over. Gently Spike reached out and slid Xander’s penis inside the L shaped tube at the center of the belt. Xander felt cool metal around his waist, over his cock, down past his perineum and up over the crack of his ass.

“The keys!” Spike ordered. Keffler slithered over and handed it to Spike. “These the only copy?”

“Yes,” Keffler said.

Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne frowned. Spike whirled baring fangs and golden eyes.

“One more time Kefer,” Spike hissed.

Keffler flushed russet, dropped full to the ground and snapped his nubby fingers.

“I’m sorry master. My memory is faulty. My slave has another set,” the orange demon said.

Keffler’s slave approached Spike and fell to his knees. The slave’s hand was shaking as he held out another set of keys to Spike.

Spike grabbed the slave’s wrist and jerked him forward.

*Please Spike, don’t!* Xander thought. Keffler’s a sleaze. *Don’t punish his slave!* Xander desperately began to snap his fingers to get Spike’s attention.

Spike turned his head to look at Xander. Xander briefly met his gaze. Then did the only thing he could think of to communicate his plea. Xander tilted his head and offered his neck to Spike.

*Very clever, pet,* Spike thought as he snatched the keys and released Keffler’s slave. Spike approached Xander and nuzzled the offered neck.

“Get out, Kenner,” Spike ordered against the scarred skin of Xander’s neck.

”Yes, my lord,” Keffler said, and then quickly slithered out of the room. His slave stumbled behind him.

Xander held very still while Spike nuzzled and licked his neck. He even held still as the tips of fangs slid across his skin leaving small bloody trails which Spike quickly licked away. Spike then took an unneeded breath and stepped back from Xander.

Xander cautiously raised his head and looked at Spike. Spike smiled.

“Let’s finish getting you ready, pet,” Spike said as he stuck one of the keys in the lock and slowly screwed the security belt through all three straps of the belt. Then Spike moved behind Xander and using the second key for the belt secured the lock covering his ass. “I can’t wait to show you off.”

Xander nodded in resignation. *Once again just another thing,* Xander thought. *Not a bottle, but a Pet.*
Once Spike had Xander securely in his belt he moved back to his chair. Lorne bent down and whispered something to Spike as another vampire approached Xander. The vampire held out a pair of black leather pants.

Xander blinked.

“The leather is soft and supple,” the vampire encouraged as it motioned for Xander to take the pants. Xander slowly reached out for the pants. They were as soft and supple as the vampire had said.

Xander looked at Spike who was frowning as he listened to Lorne. Xander swallowed. Spike locked gazes with Xander and then seemed to sigh.

“Go ahead, pet,” Spike said.

Xander’s hands were almost shaking as he started to dress for the first time since he’d been captured five tank visits and too many tappings ago. As Xander tugged and pulled the pants up over his ass and belt the vampire leaned forward.

”Ask Master Spike to let you put powder on before wearing the belt and pants,” the vampire whispered. “It will help keep things comfortable and the pants go on easier.”

Thank you, Xander thought and then looked at the vampire. Why do you care?

The vampire smiled and stepped back. He turned to his slave and retrieved a blue shirt. The vampire was holding it out to Xander just as he finished fastening the leather pants.

A shirt too? Xander thought, as he reached out and took the shirt. Like the leather pants, it was soft.

“It’s silk,” the vampire said as Xander slid one arm into it, draped it around his back and then slid his other arm inside. The sleeves came down over his wrists and the collar was high.

Xander started to button it up when he heard Spike clear his throat. Xander stopped and looked at Spike.

“Shirt open, pet,” Spike said. Xander dropped his hands.

A gray demon with antlers approached Spike and held open a long steel box. Spike reached inside and pulled out a long chain of some sort. He looked at it, smiled and then thanked the demon.

“Right,” Spike said as he stood up. “I’m pleased. Go grab a treat from downstairs.”

Demons and slaves bowed and then quickly shuffled out of the suite. Even Lorne left the suite but not before smiling warmly at Xander. It was a smile devoid of any lust or taunt. It was a smile of friendship and Xander couldn’t help but give a small smile in return.

Spike waited until the room cleared then he walked back over to Xander. He held a long ‘chain’ of white gold in his hand. At one end was a thin metal clip and the other what looked to be a small railroad spike.

Spike clipped the chain to Xander’s collar and then let it hang down.

“Your lead,” Spike said softly.
Thanks, Xander thought bitterly. Spike ran his hand through Xander’s hair. Once again Xander couldn’t deny how nice the touch felt, even if it was just the touch of a master to his pet.

“Yer not a piece of property, Xander,” Spike said softly.

Xander couldn’t help but jerk back a little. How did he kn…?

Spike gently tugged on Xander’s leash so Xander was again standing close to him.

“Yer my Pet,” Spike said. “Your status keeps you safe from other demons and allows me to dress you if I please. You don’t have to be on display. In fact I don’t want you on display. ‘S why the clothes.”

Xander narrowed his eyes. And the piercings? The belt? What’s your excuse for those Fangface?

Spike reached out and lightly touched Xander’s nipple ring.

“Most masters who take Pets like to mark them in more ways than just bites. They want to adorn them as part of setting them apart from other slaves. The piercings seemed less painful than branding, scarring or tattooing,” Spike said. Then he leaned close and whispered in Xander’s ear, “Plus they can be fun.”

Xander blinked and Spike leaned back to look at Xander. Then he ran his hands down over Xander’s hips and then over his crotch. Xander couldn’t feel Spike’s intimate touch.

“Demons are cagey creatures,” Spike said, as he petted the leather over the stainless steel cup immobilizing Xander. “They scheme, jostle for power and break the rules when they can get away with it.”

Tell me about it, Xander thought as he remembered Keffler’s tongue flicking across Xander’s penis. Xander contained his shudder.

“The belt helps make sure no one touches what’s mine,” Spike said then grinned, “And like the piercings, it can be fun.”

Yeah, right, Xander feebly riposted.

“So, Pet,” Spike said as he stopped petting Xander’s crotch. “Ready ta see my casino?”

Xander blinked as Spike turned around and headed for the door. Do I follow him? Xander thought. Is he supposed to lead me?

Spike opened the door and turned back to look at Xander. “Lead’s mostly for show or fer when I trust ya to a handler. A master with a good Pet trusts his pet to follow him. You a good Pet, Xan?”

Memories of the tank haunted Xander and he quickly nodded. Xander scurried to step behind Spike and then followed him out the door.

Author's Notes: The chastity belt is The Enforcer Steel Chastity belt.
Chapter 10

The casino floor was more overwhelming than Xander had expected. Xander had believed he'd been prepared for the lights, the noise and the patrons. He was wrong.

As a bottle, Xander could just ignore everything. He'd been trained to pick a point and keep his gaze fixed on it. A bottle didn't draw much attention either. He was just a vessel for his master's pleasure, and even when his master took his pleasure; it had nothing to do with Xander.

Xander had broken with his training the night before when he'd seen the trademark Billy Idol hair and heard the smoke roughened voice with the British accent. Xander hadn't been able to help but shift his gaze to Spike. Xander hadn't been able to avoid staring at the vampire. In some ways, watching Spike had been as rich to his over-starved senses as the city lights had been. Spike was action, hard planes, bursts of noise and something from 'Before.'

Now, Spike was Xander's anchor in a sea of sensory overload. The lights of the casino were dizzying and the sounds were deafening. Xander kept his gaze on Spike as he strode through the press of demons, vampires and slaves. Spike was like the bow of a great ship parting the waters before him and the crowd pulled back as he passed. Xander worked to stay in Spike's wake. He wished he could just disappear behind his new 'master.'

Xander didn't have to look around to know Spike wasn't the only one the crowd was watching. Xander knew he was also being watched and observed. Xander had been too long as a bottle and the attention made him edgy and nervous. Attention was something bottles really didn't want. Attention meant 'serving' the master or 'the Tank' and neither event was something Xander desired.

Xander could hear murmurs about Spike's 'Pet' as he passed. Xander not only began to feel the weight of stares but he could start to feel the desires and hungers of those who watched him. Xander stepped closer to Spike and hoped Spike had meant what he'd said about not sharing. Xander wasn't sure whether those watching him wanted just sex or blood and he didn't want to find out he was right.

Spike could smell the fear coming off his boy and he knew it was just enticing his customers' prurient interests more. Wanted to create a stir, pet, Spike thought. Not create a bloody riot.

Spike suddenly stopped and spun around. Xander almost stumbled right into him. Xander blushed then stepped back a pace. He held still and looked at Spike. Spike smiled and closed the gap Xander had created.

"Soooo," Spike said as he slowly zig-zagged his finger down Xander's chest until it rested on the edge of Xander's waistband, "What do you think of my place, Pet?"

Xander swallowed. He quickly looked around and blanched as he could see the myriad of eyes, antennae and tentacles focused on him. Xander quickly looked back at Spike. He bit his bottom lip and then shrugged cautiously.

Spike laughed and curled his finger inside Xander's waistband. He tugged Xander forward until he was pressed close to Spike and Spike was 'straddling' Xander's leg. Spike smiled and snaked an arm around Xander's waist. Spike leaned forward and Xander tilted his neck on reflex.
Great, Xander thought, trained to my new master already.

Spike nuzzled Xander’s neck and squeezed his ass. Xander gasped and went rigid. Spike chuckled and began nibbling Xander’s ear. Xander swallowed and looked around. Spike traced Xander’s ear with the tip of his tongue. The crowd was suddenly quiet but there was a restless energy surging around it as the onlookers watched Spike playing with his Pet.

A cold ball formed in Xander’s stomach as he struggled not to flinch or pull away from Spike.

“WWBD?” Spike whispered before gently biting Xander’s ear.

_Huh?_ Xander thought and slid his eyes to the right.

“WWBD,” Spike whispered again. “Gotta wonder what the slayer would do in this situation.”

*What would Buff…?* Xander choked as fire burned away the cold fear inside of him. Somehow bringing Buffy’s memory into this was an obscenity to Xander.

Spike slid Xander’s shirt off his left shoulder and traced a trail from Xander’s ear to his pierced nipple with his hungry mouth. Spike teased Xander’s nipple ring with his tongue.

Xander clenched his fists. _Buffy would have torn you and all your freaky friends apart long before now._ Xander thought as Spike abandoned Xander’s sore and over sensitized nipple. _She would have killed all of you long before the fondling, the piercing and the leashing._

Spike kissed his way back up to Xander’s neck. _You wouldn’t even be an unpleasant memory by now… Master Meathead,_ Xander thought angrily.

Spike smiled against Xander’s neck as he noted the smell of Xander’s fear decrease and Xander’s body heat increase._Pet’s getting mad,_ Xander thought happily and stepped back away from Xander.

Spike looked at Xander. Brown and blue clashed. Spike smiled at the fire he saw burning in Xander and he pulled Xander’s shirt back up to cover his pet’s bare shoulder. He trailed his hand down Xander’s leash and then grabbed the silver spike at the end. Without another word or gesture, Spike spun around and quickly walked away.

Xander continued to glare and held still as long as he could until the pull on the leash forced him to follow Spike. The crowd’s silence broke. The casino was filled with the sound of demons laughing, chatting, and enjoying themselves in ways Xander didn’t want to know.

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Spike led Xander through the crowd to the back of the casino. Security opened a set of doors and let them through. When the doors closed behind them, the sounds of the casino were muffled. Spike kept up his quick pace and Xander kept up his silent death wishes.

They reached another set of doors and once again security opened them at Spike’s approach. Spike led Xander into a lavish private office. Spike dropped Xander’s leash.

“Let Lorne in when he gets here,” Spike ordered his minions and then gestured for them to close the door.
Xander found a fixed spot on the wall and glared. Spike poured a large glass of whiskey and then plopped down into the leather seat behind his desk. He noted the plush pillow next to his chair and smiled.

*Green Bean thinks of everything,* Spike thought. Spike looked at Xander and took a long drink from his glass. The whiskey burned down his throat as he took in the rigid and angry stance of his delectable pet.

“Xander,” Spike said, “get yer arse over here.”

Xander turned his head and glared at Spike. Spike smirked and pointed at the pillow by his chair. Xander walked stiffly over to Spike and dropped to his knees.

“Here,” Spike said as he held his glass out to Xander.

Xander arched an eyebrow.

“Go ahead and take the glass, pet,” Spike ordered. Xander took the glass and stared at Spike.

“Fear’s like an aphrodisiac to a lot of things,” Spike said and gestured for Xander to take a drink. “It makes you a nummy treat.”

Xander slowly raised the glass and cautiously took a drink. He choked a bit on the liquor as it slid down his throat.

“Remember that, pet,” Spike continued. “Defiance and anger will intrigue and make a few want you. It may even make ‘em want ta break you, but fear? Well fear will make ‘em fight over ya. Don’t show it and don’t let ‘em smell it on you.”

Xander took another small drink of the liquor and then held the glass back to Spike. *So what?* Xander thought. *That little molestation scene was to make me less desirable?*

Spike took the glass from Xander and drained the rest of the contents. Then Spike set the glass on the desk. He swiveled in his chair to face Xander. He spread his legs wide and crooked his finger.

*Now what?* Xander wondered but remained still.

“Pet,” Spike ordered, “Don’t play stupid.”

Xander crawled forward until he was between Spike’s knees. Spike took Xander’s chin in hand and forced him to look at Spike.

“Now we have some work to do,” Spike said as he forced Xander to look at him. “I’m to teach you a few commands and you are going to learn the play the part of a well trained Pet.”

*If I had a voice I’d tell you to go to hell but we’re already there,* Xander thought.
“When I crook my finger and summon you between my knees,” Spike began explaining, “the first thing you’re gonna do is offer yerself to me.”

Xander blinked.

“Put yer hands on my thighs, pet,” Spike ordered.

*I hate you,* Xander thought and did as he was told. Spike smiled.

“Good. Now lean up and forward.”

Xander rose up on his knees and leaned forward. He put his weight on his hand to help balance himself.

“Now,” Spike whispered huskily as he gently ran his thumb over Xander’s chin in a soft caress, “part yer lips and close yer eyes.”

*Closing my eyes is of the good,* Xander thought as once again he did as he was told. *I don’t wan’t to know what’s nex*….

Cool lips covered Xander’s as Spike bent over and accepted what Xander offered. The kiss was gentle and tentative as if Spike were the one on his knees asking for a kiss. Xander couldn’t help but relax a little as Spike’s gentle mouth mapped his.

Spike caressed Xander’s neck softly. Xander sighed and Spike deepened the kiss sliding his tongue inside Xander’s open mouth. Xander curled his fingers into Spike’s thighs as Spike began to tease Xander with little flicks of his tongue darting in and out of Xander’s mouth.

Xander’s breathing grew heavy and he once again became aware of the chastity belt holding him firmly in place. Xander squirmed trying to ignore the restraint.

“Shhh,” Spike breathed against Xander’s mouth. Xander settled and Spike’s kiss became more aggressive.

Xander opened his mouth wider in welcome invitation. Spike was so good at this and Xander had been starved for too long of intimate contact.

What Vr’xkl had done was clinical and cold. It stripped Xander of his humanity and self. Spike’s touch ignited heat and sensation in Xander and made him more of aware of himself then he’d been in so long. Xander began to respond to Spike with hungry nibbles on Spike’s bottom lip.

Part of Xander was appalled by his behavior but the rest of Xander was tired of fighting and worrying. The large part of Xander wanted to just ‘give in’. Spike’s kisses and touch were gentle. Xander could almost pretend that he was something more than an object or a piece of property.

Xander knew he could fight or remain passive. He knew either reaction might result with him being punished, or worse, someone else could be punished. Xander didn’t want to be punished any more than he wanted to be Spike’s Pet.
But at least as Spike’s Pet, Xander thought, I feel human.

“Oh! Excuse me,” Lorne’s voice startled Spike and Xander. “I thought you wanted to see me, lemon drop.”

Xander dropped to his knees and lowered his head. He blushed. Spike growled.

“Right,” Lorne said, “I’ll come back later.”

“No need,” Spike said gruffly, “the mood’s ruined. Come in and sit down.”

Lorne took a seat opposite Spike across the desk. He didn’t like that he couldn’t see Xander any more.

“Sooo?” Lorne tried for nonchalant.

“Teachin’ Xander a few things for the floor tonight,” Spike said.

“What? Spike, sweetie, you can’t be serious?”

“Serious as a heart attack,” Spike grinned.

“You don’t have a heart,” Lorne replied.

“Do too,” Spike answered, “Just ain’t usin’ it at the moment.”

Xander stared at the floor between Spike’s feet. Teaching me a few things for the floor tonight? Teaching me a few tricks. ‘Good dog. Now roll over!’

“Oi! Pet,” Spike said as tapped his lap, “Crawl up here and face Lorne.”

Xander blinked. He’s not serious! Xander thought. Now I’m a lap dog?

“Pet,” Spike warned.

Xander sighed and somehow perched himself on Spike’s lap. Xander felt awkward and off balance.

“Just relax, Xan,” Spike said as he wrapped an arm around Xander and pulled him close. “Lean back against me. I got ya. I’m strong and I like the weight and feel of you. Yer warm and I want to feel that heat pressing against me.”

Xander blushed. Once again with the ordering to relax, Xander thought as he leaned back against Spike and tried to trust him with his weight. Spike quickly kissed the side of Xander’s neck.

“That’s good, Xan, now wrap yer arm around the back of my neck or gently caress my hand and arm circling yer waist.”

Xander turned his head and looked at Spike. What? Xander thought.

Spike smiled and put a kiss on the tip of Xander’s nose.
“Pet, I want ya to look all lovey dovey. Yer a good pet who enjoys his master’s touch and the privilege of sitting on his master’s lap. Ya gotta look like ya enjoy it. The touchin’s gotta go both ways.”

He kissed my nose! Xander thought. Why did he kiss my nose? Was he checking to see if it was cold?

“Pet,” Spike said softly. Xander blinked and then began to rub his hand across the back of Spike’s in an awkward caress. Spike laughed. “Yer’ll get there. Keep practicing.”

“Spike,” Lorne interrupted, “what are you planning now?”

“Told ya,” Spike said. “Teaching Xan a few things for the floor. Speaking of which, who are our high rollers tonight?”

High rollers? Xander thought as he continued to caress Spike’s hand.

“Do you think that’s fair to Xander?” Lorne said. “You saw the way he reacted to just being out on the floor. Now you want him to help you out there?”

“I think it’ll help,” Spike replied.

“You or him?” Lorne asked.

“Both,” Spike said.

“How do you figure that?”

Yeah, how do you figure that? Xander wondered as he rested his hand on top of Spike’s and let his thumb take over the caressing job. Spike smiled and rested his chin on Xander’s shoulder.

“Seems to me Xan’s spent enough time just bein’ an object on a shelf,” Spike said and wrapped his other arm around Xander and tightened his hold. “I teach him a few tricks to play as Master’s Pet and let him make a lovely distraction.”

Me? A lovely distraction? Xander thought and turned his head to look at Spike again. Once again Spike kissed the tip of Xander’s nose. Will you stop that!

Spike chuckled and looked at his frowning pet. Boy’s really quite lovely and very warm, Spike thought. Oh yeah, definitely keeping him.

Spike kissed Xander’s nose again and this time Xander whipped his head around face forward to look at Lorne. Lorne rolled his eyes. Spike settled back down with his head resting on Xander’s shoulder.

“So, who we got in the house tonight?” Spike asked.

Lorne sighed and held a clipboard out to Spike. Spike uncurled one arm from around Xander to take the list. Spike looked it over.

“What is it, baklava night?” Spike asked. “We got Argos here from the Fyral clan and Alala here? And since when does she leave her nest down in Fresno?”
“I’m not the one to ask what motivates a Lamia, lemon drop,” Lorne answered.

“Right,” Spike said. “Make sure to double the guards on the green stable and lock it down tight. No one but me goes in there until further notice.”


“Done,” Lorne said as he took the list back. “You still want Xander out on the floor with you tonight?”

Spike tightened his hold on Xander. He hated Lamias and while Xander was much older than Alala’s preferred diet of humans he knew his pet would be a tempting treat. Still, this was his casino and Xander was his Pet. He’d see that no harm came to him.

“Argos is the leader of his clan. I could use him in my pocket,” Spike said. “Xander can help with that.”

I can? Xander thought and then couldn’t help but tremble. Spike you bastard! You promised you wouldn’t share me!

“Pet?” Spike asked as he felt the tremors shooting through Xander and could smell the fear begin on him again. “What’s wrong?”

Right! Xander thought bitterly and began to squirm in Spike’s lap trying to get away. I’m not going to be your ‘lovely distraction’! I’ll gladly go back on the shelf! My old master never tried to make me feel human in one moment then make me a toy to be passed around the next.

“Spike,” Lorne said quickly as he picked up on Xander’s rising emotional distress.

“Xander settle down!” Spike ordered as Xander continued to pry at Spike’s arms and to get off his lap.

Drop dead…er you undead degenerate! Xander fumed. Let me go!

Spike roared and picked Xander up, spun him around and slammed Xander down on his desk. The air whooshed out of Xander’s lungs as he landed on his back and for a moment he was gasping like a fish out of water as his body struggled to remember how to get the air back.

“Calm down!” Spike yelled.

“Like that’s going to help,” Lorne said. Spike growled at Lorne. Lorne moved forward and leaned over the desk (and Xander) and looked at Spike.

“Violence isn’t going to help,” Lorne said. “You said you wanted my help so listen up, lemon drop, he’s human, he’s scared and he’s been through a hell we don’t yet understand. If you want him sane and sound then you’d better curb those Big Bad impulses. I know you’re capable of more than that. Act like it!”

Lorne spun around and stormed out of the room. Spike stared at the slammed door. He can’t just leave me! Spike thought frantically. He’s supposed to help!

Xander’s body finally remembered how to breathe and he sucked in a big breath of air. Spike looked
down at Xander. Xander froze and tried to remain perfectly still. He fixed his gaze on a point behind Spike’s head. Spike sighed.

“Bollocks,” Spike swore softly and then slowly withdrew from Xander. Xander continued to lie on the desk with his legs dangling down. *Bloody hell,* Spike thought. *What went wrong?*

Spike grabbed his glass and marched to the wet bar to refill it. Spike downed the contents and poured another round. Spike had to fill and empty his glass twice before he trusted himself to go back to the desk where Xander continued to lay still. Spike sighed again.

Xander had heard Spike drinking and refilling his glass. *Great,* Xander thought. *Can’t handle Spike sober and now I get treated to the drunken dead. We’ll at least I have experience with drunken deadbeats, that should help.*

Spike approached the desk and sat back down in his chair. He looked at Xander. *Time to try and figure this out… fix it,* Spike thought.

“Pet,” Spike said softly but firmly, “sit up.”

Xander did as he was told. Spike tapped his lap and Xander got up from the desk and went to sit in Spike’s lap as he’d done before.

“No,” Spike said as he made a spinning motion with his finger, “sit facing me.”

Xander stared at Spike and blinked. Then he carefully straddled Spike’s lap and sat down.

“That’s it,” Spike said as he gave a tentative smile.

*Easy for you to say,* Xander thought.

Spike wrapped his arms around Xander and hugged him tight. He tucked Xander’s head under his chin and then began to softly caress Xander’s back.

“Don’t know what got ya so upset, pet,” Spike said softly, “but… I’m sor… look I shouldn’t have… well… I’m the Big Bad… yeah? Haven’t had a pet in a long time. Forget how fragile humans can be.”

*Is he trying to apologize?* Xander thought as Spike continued to softly caress Xander’s back.

“Anyway, we have to work on this communication thing,” Spike said. “Bloody inconvenient you not havin’ a voice.”

*Sorry I couldn’t be more accommodating,* Xander thought as he sighed into Spike’s chest. *Not like I purposely did the whole ‘get my voice stripped, become your plaything of the moment and piss you off.’*

“From now on when you get upset you have to let me know without all the squirmin’ and fightin’,” Spike said.

*Right,* Xander thought. *I’ll just pen you a letter… but oops! Forgot! Angel forbade that! Humans who write will have their hands cut off and their eyes poked out before they get the grand prize of a slow and agonizing death.*
“Cross yer arms or somethin’,” Spike continued.

_Cross my arms?_ Xander huffed.

Spike smiled at the puff of air from Xander’s silent snort. _Least he’s payin’ attention. He’s not locked away in his head somewhere_, Spike thought.

“Cross yer arms pet. We can play twenty questions from there if we have to, but don’t just start fightin’ me. Demon doesn’t like it and…”

_And?_ Xander thought.

Spike tightened his arms around Xander, “I don’t want to hurt you.”

_Then don’t_, Xander thought.

“We have ta play the hand we’re dealt, Xander, whether we like it or not. Fold, bet or call that’s what we gotta do. I think though we could be a winning hand,” Spike said.

_Fold, bet or call? A winning hand?_ Xander gave a silent groan. _Could you get any more clichéd?_

The more Xander thought about it, the cornier Spike’s comment sounded. Xander couldn’t help but giggle.

Spike felt tremors run through Xander but he couldn’t smell any fear.

“Xander?” Spike asked and tried to pull Xander back a bit so he could get a good look at his face.

_What’s next?_ Xander couldn’t help but to continue his silent giggle fit, _Are you going to tell me we’re a ‘two of a kind,’ a ‘winning pair,’ or that we have the ‘luck of the draw?’_

Spike looked at Xander and worried. More tremors were coursing through Xander.

“Pet?” Spike asked worriedly and grabbed Xander by the chin. _“Are you… bloody hell yer laughing!”_

At Spike’s sudden realization, Xander began to sputter and snort. He nodded his head as he continued to wheeze and shake.

“I’m tryin’ ta say I’m sor..well make with the… yer bloody laughin’ at me!”

Xander lost it. Some part of him knew he shouldn’t it but the adrenaline, the hormones, the last twenty-four hours were all too much and Xander just couldn’t stop.

“Yer daft,” Spike said as he once again wrapped his arms around Xander and pulled him close. “Why do I always get stuck with the nutty ones? _Cute_… but totally crackers.”

_Cute?_ Xander thought as something of what Spike said filtered through his temporary hysteria. _Me? Big Bad Spike thinks I’m cute?_

Xander couldn’t help but start laughing all over again. The situation was just too absurd. Spike
continued to hold him through the fit and eventually Xander wore himself out. Spike continued to hold Xander.

“Ya done?” Spike asked softly when Xander had remained still for several minutes. Xander nodded his head.

“Good,” Spike said and then in a sudden movement picked Xander up in his arms and carried him to the couch. Xander clutched Spike’s neck at the sudden movement. Spike smiled.

*Pet should put his arms around me more often,* Spike thought as he sat down on the couch and arranged Xander in his lap. Xander stared at Spike and blinked.

”Now, if ya think ya can maintain some sanity for a few minutes I’d like ta explain ta ya what I was planning for the evenin’ and yer part in it,” Spike said.

Xander tensed. *Please, Spike I don’t want to…*

“Pet,” Spike said softly, “just listen. Freak out after I’ve talked to ya. Right now you don’t even know what yer freakin out about.”

Xander narrowed his eyes and thought, *Did you just outbabble me?*

Once again, Xander was frowning at Spike and Spike couldn’t resist kissing the tip of Xander’s nose again. There was just something irresistible to Spike about Xander’s frown face.

*Again with the nose!* Xander thought, rolled his eyes and tried to relax to hear what Spike had to say.

“I want ya to learn a few to play the part of my Pet,” Spike began.

*Woof,* Xander thought. *Got that part.*

“I want ya to act all devoted and adorin’ like,” Spike continued. “I want ya ta be so convincing that every time one of the other players at the table looks at me, all they see is you.”

*Me?* Xander thought and couldn’t help but tremble a bit.

“Shhh,” Spike said immediately and began brushing his hand through Xander’s hair. “They can look but they can’t touch. I told ya pet, I don’t share.”

Xander blinked and studied Spike. *Do you really mean that?* Xander thought. *What about me helping you with the Astro fellow?*

Spike picked up on the change in Xander’s heartbeat when Spike promised not to share him. *So that’s it pet,* Spike thought. *Don’t trust me to keep my word.*

“Xander,” Spike said, “I. Don’t. Share. I give you my word as your master and the Master of Las Vegas I won’t share you with anyone else. Now, you either start believing that or I’m gonna tan yer arse until you do.”

*Oh, that’s a real good basis for trust,* Xander thought even as he suddenly relaxed in Spike’s arms. Spike smiled.
“Now, as I was sayin,” Spike said, “I want the players focused on you. The more they see of you the less they see of me and the fewer of my tells they’ll notice.”

Xander frowned, *Tells?*

“Tells,” Spike explained. “Everyone’s got ’em. Some are more obvious then others; shaky hands, checking their chips, staring though the flop, etc…”

*Poker tells?* Xander thought. *You want me to distract them from figuring out your tells?*

“There are some big players here tonight. Argos is one of them. I’d like to end the evening with him owing me, big time. I want ya to help me.”

Do I have a choice? Xander thought.

“I don’t want to lock you away, Xan,” Spike said softly, “I suspect you’ve had enough of that. Plus you might enjoy yourself.”

*Oh yeah, Cuz slobberin’ over you has been my life long dream,* Xander thought and then looked at Spike. Blue eyes were staring at him; trying to read him. A hand reached out and gently caressed Xander’s face. Xander couldn’t help but turn his face into the caress. Touch felt so good.

Xander was warm in Spike’s lap and he couldn’t resist any more. He bent down and once again claimed Xander’s mouth. Spike started the kiss slow but then began to devour Xander.

For a moment Xander froze. Once again Spike was kissing him and overwhelming him. Xander sighed into Spike’s mouth. He didn’t want to fight or be frightened any more. Xander began to hungrily respond to Spike’s kisses and Spike almost purred. Spike deepened the kiss and pulled Xander under him.

Spike stretched out on top of his pet soaking up the warmth. He kissed Xander’s mouth, eyes, nose and worked his way down Xander’s neck.

Xander wrapped his arms around Spike and tried not to think about how odd this all was. Spike was a vampire. Spike was a *male* vampire and yet a desire Xander thought was long dead was struggling back to life under Spike’s touch.

Spike began kissing his way down to Xander’s nipples where once again he took delight in teasing and tormenting the sensitive little nubs. Xander arched beneath Spike and struggled to breathe and ignore how painfully aware of the chastity belt he was.

If Xander could have screamed he would have when Spike trailed his tongue down Xander’s chest to dive and delve in and out of Xander’s belly button. Xander panted and squirmed. He was drowning in sensation and the belt seemed to get tighter.

*Spike!* Xander mouthed while Spike kept teasing and tasting Xander. Xander clutched at Spike and didn’t know where the line between pleasure and pain was any more.

Spike trailed his tongue back up Xander’s chest and lapped at the hollow of Xander’s neck. Xander leaned his head back and gave Spike full access. Spike smiled into Xander’s neck and kissed his way up to Xander’s chin. Xander lowered his head and once again Spike claimed his mouth. Xander met him kiss for kiss.
Cool hands skimmed Xander’s body while cool lips tasted and teased him. Xander pressed up into Spike seeking a relief he couldn’t have. The press of hard metal against Spike’s hard cock suddenly brought Spike back to where he was and what he was doing.

Spike slowed his kisses and eased his touches. Xander squirmed and struggled underneath him.

“Shhh, Xander,” Spike crooned. “Shhh.”

Xander fought the gentling touches and soothing words. He pressed against Spike and peppered the vampire’s neck with his own hungry kisses. Xander didn’t want to let go of the desire. He wanted the hot oblivion free from fear and confusion.

Spike gently grabbed Xander’s hands and pinned them close to his body. Spike pulled away from Xander and sat up. Xander tried to follow, but Spike kept him pinned down.

“Not like this, Xander,” Spike said softly. “Want you to want this because you want it, not because you want ta forget for a while.”

Xander shook his head and bucked up underneath Spike.

“Pet,” Spike said. “I’m not going ta use you. You aren’t a bottle any more.”

Xander froze as Spike’s words sank in and Xander flushed. He turned his head away from Spike.

*I was begging Spike to… what’s wrong with me?* Xander thought.

Spike released Xander’s hands and reached out for Xander’s chin. Gently the vampire turned Xander’s face towards him once again.

“One day soon, pet,” Spike promised, “I’ll kiss and tease every inch of you. I’ll discover every sensitive spot on yer body and then I’ll take you in my mouth and swallow you down to your root. Then? Then I’ll do what vampires do best, mate, I’ll suck.”

Xander gasped.

“But not today, pet,” Spike said. “Not today. Today you learn to play the pet. You learn you are my pet. We’re going to walk out onto the casino floor and yer gonna play it so well I’m not gonna need Lorne to win the hands that I want. You’re going to make sure Argos ends up in debt to me. You’re going to remember what it’s like to be more than just a bottle.”
Chapter 12

It was a couple of hours later when a tentative knock interrupted Xander’s latest lesson - massaging Spike’s neck.

“Yeah?” Spike shouted before turning to instruct Xander. “Pet, yer not kneading bread dough… yer pleasing yer master. Press yer body up against mine. Chest to back. Caress and knead. Pepper kisses on me. Look like yer trying ta convince me ta leave the game and come upstairs for a shag.”


Spike sighed as once again he smelled Xander’s fear.

“Pet…”

“Lunch time,” Lorne sing-sanged as he entered Spike’s office bearing a tray.

Xander paused and looked at Lorne. *Food! Xander thought as he gave Lorne a big smile and a thumbs up.*

“Oi!” Spike said. “Did I tell you to stop, whelp?”

Xander glared at Spike then dug his thumbs into a particularly tight knot. Spike roared and pulled away from Xander. He spun around in game face and glared at Xander.

“You did that on purpose, ya git!” Spike snarled.

Xander shook his head and held his open palms out to the side in a ‘who me?’ gesture.

“Pet,” Spike warned.

“Lunch,” Lorne said.

Xander shrugged.

“On the pillow!” Spike snapped as he shifted back into his human form. *Bloody git! Did that on purpose,* Spike silently insisted.

Xander dropped to his knees and knelt in perfect form by Spike’s chair. Spike hid a smile. *Well, I suppose it’s better than the statue routine,* Spike conceded.

“So what we got?” Spike asked as he settled back in his chair.

“A peanut butter and jelly sandwich, applesauce, some tomato juice and water,” Lorne said as he set the tray down in front of Spike.

*Not going to salivate like Pavlov’s dog,* Xander thought as his mouth watered, *or even Spike’s Pet.*

“Should make you go hungry for that stunt ya pulled,” Spike muttered as he reached to tear a chunk
off the sandwich.

Xander turned panicked eyes to Spike.

“Calm down, pet,” Spike said as he held the chunk out for Xander to take. “I’ll let ya get away with it this time. Just don’t push yer luck.”

Xander nodded and without hesitation leaned forward to swipe the gooey bit of sandwich from Spike’s fingers with his lips and tongue. Spike smiled.

_Going soft_, Spike thought as he watched Xander chew and savor the bit of food. Spike reached to tear another hunk of sandwich off for his pet.

“Looks like you two are getting along better,” Lorne said as he sat down.

“We ‘talked,’” Spike said as Xander once again cleaned Spike’s fingers.

“I take it you’re still going to go through with having him on the floor tonight?” Lorne asked.

Spike nodded as he scooped up a spoonful of applesauce and held it out to Xander.

“Is he going to be ready?” Lorne asked.

“Pet’s, clever,” Spike said as he met Xander’s eyes and offered the applesauce to him. “He can do it.”

_Did Spike just pay me a compliment?_ Xander wondered as he licked the spoon clean of the applesauce. Xander closed his eyes and savored the flavor. Peanut butter was still sticking to the roof of his mouth. Flavors clashed and Xander loved it. He opened his eyes and smiled at Spike.

“Git,” Spike said with an answering smile and then offered Xander another spoonful of applesauce.

“Well,” Lorne said struggling for something to say. “Just be careful and be patient.”

“I’m always patient,” Spike said as he offered Xander some more of the sandwich. Xander rolled his eyes and took the offering.

"Oi! Am too!” Spike argued and offered Xander some tomato juice.

“Well, except for when you aren’t,” Lorne quipped.

Xander made a face at the tomato juice.

“Drink it anyway,” Spike said. “It’s good for you.”

Xander frowned and took a sip. _Must be really starved_, Xander thought as he found the juice wasn’t as objectionable as he once thought. Still, it was objectionable enough. He took another swallow and then tentatively pointed at the water.

“Right,” Spike said and put the juice back. He picked up the water bottle and offered it to Xander. Xander took a long swallow and then swished his mouth. Spike put the bottle back and then grabbed more of the sandwich.
“So, what are you wearing tonight?” Lorne tried again.

“Snakeskin jacket,” Spike answered without missing a beat. He offered Xander another bite.

“You can’t be serious?” Lorne said.

“You keep saying that,” Spike replied and offered Xander the last of the applesauce.

“Are you trying to start a war with Alala?” Lorne asked.

“No, just throwing her off her game.”

“By wearing what she thinks of as kin?”

“I look good in it,” Spike said and offered the last of the sandwich to Xander. “Might even impress Xander here.”

Don’t bet on it, Xander thought as he savored the last of the peanut butter and jelly. No Xander impressage. Xander’s slavish devotion is all because of his slave status. Nothing says I have to ogle you and faun over your fashion choices.

“Spike, sweetie,” Lorne said. “What do you hope to gain?”

“Alala breaks even. I don’t need her in my pocket. She doesn’t fit in with my pl…well I don’t need her. I don’t want to be in debt to her either. I piss her off, send her home with a zero balance and then I go upstairs and snog with Xander for awhile.”

Xander choked on the dreaded tomato juice. Snog? No snogging! No shagging! Not even schmoozing! Xander thought.

Spike slapped Xander’s back and offered him some water. Xander sipped the water and glared at Spike. Spike winked at him.

I hate you, Xander thought.

“Spi…” Lorne began.

“Made up my mind Green Bean,” Spike interrupted. “Now run along. Take the tray back and get me my jacket.”

“And Xander?” Lorne asked.

“What about Xander?” Spike said.

Lorne sighed. “Human… functions?”

Spike looked at Xander. Xander flushed and thought, Well, now that you mention it.

“Right,” Spike said and tossed a set of keys to Lorne. “Those are your set. Take him upstairs and let him do what he needs. I’ll work on the scroll until you get back. Oh, and have Xander carry the jacket down. More proof he’s my Pet. Go on, Xan, go with Lorne.”
Woof, Xander thought as he got up and stood behind Lorne. Time to walk the human.

“C’mon, cupcake. You carry the tray,” Lorne said as he took Xander’s leash, “and I’ll tell you all about the time Spike got drunk on cheap tequila and woke up in bed the next morning with a chaos demon.”

“Lorne!” Spike roared after the departing duo.

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Once upstairs Lorne quickly dropped Xander’s leash. Xander was still smirking at the thought of Spike waking up covered in mucus with a besotted chaos demon cooing at him. Then nature demanded Xander’s attention. He turned and looked at Lorne. Xander had no choice but to wait for Lorne to help him with his ‘problem.’

“Do you just need the front or both front and back unlocked?” Lorne asked politely.

Xander flushed and pointed to the front. Lorne handed Xander the set of keys to the chastity belt.

“Well, I’ll let you go do what you need to do then,” Lorne said. “I’ll just get Spike’s jacket.”

Xander looked at the keys and then at Lorne. He's going to let me do this myself? Xander thought. Xander looked at Lorne and smiled. Lorne smiled back.

Xander quickly headed off to the bedroom and then to the adjoining bathroom. He paused a moment. The bathtub still terrified him and the shower certainly inspired anxiety, but the room wasn’t quite as horrifying as it was earlier.

I guess after macking with Spike nothing’s quite as frightening any more, Xander thought and continued on into the room. As he stripped down his pants he winced. There were red inflamed patches on his skin.

Leather’s chafing, Xander thought. Best take care of business and then see if I can find some powder.

Xander managed to unlock the chastity belt and accomplish his business without further ado. Xander even managed to tuck himself back in the belt and pants without much difficulty. After washing his hands, Xander began to search through cabinets looking for some talcum powder. He found toothbrushes, shaving cream, a razor, shampoo and other toiletries but no powder.

Xander wandered out to the bedroom where Lorne was clucking over a jacket.

“Xander,” Lorne said cheerily when he saw the young man.

Xander smiled. Great, Xander thought, How am I going to ask for powder?

“You need something?” Lorne asked.

Xander frowned. How did he… never mind, Xander thought and then nodded.

“Is it something in here?” Lone asked.
Xander shrugged. He then pantomimed shaking something into his hand.

“Salt?” Lorne asked in confusion.

Xander shook his head. He pointed to his pants and then pantomimed shaking again.

Lorne tilted his head and then looked back at Xander.


Xander squeezed his forefinger and thumb together to make the ‘a little bit’ gesture.

“I’ll tell Spike,” Lorne said.

Xander rolled his eyes.

“Xander, I have to,” Lorne said almost apologetically.

Right, because I’m Spike’s Pet, Xander thought bitterly and offered back Lorne his keys.

“Xander,” Lorne said as he stepped forward and took the keys. “Spike has say over what happens to you. I don’t like it and I know you don’t like it but it’s the way the world is right now.”

Don’t tell me something I already know, Xander thought angrily. I know too well, and more than I care to know, about just how the world works right now for humans.

“Cupcake,” Lorne said, “the bad news is this is the way things are right now. The good news is nothing ever stays the same.”

Xander looked at Lorne. And what does that mean? Xander wondered.

“For now though, Spike’s has say over you. He may be overbearing, impulsive, and arrogant but you can trust him on this; he will take care of you.”

Right, Xander thought, as long as I’m a good pet and do….

Xander didn’t want to finish his thought. He knew what he had to do for his previous master and he’d already had a taste of what Spike wanted. Yes, there were differences and Spike even made Xander feel more human, but when it came down to it both things were really the same. It was all about what the masters wanted.

“Xander,” Lorne said softly, “Spike isn’t like other vampires. He can love.”

Xander blinked. He had a twisted kind of devotion for Dru, but that’s not love, Xander argued silently.

“Spike is capable of caring. Give him a chance. Trust him just a little. He may surprise you,” Lorne said.

Xander sighed and thought about being thrown on Spike’s desk. I don’t think I can take any more surprises, Xander thought.
Spike looked up from the scroll as Lorne and Xander entered his office.

"Here he is," Lorne said letting Xander's leash go. "Safe and mostly sound."

Spike cocked an eyebrow and sent an intense gaze at Xander who was already in the process of kneeling and offering Spike his jacket.

"Pet?" Spike asked. Xander looked up at Spike.

"He's not used to wearing leather, sweet cheeks," Lorne said. "You need to take care of that."

"Xander," Spike said urgently as he took the jacket and threw it on the desk, "Are you OK? What do you need?"

Xander rolled his eyes, nodded, and then pantomimed shaking powder again.

"He needs some powder and probably some salve," Lorne answered.

"Well what are you yammerin' on about?" Spike asked. "Go get it... and see that he's got a couple of pairs of cotton pants to wear the next few days."

Lorne smiled and backed out of the room. Spike gently cupped Xander's chin.

"Once again I... well... Lorne should probably get me the *Idiot's Guide to Human Pets,*" Spike said.

Xander nodded without thinking and then paled. *Oh ghods, now he's gonna kill me,* Xander thought.

Spike laughed. "Cheeky git. Alright, up with you and drop trou."

Xander blinked. *Huh?*

"Pet, off with the pants," Spike said.

Xander blushed and slowly took off his pants. *Don't know why this is bothering me. Twenty-four hours ago clothes were a forgotten concept, Xander thought. And Spike's already seen me in my birthday suit. Nothing new here.*

Once Xander stepped out of his pants, Spike pulled out his keys and completely unlocked Xander's belt.

"Step out of that too," Spike said. Xander did as ordered and blushed to be standing half nude in front of Spike.

Spike did a slow examination of Xander. He noted the red inflamed patches of skin. Spike reached out and gently touched a few of the spots. Xander found a point on the far wall and stared at it. Somehow this examination felt more exposing then all the staring and ogling the demons in the casino had done earlier.

"Are you in any pain?" Spike asked softly.
Xander shook his head. In fact, Spike's cool touch felt soothing to Xander's heated skin.

"OK," Spike said, "why don't you go lie on the couch until Lorne gets back. Let the air get to those sore spots."

Xander nodded and stood up. He made his way back to the couch where he and Spike had kissed earlier. Kissed? Xander thought. That wasn't just kissing, that was some serious making out. Xander shook his head. That can't happen again. It's one thing for them to use me and make me respond like a wind up doll, Xander thought. It's something else entirely if I'm doing the winding up.

Xander lay face down on the couch. He lay his head on his crossed arms and watched Spike. Spike was watching him.

"OK," Spike said. "You just lie there and relax until Lorne gets back. I'll do some work at my desk. You need anything, snap yer fingers, yeah?"

Xander nodded.

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Xander wasn't sure how long he lay on the couch while Spike was bent over a somewhat familiar scroll. The office was quiet except for the sound of Xander's breathing and the scratching noises of Spike jotting down notes. There were times Xander thought Spike had forgotten about him, but then Spike would look up from the scroll and cock an eyebrow at Xander. Xander couldn't help but give a 'thumbs up' in response. Then Spike would grunt and go back to studying the scroll. Every now and then Xander thought he'd see a quick smile after Spike's grunt.

Lying on the couch in the quiet office was soothing and Xander's eyelids grew heavy. Even though he was half naked and completely at Spike's mercy, Xander had an odd feeling of safety.

Welcome to Stockholm Syndrome, Xander thought sleepily and lost the battle with his eyelids. A knock startled his eyes wide open.

"Here's some powder, healing salve and some Arnica gel," Lorne said as entered the office and deposited his goodies on the desk. "The powder took some time tracking down. Had to raid the Cirque Du Soleil's dressing rooms."

"Knew keeping those humans and that show around was a good thing," Spike said as he picked up and examined each of the three new containers on his desk.

"They still pack the house," Lorne replied then looked over at Xander. Xander blushed and Lorne looked away. "Your idea for Xander to get out of the leather for a while?"

Spike nodded.

"Well, there may be hope for you yet," Lorne said. "Game's set to start in forty-five minutes. You still...?"

"Xander and I will be there," Spike said cutting Lorne off.

Lorne nodded then said, "Well then I'll go finish setting up. Bottle of your favorite whiskey standing
Spike nodded.

"And for Xander?" Lorne asked.

Spike looked at Xander. Is he asking me? Xander wondered and shrugged.

"Think it would be OK for him to have a soda?" Spike asked wondering if Xander still even liked sodas.

Xander's eyes widened and his heart skipped a beat. A pop? The syrupy carbonated nectar of all that was teen goodness and normalcy? Xander wondered. He hadn't had a soda since 'Before.'

Lorne smiled and said, "I think one wouldn't do him any harm. Water after that."

"Then have a tall, cold one waiting for him," Spike ordered and hid his smile. That should please my pet, Spike silently hoped and looked at Xander.

Xander gave a thumbs up.

"Right," Lorne said and then headed for the door.

"Oi!" Spike called after Lorne.

Lorne turned and looked at Spike.

"What's the gel for?" Spike asked.

"Xander's back," Lorne said a bit stiffly. "I suspect your earlier temper tantrum may have left him with some bruising. That should help."

Spike looked down at the tube of gel in his hand and flinched. Didn't mean to hurt him, Spike thought and then looked at Xander. Xander met his eyes briefly then looked away.

A cold lump formed in Spike's stomach. He knew that look. He'd given it to Angelus plenty of times in the early days.

I can do better by Xan, Spike thought. I'm not 'Gelus. I won't be.

Spike carried the two tubes and the bottle of powder to the couch. Spike sat down on the edge of the couch and put the items on the floor.

"Gonna peel yer shirt off now," Spike said softly and reached for Xander's shirt sleeves. Xander nodded.

Not like I can stop you, Xander thought.

Spike eased Xander's shirt off and studied his back. Already Spike could spot where bruises were beginning to form. Spike sighed and picked up the tube of gel. He squeezed a healthy dollop out into the palm of his hand, put the tube down and then rubbed his hands together.
"This is gonna be cool," Spike said as he gently touched Xander's back with his palms. Xander flinched and gasped.


As carefully as he could, Spike began to work the gel into Xander's bruised skin. Xander bit his lip when Spike glided over tender spots.

"I'd say I was sorry," Spike said as he worked, "but I know sorry doesn't cut it. I'd promise ta not do it again, but words are cheap."


"All I can do is... well, not do this again," Spike said.

Well I'm sure your repertoire of torture and mayhem won't be stretched too thin by removing 'slamming helpless victim onto desk' from the list.

"I'm not saying I won't hurt you," Spike said.

Of course not, Xander thought dryly.

"I'll punish you if you need it or earn it. I'll punish you to keep you safe," Spike continued. "But hurting you without cause... just because I'm angry or frustrated. I won't do that again, Xan. Yer my Pet, not my minion. You deserve better."

And the Oscar goes to... Xander thought.

Spike finished up with the gel and then picked up the salve. Again it was cool on Xander's skin, but it felt good. Xander expected Spike to take advantage of the intimate places he was touching, but he didn't. Spike's touch was clinical and focused. He'd spread the salve on to one sore spot and then moved on to another; no lingering caresses and no comments. In fact Spike was silent through the remaining process of treating Xander except for the command to "Roll over."

Once again Spike had been clinical and focused and oddly that was comforting to Xander. Xander thought about how 'Before' he couldn't have imagined a scenario where he was Spike's Pet and plaything. He couldn't imagine a scenario where Spike would tend him so carefully and gently. Yet, that was 'Before' and this was 'After' and everything had changed. Now, Xander realized, Spike was the best thing that had happened to him since being captured by the slavers. Xander trembled and his eyes misted. He didn't know if in the grand scheme of things that was a good thing or a bad thing.

"Shh, Xan," Spike whispered as he finished rubbing salve into the last spot. Hot tears leaked out the corners of Xander's eyes and ran down his cheeks. Cool fingers wiped them away. Blue eyes leaned over and stared down into Xander's cloudy brown.

"I'm pushing ya too fast," Spike said softly. Xander didn't move. "Pet, would you like to skip this evening? I could send you back up to the suite, let you be on yer own for a while."

Xander studied Spike. He's offering me a choice again, Xander thought. Why?
Xander bit his lip. Spike waited patiently for some affirmative or negative sign from Xander. Xander thought about his time as a bottle. He'd spent unknown hours alone in his padded cell between 'uses.' Bottles were brought out for an evening of use and then immediately put back in their cell for 'safekeeping.' In some ways, the cell was as bad as 'the Tank.'

There was more to look at in Spike's suite than in his old cell, but again Xander would be alone and suddenly he didn't want to be alone. Xander had spent too much time alone with only his thoughts.

Spike and Lorne had given him interaction. For good or bad Spike had noticed Xander. For good or bad Spike had paid attention to Xander and Xander realized he liked that as much as he liked the food Spike had been feeding him. Xander shook his head.

Spike smiled. "Ya sure?"

Xander nodded.

"Means playing the Pet," Spike reminded Xander.

Xander nodded again. I can do it, Xander thought. I'll figure out a way.

Spike smiled again and picked up the bottle of powder and gave it to Xander.

"Powder yerself good, and then we'll get ya dressed. They won't know what hit 'em tonight, pet," Spike said.

*Gotta slow down, Spike thought. Gotta woo him. He's gotta want my Claim. He's not just some random human to warm my bed. He's Xander, White Knight and one of the original Scoobies... and most importantly he's mine. Gonna take care of him.*

Xander gave a tentative smile and then sat up. Spike cleared off the couch so Xander could stand.

"Go ahead," Spike said when Xander looked at the carpeted floor and the bottle of powder, "minions will clean it up. Will give 'em something to gossip about."

Xander flushed and then proceeded to get ready for his night out on the floor with Spike. Spike watched his pet get ready.

*For good or bad, Xander thought, this was my choice.*
Chapter 13

Xander was prepared for the casino this time. *No fear,* he chanted to himself as he followed Spike back out on to the floor. Again the crowd parted before Spike but this time their attention was focused mostly on him and not his trailing Pet.

Xander smiled. He didn't want to, but he had to admit that Spike made an impressive show. Spike moved like he was a force of nature barely contained in form fitting leather pants, a black tee and a snakeskin jacket that looked as sleek and alive on Spike as it did on whatever snake or snakes from which it had been skinned.

Xander followed that force of nature and tried to appear obedient and devoted; not the terrified he really was.

*Why didn't I take him up on his offer?* Xander quietly moaned. *I could be upstairs watching the city lights, staring at the walls, counting the tiles in the ceiling, or anything but going to this demon 'all you can eat buffet'!*

Spike turned his head and looked over his shoulder at Xander. His eyes flashed and Xander could almost hear him say, "No fear, pet."

Xander took a deep breath and straightened his shoulders. He jutted his chin at Spike, *I remember, Blondie,* Xander thought.

Spike smiled and then turned back around. He led Xander to a table surrounded by a small gathering of spectators. Once again they parted and let Spike through. Spike took his seat and Xander fell to his knees on the pillow by Spike's chair. As they had practiced earlier, Xander sat in his new ‘relaxed’ position.

Xander sat with his legs perpendicular to Spike's, his knees were together, and Xander leaned against Spike. Xander wrapped an arm around Spike's calf and then rested his head on Spike's thigh. He was rewarded with Spike's hand gently brushing through his hair.

"Oi! Let's get on with this," Spike ordered. "Gonna win some dosh tonight and buy my Pet something special."

"Devoted and adoring, pet. Spike had said. *Always be devoted and adorin'*."

A tall demon pushed its way through the crowd and approached the table. It was large and had bumpy, orange-pink tinted flesh. Long curved horns jutted out above its ears and it had ridges along its shoulders and spine. It roared something loud and indecipherable to Xander.

"Yeah, yeah," Spike said with a bored wave of his hand, "Yer the great Argos of the D'ndr Clan. You've come to vanquish and leave me in utter ruin. My tears will fall like rain. Heard it all before, mate. Sit down and have a drink."

Xander turned his head and smiled into Spike's thigh. He'd forgotten how irreverent Spike could be in the face of danger and Argos certainly had a face that screamed ‘danger.’ Spike brushed his hand
through Xander's hair again.

Another loud noise drew Xander's attention. He paled as a woman-like demon slithered her way through the crowd. The woman part of the demon was large and fleshy. Pale, bare breasts sagged heavy and down to the line where snake met human. Her hair was long, stringy and a lackluster shade of gray. A thick forked tongue fluttered between curved and dripping fangs. Her pale hands were capped with long black talons and she hissed at the onlookers.

"Alala," Spike greeted the newcomer as she literally snaked her way to the table, "Lovely as always."

Alala hissed at Spike and Xander clutched Spike's leg tightly. Spike suddenly held a coke glass with a long straw out to Xander. Xander took a sip. The bubbly sweetness distracted Xander for a moment.

Better than I remember, Xander thought. Wonder if they still make it or is it just well preserved from 'Before'?

"Heard you had a new pet, SSSSSSpike," Alala said.

"Word must travel fast," Spike replied coolly.

"Vr’xkl hassss been lamenting long and loudly over the losssss of hissss favorite bottle," Alala replied.

Xander paled at the mention of his previous master and buried his face in Spike's leg again. Please Spike, Xander silently begged.

"Must have really been loud for you to hear it all the way down in Fresno," Spike said and put the coke glass back on the table beside his glass of whiskey.

"He isss quite dissstresssed."

"Then he shouldn't gamble with something too precious to lose," Spike said as he soothed Xander. Would never put you up, pet, Spike vowed and petted Xander.

Argos roared something that sounded like, "Kryl nrk Zaa!"

"I agree," Spike said. "Let's play."

Alala hissed and the tip of her tail flashed dangerously close to Xander. Xander gasped and went rigid. Bottles are still, Xander thought. Bottles are quiet!

Bloody hell! Spike thought as he picked up on Xander's fear and statue state. What's wrong?

Spike looked around even as the crowd focused their eyes on Spike's pet. Argos sniffed the air and said, "Dnerksa."

Alala's mouth curved into a hideous facsimile of a smile. Spike's eyes flashed gold when he noticed her tail was close to Xander. Looks like a bleedin' tentacle! Spike realized.

"That tail gets any closer to what's MINE," Spike growled low and dangerous, "I'm gonna have me
the makings for a new jacket."

"HIIIISSSSS," Alala said and quickly coiled her tail back underneath her bulging mass.

Spike tapped his lap. It was the cue for Xander to climb up. Xander remained frozen.

"Pet," Spike said sharply and tapped his lap again.

Xander moved slowly and crawled up into Spike's lap. He sat with his legs draped over the side of Spike's and Spike's arm cradling him. His gaze was focused on some far point of the wall.

Spike nuzzled Xander's neck and then lightly bit his ear. "Not feelin' the adoration here, pet," Spike whispered.

Xander's eyes re-focused and he saw Spike. Spike pulled his face away from Xander's neck and smiled. Xander blinked.

"Give us a kiss," Spike said teasingly.

I can do this, Xander thought as he closed his eyes. I have done this. I've already done the Spike kissage thing; more than I care to remember. What's one more?

Xander blushed, leaned forward and gently kissed Spike. The kiss was sweet and tentative and Spike hungered for more. Spike returned Xander's kiss with a sweet and tentative kiss of his own.

OK, Xander thought trying to reassure himself. This is good. Spike's not going all 'Spike' on me. I can handle this. It's all of the good. Xander's heart rate settled and he wrapped his arms around Spike.

Gotta make this look good. Folks expect a show, Xander thought and he kissed Spike more deeply. Spike let him.

Spike could taste the sweet cola on Xander's lips and he wanted to dive in and chase the flavors until he could find the sweet cinnamon-cedar taste underneath, but he didn't. He let Xander remain in charge of the kiss. Spike almost groaned when the tip of Xander's tongue cautiously worked its way into Spike's mouth.

Oh pet, Spike thought. I like you all sweet like this. Makes me want ta take ya away, strip ya down, and spend the rest of the bloody evenin' tormentin' ya with sweet kisses of my own.

"Nrk Zaa!" Argos said.

"Well then bloody deal already," Spike barked as he reluctantly broke the kiss. "I can play and beat the likes of you while tendin' to my Pet."

Xander blushed and buried his face in Spike's neck.

***

The rest of the evening was a blur for Xander, with just a few highlights. For the most part, Xander sat on Spike's lap, sipped coke, and tried to be the 'adoring' Pet. Xander found it was easy to fake adoration if his face was buried in the crook of Spike's neck. To outsiders it looked like Xander had a
favorite spot he liked to kiss and tease. Spike would hug him tight and Xander would just breathe in ‘Spike.’ It didn't hurt that Spike smelled good. Spike smelled very good and Xander found that it was comforting just to be held and inhale Spike's scent along with whatever enticing cologne the vampire was wearing.

Sometimes Xander would run his hands through Spike's hair. Xander had been amazed to discover that Spike's hair was silky and soft; not rigid and stiff. Xander would forget himself and just run his hands through Spike's hair over and over again enjoying the sensation. All of his senses had been starved and it was so easy to just get lost in the satisfying of them.

Sometimes while Xander indulged in the luxury of Spike's hair, Spike would make a sound almost like a purr. Other times he'd shift in his seat like it was suddenly uncomfortable. That would always bring Xander back to himself and he'd blush and once again bury his face in Spike's neck.

For the most part, Xander wasn't sure he was that distracting of a show, except for the one ‘highlight.’ Specifically, when Xander forgot that nibbling on Spike's neck was of the bad. Spike had explained earlier that if a pet 'nibbled' on his master's neck, it meant he was offering to be bitten in return.

It's simple, Spike had said. Don't bite me and I won't bite you... well, most of the time anyway.

Never gonna happen, Xander had vowed and touched his scarred neck. He should have remembered to ‘never say never,’ or in his case, never think never.

It had been a tense hand and Xander had suspected Spike was bluffing with his pair of eights. Still, Argos had a lot invested in the pot, and if Spike won he would have Argos on the proverbial ropes. Alala had already folded and it was down to just Spike and the Fyarl demon.

Xander had decided to take the initiative and had climbed down from Spike's lap. He curled himself around Spike's back and began to gently rub and knead the vampire's neck.

Xander remembered what Spike had said, Pepper kisses on me. Look like yer trying ta convince me ta leave the game and come up for a shag. Inviting Spike up for a shag was out of the question, but Xander thought he could still put on a convincing show just short of that.

Xander ran his fingers up the back of Spike’s scalp and then leaned down and went for broke. Xander traced Spike's ear with his tongue like Spike had done to him earlier. Spike made with the purring sound again and Xander snaked his hands down the front of Spike's chest while licking and kissing Spike's neck.

Can't believe I'm doing this, Xander thought. But it's better than...

Xander didn't want to think about what it was better than. Once again he buried his face where Spike's neck met his shoulder. Spike just smelt too good! It made Xander hunger for something and Xander began to nip and nibble the spot without thinking.

Suddenly Spike went very still. Xander lifted his head and looked at Spike. Gold eyes clashed with brown and Spike said, "Pet" from around fangs. It was Xander's turn to freeze, but not for long. Suddenly, Spike pulled Xander off his feet and across Spike's lap. Demon faced Spike stared into Xander's scared human face.

"I accept," Spike said as he bent down and nuzzled Xander's neck.
Xander was terrified and wanted to fight, but he'd *chosen* to come out on the floor with Spike. *He'd* chosen to play the part of the Pet and *he'd* forgotten not to ‘bite.’

*To fight now would take away any advantage we've gained, Xander thought. And that might lead to...*

Xander closed his eyes and offered his neck to Spike. He braced himself for the pain only there wasn't any. There was teasing and tasting. Someone said something loud and in a language Xander didn't recognize.

Spike answered, "All in."

Then there was a pressure, a sting, and then the most intimate feeling Xander had ever known. He remembered how Spike had drunk from him the night before. That had been harsh and hungry. This was soft and seductive. It was like Spike was teasing the life force out of Xander. Spike was a pied-piper tempting the blood to flow from Xander and Xander wanted it to flow.

Xander groaned silently and wrapped his arms around Spike's neck pulling him closer; begging for more. The pressure eased and Xander felt Spike's tongue lapping at his neck like a great cat licking its fur. Xander arched and offered more of his neck to Spike. Spike purred and continued to taste Xander. A cool hand slid across Xander's stomach and traced circles around his belly button until a cool fingertip breached the sensitive spot.

Xander panted and unconsciously spread his legs in a universal offering. Spike kissed Xander's neck and then slid his hand down the side of Xander's legs. Gently, Spike pulled them closed. Xander mewed silently in frustration.

"'S alright," Spike whispered in Xander's ear. "I've got ya."

Spike kissed the tip of Xander's nose. Xander opened his eyes.

"Grsa," Argos said.

"He folds," Spike said softly, his eyes blazing blue and smiling the smile Xander was learning to both love and hate. It was a smile that said ‘trust me, I'll take care of you.’

Xander *loved* it because it made him feel safe. Xander *hated* it because it made him feel safe. Trusting Spike was dangerous.

***

At some point Xander had settled back down along Spike's side. At some point Xander had fallen asleep with his head resting on Spike’s thigh. At some point, Spike did what he’d set out to do. Spike had Argos’ mark in his pocket and Alala had been sent back to Fresno empty handed.

Spike stared down at his pet who was fast asleep. Air was puffing out gently between Xander’s lips and a small line of drool was pooling on Spike’s leg. Somehow, Spike didn’t care.

“I think some soup and bed are in order,” Lorne whispered. Spike nodded and then began to card his fingers through Xander’s hair.

“Xan,” Spike said. Xander turned his face into Spike’s leg. Spike smiled.
“Xander,” Spike said again. This time Xander looked up and blinked against the harsh casino lights.

Wh..huh? Xander thought.

“Time for bed,” Spike said.

Bed? Xander thought in a slight panic. Bed means naked. Naked means… Xander stopped his thoughts. He didn’t want to borrow any more trouble. He'd had enough as it was. He reached up to feel his neck where Spike had bitten him. There was a taped piece of gauze on it. Xander looked up at Spike.

“Yer a sound sleeper,” Spike said.

Especially after blood loss, thought Xander and he struggled to his feet. Xander swayed a bit and Spike put out a hand to steady him.

"You OK?" Spike asked.

Xander nodded. As OK as one can be when one's the 'adoring’ Pet of a master vampire, Xander thought.

“C’mon,” Spike said as he stood up. “We’ll let Lorne take care of the winnings and we’ll head up to the suite. We’ll get you ready for bed and then Lorne will bring you up some din.”

Does Lorne fetch the paper too or is that my job? Xander wondered and then nodded.

Once again Spike led and Xander followed. This time Xander was too tired to worry about how he felt. Exhaustion overrode everything else and fear was just too energy consuming. Spike led Xander into his private elevator which would take them straight to Spike's penthouse suite. The doors whooshed close, Spike pressed the button and Xander felt the elevator lift.

Arms suddenly wrapped around Xander as Spike pressed against his back. Xander stiffened.

"Been wanting to wrap myself around ya all bloody night," Spike said against Xander's ear. "Yer so warm and sweet, pet."

Xander remained still and looked at his reflection in the shiny elevator doors. Spike nibbled Xander's ear. Xander still didn't move.

Show's over, Xander stubbornly thought. He resisted the seductive awareness he'd realized he'd developed for Spike. Xander would make Spike 'take it' from Xander just as his previous master had.

Make my body react, Xander thought, not me.

Spike abruptly stopped nibbling and then sighed. He leaned his forehead briefly against Xander's temple and then suddenly Xander was free. He turned to look at the vampire now beside him.

"Not tonight, then, huh?" Spike asked.

Xander narrowed his eyes. Is he asking what I think he's asking? Xander thought and then
tentatively shook his head. *If it's my choice, not any night Fang Face.*

Surprisingly Spike smiled and then said, "Well I guess we have done a bit of snoggin' and what not, already. Shouldn't complain. A lot's happened to ya in the last twenty-four hours. I can respect that."

*But not me?* Xander wondered.

The elevator stopped and Spike suddenly kissed the tip of Xander's nose.

*What is it about my nose?* Xander thought as he reached up to rub it. Spike laughed and led him out of the elevator. Spike ran a security card on the outside of a double set of doors, the lock clicked and Spike opened the door. Once again Xander was in Spike's suite.

"C'mon pet," Spike said as he marched toward the bedroom, "let's get you out of the leather and the belt."

Xander followed Spike. Spike already had the keys to his belt out when Xander stepped into the room. Xander began to undo his pants.

"Why don't I see if Lorne put those salves and such in the bathroom," Spike suddenly said. "Just drop yer kit anywhere. The minions will pick it up tomorrow."

Xander had his pants half way down and Spike was suddenly gone. *What's up with him?* Xander wondered and continued to strip down.

A few minutes later Xander was standing in the bedroom wearing only his belt. Spike still hadn't emerged from the bathroom. *Should I go see what's taking him so long?* Xander wondered. *Or do I wait?*

Xander's bladder voted for the former. Xander sighed and walked quietly to the bathroom. He peeked his head in and saw Spike leaning on his arms against the counter. His head was down and it looked like he was deep in thought or trying to come to grips with something. Xander lightly knocked on the door.

Spike's head shot up and he turned to look at Xander.

"Pet," Spike said. "Was lost in thought."

*Well it is unfamiliar territory for you,* Xander thought.

"Come in and let's get that belt off you," Spike said. Xander nodded and moved forward. Spike quickly undid the locks and helped Xander step out of the belt. Xander sighed. He almost felt free again.

"Feel better?" Spike asked. Xander nodded.

"Look, pet," Spike said quietly. "I have some unfinished business down in the office. Gotta wrap up some details from tonight's game."

Xander nodded.

"Ya did good out there tonight. Real good. Played the part of a Pet spot on."
Xander nodded and thought, *Can you get to the point, Spike? I really have to pee.*

"Look, why don't you do your human stuff and shower. I'll leave the salves and stuff you need on the counter. You can reach everything you need on yer own?" Spike asked.

*Well except for my back, but I'm really more concerned about my bladder and dinner at the moment,* Xander thought.

"I'll have yer dinner left out on the small table by the kitchenette, yeah?" Spike said. "Let ya feed yerself, yeah?"

Xander blinked.

*Uh yeah. I've been able to do it myself since I was three, Xander thought. 'Sides, that would almost be of the 'I'm human again'.*

"I'll be back later," Spike said. "Don't need to wait up."

*Wasn't planning on it, Xander said, but thanks for the permission.*

Spike suddenly kissed the tip of Xander's nose and before Xander could frown about it Spike was gone.

*Huh, Xander thought as he dashed for the toilet, What's up with him... and why the nose again? Ewww! Does Spike have a nose fetish?*

When Xander was done with the toilet he turned and faced the dreaded shower. *OK, in and out time,* Xander thought and steeled himself to be immersed in water.

***

Spike met Lorne at the door. He took the tray and put it down on the small table. Spike then whipped around and headed back for the door.

"Not staying then?" Lorne asked the whirlwind Spike. Spike shook his head and headed for the elevator. Lorne followed.

"Sooo," Lorne said on the way down.

"Need some time in the blue stable," Spike said in a clipped voice.

"Well that's probably good. I'd advise you to refrain from snacking on Xander for at least a week. You've taken blood from him twice in twenty-four hours. Not good for humans, unless you like them anemic."

Spike hissed.

"OK, princess," Lorne said. "What's got your panties in a knot?"

"Leave it," Spike ordered.
"Ahh," Lorne said with a smile. "Somebody's acting noble and it doesn't sit well."

"It's not too late to stuff yer head in a drawer," Spike growled.

"You wouldn't last twelve hours without me," Lorne replied.

"Well that would be twelve hours without yer yappin'," Spike said.

Lorne laughed and then put an arm around Spike's shoulders.

"Love ya too, babe," Lorne said and squeezed. "Love ya too."

Spike growled but didn't try and remove Lorne's arm until the elevator reached the bottom. Then Lorne stepped back to a respectable distance. The elevator doors opened and Spike charged out. He stomped off down the hall and to the left.

"Remember," Lorne shouted after him, "You're heading to the blue stable! No draining dry!"

Spike raised a hand and gave Lorne the finger without stopping or looking back. Lorne laughed again.

***

When Xander stepped out of the bedroom, the suite was empty. He could smell something good coming from over by the kitchenette. Xander let his nose lead him over to the table where a small covered tray sat. He looked around and then cautiously slid into a chair at the table.

It felt odd, almost unnatural, to be sitting at the table. Xander hated that. He wanted it to feel normal sitting at a table ready to eat his dinner but he felt uncomfortable so high off the floor. In his cell, Xander had been allowed to feed himself the gruel, but he'd had to sit on the floor. He had to be watched too. The blue meanies made sure he didn't have any kinds of 'accidents' when eating.

Xander picked up the tray and slid to the floor. He'd tried that once; having an 'accident.' He didn't like to think about it, but he'd been tired and just 'done with it.' The master had used him four times that night. Four times Xander had been forced to ejaculate so his master could get drunk. Four times he'd had that bastard's tentacle writhing inside his body; pressing and rubbing against his prostate. The last time had been painful and only a thin clear liquid had seeped out of his sore and strained cock. Master hadn't been pleased.

Xander's hands shook at the memory. He'd wanted to die and suddenly it had seemed so easy to just swallow the gruel down the wrong pipe. All he had to do was breathe at the same time he poured the gruel out of its bowl and into his wide open mouth. He could do it. He'd become accustomed to drowning.

Xander had come to with the blue meanies pounding on his back; forcing the gruel out of his lungs. Once they were sure he was breathing they had dragged him out of his cell, down the hall and to the 'Tank.' He didn't have a voice to scream then, but he tried. Oh Willow, how he had tried.

*Bottles aren't allowed to hurt themselves,* the meanies had said repeatedly as they readied the struggling Xander for the 'Tank.' They had kept repeating that mantra as they lowered and locked him inside.
Once again tears threatened to slide down Xander's cheeks. *Oh Willow,* he thought. *I don't know if I can do this any more. I don't even think about escaping, trying to get back to you and Dawn... and Faith. All I think about is how can I avoid being hurt? How can I be good? What use would any of you have for me now?*

Xander lifted the cover off the tray. He wasn't really hungry now, but he wasn't sure how Spike would react if he didn't eat anything. A bowl of beef and vegetable soup, a bottle of water and a small square of red jell-o sat on the tray. Xander couldn't help but smile.

*When was the last time I saw jell-o?* he thought. *And where and how is Spike coming up with all this 'people' food?*

Xander picked up his spoon and dipped into the bowl. He brought it out and raised it to his lips. It smelled really good. He opened wide. The soup was as good as it smelled and Xander's hunger came back with a vengeance. He forced his thoughts away from the 'Tank' and the blue meanies and focused on eating. Whatever game Spike was playing, at least he was feeding Xander well.

Xander tried to clear his mind of all thoughts and just be in the moment of enjoying a good meal. He was alone and had to please no one but himself. He could eat at his own pace, taking time to savor each bite, and no one was there to punish him or command him. He even chewed his jell-o; just because he could.

When he was finished he covered the tray and set it back on the table. Then Xander went back to the bathroom, made his final ablutions, brushed his teeth and washed his hands and face. Spike still wasn't back. Xander sighed and crawled into the bed. He snuggled underneath the covers.

*Covers, Xander thought. Covers are nice.*

Xander's cell had been temperature controlled. There were no covers and there were no pillows. Xander turned his head and sniffed his pillow. It smelt like clean linen and he smiled. Xander turned and flopped on his back. He stared up at the dark ceiling.

*What a difference twenty-four hours can make,* Xander thought. Then he remembered what Lorne had said, about how things never stay the same.

*Guess he was right,* he thought. *But if that's the case, what change is next?*

Suddenly Xander’s stomach knotted as he realized he wasn't sure he wanted anything to change. Yes, Spike had pierced him, fondled him, bit him and 'caged' him in a way Xander didn't know was possible. Yet Spike had been, for the most part, not the monster Xander had been expecting. He could have done a lot worse to Xander. Lorne seemed to think he wouldn't and would instead do a lot better.

*Why?* Xander thought. *And how long can I expect this to last? Is that the game? Throw me off guard and then...*

Xander stopped his thoughts. He didn't want to go down that rabbit hole. He flopped back on to his belly and scrunched the pillow up over his arms.

*Whatever happens next,* Xander thought, *at least I had a moment of quiet. A moment of remembering what it's like to be a person instead of a thing.*
Some part of Xander thought about the razors in the bathroom. *Now would be a good time to exit,* some sly voice whispered deep inside him.

*NO!* Another voice answered loudly; it reminded Xander of Buffy.

*WWBD,* he thought. *That's what Spike said. Buffy wouldn't get a razor, unless it was to use against Spike.*

Xander flopped back onto his back. *I'm not Buffy,* he continued, *I can't take out Spike and his minions with just a razor and a bar of soap. All I can do is stick around and see what happens next. Things get too bad... well...*

*NO!* The voice said again and Xander sighed. The voice really did remind him of Buffy.

*No,* he reluctantly agreed. *OK, no razors and no 'accidents.'*

Xander flopped onto his stomach one more time and this time he relaxed. Soon he was fast asleep.

***

Spike slipped quietly back into his suite. It was dark. He listened for a moment and heard the steady breathing of a sleeping Xander. Spike smiled. He walked over to the tray and quietly lifted the cover. The soup, the jell-o and the water were gone. Again Spike smiled.

Spike walked silently to the bedroom. He smiled as he saw Xander snuggled under the covers on his side. He resisted the urge to brush the hair away from Xander's forehead, and to kiss Xander's nose.

Quietly Spike stripped out of his own clothes. He'd already cleaned up in the stable. As carefully as he could he slid into the bed next to his pet. Xander rolled over and moved his lips like he was muttering. Spike gave into temptation and ghosted a kiss across the tip of Xander's nose. Xander settled and Spike curled up next to him. Spike breathed deep the scent of Xander and then let his warmth sink into him.


Xander shifted again and his hand curled around Spike's.

Spike closed his eyes and went to sleep.
Chapter 14

It had been twenty-four meals since Xander’s time in the ‘Tank.’ He was proud of how quiet he leaned to be since then. Every time he had been about to say something to one of the guards, he’d stopped. He’d remembered how it felt to drown and he shut his mouth.

Xander hadn’t quite learned to be still, though. So far the meanies hadn’t punished him for it. He’d tried to be still, but it was hard when he was in a constant state of ‘fight or flight.’ This tended to leave him in a constant state of motion with the inability to do either.

For the fourth time that day the door opened. Xander looked up. This was unusual. The blue meanies entered his cell followed by the grey demon with tentacles who’d fondled Xander at the slave market.

*And oh wasn’t that a fun memory?* Xander thought sarcastically.

Xander stood up. “He…” he started to say and just managed to stop himself at the last moment.

The demon gurgled something and the meanies surged forward. Xander froze.

*Oh ghod!* He thought and began to tremble,

The blue meanies grabbed Xander and two more of them entered the room. The new guards each carried a set of elaborate and shiny manacles. Xander’s eyes opened wide.

*What’s going on?* He thought.

The gray demon gurgled again and the new guards began attaching the manacles to Xander’s wrists and ankles. Xander forgot all about being still and quiet.

“NO!” Xander shouted and began fighting. “Whatever the plan is, I’m ixnaying it!”

The demon gurgled again and one of the meanies pulled a ball like object with a buckle out of its pocket. It moved forward and held the object up to Xander’s face.

“Uh-huh,” Xander said and shook his head. “I know where that’s been!”

The meanie grabbed Xander’s jaw and applied pressured.

“OOOW…” Xander screamed and the meanie shoved the ball into Xander’s mouth. Quickly it did the buckle up around the back of Xander’s head.

“NNMPH!” Xander screamed.

“Grglw,” the grey demon said, turned and left the cell. The meanies grabbed hold of Xander and began to drag him out of his cell.

The meanies marched Xander down the hall and after the grey demon. The dragged him to the right and then left towards the large vault like doors. This time the doors were wide open.
This is so not of the good, Xander thought.

The meanies marched Xander through the doors and down a series of hallways. Eventually they marched him up some stairs, through another set of doors and another series of hallways. The upstairs hallways were brightly lit and ornately decorated.

Xander began to hear the sounds of talking, dishes clanking and music.

We’re going to a dinner party? Xander thought just before he was marched through a set of elaborate French doors and into a large banquet hall. Demons and creatures of all sorts were there and as Xander entered there was a loud round of demonic cheers and clapping.

OK, this is gone from bad, straight past worse and directly to ‘UH-OH,’ Xander thought. In no way do I want to be the guest of honor at a demon banquet.

The grey demon made its way and settled at the head of a large table. The meanies marched Xander over to where the demon sat and pushed him against the wall. Quickly they maneuvered Xander’s wrists out to his side and secured the manacles to hooks in the halls. Then they shoved a bar between Xander’s legs forcing him to spread them wide apart. They attached the manacles to each end of the bar and then again to another set of hooks in the wall.

Oh ghod! Xander thought. This can’t be happening!

“Nmph!” Xander tried to scream as he struggled against the restraints which held him prone and immobile against the wall.

The grey demon waved a tentacle and one of the blue meanies unbuckled the belt behind Xander’s head. He pulled the ball out.

“Thank you,” Xander said automatically before remembering he probably should be quiet.

Some of the demons laughed.

Guess they understand English, Xander thought.

“Aren’t you a delight?” said a silver hued demon with long horns that curved down its back. “You may just be a find after all.”


The demon laughed and moved closer to Xander. It ran a hand with pale claws down Xander’s cheek. He tried not to flinch.

“I’m so glad your master invited me to tonight’s ‘first tapping,’ ” the demon said. “I think it will be a good one.”

“Tapping?” Xander asked.

The demon smiled and said, “You’ll see.”
“Hey!” Xander replied and the demon moved away and took a seat beside the grey demon who Xander now figured was his ‘master.’

Xander’s ‘master’ waved a tentacle and suddenly blue meanies were everywhere. They brought forth platters of unknown dishes and set them out on the table before the milieu of demonic guests. Xander tried not to look at what was on the platters. He really didn’t want to know.

For a while Xander was left alone as the demons ate and cavorted. He closed his eyes. There were some things he just didn’t want to see. He wished he could close his ears. He didn’t want to hear the grunts, slurps, and growls of demons enjoying themselves. Suddenly he didn’t think his white padded cell was that bad any more.

A loud banging got Xander’s attention. Apparently it got the attention of the rest of his master’s guests. He opened his eyes.

”Nrg gaz ner Va!” Xander’s master said. The silver demon smiled and raised a glass in toast toward Xander. The other guests cheered and clapped.

OK, Xander thought. I can wake up any time now.

One of his master’s tentacles was stretching out and moving towards Xander. He tried to move away but there was nowhere to go. It slid out and over to his leg.

“Oh that does NOT feel good,” Xander said as the cool smooth tentacle began to ooze a mucus like substance on his leg. “Waiter! Napkin please!”

The silver demon laughed and another tentacle reached out for Xander. This time it reached out and stroked his stomach.

“OK, “ Xander said. “Normally I’m a touchy feely kind of guy. Spent most of my time with the gals. But now? Gotta say. Ain’t feelin…NOOO!”

Xander screamed as the tentacle on his stomach slithered down and began to curl itself around his penis.

“Hey! Waaaay off limits!” Xander screamed and futilely tried to move away. Laughter and cheers sprang out amongst the crowd.

“Just precious,” the silver demon said.

The tentacle began to pulse and stretch. It twined itself completely around Xander’s cock and began to undulate.

“Oh ghod! Please stop,” Xander begged.

The crowd laughed again. Xander leaned back his head and began to think of baseball as the tentacle began to stroke him in a firm and rhythmic motion.

The oozing tentacle on his leg pulsed and stretched. It began to twine and snake its way up. Xander looked down in horror.

“NO!” Xander yelled.
“Spirited,” the silver demon said to a woman like creature with red skin and amber eyes. She nodded and smiled revealing a mouthful of yellow pointed teeth.

The tentacle around Xander’s cock continued to stroke. He could feel a series of little suction like movements on his shaft. He looked down in horror to see little suckers poking out from the tentacle. They latched on to his skin and sucked.

_Giles in a tutu_, Xander frantically thought as he felt his body respond to the tentacles’ obscene ministrations. He heard the sound of clapping. _This isn’t happening!_ 

The tentacle slithering up higher on his leg proved it was. It snaked up and now the tip of it was oozing and caressing Xander’s ass. He shook his head.

“Stop! Just stop!” Xander cried. He was answered with more claps and cheers.

“Marvelous,” said the silver demon.

The tip of the tentacle on Xander’s cock now began to slide over his slit. His body was responding to the stimulation and he found he was half hard.

“I won’t let this happen!” Xander screamed.

“A newborn says it does!” yelled the silver demon. A sharp chorus of answers and replies went out around the table.

_Oh ghod they’re betting on this_, Xander thought. _Betting with a…_

Xander wouldn’t let himself think about it. He focused his energy back on ignoring the tentacle working its way between his ass cheeks.

“FUCK YOU!” Xander screamed as the stroking on his dick grew more intense.

“I believe it’s you getting ‘fucked,’” the silver demon said in amusement.

More laughter tittered around the table. Xander began banging his head against the wall. _Not going to give them what they want_, Xander thought.

Another tentacle whipped out and quickly wrapped itself around Xander’s neck. It prevented him from moving his head.

“NOOOOO!” Xander screamed. More cheers and clapping answered him.

The oozing tentacle was now burrowing its way between Xander ass cheeks. He screamed and flinched when it touched his asshole.

“Huzzah!” cried the silver demon.

Xander clenched his ass against the intruder but the tentacle was slick and strong. Slowly it worked its way against his flesh. He cried out in horror as the tip breached him. The suckers were working feverishly on his flesh as the other tentacle teased and flitted across the head of his now fully hard cock.
Xander could feel the tentacle in his ass pulse and stretch. It pushed farther into his body. It hurt and burned but still it continued to delve deeper. He began to feel uncomfortably ‘full.’ He tried to fight it but the appendage was relentless and pushed in deeper.

“Please! Don’t!” Xander begged.

The stroking on his cock continued and to Xander’s horror he could feel a drop of precum forming on its tip. It didn’t last long. The sucker on the end of the tentacle quickly whisked it away. His master made a high pitched screeching sound and the crowd roar.

"He says you taste promising,” the silver demon translated.

Xander shut his eyes. He tried to picture worms and maggots. He thought of his old gym teacher in Sponge Bob Square Pants underwear. He tried thinking of anything that would cool his unwanted ardor. Any progress he made was lost when the oozing tentacle up his ass brushed against a spot deep inside him.

Need flared through Xander and he arched his back.

“I’d say he found your prostate,” the demon laughed.

Xander struggled against the restraints. He screamed and cursed. The crowd roared and the tentacle teasing him inside brushed and stroked the sensitive nub to the same rhythm as the one on his cock.

A familiar tingle started at the base of Xander’s cock. He bit his lip until it bled. The crowd laughed and his master gurgled angrily. The pulsing and stroking continued. The pain wasn’t enough to overcome his body’s reaction.

“NOOOOOOOOO!” Xander cried as semen began erupting out of his slit. The crowd roared loudly and immediately the suckers on his cock began to ‘drink’ up his spilt seed. The stroking never ceased. Xander’s orgasm seemed as long as it was unwanted. When it was over he hung limply in his bonds.

The tentacle on his cock slithered around. The suckers worked until his flesh was clean. The tentacle inside him ceased stimulating his prostate, but it didn’t withdraw.

“Now that was a show!” the silver demon yelled.

“VA! Kre dr gkl. VA!” Xander’s master said. The tentacle around his neck withdrew. A blue meanie quickly approached and it buckled a collar around his neck.

“Congratulations,” the silver demon said. “You’re a keeper.”

Xander looked up and glared at his English speaking tormenter.

“Your master says you have a bold and lively flavor. Perfect for entertaining.”

“Hurray for me,” Xander croaked bitterly.

The silver demon laughed.
“Oh, but it is ‘hurray’ for you. You’re a ‘bottle’ now. You’ll probably live longer and be treated better than most humans,” the demon explained.

“Why?”

“Your master is an Azora, boy. Azoras find the seed of male humans… intoxicating.”

Xander felt sick and nauseated. He’d been publicly raped and forced to ejaculate so some demon could get a buzz? What was worse, if the silver demon was telling the truth, this would happen again and again.

“No,” Xander whispered.

“Yes,” the demon answered. “If I were you, I’d rest up. You’ll be ‘tapped’ at least once more this evening.”

“It won’t happen again,” Xander vowed.

The demon laughed. The Azora demon gurgled and a blue meanie approached Xander. It grabbed his jaw and squeezed. Xander’s jaw popped open and the ball gag was shoved back in place.

“Looks like our conversation is over,” the silver demon said as the meanie buckled the ball gag around Xander’s head. “Pity. I did find you so amusing.”

Xander glared then hung his head. He didn’t want to see or hear anything else for rest of the evening. For a time Xander was left alone by both his master and the other demon. He was left alone until the tentacle still inside him began to move again.

Xander had been able to resist a little longer for his second ‘tapping.’ However, it ended as it had the first time, except the second time his screams were muffled.

Some time after Xander’s second tapping his master and the silver demon excused themselves from the table. The meanies undid Xander’s restraints. His sore and exhausted body was dragged from the hall.

The two demons led the meanies back down into the vault and back into Xander’s cell. Once there the meanies dropped him on the floor and undid the manacles. They removed the ball gag. They left the collar in place.

“Bottles aren’t allowed to hurt themselves,” the meanies said. “Bottles aren’t allowed to touch themselves; the drink is for their master. Bottles are still. Bottles are quiet. Bottles do not leave the Vault unless they are wanted. Bottles don’t move when on display.”

“Fuck you,” Xander said hoarsely.

“Bottles are quiet!” the meanies said.

“Mln nga Va!” Xander’s master said.

Another meanie entered this cell. He carried a vial. He offered it to Xander.

“Wha…?”
“Bottles are quiet!” the meanies said in unison.

“Drink up,” the silver demon said. “If you don’t do it willingly, they’ll pour the contents down your throat.”

“What…?” Xander tried asking again.

“VA krn!” Xander’s master gurgled loudly.

“Bottles are quiet!” the meanies said.

“I’d worry about what it is later,” the other demon said. “Drink up or have it poured down.”

Xander glared. *I’m not gonna make this easy for any of you,* he thought.

The silver demon smiled. Xander’s master waved a tentacle and two meanies grabbed Xander. Another pinched his nose shut. Xander held his breath until he almost passed out. As soon as his mouth opened a meanie shoved a finger inside. Xander bit down until flesh gave way and a sour liquid oozed into his mouth. The meanie poured the contents of the vial into Xander’s mouth. Then it removed its finger and clamped its bleeding hand over Xander’s mouth.

Xander struggled and tried to spit. He choked and the liquid in his mouth began to trickle down his throat. At first it stung. Then it burned.

Xander tried to scream and more liquid worked its way down. The meanie removed its hand. Xander opened his mouth and it felt like fire raced in and down his throat. He moaned, screamed and began to convulse. The other meanies let him go. Xander fell into a heap and then curled into a fetal position. The burn had turned into a scorching sensation.

Xander coughed and retched. He expected to see blood but all that came out was spittle and still his throat burned in agony. He screamed until his voice fell silent. The burn continued. The meanies, the silver demon and his master stood and watched.

Time lost meaning to Xander. He was just in pain and only when the pain began to recede did he become aware again. A glass of water was placed in front of him. Xander lunged for it and downed the contents before he could even wonder if it was really water.

The cool water soothed the fading agony in Xander’s throat. He put the glass down. It was refilled. He grabbed the glass and drank again. After his fourth drink of water the glass was taken away. The burning had stopped. Xander looked up at his master and the silver demon.

“Drop dead,” Xander had meant to say. Only nothing came out. His eyes widened and he brought his hands to his throat. He tried to say something again. Nothing came out. He tried to scream and was met only by the sound of the silver demon laughing.

“Bottles are silent,” the meanies intoned.

The silver demon crouched down and looked at Xander. He reached out and ran a claw over Xander’s throat.

“The Azora believe that the sounds made during a bottle’s first tapping will indicate the quality of
flavor the bottle will have. I must say, based on your master’s opinion, you validated that belief. Apparently, you are quite good...delightful even. But after a bottle’s first tapping, they don’t need to hear its voice again. In fact, they don’t want to hear it again. It’s distracting. Plus the silence is helpful when they trade or sell bottles. They always know which ones are new and ‘fresh’ and which ones are ‘matured.’ ”

Xander shook his head. No, Xander mouthed. NO!

The silver demon laughed.

“Sna krn Vaa,” the Azora demon said and then left the cell. The silver demon stood and followed. He waved goodbye to Xander. The blue meanies were the last to leave.

Xander took deep a breath and tried to scream.

***

For the second time in forty-eight hours, Spike woke abruptly to find a silently screaming Xander in his bed.

Fuck! Spike thought. Not again!

“Pet!” Spike cried. Xander’s eyes locked on him and suddenly he was all motion. Xander sprang from the bed and tried to run.

“Xander!” Spike barked and grabbed him. Xander bit, kicked and scratched. He broke free from Spike and scrambled to the corner of the room. He drew his knees up against his chest and wrapped his arms around them. He stared at Spike in absolute terror.

Spike’s demon roared and fought for control. It wanted to punish the disobedient pet for daring to fight its master. Spike pushed it down and remained still. He kept his face firmly without ridges and his eyes blue.

“Xander,” Spike said softly. Xander shook his head and hugged himself tighter.

“Another bad dream, yeah?” Spike said. Xander blinked.

Bloody hell! Spike thought. His pet stank of fear. Don’t even know what scared him. Don’t even know what he dreams!

“Yer gonna get cold sittin’ over there on the floor,” Spike said as he slowly began to move off the bed. Xander gasped and shook his head.

“Lorne will never forgive me if you catch cold and I don’t want that. Believe me pet, you don’t want to be on the wrong side of one of Green Bean’s lectures,” Spike said as he stood beside the bed and began tugging at the covers.

Xander pointed at Spike and shook his head.

He doesn’t want me near him, Spike thought and then looked at the scratches on his arms. He made that bloody clear.

“Just thought I’d get ya some covers, yeah?” Spike said quietly and balled a blanket up in his arms.
“I’ll just set ‘em on the floor near ya and you can reach out and get ‘em if you want.”

Spike took a few tentative steps toward Xander. Xander pressed himself back against the wall and continued to shake his head.

“No gonna touch pet, promise,” Spike said. “Just want to put the covers in reach.”

Spike took a few more steps and then bent down. He put the covers on the floor and pushed them toward Xander. Xander trembled. He kept pointing at Spike and shaking his head. He stopped when Spike retreated.

“See. I’m a vampire of my word.”

Xander stared at Spike, but didn’t move.

**Right,** Spike thought. *Gonna take a bit more than a scrap a cloth ta put him at ease.*

“Ya know when I was a lad and I had nightmares,” Spike said, “my Mum used to read ta me. She’d find a grand story and get my mind off whatever had frightened me.”

Xander remained motionless. Spike sighed and began to slowly back towards one of the bookshelves.

“Make ya a deal, pet,” he said. “You cover up and I’ll find something ta read to you. You can stay on the floor and in the corner as long as ya want. I won’t touch ya. I’ll just read… and when yer ready you can come back to bed.”

Xander frantically shook his head. Spike paused.

“I promise, I won’t touch ya. You come back to bed and I’ll just let you sleep,” Spike raised two fingers and said, “Vampire’s honor.”

Xander stilled. He stared at Spike and then slowly reached out for the blanket. Once he had the blanket in hand he quickly snatched it close and draped it around himself. He stared at Spike.

“Right,” Spike said. “Now ta find something to read.”

Spike kept the proverbial one eye on Xander while he perused the bookshelf. He was still concerned Xander might try and run again. He wanted to get him calmed down. He could hear Xander’s rapid heartbeat and he knew it wasn’t good for his pet.

“Ah!” Spike said as he spotted a book and plucked it from the shelf. “I think this one will do the trick, pet.”

Spike smiled at Xander and moved back to the bed. Xander pulled the covers tighter. Spike crawled back up on the bed and made himself comfortable. He reached over to the nightstand and opened the drawer. He fished around for a moment and then pulled out a pair of glasses which he promptly perched on his nose. He looked at Xander.

Xander’s mouth hung open.

“Tell… well, word gets out about my glasses, pet,” Spike said. “I’ll know who to look for.”
Xander’s mouth snapped shut. Spike smiled.

“Now, I think you’ll like this story. It’s about another White Knight like yerself. He was gone a long time and when he came home he found his country in the clutches of an usurper. He fought to save the damsel, put the proper king on the throne and still be with the one he loved. Don’t get more bloody heroic then Ivanhoe,” Spike said. “You ever read it?”

Xander shook his head.

“Bloody American education system,” Spike muttered then opened the book. “Now sit back and relax.”

Xander settled under the covers. Spike smiled again and then began to read. “In that pleasant district of merry England which is watered by the river Don, there extended in ancient times a large forest, covering the greater part of the beautiful hills and valleys which lie between Sheffield and the pleasant town of Doncaster.”

Spike voice was softer and more ‘cultured’ than Xander had ever heard. It was pleasant and soothing. By the time Wamba the Witless and Gurth the swine-herd met the strange travelers inquiring about lodging Xander was warm and breathing evenly. His fear was lessened and his eyes felt heavy.

By the time the Palmer led the Prior Aymer and Brian de Bois-Guilbert to Cedric the Saxon’s home, Xander had cautiously crawled back to the bed. He fell asleep as Cedric complained about Lady Rowena’s tardiness to dinner.
Spike lay propped up on his elbow watching Xander sleeping. His pet seemed to be resting easy. His breathing was deep, even and not so much as a frown line creased his forehead.

*Need to know what happened to you, pet,* Spike thought. *Can't have you afraid to be touched by me. Bloody hell, can't have you fightin' me!*

Spike sighed and then cocked his head. He heard the elevator approaching the top floor.

*That'll be Lorne,* he thought, and carefully eased himself off the bed. He checked to make sure Xander was still sleeping quietly. He was.

Spike quickly pulled on his pants from the night before. Then, shirtless and pants unbuttoned, he slipped out of the bedroom. He opened the door, lighting a cigarette just as Lorne stepped out of the elevator.

"Everything, OK, lemon drop?" Lorne asked as he entered the suite carrying a food tray.

"Bad day," Spike growled and prowled back towards his leather chair. "Xander had another nightmare."

Lorne sighed and put the tray down. "Any idea what it was ab...?"

"What do you bloody think?" Spike snapped. "Must have been bad, too. Look what he did to me."

Spike held out his arms so Lorne could see the fading scratches. Lorne paled.

"He fought you? Lemon drop," Lorne's voiced dropped to a whisper. "What did you do?"

Spike shook his head and blew out a puff of smoke. "Read to him."

Lorne blinked. "You read to him?"

*Ivanhoe* calmed him down enough to go back to sleep."

"You read him *Ivanhoe*?"

Spike shrugged. "Just the first book I grabbed."

"You never cease to amaze me," Lorne smiled.

"Really? Bloody astound myself all the time," Spike replied.

Lorne laughed and then made his way to the wet bar. He pulled some cranberry juice out of the small fridge and a bottle of vodka from the shelf.

"So, Xander's still asleep?" Lorne asked as he plopped two ice cubes into a thick square glass.

Spike nodded. He took another drag on his cigarette. Lorne poured an equal amount of juice and
vodka into the glass.

"I need to know what happened to him," Spike said as he exhaled a thick cloud of smoke.

"I'm working on it."

"Work harder," Spike growled.

Lorne sighed and took a sip of his drink. He sat at the bar.

"Are you willing to deal to get the intel?" Lorne asked.

"I'm about to start laying down some new railroad tracks beginning with every demon known to associate with Azoras!" Spike snarled and ground out his cigarette in a crystal ashtray. "If you get my meaning?"

"Well then," Lorne said as he took another sip, "Vr'xkl has a close associate, Zorn. A truly repugnant silver demon with unkempt horns who makes an equally repugnant martini..."

Spike cocked an eyebrow.

"Spike... my blondie bear, I really don't think you appreciate how important the details are," Lorne said. Spike glared in response. "Right. Neither here nor there. Anyway, Zorn might be able to tell us a few things or at least get me a meeting with Vr'xkl..."

"But?" Spike asked, sensing Lorne was skirting around something Spike didn't want to hear.

"Zorn wants a meet to negotiate for Xander," Lorne said and then downed his drink.

"NO!" Spike roared.

"Listen, lemon drop," Lorne quickly rushed to explain. "Just sit down with him. Meet with him. Swap a few stories of mayhem and torture. Have a few drinks. Give him some sort of deal he can go back to..."

"Not giving Xander up!" Spike yelled and his eyes flashed yellow. "Won't repeat myself again, Lorne."

"I'm not suggesting you do. Cupcake belongs with you, Spike," Lorne said and looked Spike squarely in the eye until the vampire's hackles settled. "However, meet with Zorn. Charm him. Give him something."

"Why?" Spike grumbled reluctantly.

"So Vr'xkl will have to go to 'plan B', that's why."

"Plan B?"

"When Vr'xkl's demon can't get him what he wants he'll look for an 'inside' demon."

"An inside demon?" Spike asked narrowing his eyes.
"Someone... close to you," Lorne smiled.

"Someone who might have an inside track?" Spike said, beginning to relax a bit.

Lorne nodded.

"Someone like... my floor manager?"

Lorne grinned and said, "Your slightly underappreciated floor manager."

Spike chuckled. "You wanna play him?"

"He wants Xander back. You want info. Let him make a move and when that doesn't work..."

"We make our move," Spike finished.

Lorne nodded. Spike smiled.

"Green bean," Spike said. "Give yerself a raise."

***

Xander rolled on to his back and flopped his arm out to the side. He didn't feel anything... or anyone. Xander opened an eye. The room was dark.

Where's Blondie? Xander thought. He sat up and looked around. As near as he could tell, he was alone.

No morning molestation? He wondered as he cautiously rolled out of bed and prowled around the room as best as he could. When he stumbled over his pants, Xander bent down and grabbed them. When he thought he heard voices, he quickly pulled them on.

Now what? Xander wondered, recognizing Spike’s voice. More plans for his ‘pet’ or more plans for his customers?

Quietly, Xander made his way to the bedroom door. He leaned against the door and laid his ear along the smooth wood. He strained to listen. Not going to trust the touchy feely Mr. Sensitive Spike from last night, Xander thought. The more I know about what to expect from Spike the better prep...

Suddenly he was falling forward as the door swung open and light streamed inside. Arms caught Xander before the floor did.

"Evenin', pet," Spike purred as he helped Xander to his feet.

Xander glared at Spike but managed not to jerk away from him. Spike smiled and let Xander go.

"Lorne's brought brekkies," Spike said as he turned away from Xander and headed back to his chair.

"Good evening," Lorne called out to Xander as he followed Spike into the main room. "Heard you didn't sleep so well."

OK, so it looks like we’re playing it "Leave it to Beaver... Munsters style," Xander thought. Pretend
everything is fine. Xander waved his hand back and forth in answer to Lorne.

"Well," Lorne said, "I brought you a good breakfast."

Xander smiled as he dropped into position by Spike's chair.

"Make yerself comfortable, pet," Spike said.

*That would require a sharp stake and a ticket to anywhere but here,* Xander thought and tentatively shifted so he was sitting ‘Indian Style’.

"Not on your approved list of positions," Spike chuckled as he removed the tray covering Xander's breakfast.

Xander sighed and began to uncross his legs so he could get back into a kneeling position. Spike put a hand on his shoulder.

"No. No need, pet," he said.

Xander frowned. *Will you please make up my mind you ADD suffering vamp?*

"Spike said you had bad dreams," Lorne interjected as Xander once again sat on his butt and crossed his legs. He looked at Lorne and nodded.

"I'm sorry," Lorne said.

*Me too,* Xander thought as he shrugged. *Spike told Lorne? Why?*

"So, pet," Spike said as he speared a bit of omelet with his fork. "How long has it been since you’ve been out?"


Spike sighed then said, "How long since you been outside?"

Again Xander shrugged and then he pointed at the fork.

"Spike," Lorne interrupted. "Do you intend to starve the answers out of him?"

"Oh fer... here!" Spike growled and shoved the fork at Xander.

Xander opened his mouth for the bit of omelet. He tried not to notice or wonder about the green stuff in it.

"Spinach," Lorne said spotting the quick look of trepidation on Xander's face. "Spike's been feeding off you too much lately. You need the iron."

*Oh,* Xander thought as he cleaned the fork and chewed. *I know I've been in captivity too long when a) I still have an appetite after being reminded I'm Spike's new favorite after school snack and b) spinach tastes good.*
"Good?" Spike asked. If Xander didn't like it, Spike was going to make Lorne get him something else. *He can take a bloody pill for iron if he needs it,* Spike thought.

Xander nodded and opened his mouth for another bite.

"Right then," Spike said and obliged his pet.

"So, Spike's now letting you wear clothes in the suite?" Lorne asked.

Xander nearly choked mid-swallow. *I didn't think! Omighod!* Panicked brown eyes locked with blue eyes.

"Oi! Not going to make a habit of it but... he did a good job last night," Spike said, quickly covering both for Xander and himself. *Didn't even notice! Gotta be more careful! If Angelus or any of his agents had been here...*

Spike suppressed a shudder and offered Xander one of the strawberries that had been nestled in a small bowl on the tray. "Figured he deserves a bit of a treat today."

*A treat? A STRAWBERRY!* Xander flushed and then greedily sucked the strawberry from Spike's fingers. He closed his eyes and slowly chewed. He tuned out everything as he savored the cool firm sweet flesh of the berry. *OK, If I deserve a treat today I'll gladly trade wearing clothes for more strawberries,* he thought.

Spike chuckled. *Pet likes berries,* he thought. *Will have to remember that.*

"So that's why you're bringing up going out?" Lorne asked.

Spike nodded and offered Xander another berry. 

"How long has it been since you been outside?" Spike asked as Xander once again hungrily swept the second strawberry from Spike's fingers with his lips and tongue.

Xander chewed and shrugged.

"Hold up some fingers, pet," Spike said. "Give me a number. Are we talking days? Weeks? Months?"

Xander blinked, shrugged and held his hands out to his side with his palms up. *Why does it matter anyway?* he thought.

"Right," Spike said and speared more of the eggs and spinach. He tried to keep the anger out of his voice and his jerky motions. If his pet didn't know how long it had been, then it had been too long.

"Well then," Spike said as Xander cleaned the fork, "I suppose you won't mind going for a walk then?"

*A walk?* Xander thought and then paused mid chew. He stared at Spike. *Is this a joke? A tease?*

"Wanna show you and my city off."

*Ahh! More 'Pet' time,* Xander thought. *Now I get the whole altruistic motion that wasn't.*
"Thought after you eat and get cleaned up we’d take a stroll down the strip," Spike continued as he offered Xander some juice.

Xander drank the juice then nodded. Again, not like I have any choice.

Spike frowned. He couldn't detect any telltale signs that Xander was excited by the prospect of going outside for a walk.

"Thought you'd be a bit more perkier about the idea," Spike said.

Oh, excuse me master, Xander thought as he stuck out his tongue and curled his hands up under his chin to do his best puppy dog impersonation. Please, may I go outside!

Spike wasn't sure whether to laugh or to growl. He sighed. Well at least he's over the terrors from his dreams, Spike thought.

"Keep that up and you'll be walking the strip on all fours," Spike warned as his pique won out.

Xander immediately paled and went to his knees. There's the Spike I know and hate! Xander thought. Now this is what I'm used to. I can deal with this. He spread his legs wide and lowered his head.

Spike bit back a groan.

"Spike!" Lorne chided.

"Pet... Xander," Spike said. "Relax."

Xander looked up at Spike. Cocked it up again! Spike thought.

"Look, I don't have any dealings until much later in the evening. You did well last night. You can stay up here in the suite and putter around or we can go for a walk and take in some of the sights. Your choice. Just hurry up and let me know. I gotta business to run and that doesn't include coddling my human pet."

"Spike!" Lorne chided again.

"What?"

"You can be a little..."


Xander frowned.

Of course Lorne wouldn't forget who Spike was and why was it those two sometimes seemed to have a different conversation? Xander thought. And really why was Spike 'nice' sometimes... like, well, now? Once again making with the choice? Then there was the whole "Oprah Book Club" moment the night before. If that wasn't human coddling, then the Xan-man didn't know what was. Really, what was going on?
"I know exactly who you are, lemon drop," Lorne said airily. "No reminders necessary."

Spike sighed and looked at Xander.

"Well?" he said.

There really wasn't much to think about. If it really was Xander's choice Xander knew what he wanted. He 'walked' his fingers across the arm of Spike's chair.

"You wanna go for a walk then?" Spike asked.

Xander nodded eagerly. I'm not going to let a little thing like non-existent pride keep me from actually going outside and breathing fresh air, Xander thought. I don't care if I have to walk on all fours, be at the end of a leash and carry a bone in my mouth. Even if it wasn't my choice I'd still go... but since it is... Yeah, I'll wear a collar and do everything short of barking. Show me a hydrant and I'll even lift my leg!

"Well then," Spike said as he offered Xander a bite of toast, "it's a da... it's decided."

Xander bit quickly at the toast and chewed even faster. Out! I'm going outside! he thought and quickly tore another bite of the still offered toast! Fresh air! Night air! Stars! Smells! Toast going down wrong...

Xander coughed and sputtered. Spike pounded firmly but gently on Xander's back.

"Slow down pet," Spike said.

Xander nodded.

Suddenly Xander found he wasn't hungry. He was restless. He tried not to squirm. He tried concentrating on the next forkful of eggy greeny goodness, but all he could think about was walking beyond walls. Once again he chewed quickly and swallowed without tasting his food.

Spike sighed.

"This is going well," Spike said sarcastically and offered Xander a strawberry. The berry was slurped up, chewed and swallowed before Lorne could respond.

"Pet!" Spike growled. "SLOW down or you'll be having a very meager lunch as in NONE!"

Xander blushed. He pointed at the food and shook his head.

"I don't care if you think yer not hungry now. You are gonna eat. And I mean eat, not just cramming bits down yer gullet. Yer gonna eat, then shower, then get dressed and THEN we'll go out. Capisce?"

Xander took deep breath and nodded. Spike offered another strawberry and Xander forced himself to take his time and chew it thoroughly before swallowing. Lorne chuckled.

"And what's so amusing, green bean?" Spike said.

"You've come a long way in just a couple of days, lemon drop," Lorne said. "Next thing you know
“you’re going to be the leading authority on the care and feeding of human pets.”

Spike growled and even Xander frowned. Lorne laughed.

"Why don't you make yourself useful and get Xander some new kit?" Spike barked.

"New kit?"

"Considerin' he was chafin' in his leathers just hanging out on the floor last night, I don't think they'd be good fer struttin' the strip tonight."

"Ah," Lorne said, "you know it would help if you spoke English."

Spike rolled his eyes. "Just get Xan some cool and comfies, yeah?"

Lorne stood up and winked at Xander.

"I'll be back with some jeans and a t-shirt. That sound good, Xander?" Lorne asked.

Xander looked at Spike. Spike cocked an eyebrow at Xander. My choice... again? Xander wondered. What happened to the no coddling rule?

Xander nodded at Lorne.

"Be back in about forty-five then," Lorne said and quickly exited the room.

Xander looked back at Spike. Spike had another forkful of spinach omelet waiting for Xander. Xander cleaned the fork. His eyes met Spike's.

What are you up to? Xander thought. What do you want from me Spike? What game are you playing and what position do I play?
Chapter 16

Showers were getting easier for Xander. As long as he didn't think about them as vertical boxes of watery death, he was fine. He was even better when he focused on the prospect of walking outside. Even the image of being led around on a leash by one of the famed Fanged Four didn't cool his enthusiasm.

He couldn't say the same for finding himself naked and semi-wet in front of the Fanged One himself. Xander stepped out of the bathroom running a towel through his hair to find a fully clothed vampire staring hungrily at him. Spike's blue eyes swept openly up and down Xander's nude body. Xander froze.

"Pet," Spike finally said.

Xander swallowed. He remained still.

"Uhm," Spike said and then held out Xander's chastity belt. "Theoretically if yer gonna be with just me ya shouldn't need it... but not wanting to take any chances, yeah?"

Yeah, Xander thought. Wouldn't want that. Xander wasn't sure if he was being sarcastic or not. Sometimes he still wasn't sure what scared him more, being owned by Spike or not being owned by Spike. He dropped the towel and moved closer to Spike.

Spike bent down and motioned with the belt for Xander to ‘step’ into it. Xander put his hands on Spike's shoulders for balance. He paused, foot mid-air, and cocked an eyebrow at Spike as he got a quick look at the inside of the belt.

"Powdered it for ya already. Don't want you chafing. Won't let it be said I don't take care of my Pet," Spike said gruffly in response to Xander's unasked question.

Right, Xander thought. Mustn't besmirch that snow white reputation of yours.

"Just get in," Spike ordered. Xander did and Spike carefully slid the belt up over his legs. Once again he carefully tucked ‘Lil Xander’ in and once again Xander tried not to think about Spike handling his penis. Spike stood up and locked the two locks.

"Safe as houses," he whispered.

Crack houses? Xander thought.

Suddenly Spike leaned forward and touched his forehead to Xander's. He inhaled deep. Xander stared at Spike's gold rimmed blue eyes.

Ah, now here it comes, Xander thought. Would have made more sense to put the belt on after the molesting... but this is Spike we're talking about. He doesn't excel in 'sense'.

"Ya smell good, pet," Spike said huskily. "All clean and fresh. Warm."

Xander held still as Spike moved down to nuzzle his neck and sniffed.
"Could eat you up."

*I'm sure you could.*

Spike sniffed again and then placed his hands on Xander's face. He looked at Xander. Xander met Spike's gaze. Spike's face almost seemed to ripple as if he was on the edge of fully vamping out, yet he remained human looking with only the gold circling the blue of his eyes betraying his demonic side. Those inhuman eyes bore into Xander's. Xander remained still and continued to meet Spike's gaze. Spike stared at Xander until the gold faded from his eyes.

"Finish doin' yer stuff and then get dressed. Yer kit's on the bed," Spike finally said and then quickly kissed Xander on the nose before storming out of the bedroom slamming the door behind him.

*Huh,* Xander thought as he rubbed the tip of his nose and stared at the door.

***

In the ‘Before’ finding a decent fitting pair of jeans meant spending a day at whatever discount store was having a big ‘must not miss sale’ and Willow's resolve face while enduring hours of torturous trial and error of wriggling in and out of off brand jeans. Then the fun was followed by the frantic hope Buffy was better with calculating the sales tax than he was so he wouldn't have to cover being fifty-cents short with a smile and a stick of gum... again.

However, somehow, in the forty-five minutes since Lorne had gone he had not only found a pair of Levi's Capital E '501' (The Original Jean), but they fit perfectly. They fit perfectly even with the chastity belt.

*Must be magic,* Xander thought as he pulled a plain white t-shirt over his head. Then he grabbed a thick pair of white socks. He held them for a moment and just rubbed them between his fingers. They were soft.

*Wonder what these are for?* Xander thought. *Most slaves are barefoot or wear sandals that wouldn't get them very far.*

Still, he bent down and pulled them on over his feet. He smiled as he squished his toes. The soft cotton felt even better rubbing against his toes than his fingers.

*Too long,* Xander thought, then he sighed. *Better go see what Fang Face is up to before he comes looking for me.*

Xander walked out of the bedroom.

"Looking good, cupcake," Lorne said as Xander wandered into the suite.

Xander looked around. Only Lorne was around.

"Spike has some... errands," Lorne explained with a wave after noting Xander's perplexed look.

*Type O or type AB?* Xander began to wonder then stopped himself. *Check that. I don't think I really want to know.* He headed to kneel by Spike's chair.

"Oh," Lorne said, "you might want to sit for a moment."
Xander blinked.

"It's hard to put these on when you’re kneeling," Lorne said as he held out a brand new pair of sporting shoes. They were Nikes to be exact.

"They're from 'Before'.'"

Xander stared at the shoes like they were some kind of holy relic. He'd never owned a pair of brand name sporting shoes that hadn't been a Blue Light special or a Wal-Mart price cut.

"They're OK, aren't they?" Lorne asked hesitantly. "I could only find black in your size but I could always che..."

Xander smiled and moved forward. He took the shoes in one hand and gave a 'thumbs up’ to Lorne with the other.

"You sure? I don't mind checking again."

Xander nodded and sat on the floor. He slipped his feet inside the shoes. Xander laced up the shoes, tied them and stood up. He took some practice steps around the suite. Even though he hadn't worn shoes in longer than he cared to speculate, the shoes were comfortable. Like the jeans, Lorne had managed to find a perfect fit.

Xander focused back on Lorne and smiled.

"Your status gives you some advantages," Lorne smiled in return.

Oh! Once again... make Spike's pet pretty? Xander thought bitterly as he was reminded why he was allowed to have shoes.

"Cupcake!" Lorne shouted in concern at the loss of Xander’s smile and good mood. He moved quickly to the human. "Hey! Believe me I didn't go through Merl's backroom and literal rat's nest just to add one more feather to Spike's cap. I take it you haven't been out in a while? You need something decent on your feet or you’re going to be in a world of pain even after a short walk. That's desert and concrete out there. Trust me, slaves’ sandals will only leave you with a need for a visit from the healers and a cranky Spike."

Xander stared at Lorne. He looked for any signs of deceit. He sounded sincere and the story’s good, he thought, but how can I really trust him? He's a demon and he's Spike's right hand ma... er demon. Or does this mean I've gone from dog to horse? And these are my 'horse shoes'?

"Xander, I got these shoes for you. They weren't under Spike's order. They have nothing to do with Spike and the only thing they have to do with you being Spike's Pet is that you can get away with wearing them without risk of punishment. Believe me, cupcake, if I could I'd be giving shoes out to all the humans in this city."

Xander narrowed his eyes. Why?

"You won't tell Spike I said that? Will you?"

Xander rolled his eyes. Uh, hello! Mute here! He thought. And I thought Spike was the slow one!
Lorne winced. "Sorry. Bad choice of words. I meant, when we get your voice back. You won't tell Spike because he gets all grumpy when he hears about the softer side of Lorne."

My voice back? Xander froze and all thoughts about his shoes fled. What do you mean about getting my voice back?

"OK, once again, I've put my foot into it," Lorne said as he heard the elevator reaching the top of the suite. Spike isn't the only one with good hearing, Xander thought. "Look, cupcake, I can't go into it. Spike's on his way up and he wouldn't want me to say anything because he wouldn't want you to get your hopes up. Just know that... well... if you really hate the shoes I'll see what I can do."


"Ya ready pet?" Spike's voice boomed as the vampire bounded in through the doors.

Xander turned immediately to look at Spike. For a moment he felt like he he'd been sucked through a time warp. There was Spike in his Doc Martens, his jeans, his tight black t-shirt and the ever present black leather coat. This was the Spike from Sunnydale. This was the Spike from parent-teacher night where Angel had ‘given’ Xander to Spike. A flush crept up Xander's neck at the thought.

I was so innocent then, Xander thought. I thought that was the worst thing that could have happened to me. Now I know better.

"Pet?" Spike asked as he moved close to Xander. He put a finger under Xander's chin. "You OK?"

Xander shrugged.

"Ya still up for the walk?"

Xander's eyes went wide and he nodded furiously. Please Spike, don't take this away from me now.

Spike smiled. He reached into his pocket and pulled out Xander's silver leash. He attached it to Xander’s collar and then let it hang.

"I'll be just like last night, yeah? Just fer show," Spike said and then he turned and headed out of the room. Xander hurried to catch up with him. He paused for second at the doorway to turn around and look at Lorne. He gave him a small wave.

Lorne smiled and returned the wave.

***

Stepping out into the night air was like stepping into another dimension. Not that Xander had ever really stepped into another dimension but he had been nearby when Angelus had used the statue of Acathla to open a portal to the hell dimension. So he figured that counted.

The air was thick, vibrant and Xander could feel it wrapping around him. Xander stretched his arms and welcomed the embrace. He smiled as his skin noted the temperature change. The night air was dryer and hotter than in the casino. Still, it wasn't as hot as Xander had expected. The sun had gone down and already the city was cooling.
Xander inhaled and he could smell exhaust, sweat, asphalt, chlorine from the fountains and just a hint of the desert beyond.

"Gonna stand there makin' like a windmill?" Spike asked gruffly, "or ya gonna get movin'?"

Xander lowered his arms but didn't stop smiling. He did however move quickly to follow Spike who began to move north past a large golden lion lit up by lights underneath it and by ambient lights around it. Even though it was well past dark Xander was almost blinded by all the lights. He stumbled and caught up to Spike. He tugged on Spike's arm and pointed at the lion.

"In the 'Before' this was the MGM," Spike said. "Liked it for the view."

Xander frowned. Spike pointed his finger across the street where Xander was almost blinded by more lights. His jaw dropped as he looked at a city skyline that was supposed to be its own skyline not part of Vegas'.

"I have some fond memories of New York," Spike said as he absently tugged on his coat. "Like lookin' out my casino now and then and seein' the reminder."

Xander blinked.

"Now, let's head for Paris."

*Paris?* Xander thought as he quickly fell into step behind Spike. *They made a Paris skyline in Vegas? I don't remember.*

Xander didn't focus too much on trying to remember either. He just focused on feeling the space he had. Even though walking the strip in a way felt like walking a canyon of concrete and neon it was open. There was distance and space. And though there were crowds of demons and slaves they gave a wide berth to Spike and his Pet.

Xander leaned his head back and tried to make out the stars past the light pollution but mostly he could only make out the moon. He smiled. It was a full moon. He wondered if Willow was busy working on healing spells tonight. Maybe she was looking up at the moon and praying right at the same moment. A small tear slid down Xander's cheek and he quickly brushed it away before it reached the corner of his smile.

"Oi!" Spike said as he stopped and looked at Xander. "Sumthin' in yer eye?"

Xander nodded.

"C'mon, pet," Spike said and wrapped a hand around Xander's elbow. He pulled Xander forward and they walked in silence. Xander took in the sights; well the ones he wanted. He tried not to see the cowed and frightened humans. He was pretty limited in what he could do and, Buffy forgive him, he was just selfish enough not to want to jeopardize his chance for a walk outside.

Though Xander would never admit it deep down he was a little glad for Spike's hand on his arm. It kept him moving and stopped him from bumping into others or things as they strolled down the strip. There was just too much in the way of sights, sounds and smells for Xander to take in to pay any attention to where he was going or even where Spike was going. The hand on his arm was infinitely preferable to the leash Spike was fully entitled to use.
After a slow stroll they eventually stopped. Spike tugged on Xander's arm.

"Look!" Spike ordered.

Xander shook his head and tried to focus. Spike was pointing at something. Xander following the line of his finger and slowly he began to perceive a steel structure rising off the strip in front of him. As Xander followed the criss-crossing steel lines with his eyes he leaned his head back trying to take in the full picture of what was before him. Here, in the desert of Nevada, was a replica of the Eiffel tower.

"It's only about half the size," Spike said, "but still impressive. I remember when Dru and I first went up the real one in the '20s. Nothing like French food and that view."

Somewhere I don't think you're referring to the cheese and bread, Xander thought as he stared at the tower.

"You ever go to Paris?" Spike asked.

Xander shook his head. Closest I ever got to France was the 'French Toast Slam' at Denny's.

"Bunch of pillocks run it now. Angelus signed it over to some Flaga demons. Ooo, real scary! The redhead minxes talk a good game. 'We'll crash the unwary on the shores," Spike said the last in a falsetto voice. "But their most infernal power is to give a bloke writer's block. Angelus was amused at the thought of the city with its history of poets and writers ruled by a bunch of tiny tarts ridin' around on sparrows muckin' about...""

Spike’s voice was suddenly drowned out by the sudden strumming of a guitar followed by heavy percussion. The sound of water rushing and exploding almost drowned out the vocals.

"Buggered! I forgot! C'mon, pet!" Spike yelled excitedly over the music and tugged on Xander's arm. "Ya gotta see this!"

Spike turned around and pulled Xander behind him. He dashed out into the street and held out his other hand to the passing cars. The cars screeched and stopped as Spike bounded across the lanes of traffic in full game face bobbing his head to the beat of the music. Xander struggled to keep up and then nearly fell when he realized where Spike was leading him.

Across from the mini-Eiffel tower was a large fountain. It was a pool really. It was lighted and jets of water streamed and danced up and out of it. Lights flashed and the music pulsed. It was all beautifully and twistedly choreographed.

Once across the street Spike danced with wild abandon to the music. His head bobbed, his body bounced and he angrily lip-synched the words as he pumped his fists in the air.

Xander froze. The sight and the sounds of the water were overwhelming him. The music was dragging him back under. The lyrics were taking him back to the ‘Tank’. He was going back and it was demanding his obedience; his submission.

"Submission going down down
Dragging me down submission
I can’t tell you what I’ve found
For there’s a mystery
"Under the sea under a water
Come share it"

"Had ‘em reprogram the bloody thing,” Spike screamed over the music and the water. “Used to play show tunes and the wankings of bloated Italian men. Now plays the Sex Pistols, Siouxie and the Banshees, the Kinks, and of course Sinatra. Everyone loves Franki…”

Xander stood still. Eyes locked. He didn’t move. He barely breathed. He didn’t think.

“PET!” Spike shouted. “Xander!”

His heart’s racin’ and he’s back to The Venetian’s signature act! Spike thought. What’s got ‘im spooked?

Spike grabbed Xander’s chin and forced him to look at Spike.

“Eyes on me!” Spike growled.

Xander didn’t blink. Spike grabbed Xander’s leash and yanked. Xander stumbled forward and crashed into Spike. He remained unmoving.

“Yer startin’ ta piss me off, pet,” Spike snapped. The music droned.

“Got me pretty deep baby
I can’t figure out your watery love
I gotta solve your mystery
You’re sitting it out in heaven above”

“You gotta pick for that brain of yours, pet? Huh? Cuz I’d sure like ta figure out what’s goin’ on inside there! I’d like ta know what you got locked away!” Spike said as he shook Xander trying to get a response.

The lights flashed and the water danced as the song raced to its final verse and chords.

“Submission submission
Going down down under the sea
I wanna drown drown under the water
Going down down under the sea”

When the echoes of the guitar faded, the lights dimmed and the water calmed. Xander gasped and grabbed hold of Spike. His brown eyes locked with Spike’s gold rimmed blue.

“You back with me?” Spike barked.

Xander trembled but nodded. He quickly glanced to the side and saw the pool of water. He kept his knees from buckling by looking back at Spike.

“You OK?”

Xander swallowed and nodded.

Spike grabbed Xander’s chin and vamped out.
“I told you not ta lie to me! I think you need another lesson in what happens when you disobey me, pet.”

Xander cast another look at the water and tried to stop the tremors.

*Spike! Please! Just... whatever. Just please. I can’t,* Xander thought frantically.

Spike followed Xander’s eyes.

“It’s the water, innit?” Spike asked a bit more softly.

Xander nodded.

“C’mon,” Spike said as he took Xander’s leash and began leading him away from the pool. They headed south and back down the strip. They walked in brisk silence for a while.

*Gotta get my temper under control, Spike thought. He didn’t mean ta scare me. Gotta be careful. Angelus’ spies... or any of my enemies could be anywhere. Can’t let them see Xander so... broken.*

Xander struggled to keep pace with Spike. The pulling on his neck hurt but he didn’t dare try and resist or indicate to Spike to slow down. *Things are bad enough as it is,* he thought.

They stopped just a few feet from the front of the *Monte Carlo* hotel. Spike dropped Xander’s leash. He leaned up against a palm tree, fished in one of his pockets and pulled out a pack of cigarettes. He put the pack to his mouth and used his lips to fish one out. He slid the pack back in his pocket, pulled out a light and inhaled deep as he lit up.

Spike leaned against the tree and smoked for several long minutes. Xander stood and stared at him.

*He’s gonna get rid of me for sure now,* Xander thought. For some reason that saddened Xander more than it scared him. He fell back on his training and remained impassive and motionless while Spike smoked. The one rule he did break from his ‘bottle’ days was to make sure he kept his eyes on Spike.

Eventually, Spike smoked his cigarette down to just a butt. He pulled it out of his mouth, flicked it onto the sidewalk and ground it out under his boot. He looked at Xander.

“Back in the ‘Before’ when you were in school,” Spike began, “you were a swimmer, yeah?”

Xander tried not to flashback to what it was like to dive into a pool of water willingly. He didn’t want to remember what it felt like. He nodded.

“How’d you know that?” Xander wondered.

Spike smiled at the boy’s confusion. *Ya never knew how I studied you lot did ya? Thought I was just some bleedin’ punk! Some witless thug. Well, I watched you. Watched all of you,* Spike thought.

“Pet?”
Xander nodded.

“And now yer afraid of the water?”


“Well that’s goin’ ta make things a bit rough for the swim coach,” Spike said.

Xander paled and almost fell to his knees.

*Spike! NO! Please!*

“Xan,” Spike said quickly noting his pet’s panic, “ ‘S alright. Haven’t booked one yet.”

*That’s doesn’t sound like you won’t,* Xander thought.

“This fear. This happened while… when you with the Azora?” Spike asked.

Xander nodded.

“This one of them things you dreamt about?”

Xander tentatively raised a hand and rocked it side to side.

“What’s that mean? Sorta?”

He nodded again.

*Double fuck!* Spike thought. *Settin’ that meeting up with that Zorn piece of shite tomorrow. Tired of this cocked up situation.*

“PLEAAAASE!” A woman’s cry interrupted Spike’s thoughts. Both the vampire and his pet turned their heads. It sounded like it was coming from in front of the casino. There was the sound of a body stumbling and falling followed by whimpering.

“Bloody hell!” Spike yelled and took off towards the commotion. Xander followed.

“I..I’m…sssorry,” a woman cried.

“Did I give you permission to speak?” a voice demanded and then there was the unmistakable sound of leather smacking bare flesh. The woman whimpered again.

Spike and Xander reached the front of the building just as an Boretz demon raised his whip to strike a naked blonde woman again.

“I paid good credits for you to breed,” the Boretz shouted. “Five times I’ve taken you to the breeding stables here! Five times! Nothing!”

The whip fell and the woman curled in a ball so the strike crossed where the first one hit; across her back.
“Wot’s goin’ on here?” Spike shouted.

The Boretz looked up. Immediately he lowered his arms and bowed his head.

“Master Spike,” he said.

“Asked ya a question mate.”

“I was punishing my slave,” the Boretz said.

“Ya keep up with this punishment and she won’t be able ta breed,” Spike said.

“I don’t think she is anyway,” the Boretz growled and kicked the woman in the side. She sucked in a deep breath. Xander started to move forward but the sudden feel of Spike’s hand on his arm stopped him.

“She’s worthless!” the Boretz spat.

“Well, my Pet isn’t,” Spike said, “and I was takin’ him out for a nice walk as a reward. Yer public display has now soured his disposition… which means his blood will be soured. This means my snack has now soured.”

Spike was gratified to smell a sudden whiff of fear come off the Boretz.

*What is Spike up to?* Xander thought. *My blood was already ‘soured’.*

“Master Spike… I didn’t… I mean… how could I…?”

“Nevertheless you did,” Spike growled and let his eyes shift gold.

“Please! Master Spike!”

Spike sighed and fished in his pocket again. This time he pulled out a token from his casino.

“Tell you what,” Spike said as he began to flip the token in the air like a coin. “The night’s young. I may still get my pet back to a state I find satisfying.”

“Yes! Yes!” the Boretz said.

“Only if he knows what happens to the girl… one way or another. Otherwise he’ll just fret the worst and his flavor will be all over the place. You understand?”

“Of course! There is no reason for him to wonder. I will drag her worthless carcass home and tomorrow I’ll put her back on the block in the markets.”

“How about a counteroffer, mate,” Spike said and he tossed the token to the Boretz. “You take that to my floor manager, Lorne. And you remove her collar.”

“You want this worthless flesh, Master?” the Boretz asked.

Spike smiled and there was no mirth in it.
“Living humans are never ‘worthless flesh’,“ Spike said. “And this way, Xander here will know exactly what happens to the girl. After that, I’ll know just what flavor to expect of his blood.”

*Oh ghod!* Xander thought and his hands shook with anger. *Now I understand what he’s up to!*

The Boretz laughed but then frowned.

“How much will this token get me?”


“Three hundred credits! I paid five hundred for her at market!”

Suddenly Spike was in full game face and had the Boretz by the throat.

“And that was before you PISSED ME OFF! NOW take the damned token and get the fuck out of here!” Spike hissed and shoved the larger demon, sending him stumbling and falling into the street.

“Xander!” Spike barked as he marched on the Boretz who was struggling to get to his feet. "Get the collar off the girl.”

Xander turned and looked at Spike. *I'm not going to help you murder her,* Xander thought.

Spike punched the Boretz demon who’d managed to get halfway to his feet. He then spun around and looked at Xander.

“Pet, you really don’t want to defy me any more tonight. Remember, it won’t always be you that pays the price. Now, get the collar off her!”

Xander stared briefly at Spike. He really didn’t want to help him, but he didn’t want to make the blonde woman’s fate any worse. Giles had had many notes on Spike’s infamous past. Xander hadn’t made it through all of them. He turned around and made his way to the woman who was now kneeling.

The woman looked up at him. Her large blue eyes were red rimmed. She had her arms crossed over her full breasts. She saw his collar and leash and she tentatively smiled at him. He returned her smile and then reached out slowly towards her neck. She bowed her head gracefully and pulled her long tresses to the side. There was an air of serenity about the woman that made Xander think of his Willow.

*I'm sorry,* Xander thought as he undid the buckle on the leather belt on her neck. As gently as he could he removed the collar which had been tight enough to bite into the woman’s flesh. Once Xander had the collar off he turned around and flung it at Spike.

The vampire was now standing over the bleeding and prone body of the Boretz demon. He deftly caught the flung collar in one hand and glared at Xander before turning back to look at the Boretz.

“Let me give ya some advice mate,” Spike said. “Whenever you find out that you’ve pissed off a more powerful demon than you… well just don’t do it! This is *my* city and if I say you spoiled my evening then you better be groveling and *offering* to make it better! Understand?”

The Boretz nodded its head and Spike threw the collar on the ground in front of the beaten demon.
"Don’t forget to cash in yer token for the two hundred credits I owe ya,” Spike said before turning his back on the Boretz and heading back to Xander and the woman. The defeated demon picked up the collar and hobbled away as fast as he could.

Xander quickly put his body between himself and the woman. Spike cocked an eyebrow.

“Is she your Rowena or your Rebecca?” Spike asked.

Who is Rebecca? Xander thought.

“Pet, move away from her.”

Xander stood firm.

Spike growled and yanked on Xander’s collar pulling him away. Then he moved toward the young woman.

“Up,” Spike said.

The young woman stood up. She took a deep breath, put her shoulders back and then looked Spike in the eye. Spike laughed.

“You got a name?”

The woman frowned for a moment before answering, “T..Tara..Tara Maclay.”

“Tara. That’s a pretty name,” Spike said.

“D..Do you always ask the n..names of your d..d..dinner?”

Don’t do this Spike! Xander thought as he once again tried to get in between Spike and the woman. Spike grabbed him as soon as he moved.

“Are you really looking to see someone get hurt, Xander? Does this night really have to end in a lot of blood and screaming ‘til dawn?”

Xander looked at Spike and then Tara. I’m sorry, he thought. She gave him another small smile. He shook his head.

“Don’t move again until I tell you,” Spike ordered and then let go of Xander. Then he began to slowly walk around Tara. He looked her over carefully. Every now and then he gently touched a bruise or a welt. Tara tried not to flinch.

“Hmm,” Spike finally said as he took off his coat and then held it out to the woman. “I don’t have another collar to put on ya until I get back to the casino. This will have to do. Go ahead and put it on.”

Both Xander and the woman blinked at Spike. Then Tara quickly put the coat on and tentatively pulled it closed.

“Well, now, Tara this here is my Pet, Xander,” Spike said as he motioned to Xander.
“X..Xander.” Tara said. Xander nodded at her.

“He can’t talk,” Spike said. Tara paled and looked angrily at Spike.

“Oi! I didn’t do it! He came that way!”

“Oh!” Tara said quietly.

“Now, about that dinner question,” Spike said.

Xander stiffened.

“Wasn’t really planning to put ya in the red stable, luv,” Spike said. “Just sayin’ that cuz that Boretz wanker pissed me off. I think I could use a bird like you out on the floor.”

“The… f..floor?” Tara said.

*The floor?* Xander thought.

“Well, apparently ya don’t breed well.”

Tara furiously shook her head.

“But you are a looker,” Spike said. “So we slap a tray in yer hand and ya go around on the floor getting’ the customers ta drink and make foolish bets, yeah?”

Tara looked at Xander.

*I’m as confused as you,* Xander thought as he shrugged then nodded.

”Y..yeah,” Tara said.

“That is, if everything checks out with Lorne first,” Spike said. “He’s the floor manager. I run everything about running the floor by him first.”

Then Spike turned, grabbed Xander’s leash and started heading back to the *Slayer’s End*. Tara followed. Xander wasn’t sure if he should wonder what was going to happen next.
Chapter 17

Xander could feel the other demons stare as Spike led him through the Slayer's End by his leash. He could also hear the murmuring of the rumors.

This is bad, Xander thought as he realized just how symbolic it was that Spike was holding his leash. Everyone knew he'd been disobedient and the casino was full of gossip.

Tara followed behind Xander with Spike's coat pulled tight around her. Her head was high and her gaze fixed on the bleached blond vampire. However, every now and then a small tremor coursed through her body. She also figured in as part of the gossip.

"Spike's got a new Pet already," someone muttered in the crowd.

"Knew that other one wouldn't last," someone else replied.

I wonder how close to the truth they are? Xander thought.

"Nah!" something else hissed. "The female's just a bit of entertainment to pass the time while Master Spike punishes his Pet."

The crowd laughed.

Please, No! Xander thought. He still didn't trust Spike.

Eventually Spike led the two humans through the crowd and to his private elevator.

"Tell Lorne I want to see him in my suite... yesterday," Spike ordered Security. Then he herded his slaves inside and keyed the penthouse. The trio rode in silence to the top.

Once there, Spike let them inside the suite, released his hold on Xander's leash and then wandered to the wet bar. He poured himself a large shot of whisky, downed it and then looked at the two humans. They still stood near the door. Once again Xander had angled his body so he was between Spike and Tara.

"Ya really are pushin' it tonight, pet," Spike growled. "Now get to your place."

Xander looked at Spike and then Tara. She gave him an almost imperceptible nod. Reluctantly Xander headed over to ‘his’ cushion and dropped into the kneeling position with his knees spread.

Spike motioned with his hand for Tara to move further into the room. She did. He motioned for her to stop when she was in the middle. Then he pointed at Xander.

"Let's be clear, luv, Xander's off limits. I don't share."

Tara flushed and then replied, "Th..that's OK. He's r..really not my t..type."

Spike cocked an eyebrow and looked at Xander. What's not to like? Spike thought.

Xander was yummy in his jeans and t-shirt. His muscles were well defined. His eyes and hair were
dark. They weren't just dark. His eyes were wide and his hair thick. Xander was a nummy treat by anyone's standards and especially by Spike's.

"Wot's wrong with him?"

Tara flushed again and then smiled, "I...I just prefer someone a little...softer." Spike cocked both eyebrows and then he laughed. He poured himself another drink and then downed it.

"So ya really ain't a 'breeder' then are ya?"

Tara grew a full fledged red and refused to look at Spike.

Xander rolled his eyes. Crude much? he thought and looked at Tara. *I'd apologize but I'm just a Pet and I'm not sure that falls into my job description. But if I knew it, and the phone system still worked- -and Angelus wouldn't put your eyes out for reading it and cut my hands off for writing it--I'd give you Will's phone number. She always said it was hard meeting nice girls during an Apocalypse.*

Everyone was spared further embarrassment by a knock on the door.

"Yeah!" shouted Spike.

Tara turned around just as Lorne entered the suite. She gasped.

"Spike... Oh!" Lorne exclaimed as he saw Tara. "Hello, pumpkin. Now where did Spike get you?"

"Monte Carlo," Spike said. "Some Boretz wanker was workin' out his compensation issues on her. Thought she was a looker and had some potential for floor work."

"Well you are quite beautiful," Lorne said as he moved closer to Tara and held out his hand. "I'm Lorne. Spike's floor manager."

Tara looked at Xander. He gave her a big smile. *He's OK,* he thought. *At least he has been so far.* Tara looked back at Lorne and tentatively offered her hand to him. "T..Tara Ma..Maclay."

Lorne took Tara's hand and gently brought it to his lips. He placed a delicate kiss on her knuckles and then said, "Delighted to meet you."

Tara flushed and smiled.

"She does that a lot," Spike said. "Ya might want ta get that checked out."

Lorne rolled his eyes and took Tara's arm and then wrapped it in his. He led her over to the bar.

"Leave it to a vampire to only notice anything involving the rush of blood," Lorne said.

Tara blushed again. Spike laughed.

"Have you even offered this poor girl a drink?" Lorne said as he put a cushion on the floor and indicated for her to sit. Tara went to kneel.
"Sit, pumpkin," Lorne ordered softly. She looked at Xander and then gracefully sat with her knees tucked to her side. Lorne shoved Spike aside and fixed a glass of orange juice. Then he offered it to Tara. She looked at Lorne. He smiled and nodded. She took the glass and drank it greedily. Spike watched the whole exchange.

"She's got a couple of stripes on her back and a few good bruises," Spike said.

"Healers?" Lorne asked.

"Hadn't got that far. Thought you'd better do a reading before we make any final plans."

Lorne sighed. "You think she might be a sp...?"

"I'm thinking it's always good to do a reading before we put anyone new on the floor, Lorne," Spike said and looked his manager in the eyes.

What's this about? Xander wondered.

"Right," Lorne said then looked back at Tara. "OK, pumpkin. First I'm going to need you to give me that glass back."

Tara nodded and handed Lorne the glass. He smiled at her.

"Now, I want you to think of a song. Any song. Just something you remember and like to sing. Can you do that for me?"

"I...yes. Why?"

"Cuz he said so," Spike growled and narrowed his eyes.

"Shush!" Lorne said and waved a hand at Spike. Then focused back on Tara. "This is just something I do. When you're ready, pumpkin, take a deep breath and sing until I tell you to stop. OK?"

Tara looked fearfully at Spike then Lorne. She nodded. She closed her eyes for a moment and then took a deep breath. She hummed for a few moments before starting to sing in a clear beautiful voice:

"Oh, Whisper to the wind and say that love's a sin
Leave my heart a-breaking, and making a moan
Murmur to the night to hide her starry light
So none will find me sighing, crying all alone"

"STOP!" Lorne cried and then turned huge red eyes to Spike. "Lemon drop... she's..."

"Wot?" Spike growled and was suddenly between Tara and Xander.

"She's a witch," Lorne said in a whisper.

"BLOODY HELL!" Spike roared and vamped out. He charged Tara who screamed and tried to run. Spike caught her by the neck and spun her around. He shoved her up against the wall. She cried out in pain.
NO! Xander thought and dashed toward the pair. He didn't know what he was going to do, but he had to do something.

"Who are you working for?" Spike yelled.

"Nnnn..nno..one!" Tara stuttered. "P..please..pl.."

"SHUT IT!" Spike snarled and shook her. He stopped only when he felt a weight pressed up against him. It was Xander.

Xander was on his knees. When he saw he had Spike's attention he sidled his way between Spike and Tara. Please Spike. Please don't hurt her, he pleaded with his eyes. Whatever you want.

Spike's gaze locked with Xander. He rubbed his head against Spike's leg. Please, he thought and looked back up again at Spike. Spike's focus was still on Xander. It was almost the same hungry look he'd seen in the bathroom earlier.

I can do this, Xander thought even as he realized he really didn't know what he was doing other than anything he could think of to keep Spike from hurting Tara. Once again Xander leaned forward and rubbed his face against Spike. Only this time he rubbed gently against Spike's crotch. He inhaled deep and smelled the musky whisky smoke scent that was Spike. A bulge started to form where Xander was gently rubbing and he began mouthing the word "Please" against it until it was hard and thick.

Suddenly Xander was yanked to his feet and he was staring at an angry and aroused Spike face-to-face. Hands wrapped around his neck and then yanked at his t-shirt. He flinched as the t-shirt was ripped from his chest and thrown to the floor.

"Are you my whore, Xander?" Spike growled and twisted viciously at Xander's nipple ring, "Or are you my Pet?"

Xander gasped in pain. Neither! Xander thought and shook his head.

"Because a whore," Spike said as he raked nails down Xander's chest leaving a trail of light scratches, "gets treats and presents but not my protection and not my guarantee he won't be shared. He just satisfies my cravings and gets what I think he's earned. A whore gives because he wants something. It's business."

I'm not your whore! Xander thought.

"A Pet," Spike continued as he shoved Xander to the floor, "gets my protection and is MINE. My Pet gives because he wants to give to me and expects nothing but what I've promised. You want to be my whore, Xander? I'll turn you out on the floor tonight. You can do your tricks and earn what trinkets I think you deserve or maybe you can earn 'em from some other demon. You wanna be my whore, Xander? You stay there and keep interfering and so help me I'll turn you out right now..."

"Spike!" Lorne shouted.

"STAY OUT OF THIS!" Spike commanded.

"You wanna be my Pet? You get back on that cushion! You stay there in position, arms behind your back, head down and you wait until I'm ready to deal with you!"
"I'm not your PET!" Xander silently screamed and looked at Spike defiantly.

"You have NO other options, Xander. Think carefully. Tara's fate isn't dependent on your answer. Only your fate. Whore? Or Pet?"

"X..Xander.." Tara started to whisper.

"NOT a word out of you unless I want it!" Spike said to Tara.

Xander looked at her. *It's OK*, her eyes said.

Xander looked at Spike. He started to tremble. In the 'Before' he knew he would have been defiant to the end. Yet, that was before he'd been 'tapped'. That was before he'd been made a bottle and known there were worse fates than death where demons were concerned. It was before Spike had made him start to feel human again. It was before Spike had given him real food, read to him when he was afraid, taken him on walks and just talked to him.

Yes, Spike had claimed control of Xander but he'd also given more control to Xander since he'd been captured in the raid in Oxnard. The Scooby in him demanded he save Tara or die trying but Spike wasn't giving him death as an option. He was only offering a hell as a demon whore or some semblance of life as his Pet.

*I'm so sorry*, Xander thought as he looked at Tara and began to slowly crawl backwards toward the cushion. *I'm not the man I used to be. I'm just a Pet.*

Spike could smell the fear and sadness rolling off his Pet, but he didn't have time to deal with it. He turned back and looked at the witch. She cowered.

"I want ta remind you, ducks, I'm a vampire and I'll know if you lie," Spike snarled.

Tara nodded.

"Who knows yer a witch?"

"O..only you three," she whispered.

Spike narrowed his eyes then asked, "Did you use spells or the craft to keep from gettin' knocked up at the stables?"

"Qqqueen Anne's Lace ss..seeds," Tara said. "N..no spells. Dddidn't...wwant ..to risk gggetting caught."

Spike looked at Lorne.

"Lemon drop, I didn't see anything to indicate she's lying. Only that she's a witch. What are you going to do?"

"You stay right there!" Spike barked and then stepped away from Tara. He looked at Xander. He was kneeling on his cushion with his hands behind his back, knees spread wide and his head bowed. Spike sighed. He walked over to the bar and drank straight from the bottle.
"Angelus is very clear," Lorne said. "All witches are sent to him immediately."

"Yeah yeah," Spike said. "Then he either get his lawyers to do their mojo and binds them to serve him, kills them or uses them up as power sources. I was there too, Lorne."

"To keep her away from him..."

"And what makes you think I'm going ta do that?"

Tara gasped. Xander remained very quiet and very still.

"Spike!"

"Bloody hell, Lorne! What do you want me ta do?" Spike asked as he threw the bottle of whisky at the wall behind Lorne. "Openly defy him?"

"You defy him all the time!"

"Not openly!"

"NO ONE knows about her!"

"We do and that's three too many!"

"Spike..." Lorne pleaded.

Spike looked at Tara. He looked at Lorne. He tried not to look at Xander and failed.

"Angelus finds out and this could..."

"He won't find out," Lorne said.

"Saw that?"

"No," Lorne reluctantly admitted.

"This is gettin' complicated, green bean," Spike said.

"Well, if it was easy... it wouldn't be fun," Lorne replied.

Spike looked at Lorne and then chuckled. He shook his head and looked back at Tara and studied her for several long moments.

"Right then," Spike finally said and looked back at Lorne. "You take her down to the green stables and put her in isolation. Only you, I, or someone I personally authorize deal with her. Start some rumor that she's being saved for some special breedin' project. A special order half-breed or some such shite. Yeah?"

Lorne nodded. "That could work."

Spike walked over to Tara. She backed up against the wall as far as she could. He put an arm out to the side by her head.
"And you, luv," Spike purred dangerously, "don't even think about doing a spell. I get so much as a whiff that yer doing magic... you even say 'Bless you' after someone sneezes... and I'll drag you before Angelus myself! You understand?"

Tara nodded.

"Say it," Spike ordered.

"No m..magic. N..nno spells," Tara said.

"Alright," Spike said and then stepped away from Tara. "Give me the coat."

Tara quickly stripped off the coat and handed it to Spike. Spike looked at Lorne.

"Go ahead and take her down. Make sure to get her cleaned up. Find out what mundane stuff she needs to treat..."

"A..Arnica gel," Tara interrupted.

"Wot?" Spike growled and looked at Tara.

"Arnica gel will help a lot. No magic. All herbal."

"Get her what she needs, Lorne," Spike said as he looked at Tara with a new light. Definitely knows some of the healin' arts. Might be useful, he thought.

"With pleasure," Lorne said as he quickly came forward and gently took Tara's hand. "C'mon, pumpkin, let's go get you settled."

Lorne led Tara out of the suite. Spike watched until they were gone. Then he turned and looked at his Pet. Spike pinched the bridge of his nose. He wasn't even sure where or how he was going to deal with Xander. He had to punish him. There were too many acts of defiance both public and private. He had to deal with the water phobia and somehow he had to get Xander to accept being his Pet without breaking him completely.

**Author's Note:** The verse that Tara sings is from *Willow Weep for Me*
Chapter 18

Spike walked slowly over to his chair and plopped down. Xander didn’t move, even his breathing didn’t change. Spike sighed.

_This would be easier if I hadn’t made that soddin’ promise to Lorne, Spike thought, and if I didn’t actually like the whelp a bit._

“Stand up,” Spike ordered. Xander obeyed. His movements were jerky but quick.

“Strip.”

Again Xander moved quickly to obey Spike. He toed off his shoes as he unbuttoned his jeans. Once the shoes were off and the pants unbuttoned, he slid the denim down his legs and then quickly removed his socks. He began to kneel back down when Spike stopped him.

“C’mere and hold still,” Spike said. Xander moved over to Spike and held still.

Spike fished in his pants pocket and pulled out a set of keys. He then leaned forward and unlocked Xander’s belt. He slid it down Xander’s legs and motioned for Xander to step out of it. Xander did.

Xander then stood obediently waiting for Spike’s next command. He was beyond anticipating what the vampire wanted or might do. He was beyond any illusions about what he was anymore.

“Pet, go grab us some beers,” Spike sighed as he leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

Xander blinked but turned around and hurried to the wet bar. He couldn’t help but remember his first night with Spike. _Was it really on three nights ago?_ He wondered.

_I know now he won’t kill me_, he thought as he opened the beers, _but perhaps it would be better if he would._

Xander returned to Spike to find his cushion in front of Spike’s chair.

“Kneel,” Spike ordered.

Xander sank to his knees as he did the first night. He offered a bottle of beer to Spike. Spike took it.

“We need to talk,” Spike said before taking a large sip. He swallowed and then began. “Yer in a world of trouble, pet. You’ve lied to me, you’ve defied me privately and publicly and you’ve forgotten yer place.”

Xander tried not to tremble. _Please, Spike_, he thought, _just get this over with._

“I can’t let this pass. I warned you that you would be punished if you earned it and….”

_And I’ve earned it_, Xander thought barely hanging on to the bottle, _and you are either going to punish me…punish someone else…or both and…._

“Xander!” Spike said sharply cutting through his pet’s panic. “We’re just talking and drinking our
beers right now. Take a deep breath and take a drink.”

Xander nodded shakily. He almost choked on his drink. He looked at Spike and thought, why drag this out?

“We’re taking a break,” Spike continued, “While I figure out what to do.”


“And while I cool down a bit.”

Xander paused mid-sip and studied Spike.

“I need to be careful. Punishment right now could break you. Especially the ideas rolling around in my mind right now.”

*And isn’t that the point of punishment?* Xander wondered and shivered at the memories of the ‘Tank’ that tried to creep into his consciousness. *Isn’t punishment supposed to break you so you have no fight left? Only obedience?*

“I don’t want to break you, Xander. I could. You’d be a right docile, pet, but then you wouldn’t be my ‘Xanpet.’

*Xanpet? What? You gonna get a nametag now for my collar?* Xander wondered.

Spike could detect a slight rise in Xander’s pulse and the mention of ‘Xanpet.’ *Yer still in there, ain’t ya Xan?* Spike thought and hid his smile behind his beer.

“Make no mistake, pet, I will punish you. It won’t be pleasant and it won’t be easy…but it won’t be more than you can bear. Now finish up yer beer. While we’re taking a time out we’re going to work on something else.”

*Something else?* Xander wondered as he began to try and swallow his beer past his tight throat.

***

Spike and Xander finished their beers in silence. Spike finished his first and when Xander finally put his empty bottle down on the floor Spike stood up.

“Follow me,” Spike ordered. He then stood up and headed for the bedroom. Xander followed.

Spike flipped on the lights and moved into the bedroom. He moved to the center and stopped. He turned around. Xander stopped and stood still in front of him.

“I want to make this very clear, pet,” Spike began, “this has nothing to do with punishment. I’ll explain as we go what we are doing. But I want you to understand from the beginning that this is not part of your punishment. Do you understand?”

*No,* Xander thought but he nodded.

Spike narrowed his eyes and then huffed.

Spike forced back a smile at Xander’s obvious surprise. Instead he cocked an eyebrow at his pet to reinforce his order.

OK, Xander thought and couldn’t help but rake his eyes over Spike. Yes, he had seen the vampire naked. Yes, he’d even been snuggled up next to the vampire while naked. He’d even had the vampire reach the big happy while begin snuggled up to the Xan-man. However, undressing Spike? That seemed way more intimate than they’d been yet.

Let’s start with the easy, Xander thought and reached out with trembling hands for Spike’s t-shirt. He tugged at the hem and pulled it out from Spike’s jeans. He started to jerk it up when Spike gave a long suffering sigh.

“Pet, move closer,” Spike ordered. “Yer not undressin’ a bleedin’ mannequin! Yer undressin’ yer master! Have some care!”

Care?! Xander thought as he moved closer to Spike and then gently began easing the shirt up Spike’s torso. You want me to ‘care’ about my ‘master?’ Sorry, but I didn’t take the ‘How to be a Good Slave 101’ course!

Xander ran his hands up Spike’s arms as he pulled the shirt up over his head.

And even if I did, Xander continued his silent rant, I’m happy to say I’d probably have done about as well in it as I did in every other one of my classes!

Spike smiled. He could tell Xander was working on a head of steam. Like this better then the ‘broken’ you, pet. Just wish I was privy to whatever babble was runnin’ amuck in that noggin’ of yours, he thought.

Xander dropped Spike’s shirt and stared at a half-naked Spike clad only in his black jeans. He silently groaned. There was no getting around the next part.

Unless I do his boots first! Xander suddenly thought and dropped to his knees. He lifted Spike’s left pant leg and began untying the lace on Spike’s boot. Spike lifted his foot and Xander pulled the boot off. He then removed Spike’s sock. They repeated the process with Spike’s right foot.

“Good, pet,” Spike said.

Xander looked up and then swallowed.

Out of time and options, Xander thought. He hadn’t been this flummoxed about clothes since that one disastrous game of strip Monopoly with him, Willow and Jesse when they were fourteen. Xander had to sneak home in his Snoopy boxers followed by Jesse in his Transformer boxers. Willow and her hotels!

“Xan?” Spike asked.

Xander licked his lips nervously and leaned up on his knees. Slowly he began to unbutton the fly on Spike’s jeans. He tried to ignore the slight bulge that grew with each button Xander fumbled open. When Xander had completely unbuttoned Spike’s jeans he parted the fly to reveal a half hard cock.
Xander gasped.

“Suppose yer not in the mood to kiss it, eh?” Spike rumbled.

Xander looked up at Spike with frightened eyes.

“Up to you, pet,” Spike said quietly.

Xander shook his head.

“Then finish undressin’ me,” Spike ordered. Xander quickly began to tug Spike’s jeans down the pale vampire’s lean and muscled legs.

*He’s like a statue,* Xander couldn’t help but notice. Willow had made him look through some of her history books with pictures of the great statues of Michelangelo. Spike could have been carved by him.

When Xander had smoothed Spike’s jeans down to his feet, Spike stepped out of them. He was now fully hard and fully naked. Xander was on his knees in front of him.

Spike reached out a hand, cupped Xander’s chin and tilted his face up. Their eyes met.

“From now on, unless I tell you otherwise, you will undress me before bed. Understand?”

Xander closed his eyes and nodded.

“Look at me,” Spike ordered.

Xander opened his eyes.

“Now, we aren’t going to bed yet. It’s still early, yet and I still need to relax after the commotion from earlier. There’s also something else we need to address.”

*There is?* Xander thought.

“Again, Xander, this is **not** about punishing you.”

*OK, I’m officially not liking where this is going.*

Spike studied his pet. *He’s so close to the edge,* Spike thought. *But it’s too dangerous to let this be.*

“Xander, I want you to go into the bathroom and begin to draw me a hot bath,” Spike ordered.

Xander immediately paled and began to tremble. *Spike! No! Please!* Xander frantically thought as he pictured himself trying to fill the bathtub.

“Xander, you will do this. Earlier you were willing to do anything to save the girl. Once again you played the White Knight. Well, if nothing else, here’s your second chance, one where you can make a difference. Cuz, Xander, if you don’t walk into that bathroom and draw me a hot bath, it won’t be you that pays for your failure; it will be Tara.”

*You can’t do this!* Xander thought even as he knew Spike could and would.
“Now go,” Spike ordered.

Xander shot venomous looks at Spike as he somehow made it shakily to his feet. He stumbled to the bathroom even as his body rebelled. The room stretched out before him like a great distance; a distance created by dread and haunted memories.

Xander steeled himself and began inching himself forward. As he got closer, his stomach turned and the room began to spin. He pictured Tara’s face and breathed deep. Eventually he made his way to the tub.

_Not going to let him hurt you because of me,_ Xander vowed to the image of Tara as he reached for the faucet. He turned the knob and began to run the water. The sound of it hitting the bottom of the tub sent tremors coursing through his body. Xander fell and the room spun out of control.

When the room stopped spinning, Xander found he was on the other side of the bathroom huddled in the corner. The water was still running freely in the tub. He’d never stopped the drain. Xander breathed deep again. He tried to move. His body refused to cooperate.

_I can’t do this,_ he thought and then remembered Tara huddled at the feet of the Boretz demon with whip marks across her back. Spike could do so much worse to her. _I have to do this,_ he thought.

Once again, Xander focused on trying to get his body to move. He managed to make it to his knees. From there, Xander was able to crawl slowly back to the tub. He had no idea how long he’d been huddled in the corner, but hopefully it wasn’t long enough to use up all the hot water. Spike had said he’d wanted a hot bath.

_C’mon,_ Xander reminded himself. _This is Spike’s casino, not the Harris resident. The water heater isn’t thirty years old and ten ways out of code. It has to have more then three minutes of hot water._

When Xander finally made it back to the tub he focused on the water streaming out of the faucet and not what was slightly pooling around the drain at the bottom of the tub. Cautiously Xander stuck his hand into the flowing water. It was still hot.

_Good!_ Xander thought. He then reached for the little chrome lever to flip up to block the drain. He flipped it up and then quickly backed away from the tub.

_I can’t watch this,_ Xander thought as he heard the tub begin to fill with water. _I can’t even hear it!_ He thought as he cupped his hands over his ears to mute the sound. He began to count.

_When I reach a hundred I’ll check to see how full the tub is,_ Xander thought. He began to silently count and stopped at twenty-nine. Covering his ears wasn’t enough. He could still hear the water filling the tub. He could still hear water. He could still remember it filling up and closing round him!

Xander began to rock. He tried to drive out the bad memories with good ones. He thought of Willow. He thought of his one night with Faith. The night he lost his virginity. He thought of Dawn and how scared she was when they first dug her out of the rubble of the monastery outside of Sunnydale. He’d given her his last Twinkie and she’d smiled at him. He’d smiled in return. It had been his first smile since Buffy had died.

Xander uncovered his ears. The tub sounded fuller. Xander took a deep breath and began to crawl back to the tub. His stomach clenched and knotted. He wanted to run but he focused on keeping
Tara safe. He made it to the tub and could see it was about two thirds full. Quickly he reached for the faucet and shut the water off.

He’d done it! He’d drawn Spike’s bath.

Xander somehow made it to his feet then turned to flee the bathroom. He needed to let Spike know his bath was ready. Only when Xander turned around he saw that Spike was standing in the doorway watching Xander. He had several towels in hand, soap and a washcloth. Xander dropped to his knees.

“You did good, pet. Just a little more to go and then we’re done with this for the night,” Spike said.

*Please, Spike, Xander thought, NO more.*

Spike walked over to the tub. He laid several of the towels beside the tub on the floor. He then placed one towel by the tub on a towel rack. He draped the washcloth on the edge of the tub. He set the soap on top of it and then he climbed into the tub.

“Xander,” Spike said as he sunk into the watery heat. “I want you to come sit on the towels by the tub.”

Xander barely stopped himself from shaking his head.

“You may sit facing away from the tub, but you will sit by the tub.”

A wave of nausea rolled through Xander but he began crawling back to Spike’s bath. He kept picturing Tara’s face. *I can do this, Xander tried to convince himself.*

Spike began to use the soap and washcloth to bathe himself as Xander made the excruciating trek back across the floor to the tub. Xander was a mass of sweat, a twisted stomach and trembling muscles by the time he made it back. As quickly as he could he turned around and sat on the towels with his back to the white porcelain.

“Yer doing really well, pet,” Spike said softly.

*Fuck you! Xander thought as his teeth chattered.*

“This isn’t part of your punishment.”

*No, this is just part of your sick enjoyment!*  

Spike finished washing, rinsing and then looked at Xander. He noted the elevated heart rate, the shallow breathing and the clenched muscles. *Don’t think I’ll try for him washing my back tonight,* Spike thought. He leaned back against the back of the tub.

“I didn’t do this to be cruel,” Spike said.

*What then? Bored?*

“I could say I did it because the Azora took something away from you,” Spike began, “and I want to give it back to you. I don’t want you to be afraid of the water.”
You’re not that altruistic, Spike.

“But I’m not that altruistic,” Spike said. “Though it is true. Somehow Vr’xkl took that away from you and that does tick me off. The real reason why I’m doing this because your phobia is a weakness that can be exploited.”

Wouldn’t want that to happen, would we Spike? Xander thought bitterly. Can’t have the Big Bad Master of Las Vegas have a water phobic pet.

“Think what would happen if Angelus found out?”

Xander’s stomach knotted viciously and he doubled over. Spike laid a hand on his head. NO! Xander thought. Angelus would…OH!

Xander’s stomach twisted again.

“Go!” Spike commanded and Xander fled to the toilet. He was in too much pain to even notice his head was dangling over a bowl of water. He just let nature take its course and his fear wracked body finally pushed back in the form of violent retching. Xander heaved and heaved until all that was being expelled was a thin acidic bile and stringy saliva.

At some point Spike had left the tub and he had wrapped himself around Xander. He was rubbing gentle circles on Xander’s stomach with one hand and was brushing the hair from Xander’s face with the other. When Xander’s retching stopped he sagged back against the vampire.

A cool washcloth wiped Xander’s face.

“You done or do we need to sit here for a little longer?” Spike asked quietly against Xander’s ear.

Xander shrugged.

“’S OK,” Spike said. “We’ll just sit here for a spell. You did good, Xander. You did really good.”

We’re going to do this again? Aren’t we? Xander silently concluded.

“Is all we’re going ta do today. I’m proud of you, pet. Got a treat for ya for doing so well.”

We’re going to do this...or something like this until I’m no longer afraid...aren’t we?

“Understand, Xander,” Spike said as he continued to hold Xander and rub circles on his stomach. “I really don’t want to do this to you. I know you may not believe this, but I don’t. This isn’t punishment. Punishment I can do because ya earned it and it’s ta help keep ya out of trouble. This? It’s an undoin’ a mess but I wouldn’t be takin’ care of you…wouldn’t be a proper a master to you if I didn’t try and fix it.”

Oh yeah, Xander thought. Cuz I can see how so many other demons…how Angelus would really care about their pet’s phobias.

Then Xander froze. He thought about what he just thought.

What the....?
“Pet?” Spike said noticing Xander’s sudden stillness. “You gonna be sick again?”

Xander slowly shook his head. He looked at Spike and slowly turned in the vampire’s arms. He studied him.

You...care. Or something...like ‘care.’

“What had Lorne said, ‘Spike is capable of caring.’” Xander thought. He said to trust him a little.

Xander warred with himself even as he stared at Spike. Spike stared back helpless to understand what was going on inside of his pet. The demon inside wanted to rage and shake Xander until he had answers, but he knew that would do more damage to the situation.

Xander didn’t understand it completely. He wasn’t even sure he wanted to understand it, but he was starting to get it. What he was starting to get, starting to understand, was that somehow and in some way Spike did care. Spike cared about Xander and when had it been since anyone or anything really had?
Chapter 19

Xander wasn’t sure how long he and Spike had sat on the bathroom floor while he had tried to process his new insight into his situation. It had been long enough for the small tremors of fear that still coursed through his body to turn to shivers.

“C’mon,” Spike had said as he’d pulled Xander to his feet. “Brush up and take a few. Meet me back in the bedroom when yer finished.”

Spike had then flushed the toilet, drained the tub and had left Xander standing in the bathroom. Xander had watched Spike leave before forcing himself to move over to the sink.

Slowly Xander had focused on the present. He looked at his reflection and took a deep breath. He was pale. His eyes were wide. Yet, he was a far cry from the stranger he’d been the first night Spike had won him. Xander looked down and turned on the sink faucet. He flinched a little at the sound of the water but his fear was short.

Xander watched the water swirl down the drain. He thought about what Spike had said. What it meant.

*Is it possible?* Xander wondered as he reached for his toothbrush and toothpaste. *Can he help me get over my fear of drowning? My fear of water?*

Xander’s first instinct was a resounding and heart-thumping “NO!” Yet a deeper instinct inside of him, the one that had finally recognized that Spike wasn’t like the other demons that Xander had encountered whispered that it was possible. It was possible simply because Spike believed it was, or so Xander’s instinct whispered.

Xander shook his head and brushed his teeth. He was tired and really didn’t want to think of it any more. Quickly he brushed the taste of vomit and bile out of his mouth. He spat out the toothpaste and cupped his hand under the running water. He scooped up some water, brought to his mouth and then rinsed. He then took the opportunity to scoop up several more mouthfuls to quench his thirst and soothe his throat.

When he was done he turned the water off. Once again he looked at himself in the mirror. He was a little less pale and a little less wide-eyed. He sighed. *Time to go see, Spike, Xander thought.*

He turned and left the bathroom.

***

Spike was dressed and sitting at the desk when Xander entered the bedroom. He turned and greeted Xander.

“Pet,” he said.

Xander nodded at him.

“Feeling better?”
Xander nodded again.

“Good. Want to explain something ta ya. When we work on the water thing the rules are simple. If you fail to handle a task I give you, I’ll punish the bird, Tara, for your failure. If you succeed, you’ll get a treat.” Spike said as he got up and moved over to Xander. “Ya did good tonight. Ya did what I asked. So...here, this is your treat.”

Spike held out his hand. In it was a new deck of cards. Xander blinked and then looked at Spike. He tried not to think about the threat to Tara.

“No words. All pictures. Doesn’t break Angelus blee…doesn’t break the rules. You can play solitaire…build a house…play fifty-two card pick-up. Doesn’t soddin’ matter. They’re your cards, yeah?”

Xander reached out and took the cards. Mine? Xander thought. In all the time he’d been the vault, he’d never been given anything to pass the time. He’d only had his thoughts. He’s memories. He looked at Spike.

“Now, I’ve got work ta do, so I’m goin’ to down to the office. Yer to stay here in the bedroom or use the loo if you need to. At some point I expect you ta get a shower and get cleaned up. You can get water from the bathroom yerself. You won’t be getting any more meals tonight.”

Xander looked at Spike sharply. My stomach is settling down, Xander thought. Why are you starving me?

“Your punishment tomorrow will be easier if you have a mini-fast,” Spike explained.

Xander paled. Punishment! I thought you cared! You are still going to punish me? Where’s the care in that?

“I’d tell you not ta worry about tomorrow but I know you will anyway. No sense in givin’ ya an order ya’d just disobey.”

Xander shook his head. Fuck you, Spike! How can act like you ‘care’ and then still punish me!

Spike sighed at the sound of Xander’s elevated heart rate and the shake of Xander's head. Xander was angry. He really was getting good at reading his boy. Probably thought after the water breakdown punishment was off the table, Spike thought. He still doesn’t get it.

“Pet, you lied to me, ya forgot yer place and you defied me. Any one of those are punishable offenses. All of three of them are too many to just sweep under the rug. You are my Pet. You will be punished. It will be public. It will not be easy,” Spike said.

Xander seethed and threw his deck of cards on the bed. Spike cocked an eyebrow.

“They’re yours to do with as you please, but don’t push it, pet. What I give I can always take away.”

That doesn’t surprise me, you bleached blowhard! Xander thought angrily and turned his back to Spike.

Suddenly Xander found himself pushed up against the wall by a vamped out Spike. Spike was snarling in his face and Xander was quickly reminded that Spike may care but that ‘care’ was
“Xan, it’s been a long night already. Don’t you think we’ve had enough emotional ups and downs this evening? Whatever bee is buzzin’ in your bonnet…quash it! You knew the rules and ya misbehaved. It doesn’t matter the reasons why! So now, you’ll pay the consequences,” Spike pounded his fists beside Xander's head for emphasis then continued.

"I’m done discussin’ this with you! Be cleaned up and here when I get back. Don’t make the mistake of adding to your punishment by disobeying me further. And don’t think I won’t know if ya leave this room or not. Ya, really don't want ta test me any further, pet. Ya won't like the results,” Spike growled. He then turned around and stormed out of the bedroom. He slammed both the bedroom and the suite doors for good measure.

***

Once again Lorne was waiting for him when Spike entered his office. Bleedin’ Angelus and his rulin’ the world! Spike thought as he walked to his desk. Undead life was so much simpler when it was all about the shaggin’, killin’, and drinkin’.

“The bird tucked away?” Spike asked as he plopped himself in his chair and put his feet up on his desk.

“Yes. And the guards that witnessed her being put in the isolation suite are scheduled for promotion beginning tomorrow,” Lorne answered as he took a seat across from Spike.

Spike nodded and picked up a remote control device from his desk. He pointed it at the west wall. A panel opened revealing several scenes. Spike pushed a few more buttons and images of his suite flared to life on the screens. Spike focused on the screen displaying the image of the bedroom. Xander was sitting on the floor staring at the bedroom door. It looked like he’d just slid down and sat there after Spike had stormed out. Spike sighed.

“Good,” Spike said responding to Lorne but not taking his eyes off Xander. “From now on, when you come out of the suite with the girl I want you smellin’ a bit like her and yer clothes mussed.”

“What!” Lorne exploded and jumped out of the chair. “Spike, lemon drop, she’s not my type!”

“And you’re not hers but if Angelus gets wind we got a pretty little thing down in our dungeon room and we’re not sending anyone to play with her when supposedly we’re trying for a half breed…don’t you think he’ll get suspicious?”

“B…but…,” Lorne sputtered.

“ ‘Sides the idea that yer the happy demon trying to spawn will amuse my twisted grandsire.”

“You can’t ask me to…to…”

“I’m just asking you to smell like the girl!” Spike interrupted Lorne. “How you two work it out I don’t care.”

The tiny broadcast image of Xander finally stood up and marched to the bed. It picked something it up and flung it at the wall. It then tore at the bedclothes strewing them angrily around the room before taking a pillow and swinging it like club over and over down on to the bed. Spike watched
impassively. *Always one step forward and two steps back with this one,* he thought.

Lorne gasped when he saw what was going on in Spike’s bedroom.

“Spike! Sweetums! Aren’t you going to do something?”

“Nope,” Spike said.

“He could…could…”

“He could wear himself out. Fate’s made a complete bollocks out of his life. Let him have a bag on and tear up the room a bit. Least this ways his not puttin' himself in any more harm or hacking me off further.”

“Maybe he wouldn’t be so angry if you hadn…”

“Don’t go there!” Spike interrupted as he put his feet flat on the floor and leaned across the desk to glare at Lorne. “I did what I *had* to do up there.”

“Calling him a whore? Forcing him to give up being the ‘knight’ which is so much a part of his personality? I thought you didn’t want to break him?”

“I don’t!”

“Well, lemon drop, you came damn close!” Lorne leaned forward and stared back at Spike. Spike leaned back and closed his eyes. He was bloody tired and he still had to do a lot of work on the scroll that evening.

“Lorne, we’re playing a dangerous game. One misstep and our house of cards come tumbling down.”

“I don’t see….”

“I can’t just let Xander *play* at being my Pet. He has to *be* my Pet. Trying to buy me with sex? That’s a manipulation…one Angelus or any demon hatched last century would have seen. I may be able to get away with a little coddling, my rep with Dru will get me a least that…but letting Xander pull my strings with sex? I would have put Xander, you, the bird not to mention myself in danger if I’d given into the whelp…no matter how much I was tempted. Pets offer themselves to please their masters. End of story. They don’t try and manipulate favors or earn treats.”

“Spike…,” Lorne tried again.

“Lorne,” Spike continued, “You made me promise no matter what that I would make him my Pet, and that’s exactly what I am doing. You think this is easy? This whole ruddy mess would be gone if I’d just ripped the whelp’s throat out that first night and been done with it!”

Spike looked back at the screen. The tiny Xander was now sitting on the stripped bed slowly shuffling a deck of cards. Spike huffed and reached for his cigarettes.

“Thought you said you had a plan? A use for him?” Lorne asked quietly.

“I do,” Spike said as he lit his cigarette and inhaled deeply. He let out a puff of smoke and continued.
“Just didn’t realize it was goin’ ta get this soddin' complicated.”

“Well, your plans are notorious for never working out exa…."

“Don’t say it!” Spike warned as he waved a cigarette Lorne’s way. Lorne chuckled. Spike took several of long puffs on his cigarette while he watched and studied the tiny Xander.

“You know he’s got a water phobia?” Spike said quietly.

“Xander?” Lorne asked.

Spike nodded. “Has something to do with the Azora.”

“Bad?”

“Drawing me a bath left him kneelin’ and prayin’ to the porcelain god,” Spike replied.

Lorne sighed. “You want me to cancel looking for the coach?”

“NO,” Spike said emphatically.

“Lemon dr…"

“It’s a weakness Xan can’t afford to have,” Spike said. “I’ll be working with him ta get over it. He may never like the water again, but he will be able to get back into it again. He will be able to swim in it again.”

“Spike…”

“Lorne,” Spike said as he ground his cigarette out and looked at the green demon, “think of what Angelus or any of my enemies could do with that knowledge? It makes Xander vulnerable. They could break him without ever laying a hand on him.”

Lorne was silent for a moment. He could think of lots of ways Angelus could torture Xander with his fear of water. He could lock lead weights to other human slaves and push them into deep water, give Xander the key to unlock the weights and laugh as Xander struggled with his fear and his need to rescue. Or Angelus could simply insist on an Aurelius family picnic on the beach.

“Just be careful,” Lorne finally said.

“Aren’t I always?” Spike replied with a smile.

Lorne rolled his eyes.

“Now, I want you to set up that meet with Zorn for the night after tomorrow night,” Spike said. “More’n ever I need to know what happened to Xander.”

“Not tomorrow night?”

“Tomorrow night I’m putting Xander up on the pedestal for punishment. I don’t want Zorn or any of Azora’s close friends to see that. Bad enough they are bound ta hear about it.”
“You’re putting Xander on the pedestal?” Lorne asked sharply.

“He publicly defied me, as well as privately. He needs a public punishment,” Spike replied.

“Oh, and so this is part of your plan not to break him!”

“I’m not going to lay stripes to him!”

“Spike…”

“Lorne!” Spike said sharply. “This is not the ‘Before’! This is not some soddin’ happy fairy tale or child’s play where we can fake what we want and get by with the rest! Xander’s my Pet! He defied me! I need to punish him! If I don’t….are you willing to lose everything? Say the word now and I’ll pack up! We’ll head for some little corner of nowhere and see how long it takes for ‘Gelus to find us! Otherwise…let me be the Master of Las Vegas!”

Lorne stared at Spike for several long minutes. He then looked at the tiny image of Xander sitting on a bare mattress playing solitaire. He looked back at Spike.

“I’ll work on getting that meeting setup with Zorn,” Lorne said quietly and then stood up. He moved slowly to the door and then turned to look at Spike.

“Lemon drop, just don’t lose sight of why…well…of what you want,” Lorne said before slipping out the door.

Spike looked over at the monitor. He watched Xander for a moment.

“Not bloody likely,” he sighed and then reached for the Manuscript of Steganographia. He was way behind in his transcription and he was running out of time before he knew Angelus would come looking for it.

***

Spike finished tucking the last corner of the flat sheet under the mattress just as Xander stepped out of the bathroom. Xander paused and stared at Spike.

*Spike makes beds? Was the first thought that when through Xander's head as he draped his towel over the bathroom door. The next was to wonder if he'd be punished for his obvious temper tantrum.

"Mum was a stickler for hospital corners," Spike said before shaking out the thick burgundy blanket on top of the gold cotton sheets.

The master vampire smoothed the blanket out over the bed and then threw the comforter on top. He folded it back until it lay neatly across the foot of the bed. Then he turned down the sheets, fluffed the pillows and put them at the head of the bed. Xander stood silently and watched the whole process.

"Slept in worse places," Spike muttered as he crossed around the foot of the bed to stand in front of Xander. He studied him for a moment then commanded, "Make with the new trick, pet."

*New tri...? Oh! Xander sighed and then moved in close to tug at the hem of Spike's shirt. Whee! Here we go again.*
“Had more enthusiasm from zombies,” Spike chuckled.

*Well not like you had brains to offer ’em*, Xander thought as he dropped to his knees to untie Spike’s boots.

“Case yer wonderin’,” Spike said. “Put yer cards on the desk.”

*Thanks*, Xander thought on autopilot as he tugged off Spike’s boots and started removing his socks.

“I’ll see about gettin’ another desk in here fer yer stuff,” Spike said.

*Right*, Xander thought as he began to unbutton Spike’s jeans. *Cuz I have sooo much.*

“You’ll need a jewelry box for yer earrings and nipple rings.”

*Oh joy! Just what I always wanted!*

Xander slid Spike’s jeans down the vampire’s legs. He couldn't help but marvel and their sleekness nor the cool silky feel of the vampire’s skin. Spike stepped out of the denim pants. Once again Xander couldn’t fail to notice the vampire’s cock was hard. He looked up at Spike.

*You really are an undead peroxided pervert aren’t you?*

“Probably still not in the mood, eh?” Spike smiled.

Xander quickly shook his head.

“Right then,” Spike laughed. “Up and on the bed then.”

Xander moved quickly to obey. Spike patted the bed indicating he wanted Xander to sit at the head of the bed with his back propped up by the headboard. Then Spike tucked the covers up over Xander’s legs and around his waist. Xander frowned. Spike reached to the bedside and grabbed a bottle. It was a cold sports drink.

“Here, just cuz yer not getting’ any din doesn’t means I don’t want ya to miss out on yer vitamins, electrolytes and shite,” Spike said.

*Dr. Spike, world renowned nutritionist*, Xander thought as he accepted the bottle with the blue liquid and took a long swig. It was satisfying to his thirst but not his hunger. *This is mostly sugar and salt, you dolt. Not a meal substitute.*

Spike moved to the other side of the bed and climbed up and got under the covers. He dug in the drawer in the bed stand on his side and once again he fished out his glasses. He then grabbed the copy of *Ivanhoe* he’d started the night before.

“Here’s the deal, pet. I’m tired of being cheesed off,” Spike said as he put his glass on and looked at Xander. “So, yer gonna drink yer blue drink and I’m gonna read about the disinherited knight here until we’re both too knackered to keep our eyes open. Tomorrow’s gonna be long night for the both of us.”

*Why? You getting punished too?* Xander thought bitterly as he took another swig of his sports drink.
"And tonight's already been long enough."

*OK...for once I'm not gonna argue with you,* Xander thought and nodded.

Spike smiled and settled into a comfortable position. He then began to read.

“The Prior Aymer had taken the opportunity afforded him, of changing his riding robe for one of yet more costly materials, over which he wore a cope curiously embroidered. Besides the massive golden signet ring,” Spike began reading in that strange and soft cultured voice of his.

Spike's voice soothed and relaxed Xander. Soon his drink was gone and he found himself snuggled under the covers falling asleep to the images of a pale skin and blue-eyed beauty who wouldn't be ruled by the tyranny of the times.

***

Xander woke up rubbing his nose. Something had brushed against it. He opened his eyes to find Spike propped up on an elbow leaning over him with a broad smile on his face.

"Slept well? No nightmares?" Spike asked.

Xander frowned. How did he answer? He could nod. He had slept well. That was unusual.

He could also shake his head. He hadn't had any bad dreams. Instead, his dreams had also been unusual. They were vague and dark but somehow he'd felt safe throughout them. Xander decided to give a small smile and nod.

"Well, that's sumthin', then," Spike said as he rolled away from Xander and out of bed. "Ok...up and at 'em, pet. Need ya outta that bed, in the shower, teeth brushed, water made and done with all yer other human business in the next forty-five minutes. You'll find no clothes put out for you. You'll be starkers today."

*Punishment?* Xander thought as he quickly rolled out of bed and started moving toward the bathroom.

"Be out front in forty-five and in position," Spike said sternly, all traces of his morning smile gone.

Xander nodded. He stumbled for the bathroom even as Spike headed for the bedroom door.

***

It was forty-five minutes and counting after Spike had left Xander and he was still waiting on the vampire. *Is this part of my punishment?* Xander wondered. *Staring at Spike's empty chair in the fading dusk light?*

Xander was scrubbed clean, nude and kneeling with his legs wide apart on the cushion in front of Spike's chair. He sighed. How long was he supposed to wait?

As if on cue Xander heard the suite door opened. He turned his head to look over his shoulder and Spike strode inside. Xander's jaw dropped and then quickly snapped shut. This wasn't just Spike entering the suite; this was the Master of Las Vegas!
"Eyes forward," Spike snapped as he walked across the room. Xander whipped his head around to comply and tried to process the image of Spike he'd just seen.

Spike's hair was slicked back sleek against his skull accentuating the chiseled lines of his face. His riveting blue eyes were lined with kohl and emphasized his commanding gaze. He wore a red silk shirt tailored to mold itself to his arms and chest and dip dangerously into the black leather pants that clung sinuously to his long legs. Finishing up the whole package was Spike's long leather coat wrapping around him and shining under the light. Spike looked dangerous and sexy. He looked like a dream that promised a nightmare if pissed.

"Everything is ready for you downstairs," Spike purred as he gracefully sat in his chair in front of Xander. He reached out a hand and began to trace a finger around Xander's chin.

"Before we go down, you and I are gonna talk, pet," Spike said and then lightly grasped Xander's chin.

_Oh goody,_ Xander thought and swallowed.

"I told you that I would punish you when you deserved it. I told you that you would understand why you are being punished. Do you understand why you are about to be punished this evening?" Spike asked.

Xander looked at Spike. He wanted to say no, but he knew. He had defied Spike. He'd defied Spike to try and save Tara and he lied about how he'd felt. Xander nodded stiffly.

"Good," Spike said. _Really didn't want to go through that again,_ he thought.

"Some of your defiance was public. I've decided all of your punishment will be public.

_You demons do get off on the public displays of humiliation, dontcha?_ Xander thought angrily.

"You are my Pet, Xander," Spike said, "You aren't just a slave and so you aren't treated like just a slave. Ya have the benefit of my protection. As long as you remain my Pet I can continue to protect you and treat you differently than other humans. I know this isn't the life ya had in the 'Before,' but this isn't the 'Before.' This is now. Yer only choices are to accept being my Pet and that means bear the punishments I give you or not. If you can't bear being my Pet, Xander my choices...your choices are limited. I can put you in the stables or out on the floor. Put you up on the market...."

Xander's eyes went wide and heart beat wildly. Memories of the market crowded his mind. Thoughts of being bought by the Azora terrified him. _No!_

"...but I don't want that, Xander. I want you around....but it's up to you on the pedestal tonight ta show the demons of Vegas why I don't. I'm the Master of Las Vegas and any Pet I take has to be worthy of my position...protection. I believe that's you, pet. Show 'em why I protect you Xander. Show 'em why I chose you for my Pet. Show 'em you won't break.”

_I won't?_ Xander silently questioned.

“Remember, no one can touch you. I won't let that happen. All you have to do is just follow my orders. Do that Pet, and everything will be fine in the end. So tell me now, can you do that? Can you follow my orders?"
I don't even know what they are! Xander thought frantically as he stared at Spike. How can you ask me if I can willingly participate in my own humiliation and punishment?

"Pet," Spike said softly. "I have to have your full obedience from the moment we walk out this suite. It might make the crowd hungrier and happier to have you rebellious but that's not what I want. I want you to be my Pet. Punishment or no, I want that clear to the crowd. If later you wanna come back and tear the sheets off the bed, I'll let ya," Spike said.

Xander looked at Spike. He trembled. He thought of the time in the Tank. Somehow, he knew that whatever Spike had planned, he wouldn't do something that horrible. Though, Xander knew whatever Spike had planned it would be bad enough.

Yet, Spike wanted something the Azora had never demanded, submission. They had just wanted obedience. They had wanted compliance with the rules. Spike was staring at Xander telling him he wanted his submission. He wanted Xander's blind 'faith' now that Xander wouldn't balk at anything Spike ordered him to do. In some weird way, Spike was asking Xander to trust him.

Spike studied his pet. He watched Xander mull over his words. Make the right decision, Xan. Spike thought. Yer performance tonight carries more weight than you can imagine. It will set the tone for what Angelus will believe about my claim on you and how much he'll push to test it.

Xander thought of Tara. Would she be harmed if he failed?

"Make up your mind, Xander," Spike ordered. "Can you follow my orders?"

Xander thought about it. He really did. He thought of all the times he'd ever tried to follow orders from his teachers, to Willow, to Buffy and even Faith. He thought about what it had taken for him to finally 'get it' with the Azora. And in the end he knew the one truthful answer he could give Spike. He shook his head.

Bloody hell! Spike thought as his eyes went gold. Stupid stubborn git! Is he just trying to make his lif...  

Spike internal rant was stopped when Xander laid his hand on Spike's and then bowed his head.

But I will try, Xander thought with all his might. I will try.

Spike stared at Xander for a very long moment then sighed. "Well, it was an honest answer, pet."

***

Xander stepped off the elevator behind Spike. There was a huge crowd on the casino floor and it seemed like they were waiting for Spike and Xander. They parted quickly as Spike began walking quickly toward the center of the casino. Xander tried to keep up with Spike but it was difficult. His feet were shackled together with silver cuffs and a short silver chain running between them. Spike tugged on Xander's leash and he quickened his steps. Xander stumbled. He would have put his hands out to balance himself but they were cuffed behind his back. He fell and landed on one knee. The crowd cheered.

Spike stopped and turned. He cocked an eyebrow as Xander struggled to his feet. He bowed his head once he was standing. Spike spun around and again began leading him off to the center of the
casino. He stopped when they reached a rather large round golden circle on the floor.

"Kneel," Spike commanded as he pointed to the center of the circle. Xander dropped to his knees. "Kneel up!"

Xander put his knees together and knelt in an upright position. He bent his toes and used them for balance. His head was still bowed.

"Yer first punishment," Spike began in a loud voice that boomed across the casino floor, "will be for forgetting your place and lying!"

The crowd murmured at the last charge. Rumors of that hadn't spread yet. Spike hated giving grist to the mill but he wanted to get all of Xander's punishments done and out of the way. Spike grabbed Xander's chin and jerked his head up.

"Open yer mouth," Spike ordered.

Xander obeyed. Then Spike slipped the small spike replica at the end of Xander's leash into Xander's mouth. The metal clicked angrily against Xander's teeth.

"Clamp down," Spike ordered. Xander did until it looked like he had a silver looking carrot or cigar sticking out of the center of his mouth.

"You will keep on your knees, your eyes straight ahead and keep that in your mouth until I tell you otherwise," Spike snarled. He then stepped out of the gold circle and clapped his hands. There was a slight rumbling sound and the circle began lifting into the air. Xander struggled to keep his balance and not fall over. Already his toes and knees were aching while saliva was pooling in his mouth.

I can't do this, he thought as he stared out across the top of the crowd that was now mocking and laughing at him. Then he steeled himself. But I will.

"Stories of your disobedience have already spread, pet," Spike spat the last word. "So I want the stories of your punishment spread even farther. Settle in for a long evening and enjoy being the show. Oh, and don't just keep the spike in your mouth, keep it where I put it!"

Spike then turned his back on Xander. He made his way to his table and ordered a double whiskey. He looked at Lorne. Lorne nodded at him. The green demon had promised to do his best to let Spike know when it got too much for Xander, but it was only the beginning of a long evening.

***

Xander's knees hurt. They felt beyond bruised. His toes threatened to cramp any minute and his hands were numb. He gave up trying to suck down the saliva and it ran down his chin freely. It slid down his neck and cooled on his stomach. Many of the demons that huddled around the edge of his dais snorted and laughed at that. Xander tried to ignore it all. He tried to keep his eyes fixed on the far wall and not think about the pain and humiliation.

Some of the demons taunted him in English.

"Think of that as a good work out for your mouth!" one had shouted. Xander hated those comments. They made him aware of how much his jaws ached.

"Wait 'till Spike puts the real Spike in there...and makes ya suck on that!" another demon brayed.
"Bet ya like that...huh human? Bet ya he makes ya suck on it all night long! Maybe that'll be part of the show!"

Xander tried to swallow and almost choked. He wished Buffy were here. OK, so it would be of the completely humiliating, Xander thought if Buffy actually did rescue a naked Xan-man for the midst of a howling epicenter of mocking demons, but it would be worth it. Heck, I'd even settle for Faith's nonstop retelling of 'Hey remember that time....'

Xander's thoughts were interrupted by a gray hand slinking its way on to his pedestal. His eyes went wide as it seemed to stretch and twine and reach out for his leg.

Suddenly there was a loud "THUD", a piercing cry and the crowd went silent. It parted as the gray hand slid off the pedestal to join the rest of its body on the floor. There was an axe buried in the large gray head attached to the body. Xander looked out across the crowd and saw Spike standing like he'd just thrown a weapon. He nodded slightly at Xander and then turned away.

"The management would like to remind our patrons," Lorne's voice boomed over the intercom, "that there is a strict 'no touch' policy regarding tonight's show in the casino. Enforcement of this rule is swift, sudden and final."

Xander took a deep breath and refocused on the fixed point on the far wall. I can hold out for a little while longer, he thought. I swear though, Spike's so going to be making the bed again.

He continued holding on until the sights and sounds blurred. He held on until the pain seemed to be just a part of him, like breathing. He held on until he lost himself and just accepted his punishment.

***

The sudden stop of a downward motion nearly broke Xander of the 'trance' into which he'd fallen. He'd have groaned but he had no voice. His jaws and knees were so beyond sore. He wasn't even really sure the little spike was still in his mouth until something started to tug on it. Xander clamped down and fought to keep hold of it.

"Pet," his master voice boomed, "let go."

Xander immediately let go of his hold on the spike. He felt it fall and lay against his chest. A hand grabbed his chin.

"Look at me," his master commanded.

Xander blinked at focused his eyes on the kohl lined blue. He was so tired; so sore. It was important to obey though.

"Ya did well," the voice said. Xander tried to smile at the praise but his mouth was tight and sore.

"But we're not finished."

Xander bowed his head. Spike stepped back a little way from his pet.

"Bend over, spread your knees wide and touch your forehead to the ground."

Xander ignored his protesting flesh and did as commanded. Pet's, doin' well. Gotta be hurtin'. Seems to be in the headspace I need him to be for this next bit, Spike thought as he ran a soothing hand
"You defied me. You publicly defied me," Spike intoned as he continued to pet Xander, his hand caressing and stroking lower and lower down Xander's back.

"I will **not** have that! So you will show your submission. You will show your obedience. You will show who has command over you," Spike said. He finished the last statement brushing his thumb over Xander's exposed little hole.

Something inside of Xander stirred. It wanted to fight, to be afraid, but the rest of Xander just wanted to let go. *Can't I just freak out later? When it doesn't hurt so much and there aren't so many witnesses?* Xander thought as he breathed deep and sank deeper into his trance.

Spike fished through his coat pocket and pulled out a bottle of lube. *Promise, pet,* Spike thought. *Won't give 'em the ultimate show.* He then slicked a finger and without much preamble worked it inside Xander's tight pucker. The crowd laughed and roared. Xander barely twitched.

Spike concentrated on making sure he didn't do any damage to Xander. He twisted and turned his finger and when he was sure he'd slicked up the hole as much as he dared he pulled his digit back. He then looked for Lorne. Lorne was standing by the pedestal with a frown on his face but held his hand out. Spike took the object in his hand. It was a slim flesh covered butt plug. Again the demonic crowd roared. Spike spread some lube on the plug and then lined it up with Xander's hole. It took a little more effort, but Spike worked it past Xander's tight ring and slid it deep inside.

This time Xander did more than just twitch. Sense memories were breaking through his trance. *He was being breached! OH ghod!* Xander thought as his breathing grew rapid. Spike laid a hand on the center of Xander's back.

“You’re mine to play with, pet,” Spike said as he fished another object out of his pocket and stepped out of the golden circle. Xander remembered the familiar words “You’re mine to punish. And sometimes...sometimes I’ll do both at the same time.”

Spike pressed a button on the device in his hand and Xander could feel a vibration radiating from the device in his anus and stimulating him right down to his prostate. Xander groaned silently and felt his cock begin to stir. *OH you fuckin' bleached bastard!* Xander silently screamed.

The pedestal began to rise again and Xander's cock grew heavier as the plug continued to vibrate. Xander desperately wanted to rock his hips or rub his cock against something, but he knew it wouldn't be allowed. Spike's next words confirmed it.

"You will remain in this position until I say otherwise. You will not cum. You will not let the plug fall out. You will accept both pain and pleasure at **my** discretion," Spike snapped. He then pushed the button and the plug ceased to vibrate. Once again he walked away leaving Xander surrounded by laughing demons. Only this time, Xander couldn't see them.

***

Xander couldn't figure out Spike's pattern to activating the butt plug. Sometimes he'd do it one, two and three times in quick succession until Xander's cock was dripping pre-cum and sweat was pooling under his forehead. During those times the demonic crowd would laugh and chant trying to get him to cum.

They'd shout, "Cum...cum...cum...cum!" Or they'd go into graphic detail about hot, tight and wet
channels. Xander would grind his sore jaws together and think of everything he could but about the pressure in his cock and asshole.

Sometimes it would be long stretches where there wouldn't be a single twitch out of the plug. Then Xander would have to remember to clench his ass until it hurt to make sure the plug didn't pop out. He'd try and forget about the screaming agony in his knees or the new pain in his back. The one thing he could figure is that every time he'd almost slip into that wonderful trance where he could just accept the pain and float away the damned butt plug would fire!

You're cheating you'd damned vampire! Xander thought. Don't know how! Maybe Lorne! But I know you're cheating!

The plug suddenly fired again and Xander bit his lip. His cock instantly flared to life. It was so ready to fire from being stimulated so much he really didn’t know how much longer he could hold out. Please Spike, no matter what else you do to me tonight, he thought, just don't make me cum in front of this crowd.

This time the vibration wasn't steady. It was an on again off again on again rhythm. OH great! Xander thought, sexual morse code!

Xander didn't know what Spike was spelling out, but he knew what it meant. It meant only one thing. It meant Xander was hard, aching and frantically needed to get his mind focused off his body. He started indexing Willow's Barbie collection in his head, starting with Malibu Barbie and all her friends first. The need to spill was almost overwhelming.

Fuck you, Spike! Xander thought and then immediately regretted it. Suddenly the memory of Spike's long and silky feeling legs haunted Xander. He found he wanted to wrap his body around Spike and rub his hot cock and against that cool smooth flesh.

"Cum...cum...cum!" the demon crowd was shouting again.

Xander's lip began to bleed and just as unexpectedly as the vibration began, it stopped. The crowd groaned in disappointment. The pedestal began to lower. Xander panted and tried to stay balanced. When the pedestal stopped familiar boots appeared in Xander's peripheral vision.

"Hmmmm, not bad, pet," Spike said as he reached down and gently removed the plug.

Xander fought the urge to kiss Spike's boots.

"Up!" Spike commanded.

Xander struggled to his knees. He opened his mouth in a silent scream. He hurt everywhere. Spike cocked an eyebrow.

"Follow me, pet," he ordered then turned swiftly for the elevator.

Without his hands or help, Xander was too sore and tired to get to his feet. That left him with only one option, to crawl after Spike on his overly abused knees. Xander couldn't fight the tears that welled up and spilled out of his eyes, but at this point he was willing to do anything for this to be over. He crawled after Spike as best he could. Though the demonic crowd still laughed and jeered at him, it parted for him just as it did for Spike in front of him. Spike led him to the elevator that would take them back to their suite. Xander wasn't sure when he'd ever been so happy to see an elevator.
Please let this mean this is almost over, Xander thought as he crawled into the elevator behind Spike. The master vampire turned to face Xander.

"Pet," Spike said loud enough for the crowd outside the elevator to hear. "Punishment's over."

Xander blinked at Spike. He was tired and sore but something was niggling the back of his brain. Suddenly his eyes went wide and he crawled close to Spike. He leaned forward and gently kissed each of Spike’s hands. The elevator doors slid shut. Xander sagged to the floor.
Spike dug through his coat pocket for keys as he swiftly bent down over Xander.

“Easy, pet,” Spike said soothingly as he gently rolled Xander on his side.

*Oh yea, Xander thought, cuz I’m all fight and flight here.*

“I got ya,” Spike said as he quickly unlocked the cuffs around Xander’s wrists. Xander winced and opened his mouth in a silent groan.

Next Spike removed the cuffs around Xander’s ankles. Then he rolled Xander back over on to his back. Xander’s face contorted with a grimace of pain.

*Circulation return, Xander thought, not of the good.*

“Hang in there, pet,” Spike said as he jerked off his coat and carefully draped it over Xander. Then he turned around and keyed the elevator.

The elevator jerked into motion. Xander felt it in every sore muscle and in every inch of bruised flesh. He hissed.

“You would call that fun you master sadist! Xander thought as he panted through his pain.

“Shhh,” Spike said as he cradled Xander close. “Try and relax, Xan. It’s over. I know yer hurtin’. Gonna get ya back to the suite and try an’ make it better.”

*Just tell me you’re gonna drain me, Xander thought as he closed his eyes and relaxed into Spike. That’ll make it better.*

The two rode up to the suite in silence. When the elevator stopped, Xander hissed again.

“Almost there,” Spike said as the elevator doors opened. He carried Xander to the suite doors. The doors swung open and Lorne waited on the other side.

“Got everything?” Spike asked as he carried Xander across the threshold.

*Shouldn’t I be dressed in white?* Xander wondered. *Instead of draped in black?*

“Everything’s ready,” Lorne confirmed. “How is he?”

“In pain,” Spike said as he continued to carry Xander through the suite and into the bedroom.

*And tired, Xander thought. Oh…and let’s not forget humiliated! You know all the accessories that go with being publicly tortured for hours.*

Spike laid Xander gently on the bed. The covers had already been turned back. Xander sighed as his
back made contact with the cool smooth surface of the really nice cotton sheets. Spike removed his coat and threw it across the room. He reached for a couple of pillows and then gently tucked them behind Xander’s head and under his shoulders. Xander groaned silently as the muscles in his neck complained.

“Shhh,” Spike said again. “I know.”

Then he reached for a bottle of water chilling in a bowl of ice on the night stand. He opened the bottle and brought it to Xander’s lips.

“Easy now,” he said. “Your neck and jaw muscles are going to be sore. Just let me pour a little of this in your mouth and you then you work on swallowing, yeah?”

Xander went to nod and winced. He gave a weak “thumbs up” instead.

Spike smiled and slowly poured a small amount of water into Xander’s mouth. The cool water pooled and Spike stopped pouring. Xander swallowed and closed his eyes in near bliss. The water was the best thing to happen to him since he woke up that morning.

Xander opened his eyes and weakly made a motion for “more” with his hand. Spike repeated the process.

“Lorne said to be careful not to let you drink too much at once. Don’t want ya to get sick.”

*Right, cuz that is so poor post torture etiquette,* Xander thought as he swallowed another mouthful of water.

Spike brushed a lock of hair from Xander’s forehead then poured another mouthful for Xander.

“We’ll let this last one settle,” he said as Xander swallowed again. Spike put the bottle back in the bowl. He looked at Xander then tenderly began to rub the sides of Xander’s neck. Xander opened his mouth in a strange combination of a gasp and sigh. He couldn’t tell if the gentle massage hurt or felt better than he had in hours.

“Dru once had me wear a ball gag for a week,” Spike said as he continued to try and unknot the kinks in Xander’s neck. “Said she liked the way I begged with my eyes. Bloody well couldn’t feed for days after.”

Xander’s eyebrows shot up. *Poor vampire.*

“Dru had to feed me drop by drop from her wrist,” Spike sighed and moved the massage to Xander’s jaw. “Good times.”

Xander rolled his eyes and Spike laughed.

“I suppose not your cuppa, eh?”

Xander gave Spike a “thumbs down.”

Spike laughed again and worked Xander’s jaw a few minutes more. Then he studied Xander again.

“Right,” Spike said and stopped his massaging. “Let’s get you cleaned up a bit, pet. Then if the
water stays down we’ll get some applesauce in ya. Lorne’s got some muscle relaxants but he said not to give ’em to you on an empty stomach.”

More research for your ‘How to Care for Human Pets for Dummies?’

“Just relax, pet. I’ll be right back,” Spike said and moved away from the bed. Xander heard him move into the bathroom and the water begin to run.

How…and why…does he go from Master and Marquis de Sade to Florence Fangandnail? Xander wondered. He sighed. He was so tired of trying to figure Spike out.

He wanted to be angry about what happened but he was too tired and too relieved his punishment was all over. All he wanted was to feel better and never go through that again. This made him want to be even angrier. Wasn’t that the whole point? He thought.

I don’t want to be anyone’s docile ‘Pet,’ let alone Spike’s, but I don’t… Xander couldn’t finish his thought. He’d been the alternative to Spike’s Pet in this brave new world post Buffy’s death. He knew there really wasn’t a choice.

Fuck! Xander thought and weakly pounded his hand on the bed. From the corner of his eye, he saw Spike’s pillow bounce. Some spark of Scooby remained in him. He used what little strength he had to move his arm past the near cramping muscles and aching joints to push the pillow off the bed.

Xander figured his small smile of satisfaction was worth the pain in his cheeks.

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Xander must have dozed a moment because his eyes fluttered to wakefulness at the sound of Spike’s chuckle.

“Woulda thought ya’d wait until ya could make a proper of go of mussing the bed,” a shirtless Spike said as he set a basin of water on the floor and pointed at where his pillow should have been. Xander didn’t risk his body’s retaliation in trying to shrug. He flipped Spike the bird instead.

Apparently you can’t teach an old Xander new tricks, Xander thought and braced himself for the worst.

Spike laid back his head and laughed. For a moment Xander forgot they were mortal enemies, master and pet, vampire and human, male and…male. All he could see was just how stunning Spike was when he was fully and passionately “in the moment.”

Spike’s laughter eased to a stop and he shook his head. He took Xander’s hand and curled the offending digit back down.

“As lovely as the invitation is, pet,” Spike said. “I don’t think you are any shape to offer it…and I’d truly be a sadistic master if I accepted it.”

Xander blushed. Not what I meant you…you….ahh….

Xander’s thoughts were short-circuited as Spike began running a warm wet and very soft cloth across Xander’s face. If he could have he would have purred. Spike smiled and rinsed the cloth out. He cleaned Xander’s face again and then began to work his way down.
Spike didn’t take advantage of his bathing his pet. Not that the thought didn’t cross his mind. He was surrounded by the musky smell of his pet. The salty taste of his boy’s sweat was there for the tasting and Spike could have spent all day gladly licking and sampling every inch of his pet. A tongue bath wasn’t the bath his pet needed though.

Somewhere in the vicinity of Spike washing Xander’s belly button, Xander became aware of an embarrassing sense of urgency building below the waist line. His cock twitched and Xander flushed.

Spike looked up at Xander, “I’m not smelling any happy fumes, so I take it you have another problem?”

*Happy fumes?* Xander wondered and then shook his head. His bladder didn’t care about riddles only relief.

“Right. Stay put.”

*Uh…not seeing how that helps!* Xander thought and then tried to think of the dry desert that lay beyond the city, crackers, and old cracked leather.

Spike moved away from the bed and once again headed for the bathroom. He wasn’t gone long, but it was long enough that waterfalls, faucets and melting glaciers had started to seep into Xander’s thoughts.

“Easy now,” Spike said as he slowly rolled Xander to his side and placed something smooth and metallic under Xander’s butt. He rolled Xander back on to his back.

*Oh for…you’ve got to be getting!* Xander thought. *Like this situation hasn’t been embarrassing enough! I could have handled a trip to toilet!*

Spike carefully took hold of Xander’s penis and angled it down into the bed pan. Xander flushed. Spike patiently waited and Xander’s bladder refused to cooperate with its own best interests on grounds of shyness.

Xander desperately tried too think of anything and everything associated with water. He thought of all the merits of a long satisfying pee. His bladder kept thinking of Spike holding his dick over a bed pan. Xander groaned silently.

“I could stick yer hand in the bowl of warm water,” Spike said with a chuckle, “if it would help.”

Xander glared at Spike. Spike shook his head and then put a hand low on Xander’s stomach.

“How about I play dirty?”

*What?*

Then Xander flushed and squirmed as Spike lightly tickled him. The block on Xander’s bladder was suddenly gone in a fit of silent ticklish laughter and urine started to flow. Spike stopped tickling and Xander focused fully on the relief of a pee at long last achieved after too long a wait.

*That was playing dirty,* Xander thought gratefully when he was done.

Spike eased the bedpan out from under Xander and then took it to the bathroom. Xander could hear
him empty the pan then flush. He heard water running in the sink and then shortly after that Spike was back by his side. Spike picked up the cloth and began to resuming bathing Xander.

Xander watched Spike. The vampire was smooth and efficient, but every now and then there was a look of desire. It was the hardest to hide when Spike carefully cleaned and wiped the sensitive areas between Xander’s legs. There was also a look of, if Xander didn’t know better, sadness when Spike was tending Xander’s swelling and bruised knees.

When Spike was done Xander gently grabbed his hand. Spike looked at Xander. Xander pointed to Spike, to the water basin and then to himself.

*Why Spike?* Xander thought. *Why are you doing this and not some minion?*

Spike studied Xander. He tried to figure out what Xander was asking.

“You wanna know why?” Spike asked.

Xander gave a “thumbs up.”

“Why I’m taking care of you?”

Xander gave another “thumbs up.”

Spike sighed. He then picked up a tube from the bed stand. He opened it and squeezed a clear gel into his hand.

“This is gonna be cold. Lorne and Tara, recommends are both insisting on more of the Arnica gel for your bruisin' and swellin’,” Spike said and then carefully began dabbing it on Xander’s knees. Xander hissed.

*Great, but that doesn’t answer my question.*

Spike silently treated Xander knees. Xander didn’t press for answer. The cool gel was soothing but Xander couldn’t decide if it hurt or tickled when Spike applied it. When Spike was done with Xander’s knees, he rubbed the gel on Xander’s wrists and ankles. Then he washed his hands in the basin. He moved to the desk and uncovered a tray. He brought back a small bowl and spoon.

“Xander,” Spike said as he spooned out a small bit of applesauce and offered it to Xander. “I’m your master. I protect and I take care of you. Ya proved you were my pet out there tonight by how you bore up under your punishment. Now it’s my job to take care of ya.”

Xander paused in mid-swipe. Applesauce was half on the spoon and half in his mouth.

Spike prodded Xander with the spoon and Xander cleaned it completely with his tongue.

“I’m the Master of Las Vegas and of Angelus’s line. Some see me as Angelus’s ‘right hand man.’ These are positions of strength and power,” Spike explained as he offered Xander some more sauce. “I can’t show weakness. Ta have an openly defiant Pet? That’s weakness. Even if I was willing to let it go, Angelus wouldn’t. It would reflect badly on him.”

Xander swallowed. He hadn’t even thought of the implications of his status and how it related to Angelus. He suppressed a shiver. Angelus probably hadn’t forgotten or forgiven that scene in this
hospital when Xander had stared him down.

“So I gave ya a harsh but fair punishment. One that will satisfy ‘Gelus when he hears about it. One that makes a lasting impression on you and one that reinforces in my own city I have control over my Pet.”

*More than you realize,* Xander silently confessed.

“But Xander,” Spike said softly, “I really don’t want ta go through this again. I will if I have to. Never doubt that. If I show weakness, I won’t be in a position where I can protect…where I can take care of ya. So understand Xander, you misbehave publicly, I will punish you and I will keep punishing ya until you get the point. And it will make tonight look like a cake walk.”

Xander swallowed without the applesauce. *I believe you, Spike.*

“I know yer still a Scooby though and a bloody White Knight. I do get that Xander,” Spike said and spooned another bite of applesauce into Xander’s mouth. “So I know there are times ya are gonna defy me. Times yer gonna push my limits. I could break you of that. I could stripe ya and punish ya and take ya so far down ya’d look for permission ta breathe.

The applesauce was a paste of tasteless ash in Xander’s mouth. He struggled to get it down.

“I learned from the best, pet,” Spike said and put the bowl down and grabbed the bottle of water. He carefully gave Xander another drink. “I can do it, but again I don’t want to. If I did, I wouldn’t have the pet I want. I don’t want a broken you, Xander. I want you. I want the Scooby, pain in the arse White Knight git my sire offered me all those years ago.”

*I’m not him,* Xander thought. *He drowned a long time ago.*

“I know ya think yer not him sometimes, but if ya weren’t ya wouldn’t have defied me in the first place. Ya wouldn’t have tried protecting the bird, Tara.”

Xander narrowed his eyes.

“So I want ya ta think about his,” Spike said and then picked up the applesauce and continued feeding Xander. “I’m not given ya permission to make my life hell, or fer you to be a git. Not even saying you can disobey me. I’m just sayin’ when those times happen, and they will, curb yer instinct long enough to wait until it’s just the two of us or us and Lorne. I’ll still punish ya, but I promise ya it’ll just be between the two of us.”

*No public humiliation?*

“Will you think about that, Xander?”

Xander gave a “thumbs up.”

“And remember, pet,” Spike said as he placed the empty bowl of applesauce on the night stand. “When I punish ya, I will always take care of you before, during and after.”

Xander stared at Spike. Spike returned the gaze. He then brushed another lock of hair from Xander’s forehead.
“Now, let’s get those pills down ya, yeah?”

*Drugs? Drugs to make the pain go bye-bye? Yes please!* Xander thought and risked a smile.

Spike reached for a pill bottle and Xander opened his mouth. Spike dropped two little white pills onto Xander’s tongue and then gave Xander some more water. Xander swallowed gratefully. Spike gave Xander some more water then he put the water back.

“Now, close yer eyes,” Spike ordered, “and let them pills get ta work while I see about trying unknot some more of those muscles.”

Xander closed his eyes. He took several deep breaths waiting for the pills to take affect. Meanwhile he could hear Spike unscrewing the lid off a jar. The strong smell of camphor with hints of cinnamon and clover filled the room.

“According to Lorne, the bird said this ‘Tiger Balm’ would help too,” Spike said as he began to rub the warm ointment with his cool hands into one of Xander’s tortured shoulders. Xander sighed as he could almost immediately start to feel the heat penetrate and help relieve the pain in his muscles.

Spike worked slowly and methodically down each shoulder and arm. He even massaged Xander’s hands. Spike continued massaging Xander’s muscles and Xander began to doze as Spike started to work on his legs.

"I’m proud of you, pet," Xander thought he heard Spike whisper.

*You’re proud of me?* Xander thought sleepily.

Xander’s last thought was to wonder what brushed gently against the tip of his nose before the pills and exhaustion pulled him down to sweet oblivion.
Spike eased the covers up over his boy and tucked them gently around his shoulders. He unclipped the leash from Xander's collar and then moved quietly to bedroom door, shut the lights off and slipped from the room.

"Bloody hell!" Spike sighed as he threw the leash across the room.

"Whoa! Lemon drop!" Lorne shouted and ducked the flying chain. He then held out a drink to Spike.

"Wasn't meant fer you," Spike growled as he marched over to Lorne and snatched the drink from the green demon's hand.

"I should hope not," Lorne said. "Not like you can get anyone who can run this casino as half as well as me on such short notice."

Spike snorted and downed his drink. He looked at Lorne.

"Who owes me money?" He demanded.

"What?"

"Who soddin' owes me money?" Spike barked.

"Lemon drop..."

"I feel like doing some collectin'!" Spike growled as he fished around the wet bar for some cigarettes and a light.

"Spike, it's six in the morning!" Lorne exclaimed and got out of Spike's way.

"So?" Spike said as he pulled out a crumpled pack out of the back of a drawer and dug a bent smoke out.

"Well, unless you've forgotten the basics of being a vampire it means the suns up and a tan's really not good for your complexion!"

"I'll take the storm drains," Spike mumbled as he lit up and inhaled smoke deep into his undead lungs. "Now are you gonna give me some soddin' names are am I just gonna pick some out of a hat?"

"And what am I supposed to tell Xander while you are off on your 'collection' run in the sun...shirtless I might add," Lorne asked and moved back to the bar to fix another drink.

"Xander's out," Spike said. "Won't know I'm gone."

"What if he wakes while you are gone?" Lorne pressed as he grabbed Spike's empty glass and started to refill it.
"He won't! Gave him those pills you brought," Spike argued.

"What if he does," Lorne offered Spike the glass. "Thought I heard you promise to take care of him?"

Spike flashed fang and Lorne stood his ground. He didn't even blink.

"You slip out that door and leave him here while you go knock heads and antlers together is not going to change what happened last night. It's not going to make him feel better and it's only going to make you feel worse if he wakes up and believes you didn't mean what you said about taking care of him. You made the point you're all he has. Don't undo it now just because you're not happy about it."

Spike opened his mouth as if he was going to scream or yell, instead he brought both fists down on top of the wet bar and in a blur of vampiric fury swiped the contents clean from the surface and sent it shattering to the floor. Lorne jumped back quickly and barely avoided being coated with the debris. Then Spike dropped like a puppet with its strings cut. He sat amongst the shards of glass and seeping liquid smoking. He pressed a hand down into the glass and watched pinpricks of blood well up on his palm.

Lorne moved slowly across from Spike and squatted down.

"Lemon drop," he said softly.

"I really hate this world," Spike whispered. "Some days I wish I died with Dru."

"Spike...."

"That's the irony though innit...she loved it, yeah? She was all on board with 'Daddy' and his big plans. Xander? Met 'im once while under a spell. Never forgot 'im. Called im her kitten. Had a silver bowl all picked out fer his cream," Spike leaned back his head and then inhaled another lungful of smoke. "Wouldn't I be makin' her proud?"

"Spike, this is not the same," Lorne tried again, "you know that. And besides you don't really want to leave me here all alone do you? Can't do this without you."

"Maybe you'd be better off."

"That's not what Doyle thought."

"Yeah...well see where that got him. All that's left of 'im is a pair of eyeballs hangin' out on my desk."

Lorne gasped. Spike looked at Lorne and winced.

" 'M sor...didn't mean it, green bean."

Lorne nodded slightly then asked, "So what? You want to pack it up? You want to find 'some little corner of nowhere and see how long it takes for 'Gelus to find us?'"

"Oi! No fair! Usin' my own words...."
"I learned to play dirty from the best," Lorne cut Spike off. "Doyle believed in us. He believed in his visions."

"I never asked..."

"Neither did he," Lorne said sadly. "And don't think a day goes by when for just a moment I don't hate The Powers That Be for those visions."

"I'm a vampire! A demon...not a ruddy savior! I'm not some dark knight!" Spike growled.

"But you hate Angelus...and you hate what the world has become."

"No matter what we do, it's never gonna be a world of Happy Meals and Manchester United again."

"No," Lorne agreed, "but it doesn't have to be this world. Doesn't have to be his world."

"Doyle didn't mention Xander," Spike said.

"Doyle didn't mention a lot of things," Lorne sighed.

Spike looked at Lorne. He sucked in another lungful of smoke. He listened to see if there was any movement from the bedroom. Lorne's pills must be good, Spike thought. Boy's still snoozin' despite all the fuss out here.

"I'm startin' to car...like the whelp," Spike admitted quietly.

"I know. Empath demon, here," Lorne smiled.

"Bloody hell," groaned Spike. "Don't tell me...there's more?"

"No spoilers," Lorne promised as he held out a hand to Spike. Spike clenched his cigarette between his lips and took Lorne's hand. The green demon helped the vampire to his feet. He then plucked the cigarette out of Spike's mouth and shoved the drink into his hand.

"Oi!"

"Second hand smoke is not good for Xander," Lorne said.

"Well get some of them bleedin' filters," Spike said and made futile grab for the cigarette as Lorne marched away from Spike and the ruin of the wet bar.

"You want to keep him healthy?" Lorne asked as he ground out the butt in the ashtray by Spike's chair. "Then quit."

"Bloody hell! Not gonna quit!" Spike raged.

"Lung cancer. Nasty. Wouldn't want that in Xander's future, would you?"

"Sod off!" Spike yelled.

Lorne lifted an eyebrow.
Spike growled at Lorne. Lorne smiled serenely. Spike paced then finally grabbed his pack of cigarettes, crushed them in his fists and threw them at Lorne.

"There! Ya happy?"

"Remember, NO SMOKING around Xander, period!" Lorne said with a smile.

"Maybe I'll just turn 'im then won't have to worry," Spike muttered.

"Riiiight," Lorne chuckled.

"Don't think you know me, green bean," Spike growled and stomped over to his chair.

"I would never be that presumptuous," Lorne said with a smile.

"What about that meeting with Zorn?" Spike asked as he flopped down in his leather lazy boy.

"Should hear something by this afternoon."

"Good. Also been thinking."

"Well that can't be good...."

"Don't push it," growled Spike.

"Somebody needs a nap."

"And somebody will get it if a certain green demon would shut his yap!"

Lorne laughed.

"As I was sayin', been thinkin. Need ya to find someone we can trust. Someone we can trust with Xander or the bird, Tara. You or I might not always be available when one of 'em needs tendin' to or checked in on...plus it might be too...."

"Coddling if you or I are always with Xander?"

"Exactly. Need someone not tempted by their charms or other delights. Someone of minion status but someone who I can trust."

"No vampires?"

"Absolutely not. Least trustworthy of the lot."

"I've got some ideas," Lorne said. "I'll see what I can do. You finish transcribing the scroll?"

Spike nodded. "Now just gotta figure out a way to make it harder for Peaches to read without tying it back to me."

"Spike..."

"Look," Spike said, "He's got those soulless shysters workin' for 'im. Gotta find away to slow 'im
"down a bit."

"And if he finds out?"

"Well then he'll make a meatball sandwich out of my 'nads," Spike said. "And that's if I'm lucky."

"So what are you going to do?"

Spike bit his lip for a moment then looked back at Lorne. "How much hocus pocus does that Tara bint know?"

"She has a good deal of power and some skill but I didn't get a reading indicating she's the most powerful witch on her own," Lorne replied. "I think she'd do better in a coven or as a partner to a stronger witch. Why?"

"Might want to pick her brain."

"I hope you don't mean that literally?"

Spike laughed. "And risk another fit from Xan? I'm not ready to go through all that again."

"Well, she is in your stable," Lorne said.

"Right," Spike said and then finally downed the drink Lorne had shoved in his hand. Then he decided to change the subject again, "When do those pills wear off?"

"A few hours. Xander will probably wake up then. He'll most likely be hungry as well."

Spike nodded.

"Call down when you're ready and I'll bring up a tray," Lorne said.

"Real food for the boy. No more of this soft baby food crap. Something special too. Chocolate cake for dessert."

"Spike...."

"He deserves something special."

"Chocolate cake," Lorne smiled. "But if he gets sick, you clean it up."

"He won't get sick. This is Harris we're talking about. He can eat anything. I know. I've seen him. What he used to eat back in the 'Before...?'" Spike faked a shudder. "And he thinks my dietary habits are disgustin'!"

Lorne laughed, "I get the picture. I'll send for a minion or two to clean up this mess."

"Supervise 'em personally," Spike warned.

"Will do," Lorne said. "Now go. Go curl up around Xander and get some sleep. He'll need you when he wakes up."
Spike pulled himself up out of his chair. He looked at Lorne for a long moment.

"Thank you," he said softly and then headed back for the bedroom and for his pet.

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Xander really missed the ability to groan. There lacked a certain satisfaction in expressing one's pain if one couldn't vocalize it. Still, silent groaning meant he didn't wake the sleeping vampire...the sleeping NAKED vampire curled up around Xander. Spike was nestled against Xander's side. He had an arm wrapped around Xander's stomach and his head rested on Xander's chest. One of his legs had burrowed between Xander's legs and Xander got the odd feeling he'd moved from Pet to Teddy Bear.

_He looks so innocent like this_, Xander couldn't help but think as he stared down at Spike's peaceful face. It was only then Xander realized he had an arm wrapped around Spike. _OK...maybe he's the Teddy Bear._

Xander couldn't help but giggle a little at the thought. For some reason the thought of Spike as a vampiric teddy bear made him think of the children's book _Bunnicula_ and its sequel, _The Celery Stalks at Midnight._

Jesse and Xander would make Willow read the title of that book over and over again. It always reduced them to a fit of the giggles. Apparently the memories held the same power because Xander's diaphragm started to shake and shudder with his silent laughter.

_The celery stalks...,_ Xander laughed some more. Willow had always tried to read the book so seriously, as she did every book, and Jesse and Xander could never get past the pun.

"It's coming to get you, Willow," Jesse and Xander had chanted one late night during a sleepover as they chased Willow around the Rosenberg's kitchen with celery on their heads.

Xander's giggles turned into to full belly laughter.

"Oi! Tryin' to sleep here!" Spike grumbled. Brown eyes met blue and Xander giggled some more.

"Nutters! Why do I always get all the loonies?" Spike muttered and pulled himself up to seated position leaning against the headboard. He watched his pet laugh.

_Well at least it's better than waking up to him stinkin' of fear_, Spike thought.

"You about done?" Spike asked as Xander started to hiccups to a slow chortle. He nodded his head and pointed at Spike and then his chest.

"Somebody pushed my pillow off the bed now didn't they?" Spike answered. "'Sides, yer warm."

Xander rolled his eyes.

"How ya feelin'?"

Xander took a deep breath and tried to stretch. He winced. He was still very sore and aching. He held out a hand and rocked it back and forth.
"Got an idea about that," Spike said.

*More drugs?* Xander thought hopefully.

"Thought maybe I could work out some more of those kinks under a hot shower," Spike said too nonchalantly betraying just how cautious he was being.

Xander's heart started to beat frantically and he barely kept himself from shaking his head no. Instead he gave a very slow 'thumbs down.'

"Pet, you've taken a shower every day since you've been mine."

*And I make 'em the world's quickest showers. That's not gonna happen if you are in there with me...which would be the normal freak out but I'm by passing that for the abby normal freakout of I don't want to drown!* Xander thought.

"The things that happened...the things that made you afraid of drowning," Spike began as he picked up Xander's left hand and started to massage it gently, "were you by yourself?"

Xander studied Spike. *What are you up to Master Menace?* He thought and then nodded slowly.

"Pet, if I shower with you...you won't be alone."

*And that's a whole other freak out of its own, Fang Face.*

"Xan, already told you I won't let anything happen to you. Promised I'd take care of you."

*Well you're about five trips to the Tank too late, Xander thought bitterly.*

"Look...think back to the 'Before'....after a night of patrolin' with the slayer and yer usual role as bait and easy mark."

*Ah yes, Spike, your bedside manner is legendary,* Xander huffed and thought silently.

"Well, pet, I was there. Ya did spend an awful lot of the time pickin' yerself up off the ground and dustin' yerself off after bein' a cat's toy to some big, bad and ugly."

*Can you just get on with whatever point you were trying to make beyond my inherent Zepponess?* Xander thought as he made a rolling motion with his hand.

"Well think back to all those times...didn't a long hot shower feel good? Help ease those sore muscles?"

Xander closed his eyes. He did try and think of those times. Not because he really wanted to humor Spike, but they were good times. They were the times when Buffy, Willow and he thought all they needed were Giles and Mr. Pointy and they could save the world.

*How wrong we were,* Xander thought sadly. He did try and remember dragging himself to the Harris basement for a shower. There was no such thing as a long hot shower in the Harris house, but Xander did remember that for however long the hot water did last it did feel good on all the over used and abused muscles.
"At least try, Xander," Spike said softly while he worked the muscles in Xander's hand. "It's a least worth a try, innit?"

Xander opened his eyes and looked at Spike. Earnest and bright blue eyes met his guarded brown.

*What's in it for you?*

Spike cocked an eyebrow. "Could make it an order, but don't want to."

Xander sighed. *Well, since you put it that way,* he thought as he nodded.

"Good," Spike said as he rolled out of bed. He was on the other side and ready to help Xander up before Xander had come to a full seated position.

*I'm too young to feel this old,* Xander thought.

"Easy, pet," Spike said as he gently helped Xander to his feet. Xander gasped as his muscles in his back and he joints in his knees protested. He clutched Spike's arm for support.

"We'll move nice and slow, yeah?"

*We'll use a snail for the pace lap,* Xander thought as he slowly began to move forward with Spike's help.

Using Spike for support, and moving slowly, the pair eventually made it to the bathroom. Once there Spike left Xander leaning against the sink while he made his way to the shower to get the water running and ready. Xander nearly started to hyperventilate the minute Spike touched the shower door.

*If the drain clogs,* Xander thought, *I can't move quick enough to get out.*

"Pet," Spike said calmly but decisively, "I won't let anything happen to you. Trust me. I gave you my word as your master and the Master of Las Vegas. You'll be just fine."

Xander fixed panicked eyes on Spike and then on the shower door. Spike closed and opened the door a few times.

"Vampire here, pet. Somethin' happens, you think I couldn't just tear this door right off its hinges?"

Xander blinked. Spike was strong. Xander knew how strong Buffy was and Spike had gone toe to toe with her many times. Xander shook his head.

"'S right. I can tear this door off with one hand and have you over my shoulder with the other. Hell might even do that even if there isn't a problem. Might do it just cuz it's fun. Yer firm little butt under my hand while yer meat and veggies rubbin' up against my shoulder while I'm doin' a spot a violence.....," Spike trailed off with an evil grin.

Xander swallowed. *OK... again  I must critique you on your bedside manner and lack thereof.*

Spike laughed and ducked into the shower. He turned the water on, adjusted the temperature and bounded back out to Xander.
"Ready?"

Xander shook his head.

"Want me to carry ya?"

An image of being carried naked over Spike's shoulder flashed through Xander's mind. He shook his head and made a tentative step for the shower.

"Spoilsport," Spike said and then quickly moved beside Xander to help him. Once again, Spike let Xander set the pace. They slowly made their way to the shower. The closer they got the more frantic Xander's heart beat.

"'S OK, pet," Spike soothed. "I got ya. Think about how good this will feel. It will. Only good stuff, Xan, nothing bad."

Xander's teeth were almost chattering by the time they reached the shower. He could feel steam from the hot water wrap around and cling to him. He almost turned to wrap around and cling to Spike. He steeled himself instead. I can do this, Xander thought. He then made himself take a step into the shower. Spike quickly followed. Xander moved as quickly as he could to the far wall and Spike shut the door.

Immediately the shower felt twice as small. The steam was thick and Spike took up that much more room. Xander frantically looked at the bottom of the shower to make sure the water was draining. It was.

"Shhh, Xander," Spike said soothingly as he approached his terrified pet. "It's all right."

Xander frantically shook his head and looked at the door.

"You want out all ready?" Spike asked as he inched closer.

Xander nodded emphatically.

"Let me at least rub yer shoulders."

Xander shook his head.

"Xander," Spike said sharply.

Xander's frightened gaze focused on Spike.

"You can do this," Spike said as he reached Xander. He gently put his hands on Xander's waist and began to turn him toward the wall. "Turn around and lean against the wall. Let me take care of you."

Xander clenched his fists and let himself be turned to face the wall. He kept his eyes on the floor and watched the water swirl quickly down the drain. He felt Spike move away briefly and the water was suddenly hitting him just between his shoulders. He gasped. It both frightened him and yet felt so good at the same time. Then Spike's firm hands were suddenly on him. They were slick with the hot water. They began to knead, caress and manipulate Xander's flesh. He gasped again trying to process both his fear and pleasure at the same time.
He wasn't sure when his fear lost out to pleasure, but at some point Xander relaxed under Spike's touch. His breathing became deep and regular. His hands were no longer clenched into tight fists against the wall, rather they were flat and pressing lightly against it for support. Spike, ever the master, read his pet and moved his caresses lower down Xander's back. He adjusted the water as he went so that wherever Spike was working to unknit the knots in Xander's muscles, the hot water was there pounding against his flesh to help.

Xander couldn't help but sighing over and over. He didn't even flinch when Spike knelt down and began to knead and stroke the firm globes of his ass. Instead he unconsciously arched his back and offered Spike greater access.

Spike breathed deep the air he didn't need. He was drinking in the scent of his pet heavy on the shower's steam. He was drunk on it along with the rich feel of Xander's hot skin. Spike was glad Xander's face was turned away because half the time Spike was in his game face. He craved to sink his fangs into Xander and drink deeply the blood coursing just under all that hot tasty skin. Or other times, Spike looked on Xander with such lust he knew he'd send the boy into a panic.

As Spike knelt down and worked his hands up, over and round Xander's ass his pet's tight pucker beckoned to him. He wanted to dive in, fill it up, pound into all the lusciousness that was Xander until his boy was screaming out Spike's name.

There's the rub though innit, Spike thought bitterly. Azora's taken my boy's voice. Can't hear him scream out my name.

Spike moved his hands down Xander's legs and worked the muscles there. Gonna pay for that, Spike vowed.

Xander spread his legs wider to give Spike more room. Spike leaned in close and rumbled deep in his chest.

MINE! The demon roared silently. Spike ran his hands firmly down Xander's legs and then snaked them back up. He used his thumbs to stroke and caress the line where Xander's ass met the top of Xander's legs.

Xander's breathing hitched. Spike stroked his thumbs in wider circles over Xander's globes and then began to lightly kiss the inside of Xander's thighs.

Xander's eyes flew open. Spike! Xander thought and looked down. He could see Spike was kneeling behind him, between his legs and was lightly kissing him. He was also fully erect. Xander tried to shift his legs close but firm hands stopped him.

"Know what feels really good?" Spike softly growled against Xander's skin.

Xander shook his head. Spike's wicked thumbs were circling tighter now and moving towards a private target.

"Endorphins," Spike said and then began licking and making small bites across Xander's ass.

Xander gasped and his cock started to fill.

"A good orgasm," Spike continued punctuating each syllable with a nibble or a kiss as he followed the trail his thumbs blazed, "will release all these happy chemicals in the brain which will make you
feel so much better than Lorne's pills."

Xander found he was clenching his hands into fists again. His heart was beating faster and his breathing was quick. Spike's clever thumbs stroked down the crease between Xander's ass cheeks.

"Let me make you feel good, Xander," Spike said as he licked open that musky valley.

Fuck! Xander thought. He was fully hard. He'd been played with too much the night before and hadn't come for this not to have an effect on him. Yet, unwanted memories were pressing in on him. He couldn't help but think of being chained to a wall and his pleasure being ripped away from him as a means to an end for someone else's high.

As Spike's tongue began to dart in and out between Xander's cheeks he could begin to taste the faint, bitter and acrid traces of fear. Spike ceased his teasing and laid his forehead gently to Xander's ass.

"Pet," he said softly. "'M not going to hurt you."

Xander trembled. He was once again caught between fear and pleasure. He was trapped between need and memory.

Spike slowly ran his tongue up Xander's spine as he stood up. His body blocked the water that had been pounding down on Xander. For a moment, Xander felt lost without the water's presence. Then Spike laid his hands on Xander's shoulders and gently turned Xander around.

Xander was hard, erect and once again afraid. Spike sighed and reached around to adjust the water so the water was pounding at his feet. Then he looked back at Xander. He took a deep breath. Xander was afraid, but he was pumping out pheromones and the musky scent of his precum hung heavy in the air.

"Got an idea," Spike said with his sexiest smile as he took a step back from Xander and wrapped a hand around his own heavy cock. "You show me yours and I'll show you mine?"

Xander blinked. His fear went on hold for a moment as he tried to process what Spike was proposing.

"C'mon, pet," Spike crooned as he snaked his other hand down his stomach to capture his balls and roll them gently. "It's the oldest game in the book."

Xander licked his lips. Spike's...Spike's....he's....GUH! Xander's brain short-circuited. Spike was smiling and slowly stroking his long cock. He ran a thumb over the top of his crown and he licked his lips like he wanted to taste.

I shouldn't be watching this! Xander thought but little Xander was glad he was and for some perverse reason, and Xander really thought it must be perverse, little Xander was getting happier by the minute by Spike's display. Xander's memories were definitely being crowded out by his new prurient curiosity.

"Yer not playing fair, pet," Spike teasingly scolded by waving his dick at Xander. Little Xander twitched and Xander found his right hand grasping his shaft without his brain's express permission. "That's it, Xander. Show me what ya got."

Spike watched Xander hungrily as Xander's hand remembered what to do. It wrapped around
Xander's cock and began a firm and steady rhythm. Spike smiled and mirrored Xander's movements. Xander's eyes widened and gasped.

"Mmmm, nice pet," Spike said. "Yer definitely a big boy. All grown up."

Xander blushed. Spike was comparing their cocks and while they were roughly the same length, Xander's was thicker.

"Ever done this? Wanked off with another bloke?"

Xander shook his head. He moved his left hand down and rolled his balls between his thumb and forefinger. Spike did the same. Xander shuddered.

"You wanna touch it?" Spike asked


Spike took a half a step closer to Xander and leaned forward so one hand was on the wall and his mouth was by Xander's ear.

"Women are all nice and curvy. Smell good and are soft in all the right places. But they don't have the same parts see? And sometimes a bloke gets tired of his own hand but yet wants someone who knows what to do with the bishop and his cobblers," Spike whispered into Xander's ear. "Wanna trade, pet?"

Xander was stroking faster. He licked his lips and slid his eyes to left to look at Spike. Spike was smiling and licking his lips again as if he were anticipating a yummy treat. Xander remembered how cool and smooth Spike had felt when he'd undressed him. He wondered if he felt that cool smooth everywhere or would he be hot? Would he be hot like Xander was right now? Would Xander be able to feel the blood flowing in the vein that ran along that long pale penis or would it feel like stone wrapped in silk?

A silent groan escaped Xander's lips. He was so close! He pumped harder and faster. Spike matched his pace.

"Invite me to this dance, pet," Spike whispered again. "I promise not to step on yer toes."

What does that even MEAN? Xander silently panted and desperately wanted to come but Little Xander wasn't cooperating.

"Problem, pet?"

Xander nodded.

"I can solve it," Spike promised.

Xander gave another one of his soundless groans. He stared into Spike's eyes. This will change everything, Xander thought in a last ditch argument for sanity.

Spike moved in closer. Xander looked down and could see their cocks were perpendicular to each other. He could feel the graze of Spike's knuckles against the back of his own as their hands slid and stroked across their shafts in the same rhythm.

YES! Xander silently screamed and suddenly found himself wrapping his hand around Spike's cool length. His eyes opened wider and gasped in shock and pleasure. His brain seized as he tried to process the wonderful feel of Spike's penis sliding like the cool silk he imagined under his palm. Like everything else about Spike it was strong, lean and perfectly sculpted. Yet, it was also the most 'alive' feeling thing Xander have ever touched. He was hypnotized by the feel and found he wanted to stroke, caress and map out all its secrets. Spike groaned and gasped and somehow that spurred Xander's desire even further.

Yet, as entranced as Xander was by the feel of Spike's cock in his hand he was enraptured by the feel of his cock in Spike's hand. Spike's cool hand had wrapped around Xander in ownership and now stroked him in possession. Little Xander jumped and raced to obey. Xander gasped and silently moaned. He felt the tingle in his spine and his balls began to draw up. He wanted to let go, to cum and yet he wanted to drive Spike mad. He wanted release and he wanted to prolong this.

This wasn't being torn from him. This was being coaxed and seduced. He was coaxing and seducing. He was hungry for his own release and his was begging for Spike's release as well.

Spike ran a thumb under the head of Xander's cock where the bundle of nerves were bunched and hidden. Lightening raced down Xander's nervous system, his balls tightened and his thrust. He opened his mouth in a silent scream of, *Spike!*

As soon as the hot seed began to spurt across his hand Spike grabbed the back of Xander's neck and pulled his pet to him. He covered his mouth, covered his silent scream and let loose his own control. He gasped and kissed greedily at Xander's mouth until he felt his own lightening strike and he began to spurt his own spill.

"Xan...Xander...pet," Spike panted and kissed at Xander's lips until only the tiniest shudders rocked his body. Xander still clutched at him like a life line. Then Spike gently released his hold on Xander's spent member. He looked at Xander. Xander's head was thrown back against the wall and tiny tracks of moisture were leaking out the corner of his tightly closed eyes.

"Xander?" Spike asked worriedly. His pet released him and slid slowly to the floor. Quickly Spike spun around and turned off the water. He grabbed a wet rag wiped Xander's face and then their hands.

"Pet," Spike said softly. "Are you hurt?"

Xander shook his head.

"Look at me, pet."

Xander opened his eyes. Spike read a mix of sorrow and happiness in those eyes. Even if Xander could talk, there was too much there for words.

"Scoot forward," Spike ordered and then slid in behind Xander. Spike sat with his back to the wall and Xander between his legs. He wrapped his arms around Xander and pulled him close to his chest. He rested his head on Xander shoulder.

"I loved Dru, you know," Spike said softly.
Xander sniffed.

"Oh I know those watcher journals tell ya vampires don't love, but I know love Xander and I loved her. She was my destiny...but Dru she was Angelus's child, yeah? She was his creation and before she was my princess she was 'is."

Spike...

"And what Daddy wanted, Daddy got. So if it was play time with 'is little girl...well then..."

Eww...Xander thought.

"Or if it was play time with Dru's child...."

Dru's child? Xander's eyes went wide and he tried to turn in Spike's arms but Spike wouldn't let him.

"Hold still," Spike commanded softly.

Spike...you don't have to...Xander tried to process his thoughts through his own confusion even as he settled back down into Spike's arms.

"My first time back with Dru...my first time with her after...well it was heaven and hell," Spike said. "Heaven cuz it was Dru and all the darkness and sweetness I knew with Dru...and it was Hell cuz it was such a stark difference from everything...every way it had been with Angelus."

Xander exhaled shakily. He nodded his head. Spike was heaven and hell.

"It got better though, Xander. More visits to Heaven...less reminders of Hell."

Really? I don't know if I can ever...forget.

"Don't get me wrong, Xander," Spike said as he tightened his arms around his pet. "You don't ever forget but you move forward. You get better and you put the memories in a little box where they don't hurt so bad. You make new ones...better ones...and you give them all the room. I want you Xander. The demon in me is see, want, take. But if I 'take' you Xander, I know that I really won't 'get' you. What I 'want,' you can only give...like 'ere in the shower."

Xander blushed and Spike lightly kissed Xander's ear.

"Won't mean I won't push, taunt and tease...but Xan I want ta give ya better memories then what ya came with, yeah?"

Xander nodded. I don't understand you, Spike. Just please, don't be setting me up for a fall.

Then they just sat on the shower floor for few moments lost in their own thoughts and memories. Spike kept his arms wrapped around Xander soaking up his warmth while Xander soaked up Spike's strength.

"All right then," Spike finally said as he unwrapped his arms. "Up!"

Xander stood up and they moved out of the shower. Between the mind blowing sex, the massage
and the hot water, Xander did feel better. Spike still insisted on drying them both off before leading them back to the bedroom. Then Spike tucked Xander back into bed sitting up against the headboard. He picked up the phone and called down to Lorne and ordered Xander's dinner.

"Got something special for you tonight," Spike said as he got the tube of Arnica gel out and began treating Xander's knees, wrists and ankles again.

**Oatmeal?** Xander wondered.

"Also thought we might visit Tara tomorrow. Got some questions to ask her."

**Questions?** Xander shot a panicked look Spike.

"Just questions. Not interrogatin' her," Spike replied.

Once Spike was done with Arnica gel he treated Xander's nipple ring and ear. By the time he was finished, Lorne arrived.

"Stay put," Spike said as he left the bedroom to go get the tray.

"How is...OH!" Lorne said as his nostrils flared wide. "Lemon drop!"

"Endorphins!" Spike said defensively.

"Well if that isn't the *worst* line I've ever heard! No wonder there hasn't been anyone since Dru."

"Oi! There's been lots of birds *and* blokes since Dru,"

Lorne cocked an eyebrow, "Anyone you *didn't* have for dinner?"

"Vampire here!"

"And playing with your food is a disgusting habit."

"Did you set that meeting up or what?" growled Spike.

"I did, but there's one problem."

"Wot?"

"Vr'kxl heard about the punishment. He wants Xander at the meeting so Zorn can makes sure the 'bottle' isn't damaged."

"Did you tell 'im to I've got a railroa..."

"I'll told him you'd meet him half past midnight. That gives you plenty of time to prepare Xander and talk with Tara before the meeting," Lorne said handing the tray to Spike.

"Lorne!"

"Spike, you want information? You have this meeting. Now, go feed Xander. I can hear his stomach rumbling from here."
"You can?" Spike said and half turned to head to the bedroom. "Wait! I don't like this plan."

"Neither do I but a stalemate doesn't do us any good. Now go take care of Xander."

Spike glared at Lorne for a moment then said, "Make sure security's tight."

"Already on it," Lorne said.

"Good," Spike said and then headed off to the bedroom.

Xander was waiting for him right where Spike left him. Spike heard a rumbling noise and Xander blushed.

"Oi! Sounds like a Hellmouth opening in here!" Spike said as he set the tray down on the bed and pulled off the lid.

Xander's eyes went wide. On the tray was bonafide cheeseburger with everything, fries, and a coke with lots of ice. However, what had Xander drooling on the sheets was the large slice of chocolate cake sitting next to a glass of milk.

"One condition, pet," Spike said.

Anything, Xander promised.

"Don't get sick!"

Xander laughed and nodded. NO way will I waste this by throwing it all back up!

Spike smiled and then waved his hand at the tray. "Why don't you feed yerself tonight. Go slow! I see you wolfin' it down I'm flushin' it down the toilet!"

Xander paled and silently promised to chew each bite a hundred...well maybe seventy-five...well...at least thirty times.

"I'll read, yeah?"

Xander nodded as he stuffed a single fry into his mouth and began to savor each slow salty greasy chew.

Spike smiled and fished out his glasses. He picked up his copy of Ivanhoe and got comfortable and began to read.

As Spike read, "The acclamations of thousands applauded the unanimous award of the Prince and marshals, announcing that day's honours to the Disinherited Knight," Xander burped and finished his meal.

He was asleep before Spike could start the next chapter.
Spike burrowed and nestled closer to the solid heat beside him. He wrapped his arm tightly around the warm mass and snugly buried his head into the flushed crevasse he found. He snoozed blissfully for a moment before something poked him in the side. Spike growled. Something poked him again.

Spike blinked his eyes open and found his face nestled in the crook of Xander's neck. Once again something poked him.

"Wot?" he snarled and propped himself up on an elbow to look at his pet. Xander frowned and pointed at his waist.

Spike looked down. Xander's cock was at half mast. Spike smiled.

"Woke me up for seconds?"

Xander rolled his eyes and shook his head. I have to pee, Master Moron!

"Loo then?" Spike asked as he rolled reluctantly away from his pet.

Xander nodded and started to roll out of bed. He hissed. His muscles weren't as happy as they had been when he'd gone to bed. Still, they were better than after his punishment.

"Need help?"

Xander shook his head. Been peeing on my own for a while now, he thought as he made it to his feet and started to stumble toward the bathroom. Spike flopped on his back and sighed dramatically. Xander rolled his eyes and concentrated on picking up the pace. He blushed when he saw the shower.

Great, he thought as he made it to the toilet, after yesterday's 'moment' I may never shower again and my water phobia makes the bath out of the question. Should just change my name from Xander Harris to Stinky Harris.

When Xander was finished he turned to wash his hands in the sink and nearly jumped out of his skin. Spike was standing in the bathroom doorway watching him! Xander pointed a finger at him.

You're the one who needs a collar... and a bell! Xander thought as his heart thudded. And why were you watching me anyway? Don't tell me you have some sort of bathroom fetish?

Spike chuckled, "Didn't mean to startle ya, pet."

Right, you perv! Xander thought as he finally made it to the sink and washed his hands.

"Bed's cold without you."

Get an electric blanket.
"Oi! Now what ya doin?" Spike asked as he saw Xander pick up his toothbrush and toothpaste.

Xander turned around and made an exaggerated show of brushing his teeth. *Prevents tooth decay! I'd think a vampire would want to know more about it.*

"You look like a rabid dog," Spike said.

Xander rolled his eyes, turned around and spat. He rinsed and spat again.

"Ya done, yet?" Spike whined.

Xander wiped his mouth with a towel and then nodded.

"Right!" Spike said and snagged Xander's arm. "Back to bed."

Xander followed orders and Spike. He climbed back up in the bed and under the covers. Spike immediately draped himself over Xander. Once again he buried his face in the crook of Xander's neck, tucked his arm around Xander's waist and nestled a leg between Xander's legs. Spike sighed contentedly. Xander rolled his eyes.

*From Pet to hot water bottle, Xander thought.*

The two lay like that for a few moments. Spike snuggled happily against his warm pet and Xander lay staring at the ceiling. The only sound and movement were Xander's breathing. Then the silence was ruptured. Xander's stomach rumbled noisily.

"Bloody hell!" Spike snarled into Xander's neck.

Xander suppressed a laugh.

"Yer hungry again?"


Spike rolled over and flopped on his back. He snorted then rolled over onto his side. He picked up the phone, there was a pause and then he barked, "Whelp's hungry again."

Spike hung up the phone and rolled back over to Xander. He propped himself up on an elbow and looked down at him. A slow smile spread across Spike's face.

"So," he asked, "if we can't sleep... what do we do 'til Lorne arrives with yer brekkies?"

Xander's eyes widened. *We can try sleeping again, Xander thought, or... or there's cards!* He pantomimed shuffling a deck of cards.

Spike laughed, "Cards are over on the desk... and I don't want to leave the nice warm bed."

Xander started to move and Spike put a hand on his arm. Xander looked at Spike.

"How about some wake up snoggin?"

_Uhm... Old Maid sounds much better. I'm really killer at Old Maid. Leads to less trouble and no_
possible wet spots. Xander blinked and bit his lip.

"C'mon Xander," Spike whispered and then began nuzzling his nose by Xander's ear, "Can't sleep. Not enough time for anything more interestin'. 'Sides, you just brushed yer teeth. Be a shame to waste all that minty freshness."

Ok, Xander thought and frowned even though other parts of him were starting to get happy. I thought vampires were supposed to have smoother lines than that!

Spike propped himself up again and looked at Xander. He waggled his eyebrows.

That really shouldn't be cute! Or at the very least... as a red-blooded-desperately-trying-to-remain-a-heterosexual male... I shouldn't find that cute, Xander thought and sighed. He held up one finger. One kiss!

"Right," Spike purred. "One minute of snoggin',"

Xander's eyes flew open wide and before he could protest or try to explain, Spike pounced. Xander wiggled and Spike quickly pinned Xander's wrists above his head and straddled his hips.

"Shhh, pet," he said. "I'll keep all the kissin' above the neck, yeah?"

I don't really have a ch... Xander paused in mid-thought. In the past he truly didn't have a choice. While his choices with Spike were few, he did have them and Spike had made it clear moments like these were one of them. He studied Spike. Spike was pushing but he wasn't taking. Xander nodded. Another one of those slow sexy smiles spread across Spike's face and then he slowly descended.

Xander had expected Spike to lay claim to his mouth in a searing kiss of dominance. Instead, Spike started to pepper tiny kisses along Xander's jawline starting at his chin and working slowly to his ear. Spike took his time blazing his trail leaving a bewildering sense of expectation growing in his wake. Eventually Spike reached his target. Xander gasped as Spike sucked an earlobe gently between his cool lips and nibbled gently.

Spike took his time tasting and teasing Xander's sensitive flesh. When Xander turned his head to offer Spike more access, he released Xander's wrists and slowly snaked his hands down Xander's arms. He trailed kisses down Xander's neck and then bit gently at the sweet juncture where neck meets shoulder. Xander's toes curled.

This shouldn't feel so good! Xander thought as his heart pounded and his breathing grew rapid. His skin tingled and he was torn between wanting more and wishing he hadn't agreed to this. It was all so confusing.

Spike worked his hands down to Xander's chest and slowly rubbed circles around Xander's brown and pert nipples. Xander gasped again and arched his neck. Spike sucked, nibbled and kissed Xander's exposed Adam's apple. He licked and laved the hollow at the base of Xander's neck.

Xander arched underneath Spike and buried his hands in Spike's hair. He pulled the vampire closer. Spike purred and the vibrations traveled down Xander's spine straight to his hardening cock.

Spike kissed his way up Xander's neck. He bit down on Xander's chin and pulled back. Xander silently whimpered and looked at Spike.
"Mine," Spike said fiercely and then finally dove in for the searing dominant kiss Xander had expected from the beginning. Xander's mouth welcomed Spike's claim. Spike drove his tongue in and out of Xander's wet heat searching for all the flavors that were uniquely Xander. He mimicked with his tongue what he wanted to do with his cock; dive deep in and out of Xander until Xander was well and truly fucked. Xander got the message. He clutched at Spike in a mix of want and confusion. His body ached and responded to Spike acknowledging its master. His mind raced, still trying to process his recent past and this strange new attraction to a very male Spike.

Spike began to gentle his kiss and then brought it to a mellow close. Xander lay underneath him flushed and breathing heavily. His arms dropped away from Spike and fell to his side. Spike could smell the want and a hint of fear. He kissed Xander's nose quickly then sat back still straddling his pet. He wiggled his butt against Xander's hard cock and Xander blushed.

"Now that's a much better way to start the day," Spike said.

*I'm thinking I'd be less confused and more comfortable if we'd stuck with Old Maid,* Xander thought as he tried to calm his system down and will his hardon away.

"Think we should start every day with a bit of snoggin'."

Xander paled.

"C'mon, pet. Wasn't so bad, was it?"

Xander wasn't sure how to answer that question. Technically it wasn't bad. Yet it was of the very bad.

"Pet?"

Xander wiggled his hand back and forth. Spike laughed.

"Stubborn git," Spike said as he climbed off Xander and then the bed.

Xander took a deep breath and rolled off the bed. He stood up and watched Spike pull on a pair of jeans.

"Gonna leave 'em unbuttoned till the boys settle down," Spike said as he grinned and winked at Xander.

Xander rolled his eyes and moved to the wardrobe to get his own pair of pants.

"Pet?"

Xander turned at Spike's question.

"Whatcha doin'?"

*Gettin' dressed,* Xander thought and pointed at the wardrobe and then himself.

Spike shook his head. "Not until after breakfast and we're ready to go downstairs."

Xander blinked.
"No need for you to wear clothes here in the suite. I let ya wear clothes cuz I don't want others lookin' at what's mine. When we're up here you'll be in just yer birthday suit unless I say otherwise."

Xander paled. *I should have known! You are just like the rest. I'm still just a puppet... a toy... a thing for your amusement. Nothing's changed!* Xander thought angrily.

Spike sighed. Xander's heart was racing and this time there was no scent of fear. *Back to the two step shuffle again,* he thought.

"Hello!" Lorne's voice drifted in from the front room of the suite startling both men. Spike buttoned up his jeans and looked at Xander.

"C'mon, let's go get ya fed," Spike said and walked out of the bedroom. Xander followed and tried not to think of the picture he made naked and half hard following Spike.

"There you are," Lorne said cheerily as he sat a tray down on the wet bar. Xander moved to kneel on his cushion.

"Oi! Not there, pet. Get on the couch. Wanna keep yer kneeling to a minimum today."

Xander nodded and moved to the couch. He sat down in a stiff pose and stared absently at nothing. Lorne looked at Xander then at Spike.

"You've been fighting again?" he asked.

"Pets don't fight with their masters," Spike replied coolly. *I hate it when he plays the bleedin' statue!* he thought.

"He's upset," Lorne observed.

"He's human," Spike snorted and moved an ottoman over by the couch. "Lay back and put yer feet up. Sit up against the side of the couch."

*Yes oh master,* Xander thought sarcastically. *I hear and obey.*

"Thought things were better between you?"

"Apparently a mutual wank doesn't get ya what it used to," Spike said as he picked up the tray and moved to the ottoman.

"Spike!" Lorne shouted as Xander locked flashing and angry eyes on Spike.

"Ah... that broke you of your statue routine, didn't?" Spike said.

"I'm sorry, Xander," Lorne said. "He knows what manners are... I just can't get him to use them."

Spike pulled the lid off the tray to reveal a plate of scrambled eggs, French toast and bacon. Xander's nostrils flared at the wonderful smell and his mouth began to water.

"If you can get over yer pout you can have breakfast," Spike said as he speared a bit of the toast, coated thickly with butter and syrup, on the tip of his fork.
What do you want from me? Xander thought as he eyed the food.

"What is he upset about?" Lorne asked.

"Being starkers in the suite," Spike said as he waited for some sign of submission from Xander. You will be my Pet, Spike thought. I will not give on this point, Xander. It's too dangerous.

"Xander," Lorne said soothingly, "you know slaves are naked. You were naked when you were brought here."

"He's had a taste of wearin' clothes again. Feels modesty again. Also makin' the mistake that cuz things were going good between us I'll change the rules," Spike said. Xander flashed his eyes at Spike again.

You could you know, Xander thought.

"Xander," Lorne tried again. "Spike can get away with letting you wear clothes outside the suite because you're a Pet. It's a privilege he really has... not you. It's because as your master he can decide how much of you he wants on display to others or not. Just as he can decide if he wants to share you or not. As with any other slave... he owns you... but the difference is he favors you. However, when you're in his suite and it's just him and demons he trusts there's no reason for him to 'cover you' up. To do otherwise implies that your wearing clothes is less about his wants and desires and more about yours."

This shouldn't have to be explained to you, pet, Spike thought. You should just accept what I say because I say it. I'm your master! The sooner you learn this, the better.

Xander looked at Lorne. And what I want doesn't matter in this world does it?

"Are you hungry or not?" Spike asked.

Xander focused his attention back on Spike. Xander nodded.

"Then I think you should find a way to show me you understand what Lorne has just said and that we won't be having this discussion again," Spike commanded.

Xander sighed. There's my Master. There's Spike, the Master of Las Vegas, Xander thought and suddenly missed the Spike who'd used him for a hot water bottle minutes earlier. Xander reached out and tentatively grabbed Spike's free hand. Slowly he brought it to his lips and then gently kissed it.

"That's a start," Spike said and wished it was enough. "I think you should also bend your knees, spread your legs and put yourself fully on display while I feed you."

"Spike!" Lorne hissed.

"Lorne, will you excuse us?" Spike asked then added. "Now!"

Lorne shot a sympathetic look at Xander then left the suite.

Xander's eyes flashed and his body flushed red with a combination of embarrassment and anger.
"Get into position pet, and do it quickly before I decide to make you play with yerself as well."

Xander quickly bent his knees and spread his legs. *I HATE you*, he thought as he stared angrily at Spike.

"You will stay this way through breakfast," Spike said as he moved the fork to Xander's mouth. Xander accepted the food in jerky quick movements. "Understand?"

Xander nodded and chewed slowly the food which had gone tasteless and unappealing.

"And Pet, you will clean your plate today," Spike ordered and held out the forkful of egg.

*I really HATE you*, Xander thought as he took the bite of egg Spike offered.

Spike sighed. The evening had started out with such a pleasant snog.

***

Spike had taken his time feeding Xander breakfast. Xander alternated between feeling embarrassed, angry and oddly betrayed. Intellectually he knew it shouldn't be a big deal. He'd been naked and worse in front of the Azora and his 'friends' for months. Yet, with Spike it had been different. With Spike he'd felt like a human again not just like a thing. Spike had dressed him, talked to him, touched him gently and had actually *cared* for him when he hurt.

*OK so he caused the hurt*, Xander thought as he silently fumed and chewed the last bite of bacon, *but he had cared*.

Now Spike was treating him like a thing again. Throughout the meal Spike made a show of looking openly and wantonly at every intimate place on display. Sometimes he'd even comment about Xander's penis and balls. Sometimes he'd touch them in a way one might idly stroke a knickknack on a shelf. Xander looked at his plate. It was empty. *Please let this ordeal be over now*.

"Up!" Spike commanded.

Xander swallowed and got to his feet. Spike moved the ottoman. Spike stepped back a few steps from Xander and raked his eyes over him.

"Give me ten jumping jacks!" Spike barked.

*What?* Xander thought and locked eyes with Spike. Spike's eyes flashed gold and Xander started to jump.

"One! Two! Three!..." Spike counted out each jump until Xander was done.

"Run in place until I say stop," Spike ordered.

Xander ground his teeth together and began to jog. Spike walked around him.

"Pet, understand, I want you naked, you'll be naked." Spike said. "I want you to jog, you'll jog. I'm your Master. When I give you an order or a rule, ya don't bloody question it or pout over it or bloody resent it, you obey it! You're a pampered and spoiled slave... a Pet... but yer still a slave. Lorne shouldn't have ta give ya the ABCs about a rule before ya decide whether it makes sense to you. I
say it, you do it. It's that soddin' simple, pet."

*Then why pretend you care?* Xander wonder. *Why bother?*

"Stop!"

Xander came to a stop. He wasn't even winded. *The Azora captivity program was good for something,* Xander thought.

"Bend over and spread 'em!"

Xander didn't let himself think. He couldn't. He bent over and grabbed his ass and spread his cheeks. He stared at the carpet and tried to pretend he wasn't there. Spike ran his hand down Xander's back and slid a finger down the wide crack of his ass.

"Mmmm," Spike commented and then walked away.

Spike walked over to the wet bar and poured a drink. He slowly sipped his drink while watching Xander. His pet remained bent over with his ass cheeks spread and with his face growing redder from the blood flow rushing to his head.

"You can stand up now, Xan," Spike said after he finished his drink.

Xander stood up slowly. He was a little dizzy as the blood started to reflow in all the correct directions. He looked at Spike.

"C'mere."

Xander walked over to Spike. Spike gently brushed a finger down Xander's cheek. Xander wanted to jerk away from the touch but held still.

*I don't understand you,* Xander thought.

"Are you clear about this now, pet?" Spike asked. "Do you understand the rule about no clothes in the suite unless I say otherwise?"

*Waterford,* Xander thought.

"Do you accept it?"

Xander frowned. *Accept it?*

"Pet, I'm prepared to do this little exercise every meal and every day until you do. I *will* escalate it, even. I won't have you pouting or being angry or even embarrassed. You don't have those luxuries any more."

*There not luxuries! They're emotions!*

"You. Are. A. PET!" Spike said very precisely and enunciating each word. "You. Are. MY. Pet."

*I know that!*
"I favor you, Xander. Ya please me greatly. I want ya, but do not think for one MINUTE, that I will treat you or keep ya as anything but a PET," he said. *I can't.*

*Of course not,* Xander thought bitterly.

"Do you understand the rule?"

Xander nodded.

"Do you accept it?"

*I have no choice,* Xander thought and nodded. Spike held out his hands. Xander took them and kissed each one.

"Now go get yer shower and do yer human stuff. I'll help you dress when I get back. We have a long and difficult evening ahead of us."

Xander cocked an eyebrow. *We do?* he thought.

"Go!" Spike ordered. *What's it going to take ta get through ta him?* Spike wondered and worried.

Xander went.

***

When Xander stepped out the shower Spike was waiting. He was dressed all in black; black dress slacks, black silk shirt, black trouser socks, even black dress shoes. Despite what had happened at breakfast, Xander couldn't help but find Spike breathtaking.

"All dried off, pet?" Spike asked.

Xander nodded.

"Good," Spike said and held out Xander's leather pants. Xander looked around. *No chastity belt?*

"We may need to put on a good show tonight," Spike said and juggled the pants.

*I'm not sure I like the sounds of that,* Xander thought and took the pants. Spike had already put powder in them so the slid on easily. He helped Xander button them up. Then he picked up a red silk shirt and helped Xander put it on over his arms. Once again he had Xander leave it loose and open in the front. Then Spike clipped the leash on in front.

"You look nummy," Spike said. Then leaned in quick for a kiss on Xander's nose. Xander frowned and pointed at Spike and then at his nose. *Why do you do that?*

Spike laughed. "Well, anybody but me ever kiss you there before?"

Xander shook his head.

"See, it's virgin territory," Spike purred. "And it's all mine."

Xander rolled his eyes and Spike swooped in for another kiss on the nose. This time he bit the tip
lightly. Xander wanted to make the 'loco' sign with his finger but thought better of it.

"C'mon, Lorne's waiting for us," Spike said. Then he turned and led Xander out of the office and the suite.

They rode silently in the elevator. Xander kept studying Spike trying to figure out who he was. He was quickly beginning to understand there were many sides to Spike. He wasn't just a one trick vampire. *The trouble is*, Xander thought, *I'm not always sure what trick he's playing.*

When the elevator stopped, Spike led them off and out onto the casino floor. He let Xander's leash hang loose and free. The message was clear: Xander was back in his good graces again. Some of the same demons who had taunted and mocked him the night before now smiled and nodded at him but didn't say a word. As always, the crowd parted before Spike. Tonight though, Spike worked it. He stopped and shook hands. Shared a joke or two and asked about winnings or drinks. Xander stayed quietly behind him unless it was one of those times when Spike crooked his finger. Then Xander sidled up to him and began the 'Master Pet' show.

Only this time there was more heat and fire than there had been his first night on the casino floor. Xander's mind and heart could reject Spike and question his mastery, but not his body. Spike would wrap his arms around Xander pressing his back into his chest. He'd casually trail his fingertips down Xander's chest or play with Xander's nipple ring while he talked to his patrons. When it was their turn to talk, Spike would kiss and worry the skin on Xander's neck. Sometimes he'd let his fingers brush the front of Xander's groin; lightly and oh so teasingly until Xander couldn't help but thrust his hip forward just a little for more contact. Spike would then reward him by slipping a thumb in his waistband and lightly caressing the tip of Xander engorged crown. The crowd would murmur and Xander would flush. Spike would withdraw his thumb and rub the pad over Xander's lips before then claiming them in a hot open-mouthed kiss.

The routine was the same. Simple touches and searing kisses left Xander hard and flushed. The demons would then seem to press closer and Spike would wrap his arms tighter around Xander. He'd chuckle and then move on a little farther down the line.

Eventually they made it to Spike's office. Lorne waited for them.

"Spike... Cupcake... wha..."

"Don't start with me, Lorne," Spike said as he slid into his chair. He held up a hand to stop Xander who was about to kneel beside him.

"Strip, pet," Spike ordered.

Xander looked at Spike but immediately began removing his clothes. *OK, I know this Spike*, Xander thought. *Played with him at breakfast. Not doing that again.*

"Lemon drop?" Lorne asked again.

Xander sighed when he undid his pants. *At least I'm a little more comfortable*, he thought as he freed his swollen cock from the confines of the tight leather. He quickly stepped out of his pants.

"Pick up your clothes and fold 'em neatly, then come perch 'ere on my lap," Spike said. Xander picked up his clothes and began folding.
"Spike!" Lorne demanded. "What's going on?"

Spike sighed. "Reinforcin' a message and a lesson."

"What?"

"Reinforcin' Xander's lesson from this morning," Spike said as he adjusted for Xander's weight. "And making sure the message is out that Xander 'ere is back in my good graces and is my Pet."

Spike wrapped his arms around Xander.

"You're being a little rou..."

"Lorne, I'm being Xander's Master."

Lorne sighed and sat down opposite Spike and Xander.

"So do you still want to meet Tara before the meeting with Zorn?"

Spike nodded. He watched Xander for any signs of recognition of the name.

"You're not going to have her do any magic..."

"Bloody hell! Of course not! Ya think I'm daft?" Spike retorted.

"Lemon drop, half the time I don't know what to think of you."

Xander bit back a laugh. Well, at least I'm not in a club of one.

"Just gonna have a consult with her," Spike said.

Lorne sighed in relief. "OK."

"Now," Spike said and looked at Xander, "got a question for ya, pet."

I'm not going to like this am I? Xander wondered.

"The name Zorn mean anything to you?"

Zorn? Xander thought. It sounded familiar but it didn't really hold much meaning for Xander. He shook his head.

"How about a silver demon with long horns?"

Xander stiffened and turned frightened eyes to Spike. Fragments of memories flashed through him.

“Aren’t you a delight?” said a silver hued demon with long horns that curved down its back. “You may just be a find after all.”

“Stop! Just stop!” Xander cried. He was answered with more claps and cheers.

“Marvelous,” said the silver demon.
The tip of the tentacle on Xander’s cock now began to slide over his slit. His body was responding to the stimulation and he found he was half hard.

“I won’t let this happen!” Xander screamed.

“A newborn says it does!” yelled the silver demon. A sharp chorus of answers and replies went out around the table.

“FUCK YOU!” Xander screamed as the stroking on his dick grew more intense.

“I believe it’s you getting ‘fucked’, ” the silver demon said in amusement.

Xander began to hyperventilate.

"Pet," shouted Spike.

The memories still kept coming.

Xander could feel the tentacle in his ass pulse and stretch. It pushed farther into his body. It hurt and burned but still it continued to delve deeper. He began to feel uncomfortably ‘full’. He tried to fight it but the appendage was relentless and pushed in deeper.

“Please! Don’t!” Xander begged.

The stroking on his cock continued and to Xander’s horror he could feel a drop of precum forming on its tip. It didn’t last long. The sucker on the end of the tentacle quickly whisked it away. His master made a high pitched screeching sound and the crowd roared.

"He says you taste promising," the silver demon translated.

Xander shut his eyes. He tried to picture worms and maggots. He thought of his old gym teacher in SpongeBob SquarePants underwear. He tried thinking of anything that would cool his unwanted ardor. Any progress he made was lost when the oozing tentacle up his ass brushed against a spot deep inside him.

Need flared through Xander and he arched his back.

“I’d say he found your prostate,” the demon laughed.

"PET!" Spike tried again.

“NOOOOOOOOOO!” Xander cried as semen began erupting out of his slit. The crowd roared loudly and immediately the suckers on his cock began to ‘drink’ up his spilt seed. The stroking never ceased. Xander’s orgasm seemed as long as it was unwanted. When it was over he hung limply in his bonds.

The tentacle on his cock slithered around. The suckers worked until his flesh was clean. The tentacle inside him ceased stimulating his prostate, but it didn’t withdraw.

“Now that was a show!” the silver demon yelled.
"XANDER!" Spike roared and picked Xander up and carried him to the couch. He held him in his arms and rocked him. "Xander, yer safe."

Xander trembled as he remembered.

_The silver demon crouched down and looked at Xander. He reached out and ran a claw over Xander’s throat._

“The Azora believe that the sounds made during a bottle’s first tapping will indicate the quality of flavor the bottle will have. I must say, based on your master’s opinion, you validated that belief. Apparently, you are quite good... delightful even. But after a bottle’s first tapping, they don’t need to hear its voice again. In fact, they don’t want to hear it again. It’s distracting. Plus the silence is helpful when they trade or sell bottles. They always know which ones are new and ‘fresh’ and which ones are ‘matured’.”

Xander shook in Spike's arms and then wrapped his arms around Spike in return. He clung to Spike.

I do, Xander thought. I do know a silver demon with long horns.

"Shhh, Pet," Spike crooned and continued to rock Xander. "'S OK. I got ya. Yer safe."

Suddenly Xander stiffened and tried to jerk away from Spike. He shook his head furiously.

You're meeting with him! You said... you said you were meeting with Zorn... and then you asked... Xander looked frantically at Lorne.

"Cupcake, it's OK," Lorne said soothingly. "It's just a meeting."

Xander turned panicked eyes to Spike. WHY? OH... It’s because... OH I get it now Spike! OH... I'm soooo stupid! Xander thought frantically and quickly climbed out of Spike's lap and got to his knees. He began unbuttoning and unzipping the front of Spike's pants.

_I'll be good now, Spike, Xander frantically thought as his hands trembled and worked at the fastenings. I'll be a good Pet and do whatever you say. I promise._

"Bloody hell! Xander! Stop!" Spike ordered and grabbed at Xander's hands. Xander immediately stilled and looked at Spike. Spike cupped Xander's hands in his face. "It's OK, Pet. You are OK. I'm not sending you back. You don't need to do anything but be my good Pet, yeah?"

Yeah! Xander nodded his head frantically. Spike smiled gently at Xander then cast a look at Lorne. Lorne looked worried.

"C'mon then," Spike said and tapped his leg. "Climb back up. I'm getting cold."

Xander immediately climbed back up into Spike's arms. Once again Spike pulled Xander close. Lorne left the room and Spike rocked Xander.

"Xan, luv, it's OK. There's nothing ya could do that would make me send you away or give you up. You're mine Xander. I keep what's mine," Spike crooned. Xander tucked himself in tightly against the vampire and let himself be held.

"I know yer gonna be stubborn and a git sometimes. I do. And I'm gonna be stubborn and a git back.
I promised I'd take care of ya and I will."

Spike gently kissed the top of Xander's head. Xander nestled his head under the vampire's chin. Lorne walked back into the room with a blanket. He wrapped it around the vampire and the human. Spike smiled weakly at Lorne.

"Xander," Spike continued, "stay with me. You still there?"

Xander nodded. Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne shook his head.

"Pet... listen to me. I'm... I'm... I'm sorry I ever threatened or made you think I'd give you up. I won't Xander. I won't ever give you up. Do you hear me, Xander? I'm sorry. I promise that no matter what, you will always be my Pet. Look at me, Xander."

Xander slowly lifted his head and looked at Spike.

"Do you understand me?"

Xander nodded.

Spike looked at Lorne. Lorne shrugged. Spike looked back at Xander. He looked for any sign of fire or of the White Knight. All he saw were Xander's wide and terrified brown eyes. Something in Spike responded to that terror and he knew he needed to do something. He was losing his Pet. Losing him because of that fucking Zorn! Spike vowed the silver demon's days wouldn't be counted for much longer. I'm gonna do more than 'Cry Havoc' and let loose the dogs.

"Xander," Spike said, "is this all it takes? Is this all that's left of Buffy's donut boy?"

"Spike!" Lorne hissed. Spike ignored him.

"I mention some flunky demon and you just cave? Wait until I tell 'Gelus about that. He won't believe it!" Spike threw his head back and laughed. "You were the human that stared him down in a hospital with posies in hand and now yer all cowerin' cuz of some two bit tag-a-long?"

Xander blinked.

"Maybe it's a good thing the slayer isn't here anymore," Spike continued to laugh and then pushed Xander to the floor. He got up and started to pace. "Second thought. I wish she were here! Think of the fun I'd 'ave! Look at you! All huddled there... the fight's gone out of ya! Maybe I'd take her on next? Eh pet? Wotcha think?"

Xander started to breathe hard.

"Never really fancied the blonde ones. That's Peaches' gig. But I like a Pet with some fire... and one thing you could say about the slayer... she had fire!"

Xander looked up from the floor at Spike.

"Oh...oh! I know," Spike said and twirled around into a crouch opposite Xander. "I hear that other Scoobie is still around. That red haired one. What's her name? Willow? How about her? Xan? Does she have fire?"
YOU LEAVE HER ALONE! Something roared in Xander and without thinking or feeling he launched himself at Spike. Spike fell back under the assault of flying fists and Xander's enraged bulk. Willow's never gonna be yours or anybody else's slave... pet... bottle... or... ANYTHING!

Xander's rage was blind. Over and over he pounded at Spike. He threw a punch for every bit of humanity ripped and torn away from him. Spike blocked most of the punches but a few landed. Boy's gonna kiss those and make 'em better, Spike vowed.

When Xander's strength and fury began to ebb Spike quickly rolled and pinned him. He looked down into Xander's blazing eyes and let some of his own fear be burned away.

"Ya back now, Xan?" Spike asked as he secured Xander's wrists under one hand.

"Let me go you fucking monster!" Xander thought. Spike smiled and looked at Lorne. Lorne smiled and nodded.

"Pet," Spike said, and ran a soothing hand down Xander's cheek. "Calm down."

Fuck you! Xander struggled. Not going to let you hurt Willow! I'll stake you first! I'll find a way, blood breath! I swear!

"Xander!" Spike barked. "CALM DOWN. Red's safe. Don't want her. Don't care how much fire she's got. Yer more'n enough for me. Ya got it? Told ya. Yer my Pet."

Xander narrowed his eyes.

"That's it. Ease up a bit. Gonna be good now? Can I let ya up?"

Xander studied Spike. You won't touch, Willow?

"Xander," Lorne said softly. "Cupcake, trust me. Spike's not interested in any other human but you."

Spike glared at Lorne. Lorne winked at him.

"Can I let ya up, pet?" Spike asked again.

Xander nodded. Spike rolled off Xander and stood up. He held out a hand to Xander. Xander stared at the hand for a moment then took it. Spike easily pulled him to his feet.

"Why don't you get dressed, pet," Spike said, "and Lorne, why don't you pour us all some drinks."

"Good idea, Lemon drop," Lorne replied.

Demons must have supernatural livers, Xander thought as he got dressed, or they come already pickled.

By the time Xander was dressed Spike was seated back behind his desk, drinks were poured and Lorne was sitting opposite Spike. Spike tapped his lap. Xander sighed but made his way over and sat down.

"Ya goin' ta stay sane now?" Spike asked Xander.
"Spike!" Lorne exclaimed.

"Just wanna know if we can talk about this meeting?"

*Let's get this over with,* Xander thought and nodded as he picked up his drink.

"Oi! Cheeky git! Who said I didn't want to give it to you?"

Xander held the glass out.

"Go ahead," Spike chuckled. "After that scene I guess I can spoil ya."

Xander drank down some of the smooth liquor. It burned its way down and warmed a place that was cold with the fear of talking about Zorn.

"We need information," Lorne said.

Xander looked at Lorne.

"About Vr'xkl... and what happened to you. You can't tell us and we need to know."

"Tired of you waking up in the middle of the day with them bleedin' terrors!" Spike said.

*So sorry,* Xander said and took another drink. He wasn't all that thrilled about Spike and Lorne learning about his past.

"It's no secret Vr'xkl does want you back," Lorne said cautiously.

*NO!* Xander thought and started to tremble.

"Shhhh, pet," Spike said and immediately started rubbing small circles on Xander's back. "It's all right. He can't have you. Yer mine now. Remember?"

Xander nodded and curled a hand around Spike's waist.

"He wants Zorn to try and negotiate for you. Spike's going to meet with him and 'play' it out..."

"But no matter what happens, pet," Spike said and tightened his hold on Xander, "yer not going back. Yer mine. I'm keeping you."

*But why is all this so important to you?* Xander wondered.

"Do you understand, Xander? Do you understand why we are meeting with Zorn?" Lorne asked.

Xander shook his hand back and forth.

"We need information. Zorn is our 'in'," Spike explained. "We have to have you at the meeting because the bastard insisted."

*ME!* Xander thought and looked at Spike.

"I won't let him touch you, Xan," Spike vowed. "Do you believe me?"
Xander studied Spike. He thought about the dead gray demon who tried to touch him during Xander’s punishment. Xander nodded.

Spike smiled. "There's one other thing, pet."

Yeah?

"One of the things we want information on is how you lost your voice. I wanna know if there's a way ta get it back," Spike said.

Xander stared at Spike and for a moment the vampire blurred in front of him. He blinked to clear his vision. You want to give me back my voice? Xander thought. But I thought you hated my Xander babble?

"I want you, pet," Spike said. "I want all of you."
Chapter 23

Xander sat on Spike's lap and tried to process the early evening as Spike and Lorne talked. His head swirled with Spike's conflicting natures. One minute he was nurturing the next he was every bit Angelus' heir and protégé. Xander studied Spike from under long lashes.

*He could have just let me go,* Xander thought remembering how far the fear of being given over to Zorn and the Azora had driven him. *I was ready to be...to do whatever he wanted. I was ready to stop fighting...to give up, but he wouldn't let me.*

Spike must have sensed the sly gaze. He focused his piercing blue eyes on Xander and once again started rubbing small circles on Xander's back. Spike cocked an eyebrow. Xander focused his gaze on his feet.

"Make sure the fixins needed for a 'repugnant' martini are all here," Spike continued giving orders to Lorne.

Lorne nodded.

"Want him at ease," Spike said.

*Now he wants my voice back...wants information on what happened to me,* Xander continued his internal processing. *What is Spike after? And how does it concern me? There's more than just filling out the paperwork on his Pet adoption here.*

Xander frowned.

"Pet, you OK?" Spike asked.

*I'm the Pet of a master vampire who wants a meet and greet with the number one fan of my total humiliation,* Xander thought and shook his head.

"What's the matter?" Spike asked softly.

*Too much too process and too little process with,* Xander thought as he pointed to his head.

"Headache?"

Xander nodded risking a white lie. *Thinking does make my head ache, yeah.*

"Sit on the floor between my legs. Back to me," Spike ordered.

Xander slid off Spike's lap and into position. Immediately the vampire's long cool fingers began working their magic. They began to knead and stroke the tight and sore muscles in Xander's neck. Xander sighed. The massage really did feel good. He leaned his head forward giving Spike more access. Spike chuckled.

"Gonna make a 'edonist outta you yet," Spike said.

*As long as you stick too massages,* Xander thought.

Spike worked his fingers and hand below Xander's collar and over his shoulders while he continued to talk with Lorne. Xander closed his eyes and relaxed. He let his breathing slow and as he did, so did his thoughts. Spike gently manipulated Xander's head from side to side loosening the muscles.
even more. Then his hands massaged Xander's scalp. All the while he and Lorne continued to drone on softly.

*He wants a Pet with fire, Xander thought sleepily, but he wants obedience...submission. He gives me choices...some freedom but when do I know the options are there and when they aren't?*

"Lean back," Spike said.

Xander leaned back and laid his head in Spike's lap. Spike worked the tense flesh down Xander's arms and chest.

*And why doesn't he want a broken toy? Angelus always did. Dru wasn't exactly the poster girl for mental health..more like Vampire Interrupted.*

Spike's fingers once again worked their way up and down Xander's neck. This time they gently petted and stroked him. Xander sighed again turned toward the caresses.

*Why does...how can he...feel so good...safe, Xander's thoughts jumbled as he drifted off to sleep.

***

"Oi! Yer snoring," Xander heard Spike's voice barking. He blinked his eyes open. Spike was leaning over him grinning. "Up!"

Xander blinked and struggled to get to his feet. His legs were full of pins and needles as circulation returned.

*Ouch! How long was I out?* Xander thought as he used Spike's desk for support. He managed to get to his feet. He yawned and rubbed his eyes. He blinked again.

"Turn around," Spike ordered. Xander obeyed.

Spike swooped in and kissed Xander's nose.

*OK...not awake enough for nose smoochies!* Xander thought as blinked again and idly rubbed his nose. Spike laughed. He cupped Xander's cheeks and tilted Xander's head.

"How 'bout a proper kiss, yeah?"

*Uh...No,* Xander thought and tried to figure out if this was one of those time he had a choice or not.

"Was a question, not an order, pet," Spike said softly.

Xander bit his lip and then shook his head slightly. He braced himself for the worst. Spike sighed.

"Fair 'nough," Spike said and let Xander go. "C'mon, time ta go see, Tara."

Spike stepped around Xander and grabbed a scroll off the desk before heading for the door. Lorne smiled at Xander as he waited for Xander to follow Spike.

*Bipolar vampires,* Xander thought as he followed Spike through the office doors and the casino crowd to the private elevator. Once all three were inside Spike keyed the elevator to go down.

*Stables are in the basement,* Xander wondered as the elevator descended.

When the elevator stopped the doors opened. There were two very large and very ugly gray demons
with scales and spines on their backs standing guard.

"Voynok demons," Lorne said.

"Nine lives each," Spike said as he nodded to the two guards. They bowed low. "Makes 'em hard to kill. Helps to make sure no one poaches or raids my stables."

"I'll file that a way, Xander thought. Should I ever have a chance to get a message to the resistance. Heavy fire power needed to rescue the people in the stables.

Spike began marching down the hallway. He came to a set of double doors and keyed in a number. The doors unlocked and Spike went through. Two more Voynok demons were on the other side. A hall with several doors, some open and some closed, stretched out before the trio. Along the center of the floor was a blue line.

"This 'ere's the blue stable," Spike said. "Humans here get drained, but not drained dry. More like snacks and good times."

Xander paled. Right.

Spike pointed to his left. There was another set of double doors.

"There's the red stables. Those humans are..."

"Spike," Lorne interrupted.

"Right," Spike said and then turned to his right. "Green stables down this way. It's where we keep the humans who arebreedin' or I think...well they're not available for draining. Tara's this way."

Spike began marching toward the double doors on his right. Xander and Lorne followed, but Xander couldn't help but look over his shoulder at the doors leading to the red stable. He clinched his fists for a moment. The thought of the red stables filled him with plenty of fire; more than enough to satisfy Spike.

"He's keeping humans to kill like they were cattle!" Xander thought and cursed this world Angelus had wrought. Slaves...cattle...bottles...we're all just things to use up and devour. We're Cheezits and blowup dolls!

Spike keyed in another set of numbers. Xander tried to pay attention. He only got a partial list; three, four, and nine. Spike pushed against the doors and they swung open. Once again there were Voynok demons guarding the doors. There were also three demons adorned in red robes with long pale fingers.

"Pocklas," Lorne whispered.

"Howz my stock today?" Spike asked.

The Pocklas bowed low.

"Well my lord. You should have a new male foal within three sunrises," one of Pocklas replied.

"Good. You may select payment from the red stable," Spike replied.

Xander paled and grabbed Spike's arm. NO! You can't!

"Pet? You wanted my attention?" Spike growled as he whirled Xander around pushed him against
the wall. "So spoiled."

Then Spike laid claim to Xander's mouth as he obscenely ground his hips into Xander's. The Voynok rumbled and the Pocklas hummed. Spike captured Xander's hands and kept them pinned to the wall while he bit Xander's lips until Xander opened his mouth. Then Spike thrust his tongue inside and mapped out what was his. He shifted his hips so his knee could rub against Xander's leather clad cock. Spike started a rocking motion so he stroked Xander in time to the harsh tongue fucking.

Xander struggled to process the assault as well as to breathe. His body began to respond to Spike's touch and Xander cursed himself. He tried pushing Spike away. Spike kisses became hungrier and instead of an insolent tongue laying claim to him, teeth now bit at his bottom lip until it bled. Spike sucked greedily at the treat. Xander grew harder and his face grew flushed. Spike pulled back.

"Enough for now? Or do you need more attention, Pet?" Spike asked.

Xander sucked in much needed air and tried to calm his body. He shook his head.

"Kneel," Spike barked. "Hands behind your neck and head down."

Xander slid quickly to his knees and into position. He ignored the painful protest from his bruised flesh. Spike held his hands out in front of Xander. Xander leaned forward and kissed them.

"My Pet is overly eager." Spike said to the Pocklas after he licked away the drops of blood from the back of his hands from Xander's slightly bloody kisses. The demons hummed again.

"Perhaps you will breed him?" the one Pockla finally said.

"NO! Please, Spike!" Xander thought frantically.

"Perhaps," Spike said. "For now I'm content to have all his attention focused on me."

The Pocklas hummed again and then bowed. Then they shuffled off and exited through the double doors. Once the demons left there was suddenly the sound of doors opening and feet entering the hall.

"Pike!" as small voice cried.

Xander heard Spike fake a groan and then chuckle.

"Warren!" Another woman's voice cried, "I'm so sorry Master Spike!"

"'S all right. Tyke's getting around better every day," Spike said.

"Yes, Master," the woman said.

"Master Spike?" Xander heard another woman say. "Thank you...thank you for putting me here."

"Yer breedin', ain't ya?" Spike replied.

"Y..yes," the woman stammered.

"Well then, where else would you be but in my breedin' stables? Just do what the Pocklas say, Anne. They're a creepy lot. Demons oughtn't be healers, but they know their stuff though. They'll see you deliver yer bint. Just ask Katy 'ere."
"Katrina," the first woman said.

"Anne," the second woman said.

"'arren,' said the small voice.

"Any problems?" Spike asked in a loud voice.

A chorus of "No, Master Spike" could be heard echoing in the hall.

"Good," Spike said. "Keep it that way."

"Lunch should be here soon," Lorne said cheerily.

Another chorus bounced down the halls. It was comprised of "Thank you" and "Yes, Master Spike."

"Up, Pet," Spike said to Xander, “and put yer hands down."

Xander stood. He looked around. There were about fifteen women and another dozen or so children in the hall. The children ranged from newborns to about kindergarten age.

Spike moved down the hall. The crowd mostly parted before him. The women bowed. The older children pawed at Spike's pockets.

"Oi! Worse then rats!" the vampire snarled and the children giggled. They kept pawing at the vampire until he dug into his pocket and pulled out a handful of candy. He threw it up in the air.

"Now's our chance ta make a break for it!" He cried and began to run. The children screamed, laughed and dove for the candy. Xander ran behind Spike. Lorne followed giggling the whole way.

"You know they are never going to learn respect for a vampire that way," Lorne finally teased as they slowed to a stop.

"They're learnin' respect," Spike said seriously. "They've learned more than ya realize Lorne. They see how their mums behave but they're also learnin' what pleases their Master."

Xander turned and looked back at the children. They were more sedate now. They were quieter, like their mothers and kept a wide berth away from the Voynok. The laughing and playful behavior that had been on display while Spike was around was gone.

"Master Spike," another deep raspy voice interrupted Xander's observations. He turned toward the voices. There were two large demons with bare heads, deeply furrowed foreheads and chiseled cheeks. Their skin was a mix of gray and brown. They towered above Spike.

"Mofo demons," Lorne whispered.

*Mofo...oh you've got to be kidding!* Xander thought. *They seriously can't be named that!*

"Evening," Spike said.

"Master Spike," the demons grunted and stared at Spike.

"Here to see Lorne's plaything. Wanna see 'ow my special projects goin'," Spike grinned lasciviously. The demons grunted and moved aside. Again there was number pad outside the door. Spike moved close to key in the numbers. Xander began moving up close behind and the Mofo demon on the right put out a hand. Xander stopped moving.
"Touch 'im and I 'ave ta kill ya," Spike growled.

"Will still stop him from getting the code, Master Spike," the demon grunted.

Spike chuckled, "Now that's why I like you blokes for security. All business. Pet, step back. If I 'ave ta kill the guards for stopping you from pryin' I'll tan yer arse."

Xander stepped back and Spike returned to his keypad. In a moment the locks disengaged and Spike opened the door. Spike stepped through and Xander followed. This time the Mofo demons let him be.

"Knock when the lunch trays arrive. I've ordered two; one for Spike's Pet and one for...mine," Lorne stumbled on the last word. Spike chuckled.

Xander was surprised to see a lavish one room suite behind the door. There was a couch, a wardrobe, a desk, a large TV, and of course a large bed. There were no windows. There was another door which Xander quickly figured must lead to a bathroom. In the center of the room, on her knees was Tara. She was naked from the waist up. Below her waist she wore a chastity belt.

"M..Master Spike...Lor...Master Lorne," Tara said and blushed.

"Tara," Lorne said warmly.

"Evenin," Spike said as he strolled around the woman examining her from all sides. "See Lorne's been takin' care of ya."

"Y..yes," Tara replied.

Xander longed to go to Tara and find out if she was well. Had Lorne really been treating her OK?

"Well," Spike growled as he sat on the bed, "get it over with you two. Do your human greetings."

Xander looked at Spike. He waved his hand at Xander and Xander rushed to Tara. He knelt beside her, pointed at her and made the "OK" gesture with his hands.

"I'm OK, Xander," Tara smiled. "Now, unless..Sp...Master Spike wants you on your knees please stop kneeling. Lorne t..told me what you went through. You need to give your kn..knees a chance to heal."

Xander looked at Spike. Spike nodded and Xander sat on the floor next to Tara.

"Did the Tiger Balm help?" she asked.

Xander nodded. That and Spike's nimble fingers, Xander grudgingly thought.

"You still using the Arnica gel? Several times a day?"

Xander nodded.

"Good," Tara said and smiled.

Xander pointed at Tara. What about you? What the hell had Spike meant 'his special project...Lorne's plaything?' Xander clenched his fists and struggled to keep from hitting himself or the floor in frustration.

"I'm fine, Xander," Tara said gently. "Lo...Master Lorne has been very good to me. In fact..."
Tara trailed off to a blush and looked at Lorne then said, "The towel's hanging on the rack."
"Right," Lorne smiled and then turned a darker shade of greened. He slipped in to the bathroom.

_The towel?_ Xander thought.

"Towel, luv?" Spike said.

"You said you wanted me to smell like her, Lemon drop," Lorne said as he came out of the bathroom rubbing a towel on his face and over his chest where his shirt was slightly undone. Tara blushed again and then explained, "It..it's the towel I used af..after my shower."

_What?_ Xander thought.

Spike threw back his head and laughed.

"That's bloody brilliant, luv! No wonder you smell like ya been snoggin' her, green bean!"

Xander looked at Tara, then Lorne and then Spike. Spike winked at Xander.

"It's a cover story," Lorne explained to Xander.

"Oi! Ruin all my fun," Spike pouted.

"Master Lorne visits me daily," Tara said tentatively.

_And what does he do?_ Xander wondered.

"We talk. He goss...tells me what's been going on in the casino," Tara said. "Very amusing stories."

"And he rubs 'imself over with yer bleedin' towel so he smell's like 'is been 'avin a tumble or two with ya and the other beasties and goblins gossip about you!"

Both Tara and Lorne blushed. Xander frowned and glared at Spike.

_Crude much Fang Face?_

"Spike," Lorne finally said changing the subject. "I thought you had some questions for Tara?"

Tara paled.

"Oi! How many times do I have ta say it! Just questions! Not a bleedin' interrogation!" Spike growled.

_Well your reputation does precede you Blond Bloviator!_

"Lemon drop," Lorne said, "you aren't known for friendly chats."

"H..how can I help you, M..Master Spike?" Tara asked softly.

Spike held out the scroll to Tara. Tara accepted it gingerly and gently unrolled it. She frowned.

"I'm afraid I c..can't read this," she said.

"Didn't really expect ya to, luv," Spike said.
Tara frowned.

"What I really want to know is if it's possible ta do some sorta spell to bollocks it up? Make it hard ta read and do it in such a way no one sniffs out the magicks. Is that possible?"

Tara rolled the scroll up again and sighed.

"M..Master Spike all magic leaves a trace. There are spells I could do to change or alter the scroll, but not anything that couldn't ultimately be detected. I'm sorry."

Xander looked worriedly at Spike and back at Tara.

"Knackers!" Spike growled as he stood up and began pacing the room. "Was afraid of that."

Xander scooted closer to Tara and tried to put himself between her and the vampire.

"Pet," Spike rumbled, "if I wanted ta get the bird don't think you would stop me."

Xander flushed but didn't move. *Doesn't mean I'm not going to try. You want the White Knight...well you got him! You make a move for Tara and I'll unleash all the heat I got left in me. Might even catch that over chemically treated hair of yours on fire!"

"M..Master Spike," Tara said as she held out the scroll to Spike, "if I might point out. This s..scroll, it's just paper and ink. Y..you don't need magic to m..make paper and ink illegible."

Spike stopped his pacing and fixed his gaze on Tara. He studied her for a moment and burst out into another full throated laugh. He took the scroll back from her and crouched down.

"Yer a smart one, luv, a right smart one," Spike said as he gently stroked her cheek. "Gonna do right by you."

Spike shot a look at Xander, grinned and said, "Maybe you should spend more time with her...might learn a thing or two."

Xander looked at Tara. Tara smiled. There was a knock on the door.

"That would be lunch," Lorne said as he moved to the door.

"Give us a minute," Spike said and grabbed Xander by the back of his collar.

*Now what?* Xander thought as Spike hauled him up on the bed and rolled them until Xander was underneath him.

"Special project makes me 'orny," Spike purred and then swooped down to nip, nibble and play with Xander's nipple ring.

Lorne mussed his hair and undid some more buttons on his shirt.

"Tara, pumpkin," Lorne said. Tara got up and draped herself behind Lorne. She ran her hands up over his chest and kissed the back of his neck.

Lorne opened the door. Two minions carried trays inside and set them on the desk.

Spike kissed his way down to Xander belly button and then proceeded to move down to unbutton Xander's fly with his teeth. Xander hissed.
*That is NOT a turn on!* Xander lied to himself.

Meanwhile Tara nibbled on Lorne's ear. The minions uncovered the trays, bowed and then quickly exited the room. Lorne shut the door.

"Nicely done, pumpkin," Lorne said and moved away from Tara.

"T..thank you Master Lorne," Tara said with a grin.

Spike continued to work the buttons undone on Xander's fly while playing with his nipple ring with his fingers.

"Spike!" Lorne said.

"Wot!" Spike growled around a nearly undone Xander.

"They're gone now!"

"So?"

"So, a growing boy needs to eat!" Lorne exclaimed.

"So does a vampire!"

*Baseball...the Cookie Monster and Principal Snyder in drag,* Xander thought desperately as he thought about anything but Spike's mouth near his half uncovered and half hard cock.

"Spike..." Lorne tried again.

"Oi! I never get to have any fun," Spike pouted and sat up. He looked at Xander and grinned evilly, "And *you* are fun, pet.

Xander rolled his eyes. Spike laughed and quickly did Xander's pants back up.

"Sit up against the headboard," Spike ordered. Xander obeyed and tried not to think about how snug his pants were. "Let's see what they brought ya for lunch."
Chapter 24

Lunch was a mixed blessing. On one hand it was a treat of finger foods Xander thought never to have again. There were tater tots, fried chicken strips, and baby carrots. There was ketchup, barbecue sauce and ranch dressing for dipping. For dessert there was a gooey chocolate brownie. Xander couldn't decide what he wanted to eat first.

However, on the other hand there was Spike who grinned like the proverbial cat when he saw the lunch tray.

"Finger foods," he said. "I love finger foods."

"Spike..." Lorne tried to interfere but Spike was on a mission.

"Scooch up, pet," Spike ordered and then slipped behind Xander when he did so. Then he'd looked at Tara and ordered, "Fetch me one of those trays, Glinda."

Glinda? Xander thought as Spike's legs wrapped around his and Spike tucked him close. Tara got up and brought one of the trays over to Spike.

"Set it on his lap, luv," Spike said. Xander sighed. He was gonna love lunch but he was going to hate getting it. Tara set the tray on his lap and smiled encouragingly at him. Xander tried to return the smile.

"Spike," Lorne tried again as he picked up the other tray and handed it to Tara. "We do have the meeting..."

"Finger foods, green bean," Spike leered and picked up a tater tot then dipped it in ketchup. He held it out to Xander and said, "Lips and tongue, pet, to take the food from my hand. Lips and tongue."

Xander swallowed and then opened his mouth. He snaked out his tongue and then sucked the tater-tot from Spike's fingers.

FUCK! Xander wanted to moan. The salty, tomatoey, and potatoey goodness exploded on his tongue. He closed his eyes and chewed. Damn, Spike for using junk food against me! Spike grinned and picked up another tater-tot and coated it with ketchup.

"Good, yeah?" he asked and this time darted in and coated Xander's lips with the condiment before quickly withdrawing the fried tuber. Xander licked his lips and nodded. Spike offered the tot again and Xander quickly sucked it from Spike's grasp.

Spike laughed, "I like a Pet capable of a lot of SUCTION."

Xander rolled his eyes.

"Spike!" Lorne exclaimed. "Tara's trying to eat too."

Xander blushed and looked over at Tara who was delicately eating her own lunch on her own. Lorne was sitting nearby scowling at Spike.
"You two could go in the other room," Spike said as he dunked a chicken strip into the barbecue sauce and offered the tip to Xander. Xander bit at it and Spike quickly withdrew. Xander caught just a little between his lips and cleaned it of the sauce. He licked his lips hungrily.

"You want Tara to eat in the bathroom?" Lorne asked indignantly. Spike groaned and leaned his forehead into the back of Xander's neck. Xander lurched for the strip still in Spike's hand and tore a chunk off with his teeth.

"Oi! Said lips and tongue!" Spike growled and then bit the back of Xander's neck. Xander winced.

So worth it! Xander thought as he chewed contentedly on his hunk of chicken strip.

"Fine," Spike said as he looked up from Xander's neck. "Just be sure, Glinda's done by the time I'm ready to feed Xander dessert. Then you two can go play with her towel, check the plumbing or talk interior decorations fer all I care! But come brownie time...I'm making Xan work for his nummy treat."

You're a bastard, Xander thought as Spike started offering him food without the games.

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Tara had quickly finished her lunch and she and Lorne had disappeared into the other room per Spike's orders. Spike once again worn a devil's grin and Xander prayed he was a stronger man even as his vision became fixated on the sweet chocolaty mess. The brownie was gooey and it clung to Spike fingers. The chocolate seemed to seep into the grooves in his finger tips.

"Don't leave a trace of chocolate behind, pet," Spike whispered into Xander's ear as he held out a bite just out of Xander's reach, "or I may not think you like it any more and will make sure ya don't get it."

Bastard! Xander thought again and greedily began sucking and licking Spike's fingers when he brought the confection near to Xander's mouth. First you use junk food against me...and now chocolate? You really are a heartless, souless bastard! And I'm a slut...and a glutton enough to go for it...

Spike groaned and enjoyed the hot scrape of Xander's tongue against his cool flesh. Gentlin' you bit by bit, pet, Spikethought. Don't care if I have ta fight dirty.

He broke off another chunk of brownie and offered it to his pet. Spike enjoyed the warm wet feel of Xander's mouth and could only imagine it surrounding, licking, nibbling and sucking on another part of his anatomy. His body began to harden in response and Spike chuckled seductively against Xander's neck.

Xander tried to concentrate on the chocolaty goodness coating Spike's fingers. He tried not to think about the growing bulge he could feel pressed against the small of his back. He tried not to notice the slick and smooth skin under the brownie that his tongue and lips laved and caressed. He tried to forget that Spike had an arm slung low over Xander's bare belly.

Fuckin' vampire! Xander thought as he nibbled at another bite. Doesn't fight fair!
Spike groaned against Xander's neck and the vibrations seemed to ripple across Xander's skin. His nipples hardened.

Pheromones scented the air as Spike pinched off another bite of brownie and offered it to Xander. Xander clenched his hands into fists and sucked at Spike's fingers. Spike chuckled and nibbled on Xander's ear.

*Principal Snyder in really BAD drag!* Xander thought desperately as he cleaned Spike's fingers and willed his rebellious cock into submission.

"Last bite, pet," Spike murmured against the place where Xander neck and shoulder met. "Enjoy it."

*Fine! You wanna do this, Master?* Xander thought, suddenly tired of being on the wrong end of this game. *Let's do it!*

Xander swooped in and sucked the brownie from Spike's fingers. Then he smiled and slowly began to clean each finger individually. Carefully he sucked each digit in and out of his mouth. He licked his tongue up and down the length of each finger and nibbled on the knuckles. Then he'd start all over again. Every now and then he'd caress the "V" between Spike's fingers with a long slow caresses of his tongue.

"Bloody hell!" Spike groaned and pulled Xander closer. Xander could feel Spike's hard cock pressing against his back. He smiled against Spike's fingers and began peppering them with kisses until he worked his way to Spike's palm. Then he started to draw tiny circles with the tip of his tongue.

"XANDER!" Spike growled and then suddenly flipped the human around and underneath him. He ground his heavy and hard cock against Xander's hip.

*Gotcha!* Xander thought and arched an eyebrow at Spike. Brown eyes full of fire flashed and locked with blue filled with burning need.

"Dangerous game, pet," Spike purred and ground his hips again.

Xander nodded. *You started it.*

Spike studied Xander for a moment. What lay beneath him was pure one hundred percent Donut Boy and White Knight. He was a bit flushed and turned on, but he wasn't scared. He'd also managed to turn the situation around without breaking a rule. *Now yer startin' ta get it,* Spike thought and then laughed.

"Well played, pet," Spike said. "You do as well in this meeting with Zorn and I'll have ta make sure ta get you a special treat."

*Zorn!* Xander thought and stiffened. Spike's smile faltered as he saw the fear flash through Xander's eyes.

"You'll be OK, Xander," Spike said softly as he rolled off Xander and offered him a hand up. He looked Xander in the eye and said, "Gave you my word, didn't I? Ya believe me don't ya?"

Xander studied Spike. *I don't understand you...and I sure as hell don't know what you're up to, but yeah Toothy, I believe you. You won't let Zorn hurt me.* He nodded.
"So are you two done in here?" Lorne asked plaintively from the bathroom doorway.

"Maybe," Spike said as he turned to look at Lorne. Xander rolled his eyes.

"Next time maybe you two could take it upstairs?" Lorne said as he stepped out of the bathroom followed by the blushing Tara. "As nice as the bathroom is: it's not very roomy, has few amenities and very little sound proofing."

*Oh ghod!* Xander thought and it was his turned to blush.

"B..but the tiling is very n..nice," Tara said.

"Ya think?" Spike preened. "It's Italian."

Lorne and Xander rolled their eyes.

***

Eventually Lorne and Xander made their good-byes. Lorne hugged Tara and made sure she had the key to her belt. Xander shot a frown at Spike.

*Why does she get have a key to her belt?* Xander wondered. Spike ignored Xander's pointed look.

"I..it was g..good seeing you," Tara said and held out her hand to Xander. Xander went to take her hand and then paused. *Am I allowed to touch her? Spike is very possessive,* Xander thought and looked at Spike again.

Spike studied Xander for a moment. *Yer gettin' it,* he thought.

"Since ya asked, pet," Spike finally said and nodded.

Xander took Tara's hand and squeezed. *I'll don't know how, but I'll try and see you again,* he vowed with his eyes. Tarasmiled and released Xander's hand.

"Behave, Glinda," Spike rumbled.

"Y..yes, Master Spike."

"Maybe I'll send Xander back down again you can help him figure out how to use his noggin' fer sumthin' other than a hat rack," Spike said as he ran a hand gently down Tara's long hair.

*Hey! Watch it, Master Moron!* Xander glared at Spike.

"Wh..whatever you think is best," Tara smiled and bit back a giggle.

"I'll check on you at dawn, pumpkin," Lorne said.

Tara nodded.

"Right, let's go make preparations about seeing a demon," Spike said and moved to the door. He keyed the lock and opened it. He led the way out past the Mofo demons. Xander followed but sent a
parting look and smile at Tara. She smiled back and then playfully blew a kiss at Lorne. Lorne winked at her. The Mofo demons grunted and closed the door behind them.

As they made their way through the stables to the doors once again the older children mobbed Spike. “Bloody ankle biters,” Spike roared and vamped out.

The children screamed, laughed and hid behind their mothers. He chased them and they screamed and laughed some more. Xander watched in puzzled fascination as Spike played and chased the kids.

When he’d catch one they’d immediately still and bare a neck. He then kissed them tenderly on the neck and let them go. Finally when he’d given them all some attention he once again dug into his pocket and pulled out another handful of candy. He threw it into the air and the children scrambled to catch the treats. Spike stood for a moment and watched them before turning back and marching past Xander and Lorne. The Voynok keyed the door and opened it. Spike marched on through followed quickly by Xander and Lorne.

Spike stood in the hallway as if thinking. He stared across the hall at the double doors leading to the red stables.

"Spike?" Lorne asked.

"Thinking maybe it's time I had dinner," Spike said softly. "Should do it before I meet with Zorn."

Lorne nodded.

"There's a room marked down there?"

"Seventeen's ready to go," Lorne said in an odd mixture of business and sadness.

Oh ghod! Xander thought. He looked around. There had to be something he could use to stop this.

"I can take Xander on up to the office," Lorne said.

"No," Spike replied. "I'll take 'im with me."

"Sp..."

"He needs to see me feed...kill, Lorne. He's my Pet. It's going to happen."

NO! Xander thought desperately. NO! HE doesn't need to see it!

Spike turned and looked at Xander. Sorry, pet, Spike thought. Rather have you freak out where I can control the blow back rather than...

Spike sighed and grabbed the end of Xander's leash. "C'mon, Xander."

FUCK! Xander wanted to fight against Spike but the Voynok were watching. He knew what open defiance would get him. Don't do this, Spike!

Spike keyed the door to the red stables. Once again Voynok were stationed on the other side of the doors. Xander resisted as much as he dared but Spike's pull was forceful. Xander stumbled after him
and the doors swung shut behind them.

Xander wasn't sure what he expected on the red stables to be like but the first thing he noticed was the tranquility. There weren't the screams of terror or the wails of torture he might have expected in the place where Spike fed off his prey until they died.

The other thing Xander noticed was that on the outside of each door was a place for a name tag. They were empty except for the room seventeen. Even from the front of the hall, Xander could see there was a red marker on the outside of the door.

"Master Spike," a woman said in a soft voice as they passed one of the doorways. Spike stopped and turned toward the woman. She was a tall athletic woman with cascading red hair. She was absolutely stunning. She smiled at Spike and held out her hand. It trembled a bit and she sighed. In her palm was a tiny figure in a small boat made of folded paper. The figure looked like it wore a cowl of some sort and it held a hand out.

"Charon," Spike said as he took the little figure from the woman's hand. He looked at the woman and smiled.

"I wanted to finish it before I got too bad," she said as her head and arms jerked in slight random and uncontrolled movements.

Spike stepped forward and placed a delicate kiss on the woman's forehead.

"Promise, luv," Spike said, "when the time comes I'll be sure ya have enough to pay the ferryman."

The woman nodded and did the best to wipe a tear from her eye. Then she turned and withdrew back into her room.

Spike jerked on Xander's chain and started moving again towards room seventeen. Xander desperately wanted to ask what was wrong with that woman. Why did she shake so much? Why was she so accepting of her fate? Why did she make the little figure for Spike? And who is Charon? Xander wondered.

Spike stopped in front of room seventeen. The door was open but the lights were out.

*Is the room empty? Is the person hiding?* Xander thought desperately.

"Master Spike," a thin voice called from the darkness.

"Yeah," Spike said.

"Sorry 'bout the lights. Wasn't sure when you'd be around."

"Not a problem, mate," Spike said and the room was suddenly filled with light. A pale thin man sat on the bed. He blinked into the lights. In front of him was a chessboard.

"Tell Gregori I make my final move, Bishop to 'e' seven," the man said as moved a white bishop piece between two black pawns and caddy corner to a black king. The man sighed. "The 'Immortal Game' is complete."

"Will do," Spike said as he moved into the room. He looked at the board. "Never really cared for
chess. Always thought it was a bit of a nancy boy's game, really."

The man laughed, "I don't believe that Master Spike."

"Ya callin' me a liar?" Spike growled.

"Whatcha gonna do? Kill me?" the man asked and the suddenly grabbed his head. He screamed and sat down on the bed.

"Yeah mate, I am," Spike said as he dropped Xander's leash and moved toward man.

NO! Xander thought and rushed toward the two. I'm not gonna just stand by...

"STOP," Spike roared at Xander and the man moaned. Xander halted.

"Don't you move, Xan," Spike said more softly. "If you have any thoughts of doing this bloke a favor then you'll let me be."

A favor! Let you kill him! Xander thought. The man put his hands down and looked at Spike.

"That the new, Pet?" the man asked weakly.

"Yeah," Spike said. "Ain't broken in yet."

The man nodded.

"You interfere in this Pet and I promise you a beatin' and a half."

I don't care! Xander screamed internally and started to move again.

"It's OK," the man said looking at Xander. "Really, kid...much prefer being Master Spike's steak tartare then wasting away with this brain tumor...or being part of a floor show...taking my chances in the arena...or hell ending up as something else's dinner."

Brain tumor? Xander thought and stared dumbly at the man.

"Here," Spike said as he held out the tiny figurine to Xander. "Make yerself useful. Hold on ta this and DON'T damage it."

Xander nodded absently and took the little origami figure. He stared in fascinated horror as the man managed to get to his feet. Spike moved behind him. The man tilted his neck.

No! NO! Xander shook his head even as Spike vamped out and wrapped his arms around the man’s chest and stomach.

NO! Xander silently screamed as Spike buried his face into the man's neck. The man jerked and struggled for a moment then smiled.

"Hello darkness," the man whispered.

He closed his eyes and Spike feasted hungrily. Eventually the man went limp in Spike's arms. Spike feasted a little while longer. When the man no longer breathed, Spike finally lifted his head away.
His mouth was rimmed in red with blood. He stared at Xander.

*I'm going to be sick,* Xander thought.

Spike picked up the dead man and put his corpse on the bed.

"They don't always go that quietly, pet," Spike said.

*No shit, Sherlock,* Xander thought and his eyes blurred.

"I'm a vampire, pet. I need blood to live."

*You don't have to kill!* Xander thought. *You don't kill me!*

"Sometimes I drain just a little, other times I kill. Sometimes I don't have a choice," Spike said.

*Bullshit!* Xander thought and shook his head angrily.

"The ones down here, they're sick or damaged somehow not easily seen. Lorne finds 'em. There's no long term care for humans any more, pet. Cancer, brain tumors, ALS, Parkinson's disease...all them human aches and pains just mean sick cattle to slaughter or fodder for entertainment."

*So...you...Lorne finds them?* Xander tried to process what Spike was saying.

"He let's me know when its time and I take care of it. Tomorrow he'll go to market...or maybe find someone out on the floor whose sick or too damaged to be much 'use' anymore," Spike said still in game face.

*And you'll move them down here?* Xander thought bitterly.

"It's quiet; it's clean, comfortable for them and a steady diet for me when I need it."

*Oh, it's a win for everyone!* Xander thought sarcastically.

"I know yer a Scooby, Xander...and the Scooby in you wants ta stake me. But this is a demon run world and yer a Pet. The leash you wear isn’t just on the outside, pet," Spike said.

*Huh?*

"Gonna have ta leash your inner Scooby too, Xander. Yer a strong one, pet. Maybe the strongest of all the Scoobies."

Xander narrowed his eyes. *What are you talking about?*

"But yer strength is yer weakness. Ya’ll always put others before yerself. You'll push yerself down and submit ta horrors and nightmares, Xander, but you won't easily stand by and watch 'em done to others."

*That's called being HUMAN, Bat Breath! Something you couldn't understand!*

"Yer gonna have to learn ta do that, pet," Spike said and then walked into the small adjoining bathroom.
No! Xander shook his head as he heard the water running. A few moments later the water stopped. Spike came back into the room. His face was clean. He shifted into his human face and looked at the chessboard. He looked back at Xander.

"Sometimes you make sacrifices...heavy sacrifices to buy time or gain a better advantage," Spike said in the same soft cultured voice he used when reading Ivanhoe. "This is a recreation of a game played in 1851, known as 'The Immortal Game.' The winner, Adolf Anderssen, sacrificed his bishop, his rooks and ultimately his queen...but he won, Xander...in twenty-three moves. It's still studied as one of the great games of chess."

Xander studied Spike. *What sacrifices have you made, Spike?*

Spike walked over to Xander and took the figure from his hand. He touched Xander's cheek.

"Choose yer battles wisely, pet," Spike said now back to his normal tone. Then Spike left the room. Xander took a long last look at the cooling corpse then followed Spike.

***

The ride back up to Spike's office was silent and tense. Lorne even cast dark looks at Spike. Spike seemed to shrug those off as easily as Xander's glare.

The silence didn't last past the office door being shut.

"Just what was that all about?" Lorne snapped at Spike.

"Wot?" Spike said as he set both the scroll and small figure on his desk before sitting down.

"You know very well what!" Lorne said.

Xander stared at Lorne and Spike.

"I had to eat some time," Spike said. "Figured before the meeting was better than after. Don't think it'll be good to leave Xander afterwards."

*Dont use me as an excuse!* Xander thought.

"And what, you figured torturing Xander would be the appetizer or the dessert?"

"I don't torture," growled Spike.

"Then what do you call taking him the red stable?"

"A lesson!"

"A lesson!" Lorne pounded his fists on Spike's desk. "You asked me to help keep Xander sane and then you deliberately take him to the red stables with you?"

"Xander's still sane ain't he?" Spike said and pointed to Xander.

*Oh, boy,* Xander thought. *OK...Xan-man's still reeling from the whole Spike feeding thing. Don't put*
him in the middle of tonight's Celebrity Demon Grudge Match.

"So you won that gamble, lemon drop," Lorne spat.

"Wot? He's the Pet of the William the Bloody! Master of Las Vegas...Grandchilde of Angelus! Ya think he isn't going to have to see me feed from time to time?"

"Well he didn't have to tonight!"

"Oh and I should just spring it on 'im? Or maybe...ya know say 'Excuse me gents, gotta send my Pet outta the room before din!'" Spike yelled.

"There's an option!" Lorne yelled back.

"And you bloody well know it isn't!" Spike roared and stood up to stare at Lorne. For a moment his eyes shifted to the small wooden box on his desk before he continued, "YOU know there are times and places where I...there isn't any options and Xander had better just sit pretty...be the good Pet no matter who or what I'm dining on!"

Lorne stared at Spike. Red eyes locked with blue and then finally Lorne turned away.

"You didn't have to do this tonight," Lorne said quietly.

"Clocks, tickin', green bean," Spike said softly.

What's that mean? Xander thought.

"And you're still not going to sha...?"

"No," Spike cut Lorne off. "Look, why don't you go get the stuff for the martinis and maybe fix yerself one of those sea zephyrs..."

"Seabreazes," Lorne corrected with a slight smile.

"Right...one of those ruddy sweet drinks you like so well. Let me talk with Xander some before Zorn gets here, yeah?"

Lorne looked at Xander.

"You OK, cupcake?" Lorne asked.

I keep saying...well thinking...there's nothing OK about any of this, Xander thought, but obviously that doesn't do many any good. Xander sighed and nodded his head.

Lorne studied Xander for a moment then looked back at Spike.

"Remember your promise, lemon drop," Lorne said.

Spike nodded.

Promise? Xander wondered as Lorne turned and left the room. Spike sighed and looked at Xander.
"Pet," Spike said, "We need to talk."

_Oh, cuz those always go so well, _he thought and returned Spike's gaze.

***

Spike walked over to the wet bar in his office poured a drink. He downed it.

"You remember the Judge, pet?" Spike said with his back still turned to Xander.

_the Jud...Oh! The big blue evil smurf on steroids? The one Buffy blew up into itty tiny pieces?_ Xander thought and nodded. Spike turned around.

"He could sense the 'humanity' in demons, you know that?"

Xander thought back to Buffy's last Birthday, to just before everything had gone bad. _To when I'd let her down, _Xander thought and then stuffed his worst memories deep down. _Giles had said something about the Judge being able to "burn the humanity out of you."

Xander nodded.

"Well the old arsehat was a bit of let down after the big sell and build up Dru and Peaches gave 'im," Spike said, "but that whole sensin’ humanity gig...well wasn't just a bit of piffle."

_OK was that the Queen's English because that wasn't Southern California American, _Xander thought.

"Means he could do it, ya git," Spike said when he saw Xander's confused look. "Took one look at Dru and me and said 'You two stink of humanity. You share affection and jealousy.'"

_You and Dru...the stink part I can believe...but the humanity? _Xander blinked.

Spike shook his head and laughed, "You don't believe me do you, pet?"

_Then why aren't you ash? Why didn't he burn you up? _Xander thought.

"There he was all up on his high horse and I reminded him that it was Dru and me that put all his pieces back together again," Spike said. "Gave 'im another minion to munch and crunch on...well at least turn to ash."

_There was another vampire...with 'humanity' around?_

"Sorta makes things a little less black and white, eh?" Spike said watching Xander.

"Then comes Peaches...strutin' in big and bold as you please, pretendin' he was still all soulful and then lovin' it when the Judge laid his hand on 'im and...nuthin."

_Peaches...Angelus? You call Angelus...Peaches?_

"Are you gettin' what I'm tellin' you, Xander?" Spike asked.

_Huh?_
Spike snapped his fingers. "You payin' attention?"

Xander nodded.

"Do ya understand what I'm tellin' ya?" Spike asked again.

Sorta, Xander said and waggled his hand back and forth.

"Oi! Yer cute and a make a nice bed warmer but to bad yer half-sharp," Spike sighed.

Yeah...well that's means I'm also half dull too...hey! Xander glared.

"Angelus is pure evil, pet. There's no humanity in 'im. No affection."

Old news, Spike, Xander thought then looked sharply at Spike. But you’re saying...you have some humanity...and that...

"Ah! Looks like that refrigerator light works after all," Spike teased.

You know...all I need is a well placed toothpick or a smuggled chopstick! Hey...once Wills even took a vampire out with a pencil, Xander thought and started examining the writing instruments on Spike's desk.

"I'm sayin' that's my weakness."

Your weakness?

"You ever wonder why the slayer thought she had a fightin' chance that Mornin'?" Spike asked.

Xander didn't need to wonder to which morning Spike was referring. It was the Morning that changed everything. The morning I let Buffy down. Xander thought bitterly. Let everyone down.

Xander shrugged.

"The slayer had back up, Xander," Spike said softly.

Yeah...I was there. Had a rock...well until she gave me a stake, Xander thought.

"Me, Xander," Spike said.

YOU! Xander stood up and looked at Spike.

What the hell are you talking about?

"Slayer and I had a deal. I'd help keep the Tweed Man alive and get Dru out of the way. She let us leave town."

Buffy made a deal with you? Xander thought and then shook his head. I don't believe you!

"It's true, pet. She couldn't deal with all four of us on her own and stop Angelus and I was jealous of Dru and 'Daddy.' So when she made her move, I made mine."
Xander started to pace. *This doesn't make any sense. Buffy, never said anythin...*

Xander stopped. He remembered talking to Buffy on the phone while he was at the hospital after Willow had woken up.

"I'm gonna hit it come daybreak," Buffy had said.

"You'll need backup," Xander had replied.

"No. You stay there. I'm covered," she'd insisted.

Xander looked at Spike. *You were the backup.*

"I really thought she'd make it, ya know?" Spike said.

Xander tried to remember how to breathe. He stumbled and sat down on the couch.  
*Buffy...you...Spike...a deal?*

"Dru...'Gelus...weren't too happy with me," Spike continued. "I paid dearly for my weakness, pet."

*Some dusks I wake up and can still taste Dru's ashes on my lips, Spike thought.*

"And not just with bits of flesh, bone, and so many stripes across my back there wasn't any skin left to stripe. I paid in darkness...in a small cell...and in gnawing raw hunger. I paid by not bein' there when Dru needed me...when the new slayer found 'er and 'Daddy' was 'too late' and all he could do was scoop up the ashes to throw 'em in my face."

Xander looked up at Spike. There was a hardness, a cold fury that blazed out of Spike and a shiver raced down Xander's spine. Faith. Faith had killed, Dru and that night she'd come back and celebrated by jumping Xander. It was glorious, fast, hard and the one time only.

"I paid when Angelus banished me at dawn and told me not to come back until I proved I was the vampire he made me."

**He made you?**

Spike looked down at the small wooden box again then turned around and fixed another drink. He turned around and walked over to Xander. He handed the drink to him.

"Dru was my sire, but Angelus had more'n a hand in making me the vampire I am," Spike said. "Or least the wanker likes to thinks so, and I'm not really obliged ta argue with him at the moment."

Xander took the drink with a shaky hand. He took a sip and once again welcomed the slow burn.  
*Nice to know in times of crisis the Harris genes kick in, Xander thought.*

"This world's harsh, Xan. It's not black and white...and there's no room for weakness," Spike said.

Xander looked up at Spike.

"Unless you make that weakness a strength."
"Pet," Spike said and then crouched down so he was eye level with Xander. "I'm harsh with ya and I'm strict because I have ta be. Your weakness...my weakness...it could bring things down all on top of us. Ya think Angelus has a green stable like mine? Ya think he even designates a difference? Ya think he wouldn't relish torturing or draining a newborn even as it pops out of its mum?"

Xander paled.

"I am gonna push you, pet. I'm gonna make a proper Pet out of ya...and yer gonna be that Pet cuz if you don't...then you put more'n yerself...more'n me...more'n Lorne or Tara at risk. Every time the Scooby in you wants ta charge forward yer gonna learn to think about whether the short term gain is worth the long term cost."

Whether the sacrifice is worth the extra time or the strategical advantage, Xander thought as his stomach twisted and he slowly started to get a glimmer of what Spike was saying. What else aren't you telling me, Spike? What other "weakness" are you hiding? What else happened between you and Buffy?

"Now Zorn's gonna be here soon, pet," Spike said.

A new chill went down Xander's spine. He downed what was left of his drink. Spike took his glass.

"And yer going to be perfect. Yer gonna do everything I say; when I say it, yeah?"

Xander looked at Spike and nodded.

"I mean it, Xander. Zorn needs ta see you are my Pet. Not just so he buys whatever deal I spin, but because a pissant like 'im spreads news far beyond just my city."

And what deal will you spin? Xander wondered.

"What ever I say, you do. You follow my lead. The Scooby in you get's t'd off, cap 'im until we're in the suite, understand?"

Xander stared at Spike then nodded.

"I know yer scared of this dicksplat but ya gotta put it aside...focus on being my good Pet, yeah?"

That's easier said then done, Xander thought but nodded.

"Good," Spike said and stood up. He moved back and sat behind his desk. Xander watched him.

"Up!" Spike ordered. Xander stood.

"Take off yer shirt."

Xander stripped off his shirt.

"Lay it on the couch."

Once again, Xander obeyed.
"Play with yer nipples," Spike said as he leaned back in his chair.

*What?* Xander thought.

"PET!" Spike barked.

Xander licked his lips and began to run his fingers awkwardly up and over his brown little nubs.

"Oi! Ya've a lot to learn," Spike sighed.

*Sorry,* Xander thought and then tried then began to pinch himself slightly and rub his hardening flesh between his thumb and forefingers.

"Better," Spike said.

*Thank you, Oh Master!*

A knock interrupted the show for a moment. Spike cocked an eyebrow and Xander continued to tease himself

"Yeah?" Spike said.

Lorne entered and then flushed dark green when he saw Xander.

"Oh! Didn't mean to interrupt, Spike," Lorne said.

"Yer, not," Spike said.

"Run yer hands down yer chest, pet," Spike ordered.

Xander obeyed.

"Let me guess. More lessons?" Lorne asked as he carried in a tray with vermouth, gin, an ice bucket a silver shaker, a jar of olives and couple of martini glasses. He set the tray on Spike's desk.

"Sumthin' like that," Spike grinned.

"Zorn's just entered the casino," Lorne said.

Xander wanted to freeze but he didn't. He kept stroking his one hand low across his stomach and the other high across his chest. He stared at Spike.

"C'mere and kneel down beside me, Xan," Spike said.

Xander moved quickly beside Spike. He knelt down on his pillow.

"Nice and comfy, now. Like I taught, ya," Spike said.

Xander leaned to his side against Spike and rested his head on Spike thigh. He wrapped one hand around Spike's calf. Spike let a hand drop and ran it through Xander's hair.
"Ok, Lorne," Spike said. "Go get Zorn."

Author's Notes:

Among the odd things I researched besides transcripts of Surprise, Innocence, Becoming prt 1 andprt 2:

Martinis

The Immortal Game.

Charon

To see the little figure the woman made Spike click here.
"Master Spike," Zorn said and held out his hand as he entered the office. "It is an honor to meet with you."

Xander trembled at the familiar voice. He hated himself for the reaction but it was instinctive and born from a history of abuse and humiliation which Zorn had not only witnessed but applauded. In some ways, Zorn's veneer of civility and use of English had made Xander's ordeal more grotesque and degrading then if it had just occurred in the vacuum of the Azora's "habits" and gurgling language.

"Yeah, well, that remains to be seen...dunnit?" Spike replied as he briefly petted Xander's hair with one hand and pointed to the chair across from his desk with the other. He ignored Zorn's offered hand completely.

Zorn withdrew his hand and sat down. He chuckled, "Well, you do have a point. Business meetings can always turn sour, but I fervently hope not in our case."

"It's not a good start, mate, when the business you want to discuss is taking away my Pet."

Xander's breath hitched and he unconsciously tightened his hold on Spike's leg. Spike immediately ran his fingers through Xander's hair caressing his scalp.

"Master Spike," Zorn said,"I would never seek to do business to take away your Pet. I’ve only been asked to negotiate a fair deal...an offer to purchase or trade for your Pet."

Xander buried his face against Spike's leg at even the remote possibility Zorn could negotiate for Xander's return to the Azora. Please...please, Xander thought, keep your word, Spike. Don't betray me.

Spike curled his hand against the back of Xander's neck. He stroked his thumb along the pulse point on the side of Xander's neck. Shhh, pet, Spike thought. I got ya.

"And what makes ya think I want to trade...or am even interested in a deal?"

Zorn smiled and rested his elbows on the arm rest of his chair. He put his finger tips together in front of him and studied Spike for a moment. Then he looked at Spike desk: he looked at the Manuscript of Steganographia.

"Your interests in antiquities and the arcane has been noted, Master Spike. The demon I repre..."

"Vr’xkl," Spike interrupted. Xander shuddered.

Zorn nodded and continued, "The demon I represent, Vr’xkl, is a collector. He not only collects fine...bottles but he also collects fine objects encompassing a range of tastes and interests."

"Well," Spike said as he laid a hand on the scroll, "that's nice, but why should I be interested? I'm still workin' on makin' sure this is legit."
"Master Spike!" Zorn feigned outrage and leaned forward. "Of course the manuscript is legitimate! Why would you even doubt..."

"Because before I turn sumthin’ over to Angelus," Spike growled and tapped his fingers on the manuscript, "I like to be sure...very sure I'm given him exactly what he wants!"

Angelus! Xander thought frantically. The scroll Spike wanted to alter magically...Angelus wants? What...why? Has the bleach and peroxide killed all of his two working brain cells?!

"A..Master Angelus?" Zorn whispered. Xander longed to see the look of fear on the demon's face. However, even if he still hadn't had his own face buried...NOT comfortingly...just safely against Spike's leg, the desk would still be in his way.

"You think I really give a rat's arse about this shite?" Spike asked as he shoved the scroll a bit towards Zorn. "I have a casino ta run...not portals to hells to open or barristers ta keep happy."

"So...you don't have any interests in other..."

"Didn't say that now, did I?" Spike once again cut Zorn off.

"Forgive me, Master Spike, but I'm confused."

"I might not be interested...but my grandsire has a wish list and Father's Day is comin’ up," Spike replied. "The happier I keep 'Gelus...the happier I am...and the happier I am...the happier the demons in MY city are. Understand?"

"Of course," Zorn said. Xander could hear the smile in his voice and clinched the hand not holding Spike's leg into a fist.

"So...," Spike drawled. "I'm not sayin' I'm willing ta give up my Pet, but...let's talk. What does your employer think he has that I might be interested in enough to give up my nummy?"

"Well, Master Spike," Zorn replied, "before we can begin negotiations, I must...and please do forgive me for this...I must be sure that the bott...your Pet is in the same fine state he was when you acquired him."

"You think I abuse my Pet?" Spike growled.

"Master Spike, I think you treat your Pet in the manner which pleases you. All I am saying is that my employer enjoyed certain functions and abilities of your, Pet. If he is no longer capable of functioning in that mann..."

"And what makes you think he can't?"

"Well, I do understand he was publicly punished last night and given the temperament of this bottle...I mean your Pet, I'd hazard a guess you've had to punish him privately as well."

Were a handful eh, Harris? Spike thought as he cast a quick look at Xander who still had his face buried against Spike's leg. Good on ya. Wouldn't expect anything less of ya, Spike thought and gently caressed Xander's neck.

"While this human is my Pet," Spike barked, "his punishments are not up for discussion."
"Of course not, Master Spike!" Zorn cried. "But surely you can see how my employer might be concerned?"

"Your employer's ability to control his stock is not my problem," Spike said.

"It is not a matter of control, Master Spike," Zorn explained. "I assure you, after this human's first visit to the 'Tank' he was easily controlled."

"The 'Tank'?"

"Master Spike, Azoras...like vampires I dare say, appreciate the flavor a human can provide. And while you perhaps seek one kind of flavor in your Pet...Azoras seek a different. They have found that physical damage often disrupts production and taste of the fine liqueur the human male can produce when properly stimulated."

_Raped you asshole! It's called rape!_ Xander thought viciously and wanted to twist around to look at Zorn but Spike's gentle hand became firm and held him in place. _Your fucking boss raped me so he could get a buzz! There's nothing fine about it!_

"So this 'Tank'...dunnit harm 'em? The humans?"

"No. Disobedient bottles are reminded of the rules and then locked in the 'Tank' where they are immersed in Gernackl'var."

"Gerna...wot?"

"It's a fluid that is buoyant and 'breathable' by humans. It is kept at the same temperature as the human body. Once the human is in the tank they are completely isolated from sight, sound, taste, smell, touch and feel. They are then left to think about the rules for a period of time until they are deemed compliant. Many humans only require one visit to the Tank. Most are completely pliant and obedient after their time inside and are left with none of the troublesome mental processes that caused the problems in the first place. The wonderful part of this is, they are physically in perfect health and can continue to provide the essence for which they are prized."

_Pet!_ Spike thought and was torn between wanting to rip Zorn's head from his shoulders or taking Xander in his arms and rocking him gently.

"Of course, your particular human, was a bit of a challenge. He is prized for his bold and lively flavor but his temperament had led him to visiting the 'Tank' on multiple occasions."

"Multiple?" Spike barely choked out without revealing the depth of his rage and anger.

"I believe it was fou....no five times! Yes, your Pet was a wonder! Five times he went to the 'Tank!' We were sure after the last visit he would finally be completely pliant. He was close, but the mental spark was still there. I thought it might be. I won a private bet between my employer and me over it."

_So glad I could make your day!_ Xander thought bitterly and tried to control his breathing. The memories of the 'Tank' were pressing in on him and suddenly he began to feel claustrophobic. Only the constant stroking of Spike's thumb, now stroking down his cheek, kept him from trying to struggle out of position and running out of the room.
"Five times?" Spike whispered. _Xander! No wonder ya wake up screamin'...and the water...PET!_

"He is a remarkable specimen," Zorn replied.

_One that will live well and long to dance, piss and shit on your remains!_ Spike vowed.

"Again I ask...wot does this have ta do with the way I deal with my Pet?" Spike barely kept his game face in check.

"I merely ask to examine him, Master Spike."

"Examine how? NO ONE _touches_ what's mine!" Spike growled.

"Of course not! A visual inspection will be sufficient," Zorn replied.

Spike looked down at Xander. He was barely able to control his breathing. His one hand was clenched so hard Spike thought he could smell the faint traces of blood on his palm. The other hand was in a death grip around Spike's leg. Spike looked back at Zorn.

_Should just rip off each one of those horns outta his head and then shove 'em up his arse! Then sink 'im in a tank up to his neck of saltwater!_ Spike thought. _And that's just the warm up round!_

Spike tapped his fingers on his desk. He still needed more information. He still didn't know how Xander lost his voice and he still hadn't got the one other thing he really needed from Zorn. Spike cast a look at the scroll. He sighed.

"I suppose that's a fair request," Spike said slowly.

_NO! Spike! Fucking...don't do this!_ Xander silently begged and held his breath. _Don't make me parade...perform...do anything in front of...well calling him scum is an insult to scum everywhere._

"Up, Pet!" Spike commanded.

Xander took a breath and forced himself to stand. He looked at Spike and pleaded with his eyes.

_Trust me, Xan_, Spike's eyes commanded him back. It was hard for Xander to do when he could already feel the leering and amused stare emanating from Zorn.

"Ya know, all this yappin' has made me thirsty," Spike said turning his eyes away from Xander to look at Zorn. Once again he fought to keep control of his demon. Zorn was practically salivating over Xander; and it wasn't over Xander's inherent yumminess. Spike knew the look. Zorn was a demon who relished the pain and humiliation of others. "I hear you make a mean martini?"

"Passable," Zorn smiled and preened.

"Well why don't you start fixin' a batch while Xa...my Pet here gets undressed?"

"I'd be honored," Zorn said and began making himself comfortable making martinis.

"Pet," Spike swiveled in his chair to face Xander. "Strip!"

Xander started fumbling at the buttons on his fly and cast a worried glance at Zorn.
"EYES ON ME!" Spike roared.

Xander jumped and looked frantically at Spike. Zorn chuckled.

*Eyes on me, Xan,* Spike tried to convey more gently to Xander with his eyes. *Focus just on me.*

Xander focused on Spike and quickly finished undoing the buttons on his fly. He could hear liquid being poured into the shaker. He slid his pants over his legs and stepped out of them.

"His knees are a little bruised," Zorn noted as he added more liquid to the shaker.

"Doesn't impair his...function," Spike said with a forced leer and traced a finger down the center of Xander's chest, past his navel and to the tip of his flaccid cock. Goose pimples were left in his wake.

"Of course not, Master Spike," Zorn said as he opened the jar of olives. "Just noting the...damage. Of course it's temporary and will heal. Still, he must have been on his knees some time."

"He was," Spike said as he idly stroked and petted Xander's cock. *Please, Spike,* Xander silently begged. *Don't.*

"I do need to...inspect all of him, Master Spike," Zorn said.

"Of course," Spike replied and withdrew his finger. He forced himself to not respond to the look in Xander's eye. "Turn around, Pet."

Xander turned around.


"Mmmm," Zorn said as he paused in his mixing for a moment and studied Xander's bare and naked flesh. "Doesn't appear to be any damage. Does remind me though of the first time I saw your Pet."

"Really?" Spike asked as he casually began to run his nails over Xander's ass cheeks.

"I was at his first tapping," Zorn said and added a bit more liquid to the shaker. "The secret to my martinis, Master Spike, is a bit of olive brine."

"A dirty martini," Spike said.

Zorn chuckled. "The dirtier the better."

Spike forced a laugh while Zorn finished mixing and started to pour the drinks.

"So tell me about this 'tappin," Spike said.

"Ah," Zorn replied as he handed a drink over the desk to Spike and sat down. "If you've never been to one, you are missing quite a treat, Master Spike! They are wonderful! Even if the bottle turns out less than spectacular, the first tapping is always fine entertainment."

Spike took a sip of his martini and choked it down. *Bloody hell! Did he leave any olive juice in the*
"Excellent," Spike said as he raised his glass to Zorn.

"Thank you, Master Spike," Zorn said and nodded. "As I was saying, your Pet was a particular delight. You see the Azora do their best to 'sample' a bottle at market. Then if they think the bottle has potential, they purchase it. They put it in the vault for about a month in order to give time for the bottle to acclimate to its new environment, start appropriate physical conditioning and of course to let the diet take effect."

"The 'enhancers?'" Spike asked.

"That and the diet are also formulated to ensure optimal taste and consistency of the liqueur."

Xander stared at the wall and bit his lip. Spike continued to fondle him and wheedle Zorn to tell one of Xander's worst nightmares.

"After about a month...the Azora typically invite some associates and other witnesses to gather for a dinner and the first tapping. The bottle is brought from the vault. They are restrained. They have only been given the basic of rules about harming themselves or escape, subsequently they are told about being still and quiet. You see, for the first tapping the Azora want to see all the natural responses of a bottle. It helps them judge the flavor.

Spike choked down another sip and wished he could shove the glass down Zorn's throat.

"Once their hands and feet...and sometimes their head are restrained then the tapping begins. The Azora stimulates the bottle until it ejaculates and the essence is milked. Usually they are milked twice that first tapping. During subsequent tappings they may be milked until they physically can't produce any more fluid."

"And...my Pet's first tapping?" Spike asked trying not to picture Xander chained and impaled by one of the Azora's tentacles and being forced to cum as entertainment and amusement for other demons.

"Oh, Master Spike. Your Pet was magnificent! It must have been about...I think five months ago," Zorn replied.

Five months ago! Xander thought and his breathing stuttered. I was with the Azora for...for only six months?

Spike continued to fondle Xander obscenely all the while wishing he could steal him away from the prick nattering on in front of him.

"Some humans cry...beg...weep...even soil themselves," continued Zorn. "Some never need to see the 'Tank' because their mental processes stop after the first tapping. Your Pet was amusing. He talked...then yelled...screamed...and I do believe he really did fight stimulation for as long as he possibly could. It was a very exciting show! He and I had a most marvelous exchange of words. And when his essence started to spurt and flow? Well...it was easy to see that my employer was well pleased with the flavor. You know he even continued to fight and resist when we returned him to his vault? After the first tapping, Azoras remove a bottle's voice. They find the noises after its first tapping, distracting. So they are given Torval'da."

"Torval'da?" Spike asked leaning forward and rested his hand on Xander's backside.
"I'm not sure what it is exactly, but it strips away a human's voice. Your Pet fought even then. He did not willingly he drink it...and when the Durvahl tried to force him he bit through the flesh of one of their fingers. Most exciting!"

"Most," Spike said and leaned back. _Least I gotta name now_, Spike thought bitterly. _Can research what this Torval'da is and can see if I can reverse its affects._

Xander shuddered under Spike's hand. He was exposed in so many more ways than just having his ass bare and open in front of Zorn. He fought the need to just crumble to his knees...to rock himself away into some abyss like corner of his mind.

"My employer was well pleased with this human, Master Spike," Zorn said, "and he is prepared to deal generously for its return."

"And what's he willing ta deal?" Spike asked and tried to soothe the tremors coursing through Xander.

"Well, my employer has a copy of the _Chyromantie ac Phisionomie Anastasis._"

"So did my old school master," Spike huffed.

"Ah, but was it the original or a copy?" Zorn asked.

"That may have some value," Spike muttered. _Probably about as genuine as the St. Peter’s bones some try and peddle to settle their bets too_, Spike thought.

"How about the _Douze Anneaux_ or... _The Sphere of Sacrobosco?_

"Bloody hell!" Spike nearly spat out his drink. "The Sphere of Sacrobosco?"

"And not just the treatise, Master Spike, but...THE Sphere!"

_And a fat lot of good it will do a prat if they don’t have the spell of invocation to use it_, Spike thought, but _I'll play the mark_.

"As above...so below..." Spike intoned.

"As below...so above," Zorn finished with a flourish and a smile.

"And why hasn't your employer ever used the Sphere?"

"He's a collector, Master Spike," Zorn said. "He really has no interest in those sorts of things."

_He knows the activating spell's been lost long before my great-grandsire of a tart Darla first lifted her skirts!_ Spike thought.

"It is an intriguing offer," Spike said, "though it's not on my grandsire's list."

"Does it have to be, Master Spike?" Zorn asked. "Wouldn't something like the Sphere fit in much better in a city like Las Vegas than say...Los Angeles?"
Spike, Xander thought desperately. *Please!*

"Las Vegas is better suited for the grand and elaborate," Spike said and managed to finish his dreadful martini. "Care to pour another one?"

"With pleasure," Zorn said and once again stood and began fixing another round of martinis. "Of course I will need further proof of the human's ability to *function.*"

*From 'your Pet' to 'the human'...ya tosser! Ya think ya got me, eh?* Spike thought.

"Pet," Spike ordered. "Turn around and look at me."

*No, Spike!* Xander silently pleaded even as he quickly obeyed. Spike's earlier promise that no matter what he wouldn't give Xander up was all that was keeping him from running, but he was close.

Zorn began to pour the gin and Spike wrapped his hand around Xander's cock. Spike arched an eyebrow and began to firmly stroke and play with Xander's limp flesh.

"Gonna give the demon a show, Pet," Spike said.

*Not this, Spike,* Xander pleaded with his eyes. Spike's answer was to continue to stroke and fondle Xander. Zorn added the vermouth.

"Perhaps a little extra is needed," Spike murmured and tugged on Xander until he stood between Spike's legs. "Hands behind yer neck, Pet."

Xander obeyed, Zorn began to shake the martini ingredients and Spike leaned forward and engulfed Xander's cock with his mouth.

Xander hissed! The smooth, cool suction of Spike's clever mouth was not something he was prepared to resist. He felt himself start to harden. Zorn chuckled.

Fuck you, Spike! Xander thought. *You promised!* *You....NO!*

Spike's clever lips and tongue were working their magic and Xander could feel himself responding. His balls were growing heavier, his breathing rapider and the blood was surging down his cock. Spike continued to work his way down Xander's dick until it was buried down the vampire's throat. Then Spike began to swallow and suck. Xander shook his head. He wasn't going to let this happen! Not again! Not in front of Zorn!

Zorn had grown quiet and still. He'd leaned far over Spike's desk to watch the show. Master Spike had swallowed his Pet's member down and was now milking him with his throat.

Spike pulled back and Zorn nearly groaned. The human's dick was coated with a sheen of saliva and Zorn could smell the hint of precum.

"More proof?" Spike asked.

Zorn nodded. Spike smiled and snaked a hand up Xander's chest and then up to Xander's mouth.

"Open," he commanded. Xander obeyed and Spike slipped in a finger. "Get it good and wet, Pet."
I won't forget this, Spike! Xander thought as he angrily obeyed. Some part of him hoping that obedience would buy him time. Time enough for what, he wasn’t sure. I will remember just how much your word means!

Zorn added the olive juice to the martinis, stirred and poured them into the glasses. He held them over the desk. Spike slid his hand out of Xander's mouth and snaked it behind his pet. He worked its way down to Xander's ass and then burrowed its way between Xander's cheeks.

Bastard! Xander thought as he felt Spike's finger begin to caress and play with his sensitive little hole. Then Spike once again wrapped his other hand around Xander's cock. He smiled.

"Bottom's up," Spike said and then swallowed Xander down. Zorn clinched the martini glasses in his hands and Xander clinched his ass cheeks. His breathing grew rapid and he fought even as Spike worked and stimulated him. Spike had been so good about teasing his body earlier that it didn't take much. Xander couldn't help thrust a little against Spike and the heat inside of him built.

You promised you'd push...but you wouldn't take! Xander thought angrily even as he felt his balls begin to draw up and the heat coalesce at the center of his spine. You promised not to give me up!

Spike's finger burrowed and pushed just a little to barely breach Xander's hole. The extra stimulation was too much. Xander began to thrust and seek oblivion.

"Marvelous..." Zorn whispered in appreciation.

"WHAT!" Spike suddenly yelled as he quickly pulled off of Xander's dick. He squeezed a hand tightly around it's glans to keep Xander from spilling.

Zorn and Xander jumped. Martinis dribbled and spilled out on to Spike's desk coating the papers and the scroll on his desk. Xander tried to catch his breath.

"BLOODY HELL!" Spike screamed as he saw the mess on his desk. "WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?"

"Ma..Master..S..Sp..Spike," Zorn tried to sputter and jerked the glasses back which only spilled more of the vermouth and gin out on to the desk.

"LORNE!" Spike roared and then vamped out. His eyes blazing yellow and focused on Zorn. "GET out you shithead! You wanker! Look at the mess you've made of my office! You go back and tell yer boss...he wants ta deal? He comes ta the casino 'imself! No more lackeys! NOW GET OUT before I rip your head off your neck and use your skull for an ashtray!"

Zorn stumbled backwards and tripped over the chair. Glasses crashed to floor and shattered. He stumbled to his feet and rushed out past Lorne who was rushing inside followed by security and a couple of minions.

"Le...Master Spike?" Lorne asked.

"Get this mess cleaned up!" Spike roared and waved a hand at his desk. He looked back at Xander. Xander was struggling to keep his composure. He wasn't sure whether to be frightened or to be turned on any more. He looked back at Spike.

"Ya gonna add to this mess, Pet?" Spike barked.
OH...so not in the mood right now, Xander thought and shook his head, despite what Lil' Xan-man was thinking just a moment ago.

"Good!" Spike said and released Xander's cock. "Now grab yer kit and go get dressed in the corner. Stay there until I tell ya otherwise!"

Xander nodded and quickly grabbed up his pants. He ran by Lorne and the other demons, picked up his shirt from the couch and began dressing in the far corner.

"Look at this shite!" Spike roared.

"Master Spike..." Lorne tried to placate.

"This is a mess! This has to go to Angelus!" Spike interrupted and held up an alcohol splattered scroll.

"I'll take care of it," Lorne said.

Xander finished buttoning up his pants. He studied Spike and Lorne. He looked at the scroll.

_This s...scroll, it's just paper and ink. Y..you don't need magic to m..make paper and ink illegible_, Tara had said. Xander jerked on his shirt and focused his attention back on Spike. A rage started building in him as realization worked past his fear and lingering arousal.

_You BASTARD! YOU utter and contemptible souless...moraless...moronic...waste of space and hair care!_ Xander silently fumed. _YOU USED ME!

Spike detected the sudden rise in Xander's heartbeat and the drop in the scent of his fear. Spike shifted his attention to the corner.

_Mt. Harris is about ta blow, Spike thought. And not in the fun and nummy way._

"Lorne," Spike barked as he began to quickly make his way to his fuming pet, "FIX THIS!"

Lorne nodded.

"C'mon, pet," Spike barked as he grabbed Xander's elbow and led him out of the room. Xander barely controlled his urge to jerk away from Spike. Spike marched him through the casino and to the private elevator. As soon as the doors closed and the elevator began to lift Spike released Xander.

"Pet," Spike began. Xander just pointed his finger and shook his head.

"Xander!" Spike tried again and Xander stuck his fingers in his ears and turned his back on Spike.

.Done listening to you!_ Xander thought.

"Oi!" Spike growled and grabbed Xander. He whirled him around and snarled, "Don't you ever turn yer back on me!"

_Or what! _Xander thought furiously and struggled against Spike. _You gonna beat me? Rape me? Kill me? What...stick me in your stables? WHAT!
"Xander!" Spike raged and picked Xander up and threw him belly first across his shoulder in a fireman's carry.

*Put me down you fanged freak!* Xander thought as he kicked and beat at Spike.

"STOP IT!" Spike roared and slapped Xander's ass hard with a loud smack.

Xander stilled for a moment. *You didn't just…?* He thought and tried to process the stinging in his ass. The elevator stopped and the doors opened. Spike stomped his way to the suite door and keyed it open.

*You spanked me!* Xander silently growled and then began to really kick and hit.

"XANDER!" Spike roared and smacked Xander again. Xander ignored him and kept fighting Spike.

"I've had ENOUGH," Spike said and stomped into the bedroom. He threw Xander down on the bed who bounced for a moment. "You get up and swing at me and so help me, Xander not only are you going back up on the pedestal to be striped but so is TARA!"

*You wouldn't!* Xander thought as he laid on the bed his chest heaving with anger.

"Don't test me, pet," Spike said. "I like the bird and I'd hate ta put her up there."

*I HATE you!* Xander thought as he lay still and stared at Spike.

Spike stood there for a moment assessing whether or not Xander was going to push past the boundaries any more. When it appeared the threat against Tara had worked Spike sat down on the bed and let out an unneeded breath.

*I'm sorry, Xan," Spike said softly.

*Fuck you,* Xander thought and looked away from Spike.

Spike reached out and cupped Xander's chin. He gently turned Xander's head so his pet had to look at him again.

*I didn't do it ta hurt ya," Spike said.

*You used me,* Xander thought. *You used my...my humiliation...my r...what happened to me to get something you wanted.*

*I wish I could tell ya pet, that even if I'd know what had had happened ta ya before the meeting...I wouldn't have made ya go through that, but then we both know I'd be lyin'."

*Ain't that the truth,* Xander thought.

"But if it's any consolation, pet," Spike said. "Think how pissed Angelus is going ta be at Zorn. I wouldn't be making any bets on his future."

*His future? What about yours?* Xander wondered. *Ya think Angelus isn't gonna find out you orchestrated the whole thing? And what about me? Just another sacrafice?...And...why? Why are
Spike reached out a finger and brushed the hair on Xander's forehead. Xander forced himself to be still. Spike sighed.

"I don't wanna fight any more tonight, Xander," Spike said softly and then stood up.


Spike sighed and then slowly undressed. He never took his eyes off Xander as he slowly peeled off clothes. When he was done he leaned over Xander and slowly began to undo the buttons on Xander's pants. Xander's eyes flew open.

"Shhh, pet," Spike said. "Just undressin' ya. No funny business...no hanky panky."

Right, Xander thought and resigned himself to being stripped by Spike. Although, Spike's movements were slow and methodical, they weren't seductive. It almost seemed like Spike was trying to be careful not to frighten Xander. When Xander was as naked as Spike, the master vampire crawled up into the bed and lay next to Xander.

"Now I'm gonna do what I really wanted ta do when that arsewipe was telling me about all that had happened to ya," Spike whispered.

No! Xander thought as Spike pulled him close and wrapped his arms around him. No more! Can't you fucking leave me alone for one nig...?

Spike began to gently rock Xander in his arms and to hum a lilting tune.

Huh? Xander thought.

Spike continued to hold and to rock Xander until he reluctantly started to relax.

I'm never going to figure you out am I, blood breath? Xander though as he let himself be held until the earlier anger faded away. Spike had kept his promise. Xander was still Spike's and Zorn never touched him. Guess I have to give him credit for that.

Every now and then Spike would place a soft kiss on Xander's head. Eventually Xander started to feel sleepy. Spike pulled a blanket from the bottom of the bed and covered them.

"The world's changed a lot in the past seven years, pet," Spike whispered as Xander's eyes grew heavy and his breathing deepened. "Wonder how different it'll be the next seven?"

Xander shrugged sleepily.

"I'm sorry I wasn't there," Spike whispered. "When the world fell to hell, I should have found ya, Xan. Angel gave ya to me. You were always mine. Should have made sure of that. If I had...none of this would have ever happened to ya. They're gonna pay, Xan. I promise. Gonna pay for hurtin' what's mine."

Uh huh, Xander thought as he curled his hand around Spike's and fell asleep.
Chapter 26

Spike's head joined his shoulder and leaned against the cold steel bars. It was a change from leaning against the cold concrete wall. He couldn't do anything about sitting on the floor though, there wasn't room enough to stand, only to crawl, sit or curl up in a fetal position.

He tried to think past the raw hunger gnawing at his gut the way he'd gnawed at the tiny bones littering the floor sucking every bit of marrow out of them he could. It was no use. Thinking past the pain in his gut only reminded him of the pain in his back where the open and seeping wounds flared like blooming flowers across his back.

A rat scurried across the other side of the room and Spike's eyes flashed gold. The rats were too wary of him now to come close to his cage; his cell. He'd drained too many of their brethren. Still, it just took one careless or stupid one and some of Spike's pain could be eased a fraction. He'd be further damned if he wouldn't be ready.

If Spike had had the energy he would have snarled, raged or slammed his fists against the bars at his current low state. Instead he wheezed out a weak and bitter laugh.

No better than that tosser Angel now, he thought, locked in a cage...salivatin' over rats.

"Well you still have yer sense of humor," a voice interrupted Spike's thoughts.

This time the vampire did snarl. He lifted his head and searched the room outside his cell. Bloody too far out of it if gits and wankers are sneakin' up on me! He thought.

A lean young man with short dark hair entered the room. He was vaguely familiar.

"You room service?" Spike asked.

"Sorry, no," the main replied. His Irish brogue was now evident.

"Wonderful, another Paddy," Spike snorted."Ya know, the better part of you lot dribbled down yer Mum's legs after yer Da climbed off 'er and headed back down to the pub."

"And I see you picked up Angelus' knack for crude and rude language."

"Well, "Spike smiled grimly, “gotta do something to get back in his good graces."

"Do you?" The man asked as he stepped closer to Spike's cell.

Spike narrowed his eyes and studied the man more carefully. This time the vampire recognized the man.

"Yer that prat Doyle! Yer the Pylean's pet half-breed!"

The man shook his head and for a moment his face was covered in blue spikes and his eyes flashed red. Then he shook his head again and he looked human.

"Doyle's fine."

"Whaddya want...Doyle?" Spike sighed and leaned back against the bars.

"Was bored...thought maybe you could use some company."
"Well then," Spike purred, "by all means come closer and get cozy."

Doyle smiled and shook his head.

"You might be the end of me some day, Spike," Doyle said, "but not today."

Spike studied the odd half-human and half-demon again.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Spike finally asked.

"Means you have a destiny, Spike."

Spike laughed again, "Dru put you up to this, mate? Or is this another one of Gelus's games? A destiny?"

"You were on the right path," Doyle continued, "you didn't fail. The slayer did...and others did."

"Wot?" Spike snarled.

"The deal you made. Betraying Angelus..."

"Was a moment of weakness!" Spike yelled as loud as he could. "It won't happen again!"

"Yer weakness was...is yer strength."

"Yer daft and ya talk dangerous...half-breed!," Spike growled. "And unless this is all a test to get me back into Angelus' good graces..."

"Angelus doesn't have good graces," Doyle interrupted, "and your test...the way you'll earn your way back to Angelus' 'side' is a way off yet."

"He tell ya that?"

"No."

"Then how do you ruddy well know?"

Doyle moved a little closer to Spike and crouched down so they were eye level. He studied the battered and tortured vampire.

"You're not like the other vampires, Spike..."

"Right...I have a destiny."

"You can love, Spike," Doyle continued. "You loved Dru...and you still loved yer Mum even after you were turned."

"SHUT IT!" Spike roared in a slight panic. He hadn't told anyone about his mother. How did this Doyle twat know or think he know what happened?

"Dru...Angelus...many other demons would see that as a weakness in you, Spike, but it's your strength. It's what made you unpredictable to Angelus...made you capable of blindsiding him. He sees your 'weakness' as something he has to beat or break out of you. He's tried since the moment Dru brought you home, so to speak. Yet, it's what's made you the vampire that survived when your happy little family fell apart. Think about it Spike. You were the youngest of the four greatest vampires that terrorized Europe and when everything fell apart you were left with an insane and
wounded sire. You not only survived...but thrived! Angelus has always tried to mold you...make you into a vampire more like him...but yer not, Spike."

"Bloody right I'm not!" Spike said bitterly. "I'm down here here wastin' away and he's up there with my Dru and none of yer flowery words are gonna change that!"

"Spike, this isn't the world you wanted..."

"NONE of this is what I wanted," Spike snarled.

"There's going ta come a time when you can have a chance to change it all around again," Doyle said. "You'll be on yer own for a long time. Focus on yer weakness...how to make it a strength when ya need it. When you come back..."

"When I come back?" Spike asked. "Are you soddin' daft? Where do you think I'm goin'?"

"You'll have an ally in Lorne," Doyle continued. "You'll need to prove your ruthlessness. Show Angelus you are his grandchilde and hide yer strength...and it's ok. I forgive you. It's my destiny."

"Forgive me? It's your destiny? Ya know, yer getting more balmy with every word," Spike said shaking his head.

Doyle smiled, "I wish I'd had a chance ta get to know you better Spike. I know yer gonna be important to my Lorne and ta the world. I just won't be around ta see it."

"And where are you going?" Spike snorted.

"Where the Powers say," Doyle said sadly.

"The Powers?" Spike asked.

Doyle shook his head and stood up.

"Forgive me if I'm not as pleasant when we next meet," Doyle said. "But please remember, it's OK. Do what you have ta do. I DO FORGIVE YOU."

"Mate, your train has seriously jumped its tracks," Spike said.

Doyle laughed and nodded.

"Good night, Master Spike," Doyle said and then turned and left the room leaving Spike alone again with his pain, hunger and pile of rat bones.

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Spike opened his eyes and found curious brown ones staring at him. Xander pointed at him and made the "OK" gesture with his hand.

"Yeah," Spike groaned and rolled to his side and propped himself up on his elbow. "Ya don't have the corner on bad dreams, pet."

_Dream the world ran out of bleach for your hair?_ Xander thought and cocked an eyebrow.

"Did I wake ya?" Spike asked.

Xander shook his head.
"Hmph," Spike said and then rolled on to his back. "Done yer human business in the bathroom yet?"

Xander shook his head again.

"Well, get to it. Got some punishment ta get out of the way before brekkies."

*Punishment! For what!* Xander thought.

Spike looked at Xander who was frowning and not moving.

"Seems ta me there was a certain Pet in my bed who was kicking and hitting...not to mention who tackled me yesterday. Believe there are rules against attacking yer master," Spike said. "Now, get in bathroom...do yer thing and get back here."

*I hate you, Spike,* Xander thought and rolled out of the bed and marched into the bathroom. *Just when I think there might be some bit of decency buried in that dead and dusty heart of yours you prove me wrong.*

Spike smiled as he heard Xander stomp around in the bathroom. There was something oddly comforting about Xander's moments of rebellion and displays. He rolled back on to his stomach, rested his head on his crossed arms and listened to Xander. *Won't be long, pet, Spike vowed, before I can listen to ya complain and snark.*

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Twenty minutes later Xander came back into the bedroom showered, shaved, and with his various bruises and whatnot's treated. He looked at Spike. Spike smiled.

"Climb back up on the bed," Spike ordered.

*Oh goody,* Xander thought.

"Got a special punishment for ya this evening," Spike said.

*Can hardly wait...oh wait! I lied! I can!* Xander thought even as he obeyed and climbed up on the bed with Spike.

"So, ya know how ya kicked, hit and otherwise abused yer poor old Spike? I think you need ta kiss it and make it better," Spike said.

*What?* Xander thought. Spike chuckled when he saw the look on Xander's face.

"Get over here and start layin' some lip lovin' on all those places ya hit me, pet," Spike faked a growl. "Better make it good."

Xander longed to shake his head, hit Spike again or just storm out of the room. Instead he sighed and crawled closer to Spike. He looked at the vampire’s long, lean, muscled and naked back.

*Where do I even begin? Not like numbnu...whoa! Not thinking of those!* Xander thought. *Not like NumbSKULL is bruised anywhere. How am I supposed to know where to kiss it and make it...so of this is not good for my appetite?*

"Start with my right shoulder blade," Spike grinned.

Xander sighed and leaned across Spike. He put his hand down by Spike for balance. He placed a quick peck on Spike's shoulder blade and sat back.
"Oi! Ya call that a kiss! I’ve seen more passion from nuns! I said some lip lovin' not a quick brush of skin on skin."

Xander rolled his eyes and leaned over Spike again. *I really, REALLY, hate you,* Xander thought as he brushed his mouth slowly and softly over Spike's shoulder blade. He let his lips linger for a moment before withdrawing.

"Much better, pet," Spike purred. "Now slide those lips over to my left shoulder and when yer done there slide 'em down my spine to the lower part of my back."

Xander took a deep breath and then lowered himself over Spike again. He caressed Spike's shoulder with his lips and then as ordered slid his mouth over to the top of Spike's spine and began to trace a slow descent down Spike's back.

Xander couldn't help but breathe in the unique smell of Spike; musk, smoke and whiskey. For some reason it had an odd effect on him and about half way down Spike's back Xander had the oddest need to lick his lips, as if he had to know if Spike's scent could be transferred, if he could taste it on his lips. Xander's tongue slid out and not only made contact with his own skin but Spike's cool flesh as well. Both men groaned. Xander's was silent and Spike's was satisfyingly loud.

Spike's scent filled Xander's mouth and he found himself oddly hungry for it. He opened his mouth wider and kissed a little hungrier down Spike's back reveling in the hard lines and the smooth curve of each muscle. When he reached the hollow of Spike's lower back he couldn't help but dart his tongue out for another taste.

"You'd have better access if you'd straddle me," Spike suggested. Xander lifted his head and looked at Spike. Spike's eyes were a wide and a dark blue. There was something off about Spike's logic but his tone didn't make his words so much a suggestion as much as a softly worded order.

Xander sat up and then moved closer to Spike. He threw a leg over him and then straddled Spike right over the place he'd just tasted. His body reacted to the thought and heat began to coil low in his groin. Suddenly there was movement underneath him and the delicious friction of skin on skin stoked the fire in his groin to burn even hotter. Xander looked down to see Spike twisting until he was face up.

Heat flared through Xander even as he reddened all over as he realized Spike and he were now groin to groin; hardening cock to hardening cock.

"Stay put," Spike ordered when Xander tried to shift away from this new position. Xander froze and stared at Spike.

*You never fight fair do you?* Xander thought.

"More places ta kiss, pet," Spike said as he pointed to his right shoulder.

*But then again, I don't have to fight fair either,* Xander suddenly thought as he leaned down and remembered what he'd learned at lunch the day before.

He put his hands on either side of Spike head then thought, *Time to turn one of my weaknesses into a strength.* He then began to kiss and taste Spike's shoulder.

Spike hissed and Xander swirled his tongue around the spot again before placing a few more tiny kisses. He lifted his head and looked at Spike. Spike's eyes were almost black and his mouth was open. There was a feral and hungry look on his face. He pointed to the left side of his chest. Xander cocked an eyebrow.
Spike nearly arched off the bed when Xander slid his tongue from Spike shoulder straight to Spike's left nipple. Once there Xander began to suck and circle the cool bit of flesh until it was a hard little pebble between his lips. Then Xander licked it over and over with the flat of his tongue until Spike cried, "STOP!"

Xander sat up and smiled. He tried to ignore the fully erect penis under him just as much as he was trying to ignore the fully erect penis attached to his own body. Spike was panting and staring at Xander like he could roll and devour him at any minute. Instead he pointed to his stomach.

_OK...one of us is being REALLY stupid here;_ Xander thought as he bent and shifted down slightly while he kissed a trail from Spike's nipple straight to his belly button. _Only I'm not sure at this point which one it is._

Xander began to dart his tongue in and out of the little hole he found until Spike was squirming and panting, but he didn't stop. Some wild desire was burning through Xander and he found himself obsessed with that little tiny bit of recessed flesh. It tasted thickly of Spike and the way Xander's tongue seemed to rob the master vampire of his arrogance and authority made Xander's skin itch with a strange and powerful desire. He found his hands leaving the bed and snaking down Spike side until they were holding him down so Xander could plunder his new found treasure with more ease.

"Pet!" Spike gasped and Xander smiled as he drove his tongue relentlessly into his master's belly button, swirled it around and pulled it back out again. "XANDER!"

Xander kissed and soothed the skin around the hole before squeezing his legs around Spike, rocking his rock hard cock against Spike's and then beginning a new assault. Quickly and fiercely he dove his tongue in and out, over and over again into Spike's belly button.

"FUCK! Pet! Xander!" Spike screamed and thrust up into Xander. His hands grasped Xander's shoulders. Xander kept up his assault.

_Who's in control now?_ Xander thought and began to thrust against Spike in time to the tongue fucking he was giving the moaning and nearly insensate vampire.

"XANDER!" Spike roared and hands pulled at Xander tearing him away from his prize. Then he was rolling and the world flipped upside down. Xander shook his head and lips captured his. They were hungry, fierce and unrelenting. Xander bit at them and teeth bit back until blood flowed. Then a hungry tongue was licking and sucking at Xander's lips.

Meanwhile hard cocks danced and rocked against each other. Xander silently groaned at the sensation. He opened his mouth and a hot, hungry tongue dove in and plundered the opening. Xander tried to wrap his arms around the body above him but hands captured his wrists and held them above this head. Xander countered and wrapped his legs around the waist pressing so hot and deliciously down against him.

A growl joined the tongue filling his mouth and Xander laughed silently at it. He thrust up and the body above him thrust down. Xander's tongue began to duel with the invader. He launched a counter attack and sought to not only defend his territory but invade the other mouth locked in desperate combat with his own.

In the meantime he ruthlessly set to drive the pace of thrusting and sliding of the cocks seeking just the right bit of friction, just that right touch that would set them off. Again and again Xander thrust up. He set up a brutal and a fast rhythm seeking to keep the advantage he'd achieved and not letting being on the bottom change that for one moment.
"Xander," Spike growled into his mouth.

Xander bit at Spike's lips and clenched his legs tightly around the vampire.

"XANDER!" Spike roared and cool spill began to erupt against Xander's oh so hot skin.

Checkmate! Xander thought a bit dizzily as he tried to will his own cock back from the brink. Spike kissed and tasted Xander's lips while small tremors raced through his body and his system slowly settled. Xander closed his eyes and kept focusing on cooling his own ardor.

When the need to press up against Spike had lessened Xander opened his eyes to find a pair of amused blue eyes staring at him.

"I might be creating a monster," Spike said.

Xander blinked his eyes innocently, Who me?

"Punishment's definitely over," Spike purred and sat up. Xander winced at the movement against his still sensitive cock. Spike held out his hands. Xander took hold and lightly kissed them.

"There is one more thing though," Spike purred again.

Oh? Xander thought and cocked an eyebrow.

"There was that little matter of biting, pet," Spike said with a smile and then slowly moved off of Xander.

Fuck! Xander thought.

"Spread 'em, pet," Spike ordered.

What? Xander thought as he went to sit up.

"Oh no, pet," Spike thought. "Just lie back and spread yer legs."

What are you doing? Xander wondered as he did as he was told. And what made me think I could beat him at his own game?

Spike looked over his yummy pet spread out before him with his spill still splattered over his tummy. MINE, he thought. Oh so very fine... and so very mine.

Spike settled between Xander's legs leaned over and then began to gently lick and lave Xander's stomach cleaning up all the sweet sweat of his pet and his own spunk.

Spike! Xander wanted to shout. What are you doing!

Spike hummed and greedily licked and cleaned Xander stomach before making a seductive bee line for Xander's belly button. Xander hissed and jumped as soon as he felt Spike's cool tongue begin to lave and lick his way inside Xander's little hole.

Oh fuck! I have only myself to...b..bl...bl...OH FUCK!

Spike put his hands on Xander's side to still his writhing movements. He chuckled and continued to torment Xander with as sweet a tongue fucking as Xander had given him.

Spike! Spike! Xander began rocking his head from side to side. He was on fire. Finally Spike
withdrew his tongue only to drag it very slowly down Xander's lower belly. Centimeter by centimeter his tongue dragged slowly across Xander's skin and Spike soaked up all the tastes of his pet; the salt, the musk, and the bits of his own lingering seed.

Oh please, Spike...you can't...I can't...this...you're still the master...Xander tried to get his thoughts together while he fought to control his body's response. He was losing the battle on both fronts as Spike's tongue moved ever lower.

SPPIIIIIKKKKE! Xander's mind cried out and his back arched when Spike's tongue finally reached its target and circled around the head of Xander's leaking cock. Spike chuckled against it and Xander slammed his fists against the mattress. Then Spike began to lick Xander's hard staff like it was his favorite treat. Over and over he ran his tongue down, up and around Xander's shaft and crown. Every now and then he'd let the tip of his tongue burrow and seek out all the yummy flavors weeping generously from the slit at the top.

Xander rocked his head from side to side and tried to remember how to breathe. Thinking was beyond him. He was locked in an intense pleasure and experience he'd never had. The one night with Faith had never included something like this: it had been a wham bam, thank you Xan.

With each inch of flesh Spike took in his mouth and suckled, Xander was lost to a new sensation and a new height of pleasure. When Spike kissed his way down Xander's shaft and wrapped his mouth around Xander's heavy ballsac he nearly wept. When Spike sucked one of those heavy little balls into his mouth and delicately rolled it around with his tongue Xander tried to scream with all his might.

Spike loved the smell, taste and feel of pet all hot and writhing under him. Xander was lost in the moment and Spike wanted to make it good, very good for his Xander. Pet's suffered so much, Spike thought.

Still, there's that biting, Spike thought and smiled. He knew just the sweet spot to bite in return. The spot that could wind Xander just that tighter and where Spike could taste the heat and passion flowing in Xander. Spike spent a few more moments with his mouth buried in Xander's short and curleys while he tasted and teased his boy’s sweet round balls until they were drawn up tight and oh so ready to release their sweet juice. Then Spike wrapped a hand around Xander shaft just behind the glans.

He kissed his way down to a spot just the top of the inside of Xander's left thigh. Gonna make this good for you, pet, Spike vowed as he slid into game face. Don't want ya to regret this.

Then Spike slid his fangs right into the artery that pumped Xander's life blood. Liquid Xander flowed into Spike's mouth filling him up with the salty taste of his pet. Xander's blood was rich with the taste of his passion, his pain, his strength...his life. Spike groaned and nearly wept. He would never have enough of Xander.

Xander's silent scream rocked through him at the intense intimacy, pleasure and slight pain of Spike's bite. He'd never felt so close to anyone or so desired. He nearly wept. Even if he was some how rescued or freed tomorrow, he knew he'd always be bound to Spike.

Spike swallowed once, twice and a third time before lifting his fangs from Xander's leg. Then like a great cat he licked and laved the spot over and over again until he was satisfied that not only had he cleaned away all the precious treat that was his pet's blood but that Xander was no longer bleeding. He shifted back into human face and looked up at Xander.

"Pet," Spike said hoarsely. "Xander, look at me."
Xander tried to process what Spike was saying. He gave up and just looked at Spike, his eyes wide, dark and almost completely dilated with lust and need.

"Gonna take care of you, always. Gonna always make it good for you," Spike vowed and then wrapped his mouth around the head of Xander's cock. He slid his hand away and slowly swallowed Xander down. Xander gasped. His eyes and body tried to sync the sight and the sensation short circuiting his mind. Spike relaxed his throat and took Xander all the way down. Then he swallowed.

Light burst inside of Xander. He arched, opened his mouth in a third and final silent scream and his hot seed pumped down Spike's throat. Spike greedily sucked and swallowed his pet's essence as hungrily as he had Xander's blood. Over and over Xander pulsed and Spike ran a soothing hand down Xander's side while the tremors coursed through his body.

Spike worked Xander's cock until it was clean and empty and then he gently eased it out of his mouth. He kissed it softly before moving up Xander's body and lying next to him. Tears flowed openly and freely from the corners of Xander's eyes. Spike kissed and licked those away too. He took Xander in his arms and rocked him.

Xander came back to himself being rocked by Spike. He blushed and tried to pull away.

"Oi, none of that," Spike admonished gently.

Xander settled down and Spike kissed his temple.

"Did ya enjoy it?" Spike asked.

_You've got to be kidding_, Xander thought and tried wiggling again.

"Pet," Spike warned again.

Xander sighed.

"Did ya enjoy it?"

Xander flushed and nodded.

"Ya got nothing to be ashamed of, Xan," Spike said simply and kissed Xander's temple again.

_Easy for you to say_, Xander thought.

"I enjoyed it too," Spike said.

Xander turned in Spike's arms and stared at Spike.

_Well you're an undead pervert whose been pawing at me since da...er night one_, Xander thought.

"If you poundin' on me every now and then gets me this," Spike teased. "Might have to rethink the 'no hitting your master' rule."

Xander rolled his eyes. _Don't get too sure of yourself Romeo_, he thought, _there's no summer repeats of this episode._

Suddenly Spike frowned as he heard the elevator approach. Xander held up his hands. _What?_

"Lorne's coming," Spike said.
Xander smiled, *Breakfast!*

"Was hopin' to have you ta myself a little while longer."

Xander rubbed his forefinger against his thumb. *World's tiniest violin playin' just for you,* he thought.

"Don't know what that means pet, but I'm sure when I find out you'll have earned a punishment," Spike said wolfishly.

Xander rolled his eyes.

A knock on the bedroom door had both men looking puzzled. Lorne usually waited for them in the front room.

"Yeah?" growled Spike.

Lorne walked in with a frown on his face. *Uh oh,* Xander thought as he scrambled to get under the covers.

"We have a problem, lemon drop," Lorne said.

"What?"

"Lilah's been spotted about twenty minutes outside the city."

"Bloody hell!" Spike snarled as he rolled off the bed and stood up. He dug in his drawer for cigarettes and then slammed it shut empty handed. He looked back at Lorne. "You sure?"

"Positive."

*Who's Lilah?* Xander wondered.

"Pet, get out from under those covers and go rinse off. Be out front in five minutes for yer breakfast or go hungry," Spike barked as he started marching for the door.

Xander clapped his hands. Spike turned and looked at him. Xander waved his arms in the air. *Who is Lilah?*

"Listen, pet," Spike said. "Lilah is Angelus' tart of the hour. She's one of the barristers for Wolfram and Hart. Rumor has it her bosses rule hell dimensions that make this one look like happy hour. She's been assigned to Angelus and he sends her out when he wants something done and he doesn't feel like leaving his happy place. Got it? So now ya got three minutes to be rinsed and out front, yeah?"

*Yeah,* Xander thought and moved quickly to the bathroom, *I got it. Angelus is checking up on you...and consequently that means checking up on me.*

A cold chill raced down Xander's spine and all thoughts of breakfast fled. All he could think about was Angelus.
Chapter 27

Xander scrambled out to the front room in record time. Spike was missing but Lorne greeted him with a smile.

"Spike said for you to feed yourself," Lorne said as he pointed to the tray by Spike's chair.

Where's Spike? Xander wondered as he quickly made his way to the chair, sat on his cushion and uncovered the tray.

"Sorry it's just cold cereal. I know you missed dinner. I hope we can get you a good lunch."

Xander smiled around a mouthful of frosted goodness, *I'd gladly skip a dinner or two if it means the ten essential vitamins and minerals associated with this complete breakfast… if it includes Fruit Loops!*

"Spike will be back up shortly. He went to take care of his," Lorne paused for a moment, "to take care of his needs and he'll be back."

Xander stopped mid-chew and looked at Lorne. *His needs? He thought. You mean feeding?*

Xander fished around in his bowl and pulled out a round red piece of cereal. He held it out to Lorne.

*Is he feeding from the red stables?* Xander wondered.

Lorne stared at the breakfast food for a moment before he shook his head and answered, "No, he's in the blue stable."

The one just for food…and games? Xander thought as he popped the cereal in his mouth. He tried to ignore the little twist in his gut at the idea of Spike "playing games" with someone in stable.

"Cupcake," Lorne said softly, "Spike's doing a quick breakfast like you. Nothing more. Now eat up. When Spike gets back you'll have to get ready to meet Lilah."

Xander nodded and then tore into his toast. *Spike's a big vampire, he thought. He can do what he likes and the more attention he pays to others the less he does to me.*

Lorne shook his head and smiled. He watched Xander wolf down his breakfast and worried about the evening to come.

***

Spike had swept into the suite in full Master Vampire mode. His hair was slick, his eyes flashing and his leather rustling.

"Up, Pet!" Spike barked and crooked his finger. Xander quickly stumbled to his feet and followed Spike to the bedroom. Spike pointed to a spot. Xander moved to the spot and stood. Then Spike moved quickly pulling out clothes for Xander. Once again he ignored the chastity belt. Xander wasn't sure that was a good thing.

Spike then quickly dressed Xander using sharp gestures and sharper words to command and move Xander. Xander obeyed without question. He ended up dressed in black leather pants and an emerald green silk shirt. Spike clipped Xander's leash on him and then ran a hand through his hair. He studied Xander for a moment.
"I knew this was comin', pet," Spike finally said a bit more softly than Xander had expected. "It was only a matter of time that Angelus' tendrils would reach out. The good news is that he's sent Lilah."

What's the bad news? Xander thought.

"The bad news is, he sent Lilah," Spike continued. Xander frowned.

"Xan," Spike said as he brushed a finger gently down Xander's cheek, "not only do you have to be the good Pet...I need to be a Master."

What's that mean?

"She's on a fishing trip, luv. I can't let her go back to 'Gelus without at least a bite or two."

Fine! Bite her! Bite her all you want! Xander thought as a chill started weaving down his spine.

"Xan, just do what I say...when I say...and trust me."

Two out of three ain't bad, Xander thought nervously.

Then suddenly Spike's lips were covering his. They were soft but urgent as if there were so much more Spike wanted to say but didn't have the time or the leave. Something in Spike's urgency sparked a fire in Xander and found himself not only opening up to Spike but responding to the bittersweet kiss.

Spike broke the kiss and stared at Xander. Xander stared back.

Damnit...bleach brain, he thought desperately, you're scaring me.

Then Spike swept down and kissed Xander's nose quickly before coldly ordering, "Follow me, Pet!"

***

Spike's attitude didn't thaw in the elevator or through the quick march through the casino floor. It grew frostier once they reached the office.

"On yer knees," Spike barked at Xander as he pointed to the cushion by his chair. "Keep yer legs spread and clasp yer hands behind yer back. Keep yer head down. Stay in that position 'till I tell you otherwise."

Then Spike sat at his desk, motioned for Lorne to pour him a drink and then put his papers in order.

Fuck! Xander thought. Master Moron's gone Master Medieval. Who or what is this Lilah?

Lorne set Spike's drink on his desk and the phone rang. Lorne picked it up.

"One moment," Lorne said and then looked at Spike. "She's here."

"Let's not keep the bit...bird waiting," Spike said.

"I'll get her," Lorne said into the phone and then hung up.

Lorne left Spike's office and Spike sipped his drink. Xander began to alphabetize Marvel superheroes in his head. There's Abyss, Aegis, Aero... Oh! Wait! I forgot 3-D man! How could I forget Chuck and his brother Hal?
Spike’s office door opened and Xander’s list of heroes was briefly forgotten. The sound of heels clicking on the floor and the scent of expensive perfume distracted him completely.

“Spike,” a woman’s voice purred.

“Master Spike,” the vampire corrected without getting up from his chair.

“I don’t think this meeting has to be so formal.”

“See wot you get for thinking? I’m a vampire, yer a human. Don’t see why it should be anything less then formal,” Spike purred ominously.

_Lilah’s human! Spike’s on red alert for a human! _Xander thought. _Angelus’ recon is a…woman?

“I’m also Angelus’ personal representative to Wolfram and Hart, Sp…Master Spike,” the woman laughed. “I could also represent you if you’d like.”

“Wouldn’t that be a conflict of interests?” Spike asked.

“Why? Are your interests different than Angelus’, Master Spike?” Lilah asked as she quit waiting for an invitation and sat down anyway.

“Not at all, but all demons know, one can’t serve two masters. If you represented me, how many masters would that make for you Lilah? Three? Four? Five? Maybe you’d break Darla’s _service_ record…before her turning of course.”

Lilah laughed and the sound nauseated Xander.

“Darla’s human life was colorful. Working for Wolfram and Hart’s senior partners and for Angelus doesn’t leave me much time for a social life. Not like you, I hear.”

“I’m the master of Las Vegas, Lilah. Social is business,” Spike replied.

“Angelus hears it’s a bit more personal. Seems you’ve taken a Pet.”

“_Gelus was always one to keep up with the gossip, _” Spike said. “That why yer here?”

“That’s a bonus. I’m really here about the scroll. Angelus would like to know why it’s been in your position for six days. Why isn’t it in his? He hasn’t forgotten about your _faults_, Master Spike. He fears perhaps a Pet, especially this one, has made you weak.”

Ice crept down Xander’s spine even as his heart thudded in panic. _Oh ghod…don’t. Don’t let this go where I think…Black Widow, Backlash, Blade_… Xander began to recite the superheroes in his head again.

Spike lifted an eyebrow, grabbed the scroll and shoved it across the desk to Lilah.

“First, the scroll has been in my possession long enough to determine it was authentic. I serve my grandsire loyally. Ya think I’m just gonna hand over any scrap of paper some tosser clams is the _Manuscript of Steganographia_ signed by Trithemius! Especially when that same poser also claims to have the _Sphere of Sacrobosco_!” Spike snarled.

Lilah looked at the scroll and then frowned.

“It seems to be…damaged,” she said.
“Yeah well ya have a bloke named Zorn ta blame for that. Sloshed martinis all over my desk!”

“Really?” Lilah asked as she carefully tucked the scroll in a special case and put the case in the leather bag beside her.

“Do an augury,” Spike said.

“You can count on it,” Lilah said as she smiled.

“As to the second point,” Spike said. “UP, Pet!”

_Cable, Cage, Caliban_… Xander thought as he managed to get to his feet without lifting his head or unclasping his hands.

“Mmm,” Lilah said. “Not quite like his photos.”

“The whelp was wot, sixteen or seventeen when the last photos of him were taken?” Spike scoffed and then he ran his hand lewdly down Xander’s chest. “Course he’s filled out some. The Azora regimen helped with that.”

“Of that, are you sure he was a bottle, Master Spike? Mr. Harris was a known associate of THE slayer and a suspected member of the resistance. He’s on Angelus’ wanted list. Are you sure he’s not a sp…”

“Pet, hold out yer hand!” Spike ordered.

_Captain America, Captain Britain, Captain Marvel_… Xander thought as he held out his hand.

Spike reached in his drawer pulled out his lighter, flicked it open and lit under Xander’s palm. There was the sudden stench of burning flesh. Searing pain flashed up Xander’s arm and before he could think he jerked his hand back and opened his mouth in a mute scream.

_I’m so sorry, pet_, Spike thought as he flipped his lighter shut and put it back into his desk. He looked at Lilah.

“Azora take a bottle’s voice after their first tapping. How daft do ya think I am ya twa…Lilah? Not only did I see the Azora with its tentacles all over Xander, I know the human’s been without its voice since the moment I won it.”

“That doesn’t mean Xander hasn’t become a distraction…or a weakness, Master Spike. Angelus is well aware of your history and your history with Mr. Harris.”

“Pet!” Spike barked. “Hand’s back in place!”

_D..Dagger, Da..Daredevil_, Xander tried to refocus on his heroes while he ignored the consuming pain, the nausea, the fear and the sense of betrayal and obeyed Spike. _Don’t think about what’s next…just …Darkhawk…Darkstar…FUCK!…Darwin_…

“My history with Xander started with Angel. Soul or not the boy’s a gift from my grandsire and I’ve finally lain ownership to wot’s mine. Hardly see how that’s a weakness,” Spike said as he stood.

“Look at it from Angelus’ point of vi…”

“Oh…from ‘Gelus point of view?’” Spike said as he grabbed Xander and threw him down on the desk. “I can do that!”
Spike rolled Xander until he was face up. Spike stared into Xander’s eyes and ignored the terror and pleading. He grabbed a letter opener and rested it under Xander’s right nipple. He started at Lilah.

“Like a souvenir for my grandsire? A little snack for him, perhaps?” Spike asked as he delicately traced the point of the opener around Xander’s nipple. It hardened in spite of Xander’s terror.

‘Hmm, Lilah?’

“Master Spike,” Lilah began, “This isn’t what I was talking about and you know…”

“OH! Of course!” Spike growled and then rolled Xander back onto his stomach. “Hands flat out on the desk, Pet!”

Earth Force…Earth Lord…no more Spike..please…E..Earthmover, Xander thought even as he once again obeyed and ignored the heated pain in his palm as it pressed against the desk.

Spike took the letter opener, rammed it under Xander’s collar and then slit the shirt open down the back. The shirt tattered and fluttered to Xander’s sides exposing his back. Spike then danced and weaved the tip of the letter opener down and across his Pet’s back making faint patterns in the skin.

“How about this? Hmmmm? I could prove myself to my sire all over again. You could be my witness,” Spike said and looked at Lilah. “Or maybe you could help!”

Suddenly Spike leaped over his desk and grabbed Lilah by her wrist and yanked her out of her chair. Xander remained perfectly still and where Spike left him.

“Mmmm, Lilah? Wanna see how weak I am?” Spike purred as he tugged the lawyer around his desk.

“You don’t scare me, Spike,” Lilah snapped, “and you forget yourself. You hurt me you’ll be answering to more than just Angelus!”

“I wouldn’t dream of hurting you, luv,” Spike purred in Lilah’s ear as he wrapped himself behind her. He pressed his body close and slid one arm around her waist and the other down her arm. He forced the letter opener into her hand and then wrapped his hand around hers.

“Just thought we could have some fun!” Spike said as he moved Lilah behind Xander. “Make some memories together. Give ya sumethin to report back to ‘Gelus.”

Spike forced Lilah’s hand and the letter opener back on to Xander’s open and exposed skin. Spike thrust his hips against Lilah’s backside. Lilah stiffened and Spike kissed her neck and laughed in her ear.

“Thought ya wanted to know about my strengths and weaknesses, luv?”

“I repeat, you aren’t scaring me,” Lilah said angrily.

“Good, was hoping for a different reaction,” Spike said as he pressed down on Lilah’s hand and the thinnest trail of blood began to form on Xander’s back.

E..Elektra!...Elixir!...Don’t do this Spike! Xander silently begged.

“You know when I skinned Doyle alive,” Spike purred, “I started at his feet. All those nerve endings right there. So sensitive…so sweet. Still, for you, Lilah, thought I’d save the best for last.”

“Let me go!” Lilah yelled and managed to jab an elbow into Spike’s gut.
Spike laughed and let Lilah loose. She immediately moved away from him and around the desk. She kept a death hold on the letter opener. Spike laughed again.

“Well maybe that’s not what does it for ya?” Spike said and then looked at Xander. *Hang on, pet,* Spike thought.

“Maybe ya really are more the *watcher* type, yeah?” Spike said and one again sidled up behind Xander. This time he quickly began working the fastenings at Xander’s fly.

*Falcon…Fantastic Four…this is of the very wrong…very bad!* Xander thought. Spike jerked down Xander’s pants and smiled at Lilah.

“Maybe this’ll get yer panties wet, eh?” Spike said as he began to undo his own fly. “Wanna watch me fuck ‘im raw? ‘Gelus liked that game now and then. I should ‘know…was on the receivin’ end of his cock more’n once. Ya like that, Lilah? Wanna watch me spread Xander’s cheeks and pump ‘em until he’s full of blood, piss and cum?”

*Generation X…Ghostrider…Gladiator,* Xander let his litany take him away; slip his anchor to the reality of what was happening.

“I came here at Angelus’ behest to retrieve the scroll, find out why there was a delay, to determine…”

“Whether or not I’m *weak*?” Spike asked as he smeared Xander’s blood on his exposed cock and parted Xander’s ass cheeks.

“Perhaps you’re more like your *sire,* Dru, than Angelus or the partners, suspected,” Lilah said coolly.

Spike laughed and slapped Xander’s ass.

“Maybe I am,” Spike said.

“I think I’ve seen everything I need to see,” Lilah said.

“Oh…well we could move on to the next round, luv,” Spike purred. “If this doesn’t do *it* for ya. I could always slit open one of Xander’s arteries…than you and I could bump uglies in the spray until the fountain stops and the blood cools.”

*Hawkeye, Hellcat, Hellstorm…* Xander continued desperately. The list was his protection; his defense against the gravity of his reality. In this situation he was barophobic.

Lilah shook her head. She dropped the letter opener on Spike’s desk. She bent down and picked up her bag then stood up and looked at Spike.

“Angelus wants to see you *and* your Pet in LA tomorrow. Seems he misses his *family*. He’d like to see how Xander is as your Pet. There’s been some…rumors. However, based on what I’ve seen today, I think Angelus would do better to question his sources more.”

Then Lilah turned and stormed out of Spike’s office. Spike counted until he reached ten and then yelled for Lorne. Xander had reached the League of Losers.

“Xan,” Spike said softly.

*No one’s here to take your call…please leave a message,* Xander thought.

Spike reached out and touched Xander. Xander instantly jerked away. He fell to the floor and
scrambled under the desk. He huddled there.

“Spike?” Lorne asked as he stuck his head inside the office.

“Help me…help Xander,” Spike said as he crouched down beside Xander but didn’t move. Xander blinked at him. Lorne came around the desk and looked at Xander.

Liberty Legion…Lifeguard…Ligh..Oh Fuck…can you just go away now? Xander thought.

“Xander, cupcake,” Lorne said softly. “Its over. Lilah’s on her way back to L.A.. Spike just wants to…”

Loa…Lockheed…I don’t care what Spike wants! I just…Fuck my hand hurts! Longshot…no wait! Lockheed! Lockheed then Longshot, Xander thought.

“Xan,” Spike tried again. “We need to take care of your burn and your cut. C’mon on, pet.”

Machine Man…Madam…Well we wouldn’t have to take care of them if you hadn’t put them there in the first place would we now, Master? Xander thought bitterly. He looked at Spike and this time his eyes really focused on Spike.

“Xander, I…we had to convince her of my mastery. That’s the good news we did. Better to convince Lilah than ta have ta prove it to Angelus. He’ll put us through our paces…but not this particular set,” Spike said.

What’s the bad news? What set will he put us through? Xander thought as a new chill went down his spine and he began to tremble with new fear and delayed shock.

“Xander, come out from under there,” Spike said gently and held out his hand. “Let me take care of you.”

This is a disturbing trend, you realize, Xander thought as he began to shakily crawl out from under Spike’s desk. You go all freaky bad ass Master Vampire on me then do the warm and fuzzy Mr. Nice Guy routine. You’ll either mess me up more or cure all my childhood induced neuroses. Not sure which.

Spike wrapped an arm around Xander, picked him up and carried him to the couch. Xander sighed and rolled his eyes. Not a girl, he thought but he didn’t fight or struggle.

“Get me a set of clothes for going out, some warm water, some salve for his burn and make arrangements for a good lunch at the arboretum,” Spike ordered. Lorne nodded and then quickly left.

Once Spike had Xander settled on the couch he quickly removed the tattered clothes and then wrapped Xander in a blanket. Then he picked up Xander’s hand and then rested his cool tongue on Xander’s reddened and blistered palm. Xander hissed and then sighed. He closed his eyes as for a moment there was relief from the pain that had been throbbing in his hand since Spike had burned him.

I really hate you, you know that? Xander thought and snuggled down deeper in the blanket. But you’re all I’ve got…and that’s a big kettle of LOT to have in my corner since it sounds like we’re doing the weekend at Angelus'. Imagine that will be just as funny as “Weekend at Bernie’s II.”

Author's Notes:

Xander's list of Marvel Superheroes came from here.
Chapter 28

When Lorne returned with the items Spike had ordered, he lifted his tongue from Xander's palm. Xander winced as the air once again circulated over his burn stimulating the damaged skin and nerves.

"Shh, pet," Spike said softly as he motioned for Lorne to bring the medical supplies. "Gonna patch ya up."

*Right Dr. Kill-on-a-dare,* Xander thought as he opened his eyes and stared at Spike, *cuz you know so much about taking care of people.*

Spike took a jar of salve from Lorne. He opened, scooped out a generous portion of a yellow sweet smelling gel and then gently smoothed it over Xander's burn. Blessed relief flooded Xander's system as the pain was instantly cooled and numbed.

"Better, yeah?" Spike asked. Xander nodded and stared at Spike with wide eyes.

"Pocklas cook this up. Will speed up the healing and make sure there's no scarring," Spike explained as he wrapped bandages around Xander's hand.

*Wouldn't want that,* Xander thought. *Might reduce the 'value' of your Pet.*

"Unfortunately we won't be able ta leave it on too long, with the trip to L.A., but we should be able ta leave it on long enough ta take down most of the pain," Spike said as he finished bandaging the wound in question. Then he gently unwrapped the blanket from around Xander.

"Roll over, pet," Spike commanded gently.

*Goodie,* Xander thought but obeyed.

Lorne brought a basin of water to Spike and sat it down on the floor by him. Spike nodded at Lorne and then reached into the basin for the washcloth floating in the water. He wrung it out and then gently began to wipe down Xander's back. The cloth was warm from the water and it was plush and soft. Xander couldn't help but sigh.

*Why isn't he just 'licking' me clean? Wouldn't think he'd pass up a free snack,* Xander thought.

"Tried to keep this light, pet," Spike said as he continued to clean Xander's back. "Had to be deep enough though ta draw blood and ta convince Lilah I'd be willing ta maim ya but didn't really want ta do much damage."

*Well you know what the song says, blood breath,* Xander thought.

When Spike was finished cleaning Xander's back he gently dried the area before applying some of the Pocklas' gel to the wound. Once again the gel was cool and numbing and Xander couldn't help but appreciate the relief.

"C'mon now," Spike said as he began to gently tug on Xander's arm, "let's get ya up and dressed."
Xander allowed Spike to help him to his feet. Spike smiled at him and then picked up a black t-shirt from a carefully folded pile of clothes on the edge of the couch. Spike unclipped Xander's leash, put it on the couch and then helped Xander work the t-shirt on over his head. Then Spike grabbed the larger of two pairs of jeans on the couch. Xander looked at Lorne.

*Why two pairs of jeans?* Xander thought.

"Thought Spike might like to change," Lorne said as he flushed a darker green. Xander placed his uninjured hand on Spike's shoulder for balance as he stepped into the jeans. He studied Spike and noticed the vamp's fly was still opened and stained with blood; his blood.

"I'll clean up in a minute," Spike said as he buttoned up Xander's fly. "Sit now."

Xander sat and Spike then put on some soft socks and the same shoes Xander wore the last time he left the casino. When he was completely dressed Spike began to clean himself up and to change clothes. Xander looked away.

*I'm not sure I want to know what's next on the itinerary of this fun filled Vegas all inclusive, Xander thought.*

"Ya got everything ready?" Spike asked Lorne as he finished dressing.

Lorne nodded. "Even ordered a limo."

"Limo?" Spike said. "S not that far a walk."

"Thought perhaps the fountain would be a bit much for Xander tonight," Lorne replied.

Spike paused. He looked at Lorne then at Xander. He finally nodded.

"Yeah. Probably not the time for workin' on his phobia. Good thinkin'."

Xander looked back at Spike. *Never's a good time for working on my phobia, he thought.*

Spike bent down and picked up Xander's leash. He clipped it back onto Xander's collar and snuck a quick kiss on Xander's nose. Xander quickly jerked his head away. Spike sighed.

"C'mon, let's get outta here for awhile," Spike said as he tugged on Xander's arm.

Xander tuned out the march through the casino. He wanted to tune out the limo, but he'd never been in one before and even if he did have to kneel on the spacious floor at Spike's feet until the driver put up the privacy window he couldn't ignore he wasn't in a limo.

"Won't be here long," Spike said as he tapped his lap and Xander dutifully crawled up.

*Don't you think I'm a little big for this, Blondie?* Xander thought as he tried to get comfortable on Spike's lap. Spike wrapped his arms around him and pulled him close. He buried his face in Xander's neck and took several unneeded breathes. Xander gave up trying to be comfortable. *Now what?*

"Was a bluff, Xan," Spike whispered.

*Right, Xander thought. The cutting and the burning gave it all away.*
"I still had to make it good...make it look real," Spike continued. "Don't wanna get on Angelus' bad side."

That why you damaged the manuscript he wanted? That all about staying on his good side? Xander thought. What am I, Spike? Just a distraction to keep him from sniffing out your real agenda? Do I at least rank higher than a pawn? Is that why you are always going on about my being a 'White Knight'?

Spike didn't say any more for the rest of the ride and Xander remained still. At this point he wasn't sure whether he wanted to know any more or not. Just when he thought he could start to figure things out his world turned upside down on him again. Yes, with Spike he was more than a bottle but he felt like a tennis ball being bounced back an forth between two players; two different versions of Spike.

One version of Spike was arrogant, playful and almost caring. He teased, he cajoled and he read to Xander. He took care of him. The other was domineering, focused, and more ruthlessly cunning then Xander had associated with the blond vampire from his Sunnydale days. Both versions of Spike seemed to want him and both seemed to have plans for him but he wasn't really sure what those plans were. Nor was he sure whether either Spike really cared enough about him to see to it he survived those plans, at least mentally and emotionally. Xander feared more for his sanity at this point then he did with the Azora.

The slowing of the limo interrupted Xander's musings. Spike snapped his fingers and pointed to the floor. Xander knelt down on the floor once again. The limo stopped and the minion chauffeur opened the door. Spike stepped out and Xander followed. He didn't pay much attention to where they were going until the smell of earth and mulch tickled his nose. He looked up in time to notice passing through an archway from a lobby to emerge under an arched sky.

Xander gasped as the night lights of Vegas twinkled down from a glass ceiling overhead supported by green metal in floral patterns. He looked around him and there were colors and flowers in ever a dizzying array of hues and designs. There was water tinkling in a large pool where water lilies floated and giant urns overflowing with green vines rose up defiantly. Xander was too awestruck by the beauty to be afraid. Lighting everything were artfully and decoratively placed torches and lanterns.

"This way, pet," Spike chuckled softly and took Xander gently by the finger tips. Xander blindly followed Spike unable to look away from the natural and yet magical beauty surrounding him. Spike led him along marbled paths until they reached a columned gazebo. Xander forced himself to look away from the flowering trees, the roses, the orchids, the gladiolas, the snapdragons, and all the other flowers he didn't recognize. He shook his head and tried to focus on the gazebo and why Spike had stopped.

The floor of the gazebo was covered with linens, pillows and it's own enchanting array of cut flowers, lanterns and candles. There were also several large picnic baskets. It looked like some romantic lover's nest. Xander looked at Spike. Spike smiled and pulled Xander into the gazebo with him. Xander frowned.

"Oi!" Spike said as he plopped down amongst the pillows and patted a space beside him. "Not what yer thinking. C'mon. Park it."

What? That this isn't another seduction ploy, Master Subtlety? Xander thought as he sat down and
maintained his frowned. *Maybe we should quit with the Ivanhoe, Sir De Bois-Guilbert.*

Spike reached over and unclipped Xander's leash. He curled it up and dropped it in one of the smaller baskets.

*OK, that's new,* Xander thought.

"Thought ya might need a break," Spike said.

*A break?*

"We've a lot to talk about...about what happened tonight...about L.A. and Angelus," Spike continued, "but I thought...well yer only human, pet."

*OK...let's add 'Master Obvious' to your titles.*

"So...well...this is the least...this is the nicest place I know in Vegas," Spike finally managed to say. "I thought you might like ta walk around. Take in the sights."

*Me?* Xander thought as he fingered the empty clasp on the front of his collar. *Just me?*

"As long as you stay on the paths, not all the plants in here all exactly nice, a few special orders were planted after...well After," Spike explained. "You stay on the paths, stay inside of the conservatory and you can wander around on yer own if you like."

Xander's eyes widened and his breathing grew rapid with excitement. *Really? I can...*

Xander looked behind him and around him. The gardens were like another world, almost as close to Before as he'd seen, in well, at least since he'd been captured on the rescue mission at Oxnard. He also noted there appeared to be many exits and entrances to the conservatory.

"Pet," Spike said almost as if he could read the latest directions of Xander's thoughts, "there are minions all over and I can track you by scent and smell. They or I'd catch you not two steps outside any one of the exits. Things are bad enough with us going to LA tomorrow. Ya really don't want me ta have to punish you in front of Angelus for trying ta escape."

Xander snapped his head back and looked at Spike in a heady of mix of terror and anger. *NO, I wouldn't but you would...wouldn't you?*

"Xander, we each have our roles ta play," Spike said softly.

*Yeah, well why don't you try being the one with the collar and the burned hand you Fanged Freak!* Xander thought angrily.

"Lilah will report to Angelus that I'm properly terrifying and you seem to be properly obedient."

*Goodie! We get an 'A!' At long last I'm at the top of the class! Willow would be so proud! Finally I found my niche...torture victim and sex slave!*

"Angelus will be looking for a different set of fun and games," Spike said.

*Of course he will,* Xander sighed and then looked back out at the gardens. Spike paused a moment. 
"We can talk about this later if ya want. If you want ta go wander..."

Xander shook his head and made a "continue" gesture with his hand. *Might as well give me more ugliness to think about while I'm in the midst of all this beauty.*

"Xan," Spike said gently, "Angelus won't be fooled by these 'slap and tickle' games we've been playing."

Xander once again whipped his head around and stared at Spike. He didn't even have to wonder what Spike meant. *NO! You said you wouldn't take!*

"He can't touch you..."

*Oh but you can!*

"...as long as your *my* Pet. So we can't give him reason to think otherwise, Xan."

*Well that's an original line, Spike! 'Sleep with me so Angelus won't get ya.'*

"Just like Lilah, all you have ta do is...is obey me and trust me. I will take care of you."

*Yeah, cuz that worked out so well this time,* Xander thought as he waved his hand at Spike.

"Ya think that's bad, Xan? Didn't ya hear a word I said ta that trollop? Ya know, about skinnin' Doyle alive?" Spike said angrily.

*Who's Doyle?* Xander thought even as he paled at the thought of anyone being skinned alive.

"That's not a name mentioned lightly around Angelus...or Lorne," Spike said the latter name softly and sadly.

*Lorne?* Xander wondered. *Doyle and Lorne...you tortured someone Lorne cared about and Lorne...Lorne's still your friend?*

"Xander, pet, tomorrow we're goin' ta be in L.A. and ya need ta decide if ya want to survive it body and mind intact," Spike said simply. "If Angelus isn't convinced yer my Pet, my good little Pet, then tonight with Lilah will just have been a warm up act."

Xander stood up and gazed out on the gardens. *I hate this world...I hate Angelus...I hate yo...FUCK!* Xander thought.

"Go for a stroll, pet. We have all evening. Judgin' by the size and quantity of these baskets, Lorne's packed enough food ta feed ten Xander Harris's," Spike smiled.

*Oh yeah, just what you need, a harem of Xanders,* Xander thought as he nodded tersely at Spiked before stepping out of the gazebo. *You'd never get dressed or out of bed.*

Spike watched Xander stroll slowly away from him. Part of him wanted to drag Xander back and seduce the boy senseless. Another part of him just wanted to hold him. Still another part of him wanted to put Xander through the paces so thoroughly and strictly he wouldn't even dream of being anything but a good Pet in front of Angelus. Yet, Spike knew he couldn't do any of those things.
Their only chance of surviving Angelus was for Xander to *choose* to be Spike's Pet. Xander could do it if he chose to do it, but Spike knew he couldn't be forced...not by any means that Angelus wouldn't detect or hear about.

*And I don't want to force him either,* Spike silently admitted. *Whelp's gettin' ta me.*

***

Xander strolled through the gardens and tried to push away the overwhelming thoughts crowding his brain. He just wanted to soak up the peace and artistry around him. He was tired. Tired of being out of control and yet struggling to hold on; not giving up completely. He was tired of being abused. He missed Willow. He missed his Dawnie and prayed Faith was still alive to keep her safe.

Xander blinked back tears as he let himself think of Dawn for the first time in months. She'd been only fourteen when they'd found her. She had been lost, confused and had had no memory of who she was or how she'd ended up at that old monastery. Willow and he had become her family and she their's. Later when Faith had found the resistance; she'd been included in that tight circle too. Xander smiled and bent down to look at the gardenias.

He remembered when they'd talked about names. She liked the name Dawn.

"You found me at dawn," she had said with smile. "Make sense. Besides sounds all mysterious."

"Aren't you a little young to be thinking mysterious?" Willow had teased.

The newly named Dawn had shrugged. "Maybe. Maybe not. Who knows I could be an ancient princess with knowledge that could save the world," she'd replied.

"Or a teenager looking to stay up past her bedtime," Xander had teased back.

"Oh come on! We're in the middle of an Apocalypse and you're worried about bedtimes?" Dawn had said.

"It may truly be all that stands between us and the end of the world," Xander had replied with a dramatic hand crossing his heart. Dawn had giggled.


Both Dawn and Xander had frowned and rolled their eyes. Dawn turned and looked at Xander.

"What's your last name, Xan?" she'd asked.

"Me?"

"Yeah...you!"

"Harris...but trust me," Xander had said. "You don't want to be a Harris."

"Why? You turned out pretty good. Cute too! I think I could like having a big brother to look after me and to chase off all the boyfriends who'll obviously won't be good enough for me and..."
"...and to make sure you go to bed?" Xander had interjected.

"OK, that too," Dawn had agreed and then stood up and kissed Xander on the cheek before flouncing out of the room and down the tunnel towards the makeshift sleeping quarters. Xander had watched her leave with a tightness in his heart and throat.

"Dawn Harris, has a ring to it," Willow had said and bumped shoulders with Xander. He had nodded not trusting his voice.

The gardenias blurred before Xander and he wiped his eyes. He took a deep breath and stood back up. He leaned his neck back and looked up through the glass to the night sky. Please, Dawnie, he thought, be OK. Willow...Faith...make sure she's...well I don't care if she's a young woman now there's still no one good enough for her yet, so keep make sure to give any potential boyfriends the "shovel talk."

Xander took a deep breath and began walking again. There was no escape. There was no escape from the gardens, Spike or the trip to L.A.. There was no escape from the mess he was in and thinking of the girls and the resistance didn't help him. Might make it worse, Xander thought. They're my weakness...my strength...my everything and they could be used against me.

A bench peeked out from beneath an arch covered in a cascade of climbing roses. Xander made his way over and sat on the bench. The heady fragrance of the bright yellow and ruby red blooms filled the air and enveloped him. He sighed.

Perhaps I need to rethink my strategy, Xander thought. Maybe I should checkout early. If I'm not here, then Spike can't use me, Angelus can't hurt me and I can't be a threat to the girls.

The thoughts weren't as tempting as before. Something inside of Xander wasn't ready to die any more, even if it might be the more logical choice and not an emotional one. Xander turned his head and looked back toward the gazebo. Spike was stretched out amongst the pillows. It looked like he was reading again. It can't be him, Xander thought.

Then Xander thought of Tara and the children in the green stables. He thought of the woman in the red stables. He thought of Lorne. What would happen to them if Spike fell from Angelus' grace? Xander thought. He remembered Lilah's orders that specifically included him in the order to L.A.. Would Spike be held accountable if...?

Memories of Angelus rose up in Xander's mind and answered his own question for him. Angelus would have no problem punishing Spike. Pet's probably don't harm themselves any more than bottle's do, Xander thought. If I did...that...then I wouldn't be Spike's Pet...and...DAMN!

Xander covered his face in his hands. Spike was right. They each had their roles to play. There was more at stake then just Spike and Xander.

Spike may be a monster, Xander thought, but he's not the worst one out there. If he falls...if something happens to him...then Tara, the children, Lorne and others will suffer.

Xander stood up and sighed again. I really hate him, Xander thought and then headed back to the gazebo.

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Spike looked up from his book at Xander's approach. *Pet's been a bit teary eyed*, Spike silently noted.

"You OK?" Spike asked.

*As OK as I get these days*, Xander thought and nodded. He pointed to Spike's book.

"Byron," Spike replied.

*Byron?* Xander frowned.

"Yanks and their lack of an education system!" Spike swore, picked up the book and began reading in that soft cultured voice of his,

"I watched thee when the foe was at our side,
Ready to strike at him--or thee and me,
Were safety hopeless--rather than divide
Aught with one loved, save love and liberty.

I watched thee on the breakers, when the rock
Received our prow, and all was storm and fear,
And bade thee cling to me through every shock;
This arm would be thy bark, or breast thy bier.

I watched thee when the fever glazed thine eyes,
Yielding my couch, and stretched me on the ground
When overworn with watching, ne'er to rise
From thence, if thou an early grave hadst found.

The earthquake came, and rocked the quivering
And men and nature reeled as if with wine.
Whom did I seek around the tottering hall?
*For thee*. Whose safety first provide for? Thine

And when convulsive throes denied my breath
The faultest utterance to my fading thought,
To thee--to thee--e'en in the gasp of death
My spirit turned, oh! oftener than it ought.

Thus much and more; and yet..."

Suddenly Spike stopped and then slapped the book shut.

"'Nuff of poetry hour, ya ready for din yet?" Spike suddenly asked.

*Wait! How does it end?* Xander thought and pointed at the book.

"It's just some bleeding poetry, Xan. Don't be a ponce. How about something to eat?" Spike ignored Xander's question and began to fling open the baskets.

*And since when are you afraid of words?* Xander wondered and itched to pick up the book and see how the poem ended. For some reason the verses haunted him. They seemed to be a strange choice for Spike. It was a love poem, but not one Xander could imagine Spike reading for or about Drusilla.
He shook his head and then joined Spike in looking through the baskets.

Lorne had out done himself. There were a wide selection of sandwiches; turkey, ham and roast beef. There was salad, coleslaw and potato salad. There were apples, strawberries and grapes. There was cool cold water, beer and coke to drink. For dessert there were peanut butter cookies, oatmeal cookies and the holy grail of cookies; chocolate chip cookies!

Xander's mouth was watering and his stomach rumbling. Spike laughed.

"Dig in," he said simply and pointed to the baskets.

"Really?" Xander thought and looked at Spike. You're gonna let me feed myself?

"Go ahead, make yerself sick," Spike teased.

Xander didn't have to be told a second time. He grabbed one of the plates Lorne had packed and then began piling the food on high. Spike laughed again and then clapped his hands three times. Xander paused mid-pile and looked at Spike.

"Gotta another treat fer ya," Spike said as two minions rolled an entertainment cart out in front of the gazbo. A large TV sat on top of the cart and there were speakers to the side. On the second shelf of the cart was a DVD player. One of the minions handed Spike a remote before they left.

What? Xander mouthed at Spike.

"Finish piling yer plate and go look. Told Lorne to scrounge up what ever bleedin' awful sci-fi some humans babbled on about when no one pays any attention. Know you used ta like to watch the telly with the Slayer and Red," Spike answered.

Xander quickly finished piling the food on his plate and sat it down before scrambling over to the TV. On the bottom shelf of the card were several stacks of DVDs. Xander quickly pawed through them. He turned back and looked at Spike in awe. There was the Star Wars trilogy, Star Trek the original series as well as The Next Generation, Babylon 5, Dr. Who and even some SG-1 DVDs!

"Well pick some brain rot!" Spike waved his hand at Xander. "Then get over here and eat."

Let's stick with the classics, Xander thought and picked out the Star Wars DVDs. He handed them to Spike who huffed put none the less loaded the first DVD into the player.

Spike settled and then patted the spot next to him. Xander quickly slid into the spot. He began to eat as Spike hit play. Spike stole a Grape off Xander's plate and Xander frowned. Spike bent down and kissed Xander on the nose. Xander rolled his eyes and shook his head. Then he focused all his attention on the food and opening fight sequence.

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Several sandwiches, light saber duels and hours later Xander was leaning against Spike. Spike finally hit the power button on the remote and the TV went dark and the speakers silent.

"Oi! What a whiner that Luke is!" Spike groused. "Wished they'd cacked him in the first movie!"
You're just sore the bad guys lost, Xander thought and shrugged.

"Vader should a worked a deal with the Solo character. Taken out the Emperor and the whole wacky lot," Spike continued.

Xander shook his head and reached for the last chocolate cookie.

"Oi! Are you really one of them Sarlacc things that ate Bobba Fett?" Spike asked.

Xander belched in response. Spike laughed and then suddenly "attacked" Xander.

"That's it!" he said as his nimble fingers began to dance around Xander's sides and dig gently into his hips. "Where ya hiding the bodies...the gaping maw?"

Stop! Xander silently laughed and pleaded as he wiggled and tried to avoid Spike's tickling.

"Fess up! Show yerself!" Spike continued to tickle Xander until he was flat on his back writhing and laughing. Suddenly Spike stopped and stared down at Xander. His pet looked so...young. Spike reached out and gently touched Xander's cheek. Xander froze. He was suddenly filled with an aching awareness of Spike and for some reason it didn't frighten him or disturb him.

Spike studied Xander. He wasn't the boy Spike had been first given all those years ago. He was a man, but there was still something so achingly sweet and innocent about him. Something that hadn't been tarnished by his time with the Azora. Or me, Spike thought. And here I'm plannin' on takin' him ta Angelus.

Xander bit his lip. He flushed under Spike's gaze. He wasn't sure whether he should move or not. He wasn't sure whether he wanted to or not.

"I want ta kiss ya," Spike finally said but didn't move.

Are you asking? Xander thought.

Spike didn't move. He continued to study Xander. He continued to study and wait until Xander finally realized Spike was asking. Xander flushed again. I'm not ready for this, Spike, Xander thought.

"Just a kiss," Spike said.

Xander finally nodded.

Spike leaned down and gently brushed his lips across Xander's. The kiss was soft, sweet and brief. It was tender and chaste and yet it promised something wild and wonderful. Xander's heart pounded and he licked his lips. He stared at Spike. Spike smiled back at him.

"We'll come back here after L.A. and you can torture me with more movies, yeah?" Spike said softly.

Yeah, Xander thought and smiled.

"And maybe I can give ya another kiss?"
OH yeah, Xander thought before he could stop himself.

**Author's notes:**

The [Byron Poem](#) is [Love and Death](#).

Bellagio Garden pics [here](#) and [here](#).
Chapter 29

There was an emptiness around Xander. He reached out for something; but "something" wasn't there. He moaned silently and shifted his body seeking the connection he’d lost, the one that made him feel safe even as it restrained him. It was a like a tightly secured life jacket; it kept him safely afloat but it made it hard for him to swim.

The water comparison stirred other memories and again Xander reached out for the "something." Come back, he thought, I need you!

Xander's eyes flew open. Spike wasn't next to him nor was his body coiled tightly around him. Spike? Xander thought and rolled over.

Spike was fully dressed in "Master mode" and standing in front of the magic windows. Afternoon sun poured into the bedroom and Spike stood there, gloriously defiant in the powerless sunlight staring out over his city. It was an unguarded moment and Xander couldn't help but take advantage of it. He studied Spike tracing his silhouette with his eyes taking in the lean and powerful frame. He noted how the vampire's well tailored clothes molded and conformed to his body as if they too could not defy their master.

Yet, there was also something vulnerable about Spike. He seemed so alone standing in the light which by all rights should be immolating him. His stance didn't bear the arrogance Xander so often associated with the vampire. Rather it seemed to convey a sense of burden as if the world...the universe had given him a great responsibility he didn't know how to carry or handle. Yet, he stood their resigned to bear the burden in defiance of the order of the things; just as he stood in defiance to the sunlight.

Xander sat up and the vampire turned around. They met each other's gaze and for a brief moment they were back in the gardens. Back to where Xander was undone by a gentle kiss and Spike hadn't pressed the advantage. He'd just made a promise to come back and then bundled them both back to the casino. It was close to dawn by the time they crawled into bed and while the vampire had curled around Xander, as was his custom now; he still hadn’t pressed the advantage. Xander had fallen asleep held close by Spike and not sure he was relieved or disappointed Spike hadn't asked for more.

"We'll be leaving in an hour," Spike said.

Xander frowned. It's not even dark! He thought.

"Angelus wants us in town shortly after nightfall," Spike said and then he moved toward the bed. He picked up a small brown vial and then sat on the bed near Xander. He held it out to Xander and said, "I need you to drink this."

Xander took the vial and then looked at Spike. What is it?

"It's a...cleansing potion."

Cleansing?

"Yer gonna want it, pet," Spike said.
What does it do? Xander thought as he continued to hold the vial and stare at Spike.

Spike sighed, looked down for a minute and then suddenly grabbed Xander by the chin. The grip was strong but gentle.

"Xander, are you my Pet?" Spike asked.

What?!

"You did well with yer punishment and ya did well with Lilah...but this isn't a few hours and a few minutes. This is a weekend...a weekend with Angelus! This is, as the green puppet from last night said, 'Do or do not...there is no try.' You either are or you aren't my Pet. That means from this moment, until we get back, I need you to be Master Spike, William the Bloody's, Pet. Are you?"

Xander stared at Spike. For a moment he felt like he had double vision or was staring at two photo's overlapped one over the other. It was as if he was seeing the two Spikes. There was the ruthless and cunning Spike overlaying the Spike who'd arranged for a picnic and video fest in a garden for him.

The see-sawing of Spike's behaviors over the week came flooding back to Xander and suddenly a new pattern began to emerge. It didn't make him less resentful or angry at being what he was, but suddenly Xander could see the method behind Spike's "madness."

Two Spikes...wanting two different "Pets," Xander silently realized. If there are two Spikes, why can't there be two Pet Xanders? One obedient and completely under his thumb and the other is still 'me'...the Zeppo...Scooby and Donut Boy. Or...the White Knight as he's always babbling on about.

As one part of Xander chilled at this new realization another part felt oddly free. It was like he finally figured out the right sequence of buttons to push on this game controller to do the Coupde Grace maneuver. Yes, both were Pets and being a Pet required his submission to Spike. Yet, submission as Master Spike's Pet was much different then Spike's Pet and the latter seemed to be more what Spike wanted most of the time.

"Xander?" Spike prompted.

Xander looked down at the vial. Being Master Spike's Pet means I drink what he tells me to drink when he tells me to drink it. There are no questions or pauses, just obedience, he thought.

Xander looked back up at Spike. Being Spike's Pet means I do what he says, but he lets me ask questions. He even ask questions of me...let's me set the pace some times.

There really wasn't a choice about what Xander wanted. This world and his situation made the choice impossible. Yet, Xander had a choice about how he could live within his circumstances. The choice wasn't much but it was a choice and choice gave him a little power. And it's been so long since I've had any of that, he thought.

Choosing to be Spike's Pet and being Master Spike's Pet meant not only a measure of safety for himself but it helped secure shelter for Tara, the children, Lorne and for all the others that Spike was somehow protecting as Master Spike. It also meant involving himself in whatever plan Spike had going.

"Pet...," Spike started again but before he could finish Xander nodded and then downed the vial. He offered the empty glass bottle back to Spike.
Spike frowned and studied Xander for a moment.

"You sure?" Spike asked again.

"I'm sure, Xander nodded. But let's get this show on the road before I wake up and smell the sanity.

"Right," Spike said a little more of the cold ruthlessness creeping into his voice. "You'll be needing to use the loo for awhile. Potion'll be kickin' in any time. When you're done...get yerself cleaned up and back out here. You'll have breakfast in the limo."

Xander nodded and quickly scrambled out of bed. Half way to the bathroom he abruptly paused as he felt a sudden twist in his stomach. OH NO! He thought and then double timed it.

***

It was another forty minutes before Xander returned to the bedroom. He still felt a bit shaky and empty but he was "clean" of that he had no doubt. He looked for Spike. The vampire was working at his bedroom desk. He looked up as Xander returned. For a brief moment Xander thought he saw a look of remorse or regret pass over Spike's face, but then the "Master" was back and firmly in place.


Xander didn't hesitate. He moved quickly to the bed and got into position. He even managed to keep still and not balk when he saw what else was on the bed; a medium sized butt plug and some lubricant.

"Face down, Pet," Spike said.

Xander lowered himself until he was in the same final position he was in on the pedestal. He felt exposed and vulnerable, but he remained obedient.

Spike touch was clement but firm. He rubbed small circles on Xander's lower back easing and relaxing the muscles. Then he used a well lubed finger to begin slowly caressing and teasing Xander's puckered hole. While the sensation was sending little tendrils of excitement through Xander it wasn't lighting any fires. The touch was almost too clinical and in away Xander was grateful for it. Always before when Spike had "pawed" at Xander in this bed, Xander had always felt that Spike really saw him. He felt like he wasn't just a thing. Right now, Master Spike was treating him that way and Xander didn't want that association in this place; in this refuge.

Perhaps Spike didn't either as he remained silent and per functionary as he slid another finger inside Xander to stretch and loosen him. Spike eventually worked three fingers inside Xander. He twisted them and moved them rhythmically until Xander was loose and half hard. Spike was careful not to stroke Xander's prostate, and again, Xander couldn't help but feel a little grateful. Eventually Spike withdrew his fingers. Xander then heard the squelch of more lube being squeezed from the tube and deduced what was coming next.

The firm smooth feel of silicon pressed against Xander.

"Push out as I push in," Spike ordered softly as he began to apply pressure.

Xander did as he was told. Xander's guardian ring briefly resisted but then gave way and the well
lubed plug slid easily inside. Xander still winced. It burned a little and he felt uncomfortably full, like he wanted to use the restroom again. Spike's hands were once again rubbing circles on his lower back.

"Just breathe for a second," Spike ordered.

It was an order easy for Xander to obey. The plug really must have been bigger than the one Spike had used for his punishment or Xander had been too far gone to notice. This time, he did. Eventually though his body did adjust and he couldn't help but wonder why and for how long Spike wanted him to have this thing inside.

"Up...slowly," Spike said. Xander began to stand up and then gasped as the plug hit his prostate. Sensation snapped through him. He ground his teeth and continued moving until he was on his feet.

"Gonna definitely have ta take care of that before putting ya in yer belt," Spike said and pointed at Xander's cock.

Xander took a deep breath and schooled his features. I'm Master Spike's Pet, he thought.

Spike studied Xander a moment and then walked to the bathroom. Xander heard the water run briefly and then Spike returned.

"This oughtta do the trick," Spike said and then wrapped a cold wet washcloth around Xander's cock.

BASTARD! Xander thought as he fought to keep from jumping back or smacking Spike's hand away. Instead he took several deep breaths and let his body calm down.

"Yep...that did the trick," Spike said as he removed the washcloth and tossed it on the bed. He then moved around Xander studying him from all sides. He ran a finger down Xander's spine and let it rest against the back of the butt plug buried in Xander's cheek.

"Yer gonna be wearing this all day, Pet," Spike purred in a tone devoid of seduction. "It doesn't come out until I take it out, understand?"

Xander nodded and became unexpectedly grateful for the "cleansing" potion. Spike moved around him again. This time he tugged on Xander's nipple ring. Xander winced and then tried hide it.

"No," Spike corrected and tugged on the ring again. "Your pain and pleasure are mine! You will not hide them from me. Understand?"

Xander winced openly and nodded again. Spike then grabbed Xander and ground his mouth down over Xander's in a dominant claim. Xander submitted. He opened his mouth and received his master kiss. He let his tongue be sucked into Spike's mouth where the vampire sucked hungrily and greedily on it. Xander wrapped his arms around the vampire for support and the vampire growled in appreciation.

Master Spike leads, Xander thought, and his Pet follows.

Spike lifted his head from Xander and studied his Pet.
"Remember, it's all about my needs...my pleasure, Pet," Spike said.

Xander nodded. Spike released him and picked up Xander's belt from the bed. He bent down and then helped Xander into the belt. He secured the belt in place which nudged the plug just a little deeper inside Xander. It pressed against that spot and sensation tingled but this time his cock was trapped. His eyes widened as he began to understand how uncomfortable the situation could become. He looked at Spike.

"Let's get you dressed," Spike said. "The limo's waitin' for us."

***

The limo was waiting for them down in the garage. Lorne was waiting for them by the limo. He had a tall covered plastic glass with a straw in it.

"Sp...Master Spike ordered a liquid breakfast for you," Lorne said as he handed the glass to Xander. "It's a berry smoothie with some protein powder."

_Yum_, Xander thought and took the glass. _Almost as good as sweet gruel._

"You...well...I'll have something special fixed for when you get back," Lorne said. Xander looked at Spike.

"Right then," Spike said. "Take care of things while I'm gone."

Lorne nodded.

Spike got into the limo and sat down. Xander followed. He knelt on the floor at Spike's feet.

"Good," Spike said as he petted Xander's head. "Drink yer breakfast."

The limo glided out of the garage as Xander sipped on his smoothie. It was actually tastier than it had sounded.

***

Xander wasn't sure how long he had knelt at Spike's feet. It was long past him finishing his breakfast. It was long past his legs going numb. It was long past when he'd reached the end of the alphabetical listing of Marvel superheroes and grown bored in trying to alphabetize DC's.

"Strip," Spike suddenly ordered.

_What?_ Xander thought and looked at Spike. _Strip? In the limo?_  

Spike suddenly grabbed Xander by the shirt and hauled him up in front of him. Xander gasped at the pins and needles in his legs as blood started to flow.

"I don't like to repeat my orders a second time, PET!" Spike snarled. "Strip!"

_Fuck!_ Xander thought as he quickly started sliding the sweat pants Spike had dressed him in over his hips and down his legs. When they were gone he toed off his socks. Spike suddenly released him and Xander fell to the floor. He quickly tore his shirt off and added it to the pile.
"Obedient! No questions! I'm Master Spike's Pet, Xander reminded himself.

"Kneel," Spike ordered. Xander obeyed. Spike grabbed him by the chin and leaned forward so they're faces were centimeters apart.

"Always be ready for my orders! Don't delay! Or do you want to be punished in front of Angelus?" Spike asked.

Xander shook his head.

"I will you know," Spike said coldly. "I will not hesitate to punish you if I have to...I won't have him question yours or my status. Yeah?"

Xander nodded. I know. I get it. I'm sorry, Xander thought. Give me a break, I'm new at this!

"Guess I'll have to give you a reminder, hmm? A lasting mark," Spike said and then he pulled Xander up into his lap. "Don't you move, Pet. Gasp...wince all you want but I don't want one flinch or wiggle out of you, understand?"

Xander nodded as steeled himself for whatever the vampire was about to do to punish him for his lax behavior. Then the vampire's mouth was wrapped around Xander's right nipple. It clamped around tight and his tongue danced out and around it. Spike teased the bit of flesh until it was hard and sensitive. Xander panted but didn't move. However, he nearly broke his control when Spike viciously clamped down on the nub with his front teeth. Xander gasped and longed to buck or push the vampire away but he remained still as pain raced to overcome and replace all the pleasure Spike had elicited. When Spike was satisfied that he'd sensitized and bruised Xander's ridged flesh he moved his mouth just slightly above the nipple.

Once again Spike started out gentle and caressing. He kissed and tasted the area of skin until Xander almost felt hungry for more and then once again Spike viciously bit down. This time he added suction, however he wasn't using his fangs. He was still wearing his human face using his human teeth to bite, bruise and mark Xander.

Xander silently whimpered and tears edged out from the corners of his eyes. Still, he did not move. Finally Spike lifted his head. He looked at Xander for a moment and then pushed him to the floor.

"Punishment's over," Spike said roughly. Xander grabbed the vampire's hands and tenderly kissed them.

"Lie down," Spike said in the same rough voice. Xander curled up on the floor using his clothes as pillow. "Get some rest. Yer gonna need it."

Xander nodded and closed his eyes. It was sometime later when he fell asleep, but not before he felt Spike drape his coat over his bare body. Xander didn't hide his smile.

***

"Wake up!" Spike ordered as he snatched his coat off of Xander. Xander blinked sleep out of his eyes and sat up. He moved quickly into a kneeling position. We there yet? He thought.

The limo pulled to a stop and the door opened. It was dark outside. Spike got out and slid his coat on
over his lean frame. He snapped his fingers. Xander got up and out of the car. Spike spun away and into a brightly lit multi-story building. Xander followed.

Minions opened the door for the two as the approached and Spike and Xander entered a large hotel lobby.

"Master Spike," Lilah greeted them as she strode out from behind the desk area.

"Not the place I'd have ya workin," Spike replied.

"Just checking the books," Lilah said.

"Didn't figure he was into really runnin' a hotel," Spike said. "Thought it was just a great place to keep...guests."

"Well it is, and sometimes you can generate quite a revenue as a place that specializes in 'guest services," Lilah said with a smile.

*Are you sure you're human?* Xander thought as he stared at Lilah.

"Ah," Lilah said as she became aware of Xander's gaze. "You did bring your charming, Pet. See he has a few new bruises."

"Wot's it to ya?" Spike barked.

"Just wondering what number I should take in the office pool...twenty...thirty...fifteen?"

"Number fer what?"

"Days he is going to last."

"He'll last as long as I want him too," Spike growled.

*Yeah...Hear that? Straight from the dead guy's mouth! So...suck on that!* Xander thought and tried to keep his fear in check. He was really beginning to not like this Lilah woman.

"Now that we've done the tea and biscuit routine can we get on with business?" Spike asked. "I don't like to keep my sire waitin'."

"Follow me," Lilah said and she led Spike and Xander to an elevator. She keyed it open and then keyed the penthouse. The three of them rode up in silence with Spike placing himself between Xander and Lilah. The doors opened and Lilah made and "after you" gesture.

Spike stepped out followed by Xander. Lilah remained in the elevator.

"Not comin'?" Spike said.

"Wouldn't want to intrude on a tender 'family' moment," Lilah said with a cool smile as the doors slid shut. Spike grunted and then headed for the double doors at the end of the hall with Xander following obediently behind him.

The doors swung open as they approached and the vampire of the weekend, the one who'd changed
the world stood and the one who was now grinning manically in the doorway.

"Spikey!" Angelus shouted gleefully, "You're here! And with your Pet in tow! Come in...Come in!"

"'Gelus," Spike said warmly and approached his grandsire. Angelus wrapped his arms around Spike and Spike returned the hug. Xander fought to keep his teeth from chattering, his feet from turning and running and what was left of his breakfast down. Angelus released Spike and reached for Xander.

*Oh ghod!* Xander thought. *Spike! You promi...*

"Uhn uh," Spike said as his hand quickly closed around Angelus's arm.

"Spike!" Angelus half laughed and half growled.

"No one touches him. He's mine and I don't share."

Xander watched as a ripple went through Angelus. The smile never left his face but something dark, darker than the black clothes he was swathed in, danced through his eyes.

"Never stopped ya with Dru," he said in a slight Irish lilt.

"Dru was my sire and your childe...wasn't mine ta say yeah or nay about sharin'," Spike replied his blue eyes dancing like sapphires on ice, "but he *is*."

"Ya know that *Angel* twat only gave 'im ta ya as a joke, Spike...a j-o-k-e," Angelus said.

"More like a t-r-i-c-k," replied Spike. "But it doesn't matter...he...you still gave him to me. I've marked him. He's mine."

*OK...hello...I did get past the third grade. Yeah, there were some close calls, but I did make it, Xander thought. I can spell. Not to mention...I was there and yes it was a r-u-z-e...I mean r-u-s-e.*

Angelus's eyes narrowed, the blackness pooled and then suddenly he laughed. He bent over and laughed. He dropped his arm and then pulled Spike in for another hug.

"OH, how I miss ya some days, Spikey!" Angelus said and then released Spike. "I never have to worry about you kissin' my ass...well unless I want ya to...and then nobody does it better."

Spike almost seemed to flinch at the last few words but his smiled remained.

*What?* Xander thought.

Angelus moved away from the door and inside.

"Come in! Come in!"

Spike entered the penthouse and Xander followed. Once again Xander remembered one of the reasons why he hated Deadboy, Angel...Angelus...whatever he was called so much. Not only had he always been smooth and the strong hero (or the unbelievably terrifying and psychotic villain) but he had taste. Angel/Angelus had taste and it was something Xander never could grasp.
Both Angel and Angelus knew what clothes looked good and how to wear them. They knew what
to say and how to say it. Even back in Sunnydale when Angel had lived in some carved out place
underground it was contemporary and edgy. It was cool. When Angelus took control he lived in a
mansion that was architecturally a work of art.

Now, Angelus, the harbinger and supreme ruler of hell on Earth lived in a retro penthouse done up to
bring the whole rat pack, to the modern age. It had the nineteen fifty's stylings with all the modern
trimmings.

*It's gotta be a vampire thing,* Xander thought dejectedly as once again he had to be impressed by
Angelus's taste in accommodations.

"Ya've done a little work around the place," Spike said as he walked toward a large brown leather
couch. Xander followed.

"Work's too stressful not to be relaxed at home," Angelus said as he snapped his fingers. "Oh! And
hey...you should see what I got for that!"

Xander knelt at Spike's feet and then almost jumped up as he saw what was across from the couch
next to a large brown leather chair. Angelus was smiling and point at it.

"I got this for my stress," Angelus said and ran his hand down the front of a bound and naked man.

*Not just fuckin' bound...but impaled!* Xander thought and tried not to panic.

"This...this is Lindsey," Angelus continued as he stroked the man's bound cock. The man grunted
from behind his ball gag. Hatred seethed from his eyes. Lindsey's legs were spread wide with a bar
between them. His ankles were cuffed to the bar. Rising up from the center of the bar was another
bar that seemed to disappear between the man's ass cheeks.

"And this lovely device," Angelus said as he adjusted something in the middle of the center bar
which raised it slightly causing Lindsey both to grunt and rise up on his toes, "is called the...get
this...the 'Anal Impaler.' Let's ya impale your Toy with a toy!"

Angelus cackled and slapped Lindsey's ass. Lindsey lost his balance, fell off his toes and screamed.

"Isn't this great?" Angelus asked Spike.

"Maybe one of yer best ideas yet. Wot... had dinner with Vlad recently?" Spike replied and idly
stroked Xander's hair.

*Best ideas! Are you fuckin' nuts! Oh wait! You're both soulless, perverted, undead, psychothic...and
apparently constantly hard-up VAMPIRES!* Xander thought as he watched Lindsey work his way
back to his tip toes. Only then did Xander realize Lindsey had one hand. His one remaining hand
was cuffed to a chain hanging over his head.

"Oh that's the best part, Spike!" Angelus laughed as he walked away from Lindsey and over to a wet
bar. He poured two glasses of whiskey. "I found it in a sex shop here in L.A.. It's a human device!
Couldn't believe it. Researched it!"

"And they call *us* horny little devils," Spike laughed and reached for the glass Angelus offered him.
Angelus shared the laughter as he clinked glasses with Spike.
Hey people don't use things like that to torture other people! Xander thought and then amended, unless its consensual torture in which case it's not really torture as much it is..... MMMMoreture.

Angelus moved back to his chair and sat down. He looked at Spike and then looked back at Xander. Xander couldn't help but press back against Spike which was almost a mistake because it suddenly reminded him he had his own mini "anal impaler" to worry about.

"Not quite the White Knight now, is he?" Angelus purred.

"Six months with the Azora will take that out of someone," Spike replied.

"I heard about that...so it's true?"

Spike nodded.

"Couldn't interrogate him then?"

"Wot? Ya expected him to pantomime the answers?" Spike replied.

"Well...wasn't sure if you'd follow the ru..."

"I'm not gonna risk my Pet on sumethin' so bleedin' stupid as ta give 'im pen and paper ta write without talkin' ta you first!" Spike said.

Angelus studied Spike for a moment.

"But you were stupid enough to not give me the manuscript right away."

Xander could feel the tension in Spike's body. He tried not to let it show in his own. He also tried not to watch as Lindsey struggled to keep on this toes.

"Wasn't gonna give it ta ya if it wasn't the real thing."

"I've got lawyers for that...a whole department dedicated to that," Angelus said.

"Yeah...well I'm dedicated not to fail you a sec...to fail you."

"So letting it get damaged? That's what..."

"That wasn't my bleedin' fault!" Spike snarled.

"The meeting was about Xander."

"So you did the augery?" Spike asked.

Angelus nodded.

"Then you know it wasn't my fault."

"I know you didn't spill the martinis," Angelus said.
Fuck! He knows! He fuckin' knows! Xander thought and his heart raced. Spike's hand moved away.

"Xander seems awfully frightened all of the sudden," Angelus said.

Spike shrugged. "Pet get's frightened all of the sudden for no reason."

Angelus lifted an eyebrow.

"Think he's half daft," Spike said.

"Most humans who end up with the Azora do end up a deck shy of fifty-two," Angelus agreed. "Still, rumors are he seems himself enough to have publicly defied you."

Spike laughed. "I wouldn't say that had anything ta do with his mental health. He gets these fits some times. Don't know what triggers 'em. One minute he's docile the next he's all wild-eyed and balmy. I'm handlin' it...or didn't you hear about that?"

Angelus laughed. "No...I heard. Heard he was a tempting treat up there on your pedestal too."

Spike smiled and licked his lips. Angelus laughed again.

"The manuscript's important to me, Spike," Angelus said as he once again took control of the conversation. Spike sipped his drink.

"I took it that it must be or ya wouldn't 'ave wanted it," Spike said.

Angelus studied Spike again. He sipped his drink.

"You know...when I opened the portal I allowed a Hellgod to escape back to her realm?" Angelus asked.

"Oops," Spike grinned.

Angelus laughed.

Ooops! Ooops! You let a Hellgod escape from Earth! Xander thought and then paused a moment. OH...well maybe that's not so bad.

"Glorificus has sent me a fruit basket or two...mostly they contained a bunch of crazy people. You know crazy people you can't eat just one!" Angelus laughed.

Yeah...and you two should know about crazy, Xander thought. He looked over at Lindsey who was now covered in a fine sheen of sweat from the strain. He tried to send in him a supportive look.

"She wants this manuscript?" Spike asked.

"No...not exactly. Well not any more. Seems while she was trapped her she was looking for a Key and this manuscript referenced it."

"A key?"

"A KEY, Spike," Angelus said emphasizing the word.
"And this...Key..."

"Would have opened the portal back to her dimension," Angelus concluded.

"But now she doesn't need it."

"No."

"But you do?"

"Maybe. You know what?" Angelus suddenly said, downed his drink and then stood up. "I'm hungry! I got something special for dinner."

Spike downed his drink, stood up, and said, "Let me guess..."

"TWINS!" The vampires shouted and laughed at the same time. Xander cringed and noted Lindsey rolling his eyes.

"You wanna bring your, Pet?" Angelus asked.

"Nah," Spike said then barked, "Hands and knees, face down!"

Xander immediately moved into position. He'd only thought he'd felt vulnerable and exposed with his ass in the air on Spike's bed that morning. Now, in front of Angelus, with his ass in the air he really knew what vulnerable and exposed was.

"You know, it might be worth looking into a resurrection spell to bring Buffy back just to see this," Angelus laughed.

Please...NO! Xander prayed.

"Yeah, but where would ya find a witch strong enough and foolish enough ta do that?" Spike asked.

"Give me time...give me time," Angelus laughed and started to walk away then paused. "You know...it really would be cruel for me to leave Lindsey like this. Gimme a moment."

Angelus walked back to Lindsey and then quickly unstrapped the ball gag from around his mouth.

"There. That's much better," Angelus laughed and then walked away.

"FUCK YOU!" Lindsey screamed.

"Lindsey...Lindsey...," Angelus said to Spike as they walked to the other room. "Always gets it wrong. It's Fuck HIM!"

***

Xander shifted his eyes over to look at Lindsey. He was conflicted about breaking position. Part of him wanted to help Lindsey. Actually a large part of him demanded he free Lindsey, break some
furniture and then go and try and stake Angelus or at the very least try and save the doomed twins.

"Don't do it kid," Lindsey drawled in a southwestern accent. "He's hopin' you will."

What? Xander thought and then froze as identical screams rent the air. He body jerked torn between conflicting commands to hold and to go.

"Xander," Lindsey said sharply. "Look I know he expects me to goad ya on. Free me...free ourselves and I can tell you want to save those girls...and maybe if you were somebody else I would goad ya. But I work damned hard not ta give thatfuckin ' bastard what he wants and right now he wants a reason to see you laid out so don't you move. Ya can't save those girls. They were dead the minute he saw 'em...they just didn't know it."

Xander gulped down air as his body shook. Damnit! FUCK!

Another set of screams could be heard from the other room and Xander lifted his head.

"Damnit kid!" Lindsey seethed. "If ya go in there and they're still alive he'll draw out their deaths even longer! If they're dead by the time you get in there he'll just bring in somebody else. You can't do anything!"

Xander looked at Lindsey who looked at Xander. Lindsey was clearly feeling the strain from trying to stay up on his toes. He's legs were shaking.

"I'll be ridin' this pole a long time for not givin' him what he wants. Don't give me cause to hate you like I hate him," Lindsey said.

I have to try! Xander thought and then he pictured Tara and the children. Something in him wanted to lower his head back down and he had to wonder if that meant they were more valuable than the faceless twins. Lindsey maintained his fixed gaze on Xander.

No, Xander thought sadly as he lowered his head with tears running down his face. Not more valuable, just more likely to save.

Author’s Notes:

The Anal Impaler is real. Found it when I was doing research on belts.
Chapter 30

Xander wasn't sure how long he held position or how long the vampires had been gone. It was long enough for the screams to have stopped. It was long enough for his tears to have dried. It was also long enough for Lindsey's strength to have given out.

At first he'd just grunted and then it had been a litany of whispered "Fucks!" and "Shits!". Now Xander wasn't even sure if Lindsey knew what he was saying.

"YOU FUCKIN' COCKSUCKER ASSWIPE SHITHEAD!" Lindsey screamed.

Xander's eyebrows went up on that one.

"YOU THINK YOU FUCKIN' GOT ME! I'VE FUCKIN' RIDDEN' BULLS LONGER THAN THIS! FUCK!"

Lindsey's a cowboy? Xander wondered. He swears like a sailor...or course if I had that thing between my legs I'd...

"JES...FUCK! MY HOLE IS STILL TIGHTER THAN LILAH'S TWAT! THAT WHY YOU FUCK ME AND NOT HER YOU PIECE OF DUNG SLIME!"

Xander blushed. And I was always accused of being the mouthy one? Xander thought.

"YOU CAN HAVE ME ON THIS THING FOR A WEEK AND I'LL STILL FUCKI...."

"Enough!" Angelus yelled as he stormed into the room. Spike followed. "If you are so hot to use that mouth of yours Linds, then I'll give you what you want."

"A stake, Angelus?" Lindsey spat in Angelus face as the vampire began adjusting the center rod. Lindsey grunted and moaned as Angelus began working the dildo out of his body.

"One of these days, Linds, you're really gonna make me mad," Angelus said.

"Looking forward to it," Lindsey hissed as Angelus pulled the impaler completely out of him. Angelus laughed and then stroked Lindsey's mouth.

"Did I ever thank you for betraying Wolfram and Hart? I like you so much better as my Toy...rather than my lawyer."

"Hmmm...I don't like you at all," Lindsey said.

Angelus moved close and put his mouth by Lindsey's ear then whispered, "I know. That's what makes it so good between us."

Spike sat down on the couch. He'd poured himself a drink as he watched his grandsire play with his "Toy." He sipped his drink and looked at Xander. Forgive me, pet, Spike thought as he didn't have to wonder where the next part of the evening was headed. I did the best I could to prepare you.

"Sit up, Pet," Spike said. Xander sat at up and gasped. The room spun for a moment as the blood
rushed from his head.

Angelus worked a pulley that gave enough slack in the chain binding Lindsey's arm so the man could lower it in front of him. The spreader bar was still between his legs. Angelus plopped down in his leather chair.

"Front and center, Linds," Angelus said. Lindsey dropped to his knees and crawled until he was in front of Angelus. Murder was in his eyes and in his stance. There was also the sense that he was in no way broken. In fact as Xander studied him, Lindsey almost looked as if he won something.

"Why don't you do what lawyers do best and put your mouth to work, Linds," Angelus said. Xander's eyes went wide as Lindsey bent over and began to undo Angelus fly with his only his mouth.

_Lindsey's a lawyer_, thought Xander as he tried to ignore how Lindsey then worked Angelus's cock out of his pants and began to suck on it nosily.

"Mmmm...such a talented tongue, Lindsey," Angelus purred.

Xander wanted to shake his head. He blushed he'd never seen a man get a blowjob, and he'd only ever even had the one. Yet, here he was watching a man who hated Angelus give him one like he won something, and then it hit Xander. Xander was very careful not to laugh. Lindsey had won something. He'd found away off the impaler! Lindsey had manipulated Angelus. He'd manipulated the great Angelus from keeping him on that damned thing and to giving Angelus a blowjob and while Xander had never given a blowjob he was pretty sure he'd choose that over a long stint on an impaler.

"So...," Angelus purred as Lindsey's head bobbed up and down on his cock, "not in the mood to play with Xander?"

"Just enjoying the show," Spike said as he downed his drink.

_Play! Oh Fuck! Spike!_ Xander thought and he couldn't hide the small tremors that began to course through him.

"Slow down, Linds," Angelus barked. "Want this to last through the warm-up round."

_Warm-up?_ Xander thought.

"Up," Spike commanded and tapped his lap. Xander turned around saw Spike with his legs obscenely splayed open on the couch. Xander desperately wanted to stall, to fight or to question.

_I am Master Spike's Pet_, he reminded himself as he crawled up into Spike's lap and sat astride it.

"Eyes on me," Spike said.

Xander locked his eyes on Spike. He could still hear Lindsey humming and slurping around Angelus's cock.

"Not that's I'm complaining, but does the view get better?" Angelus asked.

"I don't tell you how to play with your Toy," Spike said as he returned Xander's gaze.
Angelus hissed. Spike pulled Xander down for a kiss. Like the kiss that morning, it was hungry and dominant. Yet underneath it, Xander could taste the Spike's flavors; smoke and whiskey. He wrapped his arms around Spike and submitted to the kiss. He let Spike claim his mouth, suck on his tongue and bite at his lips. Eventually the vampire broke the kiss and Xander leaned his head back desperately for air.

Spike began to plant hungry and urgent kisses down Xander's neck while teasing his thumbs across Xander's nipples. One flared pain and the other flared pleasure. Blood roared in Xander's ears and drowned out the sounds of Lindsey feasting on Angelus's cock. Xander remembered Spike's command and looked down as the vampire replaced his thumb with his mouth over Xander's left nipple. More pleasure shot through Xander as Spike teased the pierced flesh. He darted his tongue in and out of the ring both caressing the little nub and tugging on the ring.

Xander gasped and then Spike raked his nails down Xander's back. Again, pain warred with pleasure and Xander was left forgotten on the battlefield. Spike worked his mouth back up to Xander's throat and began to lick at the scars on this neck. The belt around him grew uncomfortable as his cock sought to swell. He rocked his hips forward only to find it nudged the plug inside of him to touch his hidden sweet spot.

He jumped and gasped. Spike chuckled and he grabbed Xander's hips.

"That's right, Pet, rock those hips," Spike ordered.

_Fuck!_ Xander thought even as he followed orders. Sparks shot through him and even if he wanted to stop he really couldn't as Spike began guiding him in the motion. He was thrusting up and back. Each motion was winding him tighter and giving him not outlet. He was a capacitor being over loaded and just waiting for a touch to discharge.

Then Spike's clever hand was working at the back of Xander's belt. He twisted his wrist and pulled part of it away baring Xander's ass. Xander stared at the vampire. Spike stared back.

"Take my cock out," Spike ordered Xander.

_Spike, I can't!_ Xander wanted to cry even as his body was screaming that yes he could. He needed to and with shaky hands Xander unbuttoned Spike's fly.

Spike groaned and tried to curse himself a thousand times for enjoying the heated touch of Xander's trembling hands working his cock out of Spike's pants. _I don't know how, but I promise I'll find a way to make this up to you_, Spike thought.

"Lift up," Spike said. Xander went up on his knees and he put both of his hands on Spike's shoulders. Spike ran his hands gently down Xander's ass and then over the plug. Quickly and as tenderly as he dared he worked it out of Xander.

Xander's nails dug into Spike's shoulders. He didn't know if he was happy the plug was gone or wanted to beg to have it put back inside. All he knew was he was still needy.

"Had his own little impaler, I see," Angelus breathy voice floated across the room.

"Don't like to waste my time gettin' 'im ready. This keeps 'im ready," Spike said as he grabbed Xander's hips.
Xander stared down at Spike. Spike looked up at Xander. For a brief moment something of Spike, not Master Spike, flashed in the vampire's blue eyes. Pet, Spike thought.

Xander gave the barest hint of a smile. Sacrifice the knight, Spike, Xander thought.

Spike disappeared and Master Spike grabbed Xander tight. He pressed his cock against Xander's hole. As he began to push in, Xander pushed out and the long pale cock began to slide into Xander's body.

Xander winced. Spike was larger and longer then the plug. Spike held still for a few daring seconds while Xander breathed and then he pushed completely inside.

OH FUCK! Spike wanted to hate himself for how good it felt to slide into Xander's tight warm heat. I am such a monster, he thought, and I don't bleedin' care.

Xander marveled at the feel of Spike inside of him. It wasn't like the Azora. That had been a thing that twisted, burrowed and felt alien. Spike was solid. He was cool muscle and for some odd reason Xander felt "connected." He stared at Spike. Spike had his eyes closed at the look on his face was as if he'd found he could walk in the sun and not burn alive. Xander touched Spike's cheek. The vampire opened his eyes and began to move underneath Xander.

Xander gasped as once again that spot inside of him was tickled and teased only this time it wasn't so much a tickle as a long stroke. Spike smiled and began to guide Xander's hips in the rocking motion again. Xander held on and followed his Master's lead.

Once again the capacitor inside of Xander was charging and this time it looked like it was charging inside of Spike as well. Xander grew more uncomfortable inside the belt as Spike's cock stroked him harder and deeper inside. Xander panted and curled his fists into Spike's shoulder. He fought to let Spike lead. Part of him was burning inside, burning to go faster, harder and deeper. Make this just go, go...go. He needed so much but with the belt on, his body was thwarted so all of Xander's concentration began to seek release in that one place where he wasn't bound. He would have whimpered if he could.

Spike must have caught on to Xander's distress or maybe his own need began to flare too much but he began to increase their pace. He rocked Xander faster, he thrust harder and he went deeper. Xander bit his lip.

"Yeee Haaaw! Ride 'em cowboy!" Angelus laughed and yelled.

Spike grabbed Xander and pulled him down for a kiss. He began to thrust his tongue inside Xander's mouth in time to his cock thrusting inside Xander's ass. Xander buried his hands in Spike's hair, rocked and let Spike fuck him. He needed Spike to fuck him.

Please, Spike, Xander thought. FUCK ME!

Spike growled, snarled and then thrust deep inside of Xander. Xander's nails left half moons in Spike's scalp and then the vampire was jerking inside of him and panting in his mouth. Xander stiffened and the world pulsed white for just a moment as Spike's seed splashed deep inside him.

"FUUUUCK! That was good," Angelus screamed as he came down Lindsey's mouth.
When Spike was still he released Xander's mouth. Xander took deep gulps of air and stared at Spike. Spike longed to take him in his arms, to kiss him gently or give him the release he knew Xander must need. He couldn't do any of those things and what he had to do next would break his heart if he had one.

"Down, Pet," Spike ordered.

Only the chant of "Master's Pet" kept Xander from going still or worse, hitting Spike. It didn't keep something inside of him from suddenly feeling raw and exposed. Xander slid off Spike's lap and knelt on the floor. He could feel Spike's spunk begin to ooze out of his ass.

"OK! Now, that," Angelus said, "that is really a sight to bring Buffy back for...or...I know maybe a picture for the net? You know? My spies say Willow still leads the North American resistance. Bet she'd like to know her friend, Xander, is still alive."

Willow! Xander thought angrily and only the sudden steely grip of Spike's hand pressing painfully down on Xander's shoulder kept him from getting to his feet.


Angelus laughed. Lindsey was wiping his mouth and was now the one trying to send of a look of support to Xander.

"You sure ya don't feel like sharin'?" Angelus asked with the Irish lilt back to his speech and the blackness back in his eye.

"I'm sure," Spike said firmly and Xander felt a little less raw.

"Well then, guess it's just you, me and Linds for the rest of the evenin," Angelus said.

Spike arched an eyebrow. "Special plans?"

"Well, I did, but since ya don't wanna share guess we'll just have to make new ones."

Xander felt a wave a tension pass fleetingly through Spike.

"Mind if I secure X...my Pet away first?" Spike asked.

"Not at all," Angelus grinned. "You might be tied up for awhile."

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Spike had led Xander to a guest room. It was large and luxurious with its own bath attached. Spike closed the door behind him and when the door shut "Master Spike" was gone.

"Pet," Spike said quickly and softly. "I need ya to remember, you're my Pet. No one can touch you, yeah?"

Yeah, Xander nodded ignoring his hurt. What's going on?

"I need ya ta promise me you'll behave. You'll do what yer told, yeah?"
In case you haven't noticed that's why I've been doing...up and including you fucking me and dumping me! Asshole! Xander thought even as he fear was replacing his hurt.

"Xander!"

Xander nodded. I promise.

Then Spike shoved the two keys to Xander's belt into his hands. Xander's eyes went wide.

"Take it off only when ya have ta," Spike said. "Do yer human business then put it right back on. Find a hidin' spot for the keys and te...show no one, yeah?"

Xander looked at Spike. There were emotions Xander couldn't read going on in those blue eyes. Spike, he thought as he reached out and touched the vampire's cheek.

"Try and relax. You'll be fine here. I just...I don't know when I'll be back."

What? Xander thought. What do you mean...you don't kno...

"Xander, I have ta go. You did good. I'm proud of ya. He won't touch ya," Spike said and then ghosted the tenderest of kisses over the tip of Xander's nose. "Think about what movie ya want ta torture me with when we get back."

Spike! Xander thought as the vampire turned away and left the room.

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Hours later Spike still hadn't returned. Xander knew it was hours because there was a clock in the room. There was a window too. It looked out over a courtyard garden. He knew that because dawn had come and gone and still there was no Spike.

Xander had done his best not to worry. Why should he worry? Spike was a big vampire. Spike was Angelus's grandchilde...what was there to worry about? He thought. Except there were those emotions and there was the fact that Spike had given him the keys to his belt, which were now hidden under a loose floor board under the bed. There was also the fact he still hadn't seen Spike in hours.

The bed was rumpled from Xander's aborted attempt to sleep. He'd tried to go to sleep after he'd showered and donned his belt. It had been a long hot shower. It was unusual but the need to wash Spike from him overwhelmed his fear of the water. So he'd scrubbed and scrubbed trying to clean away the feel of the vampire and even his marks. No matter how much he tried washing between his ass though, he could still feel Spike and he hated it. He hated it because it felt good. He hated it because he'd wanted it. He hated it because Spike had shoved him away when it was done.

When all traces of Spike had been washed away, Xander crawled into the bed and that's when he missed Spike. That's when he'd really begun to worry about Spike and that's when he'd begun to touch the scars and the bruises Spike had made. They were all he had of Spike right now and Xander needed him. Xander wasn't sure if maybe he hadn't finally lost his mind.

He's coming back, Xander thought. I'm going to make him watch Star Trek the Motion Picture...or worse Start Trek V: The Total Drek.
Xander had tossed and turned in the bed. Every sound was hope and every sound was heartbreak when it didn't produce an arrogant blond vampire for Xander to hate. Eventually, Xander had given up and had begun pacing the room, watching the clock or occasionally looking at the garden. The garden hurt though. It reminded him of another garden where he'd much rather be.

The one thing Xander didn't do was try and leave. There was an unspoken command in Spike's words; "Stay here." Somehow those unspoken words compelled him more than any other command Spike had given him.

The sounds of heavy footsteps interrupted Xander's thoughts. He turned his head toward the door and his heart leapt. Spike? He wondered.

"Good afternoon," Angelus said as the door opened and Xander's heart crashed. Xander let his crashing heart carrying him to the floor and on his knees.

"More manners than I thought," Angelus said as he stepped further into the room. Two minions followed. One sat a tray on the floor and the other took fresh towels to the bathroom.

"Hope you're enjoying your stay," Angelus said.

It's really to die for, Xander thought lamely and nodded absently.

"Don't worry about, Spike. You know him. He's hanging around here somewhere."

Xander's head shot up and met Angelus's gaze. The blackness was swirling deep in those eyes and his grin was firmly in place.

"I don't think you're as 'broken' as Spike wants me to believe. I wonder? Is it because he thinks you are broken or because he wants me to believe you are?"

Xander looked down at the floor. Does it matter, Deadboy? He thought.

"Still, I have a problem and I thought maybe you could help me. You don't mind helping me do you, Xander?" Angelus asked.

You'll do what yer told? Spike had asked Xander.

Fuck! Xander thought and looked up at Angelus. He shook his head. Angelus grinned and a chill went through Xander.

"See, I knew I could count on you," Angelus said as he snapped his fingers. Three more minions filed into the room. They each led a gagged person. There was a young girl about with long brown hair like Cordelia's. Then there was a middle-aged woman with blonde hair in a style like Buffy's mom used to wear and an older man who wore glasses like Giles'.

NO! Xander thought and began to shake his head.

"Yeah, I know. Market wasn't very good today," Angelus sighed and the moved next to Xander. He crouched down. "See that's why I need your help. I just can't decide what to have for dinner."

The first minion drug the man forward. The man's eyes were bloodshot and red rimmed behind his glasses. He was soaked in sweat.
"What about him, Xan? He look good?" Angelus asked.

_Fucking NO! You bastard!_ Xander silently screamed and shook his head.

"You're right," Angelus sighed. "He is a little past his prime."

The second minion moved forward dragging the girl. She held her head up high but tremors wracked her body.

"Her?" Angelus asked.

_NOO! NO! I won't do this!_ Xander thought as he shook his head.

"You're right again," Angelus said. "Maybe I should save her for special occasion. Just like the real Cordelia."

Xander shook his head. He couldn't stop the tears from flowing.

"I guess that leaves just the Mom look-a-like huh?" Angelus asked.

_No!_ Xander quietly sobbed.

"Bet she won't fight like old Joyce did. You know, I have to admit, I almost wondered if Joyce wasn't the real slayer in the family. Took a lot longer to finish her off than Buffy," Angelus said as he stood up. He walked to the door and ushered the minions out.

"Still, you know what's really great about being me, Xander?" Angelus said in tone that commanded Xander to look up. "I don't have to choose! I can have them _all._"

Xander hung his head and began sobbing in earnest while Angelus's laughter floated down the hall. The minion carrying out the dirty towels closed the door.

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The courtyard garden was dark again; so was the room. The tray was still covered. Xander's tears were long wrung out of him. He'd now moved himself to the farthest corner in the room and sat huddled with his back against the wall. He was covered by the shadows and the dark. He sat there wondering if Spike had forgotten what he had. Angelus didn't need to touch you to hurt you.

_Spike,_ Xander thought. _Please come back. Come back soon._

Once again heavy footsteps interrupted Xander's thoughts. He looked up in dread at the door. The door swung open and the room flooded with lights as someone flipped the switch.

"Honey! He's home!" Angelus cried.

Xander blinked back through blinding light. Two minions once again followed Angelus inside. This time they drug a body between them. They moved to the center of the room and let it drop to the floor before leaving.

"Be sure he's up tomorrow so I can see him off. He's gotta a city to run," Angelus said and turned to
leave then stopped. "Oh! And tell him I didn't get anything on his coat! He gets so pissy about that."

Angelus threw something on to the bed and the left. He shut the door behind him.

*Spike?* Xander thought and scurried to the center of the floor. One close look and he was glad he hadn't uncovered the tray. As it was he was having a hard enough keeping his bile down.

The body dumped on the floor was a mass of welts, cuts, and bruises. His wrists and ankles were scraped raw from restraints. Fingers were sticking out at odd angles. Skin hung in shreds in some places.

*Spike?* Xander thought and moved cautiously around the body. Spike's legs were splayed wide and Xander could see blood and semen oozing out between his red and raw cheeks. In fact Xander could see places where blood and semen had dried on Spike's back and legs. He could see it now around his split open mouth.

*Oh, Spike!* Xander thought and began to shake with a new understanding. He reached out and tentatively touched the vampire's uninjured cheek. There was no response.

*He couldn't touch me,* Xander thought, *but he could touch you. He could always touch you.*
Chapter 31

Xander shook himself to push his shock and emotions back. Spike needed him and now wasn't the time for either. He reached out a hand and gently touched the vampire again.

_C'mon, Spike_, Xander thought. The battered vampire remained unresponsive. Not for the first time Xander thought about how he was going to kill Angelus and not for the first time did he feel responsible for the monster who'd released hell on Earth.

_I got Buffy killed and now I got you..._Xander once again pushed back the useless thoughts. The years old guilt wasn't going to help Spike.

_Gotta get him clean_, Xander thought. _Don't know how bad he is until I can wash the blood and...well wash him up._

Xander carefully rolled Spike onto his back. He was hyper alert for any signs of consciousness or distress from the vampire. There were none. When Spike was laid flat on his back Xander looked at his mangled hands. He studied the disjointed fingers. Tears formed as he remembered how careful and gentle those fingers had been with him, preparing him for the inevitable, and now they were twisted like forgotten wreckage.

_Might be better to set them while he is out_, Xander thought. The last thing he wanted to do was to hurt Spike anymore. Once again he forced the bile back down his throat. He picked up Spike's right hand. As gently and as quickly as he could, Xander began to snap and realign the fingers back into place. He constantly monitored Spike for any reaction and he didn't know whether to be grateful or to worry when there was none. He repeated the process with the left hand. When he was done, something inside of Xander was twisted and broken. Gently he picked up Spike's hands again and ghosted kisses over the raw knuckles.

_Punishment's over_, he thought and then tenderly set Spike's hands back down. He then moved to the bed, picked up Spike's coat and folded it neatly and lay it in the chair by the window. Next, Xander stripped the comforter off the bed and draped it over Spike.

_Gonna go get the wa..._Xander nearly choked on his own thoughts. He had to get Spike clean but he didn't know yet how he was going to do it, but he _was_ going to do it.

_Gonna get the water ready, Spike. Be right back_, Xander finished his thoughts and headed off to the bathroom. The bathroom was nice but not quite as luxurious as the one in Spike's suite. There was not a separate bathtub and shower. Here there was just a large tub with a nice shower curtain. Panic began to rise in Xander at the thought of crawling in the tub, but he pushed it down.

_Let's think about this_, Xander thought as swept back the shower curtain and stared at the tub. _Gotta get Spike clean._Bath...a bath...

Memories of the "Tank" swirled around Xander and once again his stomach rebelled. His chest tightened and the world spun. _I can draw a bath_, Xander continued. _I've done it before...just...Spike can't help me...and I can't._

Xander backed up from the tub and took several deep breaths. Drawing a bath wasn't the problem so much as trying to give one to Spike. _Can't do it without getting in the tub with him...and I can't do it,
he thought.

Xander looked back in the bedroom where Spike lay motionless under the comforter. He looked back at the tub.

_OK, I'll do what I can do,_ Xander vowed. He stepped back to the tub, closed the curtain and got the shower running. He then went back into the bedroom. He dropped to his stomach by the bed and reached under it. He worked up the loose floorboard and removed the keys to his belt. Quickly he removed his belt and put everything back under the bed. Then he moved over to Spike.

Carefully he pulled the comforter back away from Spike. Warily he maneuvered the unconscious vampire into a seated position and from there he hefted Spike into a fireman's carry across his shoulder.

_Ugh!_ Xander thought under Spike's weight as he started for the bathroom. _Gettin' a little heavy there, blondie...might want to stick to O negative for awhile._

The two minions who had bodily drug Spike in had done it for dramatic affect, of that Xander had no doubt. He knew first hand about vampiric strength and as he finally managed to delicately lower Spike into the tub under the warm spray of water he wished he'd had a little of it. He was slightly out of breath and a little dizzy.

_Course it would have helped if I'd had something to eat in the last twenty-four hours,_ Xander thought as he stepped into the tub with Spike. The water swirling to the drain was rust colored but it was draining. Xander breathed a bit easier.

_Gonna be the strangest shower of my life,_ Xander thought as he settled behind Spike on the tub floor and began to tenderly soap and wash the vampire. _Still neither one of us is in any condition to complain._

Once again time lost meaning as Xander worked with the spray falling on him like a hot rain. Carefully and methodically he scrubbed Spike clean. He hesitated only when it came to clean the vampire's raw and bleeding anus. He was caught between the intimacy of the action, the fear of hurting the vampire further and knowing if he was in Spike's place he'd want to be clean. Empathy for Spike won out and Xander tenderly worked a cloth between Spike's cheeks and cleaned away the blood and semen.

Afterwards, Xander even took the time to wash Spike's hair. It was the last thing he washed and somehow it felt like putting the last piece in place in restoring a broken vase. When he was done, Xander turned off the water and once again wrestled Spike's limp body out of the tub. Xander stretched him out on the bathroom floor and then began to use a towel to gently dab the vampire dry.

Throughout the whole ordeal Spike remained unresponsive. He looked and felt like a corpse. He was cool to the touch and for a moment Xander panicked. For a brief moment he wondered if Spike was truly "dead" but then he quickly shoved the thought aside.

_Yes he's dead,_ Xander thought as he stood up and stared at Spike's naked and abused but clean body, _but he's not dust._

Then Xander marched into the bedroom. He turned down the sheets and blankets on the bed. Once again a sudden wave of dizziness struck and Xander was reminded he was expending a lot of energy for someone who hadn't eaten in awhile. He looked over at the tray. He walked over, crouched
down and uncovered it.

A peanut-butter and jelly sandwich, some chips an apple and a juice box waited there. Oddly enough there was also a set of silverware.

Minions probably have a habit of packing silverware on every tray, Xander thought as he reached for the apple and quickly bit into it. He let his hunger set the pace and soon several bites of the apple had been chewed and swallowed. The food hit his system and had an immediate it affect. He could feel his body responding and his energy picking up. Xander stood up and looked at the bathroom.

Food! Xander thought. Spike needs fo...OH!

Xander dropped the half eaten apple back on the tray and forced a lump of apple down his throat. Spike needed food but the only source of food available to him was Xander.

Fuck! Xander thought as he headed off to the bathroom. Double fuck! My life's ambition was not to be a vampire's Lunchable!

Once again Xander worked Spike's body into a fireman's carry. He moved him back out into the bedroom and lay him in the bed. He covered him with the sheet and blankets and then smoothed a lock of hair from his forehead. Spike was paler than usual, battered, bruised and looked completely vulnerable.

OK, batty, Xander thought. If I'm going to do this I'm going to need to eat myself...I mean eat something myself.

Xander got up and moved back to the tray. He picked it up and carried it back to the bed. Then he sat down and ate while he watched the immobile vampire. Seeing the normally frenetic vampire so still almost had Xander lose his appetite again but he forced himself to eat. He finished the apple first and then began to work on the sandwich and chips.

When he was done he sat the tray back on the floor and picked up the dinner knife. Xander looked at the dull blade and cringed. That's not gonna cut it, he thought.

He put the knife back down and picked up the fork. He winced. Still, better than the knife, he thought.

Xander climbed back on to the bed. He arranged Spike so the vampire was now almost in his lap. His back was pressed to Xander's chest. Xander wrapped his arms around him. Spike's head flopped back on Xander's shoulder. Xander reached up and stroked Spike's chin until his mouth hung open and slack.

Then Xander took a deep breath, grabbed the fork and began to worry a tine back and forth into his wrist. The pain was both dull and sharp at the same time. Instinct warred with will and while Xander's flesh wanted to pull back from the damage he was inflicting on it he remained firm. He continued to press and twist the metal until the skin started to give.

OW! OW! FUCK! Xander thought as he bit his lip and continued to jerk the tine into his wrist. C'mon already!

Finally a red pearl of blood welled up and formed around the tine. Xander let loose a loud sigh and pulled the fork back. He sat it on the bed and then quickly moved his bleeding wrist over Spike's
mouth. He pressed his wrist as firmly to the vampire's lips as he could and then he waited. He could feel the pearl of blood grow until it was a slow liquid trail of warmth flowing down his wrist. He willed it to trickle into Spike.

*C'mon, Spike,* Xander thought as the trickle flowed, *blood's in the water. Wakey wakey! You know you want it! Yummy fresh bl...*

Suddenly there was a growl and fangs ripped into Xander's wrist as hands grabbed his arm and held him painfully to the vampire. Xander screamed silently as blood was sucked greedily and viciously from his body. Fear ran unchecked in him as he realized Spike was operating on instinct and may not stop taking the blood he needed until it was too late.

**SPIKE!** Xander silently screamed as he began to struggle and fight the vampire. Spike only grunted and continued to take more. Blood roared in Xander's ears and he was getting weaker.

*He's gonna kill me!* Xander thought as he kicked with his legs and punched with his free hand. Spike only grunted and continued to drink Xander's life down. *He's gonna drain me...Angelus....Angelus set this up! Knew...*

It was getting harder for Xander to think. Yet an idea was dancing in his head, teasing him. If only he could think, he might understand. He knew he was running out of time. He thought about Willow, Faith and of course Dawn. He thought about Tara and about the children.

*The children!* He suddenly thought and he remembered how when Spike would play the monster the children would run and squirm until Spike caught them. Then they would go still while he kissed them on the neck.

Against all instinct, Xander let himself go limp. He lay passive. At first Spike seemed to just suck Xander's life away faster and Xander thought this might be his biggest mistake since opening his wrist for the hurt vampire, but then Spike's feasting slowed and then abruptly stopped. Hurried but gentle licks worked over Xander's torn flesh to stop the bleeding. Xander didn't move.

"Pet?" Spike finally croaked in a voice that was raw like it came from a throat shredded by shards of glass.

Xander nodded. Spike released his wrist and tried to turn in Xander's arms. Xander held him still.

"Pet, I need to know yer OK!" Spike said.

Xander made the "OK" sign with his other hand. He was really tired, but OK.

"Could have killed ya!" Spike ordered. "No more blood! Understand?"

Xander gave the thumbs up. *I can live with that,* he thought.

"Xan, I'm...I didn't know...was too far gone..." Spike began to explain in his strained voice and stopped when Xander suddenly laid a forefinger over the vampire's lips.

"Pet, are you tellin' me to shut it?" Spike asked from behind Xander's finger.

*And here I always said you were dumb,* Xander thought as he gave another thumbs up.
"You know that could get you a punishment," Spike said with a smile.

Xander rolled his eyes and put two more fingers over the vampire's lips. *So what else is new? Just go to sleep and get better so you can get us the hell out of here and then you can give me whatever perverted punishment you dream up back in the privacy of our own room*, Xander thought sleepily.

Spike chuckled at his pet despite the pain. He kissed Xander's fingers and let himself be held by his warm, wonderful pet. He concentrated on the sounds of Xander's breathing and reassured himself with the beat of Xander's heart. With the scent of his pet surrounding him, Spike slept peacefully and soundly for the first time since coming to L.A..

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Xander woke to see a pair of clear blue eyes staring at him.

"Afternoon," Spike purred. His voice sounded much better. His face even looked a little less battered. Xander pointed at him and made the "Ok" gesture.

"Been better," Spike said, "but been much worse."

Xander nodded.

"Need more blood," Spike said.

*Don't think I have much left to spare but if it will get us out of here sooner*, Xander thought but tilted his neck anyway.

"NO!" barked Spike and Xander nearly jumped upright. Spike put a gentle hand on Xander's shoulder. "No, Xander. Almost took too much as it was last night. Think Peaches was hoping I'd lose control and take it all."

*You almost did*, Xander thought.

"No more blood from you for a long while. Yeah?" Spike said.

*No argument from me*, Xander said and nodded. Spike reached out a hand and touched Xander's cheek.

"Ya know a good Pet always takes care of his Master," Spike said.

Xander rolled his eyes but nodded.

"Xan," Spike said softly, "ya took good care of me. I know Angelus didn't clean me up and tuck me inta bed."

Xander looked away. *Seemed like the right thing to do*, he thought.

"Eyes on me," Spike order tenderly. Xander looked at him.

"I didn't want ya ta see me that way. Didn't want ya ta know...but thank you for cleanin' up the mess."
"Why, Spike? Xander thought. Why let...why didn't you...I mean...

Xander couldn't finish his thoughts. He was selfishly glad Angelus hadn't been able to hurt him the way he had hurt Spike. It would have broken him, but that didn't mean he wanted Spike to be Angelus chew toy. He didn't want Spike to suffer because of him.

"Oi!" Spike said, "wish I knew what was causin' the hamster to start spinnin' the wheel in yer brain, pet."

Xander flipped Spike the finger.

Spike laughed, "Anytime, pet. Anytime."

Xander flushed and shook his head. Think I've had enough of bang the Xan-man, Xander thought and then pointed to the restroom.

Spike sighed then said, "Right, go do yer human stuff. I'll go see if I can scrounge up some breakf...clothes."

You're leaving me? Xander thought frantically and grabbed Spike's arm. What if Angelus wants another round ofra...abuse Spike?

"Shh, Xan," Spike said soothingly guessing at what was behind Xander’s response. "Angelus had his fun. He'll be his mouthy ponce self as usual but he'll be hands off."

How can you be sure? Xander thought and stared beseechingly at Spike. You said it yourself, I can't give you any more blood and what if he dumps you back here again. Spike, I can't help you again...I can't...

Spike ran a finger down Xander's nose and tapped the tip lightly. He smiled sadly and said, "Xander, this isn't my first time ta the dance with Angelus, yeah? I know him. He's had his pound of flesh...literally and now he'll be back ta business."

Spike's words sent a wave of ice down Xander's spine and his stomach rolled. He's done this to you before, he thought. He's...Spike, how can you be so...calm about this...so matter of fact!

Xander's shock and revulsion must have shown on his face or in his eyes. Spike sighed and shook his head.

"Pet," he said. "Ya have ta understand, we're vampires. It's different. I'm not sayin' I enjoyed it or it's on my top ten list of things ta do in L.A., but it is what is. Angelus is a sadistic prick. Always has been...always will be. He plays games. I've been a player in so many of 'em since Dru turned me I used ta forget what it was like not ta be...that was until he got 'imself cursed. Never ate a gypsy after that...missed the family I did, but not the fun'n games. Was thankful for the break."

I don't understand, Xander thought and shook his head.

"Dru played games too," Spike said softly.

Oh now I'm really going to be sick, Xander thought and stared wide-eyed at the vampire.

"Learned 'em from 'Daddy' she did. Gladly played 'em fer her. She was my love, Xan. Would have
walked across crosses for her...come ta think of it I did that once," Spike laughed.

Stop it! Xander thought and reached out and grabbed Spike's arm again. Xander shook his head furiously. Stop it! OK...you're a soulless blood sucking fiend and a monster but ...you're not one of the bad guys! I don't know if you're one of the good guys...but damnit Spike you don't deserve this...that! No one does.

Spike stared at Xander. He heard his furious heartbeat. The White Knight was in Xander's eyes and was ready to do battle only he didn't look like he was ready to battle Spike. He looked like he was ready to battle for Spike. It was a sight so unexpected and so remarkable he took an unneeded breath.

"It's OK, pet," Spike said with smile, he longed to kiss Xander but he didn't to want to drive the Knight away. "I'm OK...but maybe now you'll take pity on me next movie night, eh?"

Xander shook his head and couldn't help but laugh. Not a chance, golden boy. Not a chance, he thought, especially if you go and get yourself tortured again. It’s time we go home.

Spike watched Xander laugh silently and longed to hear it. Gonna get yer voice back, he vowed.

"Right," Spike said and then slapped Xander's ass. Xander jumped. "Go do yer human stuff. I'll be back soon."

You better be, Master Muttonhead, Xander thought as he climbed out of bed and headed for the bathroom. Spike watched him leave before moving from the bed. He didn't want the whelp to see how much it still hurt to move. He really did hate Angelus's games.

***

Spike entered the front room. Angelus got up from his chair and walked over to greet him. He studied Spike taking inventory of the still vibrant bruises, puckered cuts and raw abrasions. Spike paused and Angelus stalked around him trailing a finger over the blond vampire's naked flesh. He moved behind Spike and put his mouth by the blond's left ear.

"Ready for round two?" Angleus purred.

"Are you?" Spike replied

Angelus laughed.

"You've come along way from the genteel Mama's boy Dru first brought home," Angelus said. "Sometimes I almost miss, William."

Spike shrugged and said, "I am what ya made me, sire."

Angelus laughed again and ran his hands down Spike's welted back. Spike bit back a wince.

"Didn't approve of Dru's choice at first," Angelus purred as he reached around and began tugging on Spike's cock, "but you've grown on me, Spikey."

Spike held still and let Angelus play. He let his cock get hard even as something inside of him loathed Angelus's touch.

"How's your Pet?" Angelus asked as he played with Spike.
"A little tired. Don't think he slept well this weekend. In the shower now," Spike replied.

Angelus laughed again, "You didn't kill him then?"

"Was that the plan?"

"Was a possibility."

Angelus kissed the back of Spike's neck and continued to tease and stroke Spike.

"Ya did drink from him though?" Angelus said with a touch of his native accent.

"Don't think I'd be standin' without it," Spike said.

Suddenly Angelus's fangs tore into Spike's neck. He sucked deep and increased the rhythm on his strokes. Spike moaned at the pain, the humiliation and the need. He'd been a player in Angelus's games too long not to respond. The game was brief but thorough. Angelus gave a last twist and tug and Spike spurted what little seed he had to spill. Angelus laughed as he pulled his face away from Spike's neck. He licked his lips loudly and held up his soiled hand to Spike's. Spike began to dutifully clean his spunk from the offered hand with his lips and tongue.

"He tastes good," Angelus purred. "Always knew he would. So good of you to *share*, Spike."

Spike resisted the urge to turn on Angelus even though the demon inside howled, *Xander's MINE!* It wanted blood for blood and pain for Angelus's presumptions. It also hungered for more blood. He was weak again.

When Spike was done cleaning Angelus's hand, the elder vampire released him. He sat back down in his chair and picked up a vial from the table next to it.

"Clothes and something more *substantial* to eat are in the other room," Angelus said and pointed to the room where they'd had the twins the first night.

"Ta," Spike said and began to head towards the other room.

"Oh, Spikey!" Angelus called out. Spike stopped and turned to look at Angelus. The elder vampire grinned and then threw the vial at Spike. Spike snatched it from the air, wincing as the move pulled torn flesh and muscle.

"For Xander. Pain...torture...humiliation, well they're just no good if ya can't hear 'em scream," Angelus said.

Spike stared at the vial and then again at Angelus.

"Yeah. Thanks mate," he said not sure whether to trust Angelus or not but the promise of hope kept him from dismissing the vial outright.

***

Xander panicked slightly when he got through in the bathroom. Spike was still not back.
"Keep it together," Xander thought. He got on his stomach and reached under the bed. Dutifully he donned and secured his belt. He was just about to hide the keys again when the door opened. Xander spun around and hid the keys behind his back.

"Just me, pet," Spike said as he entered the room. He was fully dressed and he looked better. The bruises on his face looked faded.

"He's fed," Xander thought and tried not to think of the implications.

"Ready to get out of here?" Spike asked. Xander nodded enthusiastically.

"Well give me the keys and then let's get going," Spike said. Xander sighed.

"Was hoping to keep these," he thought as he stepped forward and gave the keys to Spike. Spike took them and put them in his pocket.

"Safe as houses," he said and turned to leave.

Xander went to follow and then stopped.

"His coat!" Xander thought and ran back to the chair.

"Pet?" Spike asked when he heard Xander run back into the room. Xander snapped his fingers and then held out Spike's coat.

Something unknown stuck in Spike's throat and for a moment he was as mute as Xander. All he could do was nod and don the coat in a swirl of leather before quickly turning around and marching out of the room.

"You're welcome," Xander thought.

***

Once again Angelus was waiting for them in the front room. Lindsey was there again. He was gagged, blind folded and chained to the floor by his collar.

"Spike, it's been fun," Angelus said as they moved into the room.

"Family's always a crack," Spike said.

"Well, don't be a stranger," Angelus laughed.

Spike nodded.

"Oh...and be sure to let Zorn know how displeased I was with my damaged manuscript."

"Certainly," Spike said.

"Have a good trip back," Angelus said. Spike nodded and then headed for the door. Xander followed aware that Angelus's eyes followed them both. He breathed a bit better once they were out the door and in the hallway. Xander had never been so happy to see a set of elevator doors in his life. He was even happier when they opened. Spike wasted no time stepping inside and neither did
Xander. Spike pressed the "L" button for the lobby.

Just as the doors were about to close Angelus's voice rang out, "SPIKE!"

Spike thrust a hand between the doors and held them open. Angelus jogged up to the doors and grinned, "Almost forgot! Be sure to say 'Hi' to Lorne for me. Hope he's moved past that whole 'Doyle' thing. Some relationships just aren't meant to be...they can be so destructive."

"I'll give him the message," Spike said.

Angelus laughed and Spike withdrew his hand. The elevator doors slid shut and Xander practically held his breath until they reached the limo.
Chapter 32

A black awning with covered sides hung outside Angelus's hotel. It allowed Spike to walk briskly from the lobby straight to his waiting limo without risking being burned by the late afternoon sun. He stepped inside and sat down. He pointed to the floor when Xander entered. Xander slid to his knees by Spike and willed the limo to leave, leave, LEAVE.

Xander didn't have to wait long. The limo pulled away from the hotel. Spike pushed a button and the privacy window slid down. The minion driving was the same one who had driven them from Las Vegas.

"Home. Best speed and no stops," Spike ordered. "Signal me when we've passed the city limits."

The minion nodded and Spike raised the privacy window back up. He then leaned over, opened the tiny bar and poured himself a drink. He took two swallows then held the glass down to Xander's lips.

Don't need to tell me twice! Xander thought gratefully as he parted his lips. Spike carefully tipped the glass and the smooth warm liquid taste of whiskey flowed into Xander's mouth. He briefly savored the drink before swallowing. Spike tilted the glass again and Xander welcomed the second shot. Then Spike took the glass away and finished the liquor.

They rode in silence for a long while. Every now and then Spike would run his hand through Xander's hair. Xander wasn't sure whether Spike was trying to comfort Xander or himself.

Eventually a little light flashed near Spike and the vampire suddenly relaxed. He smiled at Xander.

"C'mere and up on yer knees," Spike ordered as he spread his legs wide.

Xander frowned but moved between Spike's legs. Spike dug the belt's keys out of his pockets and quickly unlocked the device. He worked the belt down over Xander's hips and then down his legs as far as he could.

"Step out of it," Spike ordered.

Something inside of Xander tensed. He really wasn't ready or in the mood for any of Spike's seduction games. He'd been through enough. I let him fuck me, Xander thought bitterly as he removed his belt, and while it was now where near my worst nightmare I'm not exactly about to start waving a rainbow flag!

Spike smiled and then reached into a cabinet under the seat. He pulled out Xander's sweat pants and shirt. He handed them to Xander.

"Get dressed," Spike said with a smirk.

Xander almost leaned in to kiss Spike but caught himself. Instead he donned his shirts and pants. He grinned wildly at the master vampire who only rolled his eyes.

"Get up here ya git," Spike ordered and tapped the seat next to him. Xander scrambled up on the seat.
"Can't have ya sittin' up here, but figured yer probably still pretty knackered so stretch out and lie down," Spike said. "Use my lap for a pillow, yeah?"

*Hey, if it means I don't have to ride all the way back to Las Vegas naked and on the floor, Xander thought, well then...yeah!*

Xander stretched out on the long leather seat. He laid his head in Spike's lap and blushed when his stomach growled.

"Oi! Gonna have to feed that monster of yours before it swallows the limo," Spike teased.

Xander flipped Spike the bird. Spike grabbed Xander's hand and kept the offending finger from curling back down.

"Offerin' something, pet?" Spike purred.

Xander shook his head. *Offered enough already,* he thought as something inside of him still smarted from Spike's dismissal afterward.

"Not nice to flip off yer master if ya don't mean it," Spike said as he brought Xander's hand close to his mouth.

OK! I'm sorry! Xander thought and tensed. Won't do it again!

Spike smiled and then sucked Xander's finger into his mouth. Xander gasped and then the vampire lazily stroked the finger with his tongue. He sucked it with his lips and all the while he stared at Xander with mischief sparkling in his eyes. Xander's breathing grew shallow and faster as wet and delicious sensations danced down from his finger to lower parts of his body. He couldn't help but remember how that mouth had suckled on his cock. Xander flushed. Spike hummed and Xander's sweat pants began to tent.

Teeth raked teasingly up and down Xander's finger. Xander fisted the leather seat underneath him. Spike sucked the entire finger into his mouth and nursed it. Xander fought the need growing in him. Spike took his time tasting and teasing Xander. He never took his eyes of him. He seemed to enjoy watching Xander squirm. Eventually Spike released Xander's finger.

Xander snatched his hand back and stared at Spike. He tried to will his erection away. Spike arched an eyebrow and Xander glared.

"Right then," Spike finally said reaching into a cabinet above the seat and pulling out a familiar book and pair of glasses. "How about some *Ivanhoe*?"

***

Lorne was waiting for them when they arrived back at the Slayer's End.

"Sp...Master Spike!" Lorne cried in greeting. He shot a smile at Xander as well.

"Lorne," Spike said as he headed into the casino and handed him a duffle containing Xander's belt, his glasses and the copy of *Ivanhoe*. Lorne at his side and Xander at his heels. "Everything OK?"

"Everything went fine here, Master Spike," Lorne said leaving no doubt he wanted to know how it went in Las Angeles.
"You have something for my Pet?" Spike replied as he waved and smiled at a few regulars. "He's rather drained from the journey."

"A tray is already waiting. I was alerted the moment your limo was spotted just outside city limits," Lorne said and cast a concerned eye at Xander. Xander smiled at Lorne and gave the thumb's up.

The trio spoke no more of L.A. as they walked through the casino. Instead, Lorne filled Spike in on casino happenings. Lorne discussed how much the casino had taken in over the weekend, which high rollers had been in town and what demons were newly or more deeply in debt to Spike. Throughout the debriefing Spike nodded or frowned. He acknowledged customers and every once in awhile he'd pull Xander to him. During those times, Xander quickly fell into his part of "Master's Pet" and followed Spike's lead. He'd returned passionate kisses given to him and he'd relax into indolent and intimate caresses until his body was hard and needy.

Xander hated that it left his erection obvious to all; it made him long for his belt. He hated that he wasn't sure how much of this meant anything at all to Spike. It cost him so much. Yet, he didn't fight it any more. He now understood the stakes and his part in Spike's complex dance.

Eventually they made their way to the private elevator. Once the doors slid shut Xander scuttled to the corner of the elevator and crossed his fingers to form a cross. He held them up toward Spike. 

*Back Master McGrabby!* Xander thought.

"Problems, pet," Spike chuckled. Xander glared and Lorne cleared his throat after a minute of awkward silence.

"Spike, are you and Xander all right?" Lorne asked. "Did Angelus...I mean were there any probl..."

"Angelus was the sadistic arse we've all come to know and love," Spike replied. "Yes there were problems but Xander and I handled them."

*Love? Try loathe,* Xander thought.

"That doesn't really answer my question," Lorne said as the elevator doors slid open. The trio exited and Spike keyed the suite doors.

"Wot? Ya want details of Angelus's fun'n games, Lorne? When did ya become the sadist voyeur?" Spike said as they entered the suite. He pointed to the cushion by his chair and Xander went over and sat down.

"You know that's not what I meant, lemon drop!" Lorne exclaimed as he went to the mini-bar to fix a round of drinks.

"Angelus wanted me to share Xander and I didn't. Gave him proof of Xander's status of my pet," Spike explained as he dropped into his chair. "And he decided he'd play with me instead."

*Proof! Play! Spike it wasn't an initiation into some damn secret jock club! He rap...tortured you. Manipulated us to fucking in front of him which left you behaving like a dick and me...Xander didn't finish his thoughts, well we'll skip that and move on to not mentioning the whole mental mind-fuck Angelus did! He clenched his hands in his lap.*
"So why is Xander so 'raw'?" Lorne asked.

"Pet?" Spike said in a voice suddenly filled with concern.

Xander glared at Lorne. *Mind your own emotions!* He thought.

"Look at me, Xander," Spike said. Xander looked at Spike. Spike studied him.

"While I was...out," Spike asked softly, "did Angelus come and see you?"

Xander first instinct was to lie but he's second instinct was not to risk it. He nodded. Spike barely kept his demon from showing.

*BASTARD!* Spike raged silently. *I PLAYED YOUR GAMES AND YOU STILL WENT FOR MY PET!*

"Did...did he hurt you?"

*Yes, but not in the ways you think,* Xander thought and nodded.

Spike was suddenly down on his knees in front of Xander. His hands were gently touching Xander's cheeks.

"Where...how pet? Where did he touch you?" Spike asked trying to keep the fury from his voice.

Xander shook his head. Then he pointed to his temple. *All mental games,* Xander thought. *All mental games.*

Spike studied Xander again. He relaxed as he seemed to suddenly understand the hurt wasn't physical. It didn't soothe the demon any. *He's MINE!* Spike thought as he touched the tip of Xander's nose.

"I'm sorry, pet. Shoulda known he wouldn't leave ya alone," Spike said softly.

Xander shrugged. *It's not like you were in a position to stop him,* Xander thought.

"Anything I can do?" Spike asked.

Xander nodded. *Move on and forget about it,* he thought and then made the eating motion with his hand. *I'm STARVING here and I just want to get back to normal...as normal as being a vampire's Pet goes.*

Spike stared at Xander a few moments more before reluctantly smiling and climbing back in his chair. He uncovered the tray and the unmistakable smell of pepperoni pizza drifted in the air. Xander sat up and looked at Spike with pleading eyes. Spike laughed and gave the tray to Xander.

"Eat slowly!" Spike commanded. "Don't want you getting sick."

Xander nodded as he stuffed half a slice in his mouth. Spike shook his head and looked at Lorne.

"Yer spoilin' him," Spike said. Lorne came over and handed Spike a drink.
"And you really mind," Lorne observed with a grin.

***

Three quarters of a pizza later, Xander was stretched out on the cushion by Spike's chair. He was rubbing his stomach and trying to burp quietly.

"Oi!" Spike said after the fourth belch. "Isn't that beast of yours ever quiet?"

Xander rolled onto his stomach and shrugged. He closed his eyes in a contented haze of being full and feeling safe. Spike reached down and ruffled his hair. *Not a dog,* he thought and went to flip him off again but stopped. Instead he stuck out his tongue.

"Cheeky git!" Spike exclaimed and lightly slapped Xander on the ass. Xander ignored him. Spike smiled. His boy was beginning to relax with him. He was pushing the boundaries of being a Pet, but he wasn't fighting Spike.

*And he ain't doin' the bleedin' statue routine either,* Spike thought. He almost wished he didn't have to leave, but he had things to discuss with Lorne he didn't want Xander to hear right now.

"Lorne, did you ever find someone for that position we discussed?" Spike asked.

"I did," Lorne answered.

"Have 'em come up. Wanna meet 'em and if I like 'em want them to stay with Xander for a spell."

*What?* Xander thought and sat up. He snapped his fingers.

Lorne turned and picked up the phone and moved over to the kitchenette area. Spike looked at Xander.

Xander snapped his fingers again. *Yo, Master Mysterious what are you talking about? Where are you going? Who are you planning on leaving me with?*

"Pet," Spike said. "Not that a Master has to explain himself...but there are times Lorne and I need to do business without you. Don't want to leave you on your own..."

*Then leave me with Tara!* Xander thought and frowned at Spike.

"...so I've asked Lorne to find someone I can trust to keep you company."

Xander shook his head and wrapped his hand around Spike's ankle.

*Just cuz you trust them blood breath doesn't mean I do. I've only just learned what to expect from you. Don't foist me off on to some other being bad scary demon. I can't take much more of this,* Xander thought.

Spike bent down and put his hand over Xander's hand.

"It's not up for debate, Xander," Spike said firmly.

*Fine!* Xander thought as he flopped back down on his stomach. *The next time you need blood from me...you're getting tomato juice!*
Shortly after Lorne returned Spike ordered Xander into the bedroom. Xander went but he maintained his frown. Spike ignored it and ordered Xander to strip.

"Do your necessities," Spike ordered and pointed at the bathroom. Xander rolled his eyes and obeyed. When he returned Spike ordered him back into his belt. Xander sighed.

**Great, get to meet my babysitter wearing only my metal Pampers, Xander thought.**

Once Spike secured the belt he looked at Xander. *Pet's still frownin, Spike thought. Know what he wants but if I just give it to him...bad precedent. Dangerous habit.*

"Listen, pet," Spike said. "I know you aren't happy with being left behind and I know you don't want to meet your new personal guard and companion wearing only your belt. I don't have to take what you want or like into account, yeah?"

**Yeah, oh Master Maleficence, Xander thought and stuck his chin out.**

"Attitude, Xan," Spike warned. Xander sighed and nodded.

"However, you were good in L.A.. I'm proud of you, so I'll give you a chance for a little reward...a little leeway."

I give up my ass, and blood, and you're going to give me a *chance* for a little reward? Xander thought as he stared at Spike with wide eyes.

"Give us a kiss," Spike continued. "A real kiss and I'll let you wear your sweat pants."

Xander's jaw dropped open. *Spike wants a kiss...me to kiss him! Xander thought. Part of him shrugged at the thought, another part of him was indignant but there was also a part Xander tried desperately to shut out that was a little excited by the idea. Spike had proven to be a good kisser so kissing him wasn't exactly a hardship, especially if it meant he got to wear pants around some new bad-ass scary demon coming to stay with him.*

But Xander was still hurt and angry. Yes, Xander knew Spike had to be the "Master Vampire" in front of Angelus but it still didn't deaden the feeling of humiliation Xander felt at being used. He'd consented to something he'd never consented to before and Spike had just dumped him when it was done.

**Still, he wants me to kiss him, Xander thought. Wants me to take the lead...to initiate and that's more than I've been given before. Plus I get pants if I do.**

"Pet?" Spike asked and arched an eyebrow.

**Pants! Xander thought and nodded. Spike smiled and waited. Xander stepped nervously close to Spike. He looked into the vampire's blue eyes. Something in him eased a little when he didn't see any signs of plots, plans or triumph. Spike's eyes only twinkled with patient and indulgent waiting.**

Xander swallowed and ran his hands up Spike's shoulders and gingerly behind his neck. He stepped in close pressing his body against Spike's. He pulled the vampire's head to his and then covered his...
lips in a gentle caress. Gently and tentatively Xander brushed his lips back and forth over Spike's and when the vampire opened his mouth Xander covered it firmly with his own.

As Xander cautiously explored Spike's mouth, the vampire wrapped his arms around Xander pulling them closer together. Xander could feel the hard length beginning to fill Spike's pants press against his thigh. For some reason this made him hungry for Spike. Xander deepened the kiss. He thrust his tongue against Spike's in an invitation to dance. The vampire growled an acceptance.

The kiss deepened and Xander began to lose himself in it. Once more the musky whiskey and smoke taste of Spike filled him. Fire stirred inside of him and he found the belt get increasingly uncomfortable. He sucked greedily on Spike's lower lip and pressed his body closer. Spike slid his hands over Xander's bare back soaking up the heat and reveling in the hard muscles hidden under all the smooth skin. Xander dueled with Spike's tongue again and Spike ran his nails gently down Xander's back.

Xander arched his body into Spike and sucked hungrily on the vampire's tongue. Spike moaned. He moved his hands down Xander's back to cup his ass and growled. Hard metal covered and blocked access to his pet's yummy flesh.

A hard knock on the bedroom caused Xander to jump and Spike to snarl. Quickly Xander pulled away from Spike and stared wide eyed at the vampire while he struggled to catch his breath. Spike eyes were yellow and his desire for Xander fully evident behind his leather pants.

"Spike...Xander," Lorne voice called behind the door. "Company's on the way up."

"Get your pants on," Spike managed to bark out before spinning quickly around and storming out of the bedroom.

_Huh!_ Xander thought as he pulled on his sweatpants. _OK...maybe I'm ready for the rainbow pin._

***

Xander walked out into the front room to find Spike behind the mini-bar drinking a tall glass of whiskey. His face looked dark but his eyes were hungry when they locked onto Xander. Xander swallowed and moved quickly to kneel on his cushion.

There was a knock on the suite door and Lorne moved quickly to answer it. Xander looked anxiously at the door. Spike continued to stare at Xander.

"Uhm, yeah. Lorne, this is the right place right? Never been above the second floor. Little nervous here," a voice said.

"You're in the right place," Lorne reassured and ushered the stranger into the suite.

The stranger saw Xander and immediately waved a hand with long black pointed nails. They weren't the only thing pointed, so were the tips of his droopy ears. Xander tilted his head as he took in the sight of this strange demon. His nails and the tips of his ears were the only thing sharp and pointed, the rest of him seemed to be all droopy skin.


"M..Master Spike," he spit out and then bowed awkwardly. "It's an honor to m..meet you."
"Sp..Master Spike may I present, Clem," Lorne said with a smile.

"Clem?" Spike repeated the name as a question.

"Really sir, it's such an honor!" Clem said as he pulled a bag strap down his shoulder. "I've come fully prepared!"

"Prepared?" Spike asked.

"For tak..spending time with your Pet," Clem said as he began to dig into the bag. "I brought snacks!"

Clem began to pull out bags of chips, cheesy curls, nuts and pretzels.

"I brought drinks," Clem said as he pulled out cans of cola, root beer and Mountain Dew.

"Even games!" Clem said as he pulled out a deck of cards, a Chinese checkerboard and the unmistakable brightly colored box of Candyland. "None of which require reading. Wouldn't want to risk gettin' anyone in trouble."

Candyland? Xander couldn't help but smile and then he laughed when a small gray tiger-striped kitten crawled out of the bag and sneezed.

"A kitten?" Spike asked.

Clem blushed and grabbed the kitten. He try to stuff it back in the bag and it sneezed all over him.

"Clem...I remember you now!" Spike said. "You run that little unsanctioned poker game down on Capella Avenue."

"Mew" said the kitten as it squirmed in Clem's grasp.

"That was a small indiscretion, Master Spike. I assure you those days are over," Clem said as he tried to grab the kitten who'd worked itself free again.

"And so this kitten is what?" Spike asked.

"Well he's got a sinus infection, obviously I can't ante him up!" Clem remarked and then covered his mouth and looked terrified at Spike. Meanwhile Xander lured the kitten over to him. He picked it up and scratched it behind the ears. A loud purr erupted.

"Right," Spike chuckled and then put on his stern mask. "Here's the deal, Clem. Ya got the job. Just make sure ya take care of the kitten and bring him back on occasion."

Clem nodded his head.

"You have any problems you contact me or Lorne right away," Spike ordered.

Clem nodded again. Xander continued holding the kitten. He grinned at Spike and Clem.

"No on touches Xander but me unless they have my express permission, got that?"
"Got it!" Clem said and practically saluted Spike.

"And Clem," Spike said as he moved out from behind the bar. "Shut down the poker game. Yer workin’ fer me full time, yeah?"

"Yes sir!" Clem said with a smile. He then clapped his hands and looked at Xander. "Checkers or Candyland first?"

***

Spike and Lorne retreated to the office downstairs. Spike pulled the vial Angelus gave him out of his pocket and sat it down on the desk.

"What's that?" Lorne asked.

"According to Peaches it's something to bring back Xander's voice," Spike replied.

Lorne leaned forward and picked up the vial. He studied it for a moment then looked at Spike.

"You believe him?"

Spike shrugged and said, "I don't know what to believe."

"Why would he give you something to restore Xander's voice?"

"Arrogance. I put on a show...he put me through the wringer...Xander survived. Maybe he wants word I put Xander through the same. Wouldn't be as much fun cuz as he says 'can't hear 'im scream.'"

Lorne swallowed and put the vial back down on the desk.

"Then there's the fact that Xander is Willow's best friend. Can't torture him for him info if he can't talk."

"You won't do that anyway. He's been in a vault for the last six months. What can he tell you?" Lorne said.

"Think that makes a difference to Angelus?"

Lorne shook his head. "You're not really believing..."

"No. I know just as well it could be a poison...or worse, " Spike replied.

"So what are you going to do?"

Spike put his hands together and thought for a moment. Then he looked at Lorne.

"Angelus gave me two tasks," Spike said.

Lorne cocked his head.
"One, to remind you pointedly about Doyle and destructive relationships."

Lorne hissed and his eyes flashed red with something wild and desolate.

"The second was to let Zorn know how displeased he was about the damage to the manuscript."

Lorne nodded.

"I want you to invite Vr'xkl to a high stakes game with me two nights from now. Be sure to extend the invite to Zorn..."

"Lemon drop!" Lorne interrupted.

"This will be a winner takes all pot," Spike said.

"What are you playing at?" Lorne asked worriedly.

"For that kind of game it'll be standard to do a some major mojo to prevent using magic to cheat," Spike explained.

"Yes, but I still..."

"While the casino witches do the prevention spells we have Tara do an identify spell of some sort on the vial. Find out its nature. If it's harmful then it doesn't go anywhere near my pet. If it's what Angelus said...I'm going to give Xander his voice back."

"One," Lorne said quickly, "we don't even know if Tara can do that kind of spell. Two, you are risking a lot that her magic use might be detected even with all the other 'magical clutter' going on and three, you know the only pot Vr'xkl is going to want to play for...are you really willing to risk losing Xander?"

"Xander will never be part of the pot," Spike growled.

"How are you going to get Vr'xkl to play then?"

"Let me worry about that...meantime you lock the vial away in the safe and find out if Tara can help."

"Spike..."

"Lorne...I have to know...and I have to settle accounts which really have very little to do with Angelus. That's just a side bonus. I'll also be another step closer ta getting Xander to accept my Claim."

"Not if you lose him," Lorne observed.

"Not gonna happen," Spike vowed.

***

When Spike returned to his suite he heard a loud yell.
"NOT AGAIN! This is HELL!"

Spike quickly keyed his security code and stormed into his suite in full game face only to see Xander laughing and Clem with his arms crossed over his chest in a full pout. The kitten was fast asleep in Xander's lap.

"Pet?" Spike barked!

Xander's attention whipped to Spike and his mouth snapped shut when he saw Spike's ridged forehead and fangs. He pointed to the colorful game board spread out between himself and Clem.

"Clem?" Spike asked.

"Master Spike this game is cursed!" Clem said. "I have been lost in the Lollipop Woods for three turns now! All I need is blue block! Just a blue! And what do I get? Yellow! Purple! Red! But no blue! Cursed I tell you."

Spike shook his head and relaxed back into his human face.

"I'll see about having it checked for hexes," Spike said with a straight face. Xander giggled silently. "In the meantime why don't you call it a night. Dawn's fast approaching and I'm ready to turn in, yeah?"

"Right!" Clem said as he began picking up the board pieces. Xander helped him. After they packed the game away, Spike observed there weren't many bags of snacks to repack or sodas.

"Hungry then, pet?" Spike asked. Xander rolled his eyes, shook his head and rubbed his tummy. Serves ya right, Spike thought. Gonna have to have Lorne instruct Clem on what ta feed Xander.

When Clem had his bag all packed Xander handed over the sleeping kitten to Clem. It sneezed again.

"Oi! Take that to the Pocklas and have 'em fix it! Don't want it bringing plague and pestilence to my Pet!"

"Of course, Master Spike!" Clem said as he backed out of the suite. When the door closed and locked behind him Spike sighed. He looked at Xander sprawled on his cushion in the center of empty soda cans and snack bags.

"Oi! Minions have a mess ta clean up in the mornin'," Spike said. Xander nodded unrepentantly. He'd had a surprisingly good time with Clem. He'd almost felt carefree for awhile. Xander's good mood didn't go unnoticed by Spike and it did something to him.

"C'mon, let's take it to the other room," Spike said as he held a hand out to Xander to help him up. Xander looked at Spike a moment and then took his hand. He led them to the bedroom.

Xander moved by the bed and began to strip.

"No," Spike said softly and moved away from Xander.

Spike picked up a remote and music started to swirl in the air. A horn began to play.

"First there's that little matter of punishment," Spike said as he moved back to Xander and wrapped his arms around his waist.

_Punishment? OH!_ Xander thought and then rolled his eyes. _OK? What now, Master Stickler?

"Dance with me, Xan," Spike said as he began to sway to the light jazzy tune.

_Dance?_ Xander gulped. A scratchy voice began to sing in time to the horn and piano.

"Put your arms around my shoulders and just follow my lead," Spike whispered by Xander's ear. Xander swallowed again and obeyed.

The voice continued to sing,

"I tried so hard my dear to show that you're my every dream.
Yet you're afraid each thing I do is just some evil scheme
A memory from your lonesome past keeps us so far apart
Why can't I free your doubtful mind and melt your cold cold heart"

Xander's body swayed in time with Spike's. His breath caught in his throat each time Spike's silk shirt moved sinuously across his bare chest.

"Ya feel good in my arms, pet," Spike said. "Do you know how much I like to hold you?"

_Is that why you pushed me away...after?_ Xander thought bitterly.

Spike spun them in a slow circle and leaned into to kiss Xander's neck. Shivers raced down Xander's skin.

The singer continued,

"You'll never know how much it hurts to see you sit and cry
You know you need and want my love yet you're afraid to try
Why do you run and hide from lies, to try it just ain't smart
Why can't I free your doubtful mind and melt your cold cold heart"

"I wanted our first time to be different," Spike whispered.

_Who said I wanted a time at all?_ Xander thought as he jerked up and looked at Spike. The vampire gave him one of those open dazzling smiles that left him wondering if Spike were really a fallen angel and not a vampire.

"I promise ta make it up to you," Spike vowed.

_How?_ Xander thought.

"Don't know how yet, but I promise, Xander. Just know I never wanted ta push ya away. Wanted ta hold ya close. Just like I am now...wanted ta feel your breath on me, your warm skin under my hands and most of all hear your heart beating loud and strong."
Something inside of Xander that had been still open and raw since Spike had ordered him off his lap after their coupling finally began to feel a little less wounded. A tightness in Xander's chest loosened and he laid his head on Spike's shoulder. Spike held him tighter and they danced through to the next song.

They swayed gently to a woman singing,

"See the pyramids along the Nile
Watch the sunrise on a tropic isle
Just remember darlin' all the while
You belong to me"

Author's note:

First song is Louis Armstrong's cover of Cold Cold Heart.
Second Patsy Cline's You Belong to Me
Chapter 33

Xander woke up with memories of dancing in his mind. He and Spike had danced silently through several songs the night before. Every now and then Spike would brush his lips against Xander's ear or neck. The pair had finally parted when light began to seep through the windows.

Without words Spike had undressed Xander and himself. He’d turned off the music and then lead his pet to bed. He’d wrapped himself around Xander.

"Punishment's over," Spike had finally whispered. Xander had taken the vampire's hands and kissed them softly before falling asleep wrapped in Spike's arms.

"Penny for yer thoughts," Spike said bringing Xander back to the present.

Xander rolled over and to see the expanse of Spike's naked chest. Xander followed the trail of pale but well defined muscles up to see Spike looking at him. Xander pointed at his head and then Spike.

"Thinking of me, eh?" Spike preened.

Xander rolled his eyes and rolled back over.

"Oi!" Spike said and poked Xander. "Roll back over here."

Xander obeyed and stared at Spike.

"Good or bad thoughts?" Spike asked.

*Good, I guess,* Xander thought and blushed remembering how it felt to dance with Spike. He gave a thumb's up.

Spike smiled and pulled Xander up so he was in his arms chest to back. Xander let him.

"I like that," Spike preened again.

*You would,* Xander thought.

Spike kissed the back of Xander's neck. His pet blushed and squirmed. Spike sighed.

"No morning nookie?" Spike asked.

*Is that all you think about?* Xander thought and twisted around to look at Spike. He shook his head.

Spike studied Xander for a moment. He was once again struck by that sense of innocence about him.

"Pet," Spike began, "how many lovers have you had?"

*WHAT?* Xander mouthed and frowned at Spike.

"How many?" Spike insisted.
None of your business, Master Nosey! Xander thought and twisted back around.

"Xander," Spike warned.

Fine! Xander internally groused and raised a single finger.

"Male or female?"

Xander twisted around again to glare at Spike.

"Makin' no assumptions, pet," Spike said.

Xander pantomimed running his hands down an hour glass shape.

"Fancy the birds, eh?"

Xander nodded vigorously.

"Nothing wrong with that. Was very happy with Dru."

Then what's with...why this? Xander thought and pointed at Spike and himself.

"I like you too," Spike purred.

I got that part, Xander thought, your hand on my cock was my first clue.

"Nothing wrong with blokes," Spike said. "Liking both means more choices on the buffet, yeah?"

Xander rolled his eyes.

"Seriously, pet, sometimes soft and curvy is nice. Sometimes someone lean, hard and who knows exactly how the dangly bits work is nice...and there's nothing wrong with that."

I'm not saying there is...not saying anything at all, Xander thought. It's just...I'm just...well...we're just...

Xander sighed and twisted back around so his back was once again pressed to Spike's chest. This whole conversation was confusing him and maybe even scaring him a little. There were things he didn't want to think about. There were things he might have to face or admit if he dug too deep.

"How long were you together?" Spike asked slightly changing the subject. "You and your bird?"

Xander sighed again and held up one finger.

"A year?" Spike asked.

Xander shook his head.

"A month?"

Xander shook his head again.
If Spike could have gone paler he would have. No pet! He thought, Fate can't be that much of a cowbag! 

"Once pet?" Spike asked softly.

Xander flushed and nodded.

*Oh Xander!* Spike thought and hugged him. *You were...are an innocent!*

Spike closed his eyes. He remembered his first few months with Dru, Angelus and the bitch Darla. William had been an innocent thrown into a demonic world of perversion. While the demon in him had reveled in it, the memories and the bits of William that remained had been horrified, scared and at the best of moments confused. It had been hard to resolve the differences between what his body wanted and what his head said was right.

How much more difficult must this all have been for Xander? How much more confusing?

"Did you love her?" Spike pressed on needing now more than ever to understand Xander's past.

*I love Faith...but I wasn't in love with her,* Xander thought. He rocked his hand back and forth.

"Friends?"

Xander nodded.

"Heat of the moment?"

*Something like that,* Xander thought as he remembered how Faith had practically jumped him. She'd killed Dru that night. She'd had a large cut on her arm but was full of energy. Xander had come to her room with bandages. She'd pushed him against the wall and ground her lips against his. She was warm, soft and he wasn't. He'd gone instantly hot and hard.

It was over almost as soon as it had begun. Later she'd apologized and made it clear it couldn't happen again. She'd cared about him but relations with a Slayer in the middle of an Apocalypse just weren't a good idea. She'd said Xander deserved better.

Xander closed his eyes and fought back bitter tears. "Better" had been being a bottle for the Azora for six months! Better was being a "Pet" to a master vampire and being forced to have sex in front of Angelus! If given a choice, Xander would have chosen Faith the last few months.

"Pet?" Spike's voice once again brought him back to the present. Xander turned and looked at Spike.

"None of what happened to you was your fault," Spike said as he gently wiped a tear that managed to sneak past the corner of Xander's eye.

*Duh,* Xander thought and blinked away the remaining tears. Spike brushed them all way too.

"What happened in L.A. wasn't what you wanted...and believe it or not it's not what I wanted either," Spike said. Xander swallowed and studied Spike.

"I told you I want only what you can give me. I won't take it. I can't."
Xander nodded. He did remember and he did know that Spike hadn't wanted what happened in L.A. either. *Hell, he could have had it much easier if he'd given Angelus what the bastard had really wanted, Xander thought, me.*

"I'd like to think though, pet, that all the times between us...well that there have been times when it's been good with us? Yeah?"

Xander blushed remembering the shower and the blowjob. *Yeah, Master Seduction there have been some good moments,* Xander reluctantly admitted and nodded very slightly.

"That's OK too. It's OK for you to have wants and desires."

*As long as they are with you,* Xander thought and grunted.

"Wot?" Spike asked.

Xander jabbed his thumb back and forth between himself and Spike.

"Is there someone else you want beside me?" Spike asked trying to keep the demon's edge out of his voice. *No, pet, don't want anyone else,* he silently roared.

Xander shrugged. *Not like I have a choice to find out,* he thought.

"Xan, this isn't a world where hum...we get many choices."

*And mine's to relax and enjoy it?* Xander thought bitterly as he twisted around.

"Can you tell me you really hate my touch?" Spike asked once again dreading Xander's answer.

Xander blushed. He wanted to nod. He really wanted to nod but he couldn't. Yes, he hated being a slave and yes he wasn't used to being manhandled...well by a man. Yet, he did like Spike's touch when he wasn't Master Spike. He liked it when he was the Spike in the gardens or the one who danced with him. Xander shook his head.

"Then how about a little more practice touching," Spike sighed relief flooding through him. Xander didn't hate his touch! "Not for show and with no agenda other than just learning about each other?"

Once again Xander turned in Spike's arms. He studied the vampire. *Why?* He thought.

"Let's set aside time and place to practice touching...like lovers."

*We're NOT lovers!* Xander thought and turned away. He tugged at his collar. *We're Master and Pet!*

Spike lightly traced Xander's collar with his fingers and whispered in Xander's ear, "This is one of those choices we didn't get to make, Xander...but learning to be lovers is."

*Why?* Xander thought again.

"Pet, you never really had a chance to be someone's lover before...to want and to be wanted in return. It's a gift...something I'd like to give you if you'd let me."

*Again...gotta say por que?* Xander thought as he turned to study Spike. He looked for subterfuge,
plots or ploys. He only saw an honest emotion he couldn't understand.

"Think about it? Yeah?" Spike asked as he gently tapped the tip of Xander's nose.

Xander continued his silent study of Spike. What's in it for you? Well besides the obvious? Xander wondered. Why don't you just...take? Lovers?

Spike smiled and released Xander.

"How about we have breakfast with Tara?" Spike asked once again changing the subject.

Xander's face widened into a genuine smile and he nodded. Spike poked him in the ribs.

"Well get moving then ya git!" Spike ordered.

Xander laughed and climbed out of bed. He headed for the bathroom thinking about what Spike had said and then the offer to breakfast with Tara. He wondered about Spike's mercurial attitudes. Xander was beginning to think the vampire's thoughts and moods changed with the weather.
Chapter 34

The Pocklas were the first to greet Spike when they entered the strangely quiet and subdued green stables. They bowed low before Spike. Spike grunted. The Pocklas clapped their hands and a woman moved forward. She had a bundle in her arms. She moved slowly toward Spike and when she was within a few feet she fell to her knees. With trembling arms she held out the bundle to Spike. Spike accepted the bundle. He moved a blanket aside to reveal a round pink face.

"A baby!" Xander thought and gasped.

"Your new male foal...should you desire it, master," the Pocklas said. The woman bowed her head and fought to contain her evident fear.

"Spike!" Xander thought as he watched the vampire. What did accepting it mean? And what were the consequences of not accepting it?

Spike brought the child close to his face and inhaled deeply. He's face rippled as if his demon were close to the surface. He looked at the woman kneeling at his feet.

"Ya named him?" Spike asked.

"N..no, master. I was...would you?" she asked in near tears.

"Clever," Spike purred with approval. He looked at the baby again. He ran his finger down the tip of the child's nose and then looked at Xander. He smiled and then looked back at the woman. "His name is Alex. He is property of William the Bloody of the Order of Aurelius and has all the protection thereof as long...as I desire to keep him."

The woman let out a loud sigh, bent forward and kissed Spike's feet.

"Thank you, master. Thank you," she whispered.

"Oi! Enough of that! Now take the whelp back before he blows he's nappy and makes me all manky!"

The woman rose swiftly to her feet and took the baby from Spike's outstretched arms. She smiled and bowed again.

Then it was as if a spell was lifted. The stables were chaos as the children swarmed Spike. He roared, they squealed and Xander laughed. The Pocklas retreated. Xander watched in fascination as Spike the dreaded Master of Las Vegas played with children. After the horrors of L.A. there was something almost normal about the antics of Spike and the children.

"Oi! Yer a dangerous horde!" Spike growled as he threw the expected handful of candy into the air. The children giggled and scrambled for the treats. Spike winked at Xander and led the way to Tara's rooms.

Xander stepped gingerly through the mass of children and followed Spike. Once again the Mofos kept careful watch at Tara's door while Spike keyed the lock. Spike opened the door and ushered Xander inside.
"Xander!" Tara shouted in delight as soon as Xander entered the small suite.

Xander looked over his shoulder at Spike who was closing the door behind them. *Can I hug her?* He thought.

"Go ahead! Do yer silly human greeting ritual," Spike said as he waved his hand.

Tara wrapped her arms around Xander and hugged him fiercely. He returned the hug and buried his face in her hair. She was safe. He was safe and L.A. was a horrifying memory behind him.

"I was so worried about you," Tara said, "L...Lorne told me you had to go to L.A. to see A...Angelus."

Xander squeezed Tara harder. *It's OK,* he thought.

"He told me S...Spike wouldn't let anything h...ha...happen to you...but I just...XANDER I was so worried!"

*Me too,* Xander thought and continued to hold Tara.

"Uhm...breakfast is getting cold," Lorne's voice gently interrupted.

*Lorne,* Xander thought as he smiled and broke his hold on Tara. He turned and looked at the green demon. He gave a thumbs up.

"Bl...blueberry pancakes," Tara said, "by special request."

Xander gave Tara two thumbs up.

"Why don't you two make yerselves comfortable and dig in," Spike said from where he was propped up on Tara's bed.

Xander looked at Spike. *No repeat of slap, tickle and grope on the bed?* Xander thought.

Spike cocked an eyebrow and Tara tugged on Xander's arm. Xander focused back on Tara and let her lead him to a corner where there were pillows and a small and low wooden coffee table set on the floor. There were two small trays on the table. Tara uncovered them both revealing two blueberry pancake breakfasts.

"Dig in," Tara said. Xander smiled and then didn't have to be told twice.

Spike snorted.

"Some days I think he's part Chuflas demon!"

"Spike!" Lorne replied.

"Well his table manners...aren't!"

Tara laughed and Xander stuck out a blueberry coated tongue.
"Oi!"

"What are your plans today Spike?" Lorne asked.

"A bit of this...and that," Spike said as he leaned against Tara's headboard and then dug into his coat pocket. "But I did want ta talk to yer girl here about this."

Xander and Tara stopped in mid-chew and looked at Spike. He was holding a vial.

"What is th..that, master S..Spike?" Tara asked.

"Spike...when we're down here," Spike said. "It's something Angelus gave me and I'm hoping you can tell me."

Tara paled at the implication of what Spike was saying. Spike rolled his eyes.

"Not right now, ya git! Workin' on a plan so you can do yer mojo without gettin' detected."

No! Xander thought and dropped his fork with a clatter. You are not risking Tara.


"Wh..what do you have planned?"

"Best finish yer breakfast," Spike said.

I've lost my appetite! Xander thought as he stared at Spike. He crossed his arms over his chest. Tara quickly resumed eating.

"Xander!" Spike barked.

What? Xander thought and cocked his head.

"Xander," Tara said gently between bites. "Please, let's get through breakfast and find out what ma..Spike wants."

Fine, Xander thought and turned back around and quickly started shoveling his food down.

"OK...now that's just disgustin'!" Spike said.

Xander ignored Spike and focused on finishing his breakfast as quickly as possible. He didn't like that Spike had plans for Tara. Every now and then he looked at Lorne and Lorne's return gaze didn't reassure him. When Xander was done he made a big production of covering his empty plate and turning to face Spike. Once again he crossed his arms over his chest and he narrowed his eyes to glare at the vampire.

"Ya now, I can always paddle that attitude right outta ya, pet," Spike warned.

"Ma...Spike, I'm finished," Tara delicately interrupted.

Spike smiled at Tara and said, "Hmmm, think you would have made the better Pet, luv."
Tara blushed and Xander gasped. He almost moved in front of her. *Over my dead body, buddy!* He thought.

"Lemon drop, will you please stop baiting Xander!" Lorne said.

"Well if he wasn't so much fun when he was caught...," Spike purred.

Lorne groaned, Xander choked caught between a blush and glare while Tara hid a smile behind her hand.

"Right then," the vampire finally said. "Angelus gave me a couple of tasks. He also gave me this vial. I have an idea of what it's supposed to do but I'm not crackers enough to actually trust the old codger at his word, yeah? So, I want you to make with the magics and see if you can tell me what it does. Can you do that?"

"I might be able to get some sense of what it does. I might not get what it is exactly," Tara said.

"You will be able to tell me if it's poisonous or dangerous to humans, yeah?"

"I should be able to. Why? Who is it for?" Tara asked and then worriedly looked at Xander.

Xander stopped glaring at Spike and looked at Tara. *Me?* He thought and then looked back at Spike. Spike looked away. Xander stood up and stomped toward the bed. He pounded his fist on the mattress.

"OI!" Spike snarled.

Xander jabbed his thumb at his chest. *Did Angelus give you something for me?!* 

"I'm not giving it to you until I know for sure what it is," Spike said.

*You are NOT defying Angelus!* Xander thought and held out his hand palm up.

"NO!" Spike said.

Xander nodded. *Damn it, Spike!* Xander thought. *You can't fall out of favor with Angelus! You...we...did not go through everything in L.A. just to blow it now Master Jackass.*

Spike rose off the bed in a sudden fury and grabbed Xander. He pushed him against the wall and growled, "I'll have you on yer knees for a week if you don't calm down right now!"

"Spike! Xander!" Lorne yelled. "This is really not helping!"

Spike released Xander and prowled to the other side of the room. Xander went to storm after the vampire but Lorne put a hand out to stop him.

"Cupcake," Lorne said quietly.

Spike whirled around and looked at Xander. He snapped his fingers and pointed to the floor. Xander glared but dropped to his knees.
"Arms, behind yer back and don't get up without my say so, pet," Spike grunted.

Yes, master, Xander spit the words out silently in his head as he obeyed. Spike took a couple of unneeded breaths and then looked at Tara. She kept flicking her gaze thoughtfully back and forth between Spike and Xander as if she were trying to put into place the last few pieces of a jigsaw puzzle.

"S..S..Spike," Tara said softly, "what w..were the other t..tasks Angelus wanted you to complete?"

Spike was silent for a moment then said, "He had a message for Lorne. It was private and I gave it to him. That task is complete. The other is to punish Zorn for damaging Angelus's manuscript. Zorn spilled martinis on it."

Tara's eyebrows went up as Spike explained the last task and she bit back her laughter. The vampire had followed her suggestion. She just didn't know why Spike wanted to sabotage something of Angelus's.

Xander kept still at the mention of Zorn's name. Though he couldn't help but feel a strange tingle of anticipation at the thought of Zorn being "punished" for pissing off Angelus. Angelus would expect something truly spectacular and Spike would deliver nothing short. Xander had just lost enough of his humanity to not care.

"So this vial..."

"I've got a plan in action," Spike interrupted Tara as he began to pace the room. "Gonna get together a high stakes poker game. Winner take all. Big player...big stakes. Zorn and his favorite demon'll be there."

Vr'kxl! Xander thought as a chill went down his spine. Spike! What are you planning now you imbecile?

"A game like this will have some powerful circles cast...make sure no magic used fer cheatin', yeah?" Spike said as he turned to face Tara.

"And while those circles...spells are being cast..." Tara began.

"You can do yours. Find out what you can about the vial," Spike finished.

"The idea is no one w..will pay attention to my stray bit of a m..magic," Tara said as she nodded.

Spike nodded. Xander shook his head. Spike! NO! Give me the damn vial! I'll take my chances! Don't risk Tara!

"Can ya do it?" Spike asked, ignoring Xander.

"I think I can," Tara said. "I'll need s..some supplies."

"Lorne can get ya whatever ya need," Spike said.

"I have to a..ask, Spike," Tara said.

"Wot?"
"Wh...what happens if the v..vial is something dangerous? Angelus will s..still expect you to give it to X..Xander."

*See! Just give it to me! Don't put Tara at risk, Xander thought. It's not worth it. I'm not worth it.*

"Then we'll find a way ta fake the results," Spike said.

"And if it's..d..death?" Tara asked.

"I'm not letting anything happen to Xander!" Spike said with a cold voice that made clear he wouldn't argue the subject. "Other options will be made!"

*What does that mean? Xander thought as a chill went down his spine. Turn me? What?*

Spike suddenly turned around and knelt down before Xander. He ran a finger down Xander's nose and whispered.

"Promised ya, pet, I won't let anything happen to ya. If this vial is bad news I'll find another ace ta play, yeah?" Spike said. Xander stared into Spike's blue eyes. They were once again the blue of Spike and not Master Spike and something inside of Xander twisted. Spike wanted to be his lover and Spike wouldn't hurt him if he could. Xander sighed and then nodded.

"So stop pissin' me off about this," Spike said. Xander cocked his head at Tara.

*Not if you're putting her at risk, he thought.*

"I'll take care of her too," Spike promised.

Xander narrowed his eyes for a moment. *Do you want to be her lover as well,* a small voice inside of him asked before he could squash it. He quickly and guiltily looked away. Spike stared at Xander funny for a moment the leaned forward to whisper in Xander's ear.

"She's not the one I want ta take to the gardens tonight. Can't play the skin flute with her."

Xander blushed and jerked away. He bit back a grin as he shook his head. Spike laughed and leaned forward again.

"Oi! I promise I'll still respect ya in the morning! I'd even want ta do ya again!" he whispered.

*Stop! Xander thought as he couldn't help but laugh. Damnit but Spike could be arrogant and infuriating one minute and sexy and seductive the next!*

"Lemon drop?" Lorne asked discreetly breaking the moment. Spike sighed and rose to his feet. He tugged Xander to his feet as well.

"I'll d..do it," Tara said, "b..but I'd like to a small f..favor first."

"Wot?" Spike barked startling Xander.

"I'd like to t..talk to X..Xander alone," Tara said serenely.
"You want to..." Spike began to growl.

"We can step into the bathroom for just a moment," Tara said. "We’ll run the water. I just want a few moments to talk to him."

"And if I say no?"

"Then no spell," Tara said calmly.

Spike roared and vamped out. Xander grabbed his arm and Spike brushed him off.

"Lemon drop!" Lorne shouted and moved between Spike and Tara.

Tara remained calm and arched an eyebrow.

Spike paused and studied Tara.

"You'd risk his death or worse by not doin' the spell?"

"No," she said calmly, "but neither would you."

Spike stood stark still for a moment then began laughing. He bent over shortling before straightening and pointing a finger at Tara, "Yer a cagey bird, my duck."

Tara smiled.

"Best definitely be sure Angelus never lays 'is eyes on you. He'd make a fine a vampire out of you. All sweet a nice with a spine made of pure iron ya have."

"You'll let me..."

"Yer time's countin' down," Spike waved his hand at Tara. Tara moved quickly forward and grabbed Xander's hand. She practically dragged the gobsmacked Xander to the bathroom.

***

Xander stared everywhere in the small bathroom but at the tub. The walls were tiled with a marble in varying shades of green.

_They are very nice_, Xander thought.

Tara turned on the water in the sink and Xander jumped. He moved toward the door and looked at Tara. She smiled.

"Sorry, didn't mean to s..startle you," She said. "Just trying t..to give us more p..privacy. D..demon hearing."

_It's OK_, Xander thought and shrugged. He tilted his head and looked at her. _What did you want to talk about?_
"Xander do you care about S..Spike?" Tara asked.

What? Xander mouthed and stared at Tara in shock.

"Because..he..he cares about you," Tara said.

You don't know what you're talking about, Xander thought and shook his head. You've been down here on your own too long.

"He does," Tara said. "Y..yes he's arrogant, b..bossy and overbearing but I..I've never s..seen a demon protect a h..human like he does you."

Tara, Xander thought.

"Xander...," Tara began, "I've been in the custody of v..various d..demons since the F..Fall. I've...I've s..seen a lot. I know S..Spike isn't like the rest. I kn..know he's planning something...what exactly I don’t know. I do know though...that he cares about you."

Xander stared at Tara trying to process what she was saying and the implications of what she was saying. How had she survived? What had she done? Was she right about Spike?

"I th..think you care about h..him too...and you sh..should know it's OK."

What! Xander mouthed again.

Tara reached out and gently took Xander by the hand.

"There are some who think we sh..should cut ourselves off..in times like this, but I don't. If..if we don't reach out...feel...experience what makes us human even in the midst of an Apocalypse than when? When Xander?"

Xander stared at Tara for a moment. She was telling him to...Xander shook his head.

"Xander... you do what you feel comfortable doing...but...d..don't push something away j..just because you are afraid."

Afraid? I'm petrified! Xander thought. Human here! Demon there!

Tara smiled at Xander then said, "W..when I first realized I liked women..I was so scared. My f..family didn't have a high opinion...of women in the f..first place...especially witches. I knew...loving women w..would alienate m..me more. Y..yet if I let m..my fear stop me...I never would have gotten the sweetest Sweet Sixteen kiss a g..girl could have."

Tara blushed and smiled the happiest smile Xander had seen on her since they'd met.

"T..that memory has k..kept me going through all the dark t..times since," Tara said. "Find a way past your f..fear, Xander. I think S..Spike will be worth it."

Tara squeezed Xander's hand and then turned off the water.

"Think about it?" she asked.

Xander sighed and nodded. As if I don't have enough to think about, he thought.

Tara hugged him and then led him out of the bathroom where Spike was pacing.
"See, told you there was no reason to go storming in after them," Lorne said. Spike stopped pacing and turned around and his eyes locked on Xander. There was a raw and almost vulnerable look in those unreal blue eyes and Xander smiled reassurance before he could stop himself.

"C'mon," Spike said softly but gruffly, "we got business ta do before we go to the gardens."

Xander nodded. He followed Spike out of the room but gave Tara a last look before he left. She smiled at him. He sighed and smiled back.
Chapter 35

Spike’s business appeared to be mostly working the crowd at the casino. Once again Xander was paraded around demons. This time it wasn’t just a quick greeting or two.

Xander would be on his knees or at Spike’s feet while the vampire sat at a game or had a round of drinks. Every now and then Spike would tap his lap and Xander would crawl up. Then Spike would make a big show of fondling Xander’s nipples or kissing his neck. Xander would close his eyes and relax into Spike’s touch. There wasn’t much else he could do; besides be grateful for the belt he was wearing. It hid just how much Spike’s touch affected him.

“Hungry, Pet?” Spike purred into Xander’s ear while holding a seven of diamonds and a five of spades. A two of hearts was showing on the table in front of Spike.

Xander thought about it. He’d lost track of time since breakfast.

Spike tossed his cards down on the table. “Fold,” he said, then looked at Xander, “Pet?”

Xander nodded. Yeah, he thought, I’m hungry.

Spike snapped his fingers and a young female slave scurried off to the kitchens. The dealer dealt the fourth street and the other demons at the table began to place their bets.

“Rumor has it you’re staging a rematch with Vr’xkl,” an iridescent beetle-looking demon chittered.

“Not a rumor,” Spike replied while easing Xander’s shirt off his shoulder. Xander forced himself to relax. He could feel the demons’ hungry interest ripple around the table.

“Sssame sstakes?” a snake head on a medusa-like woman asked.

“Flesh,” Spike said as he ran his hands down Xander’s shoulders and across his torso then back up again to dance fingers along his neck. Xander struggled to keep his breath even.

Flesh? Xander thought. Not liking the sounds of this Master McGrabby!

“How much?” grunted a Chaos demon as he folded.

Spike leaned back and then ran his eyes down Xander’s shoulders and across his torso then back up again to dance fingers along his neck. Xander struggled to keep his breath even.

Flesh? Xander thought. Not liking the sounds of this Master McGrabby!

“How much?” grunted a Chaos demon as he folded.

Spike leaned back and then ran his eyes down Xander’s shoulders and across his torso then back up again to dance fingers along his neck. Xander struggled to keep his breath even.

“About twelve stone,” Spike said.

Laughter fluttered around the table. Xander breathed in through his nose and out through his mouth.

Dammit Spike! He thought. Moving from the not-liking to the upscale hating-this-plan neighborhood!

“Master Spike,” the female slave whispered as she sat a tray down beside the vampire. The tray was laden with fruit, cheese and bread.
Spike waved his hand and the young woman scurried away. Spiked picked up a slice of apple and then slid it teasingly across Xander’s lips. Xander went to bite the tart fruit and Spike snatched it away. The demons laughed.

“You win,” the bug demon conceded to the medusa demon. She hissed with pleasure and scooped the pot towards her. “You in for the next hand, Master Spike?”

“Yeah,” Spike said as he again teased Xander with the apple slice. Xander glared at Spike. Spike and the rest of the demons laughed again.

“Go ahead, Pet,” Spike said pushing the slice between Xander’s lips suggestively.

*Next time you need blood… see how you like getting it drip by excruciatingly slow drip,* Xander thought as he once again bit at the apple. This time Spike didn’t jerk it away.

“It’s a wonder you’d gamble with sssuch a ssspirited and amusssing Pet,” the medusa demon hissed.

Spike shrugged and picked up his cards, stared at them a moment then said, “Fold. Vr’xkl has some interesting and rare items. Pets on the other hand are easy come…”

Xander nearly choked on as Spike suddenly pinched and twisted both of Xander’s nipples on the word ‘come’.

“And easy go,” Spike said before biting hard on Xander’s neck with human teeth. The bite was painful and would bruise.

Again laughter made its way around the table. Xander fought to keep his fists from clenching.

“Vr’xkl’s items are more… durable,” Spike said as he ran nails down Xander’s chest leaving faint scratch marks. Goose pimples dotted Xander’s skin and his body didn’t know whether to register pain or pleasure.

“Perhaps you’ll honor us with a demonstration of this Pet’s… durability,” the Chaos demon suggested.

Xander and Spike stiffened. There was a brief pause then Spike laughed.

“Perhaps, but not tonight. Tonight I have other plans for my Pet… private plans.”

The beetle demon chittered and the medusa snakes hissed in delight. Spike ran his tongue up Xander’s neck and fed him a wedge of cheese on a slice of bread.

Xander chewed and swallowed without tasting. The apple slice was already a lead weight in his stomach and he didn’t think the cheese and bread would sit better.

The other demons played out the hand while Spike continued to alternatively feed and fondle his human. Xander focused on being a good Pet and not choking.

***

Eventually the game ended. Spike broke even and wished the other demons a good evening. Then he led Xander to the private elevator. Once inside Xander stepped as far from Spike as he could and
glared.

“Wot?” Spike asked as the elevator began to rise.

Xander ran his hands over his chest in a bad pantomime of overt fondling. Then made jabbing motions at his mouth.

“Was a good show wasn’t it?” Spike smiled. Xander narrowed his eyes and shook his head.

“Pet, those three are the biggest gossips in Las Vegas. They’ll have the news about the game all over town within the hour. Vr’xkl’s gonna show up thinkin’ he knows where my head is at.”

Xander pointed at Spike’s ass and made an ‘up’ gesture.

“Oi!” Spike growled. “Someone’s just bought themselves a punishment!”

Really? I thought I’d enough for one evening! Xander thought as he crossed his arms over his chest even as a chill raced down his spine. He realized he might have just pressed Spike too far.

The elevator stopped and the doors slid open. Spike grabbed Xander’s leash and led him out. He keyed open the suite doors and marched Xander through the suite into the bedroom. A pair of jeans and a t-shirt were laid out on the bed. Xander’s socks and shoes were by the bed.

Xander looked at Spike.

“Ya didn’t think I forgot my promise to take ya ta the gardens, did ya?” Spike asked.

Xander sighed. To tell… to think… the truth…yeah, he thought. It did slip my mind. Xander nodded and then pointed to his head.

“You forgot?”

Xander nodded.

Spike shook his head.

What? Xander thought.

As Spike sat down on the bed he said, “Go get a shower and get cleaned up while I think up something ta do to ya.”

Xander rolled his eyes and pointed to his crotch. And what about the belt? He thought.

“Right,” Spike said as he stood up and helped Xander get undressed. Once Xander was naked he took off for the bathroom and Spike sat back on the bed.

***

As usual, Xander’s shower was quick. It wasn’t more than fifteen minutes and he was once again standing in the bedroom naked in front of Spike. Spike was stretched out on the bed on his side staring at Xander. He took an unneeded breath when Xander walked into the room.
Xander blushed. He pointed at his clothes and looked at Spike.

“Just a sec, pet,” Spike said softly as he ran his eyes over Xander’s lean form. He wanted a moment to enjoy Xander before things got difficult again. Xander flushed again and grew warm under Spike’s gaze.

_Cut it out Master Lech!_ Xander thought.

Spike sighed and sat up on the bed. “I’ve decided on your punishment.”

Xander arched an eyebrow.

“C’mere,” Spike ordered. _Pet’s not going to like this, _he thought. _Still, his flippant attitude in the elevator… went too far. It’s too dangerous._

_Oh boy, _Xander thought but did as he was told. He moved to the bed and stood in front of Spike.

“Lie across my lap,” Spike ordered.

_NO! _Xander thought and paled.

“Pet!” Spike commanded.

_Fuck! I hate you! _Xander thought as he found himself moving stiffly to lie across Spike’s lap.

_What could be better than a lapful of a naked Xander? _Spike silently mused as he moved and arranged his pet until Xander’s arse was just where he wanted it. He just wished the spanking was for fun and not for a lesson. Xander buried his face in the mattress.

“I’ll give ya ten swats, pet,” Spike said as he gently rubbed Xander’s ass. “I’ll start out light but the last two will sting. We can’t afford a slip up Xander. You have to remember where the lines are, yeah?”

_Like you’ll let me forget? _Xander thought and nodded stiffly.

“These’ll remind you,” Spike said and then delivered the first slap.

_Yeaow! Fuck! _Xander thought and slapped the mattress. _That’s light? _

Spike gave Xander two more quick slaps across his arse then rubbed the sting for a few moments. Xander panted and fist the mattress.

“Shhh, pet,” Spike said. “These are love taps.”

_Between King Kong and Godzilla? _Xander wondered and then grunted when Spike delivered two more.

_Spike! _Xander thought. _Stop! Dammit! _

“Halfway there, Xan,” Spike said as he blew gently on Xander’s red skin. He fought the desire to turn the spanking from punishment to fun. It would be so easy.
Oh don’t do that! Xander thought and buried his face again. The cool air on his hot skin had an unwelcome affect on his cock and he didn’t need to deal with that right now.

“Here comes number six,” Spike said as he slapped Xander’s ass. The firm cheeks bounced. They were hot and beckoned to Spike. He ignored his interest just as he ignored Xander’s response. He delivered slaps seven and eight.

Xander turned his head and panted. Spike brushed the red flesh with the palm of his hands and gave Xander a few minutes to catch his breath.

“Just these last two and then punishment’s over. We’ll go to the gardens and you can torture me with a movie.”

Xander nodded. At this rate you’re looking at Highlander II: The Quickening! Xander thought.

“Nine! Ten!” Spike said as he struck Xander twice in quick succession. As Spike had promised, the last two were the most painful slaps. Xander gasped for breath and blinked back tears.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said as he ran his hands gently down Xander’s back. “All done now. All done. No more. Punishment’s over.”

Xander nodded but lay still for a few more minutes catching his breath. Spike let him. He continued to stroke Xander’s back and whisper words of comfort. Eventually Xander got to his feet. He took Spike’s hands and shakily brought them to his lips. He kissed them.

“How about the sweat pants instead of the jeans tonight, eh pet?” Spike said softly.

Yeah, that would be nice, Xander thought as he nodded. Spike smiled and then helped Xander dress. It was slow, but Spike didn’t seem to mind.

***

Lorne had arranged for the limo to take them to the Bellagio again. Xander was very grateful. He was feeling very shaky after the spanking and the fountain was the last thing he wanted to see. The gardens seemed to be even more beautiful then Xander remembered and he paused as he entered.

He still couldn’t believe something so beautiful and so full of life still existed in the world.

“Would ya like a few moments on yer own again?” Spike asked.

Xander turned and looked at Spike. He was just ‘Spike’ at the moment. Xander smiled slightly and nodded.

“You know where ta find me then,” Spike said and he headed off to the gazebo. Xander watched the vampire walk away. Xander shook his head.

How does he do it? Xander thought. How does he switch so easily… so quickly between the roles?

Xander began to stroll through the gardens. He thought about the last few days. He tried to gloss over the horrors of L.A. but it wasn’t easy. Angelus had been brutal in the things that he’d said and done.
Angelus was not only evil but cruel. Cruelty was his art and he wanted to shape the world with it. Xander shook his head. He looked over at the gazebo. Spike was so different then Angelus. Of that, Xander could no longer doubt. He rubbed his ass. It still hurt, but the pain was fading.

*Yes, he can be a bastard, Xander thought, but... damn I don't know what to think any more.*

Xander sighed and made his way to what he thought of as ‘his’ bench. He sat down gingerly and looked out over the fragrant blooms. He thought about what had happened up in the casino and also what Tara had said.

*How can Spike care about me, he thought, and yet still use me? Parade me? Then spank me when I get upset about it? If he cares about me...doesn’t it bother him?*

Something inside of Xander already knew the answer. He knew it bothered Spike, but Spike didn’t have the luxury of letting it show or letting it stop him. Xander wasn’t sure how he knew…or at least that’s what he told himself.

*He doesn’t let other demons touch me, he doesn’t parade me around naked and the belt keeps my... reaction to his fondling from showing,* Xander thought.

Xander thought about Lindsey and how Angelus had punished that man. He shuddered. Xander couldn’t survive that and he knew it.

*That is something though, Xander thought. Spike, his punishments...even at their worst they’re nothing I can’t handle...nothing that will break me. I don’t like them...and I don’t want them.*

*Yet, if he didn’t punish me...then I would forget where the lines are or other demons might challenge Spike,* Xander thought and leaned back and looked up at the skylights.

*I’m not saying I deserve it, Xander thought. It’s just in this fucked up world it’s how it works.*

Xander looked back at the gazebo. The real question he hadn’t asked though was did he care about Spike. Memories of the battered and bleeding Spike flooded his mind. He closed his eyes and his breath caught. He’d suffered so much for Xander.

Then Xander thought about the way Spike had held him while they danced. He’d never had a prom. He’d never got to slow dance with anyone and Spike had held him so gently. Xander sighed. Spike did hold him and treat him gently when he could. He’d not only freed Xander from being just a bottle, he’d woken up something inside of him. Was Tara right? Was it OK to reach out...to feel? *Spike,* he thought as something inside of him settled. Xander opened his eyes and stood up. He walked to the gazebo. Spike was rummaging through the baskets when he got there.

*“Fried chicken, potato salad, tossed salad, chocolate pudding, and cookies,” Spike grinned at Xander. Xander smiled back.*

He moved silently into the gazebo and sunk gracefully to his knees in front of Spike. He stared at the vampire.

*“Pet?” Spike asked.*

*I care,* Xander thought as he looked at Spike. *I’m just scared...and not as good at switching between*
“Xan?”

Xander reached out and touched Spike’s face before leaning in and brushing his lips softly over Spike’s. They parted in surprise and Xander pressed the advantage. He closed his eyes and focused on just mapping Spike’s mouth.

Spike wrapped his arms tentatively around Xander as if he were afraid of scaring him. Xander smiled against the vampire’s lips and pressed his body close. Spike hugged him tightly and took the lead. Xander sighed and relaxed into Spike’s kiss.

Gently Spike eased Xander back among the pillows and stretched out on top of him. He continued to taste and tease Xander’s mouth with deep and satisfying kisses. Xander let his hands wander through Spike’s hair and down his neck. He buried his fingers under the vampire’s collar and caressed the bare skin of his back.

Spike growled and kissed his way down Xander’s chin. Xander arched his neck and Spike kissed his way down and over Xander’s throat. Xander bent his legs and invited Spike’s body to settle above his growing and aching cock.

“Xander,” Spike whispered as he lifted his head and looked at him. Xander smiled and ran his hand through Spike’s hair.

“Are you…everything’s OK,” Spike said. “You don’t have to do this. I’m not going to lose ya…I’m not…”

Xander tugged Spike’s head down for another kiss. Xander swept his tongue inside and made the bossy vampire mute.

Blood pounded in Xander’s ears and he felt on fire. He was a slave, a pet, and yet at this moment he felt free! He felt as if the earth was literally moving underneath him.

“BLOODY HELL!” Spike roared as he jerked up from Xander’s kiss. Xander blinked and the earth moved again.

OK…the kissage stopped why is the… Xander began to think.

A loud explosion interrupted Xander’s thoughts. Xander tried to sit up but an enraged vampire shoved him down. More explosions were going off and Xander could hear gunfire.

“STAY PUT!” Spike ordered in game face and then moved to the front of the gazebo. There was smoke pouring through the gardens. Xander could hear growls and screams now. He looked at Spike.

“Don’t move!” Spike ordered and then he disappeared.

Spike! Xander thought but remained still. What the hell is going on?

Xander strained to see Spike and to follow what was happening. The gunfire was growing more sporadic and the explosions had stopped. The screaming was horrible. The growls were worse. Xander knew the sounds of battle. He’d been in more than a few even before the Before.
He couldn’t fathom who’d attack Spike though. Then fear settled low in his stomach. Had Angelus found out about Spike? Had Angelus attacked? Xander began to freeze and go very very still. If Angelus was behind this then life as a bottle would be a fairytale life.

“Xander!” a voice shouted at him. Xander blinked. The voice was familiar.

“Xander, hurry!” Xander shook himself and focused. A man was standing at the front of the gazebo. He was a large man. He was built like a football player. He had a rifle in one hand and his other was stretched out toward Xander.

The man was familiar.

“XANDER!” The man shouted in frustration and moved forward.

Xander tried to kick start his brain. How did he know this man?

“I swear, Harris, if you don’t move I’m gonna pound you into next week!”

Larry! Xander’s eyes went wide as he finally recognized the man. Angelus wasn’t attacking, the Resistance was! They were trying to rescue him! Xander forced his legs to move and he got shakily to his feet.

Larry, he thought and began to move toward the man. Omig...is Willow here? Is Faith?

A dark shape dove through the gazebo opening and tackled Larry.

NO! Xander thought and moved toward the man who was twisting under the weight of a snarling minion. NO!

Larry shoved the butt of the rifle into the minion’s face. It knocked the vampire’s face back but it tore at Larry’s arm. Larry screamed as his arm was jerked out of its shoulder socket.

Xander moved to hit the minion.

“DOWN PET!” Spike roared and Xander froze.

The minion went to tear at Larry’s throat only to find itself being flung to the side of the gazebo. Spike stepped on Larry’s chest, grabbed the rifle and flung it to the other side of the gazebo. More minions poured into the gazebo surrounding their Master. Spike looked at Xander. Xander looked at Spike.

“How many survivors?” Spike asked.

“Just this one, sire;” a minion replied.

“Must be your lucky day,” Spike said coldly as he stared down at Larry.

Xander sank slowly to his knees and began to pray.
Author’s notes:

1) Ok… I decided Spike would use the “stone” measure for Xan’s weight which I figured to be about 168lb based on Xander being 5’11 and the US Marine’s max standard for a 71 inches being 197.

2) Fourth street refers to the fourth card dealt in 7 card stud played Vegas style (at least according to my Casino Master game)
Chapter 36

Spike watched the two male lions pace while the lioness, stretched out on the floor of the pen with her tail lazily flopping back and forth, studied him. Her eyes flashed green.

“Bored, eh? I miss Africa too… sometimes. So much simpler there,” Spike whispered then rubbed his hand over his face.

He’d left Xander chained in a kneeling position with his head down in the interrogation room an hour ago. Clem was with him and had been ordered not to talk or communicate with Xander, just see to it he was left alone. The other human was in a cell outside the interrogation room.

It was standard technique to let those about to be questioned stew for a bit before the games began. Angelus always said it built up the fear and anticipation and he was the master at head games.

Spike sighed. He also needed the time to think. So he came to the lion habitat. The lions were reminders of Africa and they were soothing to him.

He’d expected a move by the Resistance, just not this soon. He’d hoped to have claimed Xander before they’d made their move. Claiming him now would be an almost impossible task.

“Thought I’d find you here,” Lorne’s voice said quietly from behind Spike. The lions paused their pacing and sniffed the air. Their eyes flashed green. “Oooh, they give me the chills.”

“Just demons… like us,” Spike said.

“They’re nothing like us,” Lorne said.

Spike turned around and lifted an eyebrow.

“Well… they’re…”

“Primals…” Spike said. “Just a different form a demon. Bit simpler I think.”

“Still don’t like them,” Lorne muttered.

“That’s cuz they attack and eat anything. Human… demon… doesn’t matter.”

“Except you.”

Spike smiled and looked back at the lions. He shrugged.

“Bit of fortune that. Got on the good side of a Maasai medicine man is all. Brought down a mountain and sealed the mouth of a cave where a ‘devil’ dwelt.”

“What are you going to do, lemon drop?” Lorne asked bringing the focus back to the subject neither really wanted to talk about.

“What I have to.”
“Spike,” Lorne said and touched the vampire’s shoulder. The lions growled. “You can’t…”

“You wanna do it for me green bean?”

Lorne gasped and let go of Spike’s shoulder.

“Lorne,” Spike sighed. “I gotta do this and I gotta make it look good.”

“And what about you? I know what this will cost you! You have a…”

“Don’t you bloody say it!” Spike roared and spun around and looked at Lorne. Lorne held his tongue. “This? This will cost me less than what it did ta do Doyle!”

Lorne flinched and all three of the lions were pacing and growling. Their eyes were burning a solid bright green.

“Then what about what it will cost Xander? Are you willing to risk losing him too? Because don’t pretend to ME that you don’t care.”

Spike’s yellow eyes locked on Lorne’s red and for a moment there was a silent contest of wills. Then Spike sighed.

“I haven’t forgotten him. And no matter what I do I may lose him.”

“Then…”

“And despite what ya think I haven’t just been out here bleedin’ sulkin’ with the cats. Been thinkin’.”

“Did you hurt yourself?”

Spike looked startled for a moment then laughed. He shook his head.

“I always hurt myself when I think,” Spike replied. “Look… I need you to get a ‘package’ ready.”


“Immediate delivery… local,” Spike said eyeing Lorne carefully.

“Lemon drop…”

“Then I need you to arrange for storage, yeah?”

“Spike?”

“Lorne… can you do it?”

Lorne closed his eyes and thought for a moment. He opened them and looked at Spike.

“It’ll be tricky.”

“But ya can do it?”
“It’ll take a couple of hours,” Lorne said a bit sadly.

Spike nodded then said, “That should be plenty of time.”

“This is still going to cost you,” Lorne said.

“But not as much as Doyle,” Spike replied.

“Xander won’t understand.”

“No,” Spike said sadly. “He won’t.”

***

Xander’s neck, back and knees where aching. He was beginning to tremble not from fear but from fatigue, but still he held form. Not that he had much choice. After Spike had dragged him into the room he’d chained him into position and then ordered Clem to stay with him.

“Not one bloody word to ‘im,” Spike had growled. “No communication of any kind! See he stays in form and no one comes in here, yeah?”

“Y..Ye..Yes, Master Spike!” Clem had spit out. He’d been shaking almost as badly as Xander.

Xander had no idea where Larry was or in what condition. He just suspected the man was still alive. 

*Spike will want to interrogate him first, Xander thought and caught his breath. Dammit! Why did they have to make a play for me? Why now? I’m not worth it! *

Xander fought back tears, tears of guilt. He’d been ready to make happy with Spike while Larry and the others were planning on ‘freeing’ him. He’d been kissing Spike and they’d been preparing to die to rescue him!

*Please, Buff, Xander prayed, if you have any pull from the other side… don’t let Willow or Faith have been involved in this rescue attempt. Don’t let them try again!*

Xander shifted as much as he could in his chains to give some relief to his muscles. He hissed at the pain. Clem stood up and moved close to Xander but he didn’t say a word. He didn’t touch him either, but somehow the closeness seemed comforting. Xander shook his head.

*Larry doesn’t get comfort, neither should I, he thought. How could I have been so stupid? I believed he was more than just…*

The interrogation room door burst open and Xander’s thoughts jumped track. Clem jumped back.

*He’s back! Xander thought bitterly.*

“Bored yet, Pet?” Spike snarled. “Ready for some fun and games?”

Xander shook his head and Spike growled. He moved quickly over to Xander and released the leash.

“Eyes on me!” Spike ordered. “You’re excused Clem.”
Xander looked up at Spike. He looked up and saw only Master Spike. Xander looked up at him with hatred and hurt.

“Someone’s having a bad day,” Spike said coldly.

*Fall on a stake and die, Xander thought.*

“Don’t worry… someone else is gonna have a worse one, Pet,” Spike said and then snapped his fingers.

There was the sound of struggling and Xander’s eyes shifted from Spike to the door of the interrogation room. Two minions were dragging in a struggling Larry as Clem quickly left the room. Xander tried to school his features.

“Smile now,” Spike said to Larry and then pointed to a corner. “Yer on Candid Camera!”

“Fuck you!” Larry shouted.

“Maybe later,” Spike said. “If you’re a good boy and answer my questions. Whaddya think, Pet? Feel like a threesome?”

*I think I was as big a fool as Cordy always thought I was to believe you,* Xander thought as he glared at Spike.

“Mmm… not looking good… what was your name again?” Spike said as he prowled close to Larry.

“Eatshitanddie!” Larry replied.

Spike growled and grabbed Larry by the throat and began to choke him.

“That’s ‘eatshitanddie’ Master!” Spike sneered.

*Spike!* Xander thought in panic as Larry’s face went red and then purple before the vampire finally released his hold. Larry sucked in a huge breath.

“String ‘im up!” Spike ordered.

The minions moved quickly and quietly. They took Larry’s cuffed hands and then attached them to a chain hanging from the ceiling. Larry screamed as they pulled the chain tight forcing his arms high above his head.

“Stings does it?” Spike asked. “Arm’s still out of the socket then?”

“I’ve hurt worse on the fifteen yard line,” Larry spat out through gritted teeth.

“Hmmm? Was that an American football reference?” Spike looked at Xander. “He play that sport?”

Xander glared at Spike. Spike punched Larry in the stomach. Larry grunted in pain.

“Better answer me, Pet!”
Xander nodded.

“So you know this one then, eh?”

_Fuck!_ Xander thought thinking of what he just revealed.

“Don’t tell him anything, Xan!” Larry yelled. Spike punched him again. Xander thought he heard something crack.

Xander nodded.

“From the Resistance?”

Xander nodded. Spike focused on Larry.

“So… a bona fide Resistance fighter,” Spike said.

“Humans took this world from the demons once,” Larry spat, “we’ll do it again.”

Spike smiled then took off his coat. He laid it on the table across the room.

“Knife!” Spike ordered. One of the minions pulled out a large hunting knife and handed it to Spike. Spike ran his thumb over it. A small line of blood formed on his thumb pad. He smiled and sucked his thumb.

“Did you know I won Xander here off the Azora?” Spike asked Larry. Larry glared at Spike.

“Know anything about them?”

Larry remained silent. Spike took the knife and slit Larry’s shirt from collar to hem. Larry focused his eyes on the far wall.

_Don’t do this!_ Xander silently pleaded.

“Azora don’t like to hear a sound from their ‘bottles’ after they first ‘tap’ ‘em,” Spike explained as he continued to cut at Larry’s shirt. “I’ll let you figure out what ‘tapping’ means. Anyway, the long and the short of it is that my Pet is mute. Can’t say a word.”

Larry’s eyes shifted to Xander. The two men stared at each other and Xander nodded almost imperceptibly. Spike grabbed Larry by the chin and focused his attention back on him.

“I get bored. Be nice to have someone who can talk back… for awhile anyway,” Spike said as he pulled the tatters of Larry’s shirt off leaving the man half naked. “You will talk to me, won’t you… what was your name again… ’eatshitanddie’?”

Larry spat in Spike’s face. Spike laughed and made a light cut down Larry’s sternum. Xander struggled against his chains. Larry bit back a groan and Spike lapped at the welling blood.

“Not quite as tasty as my Pet,” Spike purred with bloody lips, “but tasty enough to hope our conversation lasts awhile.”

_STOP THIS!_ Xander screamed silently and continued to struggle against his chains.
“Pet,” Spike said turning his head to look at Xander, “don’t be jealous. You’re still my favorite.”

_I’m going to kill you_! Xander vowed.

***

Larry’s interrogation seemed to take days but Xander suspected it really took hours. Larry’s one eye was swelled shut. His back, torso and sides were covered in shallow cuts that still seeped blood when Spike didn’t lick at them. Under the cuts were bruises from Spike’s punches.

Xander had given up fighting against his own tears of impotent rage and guilt. He’d even given up hiding his relief to know that neither Willow, Faith nor Dawn had been part of the raid. The raid had not been ordered.

“Was a recon mission only,” Larry had finally gasped. “Word was Xander had surfaced as your personal slave.”

“Pet,” Spike had corrected after a lapping at a cut under Larry’s arm. “Why the raid?”

“Thought you were vulnerable in the gardens. Saw an opportunity…” Larry had hissed as Spike pinched a cut across Larry’s left nipple causing it to start bleeding again. Spike sucked at the blood.

“Fuck! That’s all I know!” Larry had cried.

“Who’s the leak? Where’d the information come from?” Spike had asked as he danced the tip of the knife around Larry’s belly button.

“I don’t know,” Larry had said.

“Don’t know? Or don’t want to tell?” Spike had asked as he cut a circle on Larry’s stomach.

“I DON’T KNOW! I’m just a grunt!” Larry had screamed.

Spike had moved away from Larry after that. He’d set the knife down on the table and walked over by Xander. The three had been paused like that for a while. Xander couldn’t fathom what was next but whatever it was he knew it couldn’t be good.

“Right,” Spike had finally said. Then he moved to his coat and pulled out his cell phone. He punched a button and a few seconds later spoke into the receiver. “We’re moving this upstairs.”

“I think we all need a bit of fresh air,” Spike said as he put away his cell phone and put on his coat. He knelt down and unchained Xander. He grabbed his leash. “Ready for some night air, Pet?”

_Please stop this, Spike, _Xander silently begged with his eyes and shook his head.

”What about you, Lar?” Spike asked. Getting the man to give up his name had been one of Spike’s first breakthroughs.

“Sure, why not?” Larry panted as the minions detached his cuffs from the chain overhead. Larry screamed when they lowered his arms.

“Ever seen the Vegas skyline?” Spike asked.
Larry shook his head.

“It’s to die for,” Spike purred. Larry looked at Spike. Xander tugged on Spike’s arm and frantically shook his head.

“Pet,” Spike warned. “Are you feeling ignored? Do you want some attention too?”

Xander’s gut twisted. He stared at Spike. There was nothing caring or humane in this monster before him.

*You belong to this world,* Xander thought.

“Now everybody,” Spike said and turned toward the camera in the corner. “Smile and wave to Angelus! He’s just gonna luv this tape!”

Xander fought the bile rising in his throat as Spike waved at the camera before leading them out.

***

They took a service elevator up to the top floor and then climbed a small set of stairs. Another minion and Lorne waited there with a video camera.

“Wouldn’t want Angelus to miss the grand finale,” Spike said. Xander stumbled. He couldn’t get his feet to work.

“Lorne, you better take my Pet,” Spike said as he handed Xander’s leash to the green demon. “I think he’s getting worn out from all the festivities.”

“S… Master Spike,” Lorne said softly as he took Xander’s leash.

“Oh I know, scenes like this always make you a bit… green,” Spike laughed. Xander flinched and looked at Lorne.

*Do something!* He silently pleaded. Lorne didn’t look at Xander.

“I’ll take it from here,” Spike said as he grabbed Larry’s injured arm. Larry let out another cry of pain and the minions laughed.

“Now let’s go and get a better view and maybe more will come back ta ya, eh?” Spike said as he began to drag Larry towards the far side of the roof. The minion with the camera began to follow but Lorne put a hand out.

“Did he tell you to follow? Get it from here,” Lorne said.

Xander’s eyes were glued in horror at the two figures. He strained against the poor lighting to keep an eye on what was happening as Spike led Larry toward the edge. For a brief moment it looked like Larry struggled. Spike punched him and Larry disappeared as he fell behind one of the large rectangle looking boxes that covered the ventilation shaft. Spike bent down and dragged him up and over to the edge of the roof.

“Anything more to say?”
Larry hung limp.

“Right. Then I guess it’s time to say goodbye, eatshitanddie,” Spike said as he hauled Larry up and threw him off the roof.

NO! Xander silently screamed and fell to his knees. He tried to crawl forward but Lorne held him. NO! NO! NO!

Spike trotted back over to Lorne. He was wiping his hands. He looked at the camera and smiled. Then he took the leash from Lorne.

“Clean up the mess down below,” Spike said and then began to tug on Xander’s leash.

Xander’s brain and legs refused to work.

“PET!” Spike barked.

NO! Xander thought.

Spike yanked on Xander’s leash. Xander blinked and stumbled to his feet.

“Let’s all go down for a drink,” Spike said to the minions as he pulled Xander into the stairwell. The minions followed. Lorne stayed behind staring sadly at Xander until the stairway doors closed.
Chapter 37

Xander was huddled at Spike’s feet. He was barely on his knees. The vampire was laughing and drinking with the minions who’d helped torture Larry. Xander wished he was deaf as well as mute. The taste of bile from his nausea was heavy in his mouth as well as the whiskey Spike had forced him to drink.

When will this nightmare be over? Xander thought. Spike tugged on his leash.

“Still with me, Pet?” Spike asked.

Xander glared at Spike. He and the other vampires laughed.

“Master Spike,” Lorne interrupted, “the mess has been cleaned up.”

Larry wasn’t a ‘mess!’ Xander silently screamed. He was a human being!

“Good,” Spike said as he nodded and then handed Xander’s leash to Lorne. “Take this upstairs. See it gets cleaned up, fed and watered. I’ll deal with its poor attitude and behavior later.”

Lorne nodded and tugged gently on Xander’s leash. “Come along,” Lorne ordered.

Gladly, thought Xander and as he got to his feet. He refused to look at Spike again.

Lorne led Xander to the private elevator. He remained aloof and quiet all the way there as well as on the ride up to the suite. Xander was welcomed the silence. When the elevator arrived upstairs Lorne keyed the suite open and led Xander inside. He unclipped the leash and then offered Xander the keys to his belt.

“Go get cleaned up, Xander,” Lorne said softly. “I’ll order you something light to eat.”

Xander looked at Lorne. The green demon’s face showed a gentle kindness Xander had been desperate for since Larry had been captured. Xander gasped. Lorne smiled sadly.

“Go on, Xander,” Lorne said. “But don’t take too long or sink too far down in your grief. I’ll know if…well if you decide to do something that would upset Tara.”

Tara! Xander thought and the little whispers deep inside that returned about escaping Spike and the other demons permanently were silenced. Xander flinched from Lorne’s gaze.

Would Spike have a reason to protect Tara if I were gone? Would he turn her over to Angelus? Xander mused and then paled as another thought hit him. Would Spike make her his Pet next?

“It’s OK, Xander,” Lorne said.

Xander shook his head. No it’s not; he thought then headed for the bedroom.

Lorne sighed and watched Xander leave before ordering up a plate of scrambled eggs and toast.

***
Xander made it through his shower. He made it through choking down the light meal Lorne had ordered. Xander had no illusions he could get out of eating. Spike had commanded he be fed and Xander understood enough by now to know whether he was hungry or not, he’d be fed. When he was done he looked at Lorne.

“Time to tuck you in I suppose,” Lorne said. Xander shrugged and stood. He headed to the bedroom then proceeded to the bathroom where he brushed his teeth and did his pre-bed routine.

Lorne was sitting on the edge of the bed when he returned to the bedroom. Xander arched an eyebrow. Lorne pulled back the covers and patted the mattress.

“Thought I’d keep you company ‘til you fell asleep,” Lorne said.

Xander shrugged and got into bed. He hadn’t dressed after the shower since he was in the suite and Spike had made it abundantly clear he was to be naked in the suite.

Lorne draped the covers over Xander. Xander turned his back to the green demon and closed his eyes. He wanted to shut out this nightmare of a world…of an existence.

“After Doyle,” Lorne began in almost a whisper, “I think I hated him. It didn’t matter Doyle had warned me. He had visions. Did you know that?”

Xander didn’t move. He didn’t want to listen. He didn’t want to hear about Spike or Doyle. He just wanted to go away.

“He told me someday Spike would come back from exile. He told me that when he did Spike would have to prove himself to Angelus…and…and that Doyle would be his proof.”

Lorne paused and took a deep breath. Xander tried not to hear the pain and grief in Lorne’s whispers.

“He warned me that I’d have to let Spike do what he had to do..to even..I had to..” Lorne choked to a stop. It almost sounded like he was sobbing. For a moment Xander was tempted to turn over and help the demon but then he remembered how Lorne had held him back when Spike had thrown Larry off the roof. Xander remained still.

“Spike took his time. It took hours for Doyle to die,” Lorne resumed his story. “I hated Spike. Angelus enjoyed it. It’s why he ordered me to go with Spike when he gave him Las Vegas. I did hate him. I hated them both.”

Then why do you help him? Xander wondered. Why are you so loyal to him? He tortured and killed someone you loved! How can you betray the memory of that person?

“Doyle was doomed to die. Angelus had found out about his visions and who they came from. Spike had to prove himself to Angelus to gain his trust. There wasn’t anything good or right about any of it. Spike can be a cold blooded bastard, Xander…but he isn’t a cold blooded bastard.”

What’s that mean? He smoked but didn’t inhale? Xander thought bitterly.

“Doyle told me to trust Spike when he returned. Told me to help him, that he would need a friend.”
Xander snorted.

“Xander,” Doyle said softly. “He cares…he cares for you.”

Xander rolled over and glared at Lorne angrily. He shook his head furiously. *Well I don’t want him to care for me!* Xander thought. *I don’t care for him! I was an idiot to believe I did! Won’t happen again.*

Lorne sighed and said, “Go to sleep, Xander.”

***

Lorne entered Spike’s office hours later. It was well past dawn. Spike stuffed something in his coat pocket as Lorne entered and looked up at the green demon.

“Howz Xander?” Spike asked.

“Hurt. Confused. Taking you off his Christmas list. Left Clem with him.” Lorne replied as he fixed a drink before sitting down. “What are you still doing up?”

“Work,” Spike said.

“You ever going to face him?” Lorne asked.

“I think space would be good for him for awhile.”

“Good for him or for you?”

“Don’t push it green bean,” Spike growled.

“Lemon drop he’s hurting! You didn’t just go back a couple of steps he’s already back to where you started and then some. I don’t think he’s planning on moving forward!”

Spike sighed. “Well that’s probably for the best right now.”

“How can you say that?”

“Simple. I open my mouth and the words come out,” Spike replied.

“You can joke at a time like this?” Lorne asked.

“Times like this are exactly when we should joke.”

Lorne shook his head and sipped his drink and then studied Spike. “You can’t tell me this doesn’t bother you,” he said.

“No, I can’t,” Spike said. “But what would you have me do?”

“Tell the boy the truth!”

“And get him killed? Get us all killed? Timing is every thing. And now is not the time!”
“So you are just going to let him hurt?”

“Do you think I like it?” Spike yelled and slammed his fist own the desk.

The room fell silent for a moment as the two demons stared at each other. Then Lorne shook his head.

“No, I know you don’t.”

“I’ll let him know when I can,” Spike said softly. “In the meantime I think leaving him with Clem is a good thing. In fact, let Clem know I want him to work with Xander on his phobia. Take him outside during the day to some of the pools around the casino.”

“What about the game?” Lorne asked.

“I’m postponing it a few days. After the attack I need to do a security sweep,” Spike said as he stood.

“And what about you and Xander?” Lorne asked.

“He’s being punished. Master won’t be bringing him to the tables for awhile. Give Clem a set of keys to the belt. Until Xander’s back in the Master’s good graces that’s all he’ll be allowed to wear out of the suite. I’ll be spending more time in the stables,” Spike said as he put on and patted down his coat before heading for the door.

“Where are you going, now?” Lorne sighed. “It’s after dawn. Little late to be painting the town isn’t it?”

“Not painting the town,” Spike smiled and said before leaving, “papering it.”

***

Something soft was brushing against Xander’s nose. He swatted at it with his hand and tried to go back to sleep. The something was insistent. Xander froze as consciousness washed over him. *Spike!* he thought and refused to open his eyes. Again something patted his nose. Xander frowned. It didn’t feel like a kiss. He slid his eyes open to a small slit and then smiled. It was Clem’s kitten! It was pawing at his nose!

Xander sat up and the kitten bounded back briefly before bounding forward onto Xander’s toes. Xander laughed.

“Good morning, Xander,” Clem said cheerfully if not a little nervously. Xander turned his head and saw Clem sitting in one of the chairs in the bedroom. Xander arched an eyebrow.

“I thought I’d let Ante wake you up,” Clem said.

*Auntie?* Xander thought and frowned.

“Ante,” Clem said and pointed at the kitten. “That’s what he would have been if he’d been healthy. So I thought it was a good name for him.”

Xander paled and snatched up the kitten. The kitten squirmed, struggled, and chewed on Xander’s fingers. Then the kitten sneezed in Xander’s face.
“He’s still not quiet over his cold. The Pocklas said it would take time,” Clem said. Xander looked suspiciously at Clem.

“Don’t worry, Xander,” Clem said. “Ante’s no longer…well ante. Master Spike ordered me to shut down the game so…”

Xander released the squirming kitten he once again pounced on Xander’s covered feet.

OUCH! Xander thought as kitten claws and teeth sunk through the covers and sheet to nail Xander’s toes.

“Sorry. He really likes the ‘mouse under the blanket’ game.”

Yeah I se…Hey! Stop..OUCH! Xander tried to withdraw or move his feet only to have them chased by Ante. Clem moved quickly forward and scooped the kitten up. Suddenly a thin tentacle shot out from a fold of Clem’s neck and danced about the kitten. The kitten batted at it with its paw.

Xander froze. Clem had tentacles! Xander suddenly felt vulnerable and exposed. He backed up to the headboard and pulled the blankets up high.

“Xander?” Clem asked anxiously as he saw Xander’s response. Xander stared in horror at Clem’s thin tentacle. “Hey? This? No…Xander…nothing to be afraid of. I just use it to entertain Ante. See?”

Clem kept dancing and waving the tentacle around Ante and the kitten kept batting and trying to “get it.”

“Nothing to be afraid of Xander,” Clem said. “Wouldn’t hurt you. Master Spike…we’ll he’d do more than just hurt me if I did. Sides…you’re my friend. Friends don’t hurt friends. Right, Xander?”

Xander blinked and shifted his focus slightly from Clem’s tentacle to Clem’s eyes.

“Tell you what,” Clem said as he sat Ante on the floor who then quickly scurried under the bed to chase a dust bunny. “I’ll tuck it away if it’s scaring you. I don’t want to scare you. I hope we’ll get to have a rematch of Candy Land again.”

The tentacle slinked back into the folds of Clem’s skin and Xander relaxed a bit.

“Better?” Clem asked.

Xander nodded.

“OK. Good. Why don’t you get up and head out in the front room when you’re ready. I bought up a smoothie to drink. No need to shower. I’m supposed to take you outside. You’ll want to put on your belt. I’ve got keys to lock it,” Clem paused for a moment. He looked uncomfortable then he finally said, “Master Spike said that was all you were to wear.”

FUCK! Xander thought and then nodded. So much for caring enough to not parade me in front of other demons!

Clem smiled weakly and headed out of the bedroom. Xander threw back the covers and got out of bed.
DAMMIT! he silently yelled as two tiger striped paws grabbed his ankles from underneath the bed. Xander bent over and then rolled his eyes. Ante stared at with him wide innocent eyes then blinked.

*It's a good thing you're cute, Xander thought.*

***

After his shower, Xander snuck successfully past the bed without getting pounced upon. Clem and his sack were waiting in the front room. Xander could tell by the sunlight pouring through the windows that it was late in the afternoon.

*Where was Spike?* he thought. *Why hadn’t he come back to the suite?*

“Uhm…” Clem started and blushed, “ready for me to lock the belt?”

Xander nodded. Clem stepped quickly forward and fumbled with the keys for a moment before locking the front lock.

“Sorry,” he muttered as he dropped the keys as he tried to lock the back. He picked the keys up and tried again. Xander heard the ‘snick’ of the lock. “Whew! Glad that’s done!”

Clem stepped back from Xander and pocketed the keys. He then picked up a tall glass with a thick pale red substance in it.

“Here. Strawberry smoothie,” Clem said as he held the glass out to Xander. Xander smiled and took the glass. He dropped down on to his pillow and began sipping the glass.

“Good?” Clem asked.

Xander nodded. *Yeah, it's good,* he thought.

“Spike asked me to take you outside this afternoon,” Clem said. “You mind going out in the sunlight?”

Xander shook his head. *Nope. Human here. Kinda miss going out in the day actually,* Xander thought and then wondered why Spike had asked Clem to take him out.

“Oh good. Was hoping at least that wasn’t going to be a problem. I’m not very good with confrontation you know,” Clem said.

Xander studied Clem. The saggy skinned demon seemed to be nervous.

“I just have never been very good about the whole ‘terrorizing other’s bit.’ You’d be surprised how much a demon like me got picked on by the other demons. Just never saw the point in it ya know?”

Xander nodded and slurped on his smoothie.

“Oh sure…a good scare now and then. That’s always fun. You should see some of the faces people make! And the Halloween gig is great! I get enough candy to satisfy my sweet tooth for months!”

*Spike’s asked him to do something he’s not happy about, Xander thought. Something to do with me.*
“I just…well terrifying folks…well can I tell you a secret, Xander?” Clem asked.

Xander nodded as he slurped up the last of his smoothie.

“That’s why I left California. Angelus rules it…and it was all too…just too scary. You know?”

Yeah, I know. I know, Xander thought as he nodded.

***

Clem took Xander out the back way. Or at least Xander thought it was the back way since he hadn’t been out that way before. He was grateful. They didn’t pass a lot of other demons, just mostly other humans. Clem held on to Xander’s leash and steered him through plain hallways and bustling kitchens until they spilled outside into the bright sunshine.

Xander was almost overcome by the brightness and the heat. Yet both felt good. They were real. Xander had been living in an artificial environment of heat and light for so long that those moments of being outside helped him feel connected to the Earth again. They helped him remember an essential part of his humanity.

Was why I liked the gardens so much, Xander thought ruefully.

“C’mon,” Clem said cheerily as he tugged on Xander’s leash and adjusted the bag on his shoulder. Xander followed Clem absentely as he took in the sights, smells and sounds of the world around him. He even closed his eyes at times to concentrate on the feel of the heated air against his skin that was sometimes chased away by an errant breeze.

It was the smell on the wind that first alerted Xander where Clem was leading Xander. Xander stopped moving. Xander could smell chlorine in the air. Xander looked around and saw the pool where Clem was leading them. The leash pulled tight and Clem turned to look at Xander.

“Xander?” Clem asked.

Xander raised his arm and pointed at the pool. Clem sighed. He put his bag down and walked back to Xander.

“Xander,” Clem said, “Master Spike told me about your fear of water. He’s ordered me to help you with it.”

Xander backed up a step and shook his head.

“Xander I know how you feel. Well OK, maybe not. But I do know what it’s like to be afraid. I’m a small demon in a big demon world. You know?”

Xander stared at Clem.

“Demons..well everything is based on power how much you have and what you are willing to do to keep it. I don’t have any power. So…Xander…look…I don’t want to scare you. You’re my friend. Right?”

Xander nodded and then he looked at the pool.
“So I figured…friends take walks right?”

Xander looked back at Clem and narrowed his eyes.

“I figured you and I could just…well walk around the pool. See? I could then tell Master Spike that you had a big breakthrough. You went near the pool. That would be breakthrough right?”

Xander tilted his head.

“I’d be with you the whole time, Xander,” Clem said. “I’ll walk between you and the pool. We’ll just walk around it. You won’t even have to look at the water. I promise. And…and…”

Clem stopped talking for a moment and tugged at the leash as he stepped back toward his bag. Xander followed. Clem bent down and dug through his bag and pulled something out.

“We could look at these when we were done! Like a reward!” Clem said holding up several comic books. There were a couple of copies each of Batman, Spiderman and Superman.

“I can read them aloud and you can just look at the pictures,” Clem said.

Comic books! Xander thought. It had been since the Before since he’d seen one and he had to admit, there was a part of him that was tempted.

“C’mon Xander,” Clem said. “Just a walk?”

Xander looked from the books to the Clem. There was a slight fear in Clem’s voice and Xander sighed. He realized that Clem was scared Xander would refuse. Clem didn’t want to force Xander to walk around the pool but Clem had been ordered to work with Xander on his fear and if he didn’t…

You’re a bastard, Spike, Xander thought as he forced a smile and nodded at Clem. Clem smiled and put the books back in the bag then slung the bag back up on his shoulder.

“Let’s go,” Clem said and led Xander off to walk around the pool. Xander felt like he was walking to his own execution.

***

Xander wasn’t sure how he managed to make it through the walk. Perhaps it was because Clem talked to him the whole time. What he talked about, Xander couldn’t remember. All he knew was that he focused on Clem’s presence and his voice as a shield against the well of death just a feet from where he walked.

He didn’t notice the heat of the sun or the concrete under his feet. He only noticed the smell of the chlorinated water and the sound of Clem’s endless stories. When they’d made a complete circuit of the pool, Clem had led them away from it and over a grassy area. There he’d sat on the ground with Xander and read all the dialogue in the comic books as Xander looked at the pictures.

Again Xander hadn’t remembered the first few issues they looked at as he focused on calming his panicked mind and reassuring it that they were safe. Afterwards, Xander thought it was almost a pleasant time, until he’d remember Larry’s screams or the image of his limp figure being thrown off the roof. Then Xander’s eyes would tear. Clem would pause from his reading for a moment and then quietly resume.
When the sun was low in the sky Clem had asked Xander if he was ready to declare it a day. Xander had nodded. Clem had packed away all the comic books and then led Xander back to the casino. He took a different route so they didn’t have to go near the pool.

Spike was an unexpected sight when they reached the suite.

“Bloody hell!” he yelled when he saw Xander.

Clem flinched and Xander stepped between the floppy eared demon and Spike.

“Leaving that stripped little beast here was bad enough but look at my Pet!” Spike roared.

“M..master Spike?” Clem sputtered.

“He’s as red as a boiled lobster!” Spike growled and marched forward and snatched Xander’s leash away from Clem. “Haven’t ya ever heard of ruddin’ sun block?”

“Sun block?” Clem asked.

“Oi!” Spike barked. “Ask Lorne! And make sure my Pet’s got some on before you take him out tomorrow! Don’t want him ta get a case of skin cancer!”

“Skin cancer!” Clem squeaked. “Master Spike you must know I wouldn’t do anything to hurt Xander! I’m so sorr…”

“I know!” Spike said as he pulled Xander away from Clem. “That’s why yer still alive and still trusted with him.”

“Yes, Master Spike!” Clem said.

Xander looked down at his arm. He was rather red. He looked at Clem and tried to reassure with the panicked demon with a smile.

“So how’d he do?” Spike asked a little more calmly.

“Wonderfully. He walked the entire circuit of the pool,” Clem said.

Spike looked at Xander. Xander stared back defiantly at Spike.

“That’s good, pet,” Spike said softly. “That’s real good.”

*Go to hell,* Xander thought.

“All right,” Spike said turning back to Clem. “Gather up that little monster of yours and beat it. Be back tomorrow.”

Clem nodded. Spike tugged Xander over to the chair and to his pillow while Clem scurried around the suite trying to gather up Ante. Xander couldn’t help but laugh at the merry chase. Finally Clem caught the kitten and he made his way out of the suite.

“Ready for something to eat?” Spike asked as he uncovered a tray. Xander shrugged. Spike growled
and stabbed at the meatloaf. He offered it to Xander.

“EAT!” he ordered. Xander did. He was surprisingly hungry even if he had to eat at Spike’s hand. The meatloaf, mashed potatoes, gravy and green beans were actually good. There was a large glass of milk to drink and a bowl of mixed fruit for desert.

Spike was blessedly quiet while he fed Xander. It was a relief to Xander who increasingly became aware of the extent of his sunburn throughout dinner. By the time he was finished his skin felt raw and tight.

“C’mon,” Spike said as he unclipped Xander’s leash, “let’s get the belt off ya so ya can get a cool shower. That’ll take some of the heat out.”

Xander stood and Spike unlocked the belt. Xander hissed as the belt rubbed against his skin as Spike slid it off.

“Go get yer shower and meet me back in the bedroom,” Spike said. Xander moved quickly and headed for the bathroom.

As Xander stepped into the bathroom he realized he was almost looking forward to the shower. After dealing with the pool his fear of the shower was minimal and the promise of some relief from the burn in his skin helped too.

Xander stepped quickly in the shower and turned on the water. He adjusted the temperature to the cool side. He gasped as the pelting drops stung his skin. He forced himself to relax and let the water cool and sooth him. He didn’t have to wait long.

***

Spike closed the door behind the minion and took the tube of aloe vera Lorne had sent up. Spike was still dubious that the sap from a spiked green plant could help Xander but Tara had told Lorne that’s what his pet needed and she’d been right about the arnica gel.

The sound of the shower cut out and Spike hurried to the bedroom. He turned down the sheets, stripped off his shirt and climbed up on the bed. Pet’s not going to like this, Spike thought, but going ta do it anyway.

Spike could pretend he only wanted to make sure Xander’s sunburn was treated but deep down he also just wanted to touch Xander again. The incident with Larry had put so many walls between them and Spike was aching for his pet. He was aching not just to touch him but aching because Xander was in so much pain, pain Spike had caused. He needed to give him some comfort. Xander was his. He needed to take care of him.

Xander walked out of the bathroom and paused when he saw the bed and Spike. His face froze into a look of disgust.

“Up on the bed. Face down,” Spike ordered. Xander glared at Spike for a moment then climbed up on the bed as he was told. His body was stiff and his whole attitude screamed rejection.

Spike squirted a large dollop of the aloe vera gel into the palm of his hand then rubbed them together. Then he gently began to rub the gel into Xander’s shoulders. Xander hissed but remained still.
“Know its cold. Tryin’ ta be gentle,” Spike said. “Tara said this will help with the burn.”

Xander remained still and unresponsive. Spike sighed. He continued to work the gel into Xander’s skin. Part of him marveled and reveled in the heat coming off his pet. Spike never seemed to get warm enough and the heat emanating from Xander tempted him to just stretch his body out on top of his pet and soak it up.

“Know ya need the sun block, but maybe more sun’ll do ya good, eh?” Spike said resisting temptation and focusing on Xander. Xander remained still as Spike worked his hands down Xander’s back.

“Pet,” Spike warned lightly. “Would ya like more time outside during the day?”

Xander shrugged. Spike slapped his ass lightly. The sunburn made it feel twice as hard. Xander gasped then turned his head to glare at Spike.

“Yes or no?”

Xander nodded stiffly. Spike squeezed some gel on Xander’s ass cheeks and began to soothe the burned and irritated skin. Xander turned his head away.

“Know yer upset. Know why. But yer still my Pet. Rules are still rules, Xander,” Spike said as he he manipulated the firm and round globes. “I really don’t want to have to punish you right now.”

Will you throw me off the roof too? Xander thought.

Spike squeezed out some more gel and slid his slick hands down the back of Xander’s right leg.

“I won’t let anyone take you away from me. I won’t let anyone jeopardize my organization,” Spike said.

So you never really did care any of us? It’s all about you? Xander thought and tried not to think about how much better he felt. How good Spike’s hands felt or how soothing the gel was to his skin.

Spike began to work gel into the skin of Xander’s left leg.

“I gave Larry a clean death.”

That was clean! Xander screamed silently and hissed.

“Angelus would have done much worse.”

I didn’t trust Angelus! I wasn’t planning on…My tongue wouldn’t have been willingly down Angelus’s throat! Xander thought.

Spike finished Xander’s leg then redid his back before beginning to work on the back of his arms.

“I do what I have to Xander and I make no apologies.”

Let me go, Spike, Xander thought. Let me got back to the Azora at least because being treated like what I was…property is a lot easier than being treated like I’m something you care for…when I am still just property.
“Roll over,” Spike ordered.

Xander sighed and did as he was told. He couldn’t help but look Spike in the eyes. For just a moment there was that spark between them. He could see Spike and he could almost believe the vampire could care. Xander looked away before he could deceive himself further.

Spike began to work rub the gel into Xander’s face. Xander closed his eyes and forced himself to be very still. Spike worked slowly and silently. After he treated Xander’s face he slid his hands down Xander’s neck then shoulders.

Spike mapped out the muscles in Xander’s arms before running his hands over Xander’s chest soothing the red skin with the cool gel. Spike’s touch was gentle and Xander fought the hum of awareness stirring inside of him. His heart and his brain were hurt. They were betrayed and full of hatred. Yet, Xander’s body knew Spike’s touch. It had become used to it and maybe because of Xander’s pain it soaked up the gentle touch like his skin the gel.

Xander bit his lip as Spike’s hands slid lower and moved to work on his legs. *Please…I can’t…not now…not after*, Xander thought frantically.

Spike breathed deep the delicate scent of pheromones Xander’s body was releasing. He could feel his pet’s reaction and he could see the stir of interest in Xander’s loins. It both pleased and saddened him. It pleased him because as long as part of Xander still wanted him there was hope that not all was lost. There was hope he could still win Xander back…could still Claim him. It saddened him because he knew the terrible burden and guilt it was to be attracted to someone who’d hurt you. He knew what it was like to respond to someone who you hated.

“It’s OK, pet,” Spike whispered. “Blood..passion..works its will regardless of what we want.”

Xander turned his head. Spike quickly finished up with treating Xander, got off the bed and then he covered Xander with the blankets.

“My promise still stands, pet,” Spike said softly. He touched the tip of Xander’s nose briefly before turning off the lights and leaving the bedroom.

**Author's note:**

Yes Clem does have tentacles.
Chapter 38

The strange pattern repeated itself over the next couple of days. Clem or Ante would wake Xander up in the afternoon. Clem would feed him a smoothie or something light and then take him outside. Only this time he made sure Xander put on a sun block.

“I have permission to do your back,” Clem had said the first time Xander tried to apply the lotion. Xander had nodded his assent. Clem’s hands had been cool, not as cool as Spike’s but cooler than a human’s. His skin was also soft and while Clem had been gentle there was none of the strange sense of soothing Xander had felt at Spike’s touch. He had hated it.

Each day Clem enticed Xander a little closer to the pool’s edge. Each day he talked the whole way through the walk and let Xander know he was there for him. Each day he also brought comics and then snack food to share after the walk. Xander had found those moments soothing.

He’d come to learn that Clem was a gentle and kind being. He also had sensed that Clem had been somewhat lonely too. Clem had been a little demon in a big demon world. Being the “sitter” for Master Spike’s Pet gave him status that he had never had before but what seemed important to him was Xander’s friendship.

Clem made sure to always take Xander to and from the suite in routes where they were less likely to be seen by other demons thus keeping Xander’s near nakedness from being an issue. Clem always talked to Xander like a person, not a thing. Clem was always nervous around Spike and Xander began to put himself more and more between Spike and the floppy eared demon.

That was part of the daily ritual. Clem would bring Xander back to the suite after their afternoon excursion and Spike would be waiting for them. He’d dismiss Clem, feed Xander and then gently massage skin lotion on after Xander showered.

Xander wondered what the point of the lotion was. The burn was fading. Yet, Spike seemed obsessed in making sure Xander didn’t peel. He was quiet most of the time he worked on Xander and he was infinitely patient. His touch was light. Xander bore it with clenched jaws. He hated how it soothed some wounded part of him. He hated it even more how his body responded to Spike. The vampire ended the massage the same way; he tucked Xander in and touched him lightly on the nose before leaving.

Sleep would overcome Xander then for a few hours. When he awoke Clem or Lorne was always there to keep him company the rest of the evening. Spike never returned and Xander didn’t try to find out where the vampire went though he couldn’t help but wonder.

Lorne had told Xander the game had been delayed until Spike had finished a security sweep. Xander had grunted in response. He hadn’t cared about the sweep. He had cared about the game though. He was conflicted on what he wanted as an outcome.

The third day was different. Spike was waiting for him as usual when Clem brought him back to the suite.

“How’d he do?” Spike asked Clem.

“Great, Master Spike!” Clem replied enthusiastically. “He walked right along the edge!”

Spike gave Xander a long look. Xander returned the look with his customary angry glare. Spike nodded.
“Tomorrow I want you to get him to wade in the pool up to his knees,” Spike said.

Xander and Clem gasped.

“M..Master Spike?”

“Is that a problem?” Spike asked Clem.

_Damn you! You're just as sick as your grandsire you over bleached whiskey soaked sadist!_ Xander thought.

“Well..its just that..well X..Xander’s still awfully nervous,” Clem said.

_It’s OK Clem, _Xander thought and moved a bit closer to the saggy skinned demon. Spike arched an eyebrow.

“He is…but he’s come along way since you’ve been working with him. I have confidence you can get him to do this, Clem. I know you won’t let me down,” Spike said.

Clem paled and then nodded his head quickly. “Of course Master Spike,” Clem said.

_Bullying Clem! That make you feel like the big vampire on campus?_ Xander wondered and glared at Spike. Spike sighed.

“See ya tomorrow then, yeah?”

Clem nodded and then gathered up Ante. He left quickly and barely managed to wave goodbye to Xander. Xander smiled back at the demon then marched to his pillow where he slunk down to his kneeling position.

Spike closed and locked the door behind Clem. He came over and sat in the chair beside Xander.

“Front and center,” Spike ordered. Xander looked at Spike but moved until he was kneeling in front of Spike. He looked up at the vampire.

“Look, pet, you have made good strides with the water thing. Clem’s been doing a good job with you. You get in the water tomorrow and not only will Clem get a nice little raise and access to more of the human stuff he likes but I’ll take ya to see Tara. Whaddya think?”

Xander narrowed his eyes and studied Spike. The thought of going into the pool nearly had him choking on air, but the promise of seeing Tara... He nodded.

“Don’t let me down,” Spike warned.

_Right or it’s time to see if Xander…or maybe Clem..can fly, _Xander thought.

Spike reached out his hand and touched Xander’s cheek. Xander used all the self control he had not to flinch back from the vampire. Still some twitch of muscle must have betrayed him because Spike’s eyes narrowed then he sighed before dropping his hand.

“The game has been rescheduled for the night after tomorrow,” Spike said.

Xander shrugged.

“I’m not going to lose you,” Spike vowed again.
Xander blinked and then shrugged again.

“You trying to tell me you don’t care?” Spike growled.

*And I thought you were a moron!* Xander thought as he blinked again.

“Dammit Xander!”

*Damn YOU!* Xander thought.

Spike sat back in his chair and glared at Xander. Xander returned the glare.

“Take your tray and go eat in the corner,” Spike finally ordered. Xander obeyed.

***

It was hard for Xander to decide who was more nervous, Clem or himself. They were down by the pool and both were just standing staring at it.

“I’m really sorry, Xander,” Clem finally said.

*Me too,* Xander thought as he nodded.

“You OK?” Clem asked.

Xander’s heart was racing. Rivulets of sweat were making their way down his skin and beneath his belt. Breathing was difficult. He nodded.

“Do you want to go slow or just get it over with?” Clem asked. “I mean..I hate taking off bandages so I just rip ‘em off. Get it over with quick…but I understand if you don’t wanna do it like that.”

Xander turned and smiled at Clem. He held up one finger.

“Huh?” Clem said.

Xander sighed and then used two fingers to pantomime walking slowly.

“Oh! Slowly!” Clem said.

Xander smiled again and nodded.

“You wanna hold my hand?” Clem said.

Xander blinked at Clem. *Is that allowed?* he wondered.

“M..Master Spike doesn’t have to know…and if even if he find out..well I’ll just tell him it’s what it took to make sure his orders were carried out,” Clem said as close to defiant as Xander had ever heard the gentle demon.

Xander thought about refusing even though a friendly hand was comforting. He didn’t want to put Clem at risk. Yet, there was something in Clem like he’d found a spark of courage he’d always lacked and if Xander refused him it might just put out that spark.

Xander held out his hand. A smile lit up Clem’s face as he quickly reached out and clasped hands with Xander.

“I won’t let anything happen to ya, Xan,” Clem said. “I can swim really good. I’m also your friend.
I know, Xander thought as he smiled at Clem. *I trust you.*

Then Xander took a deep breath. He turned and looked at the pool. It was large. He knew that. He’d walked around it the last few days. There was a reason why it was called the Grand Pool. He and Clem were standing at the tops of the steps leading down to the concrete area just before the pool. Xander exhaled and began to move down the steps.

“You know,” Clem began to talk immediately as they began to descend the steps. “There used to be chairs and cabanas all around this pool. Spike had ‘em taken out. Said he liked things simple. I think its just cuz he doesn’t want many demons to use it. Wonder why that is? You think maybe he sneaks out for a moonlight swim now and then?”

Xander let Clem’s voice wash over him as he concentrated on putting one foot before the other. Each step brought him closer to the pool. Each step brought him closer to the placid blue water and stirred up memories of liquid covering him, choking him and immobilizing him. Xander stumbled.


Xander turned and smiled at Clem. Clem smiled back. Xander took another deep breath and let it out before focusing back on the pool. He managed to descend a few more steps down before stopping.

“So then I was up three torties and two Siamese,” Clem prattled on. “Thought I’d hit the jackpot.”

Xander turned again and looked at Clem.

*You really gambled for kittens?* Xander wondered.

“What?” Clem asked as he realized Xander was staring at him. Xander shook his head and looked at the pool.

“But then, my luck changed,” Clem continued. Xander started walking towards the pool. He focused on Clem’s voice and not the clear water. One, two, three… twelve steps and he was now at the edge of the pool.

“Well I mean how could I resist a Sphynx kitten? I mean I had to go all in right?” Clem said as Xander put his free hand on the hand rail and put his right foot down on to the first submerged step leading down into the pool.

Xander hissed as the cool water surged over his hot foot. He clenched Clem’s hand tightly and fought to control his breathing.

“A royal flush!” Clem said. “Can you believe it Xander! I was wiped out! Not so much as an orange tabby left!”

Xander swallowed and stepped down with his left foot. Clem followed. The water surged up to cover his ankles.

“I think I ate canned tuna and crackers for a month,” Clem lamented. Xander squeezed his eyes shut and counted to ten.

“…so that meant I was back in business! Well just so long as I shared my tuna with her highness,” Clem was rattling on by the time Xander reached ten. He opened his eyes and move down another step.
“Torties! Prima donnas!”

The water was half way up Xander calves now.

“…though she was sweet. Cutest little litter of kittens you ever did see.”

Xander pulled Clem close and took another step down. The water lapped at his knees. Xander froze. A scream was building at the back of his throat.

“Xander,” Clem whispered urgently in his ear. “You did it! We can leave now.”

Xander turned and looked at Clem. Clem was silently looking at Xander. Xander nodded furiously and Clem led him quickly back out of the pool. Tears were streaming down Xander’s face. He did it! He’d waded into the pool. He’d made it out alive.

Clem led Xander back to the grassy area where his bag was. He reached in and pulled out a thermos.

“Time for a celebration,” Clem said and he reached in the bag and pulled out a packed treat of chocolaty goodness. “Milk and Ho Hos!”

Xander laughed and nodded. Clem smiled and opened the thermos.

***

Spike was waiting for them in the suite. He sniffed the air when they walked in and then smiled.

“You smell of chlorine, pet,” he said.

“He went into the pool up to his knees,” Clem said proudly. “Just as you ordered.”

Spike stared at Clem for a moment then smiled.

“Good. Clem talk to Lorne. I think ya deserve a raise…and maybe a room here at the Slayer’s End, yeah?”

“M..Master Spike..I…well..yes thank you!” Clem sputtered in shock.

“Take the night off,” Spike ordered. Clem looked at Xander then nodded. He gathered up Ante and left.

“Go take a shower, pet,” Spike said as he helped Xander off with his belt. “I’ll tell Lorne you’ll eat with Tara, yeah?”

Xander nodded stiffly and headed for the bathroom. Spike sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

After the pool the shower was easy. Xander stepped in, cleaned up and got out. There was no fear and no hesitation. Xander even found himself smiling. It was strange. He shouldn’t be smiling but something about being in the pool and coming out strengthened him.

He dried himself and strode back into the bedroom. A pair of slacks and shirt were on the bed, so was Spike.

“Thought ya might want ta wear a bit more when ya see Tara,” Spike said as he got off the bed and moved to Xander.

Xander nodded stiffly as Spike helped him on with his belt. For a moment, as Spike locked the front
of the belt, they were face to face and centimeters apart. Their eyes met and Xander thought Spike’s
eyes were as blue as the pool. Before he looked away, he wondered briefly if he’d ever have the
courage to go wading in those depths again. Spike sighed and stepped back. He handed the clothes
to Xander.

Once he was dressed, Spike clipped the leash on Xander.

“Let’s go,” he said quietly and led Xander out of the bedroom, the suite and into the private elevator.
Spike keyed the elevator. They rode down in silence.

Spike and the children did their ritual but it seemed as if Spike just wasn’t into it. His joy seemed
faked.

WAS HE EVER REALLY INTO IT? Xander thought. WAS IT ALWAYS JUST AN ACT?

Spike led him to Tara’s room and keyed it open under the ever watchful eyes of the Mofos. The door
swung open and Spike dropped Xander’s leash.

“I’ll get ya later,” Spike said as he gestured Xander inside. Xander studied Spike a moment before
slipping inside. The door shut.

“XANDER!” Tara cried and flung herself at Xander. Xander wrapped his arms around Tara and
hugged her close. Tears formed in his eyes and he held her tight.

She is safe, Xander thought. I can save her.

“X..Xander?” Tara asked.

Xander shook his head and held on tight. Tara returned the tight hold and then just muttered soothing
words. Xander began to cry in earnest and Tara let him. She rubbed his back and whispered sweet
words of comfort. Finally Xander let her go and stepped back. He looked at her.

“Oh X..Xander,” Tara whispered, reached out and wiped the tears from Xander’s cheeks. “What
happened?”

HOW..I DON’T KNOW HOW TO EXPLAIN, Xander thought and held his hands out in an empty gesture.

“It was Larry,” Lorne whispered. Xander whirled around only now noticing the green demon.
Xander angrily wiped at his face with his arm.

“L..Larry?” Tara asked.

Xander shook his head. She doesn’t need to know! Xander thought.

“The Resistance made a move to try and rescue Xander. Larry survived the attack,” Lorne said.

Tara gasped and looked at Xander.

“You knew him?” she asked.

YES I KNEW HIM. I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH HIM. HE BEAT ME UP EVERY FIFTH PERIOD LIKE CLOCK WORK FOR TWO
YEARS, Xander thought then paused. How did you know it was ‘knew’ and not ‘know?’

Xander studied Tara closely as he nodded slowly.

“I’m so sorry, Xander,” Tara said and she looked at Lorne. “Tell me.”
“What’s there to tell?” Lorne shrugged sadly. “Larry thought he saw an opportunity with his team and tried capturing Xander. Larry survived. Larry was tortured…”

And now Larry’s dead! Xander thought angrily and stormed to the other side of the room.

“Spike killed him. Spike tortured him and Xander was there,” Tara said softly.

Lorne nodded. Tara looked at Xander who looked at the wall.

“How long?” Tara asked.

“How long what, pumpkin?”

“How long did he torture, Larry,”

Long enough, Xander thought as he clenched his fists.

“A few hours,” Lorne said.

“And how did he die?”

Xander whirled around and looked at Tara. What difference does it make? he wondered.

“Spike...he threw him off the roof,” Lorne answered.

Tara moved over to Xander and put her hand over his heart. He stared at her.

“It could have been much worse,” Tara said softly. Xander jerked back in horror.

Worse! You act like Spike should be applauded! Xander thought. News flash! Larry...human being... former bully and soldier for humanity now dead!

“Xander,” Tara said softly, “I’ve been a slave to demons a long time. I’ve seen people tortured and killed for a lot less. They were tortured not for hours but days and their deaths weren’t quick but slow...horribly slow.”

So what? That makes Spike the Death Fairy? Good humans hope when it’s their time they get him to deliver their ugly and painful demise? Xander shook his head and stormed to another corner.

“Spike...he...he does what he can...he...care...”

Xander turned on Tara and shook his head violently. He pointed at her.

Don’t you say it! Don’t you dare say it! he thought angrily.

Tara sighed. She moved close to Xander and touched his arm. He jerked away and she tried again. He looked at her.

“This is an e...evil world Xander. S...sometimes b...bad things have to be done j...just so a little g...good will survive,” Tarasaid quietly.

If I’m the good that’s survived then I’m not worth the bad thing of Larry’s death! Xander thought.

“If...if your positions had b...been reversed,” Tara asked, “would you h...have done the same for h...him? If he’d been prisoner of a v...vampire and you thought you c...could rescue h...him would you try?”
Of course! Xander thought.

“And if... you f...failed... w...would you still think the attempt was worth it?”

It's not the same! Xander thought as he backpedaled from where Tara was going.

“W...would you h...have died to try and r...rescue Larry?”

But... I didn’t need to be rescued! Xander thought and then fresh tears sprung from his eyes. I was... OH Buffy... I was going to... Rescue wasn’t even on my mind!

“Xander,” Tara said. “Larry didn’t know you were safe with Spike.”

Xander shook his head. I’m not safe with him! he silently protested.

“He didn’t know what lengths Spike would go to protect you,” Tara continued.

Xander continued to shake his head. Tara wrapped her arms around Xander.

“Larry tried to rescue y...you. If your p...positions had been r...reversed you’d have done the s...same thing,” Tara whispered.

Xander nodded and hugged her tight.

“You’d be... h...happy he was alive... and w...well,” Tara continued

Xander nodded and sniffed.

“What Spike did was wrong... but... it was also necessary,” Tara said. “And in the scope of just how bad this world is... his w... wrong? Maybe it was the r...”

Please don’t say it, Xander silently pleaded and hugged her tighter.

Tara bit her lip and held Xander close. They stayed like that for a long time.

***

Spike’s day wasn’t improving when he got back to his office. Lilah was waiting for him. Bloody hell! he thought. How did she slip into my city without me knowing!

“Lilah,” he purred, “what a...surprise.”

“Spike,” she replied.

“Tsk...tsk,” Spike said as he wagged a finger at her before sitting down. “It’s Master Spike. You keep forgetting that. Yer bosses aware of yer memory problem?”

Lilah leaned forward in her seat and stared at Spike then said, “Maybe it’s Master Spike and maybe it isn’t.”

“What’s that supposed to mean, ducks?”

“Means Angelus got your tape and has a few questions.”

Spike picked at his fingernails.

“Granddaddy didn’t like it?”
“Granddaddy thought it was missing a few things…like a more prolonged torture session. More information.”

“Ah c’mon!” Spike said as he rolled his eyes. “Lar was a grunt! He gave up what he had! I wasn’t about to sit around and ask the same boring questions…listen to the same boring screams when I could be out having fun! When I could be out taking care of business.”

Lilah studied Spike. Then said, “Where’s your Pet?”

“Around,” Spike said. “A bit put off with him. He’s got a bit of an attitude problem since this whole Lar thing.”

“I’d like to see him,” Lilah said.

“Well lots of folks would,” Spike purred lasciviously, “but he’s still my Pet and I don’t share.”

“Have him brought to the office,” Lilah ordered, “now.”

Spike’s eyes flashed yellow as he leaned over his desk and yelled, “Yer ordering me around in my office you over priced tart!”

“Please,” Lilah added with a lifted eyebrow. Spike growled and then picked up the phone. He punched in a few numbers and waited a few moments.

“Yeah. Bring Xander to my office. We’ve got company,” Spike barked into the receiver before slamming it back down on his desk.

“Somebody forget their O positive this evening?” Lilah asked.

“Somebody forget how dangerous it is to piss off a master vampire?” Spike replied.

“I’m under protection from Angelus and Wolfram and Hart, Spike. You won’t risk breaking that.”

“I’m a member of the order of Aurelius. You never know what I’d risk. Look at our family history. Not exactly stable, ducks.”

Lilah paled for a moment and then shifted in her chair. There was a slight scent of fear underneath of her expensive perfume. Spike smiled.

“So why didn’t the old man come himself?” Spike asked.

“You know he doesn’t like to leave L.A.,” Lilah answered.

“So he’s sends his favorite shoeshine girl, eh?” Spike asked. “What else ya shine for ‘im, Lilah? Ya think yer next on his list of toys? It make yer panties moist knowin’ yer only one mistake away from being his next plaything?”

Lilah gasped then narrowed her eyes. “I’m not soft like Lindsey,” she said. “I don’t make mistakes.”

Spike looked Lilah up and down. “Ya look plenty soft ta me, ducks.”

“Here I thought you were all about boy toys now?”

“Bloke can like whiskey and a good larger.”

“Well I’m neither,” Lilah said.
There was a knock on Spike’s door.

“Yeah!” Spike shouted. The door opened and Lorne led Xander in by his leash. Spike’s eyes narrowed as he looked at Xander. Boy’s been crying, he’s upset, Spike thought and shot a glare at Lorne. Lorne shrugged slightly.

“Lorne,” Lilah said.

“Ms. Morgan,” Lorne said pleasantly. “I’m sorry I wasn’t aware of your visit. I would have greeted you personally if I’d known. Please let me know if there’s anything I can get you or provide to make your stay pleasant.”

“My visit was supposed to be a surprise. I’m sure you’ll know if I’m not completely satisfied. You may leave now.”

Spike growled. Lorne looked at Spike and the vampire nodded. Lorne dropped Xander’s leash and left.

Xander’s eyes went wide when he saw Lilah. He remembered what he’d endured his last visit. His emotional state was still raw from talking with Tara and he’d been as surprised as Lorne when he’d been ordered to Spike’s office. He looked at Spike. Spike looked angry. Fear coiled deep inside of Xander and chilled him. He couldn’t stop the tremors that started to race through his body.

“Xander,” Lilah said.

Xander locked frightened eyes on the lawyer.

“Hear you had a visit from an old friend,” Lilah said.

Shock slammed through Xander. She’s here about Larry! Xander thought. Angelus must have sent her! Dammit! Wasn’t his death enough!

“Xander?” she asked.

Xander nodded stiffly.

“Did you know anything about his plans?” Lilah asked.

Xander shock shown openly on his face. What?! How the hell could I… Xander looked from Lilah to Spike What the hell is going on? Torture time for me too?

“Xander!” Lilah barked. Xander looked back at her and shook his head.

“Pet,” Spike ordered, “Over by me.”

Xander moved stiffly and stood by Spike’s chair. Xander watched him the whole time.

“I wonder Spike…I mean Master Spike,” Lilah began, “did you shorten the torture session on behalf of your Pet?”

Xander paled and looked at Spike.

“Told ya, I was bored!”

“What do you think, Xander?”
“It wasn’t short, lady! See how ‘short’ you think it is when someone’s cutting and beating you!” Xander shook his head.

“You haven’t given him the potion yet?” Lilah asked.

Spike picked at his desk and shrugged.

“I’ll give it to him when I think he deserves to talk,” Spike said.

“Angelus…”

“Angelus didn’t make it an order or I would have,” Spike said.

“Was implied.”

“Which gives me leeway.”

“Be careful Master Spike,” Lilah warned.

Spike laughed.

“You! Yer warnin’ me? Got news for ya bird, I’ll be around long after yer an empty husk and Angelus has drained you dry and used ya like yesterday nose blow!”

Lilah stiffened.

“You’re not winning any favors,” she said.

“Don’t need to,” Spike said and then began to punch numbers on his phone. He pushed the button so it was on speaker phone. Lilah’s eyes narrowed as she heard the ring on the line.

“Who are you…?”

“Spikey!” Angelus voice boomed out of the phone.

“Sire,” Spike said smoothly.

“Lilah must be there,” Angelus said.

“The tart’s here and stinkin’ up my office,” Spike said. Angelus laughed.

“Well I was a bit put out, Spike my boy,” Angelus said.

“Thought you’d enjoy that bit of snuff,” Spike said.

“Was too short.”

“Torture’s borin’,” Spike said. “Specially when ya already have all the answers.”

“Spikey…Spike. Thought I taught you better than that,” Angelus said.

“Send me out for a spot a violence…let me wreak havoc and chaos. I’m your vamp. Do the slow dance of poke, gouge and endless questions….well…”

Angelus laughed again.

“So Lilah,” Angelus asked, “how are things in Vegas?”
“Spike is impertinent as usual,” Lilah said.

Spike growled.

“Don’t think he likes you,” Angelus said. “Wonder if I should give you to him for a few days.”

Lilah’s eyes widened.

“S..sir?”

“Well, you did forget to call him Master. Spike does stand on ceremony about the oddest things.”

Lilah swallowed.

“Forgive me sir. I meant to say that Master Spike is…well less hospitable and gracious than I had expected.”

Angelus laughed again. “Spike! Hospitable and gracious! Lilah…I think I need to adjust your…expectations.”

“Sir.”

“So how does Xan look?” Angelus asked.

Lilah looked at Xander.

“Shocky. He’s been crying recently. He’s had a lot of sun lately but he looks pale underneath it. I’d say traumatized.”

“Have to say, Spike,” Angelus said. “Xander’s reactions were my favorite part. Bit disappointed though I didn’t get to hear him yell and scream. Would have been nice to hear him beg a bit.”

“Thought the vial was a reward. Hasn’t earned it yet.”

“Well you have! Next time you send me an update like that…I want to hear Xander’s anguish.”

Spike nodded and replied, “Right.”

“Still, him on his knees…struggling…” the sound of Angelus smacking his lips could be heard easily through the speaker. “Linds and I had lots of fun watching that.”

Xander’s stomach rolled. The world spun.

“Down, PET!” Spike ordered. Xander dropped to his knees.

“Problems?” Angelus asked.

“Your commentary was a little too colorful for Xander,” Spike smirked.

Angelus laughed.

“Really…if Buffy could see him now,” the elder vampire said. “OK, Lilah. Pack it up and head back.”

“Sir?”

“Spike’s got the message loud and clear and you confirmed what I wanted to know.”
“Ange…”

“Lilah…do you really want to argue with me?” There was the sound of flesh slapping flesh and then the sound of a pained grunt. Xander pictured a gagged Lindsey on his knees and Angelus behind him.

“No sir,” Lilah said as she stood up.

“See Linds,” Angelus said as the sound of flesh against flesh resumed and became rhythmic. “That’s obedience. Maybe one day you’ll learn it.”

There was a grunted response. Angelus laughed and the sounds of rough sex continued.

“I’ll have Lorne show you out,” Spike said to Lilah. She nodded and then headed for the door.

“Oh uh…YES!” Angelus screeched on the line. “DAMN Linds! Still so tight after all this time!”

“Will that be all, Sire?” Spike asked.

“Well from your end Spikey! Linds here has a looong hard night ahead don’t ya boy?” There as another grunt and Angelus laughed.

“Bye Angelus,” Spike said.

“Todoloo,” Angelus said and the line went dead.

Lilah opened the door. Lorne waited on the other side.

“See she gets safely out of the city. Let me know when she’s gone,” Spike ordered.

Lorne nodded and Lilah glared at Spike. She turned and left. Lorne closed the door behind her.

Xander was still on his knees. He had his eyes clenched shut and his hands fisted. Spike reached out and ran his hand through Xander's hair. Xander jerked back.

“Pet,” Spike said softly. Xander locked eyes with Spike. There was so much fear, hurt, anger and borderline hatred shining in those dark pools.

“Xander,” Spike said in a whisper, “just hang on until Lorne gets back.”

*Why?* Xander thought.

Spike tapped his leg and Xander reluctantly crawled back to him. Spike ran his hand down Xander’s neck and urged him to lean against his leg. Xander obeyed the silent commands but did not relax against Spike.

***

Xander wasn’t sure how long he leaned against Spike. It was long enough he lost track of time. He never exactly relaxed but he did “zone out” for awhile. He drifted away from the hurt, the pain and the confusion.

He jumped when there was a knock at Spike’s door.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said quietly before shouting a subdued, “yeah!”
Lorne walked in the office and flopped down in the chair opposite Spike.

“She gone?” Spike asked.

“Yes,” Lorne asked.

“How the hell did she get in here without…?”

“Magic. Shielded her entrance. No one saw her.” Lorne answered before Spike could finish asking the question.

“Showy,” Spike said and sighed.

“Spike…”

“He was sending a message, Lorne,” Spike said. “I get a pass on this one.”

A pass? Xander thought.

“Next time…”

“Well if security does its job maybe there won’t be a next time!”

“Lemon drop…sooner or later…”

“I’ll deal with it when it comes. No sense borrowin’ trouble. We’ve got enough.”

What are you talking about? Xander thought and pulled away from Spike. Spike looked at Xander.

“Confused, pet?” Spike asked.

Xander nodded.

“Angelus didn’t like the way I handled the situation with Larry. Thought I ended it too soon. Was letting me know he was displeased.”

Xander paled. Angelus was displeased! What happened with Larry wasn’t…? Xander crawled away from Spike and shook his head. Spike sighed.

“C’mon, Xander,” Spike said as he stood up and walked over to Xander. He leaned down and picked up Xander’s leash. “Time you and me went for a walk.”

Xander shook his head.

“Not a choice,” Spike said and tugged at the leash until Xander was on his feet then ordered, “Lorne, bring the car around. We’re goin’ to the Luxor. Feel like a field trip. Want to see the mummies.”

Lorne nodded and Spike led Xander out of the office. Spike was silent as he led Xander through the casino crowd and down to the garage.

The Luxor? Mummies? What the hell? Xander thought and then shivered remembering his last run in with a mummy. I hope that they aren’t real mummies.

The limo was waiting for them when they arrived in the garage. Once again Xander was on his knees at Spike’s feet. Once again Spike’s unwanted hand was threading it’s way through his hair.

Stop it! Xander thought. Stop playing games with me!
They drove the strip in continued silence. Xander stared at the floor. The ride was short. The driver opened the doors when they stopped. They were in another garage. Spike led Xander out of the limo and through a different casino. This one looked like it was something out of a late night feature film. Everything looked like it was decorated by a fan of Boris Karloff’s *The Mummy*.

Spike nodded and smiled at those he greeted. He led Xander on until they came to a museum. It was the King Tut Museum. Xander looked at Spike. Spike looked at security.

“Want some *private* time with my, pet,” Spike said. The guards smirked. “Come here for a specific game. See we’re not disturbed.”

The guards nodded and looked at Xander. They grinned again. Spike tugged on Xander leash and they entered the museum. It was a replica of King Tut’s tomb. It was dazzling. There were clay pots, statues and assorted bits of furniture. Spike continued to lead Xander through the first room and on until they reached the room where the huge golden sarcophagus lay. Xander looked at Spike and frowned.

*What the hell are you up to?* Xander thought. Spike moved toward the far wall. He searched for a moment then pressed on one of the painted images. The wall swung quietly forward into the room. Xander’s eyes went wide. He stared at Spike. Spike smiled and he tugged on the leash.

Quickly the vampire led him beyond the wall. On the other side Spike hit a button and the wall swung closed. Xander looked around and it seemed like they were inside some storage area. Spike moved toward the far wall where there was a large door with a handle and huge lock on it. Spike keyed the lock then tugged on the handle.

The door was heavy but easily opened by the master vampire. Spike tugged Xander forward until he was at the threshold. There was the sound of chains rattling and a body moving. Someone flipped a switch and the room filled with light.

Xander’s heart thudded to a stop and his breath caught in his throat. He would have fallen to his knees but Spike’s arms wrapped around him and held him up. Sitting on a cot on the far side of the room with his feet chained and his arm in a sling was Larry!

Larry was sitting up and blinking into the light. He looked at the figures standing in the doorway.

“Larry?” he asked.

*Larry!* Xander’s mind raced. *Larry...you’re ALIVE!*

**Author’s notes:**

*Sphynx* are hairless cats with wrinkly skin.

At the time I wrote this the Luxor did have a [King Tut Museum](http://www.luxor.com/museum/) and in my universe the remodeling started in 2007 never happened.

The pool Clem and Xander have been walking around is the [Grand Pool](http://mgmgrand.com/pool/) at the MGM.
“Xander?” Larry repeated.

Xander pulled himself upright and struggled against Spike’s hold. Spike released him and Xander stumbled forward close to the cot. Larry stood up and Xander stopped inches in front of him. He stared in wonder at the man before him.


“Why should I?” Larry retorted shooting Spike a look of hatred. Spike rolled his eyes and Xander snapped his fingers furiously trying to get Larry’s attention.

“Cuz he’s been wracked with guilt and pain for days now over your death,” Spike said.

“Wha..he didn’t know?” Larry stared in shock at Xander.

Know? Know what? Fuck! Someone tell me what’s going on! Xander silently pleaded with Larry. Larry stared at Xander’s shocked face and then glared back at Spike.

“You’re a bigger bastard than I thought,” Larry said.

“Mum was married when she had me,” Spike replied drolly then patted his coat for a cig before he remembered his promise to Lorne. Jeez I need a fag, Spike thought.

Xander stomped his foot. Larry looked at Xander and blushed.

“Don’t have a cow, Harris,” Larry said. Xander rolled his eyes. “Look. Let me get this straight…you thought I was dead?”

Xander nodded. I saw you go off the roof! Xander thought and then another thought slammed through him. I thought I saw you go off the roof.

Larry stared at Xander’s shocked face and then glared back at Spike.

“Anyway, he smears this stuff on all my cuts and bruises. Tells me he’s left some MREs in the corner sans the ration heater. Guess he was afraid I might make some noise of my own. Anyway, he

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“Spike started dragging me toward the edge of the roof,” Larry began to explain. Xander turned back and focused his attention on Larry. “Wasn’t going to go down without a fight. Then…well I figured out the hard way bleach head over there was pulling his punches while he was sweating me downstairs. One punch and I was seeing birdies! Next thing I know I’m waking up down here with some red-eyed green demon apologizing and setting my arm. When I try to tear into him he lets out this unholy shriek…”

Huh? Description matches Lorne, Xander thought and arched an eyebrow, but never heard of him doing something like that.

 “…fucking worst headache of my life! Demon tells me to “behave” and “not be rude,” Larry stopped talking for a moment and shook his head. Then chuckled, “Never been given a lesson in manners by a demon before.”

That sounds more like Lorne, Xander thought and nodded.

“Anyway, he smears this stuff on all my cuts and bruises. Tells me he’s left some MREs in the corner sans the ration heater. Guess he was afraid I might make some noise of my own. Anyway, he
says my chain’ll reach everywhere in the room and the adjoining john but won’t get me as far as the
doors. Says he’ll be checkin’ in on me as much as he can…and that’s been my life until you showed
up.”

Xander looked at Spike. *If Larry didn’t go off the roof...* he paled at what he was thinking.

“Xan,” Spike said softly.

*Who! Who went off the roof?* Xander thought and pointed at Spike. Then made a tossing motion with
his arms.

“Lorne found him,” Spike explained.

“Found who?” asked Larry.

“It was someone who…not everyone has a red stable like mine, pet,” Spike said. “He’d been in the
arenas a long time, pet. Lorne made sure he went out peacefully. He was unconscious when he was
planted on the roof. In the arenas he’d have been beaten to death or torn apart while alive and
screaming.”

“You fucking bastard!” Larry screamed. “You fucking own this city and you let this shit go on!”

Xander closed his eyes for a moment then opened them again. Yes, he lets it go on, Xander thought,
because if he didn’t every one of those happy and healthy children in the green stables would be
more fodder for the arena or the people in the red stables would die screaming in agony.

“Harris?”

Xander turned and looked around the room. In the corner near the cot there was a small pile of
MREs. Some were opened and others weren’t. There was a light switch by the cot. He could also
clearly see the small bathroom connected to the room. There wasn’t a door, but it did have a small
curtainless shower, a toilet and a sink. There was a plastic cup and a toothbrush on the sink. There
wasn’t a mirror.

Xander looked at Larry then patted his own smooth cheek. *Shave?* Xander thought.

“The green demon…”


“The green *demon,*” Larry insisted as he reached under the pillow of his cot. He pulled out a battery
operated electric shaver, “left me this.”

“Oi! Didn’t authorize that,” Spike growled.

*You wouldn’t!* Xander thought and glared at Spike.

“You wouldn’t!” Xander thought and glared at Spike.

“Not gonna take it away from him!” Spike said. Xander grunted and looked back at Larry. He
pointed at him and made the “OK” sign.

“How? Well..other than being a prisoner of Spike…recovering from being sliced, beaten and
surviving on ‘Meals Refusing to Exit’, yeah I’m OK,” Larry said. “You?”

*Getting better,* Xander thought and see sawed his hand back and forth. Then he blushed as he
realized Larry was naked.
“Huh?”

“Think he just realized yer starkers,” Spike observed.

Xander nodded.

“Guess I haven’t earned clothes,” Larry said pointing at Xander’s open shirt and leather pants and suddenly starting to wonder about Xander’s relationship with Spike. Xander flinched and Spike growled.

“Xander’s my, Pet,” Spike said, “I don’t share.”

“That right, Harris?” Larry said bitterly. “You a good do…”

Before Larry could finish his sentence Spike was across the room in full game face. He had Larry by the throat and up against the wall.

“I may need you alive and healthy for my plan,” Spike growled, “but there’s lots o’ ways I can leave you in agonizing pain for the rest of yer long healthy life! Choose yer words carefully!”

Xander tugged in futility at Spike’s arms while Larry gasped and struggled. Eventually Spike released him and Larry sagged to the floor. He stared up at the angry vampire.

“Huh,” Larry said. “You almost seem protective of him.”

Xander pushed his way between Spike and Larry. He looked at Larry and thought, Don’t push it you idiot!

“I protect what’s mine,” Spike growled.

Larry looked at Xander.

“Is that right, Harris? You his?” Larry asked.

Xander flushed. He didn’t know what to think anymore. He looked at Spike and he looked at a living breathing Larry who didn’t have clue one what Spike had risked with faking his death.

Whatever Spike’s up to, Xander thought. He’s in deep. Way deep. Keeping and playing with kids in the green stables is one thing. Even hiding Tara could be argued as just another demonic power play…but this? The manuscript…he’s up to something big…and whatever it is it’s definitely not something Angelus would approve of…maybe something…

“Gonna answer him, pet?” Spike asked softly.

Xander looked at Spike. He was back in his devastatingly handsome human face. Xander searched the vampire’s blue eyes and saw only Spike. He felt the pull he’d felt after L.A. and he no longer had Larry’s death to hide behind. He sighed and reached up and tugged at his collar.

For now, he thought, for now I’m still yours and will play your game.

“Harris!” Larry yelled in shock at the confirmation of his worst suspicions.

“Pet,” Spike whispered in surprise.

But don’t you ever pull some thing like this again! Xander thought as he balled up his fist and pummeled it as hard as he could into Spike’s jaw. Spike staggered back and rubbed his chin. Don’t
“Right,” Spike said as steadied himself, “I’ll give ya a pass on that one.”

“Harris you hit him! Are you nuts?” Larry asked now suddenly worried that no matter the relationship Spike wouldn’t let a human get away with decking him.

Damn right you will Master Bastard, Xander thought angrily.

“But in my defense it was your reaction that sold that bit of stage magic to Lilah…to Angelus,” Spike said.

“Lilah? Who’s Lilah?” Larry whispered. “And what’s Angelus got to do with anything?”

And you don’t think I could have ‘sold it’ if I knew the truth? Xander thought as he angrily marched on Spike.

“Pet, yer not very good at lyin’. One look in those big browns and the jig would have been up.”

“Jig?” Larry asked.

So you just let me suffer! Think Larry was dead! Let me believe you were a mo…Xander balled his fist again.

“Pet,” Spike warned and took a step back. “You throw another punch and so help me yer not gonna like yer punishment.”

“Harris have you gone completely mental?” Larry asked.

Might be worth it Master Meathead! Xander thought and closed the distance on Spike. Blue eyes warred with brown eyes.

“Pet…” Spike said.

Apologize! Xander thought angrily! You didn’t just hurt me Spike…you betrayed me!

“Xander…”

Xander shook his head at the vampire and kept his angry and determined glare on Spike.

“There wasn’t any other way,” he said softly and then relented, “I’m…sorry.”

Xander narrowed his eyes and studied Spike. Regret was clearly seen shimmering in those eyes and something that had been wound tight and painful in Xander’s chest for days began to unravel. He nodded slightly.

“Will someone tell me what’s going on?” Larry asked clearly confused.

Xander looked back at Larry and shook his head. I can’t, Xander thought. I don’t even understand it myself. Spike cares…

Xander paused and looked back at Spike. There was still a swirl of emotion like a stormy sea in those pure blue eyes. …and for some reason the idiot cares about me, Xander concluded.

“Yer safe,” Spike said never taking his eyes off Xander.
“Safe and held prisoner,” Larry said indignantly.

“Sometimes being a prisoner is the safest thing ya can be,” Spike said.

“Whatever Stockholm scam that’s running on Harris won’t work on me,” Larry grunted.

Spike finally looked away from Xander and at Larry. He let out his own grunt.

“Wouldn’t want it to anyway, ya nit!”

Xander hid a smile. Larry’s *not so bad when you’re not on his bad side*, Xander thought. He turned around and faced his former classmate.

“When Willow gets him back, and she will,” Larry warned, “Harris will snap back to his senses.”

*Willow!* Xander thought excitedly. *She’s OK?*

Spike growled and Xander put a hand behind his back and brushed it against Spike’s stomach. *Down boy,* he thought.

“Nothin’ wrong with Xander’s sense,” Spike said.

“There is if he can’t tell you’re one of the bad guys…and it’s beginning to look to me like he can’t!”

Xander rolled his eyes and held up his hand palm out. *Stop! Just stop. Just let me enjoy the fact you’re alive before Spike kills you…again, OK?*

“Xander…” Larry almost whined. Xander shook his head. Larry snarled as Spike smiled behind Xander.

“C’mon, pet,” Spike said. “We stay much longer and the guards will get suspicious.”

Xander nodded. Then turned and looked at Spike. He frowned. *How does Lorne get by the guards with supplies and not have them get suspicious?*

“Pet?” Spike asked. Xander pointed at the MRE’s and made curved his forefingers over his forehead to look like horns.

“Right. Lorne’s got another way in…be more suspicious though if I was to go slinkin’ around back hallways and service entrances then if I just walked through the club, don’t ya think?”

Xander nodded. Spike had a point.

“Now wave goodbye and lets go,” Spike said as he headed for the door. He let Xander’s leash dangle free. Xander turned to Larry who was still frowning. He waved at him.

“Harris…” Larry tried again.

Xander shook his head. *I don’t know what he’s up to, but he’s saved your life Larry. He’s defied Angelus to do it. I gotta give him a little trust on this,* he thought.

Xander turned and followed Spike out the door. Once outside Spike shut the door and made sure it was locked securely. Xander looked sadly at the door.

“Ya OK?” Spike asked.
Xander nodded. As OK as I’ll be leaving a friend and comrade in arms chained nude in a small cell with nothing but an electric shaver and MREs, he thought.

Spike smiled and then led them back to the swinging wall. Once again Spike studied it for a moment and then pressed a spot. It swung open and they slipped back inside the exhibit. The wall swung shut. Spike tilted his head for a moment as if listening.

He looked at Xander and then seemed almost embarrassed.

“Uhm…pet,” Spike said almost apologetically, “guards have some pretty interestin’ ideas of what we’ve been up to back here.”

Xander rolled his eyes. Of course they have, he thought and sighed. They’re demons!

“You look a little well…I think you should at least look a little mussed before we head out.”

Mussed? Xander thought and then the refrigerator light went on in his head. It did more than light up his head…it lit up memories and desires he thought he’d made sure were dead and buried. They came roaring out of their graves and poured through him with a vengeance.

“Look…I know the last few days have been difficult…and this evening’s been a bit of a shock but we can ju…”

Shut up, Xander thought as he suddenly wrapped his arms around Spike’s neck and covered his lips with his own. Spike stiffened in surprise for a moment and opened his mouth to say something. Xander pressed the advantage and slid his tongue inside searching for the whiskey smoke flavor he knew was uniquely Spike’s. He pressed his body close and ran his nails down the back of Spike’s neck.

Spike groaned and suddenly wrapped his arms around Xander. Xander smiled against the vampire’s mouth. Spike’s hands wandered up under the back of Xander’s shirt and mapped out all the warm flesh hidden under it.

Xander kissed his way down from Spike’s mouth to his neck and back up to his ear.

“Pet,” Spike groaned and then ran his hands around Xander’s side and up his chest until his thumbs covered Xander’s nipples. They hardened quickly as if by their master’s command. Xander panted as Spike teased and tormented the sensitive nubs of flesh. Xander clawed at Spike’s back and the vampire growled. He ripped Xander’s shirt down off his shoulders and his body.

Xander threw his head back in blatant invitation. Spike lapped at Xander’s throat and bit the tender flesh with human teeth. It hurt and bruised and it lit a fire of searing heat inside Xander. He wanted Spike! He wanted him more then he’d wanted air when he was in the Tank.

Spike’s cool lips and torturous mouth worked their way down Xander’s neck and over his chest. He tasted and teased where his thumbs once had dominion before sliding down to mark Xander’s flat stomach.

Some instinctual basic part of Xander’s brain knew Spike was a predator and as prey he shouldn’t let him so near such a vulnerable part of his body with hungry teeth. Yet, the feel of Spike’s bruising bites forced his bound cock to grow more and more uncomfortable within his restraining belt. Xander groaned silently and slid his hands through Spike’s hair.

Spike took his time feasting and mapping out his pet’s sweet flesh before working Xander’s fly open. The musky smell of Xander’s want and need filled the air and Spike’s demon responded. He
suddenly shoved Xander up against the wall. He put his hands on either side of Xander’s head and his yellow eyes bore into Xander’s. He sniffed the air around Xander and moved in until just the heat from Xander’s body separated them.

“Yer mine,” Spike’s voice rumbled. The sound of it washed through Xander and more of his musky scent filled the heated air between them.

Yes, Xander thought as he nodded taking in the sight of Spike’s fangs, yellow eyes and ridged forehead. But you’re mine too!

Xander suddenly pushed back and the stunned vampire found himself against the golden sarcophagus. Xander’s hands were tearing at his shirt working and raking it up to expose bare skin and when they’d done it Xander’s hot mouth and hungry teeth were marking Spike’s flesh. Spike leaned back against the sarcophagus and let out a sound somewhere between a growl and a howl. He stretched his arms wide and offered himself up to his pet.

MY master vampire, Xander thought as he hungrily tasted Spike’s cool flesh. MY Master Spike!

Xander slid to his knees. The smell of Spike filled his senses and he needed more. He fumbled with the buttons on Spike’s fly and silently cursed in frustration. It took an eternity of moments for Xander to work the pants open but when he did he breathed in deep the raw powerful scent of Spike.

He looked up at the vampire with hungry eyes. Spike stared back down at him and with a feral smile Xander jerked Spike’s pants down freeing the vampire’s thick, heavy and erect cock.

Some part of Spike struggled for sense. Xander didn’t have to do this. He put a hand on Xander’s shoulder. Xander shook his head and let his hot angry need carry him forward. With tentative and inexperienced lips he tasted Spike. Spike groaned. Xander smiled and wrapped a hand around Spike shaft.

He wasn’t sure exactly what he was doing, but he wanted this. He needed this and he was going to have it! Xander began to work Spike’s shaft the way he had in that shower where Spike had helped him rediscover the pleasure of his own body. He wrapped his mouth around the head of Spike’s cock and began to chase the salty and smoky flavor with his tongue.

In his undead life Spike had many men and women. He’d had virgins and he’d had whores. His body had been played like an instrument by Dru and driven like a race car by Angelus. Yet, never had he felt as hard and out of control as Xander’s naïve blowjob was making him.

Xander’s hand was too rough on the delicate skin of his dick without some sort of lubrication. His mouth was too tentative and light at the crown and yet Spike was panting, growling and fighting to keep from thrusting his cock deep down Xander’s hot throat.

The heady taste of Spike’s precum filled Xander’s mouth and his tongue lapped at Spike’s slit for more. He worked his hand down Spike’s dick and with each growl and sound of desire he worked from the vampire Xander felt hungrier and more powerful then he had ever known.

He let his teeth graze slightly behind the ridge left behind by the absence of foreskin. Spike growled and his hips thrust forward. Spike’s cock filled Xander’s mouth and he struggled not to choke. He wrapped his lips tight around the hard flesh and sucked deep the flavor and taste.

Spike pounded his fist into the fake gold underneath him. Desire sizzled at the base of his spine.

“Xander!” he tried to warn. His pet only tried to take him deeper. Spike leaned back his head and howled as his release tore through him.
Cool musty seed tasting of Spike pumped into Xander’s mouth. He tried to swallow it around Spike’s cock and coughed and sputtered. He pulled his mouth back till only his lips were trying to catch Spike’s release. It sputtered out and dripped down Xander’s chin.

“Xander,” Spike softly cried as his hands buried themselves in Xander’s hair. Xander kissed and lapped softly as Spike’s softening cock.

Hands tugged him gently to his feet. Blue eyes stared into brown and then Spike was kissing him. His mouth was gentle and sweet; the counter balance to Xander’s rough and angry passion.

His tongue chased his own flavors in the hot cavern of Xander’s mouth before he kissed his way tenderly down Xander’s chin. He licked and cleaned his own spunk from Xander’s hot skin. He discovered he could get drunk on the taste of himself on Xander’s flesh.

Spike! Xander thought as desire tapered a bit even as his body screamed for its own release. His cock trapped uncomfortably within his belt.

Eventually Spike’s kisses slowed and then stopped. He pulled back to stare once again into Xander’s eyes.

“Gonna take you home. Gonna taste and tease ya until your nothin’ but raw desire and then I’m gonna make you cum, Xander. Gonna make you cum so hard and so good you’ll never cum for anyone else,” Spike said.

YES! Xander whole body screamed and he thought his dick was going to break the belt trying to swell to its full desire. He grasped Spike’s shoulders and nodded.

**Author’s Notes:**

Lorne can emit [high-pitched shrieks](#) painful to human beings.

**MRE** stand for “Meal, Ready to Eat.” It’s essentially field rations. The current (American) MRE contains a flameless ration heater which can be used to create a small explosive device akin to a dry ice bomb. The soldiers in the field have come up with many colorful alternative meanings for MRE including “Meals Refusing to Exit.”
Chapter 40

Spike led Xander out the exhibit and back out to the casino. He didn’t stop to retrieve Xander’s shirt, only to do up his own pants. He’d looped Xander’s leash several times around his fist and led him out shirtless and with his fly opened.

The guards had stopped, stared and sniffed. They’d been about to say something but the look on Spike’s face had given them plenty of reasons to keep silent.

Xander almost smiled as Spike led him out onto the casino floor. Yes, he was half dressed. Yes, he was covered in bites and scratches. He reeked of sweat and sex. Yet, he felt powerful, not vulnerable.

When they reached the middle of the floor with most of the patrons staring Spike jerked him roughly face-to-face. He claimed Xander’s mouth in a brutal kiss. Xander melted and submitted. He wrapped his arms around Spike and rubbed his body against him.

MY Master Spike, Xander thought. Spike lifted his head and his eyes shone yellow. His fangs were bared and his face ridged. Xander leaned forward and ran his tongue along the bottom of one of those sharp fangs. Blood welled and Spike once again captured Xander’s mouth. This time he sucked greedily and hungrily on Xander’s tongue.

Sounds of demon laughter and chatter had ceased. There was only the whir of gaming machines and electric lights. Xander’s skin heated with a still unmet desire and awareness of suddenly being the casino’s main attraction. Again he pressed his body seductively against his master vampire.

Spike once again broke the kiss. His eyes locked on to Xander’s. Hunger, desire and some other powerful emotion Xander couldn’t read blazed in those inhuman eyes.

“Whaddya all starin’ at!” Spike snarled never looking away from his pet. “I catch anyone or anything lookin’ at my Pet and they won’t live long enough to register it was the last thing they did!”

Xander cast his eyes down demurely and fought back a smile. Possessive much? Xander wondered in amusement as demon chatter suddenly resumed and fake laughter forced its way from a crowd which was no longer watching them.

“Yer MINE!” Spike barked.

And you don’t share, Xander thought and nodded. I get it! But would you please take me back to the suite and get this belt off before I break something? Namely my dick?

Spike coiled the leash one more loop around his fist in another sign of ownership. Xander didn’t resent him for it. He felt protected and more powerful then he’d ever had in this world of demons.

“Yer gonna be a good Pet and gonna beg and spill for me,” Spike growled.

Yeah…yeah, Xander nodded and squirmed as his cock was once again trying to hammer its way free from the chastity belt. Just quit with the promises and make with the ‘doing Xander?’

Spike looked away from Xander and looked over the casino. Not one eye, tentacle or antennae was
focused on the pair. Spike grunted and led Xander out of the casino and down to the garage where
the limo still waited. Xander was happy to follow.

The limo driver opened the door and Spike ushered Xander inside. He pointed to the floor and
Xander dropped to his knees. Spike took his seat and the driver closed the door.

“Hands behind yer back,” Spike ordered. Xander obeyed. Spike shook his head and his face was
human once more. He smiled seductively and said, “I like this new obedient streak in you, pet.”

Don’t push it, Master Arrogance, Xander thought as he arched an eyebrow. Spike laughed.

“Get between my knees,” Spike said.

Take this damn belt off, Xander thought as he crawled forward and knelt between Spike’s knees.
Spike leaned forward until there lips were almost touching. He ghosted a kiss over those lips and
Xander’s toes curled with need.

“Belt getting uncomfortable, pet?” Spike asked.

DAMNIT! Yes! Xander thought and nodded furiously.

“Good,” Spike whispered just before he ghosted another kiss across Xander’s bruised and hungry
lips. Xander groaned silently and tried to deepen the kiss. Spike pulled back.

“Be still…like a statue,” Spike ordered.

FUCK! Xander thought and clenched his fists behind him. He moved back into position and held
still. Spike leaned forward and once again began peppering him with the slightest whisper of kisses.
He started with the mouth and then moved on to other territories, eyes, ears and the nape of Xander’s
neck.

PLEASE! Xander’s mind screamed as his skin hummed and something inside him wound tighter and
tighter. He ached for touch. He ached for the deep searing kisses he knew Spike could give him.
Mostly he ached where he was bound.

Spike hummed and purred his pleasure while he tormented Xander. He could feel the tremors of
need in Xander’s skin with each delicate kiss. The scent of Xander’s desire was filling the back of
the limo and Spike inhaled it.

The drive back to the Slayer’s End was too short for Spike and too long for Xander. By the time the
car pulled to a stop Xander’s was panting. He stared at Spike with pleading and impatient eyes.
Spike’s cock stirred back to life.

The door opened and Spike led Xander out of the limo. He didn’t waste his or Xander’s time with
another floor show in the casino. Their trip to the elevator was quick. The trip to the top was slow
and agonizing as once again Spike gave Xander the order to be still.

This time he ghosted his finger tips over Xander’s skin while the elevator made its way to the top
floor. Spike mapped out every scratch and bite on Xander’s tan skin. He pressed his body close
behind Xander’s but not close enough so that their bodies were pressed together.

“I liked what ya did back in the museum, pet,” Spike whispered. “I liked the way your lips felt on
my cock and the feel of your skin on mine.”

Xander groaned silently. SPIKE! he silently pleaded for this wonderful torture to end…or maybe to continue.

“But I really liked the way I tasted on your skin. I liked seeing my spunk dripping down on you and cleaning it off your hot flesh.”

Xander’s breathing was heavy and the belt was almost painfully uncomfortable. He focused on remaining still though. He almost came undone when he felt Spike’s cool tongue draw a line straight down his spine.

FU…SPIKE! Xander silently screamed as the elevator came to a stop. So help me if you don’t…If I’m not…you’re skipping straight past Highlander right to Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone!

Spike chuckled and led Xander out of the elevator and keyed open the suite. He led him inside, closed and locked the door.

“Get yer pants off,” Spike ordered. Xander wasted no time in following that order. When he was down to only his chastity belt he turned and looked at Spike. Spike swept his eyes over Xander greedily. Then he moved past him and plopped in his chair.

Huh? Xander thought and looked almost angrily at Spike.

“Get us a beer, yeah?” Spike ordered.

Spike! Xander thought and arched an eyebrow.

Spike arched one of his own in answer.

BASTARD! Xander thought and stormed off to the kitchenette and pulled out a beer. He popped the top and stomped back to Spike.

“Looks like someone’s getting a little hot under the collar,” Spike observed with a smile.

Hardy har. har, Xander thought and held out the beer. Spike took and stood up.

“Maybe someone needs to cool off?”

Maybe someone needs to get this belt off me and make me cum like he promised! Xander thought.

“Face the window,” Spike ordered.

Spike! Xander thought in frustration.

”Pet, you do want to cum some time tonight don’t ya?”

OH! You sadistic..evil…control freak…VAMPIRE! Xander thought and stood and faced the window. Spike dimmed the lights. Xander rolled his eyes. Suddenly he could feel Spike behind him.

“Nice view,” Spike whispered in Xander’s ear. Xander groaned silently. He remembered those
I’d never thought I’d see the Slayer’s Donut Boy stark naked and absolutely still either. Not in my presence. Course ya weren’t completely still with me earlier, was ya pet?”

Xander whimpered silently. Those words meant something completely different to him now. He leaned back his head and bared his throat.

“Still, pet,” Spike ordered softly. Xander corrected his posture. He knew what was coming next.

Spike ran his finger slowly down Xander’s spine. Xander gasped and goose pimples peppered his skin. Spike! he thought.

“S’ good, pet,” Spike said then whispered in Xander’s right ear, “Whaddya see?”

A chill raced down Xander's spine. He focused on the windows.

"Ya see the lights?"

Xander nodded.

"How about you?" Spike whispered. "Do you see yourself?"

Xander nodded again.

Xander swallowed. He could see an image in the window. There was a tan semi-naked man wearing a metal belt. He wore a metal collar and had dark eyes. The man was tall, broad and lean with well defined muscles in his arms, legs and abs. The man looked tense and his cheeks were flushed with desire and need.

"That's pretty much what I saw when I walked first walked in and saw you, pet," Spike said as his lips brushed against Xander's earlobe. "As I said, nice view."

I'd like the view better if this belt were off and your hands were on my cock, Xander thought.

Spike rested his chin on Xander's shoulder. "Yer pretty, pet."

Xander shook his head as best he could. You're the pretty one, Master Tease.

"Don't argue," Spike said and kissed Xander's neck. Xander's scent and flavor were calling to him.

"Thought you were a nummy treat when Angel offered ya to me all those years ago...but now?"

Spike slid an arm around Xander and began to stroke a line from Xander's left nipple down to his to the waist of his belt. Xander started to tremble. Spike! Please! Xander silently pleaded and closed his eyes.


"Keep watching. This is a special occasion."

Xander opened his eyes to watch as his reflection trembled while invisible lips caressed his cheek and invisible hands explored the rest of his flesh.
"So yummy," Spike murmured against Xander's skin. “But still so warm, pet.”

Suddenly, Spike brought up the beer bottle and dribbled some of the liquor down Xander’s back. The cool bubbly liquid chilled his skin instantly and he hissed. Spike tongue quickly chased the rivulets and lapped hungrily at the taste of fermented hops and Xander.

“Mmm,” Spike murmured and poured and little more.

**FUCK!** Xander thought and lost his battle to be still. He clenched his hands into fists.

“Oops!” Spike said and then bit lightly at Xander’s neck. “Somebody disobeyed. Gonna have to be punished.”

Xander whirled around and looked at Spike. *You can’t be serious!* he thought, *isn’t this punishment enough?*

Spike grinned evilly and poured some beer on Xander’s chest. Once again he lapped at the liquor as it streaked down Xander’s skin. Xander gave a silent scream of frustration. Spike kissed his way up to Xander’s lips and kissed him deeply. Xander tasted beer, Spike and his own frustration. He sucked greedily on Spike’s tongue begging for release.

Spike broke the kiss and offered Xander a drink. Xander shook his head. Beer was NOT what he wanted.

“Sure? Wouldn’t want you to dehydrate,” Spike said and then put the bottle to Xander’s lips. Xander sighed and opened his mouth. Spike tilted the bottle and Xander took a long drag off the beer.

*Satisfied?* Xander thought, *cuz I’M not!*

Spike laughed then finished the beer. He dropped the bottle then grabbed Xander. Once again he kissed him. He feasted on Xander’s desperation and Xander pleaded his case with lips, teeth and tongue.

“Bedroom! Now!” Spike barked raggedly when they parted.

*Finally!* Xander thought and practically ran to the other room. Spike was right behind him and caught him around the waist when he reached the room. Spike fished in his pocket and Xander heard the jingle of keys. Xander groaned silently and tilted his head back.

*Please! Oh please!* he begged as Spike nibbled at his neck and unlocked the back of Xander’s belt. Xander wrapped an arm behind Spike’s neck. Spike ran a hand up Xander’s flat stomach and threw the keys on to the nightstand with other.


“Time for yer punishment, pet,” Spike said.

Brown eyes pleaded with amused blue. Spike kissed the tip of Xander’s nose.

“Up on the bed. Hands and knees, face down and I want to see that lovely arse of yours up high in the air,” Spike said.
Xander’s eyes widened. *You aren’t going to spank me are you?* Xander thought and his cock twitched painfully at the idea.

”Now, pet,” Spike said. Xander turned and got up on the bed and in position.

“The view in this suite just gets better ‘n better,” Spike mused as he undressed. 

*And this belt gets more and more uncomfortable,* Xander thought. Then the bed dipped with the weight of Spike as he climbed up.

*Spike…please,* Xander thought.

”Made you a promise,” Spike said as he began to trace Xander’s back with his cool smooth hands. Xander relished it.

*Made me several in fact,* Xander thought, *but right now only care about the cumming hard one.*

”Will always make it good for ya, Xan,” Spike said as he began to pepper little kisses on Xander’s tanned cheeks. “Will only take what ya give.”

Xander panted as Spike’s hands joined his lips in their exploration and adoration of Xander’s ass.

”Told ya ‘You’re mine to play with, pet. You’re mine to punish. And sometimes…sometimes I’ll do both at the same time,’” Spike said as he parted Xander’s cheeks.

*What…Spike?* Xander thought desperately and bit at the comforter underneath him as he felt Spike’s thumbs caress and touch his most intimate place.

“And tonight I promised I was gonna tease and taste ya and make ya cum so hard and so good, you’ll never cum for anyone else!” Spike said just before Xander felt Spike’s tongue slowly caress the most unlikely of places.

Xander gasped and fire surged through him. Spike’s tongue teased and tasted like he promised and Xander thought he was going to go mad. A small part of him panicked briefly, the feeling was almost like that of the Azora’s tentacle but then Spike hummed his pleasure and Xander was at peace. It was Spike torturing him into a madness he didn’t know if he wanted to recover from or not.

Over and over Spike ran his tongue up and down Xander dusky slit and around his puckered whole. Xander screamed silently and fisted the comforter. His balls ached and his cock struggled to swell.

Spike bit him lightly on a cheek.

”You know it’s possible to come while your cock’s still restrained,” Spike purred.

*NO!* Xander thought and shook his head, *please Spike!*

”It’s a unique sensation; a kick in the gut and an explosion of pleasure all at once.”

Xander panted.

“But that’s not gonna happen to ya tonight, pet,” Spike said.
Xander nodded thankfully.

“Know why?” Spike asked.

*Because…I’m gonna have that Dustbuster on stand by!* Xander thought.

“Cuz yer my good, pet, Xander…and you won’t cum ‘till I tell ya. Will you?” Xander groaned. He wanted to shake his head and deny what Spike just said but something deep inside of him rolled over and hungered for Spike’s command. He found he didn’t *want* to cum now without it.

*Damn it! Master Manipulator! Master Sex-on-a-Stick!* Xander thought and finally nodded.

Then Xander was silently screaming again as Spike’s tongue began to wiggle and caress across Xander’s hole. Xander pounded his fists into the mattress as Spike began to lap and work at Xander’s tight ring until it finally began to give under the assault.

Xander’s world started to go white and he focused on his breathing. He forced back his need even as Spike’s tongue worked its way deeper inside Xander’s opening. It felt so good! Xander couldn’t help it. He began to rock backward wanting that piece of Spike even deeper inside of him.

*Please…please…please,* Xander panted and began to fuck himself on Spike’s tongue. Spike purred his approval and wrapped his hands around Xander’s waist. He began to control Xander’s pace making it slow so he could enjoy the heat, the taste and his pet’s sweet tension.

Tears of frustration and pleasure began to leak from Xander’s eyes. His breath caught. His body was too confused to know whether to inhale or exhale. Xander’s whole being was wrapped up in one thing; release. He pushed back hard and Spike’s tongue was buried as deep as it could go. He held Xander still for several torturous moments while he tongue fucked Xander.

Finally he pulled out and then flipped Xander on his back. Xander stared up at him with eyes so dilated with need they were almost black. Tears still streaked his cheeks.

“Please,” Xander mouthed silently. “Please let me cum!”

“Punishment’s over,” Spike said and Xander grabbed frantically for Spike’s hands. He kissed them with passionate pleading.

Spike reached over to the nightstand and grabbed the keys. Xander’s breath caught.

“Remember, pet,” Spike said, “not ‘till I say.”

Xander nodded and focused on control. Spike unlocked the belt and then eased it down Xander’s legs. Xander immediately hissed and grabbed his cock. It swelled quickly and the need to spill was almost overwhelming. He panted and held back.

“Spread yer legs,” Spike said and then Xander almost panicked. Was he ready for this? He looked at Spike with uncertainty.

“Shhh, pet,” Spike said as he moved between Xander’s legs and then lay his hand gently on top of
Xander’s. “Only want what ya can give me.”

Xander nodded. Spike smiled and then nudged Xander’s hand out of the way. He wrapped his hand around Xander’s hard and aching cock and began a gentle stroking rhythm. He stared into Xander’s eyes.

Skin on skin was a little rough but Xander didn’t care. He was lost in the feel of Spike’s hand on him and in the blue of Spike’s eyes. Spike smiled and leaned down. He kissed Xander and Xander wrapped his arms around him. Spike released Xander’s cock and stretched out on top of his pet.

Xander hissed as he felt Spike’s hard cock brush and slide against his. He broke their kiss and looked at Spike.

“Wrap yer leg around my waist, look at me…and hold on,” Spike purred.

Xander didn’t waste time nodding. He only obeyed. Spike began to rub against him. Their cocks danced and slid across each other. Precum and sweat began to slick the way. Xander gasped and wrapped his leg tighter around Spike. Spike increased the rhythm.

This…this is fucking! Xander though dazedly, Fucking without penetration.

“Look at me,” Spike whispered. Xander focused his eyes on Spike.

“Cum for me, Xander,” Spike said. “Cum for me.”

The words were Xander’s very own private ‘Open Sesame.’ Something inside of him broke loose. He arched and bucked. His mouth opened in a silent scream of pleasure and his world exploded in sensation. He lost track of who and where he was. He was only aware of his long blessed release. It roared through and out of him coating his stomach and chest. Cool spurts of release joined his, but it barely registered. Xander came until he thought he’d pass out. Maybe he did.

When he was aware, truly aware of himself, Spike was kissing him gently and whispering, “Beautiful. So beautiful, pet. I…Xander…”

Xander looked at Spike and swallowed. Spike kissed him gently and then brushed sweat soaked hair from his forehead.

“You’re amazing, pet,” Spike said in a voice filled with wonder.

If Xander wasn’t suddenly so tired he’d deny it. He’s eyelids fluttered. The emotional events of the past few days and the rollercoaster ride of the day finally caught up to him. His body was cashing in its chips and demanding rest.

“Sleepy?” Spike asked still pressed close to Xander and still touching him gently.

Xander nodded. Spike smiled then kissed the tip of his nose.

“Go ta sleep, pet. I’ll be here when you wake.”

Promise? Xander thought sleepily as he fought to keep his eyes open. He found he needed to know Spike would be there with him when he woke.
“Promise, pet,” Spike said and Xander’s eyes drifted shut. His breathing quickly deepened and sleep claimed him.

“Ya really know how to bollocks up a plan, Xander Harris,” Spike tenderly whispered as he brushed another kiss across the tip of Xander’s nose. Xander snuggled sleepily against Spike. The master vampire lay down next to his pet and held him in his arms.

There was no use denying it any longer. He was deeply and dangerously in love with his pet.

*I love ya, Xander, Spike thought, and that could..has complicated things.*
Chapter 41

Something was tickling Spike’s nose. He growled lightly and turned his face to the side trying to snuggle closer to the warm sweet body next to him. Again, something soft brushed against his nose. Spike swatted at it with his hand and the tickle disappeared. He snorted comfortably and drifted back closer to sleep.

A sharp pain pierced the side of his nose.

“BLOODY HELL!” the vampire rose and sat up as a kitten snatched back its paw. Then it pounced backward and swatted at Spike’s toes. “OI!”

Huh...wha..., Xander mumbled silently as he sat up.

“Get this beast off me!” Spike shouted as the kitten wrapped itself around Spike’s foot and made a “kill.” Spike vamped out and hissed at the kitten. The kitten lifted its head, flattened its ears and hissed back.

Xander snapped his fingers furiously. Spike looked at Xander. Xander shook his head.

“He’s tryin’ to eat my toes!”

Xander leaned forward and scooped up the kitten in his arms who then immediately settled and began to purr. Xander frowned at Spike and started scratching behind Ante’s ears. Spike frowned at the kitten. The kitten narrowed its eyes at Spike.

The bedroom door flew open and a startled Clem stumbled forward.

“M..Master Spike!” he squeaked. “I..Oh..I didn’t know you were!”

“Obviously,” Spike sneered as he shifted back to his human face and then slid out of the bed. Ante began to purr. “You let that dangerous beast in my bedroom every morning?”

“B..beast?” Clem asked and looked around the room confusedly. Xander silently laughed and continued to pet Ante. Clem’s eyes focused on the human and kitten still in bed. He flushed. “An...Ante’s not a beast, M..Master Spike. He’s a kitte....YOU’RE NAKED!”

Clem gulped and turned his back quickly. He began to shake. Spike rolled his eyes and grabbed a robe.

“Course I’m naked. Got woke from a pleasant post-Pet-shaggin’ sleep by a demon beast from the ninth ward of Asloth’s hell!” Spike said as he pulled on his robe.

Gee...so much for privacy! Xander thought and blushed.

“I...just...well Ante always wakes Xander,” Clem said, “I’m mean when I’m here to take him to the pool.”

Spike looked at Xander. The kitten was purring with its eyes half closed. Its ears were cocked forward.
“Think Xan will need a shower this morning before ya head out,” Spike said.

“Yes, Master Spike,” Clem nodded and then quickly made to leave.

“OI! Take the creature with you!”

Clem turned around and quickly walked to the bed. Xander smiled at him and handed Ante over. Clem nervously returned the smile and carried Ante out of the room and shut the door behind him. Spike turned around and looked at Xander. Xander blushed.

“Don’t be goin’ all shy on me now,” Spike said as he approached the bed.

_Shy? Shy would be a more bright pink color…this? This is a more “Omighod what have I done” color of pink. Much darker,_ Xander thought and looked at Spike. Spike sat on the bed and smiled at Xander.

“A touch of the ‘mornin’ after’ then, eh?”

_Xander shrugged. Not real experienced here, Xander thought, not sure what to do. Most of my “morning afters” were spent back in the vault staring at the same four white padded walls._

“Well, how ‘bout a shower then? We’re both a bit ripe.”

_I think I can handle that_, Xander thought as he nodded and smiled.

Spike smiled in return then reached out his hand. Xander took it and Spike led them off to the bathroom.

***

The shower was relaxing. Xander almost snorted at that realization. _Who would have thought I'd ever find a shower "relaxing" again, he thought, let alone when I'm doing it with a naked Spike?_

Xander slyly looked to the left. Spike was busy soaping himself with a hearty lather and whistling. Xander bit back a smile.

“Soap, pet?” Spike said when he caught Xander peeking. Xander nodded.

“Don’t drop it,” Spike said with a leer as he handed the bar over. Xander rolled his eyes and blushed. Spike laughed and began to let water sluice over his body washing away the thick fragrant lather.

Xander swallowed and focused on lathering his own body. He tried not to think about how good Spike looked or remember how good he felt.

“Mmm…something smells good,” Spike teased as Xander’s hormones refused to be dormant.

_At this rate we just might as well dye me a permanent “red,”_ Xander thought as he flushed again.

“Need a hand?” Spike asked as he stepped closer to his pet. Xander shook his head and backed up a
“Ya sure?” Spike purred. Xander’s cock twitched and he bit his lips. No, he wasn’t sure. Spike took another step forward pinning Xander up against the wall without laying a finger on him. Xander’s breathing grew ragged.

Spike put his hand on Xander’s shoulder then slid it seductively down his arm until it wrapped around Xander’s hand still clenching the soap. Spike sniffed the air and then grinned. Xander’s stomach bottomed out and his dick went hard.

Fingers entwined and suddenly the soap was out of Xander’s hand and in Spike’s. Xander leaned his head back against the shower wall baring his throat. Yes, he thought.

Spike chuckled as he tenderly kissed and nibbled at Xander’s neck while he soaped and primed Xander’s cock. A guy could learn to really like showers, Xander thought briefly before all ability to think was masterfully short-circuited.

***

When Xander and Spike finally made it to the main room of the suite both Lorne and Clem were waiting for them. Xander went almost as red as Clem. Ante was busy trying to get under the lid covering a meal tray. Xander clapped his hands and Ante gave him a “who me?” look before jumping away.

“M..Master Spike…I..well I wasn’t sure I should wait or not so I called Lorne and…”

“I thought Xander would need a good breakfast,” Lorne said interrupting Clem.

Great! Xander thought. Does every demon in this town have to know when Spike and are..or have been bumping…ug…well their not really ugly..but…when we’ve been ’shaggin’’?

“Good idea,” Spike said and pointed to the pillow by his chair. Xander trotted over and sat down. Spike watched him go and felt the urge to drag him back to the bedroom.

To hell with Angelus...Vegas and everyone else, Spike thought. Just want one day with ‘im where it's all nice and cozy like this.

Spike sighed and sat down. He was used to not getting what he wanted, last night and this morning notwithstanding. He uncovered the tray then picked it up and sat it down before Xander.

“Be a luv and feed yerself this morning, eh pet?”

Xander looked at Spike and smiled. Thank you, he thought and nodded. Spike looked back at Clem and Lorne.

“Any emergencies?”

“Not yet, Master Spike. But it’s only a matter of time if we don’t get him a litter box up here,” Clem said seriously.

Xander nearly choked on his eggs and hid his laughter behind a napkin.
“I meant with the casino!” Spike growled.

“Oh,” Clem shrugged and scooped up Ante who was stalking Xander’s breakfast tray again.

“None, lem..Master Spike,” Lorne said. “Unless you want to count the game tomorrow night.”

Spike shook his head. “Not an emergency. That’s a plan.”

Lorne sighed. “Well the plan is on schedule. Vr’xkl’s people will be here tonight to go over everything and to negotiate what spell casters they’ll be using for magic detection.”

Spike nodded. “We’ve worked out everything on our end?”

Lorne looked at Clem then Spike.

“Everything’s ready,” the green demon said.

“What stakes do we have to put up?”

“There’s the standard ….wealth and property. I’ve also put out the rumor that you are looking for a lieutenant.”

“What?” Spike growled.

“That’s definitely worth gambling for, lem..Master Spike,” Lorne said.

Clem nodded.

“You still here?” Spike asked.

“Well I have to take Xander to the pool,” Clem said straightening up a little. Lorne smiled and Xander winked at the floppy eared demon.

“Hmph,” Spike snorted then studied Clem for a moment. “Right. Xander’s not going to the pool today or tomorrow. Want to keep him close ‘til after the game. But I think I can still use ya.”

“Yes, Master Spike?” Clem asked.

“Go out and mingle with the demon on the street. Prowl around the back allies and other fun places. Find out what the word on the low is. I want to know what they’re gabbing about in the pubs.”

“Yes, Master Spike!” Clem said as he tried to salute while forgetting he had Ante in his hand. The kitten squirmed, mewed and dropped to the floor. It raced under Spike’s chair and then swatted at the vampire’s ankles.

“CLEM!” Spike roared as he leaped up out of the chair and away from the kitten. Xander snorted orange juice and Lorne turned some shade of chartreuse while trying to suppress his laughter.

Clem dropped down to his knees to dig Ante out from under the chair. Spike glared at everyone.

“I’ll be in my office!” he growled. “Lorne, bring Xander down when he’s done…and make sure that
Spike stormed out of the suite. Lorne and Xander laughed in his wake while Clem petted and soothed a contentedly purring Ante.

***

So far the toss off in the shower and the kitten attack on Spike had been the highlight of Xander’s day. He rolled on his back and stared up at the ceiling of Spike’s office and sighed. He was bored. He almost missed the pool. He definitely missed the reading the comic books with Clem. Oh sure, he wasn’t supposed to be reading them. Clem read them aloud and Xander was supposed to only look at the pictures, but really, they were comic books! How could he not read them?

Xander rolled back on to his stomach and turned his head. Spike was playing some weird form of solitaire with a deck of cards. He’d been doing it for hours. First the vampire would shuffle the cards while staring at them carefully. Then he’d deal two hands. One face up in front of him and the other face down in front of him.

He’d study the hands and look at the remaining undealt cards. Carefully he’d draw one card after another and lay them face down in front of him. Then he’d look at the hands mutter or smile then start all over again with another shuffle.

*Is this how you practice playing poker?* Xander wondered and sighed again. This time Spike looked up from the cards and stared at him.

“Bored, pet?” Spike asked.

Xander nodded.

“I’m not going to lose ya,” Spike said firmly. Xander nodded again.

*I know, Master Excitement,* Xander thought. Spike smiled and tapped his lap. Xander made an exaggerated sigh but scampered off the couch and quickly climbed up into Spike’s lap.

Blue eyes and Brown eyes locked. For a moment the demonic world, the game and all the roles fell away until there was only Spike and Xander left. Their mouths met in a mutual greeting and acknowledgement of want and need. Lips and tongues danced and Xander was far from bored. Laughter rumbled through Spike and they broke the kiss.

“Ya behave like that tomorrow and I’m liable to have ta barter the whole city to keep ya!”

Xander smiled and shrugged. Spike laughed again and ran a thumb over Xander’s bottom lip. He fell silent and studied Xander for a moment.

“Ya really going ta be ok, pet?” Spike asked softly.

Xander studied Spike right back. *Sure! You betcha!* Xander wanted to think but couldn’t. The truth was he was scared and nervous. He didn’t want to see Vr’kxl again. He didn’t want to even think about the possibility of going back to being a bottle; so he hadn’t been.

Xander squirmed.

“Pet?” Spike asked a bit more forcefully.
“What? Xander thought and shrugged while turning up the palms of both his hands. *What can I say? Nothing about what you are doing tomorrow makes me comfortable, but I know you aren’t going to change your mind about it.*

“Xander,” Spike said. “I promise…Vr’kxl’s never gonna touch you again. Yer mine now, yeah?”

Yeah, Xander thought and nodded.

A knock stopped Spike from reassuring Xander further. Spike looked at the door.

“Yeah?”

Clem opened the door partway and peered his head around.

“Master Spike?” he asked.

“Wot?”

Clem slipped all the way inside the room and shut the door behind him. He looked around Spike’s office and then waved at Spike. Xander waved back.

“Clem?” Spike asked. “You found out something?”

Clem nodded. “Word is Vr’kxl’s has just come back from a trip.”

“A trip?” Spike asked.

Clem nodded. “Seems he traveled to a place called…um…let me think…oh it’s on the tip of my tongue. Give me a moment.”

Spike growled and Xander snapped his fingers. Spike looked at him and Xander shook his head.

“Uhm…Pel…no. Pir…Pill…p..pu…PYLEA!” Clem finally shouted excitedly.

Spike leaned forward suddenly and almost dropped Xander on the floor. Xander grabbed the back of Spike’s neck painfully to keep himself on the vampire’s lap.

“PYLEA! Are you sure?”

Clem nodded. “I remember cuz it made me think of piles..and I had a real bad case of those once. Never thought they…..”

“Clem!” Spike interrupted, “Anything else you remember?

“Only they said that Vr’kxl seemed to be real pleased. Apparently he bragged it was a very *informative* trip and that there was *no way* he was going to lose this time.

Spike snapped his fingers and pointed at the floor. Xander slid down to his cushion and watched his vampire. Spike picked up the phone.

“Lorne!” he barked. “In my office…NOW!”
A few moments later Lorne entered the room. He didn’t bother knocking. He took one look at Spike and almost wished he had.

“L..Master Spike?”

“Clem here said word is Vr’kxl just got back from a trip to Pylea,” Spike said as he stood up and began to pace.

Lorne turned a swamp green and sat down on the couch. He looked at Spike and then Clem.

“Are you sure?” he whispered.

Clem nodded. “That’s what they are saying. Seems he didn’t want to pay his house staff for the time he was gone so he forced ‘em to take the time off…without pay.”

_What…where’s Pylea? _Xander thought, _And why does the idea of Creepy Crawlie going there wig everyone out?_

“Do you think he knows?” Lorne asked Spike.

“I think it’s a given,” Spike said.

“Why not tell…”

“Saving it for leverage if he needs it,” Spike said as he cut Lorne off.

Leverage _what_? Xander thought anxiously. _Damnit! Spike! You promised!_

Spike turned and looked at Xander. His pet’s heart rate was up again.

“Xander, this changes nothing. I won’t lose you.”

“It changes everything, Spike!” Lorne said.

Spike hissed and looked at Lorne then at Clem.


“Y..yes, Master Spike,” Clem said as he looked confusedly between Lorne and Spike. Then he began to back out of the room.

“Oh..and Clem,” Spike said. Clem stopped and stiffened.

“Yes?”

“Good work,” Spike said.

Clem smiled, waved and Xander then left. He shut the door behind him.

“You can’t go through with this game, lemon drop!” Lorne said immediately after Clem left.
“I have to,” Spike replied, “and don’t think we’re so close that you’re immune to being reminded of your place!”

Both Lorne and Xander hissed.

“Well…forgive me Master Spike,” Lorne said with an exaggerated bow.

“Dammit green bean! “ Spike snarled. “You slipped in front of Clem!”

“It’s Clem!” Lorne yelled back.

“Yeah…Clem today…and who..what Zorn tomorrow?”

Xander’s eyes went wide and Lorne flared a deep hunter green.

“You know better than that,” Lorne said in a low voice.

Spike sighed and then plopped down his chair behind his desk.

“I need a fag,” he growled.

“You quit smoking,” Lorne quickly reminded him.

Spike growled.

“You know you can’t use me tomorrow,” Lorne said.

Spike nodded.

*This is about how Lorne helps Spike cheat,* Xander thought remembering the night that started it all. Remembering the night when Spike won him away from the Azora demon. *Lorne was helping Spike and now Vr’kxl knows how he did it.*

“Then I won’t,” Spike said.

“And you can’t use magic,” Lorne said.

“IT’s a card game!” Spike snarled.

“It’s XANDER!” Lorne yelled.

Xander snapped his fingers and looked at Spike. Spike looked at Xander.

“Pet, I’ve been playing poker a long time. I’m not going to lose.”

*How many famous gamblers have said that, Spike?* Xander wondered.

“You think you can charm Lady Luck like you charm everyone else?” Lorne asked.

Spike grinned and shrugged. “Why not? I’m a charmin’ fellow.”
I’m so gonna end up in the vault again, Xander thought and rolled his eyes.

“Spike…”

“Look,” Spike said, “go ahead and plan for the worst. Come up with a contingency plan…but the game is still on. Tomorrow night Vr’kxl is going to lose more than he bargained for and Zorn gets crossed off my to do list.”

“Spike…”

“It’s not open for debate, green bean” Spike said as he looked at Xander. *Vr’kxl hurt what’s mine. He’s going to lose and he’s going to lose BIG.*
Spike had been true to his word and kept Xander close to him all evening. Even though Spike had continued to be obsessed with his deck of cards he had taken a lunch break where he’d alternately teased Xander with kisses and food. He’d wound Xander up so much his pet didn’t know of which he wanted more. When he’d indicated his confusion Spike had only smiled evilly and promised both later. Xander had silently promised revenge.

The master vampire had tried to provide Xander with something to relieve his boredom while he practiced. He’d given Xander a choice of deck of cards of his own or a coloring book and crayons.

A coloring book? Xander thought and stared at the vampire torn between being amused and insulted.

“Doesn’t require any readin’,” Spike said slightly chagrined.

Xander silently chuckled and had chosen the book and crayons. Sure? Why not? He’d thought. First Candy Land and now coloring books, who says you have to grow up?

Xander spent the remaining part of the evening coloring plants and animals until near dinner time. One page gave him pause and caused him to grin evilly. It depicted a cute little kitten.

Vengeance! Xander silently crowed as he looked up from the floor to the desk where his master vampire was deeply engrossed in his mock game.

Revenge is at hand oh Master Agitator, Xander thought as he began to color grey stripes on the picture of the cute kitten in his coloring book. Then he drew in a small stick figure between the kitten’s paws. He colored bright yellow hair on top of the stick figure and gave it an obvious set of fangs. Next he drew yellow eyes wide in mock terror of the giant cute kitten. Xander smiled at his masterpiece. When it was done he stood up and sauntered to Spike’s desk.

“Pet?” Spike asked as he looked up from his cards and arched an eyebrow.

Xander held out the page to Spike and waggled his eyebrows. Spike narrowed his eyes suspiciously and took the page. He turned it over and studied it for a moment. Then in a blur of motion he was suddenly launching himself over the desk and at Xander.

“PET!” Spike growled.

Xander stumbled backwards as Spike pounced and they tumbled to the floor. Somehow Spike had managed to keep Xander from being hurt in the fall while still managing to pin Xander beneath him.

“Think that’s funny do you?” Spike growled again.

Xander stared up into the Spike’s eyes glowing gold with amusement and nodded.

“I think that just earned you a punishment,” Spike said in a low husky voice that caused Xander’s cock to twitch painfully in its belt.

Promise? He thought just before Spike swooped down and claimed Xander’s mouth in a kiss that left no doubt who was in charge. Oh yeah, the Master of Las Vegas had it bad for his Pet.

***

Xander woke the next afternoon to tender kisses peppering his nose. He smiled and opened his eyes.
“‘Bout time sleepyhead,” Spike muttered.

*Your fault!* Xander thought and then blushed as he remembered what had worn him out. He’d never look a melted chocolate the same way again. He couldn’t help but sniff Spike for any lingering residue.

“Ya got it all last night,” Spike said. “If ya hadn’t ya’d still be waiting fer release.”

Xander groaned silently. His cock twitched at the memory of how long it had been denied its fun and then how good it felt when fun had finally come.

“Oi! No time for that now!” Spike said.

*What?* Xander thought and blinked innocently at Spike.

“I’ve created a monster!” Spike chuckled.

*I’ve a lot of opportunities for a misspent youth to make up for,* Xander thought defensively.

Spike shook his head and tapped Xander’s nose. “UP!” he ordered.

Xander sighed and rolled out of bed. Spike followed and then took him by the hand. He led them into the bathroom where they showered. It was a long leisurely shower where Spike took his time soaping and cleaning Xander. It was sensual but not seductive. Xander couldn’t help but sigh and relax.

“I’m spoilin’ ya rotten,” Spike murmured from behind and next to Xander’s ear.

*And that’s a problem why?* Xander thought.

“You know what tonight is, right?”

Xander nodded. Tonight was the game.

Spike turned Xander to face him.

“You worried?”

*Beyond worried,* Xander thought. *Was thinking I was more in the neighborhood of petrified.*

“Pet,” Spike said softly and touched Xander’s face, “I’m not going to lose you.”

Xander nodded. He wanted to believe it. He tried to believe it. He only had enough faith to know Spike believed it.

“But if…” Spike paused for a moment as if the words were painful to think let alone say. “…if something should happen. If things don’t go as planned…ya know I’ll come for you. Yer mine, Xander. I won’t let you go.”

Xander stared into Spike’s blue eyes. He reached up a hand and placed it over the scar on his neck. He remembered the pain and ecstasy of Spike feeding from him. He felt the water sluicing over his body. He breathed in deep the scent of their bodies close together and remembered the feel of Spike’s hands and mouth on his most secret places.

Whatever happened Spike had marked Xander in the flesh. He’d undone him and remade him. He was Spike’s. Xander nodded.
It's what I'll be holding on to, he thought.

Spike wrapped his arms around Xander and pulled him close. They kissed tenderly and finished their shower.

***

In a scene eerily familiar to his first night with Spike there was a crowd of people waiting in the main suite when they excited from the bedroom. Xander looked at Spike.

“Pullin’ out all the stops, Pet,” Spike said as he stripped Xander’s towel out of his hands and away from his body. “Gonna drive up the value. He wants to play for you? I’m gonna make it hurt.”

And so that's why I'm getting the Rocky Horror vibe here? Xander thought.

“Let’s move it people!” Spike barked and an arched an eye brow. Xander rolled his eyes and stood still.

The orange demon from Xander’s first night rushed forward. It snapped it’s scaly fingers and human assistance positioned themselves around Xander. The demon looked at Spike.

“With your permission ssire,” it hissed.

Spike growled but nodded. Xander felt hands on his arms and legs. He allowed his body to be moved and positioned so his arms were straight out away from his body and his legs were wide apart. Then he fought to hold still as the assistants began to brush a golden dust all over his body.

That tickles! Xander thought and squirmed as the slaves brushed the golden powder under his arms.

“Hold still, Pet!” Spike shouted. Xander glared at Spike and held still. Like to see you hold still through this, blondie!Xander thought and then blushed when he realized the slaves carefully picked up his cock and began to powder it.

Spike snarled and the slave holding Xander’s dick trembled but continued to paint Xander’s skin with the dust. Another slave began to dust Xander’s face. He breathed in the dust to his mouth. It was sweet, like honey. He shot another look at Spike who was in full vampire mode glaring at all those who still touched him.

Hey! Your idea, buddy! Xander thought.

“Enough!” Spike finally shouted. The slaves immediately bowed and backed away from Xander. Spike moved forward and stared at Xander for a moment.

What? Xander thought then Spike snapped his fingers. One of the slaves handed Spike a pair of black leather pants. Spike helped Xander into those as well.

Xander grunted as Spike fastened the pants. Wouldn't it have just been easier to paint them on? Xander thought realizing these were tighter than any pair of pants he’d worn yet. No need for the belt tonight! Pants are snug enough!

When the pants were fastened Spike slid behind Xander and ran his hands possessively over his pet’s ass and down his legs.

You know I don’t think there’s anyone here who doesn’t get it, Xander thought. I’m yours.

Then Spike’s nimble fingers began moved over to Xander chest. They began to work the nipple ring.
Xander groaned silently as his sensitive nub of flesh hardened and his bound cock twitched. Then to Xander’s surprise Spike unclasped the ring. He worked the sapphire off.

A slave rushed forward with a little box. On it was a ruby bead and matching ruby earring.

*Time for an upgrade,* Xander thought as Spike replaced the sapphire on his nipple ring with the ruby and then exchanged the earrings.

Spike stepped back away from Xander then walked around him. He examined him from all sides then picked up a red silk shirt a slave was holding. He slipped it on to his pet then examined him again. He picked up a dust brush and dusted Xander’s left nipple again covering up the smudges left when he changed the stone.

“We’ll save the makeup for after breakfast,” Spike finally declared.

*Makeup, Master Frankenfurter?* Xander thought.

***

*Rocky Horror was right,* Xander thought as he followed Spike into the casino. He’d caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror and he wished he’d hadn’t. His pants were obscenely tight. His hair was styled to look perfectly rumpled as if fingers had been busy running through it while his mouth had been busy doing something else.

*Let’s not even think about the mouth!* Xander thought as he remembered the sheen of lip gloss coating his lips making them look wet, plump and shiny. Their shine competed with the glitter in the gold dust coating every inch of his skin. The worst though was his eyes.

Xander closed his eyes. His lids felt heavy to him. He’d never worn mascara before tonight. He opened his eyes and kept in step with Spike. Not only was he wearing mascara but he was wearing eyeliner. Xander’s eyes were not to be missed. They looked impossibly wide, dark and yet somehow innocent. They were as striking as the rubies flashing on his skin in the bright casino lights.

Xander sighed. He hadn’t dared fight or protest the makeup. Spike had been in “Master Spike” mode from the moment he’d whipped Xander’s towel off in front the orange demon and his slaves. Xander sighed again and Spike turned his head to look at Xander. He narrowed his eyes. Xander flushed and focused back on what was going on and not his looks.

The crowd in the casino was as large as Xander had ever seen it, but it parted quickly and easily as Spike strode through. Xander followed closely behind. Eventually Spike led Xander to a table setup on a slight stage. Lorne was already there waiting for them. Spike slid into a chair by Lorne and pointed to the pillow by his feet. Xander dropped to his knees.

“They here yet?” Spike asked Lorne.

“Momentarily,” Lorne answered anxiously.

“Sumthin’ yer not tellin’ me?” Spike asked.

“Seems they brought back a visitor from Pylea,” Lorne sighed. Spike arched an eyebrow. “My brother…Numfar.”

Spike nodded then said, “How do ya feel about fratricide?”

“Spike!” Lorne shouted.
“Wot?”

“I don’t think I have to do anything so…extreme,” Lorne said.

“Lorne I’m no…”

“Let me handle Numfar,” Lorne said. “Really, he’s a deck shy of an ace or two. I can handle him.”

Spike studied the green demon for a moment then nodded.

“Anything else I should know about?”

“Can’t think of anything.”

“Everything’s ready then?” Spike asked referring not just to the game but to Tara.

“Yes,” Lorne said.

Spike looked around. The crowd was gathering close to the stage. Spike’s handpicked minions were keeping them bagged. Those who pushed it or didn’t get the message quickly found themselves on the wrong end of a battleaxe. Spike smiled. Angry vampires wielding battleaxes were very intimidating.

A new murmur went through the crowd. Heads, tentacles, antennae and other various body parts turned towards the entrance. Vr’xkl and his entourage were making their way to the casino.

“Show time,” Lorne whispered.

***

Xander paled when he saw the Azora demon. Unwanted and unbidden memories threatened to overwhelm him. He grew pale under the gold glitter dust on his skin. His eyes stood out even starker. Spike’s hand fleetingly caressed the scar on Xander’s neck before the vampire stood.

“Vr’xkl,” Spike greeted the other demon. “I’m glad you could make it.”

The Azora demon gurgled something in reply. Spike laughed hollowly. Then he looked at the strange new demon with Vr’xkl.

“Yer new, mate,” Spike said. “I make a point to know who comes into my town…and I don’t know you.”

“Lord Spike,” Lorne quickly said, “May I introduce you to my brother, Numfar.”

“Ya think being Lorne’s brother means ya can come and go in my town without so much as a ‘how do ya do?’” Spike snarled and the large Pylean backed up.

“M..my Lord Spike,” Zorn said as Vr’xkl gurgled, “no slight was meant. Numfar has just recently arrived and Vr’xkl wished it to be a surprise for your assistant Lorne.”

“A reunion then!” Spike said almost too cheerily. Numfar nodded eagerly. “Well, I wouldn’t want you to waste it here!”
“Master Spike?” Lorne asked.

“How long has it been since you’ve seen your brother?” Spike asked.

“Years…”

“Well than I insist you go and have a few drinks! Take in a show! Have some fun!”

“But my Lo…” Zorn started to say.

“I really do insist,” Spike growled. Numfar swallowed and Lorne shot Spike a worried look before nodding. Xander stared at Spike. “But first let’s get the mojo out of the way.”

Lorne nodded.

“Ig vr mrm str,” Vr’xkl clicked.

Spike clapped his hands. Robed figures stepped forth out of the crowd. They formed a circle around the stage. Xander looked at Lorne. Lorne smiled reassuringly at Xander. Tara would start her spell the moment she felt the magic being cast by the ritual.

The robed figures began to chant and an acrid smell suddenly filled the room. An eerie blue light sparked and over for several moments before suddenly showering over the beings at the table. Even though Xander wasn’t a wizard or a witch he could feel the magic in the air and he shivered.

The chanting stopped and the robed figures withdrew. Xander hoped it had been enough time for Tara to do her spell.

“Right then,” Spike growled and shook himself. "No magics at the table."

“Brother,” Lorne said as he made a sweeping ‘let’s go motion’ with his hand. Numfar bowed quickly to Spike and then left the stage. Lorne followed and soon the two demons disappeared in the crowd.

Vr’xkl was gurgling and squeaking loudly. Zorn flushed a muddy grey.

“Wot? Ya don’t want ta play now?” Spike said and then tapped his leg. Xander somehow managed to find the strength to stand. He kept his eyes on Spike and tried to forget the Azora was there. Spike’s hand reached out and pulled Xander snuggly to the vampire. Spike nuzzled Xander’s neck. Chills of desire blended with chills of fear and Xander trembled. Another murmur made its way through the crowd.

“Ni Va!” Vr’xkl warbled. Spike chuckled against Xander’s skin.

“Only if ya win ‘im back,” Spike said as he slid a hand down Xander’s stomach and played with the top button on Xander’s fly. “And who says I’m gonna offer him up?”

Vr’xkl gurgled something else and sat down. Zorn took up a sit behind him. Spike laughed and pointed back down to the pillow. Xander dropped gratefully to his knees. He kept his eyes locked on the floor and concentrated on keeping the bile at the back of his throat from going any higher.

*Spike…I can’t…please…don’t lose me* Xander desperately thought as the vampire snapped his fingers. A minion wearing the uniform of another casino stepped out of the crowd and onto the stage.

“Acceptable as dealer?” Spike asked. Vr’xkl gurgled.
“If I can examine the deck,” Zorn replied.

Spike nodded. The dealer drew out an unopened deck of cards. Zorn watched him tear off the cellophane making sure that the seal was unbroken. The minion handed the deck to Zorn who examined the deck briefly before handing it back. The minion did the same for Spike. Spike examined the deck and handed it back to the dealer. The dealer then cleared the debris from the table and handed it to a slave who took it away.

Another slave moved forward and knelt.

“Anything to drink before we get started?” Spike asked.

Vr’xkl gurgled something and the crowded parted. Xander began to tremble again as he saw one of the blue demons from the vault lead a pale naked man to the table.

“Vr’xkl has brought his own bottle, Master Spike,” Zorn said as the man took up position behind the Azora. Xander didn’t want to look at the man’s face but he couldn’t help it. He didn’t recognize him, but he recognized the look. His eyes were vacant and unfocused. He didn’t seem to react at all as one of Vr’xkl’s tentacles coiled around his cock and began to writhe.

Spike tapped his leg. On autopilot Xander crawled up into Spike’s lap. He buried his face in Spike’s neck.

“Don’t mind at all,” Spike sneered then waved the kneeling slave away.

TBC
Chapter 43

Xander didn’t pay much attention to the first few hands. He knew they were playing seven card stud with no wild cards and no jokers. He knew various stakes had already been anted up into the pot. Spike had been up and Spike had been down. Xander also knew somewhere along the line the Azora had “tapped” his bottle.

Thankfully he’d been kneeling by Spike and could bury his face against the vampire’s leg as he tried to block out the images and his own memories. When the musky scent of sex briefly filled the air Xander had gagged. Only the cool feel of Spike’s fingers against the scars on his neck had kept Xander from retching while the Azora gurgled its appreciation.

*I’ll break if I go back this time*, Xander had thought and wrapped his hand around Spike’s ankle.

The evening wore on and it slowly dawned on Xander that Spike was losing more than he was winning. The realization was slow. Xander’s fears and Spike’s distraction techniques had been good at hiding the truth from Xander.

Every time Spike had lost a big pot he’d tapped his leg and then made a big show of rendering Xander senseless with teasing touches. Xander’s shiny lip gloss had long been smeared away from his lips. Spike’s fingerprints smudged and dotted Xander’s the gold powder on Xander’s skin. His neck was slightly purple from the nibbles and bites with which Spike had peppered it. While his dick was trapped in the tight leather pants, his musky scent of want wasn’t and Xander knew Spike could smell it.

It had taken Xander awhile to figure out Spike was losing, and losing bad. It wasn’t until Vr’xkl had warbled loudly and Zorn bowed that Xander had somehow shaken himself from the sensual spell Spike had put him under to pay attention.

“Vr’xkl looks forward to serving as your lieutenant,” Zorn said.

Xander’s scent of want had swiftly changed to that of a scent of fear at those words. He looked at Spike.

“I’m sure his service will be long remembered,” Spike replied then looked at Xander. “Yer spoilt, Pet!”

The crowd laughed and the Azora squeaked. Xander blinked. Spike snapped his fingers and Xander slid to his knees.

The dealer dealt the first cards of the next round. Each player received their two cards down and their one card up. Vr’xkl card up was the seven of clubs. Spike’s was the nine of spades.

“Oi! Think I want ya attendin’ ta me this round!” Spike barked.

Vr’xkl gurgled and called Spike’s bet. The “fourth street” was dealt; one card face up. Vr’xl card was the seven of diamonds. The Azora warbled and clicked cheerily. Spike’s card was the jack of spades.

Xander jumped to his feet quickly and scrambled to stand behind Spike while the cards. *Please tell me you have a plan, Master Mendacity!* Xander thought as he began to run his fingers through Spike’s hair to work the vampire’s scalp. He tried to look at the vampire’s cards but Spike kept them face down on the table and out of sight.
Vr’xkl gurgled and pushed a large stack of chips into the middle of the table. Spike peeked at his cards, looked at the cards on the table then shoved a matching stack of chips into the center of the table. The crowd rumbled with excitement.

The dealer dealt the “fifth street”. Vr’xkl’s card was the seven of hearts.

“Three of a kind showing,” Zorn said softly.

The dealer dealt Spike’s card. Spike had a ten of hearts face up.

Vr’xkl clicked and chittered. This time it shoved in two scrolls into the center of the table. Spike sighed. He looked at his cards again then threw a chit out on to the growing pile.

“Call with the seer’s eyes. That’s the marker for ‘em,” Spike said.

*Spike, what are you doing?* Xander wondered.

The dealer dealt the “sixth street.” Vr’xkl’s card was the two of clubs and Spike’s was the jack of clubs.

“Vr’xkl still has the high hand with three of a kind. His bet,” the dealer said.

The Azora pushed in two chits and a stack of chips. It gurgled at Spike. Spike looked at his cards. He looked at the table. He took a deep unneeded breath. He matched the bet.

The dealer dealt the seventh and final card face down. Spike watched impassively as Vr’xkl picked up the card.

“Ix nrg grl,” Vr’xkl said as it pushed a globe into the center of the table.

Spike leaned his head back against Xander’s stomach and studied Vr’xkl. The Azora began to pulse the tentacle snaked up between its human’s legs.

“I’m tired,” Spike said abruptly.

*Huh?* Xander thought.

“Master Spike?” Zorn asked.

“Let’s just cut to the chase shall we?” Spike said.

“Xqrl gr?” Vr’xkl said.

“How about we go all in?” Spike said. “This final card…winner takes all.”

“Take all, Master Spike?” Zorn asked. “Including…?”

“Including…,” Spike paused and then turned to look at Xander. Xander froze and Spike’s eyes swept slowly up and down Xander’s body. This time Spike’s look didn’t stir fire but ice. Xander paled.

“Including…about 168 pounds of flesh,” Spike intoned. The crowded murmured and twittered. Xander could hear the side bets going on and yet it was as if it were all far away.

*He’s really doing it!* A part of Xander thought while another part denied it. *He’s really going to gamble with me…and he hasn’t even looked at his last card!*
“Ix ngr nl,” Vr’xkl said.

“Put his collar on the table,” Zorn said, “and the bet is accepted.”

“Lean down,” Spike ordered.

NO! Xander silently screamed and pleaded with Spike with his eyes. Please! You promised!

Xander leaned back and looked frantically around for Lorne. The crowd murmured and Spike grabbed Xander’s leash and yanked him down hard.

“Think very carefully, Pet. Disobedience will be punished by whoever wins this hand,” Spike growled then whispered a word against Xander’s collar. The collar fell away from his neck. Xander gasped. Hatred, fear and betrayal surged through him. They were the only things keeping him on his feet. Spike casually threw Xander’s collar and leash into the middle of the table. He smiled and then pushed his remaining pile of chips and chips into the center as well.

The noise from the crowd was almost deafening. Vr’xkl gurgled and then used a tentacle to push all of his winnings into the center of the table.

The dealer motioned for quiet. Vr’xkl reached out a tentacle and flipped over his final card; four of clubs. He flipped over his first two cards as well; a three and nine of hearts.

“Vr’xkl has a three of a kind,” the dealer said. All eyes, antennae and other various demon parts focused on Spike.

Spike cocked his head to the side, gave a half smile and flipped over his final card. He never looked at it. He’s eyes remained fixed on the Azora as he flipped over his other two cards; an eight of spades and king of clubs.

“Queen of hearts,” Zorn whispered.

Eight, nine, ten, jack queen...a king even...a straight! Xander thought as his heart stopped in mid-beat between hate and something equally powerful.

Xander’s former master made a strange choking sound he’d never heard before. It slid its tentacles away from its human and began to undo the “bottles” collar.

“Uh-huh,” Spike said as suddenly sprung to his feet. Xander backed up.

“Master Sp…?” Zorn started to ask.

Before Zorn could finish his question Spike spun around and grabbed an axe from one of his minions. He swung it in a wide arch and then slammed it down into one of Vr’xkl’s tentacles. The Azora emitted a loud screeching sound.

“I said I wanted 168 pounds of flesh! Didn’t specify I wanted human flesh, did I?” Spike said as he swung and severed a second of the Azora’s seven tentacles. The Azora stumbled back and tried to get away from the angry vampire but was hindered by the human behind him who followed its training and remained absolutely still. Zorn was also a hindrance as he tried to make sure he didn’t get hit by the axe as well.

“I think one more ought to do it,” Spike said as he swung the axe a third time and lopped off another tentacle. The Azora was mewling on the floor now. Grey ichor was fountaining from three stumps on its body.
Spike reached down and picked up the three long tentacles. One uncoiled limply from around the human’s cock. He hoisted them onto the table.

“Anyone feel like calamari tonight?” Spike shouted at the crowd. At first there was still the stunned silence and then laughter broke out amongst the demons. There were cheers and bleats.

Xander stared at Spike. He looked at tentacles and then at the Azora demon.

Does he know the Azora can only feed and drink with three of its seven tentacles? Xander thought. A motion caught Xander’s eye. Zorn was trying to slip away from the crowd. Xander looked to Spike who was already motioning for his minions. They quickly closed in and held Zorn. Meanwhile Spike bent down and looked at the bleeding Azora.

“That looks painful, mate,” Spike said and then made another motion for more minions. “I’ll see ya get home and get patched up. Wouldn’t want ya bleedin’ out.”

He knows, Xander thought as minions came and began to attend to the mortally wounded demon who had a long death of starvation ahead of him. Then Spike looked at Xander. Spike’s eyes were a hard gold. He was all Master Spike. Xander bowed his head. Spike snatched Xander’s collar off the table and leapt over to his pet.

“Oi!” Spike roared above the din. The crowds fell silent for a moment and looked to its Master.

“This here is MINE!” Spike said as he put Xander’s collar back on. Once again he whispered the word that magically locked it. Then he lifted his head to look at the crowd.

“e’s been mine since before the Before! Look at ‘im and think back if you’ve ever touched ‘im! Cuz if you ‘ave? I better never know about it! I DON’T SHARE!”

The crowd whispered, murmured and moved back. Then Spike’s eyes locked on Zorn. He smiled.

“And you?” Spike said, “I have a message for you from Angelus.”

Zorn had been scared before, now he was terrified. He sagged in the grasp of the minions.

“Take him to a cell until I’m ready to give him the message,” Spike said as he grabbed Xander’s leash and began to lead Xander through the crowd. Xander moved as quickly as he could to keep up with the vampire.

Spike’s pace was swift and soon they were in the private elevator that would take them up to the suite. Spike was covered in Vr’xkl’s blood. His eyes were still blazing gold and his fangs were still prominent. Xander thought of how he’d disobeyed Spike publically and began to tremble.

“How was I supposed to know you’re a lucky and sadistic son of a bitch? Xander thought and returned Spike’s gaze.
“I think you owe me a blowjob,” Spike said suddenly as his blue eyes danced with lust and amusement.

What! Xander silently sputtered.

“Lack of trust…disobedience…definitely think ya need ta play the pink oboe.”

Xander blinked and then felt the shades of hurt and outrage he’d felt at the table well up inside him.

You gambled with me! You knew I was terrified and you went all out! You could have lost me! You idiot…you arrogant egotistical British…brutish bastard! Xander thought as he shook his head and backed up.

Spike advanced on him and grabbed him by the arms. He leaned forward and whispered into Xander’s ear, “I’ll tell you how I did it.”

Xander blinked and looked at Spike. Spike waggled his eyebrows.


“I’ll tell you how I cheated,” Spike whispered seductively against Xander’s neck.

Xander stilled. You cheated? He thought. How?

Spike pulled back and looked at Xander. He smiled.

“You wanna know how now don’t ya, eh?” Spike said.

You really cheated? But the spell! Xander thought then rolled his eyes. Of course you cheated! You’re Spike!

Spike slowly ran a finger down Xander’s chest and hooked into his waistband. Xander shuddered. He wasn’t angry or afraid.

“Nod yer head and I’ll tell ya,” Spike said as he began to undo the buttons on Xander’s fly. Xander silently groaned. He had a feeling that not only wouldn’t he get to know how Spike cheated but he wouldn’t get to come until he gave Spike a blowjob. Something he wasn’t sure he really knew how to do or really wanted to do. Then Spike slipped his hand around Xander’s cock and began to stroke him.

“I really wanna show ya how,” Spike whispered.

How you cheated or…how to suck dick? Xander thought.

“Don’t you wanna know?” Spike asked before he claimed Xander’s mouth in a searing kiss. He kissed Xander until he was desperate for air and more of Spike’s touch. Then Spike laughed a throaty husky laugh before he began kissing a trail down from Xander’s throat straight past his firm pecs to slide into the dark curls above his hard cock. Spike dropped to his knees, pulled Xander’s pants down out of his way and looked at the hard cock in his hand. He looked up to see Xander’s dark eyes looking down in amazement at him.

“I really wanna show ya how,” Spike whispered.

How you cheated or...how to suck dick? Xander thought.

“Nod, Xander,” Spike ordered and Xander did. Spike smiled and then began to work his cool lips around Xander’s cock. Xander’s fingers grabbed Spike’s hair and held on as his master vampire began to slowly swallow Xander’s cock down to its root. Xander let out a silent scream of bliss when Spike began to rhythmically suck on his sweet treat while fondling and caressing Xander’s
balls. It shouldn't be like this. He should be hurt and angry, but it was always like this. This was Spike. This was him and Spike.

Need, bliss and hunger shot through Xander. He dug his fingers into Spike’s scalp and thrust his hips forward trying to sink deeper into that tight channel milking him. Fire shot through him and he was erupting straight down Spike’s throat who somehow moaned and hummed while still swallowing every drop of Xander’s essence.

Xander would have collapsed to the floor if Spike hadn’t caught him and then gently laid him on the floor. He looked up dazedly at Spike who was leaning down over him.

*I hope you don’t expect that from me,* Xander thought.

“That’s the idea but I’ll settle for anything involving yer mouth on my tadger,” Spike said before kissing Xander’s nose. Xander rolled his eyes.

“But first,” Spike said and then got up. Xander rolled to his side and propped himself up on his elbow to watch Spike. Spike rummaged through a drawer and came out with a new deck of cards. He came back and settled down on the floor next to Xander. He handed the deck to his pet.

“Looks like an ordinary new deck of cards, eh?” Spike said.

Xander nodded and looked at the deck.

“Look carefully at the cellophane on the bottom of the deck,” Spike said.

Xander studied the cellophane. The wrapper looked a little off.

“It’s been reglued,” Spike said as he took the deck from Xander and tore the cellophane. Then he opened the box and took out the cards. They looked just like the deck used in the game. They had the same repeating blue diamond pattern on the back. He handed the box to Xander.

“Check out the bottom of the box too,” Spike said. Xander looked at it. Again there was something a little “off” about it.

“Like the plastic, it’s been opened and reglued,” Spike said as he began to shuffle the cards. Then he handed them to Xander.

“Shuffle ‘em and then deal out five cards face down,” Spike said.

Xander took the cards and shuffled them Spike ordered. All the while he studied the cards looking for some sort of fold, cut or imperfection. He couldn’t find any. Finally he dealt five cards face down. Spike took a moment and studied them.

“Ace of diamonds, two of clubs, five of spades, jack of hearts and nine of diamonds,” Spike said.

Xander blinked and began turning the cards over one by one. They were exactly the cards Spike said they were. Spike grinned.

“Papered the town with juiced decks,” Spike said.

*Could you say that in English?* Xander thought and continued staring at Spike. Spike laughed and turned the cards back over so they were face down.

“I planted marked decks. Don’t need magic ta cheat at cards. Been ways ta do it without mojo as long as there’s been ways ta play cards! Now, look at the back of the deck. Relax your vision, let
your eyes go out ‘a focus a bit,” Spike said. "No matter what dealer from what casino was used tonight we'd be using one of my special decks."

Xander took a deep breath and then did a he was told. He really wasn’t sure what Spike meant about letting his eyes go out of focus. The repeating pattern on the back of the card was making him rather dizzy and then all of the sudden he saw something odd on the back of the ace. There was short line in the upper right hand corner and in the lower left hand corner. Xander turned and looked at Spike.

“Worth a blowjob ain’t it?” Spike said with a grin.

You could have told me! Xander thought and pointed to the cards and then himself. You didn’t have to let me…! Then Xander remembered what happened with Larry. Xander narrowed his eyes and punched Spike in the shoulder.

“Ow! Oi! Keep this up and it’ll be more’n a blowjob!” Spike warned.

Xander glared at Spike and stood up. He somehow jerked his too tight pants up over his hips and fumbled to button them.

“Pet…I…wasn’t gonna take any chances. Was the only plan I had,” Spike said as he too got to his feet.

Do you have any idea of how completely terrified I was? Xander thought as he pointed at Spike. And what if you’d been found out? Huh?

“And I told you I wasn’t gonna loose ya! And I didn’t! No one’s gonna find out! The cards are covered in Azora ick! Already in the trash as we speak. You’re here and instead of getting dressed you should be getting bare arse naked and droppin’ to yer knees!"

Xander shook his head.

“Oi!” Spike shouted, grabbed Xander and then threw him over his shoulder. Xander kicked and hit until Spike swatted him several times on the ass as he carried him into the bedroom where he tossed Xander onto the bed. He then moved quickly to pin him to it before Xander could scramble away.

“I’m sorry I had to keep things from you again,” Spike said staring into Xander’s angry face. “But I’m not sorry for keeping you. Yer mine, Xander. I will use every sneaky, dirty handed and complete utter shite tactic in the book to keep it that way. So get used to it.”

You can’t just keep using my angst and terror ridden moments as cover! Xander thought.

“Xander,” Spike said softly, “I’m doin’ the best I can. Don’t make it tougher for me.”

Make it tougher for you? Xander thought as Spike captured his lips in a tender kiss. Then Spike raised his head and looked at Xander. Blue and brown clashed once again and this time Xander saw something he never expected to see in Spike’s blue depths; vulnerability.

Ah, fuck, Xander thought as he reached up and reclaimed Spike’s lips in a gentle kiss of his own. I’m such a goober.

TBC
Author's notes:

Information on juiced decks, marking cards, and "papering the town" jargon came from here.
Chapter 44

It didn’t take too many kisses and heated caresses before Xander became more aware of the Azora ichor covering Spike than Xander’s own need. Xander pulled back and snapped his fingers.

“Wot?”

Xander grimaced and pointed at the ick covering Spike and then pinched his nose. Spike grinned.

“Azora blood not a turn on, eh?”

Xander rolled his eyes and shook his head.

“Shower then?”

Xander nodded. Spike laughed and pulled them both off the bed. He then led them toward the bathroom.

_Huh_, Xander thought as he stepped eagerly into his second shower of the evening, _seems being a sex slave is a good cure for phobias._

***

The shower was quicker than either pet or master wanted. The water had swirled away blood and makeup and had somehow cleared Xander’s thinking.

_Tara!_ Xander had wondered and had looked at Spike. _Had anyone checked on her since doing the spell?_ He’d pointed to the floor and then pantomimed an hour glass figure with his hands.

Spike had sighed then nodded. “Yer gonna be old and wrinkly before I get my blowjob at this rate.”

Xander had rolled his eyes.

“We’ll check on the bird after we get out of the shower,” Spike had promised. Xander had smiled and picked up the pace.

Once out of the shower it hadn’t taken Spike long to figure out they weren’t alone in the suite. He’d stared at the bedroom door tilted his head and looked at Xander.

“Lorne’s waitin’,” Spike muttered. Xander nodded.

Spike quickly dried off and got dressed even more quickly. He helped Xander into his belt and one of his regular pair of leather pants.

_Never thought I’d see the day when I thought the belt was comfortable,_ Xander thought as he remembered how tight the pants were he’d worn earlier. He looked for a shirt but Spike hadn’t pulled one out of the wardrobe for him. Xander looked at Spike.

“Gonna have to have a public punishment for your public disobedience, pet,” Spike said.

_Spike!_ Xander thought and paled. He knew he’d defied Spike publically but he’d been afraid. He’d thought the vampire was going to lose him back to the Azora.

“We had a deal, Xander,” Spike said.
Xander swallowed and nodded. Spike moved close to Xander and traced a finger down his chest. He leaned in and whispered, “Punishment will be done in private but the marks you’ll bear publically, yeah?”

A familiar tingle raced down Xander’s spine. *How does the blond menace do this to me, he wondered, even when he’s punishing me?*

Xander nodded. Spike smiled and pulled back. He looked at Xander then placed a brief kiss on his nose.

“Let’s go see what Lorne has to say first.”

***

Lorne was sitting at the suite’s bar nursing a Sea Breeze when Xander and Spike entered the room. He looked at the pair and shook his head.

“Given your lineage I should expect your flair for the dramatic by now, lemon drop,” Lorne said to Spike.

“Wot?” Spike grinned as he plopped in his chair. He pointed to the pillow beside it. Xander sat down and leaned against Spike’s legs.

“Did you have to drag the game out? Did you have to make it so close?”

“Oi! It was the luck of the draw.”

“One,” Lorne said as he held up a finger, “don’t lie to an empath. Two, no one gets that lucky unless it’s in the movies and three…I know you.”

Spike grinned. “Told ya wasn’t going ta lose him.”

“And the whole ‘Merchant of Venice’ riff you had going?”

“Stick with the classics,” Spike said and then winked at Xander.

*What merchant?* Xander wondered and stared blankly back at Spike.

“Oi! Yankee education! Shakespeare!”

*Shakespeare!* Xander stuck out his tongue. *Men in tights speaking a funny form of English that isn’t.*

Lorne laughed. Spike narrowed his eyes.

“I think I know what’s on our viewing schedule for our next picnic,” Spike said.

Xander turned wide and fearful eyes toward Spike. *What have I done to deserve to be punished like that?!!*

Lorne laughed again and Spike sighed.

“So,” Lorne said trying to bring the conversation back to the business at hand. “You’re just going to let Vr’xkl starve to death.”

“Seems like a fittin’ end,” Spike said as he ran his hand through Xander’s hair. Xander let out a puff of air and resumed leaning back against Spike’s legs.
“What about all his…property?”

“Salvage what you can…,” Spike paused and looked at Xander. Xander shuddered. He tried to pretend he didn’t know what they were talking about. He could only imagine how many of the Azora’s “bottles” could be “salvaged.” He didn’t want to think about what would happen to the humans so far gone their eyes were blank and listless. He turned his head and buried his face against Spike’s thigh.

“I’ll take care of it,” Lorne said.

“You checked on Tara?”

At the mention of Tara’s name Xander turned to look at Lorne again.

“Not yet, had to settle things with my brother,” Lorne replied.

“So what did you do with the body?” Spike asked.

“I didn’t kill him!”

“Wot! He’s Pylean!” Spike shouted angrily. “He could have read me…”

“He didn’t.” Lorne interrupted.

“And you can be sure?”

“I read him. There was too much commotion going on…you didn’t say enough. Trust me, lemon drop, all he got from you was that you were far more dangerous and in control of the situation then Vr’xkl realized.”

Spike snorted.

“I still don’t like it.”

“Well I don’t like killing…especially my brother. I know it makes me a bit of black sheep back home but…”

“So what did happen?”

Lorne took another drink of his Sea Breeze and then sighed. He looked at Spike and then out the window at the city lights.

“I showed him Doyle’s eyes.”

“Wot?”

“Back home…on Pylea,” Lorne began to explain, “There’s a powerful prophecy involving a seer. It holds a lot of religious sway…”

“And you showed him Doyle’s eyes hoping to sway him?”

Lorne nodded.

“They believe one with pure sight will be the messiah…to return the monarchy…”

“But…Doyle’s…”
“He’s eyes…aren’t,” Lorne said stiffly. “They could still be used…”

“And…”

“And I was Doyle’s… Well I was Doyle’s.”

“So Numfar sees the eyes as somethi…”

“He’s going to go back to Pylea and talk to the priests of the Covenant of Trombli. We may have new allies,” Lorne concluded and downed his drink. Xander looked at Lorne and back at Spike. He was confused.

*Something big is happening here but I can’t work past the part of a dead guys eyes still working,* Xander shuddered. Spike curled his hand tenderly along the back of Xander’s neck.

“Numfar left already?” Spike asked.

Lorne nodded.

“Right then,” Spike sighed. “I need to take care of a bit a’punishment with Xander than we can head down to see Tara.”

Lorne nodded and stood up. “I’ll wait for you downstairs.”

Spike nodded. Lorne waved at Xander and left the suite. Xander turned to look at Spike.

*Now what?* He thought.

Spike grinned. “Don’t look so worried, pet.”

Oh see, that right there? Doesn’t help. Xander thought. *Makes me worry even more.*

Spike stood up and offered a hand to Xander. Xander narrowed his eyes and accepted the offering. Spike easily pulled the human to his feet. He turned Xander so his back was to the vampire. He began to dance his fingers down Xander bare back. Xander’s skin pimpled with sensation. Spike leaned in close.

“Gotta learn ta trust me, pet,” Spike whispered in Xander’s ear and then raked his nails down Xander’s back. Pain and pleasure chased after the vampire’s nails and Xander arched his back. He gasped. Spike raked his nails back up Xander’s spine. Tiny beads of blood dotted his back in ragged lines. They were quickly cleaned away by Spike’s hungry but gentle tongue that lapped seductively at the damaged skin; soothing, teasing and tasting. Xander curled his hands into fists. He squirmed not knowing if he wanted more or less.

Spike tasted his way up to Xander’s neck. He licked and kissed the sensitive spot where it joined the shoulder until Xander tilted his head and offered himself completely to Spike. The vampire growled and slid fangs deep into Xander’s neck. Again Xander arched his back. Strong arms wrapped around him and held him close while Spike took three quick draws of Xander’s hot blood. Xander moaned silently. Spike lifted his face and let some of the precious fluid drip down Xander’s chest.

The red drop mapped a trail from Xander’s neck down the center of his chest and pooled straight at his belly button. Spike kissed and nibbled on Xander’s ear as the blood trail cooled and coagulated.

“Want them to see the scratches, the bite, and the blood. Want them to smell the taste of you and...
know it’s mine. Should make you cum in your pants. Wrap my hand around your shaft and milk you dry. Coat my hand in your spill and then spin ya around. Shove ya up against the wall and use my spunk coated hand to jack off and coat yer back side with my own juice. Send ya down ta the casino reeking of sex and blood like a proper Pet.”

Xander gasped. The belt was entirely too uncomfortable and damn Spike the scenario was entirely too appealing.

*What have you done to me Master SexyPants?* Xander thought.

Spike spun Xander around so they were face to face. He ghosted lips over Xander’s eyes and cheeks.

“Should make you clean that spunk coated hand,” Spike whispered. “I’d shove my fingers into that mouth of yours and let ya taste our juices all mixed together like a cocktail. Make you suck on them like it was my cock. Suck and lick and nibble til they was clean.”

Xander’s lips parted of their own accord and Spike traced them gently with just a finger tip. Spike stared into Xander wide and dark brown eyes.

“Yeah. I’d pull your pants up around you with your tadger stewin’ in your own spend while your arse was painted with mine. Every step you’d take you’d feel the pull of the leather against the slick on yer skin. You’d blush and the demons down there would laugh but you’d still want me. You’d still drop trou ta have me do it again.”

*Fuck!* Xander thought and fought against Spike’s seductive words. His back and his neck hurt but the pain was nowhere near as uncomfortable as the tightness of the belt keeping him from getting hard.

Spike slid a finger tip in between Xander’s lips. Xander immediately wrapped his lips around it and began to lick and suck on it as if somehow the action would give him the relief he needed. Spike smiled.

“You know why you’d do it? Xander?” Spike asked softly as he continued to finger fuck Xander’s hungry mouth. “Ya know why you’d let me?”

Xander shook his head. Spike pulled his finger free from Xander’s mouth.

“Cuz yer my good Pet,” Spike whispered just before he covered Xander’s mouth in open kiss of domination. Xander groaned silently and grabbed Spike’s shoulders. Spike sent his tongue to take over where his finger left off. Xander greedily and hungrily sucked and nibbled on the new intruder.

Spike raced his hands down Xander’s back and cupped his arse cheeks. Xander gasped into Spike’s mouth. Spike ground against Xander and the human nearly cried in frustration at his inability to feel anything. He desperately wanted to feel his cock against Spike’s.

Spike pulled back and broke the kiss. Xander’s scent was strong in the air. He desperately wanted to fuck and plunder his pet, but now wasn’t the time. He sighed. He stared into Xander’s hungry eyes and smiled.

“Think we’re both gettin’ punished this round,” Spike said as he fought to cool his ardor.

Xander laughed and nodded.

“Right then,” Spike said. “Let’s head downstairs before I make that little fantasy a reality, eh?”
Xander nodded again.

*It’s a good fantasy…very good fantasy in the way that totally baaaad fantasies go, Xander thought. And I’m glad to keep it that way.*

Spike laughed and led them out of the suite and to the elevator. He made a point to keep his hands to himself on the elevator ride down to the casino.

***

Xander’s bare, bloodied chest and scratched back were an instant attention getter as the pair made their way through the crowded casino floor. Xander could feel the weighty and curious stares as well as hear the murmurs of speculation. Oddly he didn’t feel embarrassed or angry. He felt almost daring as if Spike’s marks were something to flaunt. He couldn’t help but stand a little straighter or put a little swagger in his step.

*Definitely not the same Zeppo-Donut boy who left Sunnydale clutching my Captain Picard action figure in one hand and a stake in the other,* Xander thought as the crowd responded to Xander’s taunt.

Spike quickly jerked Xander inside his office and slammed the door.

“Someone’s getting’ cocky,” Spike growled as he shoved Xander up against the door.

*Not really,* Xander thought, *not with this belt trapping my dick.*

Xander arched an eyebrow and stared back at Spike. Spike shook his head.

“My very own little Xanderstein, eh?”

Xander laughed and nodded.

“Behave, Pet. I enjoy spankin’ that arse of yours more than you.”

Xander’s eyes went wide and his hands quickly moved to cover his butt. Spike laughed. Now he really did hope Xander pushed it. He did love to turn those firm globes a rosy pink under his hand.

A knock interrupted his lascivious thoughts and Spike sighed.

“Over by the desk,” he ordered. Xander nodded and moved quickly to obey.

“Yeah!” Spike barked.

Lorne entered.

“Lorne,” Spike acknowledged as the green demon entered and shut the door behind him.

“Lemon drop, cupcake,” Lorne greeted the pair and sat down in the chair across from Spike’s desk. Spike sat in his desk.

“Xander made quite an entrance,” Lorne observed. “The chatter’s still going strong. Word is your Pet isn’t really disobedient…just likes to be punished.”

Xander blushed. *OK, maybe I went a little too far,* Xander thought.

“Well they’re only half right,” Spike said.
SPIKE! Xander thought and tugged on Spike’s pant leg. Spike looked at Xander and winked.

“Well…I don’t think that little reputation is going to hurt anything,” Lorne continued.

Just my reputation…or what’s left of it, Xander thought.

“Zorn still on ice?” Spike asked switching to relevant topics.

Lorne nodded.

“Good. Anything else we need to deal with before going to the stables?”

“I don’t think so. I had Clem take the ‘bot…’ the human Vr’xkl brought with him to the blue stables.”

Spike nodded. “If there’s any hope of …well Clem has the best chance of…well…”

Salvaging him. Xander thought what Spike didn’t say. He looked at Spike and sighed. Clem did have the best chance. Xander hoped Clem could do it.

“If…Clem can’t help?” Lorne asked.

“We’ll move him to the red stables,” Spike said as he stood up and looked at Xander. Xander met Spike’s eyes and nodded. “Let’s go.”

Lorne and Xander stood up and followed Spike out of the office.

***

The green stables were oddly quiet this trip. The guards were about but there were not any children.

“Bedtime,” Lorne whispered to Xander.

They don’t keep vamp hours? Xander thought.

“The monsters are easier to manage if they get their sleep,” Spike said softly.

Translation, you want to make sure they get enough sleep, Xander thought as they approached Tara’s door.

“Any problems tonight?” Spike asked the guards.

“None, sir,” one of the guards replied. “Were you expecting any?”

“I’m always expecting problems,” Spike growled. “That’s what keeps me Master of this city.”

“Yes, sir!” the guard barked and stood a little straighter. Spike keyed the door and led the way inside.

“Xander,” Tara said tiredly but excitedly. Xander rushed to her as soon as Spike had the door closed. She was sitting propped up on her bed. Xander looked worriedly at her then Lorne.

“I’m fine,” Tara said. “Just a little wiped out.”

“Luv?” Spike asked.

“I wasn’t sure how m..much time I had to do the s..spell once I felt the w..wards being cast so I ‘p..pushed’ it,” Tara said.
“Do you need anything?” Lorne asked.

*We should have checked on you sooner!* Xander thought guiltily and sat down on the bed.

“Pet,” Spike warned.

*Stuff it, Master Mine-Mine-Mine,* Xander thought as he flashed an angry look at Spike and then looked again at Tara.

“No hugs,” Spike warned, “after tonight’s performance it wouldn’t make sense for you to have any other scent but mine on you.”

“C..can he hold m.my hand, Master Spike?” Tara asked when Xander looked like he wanted to defy Spike damn the consequences.

“No ‘arm in that,” Spike conceded.

“Xander,” Tara said and held out her hand to her friend. Xander smiled and took her hand. He shot Spike a hot look. Spike arched an eyebrow.

“I really am OK,” Tara assured everyone. “J..just a little tired.”

Spike sniffed the air. It still smelled of sage and the slight tinge of ozone. He looked worriedly at the door and then Lorne.

“I didn't sense the guards suspected anything, lemon drop,” Lorne said.

“I don’t want to take any chances. I want to know for sure if they noticed anything,” Spike ordered.

“And if they did?”

“I'll take care of it,” Spike growled.

Lorne nodded. He looked at Tara at smiled.

“I’m going to go get you a cool rag and a glass of water,” Lorne said as he moved toward the bathroom. “And I’m going to order up a large dinner for both you and Xander. Lots of protein and a good dose of sugar. No arguing. I want lots of empty calories consumed tonight in the form of chocolate cheesecake.”

Tara laughed and nodded. “Yes…master.”

Lorne rolled his eyes and disappeared. Spike moved to the other side of the bed and sat down.

“Sure yer OK, luv?” Spike asked.

Tara smiled and nodded. Xander stared earnestly at Tara looking for any signs of distress.

“I was n..napping up until a l..little while ago,” Tara said. “I take it things went well at the game?”

“Just as I planned,” Spike grinned.

Xander rolled his eyes.

“And th..that’s why X..Xander looks like he’s b..been mauled?” Tara asked her voice firmer than it had been all evening.
Spike cocked and eyebrow at the young woman then smiled.

“There’s that iron in ya, luv,” Spike said.

“M..Master Spike?”

*Tara, it's nothing,* Xander thought and squeezed Tara’s hand reassuring. *Let it go.*

Tara looked at Xander. Xander smiled warmly and then blushed.

“Not that I have to explain myself ta you, but Xander showed public disobedience… “ Spike said.

“…And you he had to have some sort of p..public p..punishment?” Tara interrupted.

Xander nodded.

“This it?” Tara asked remembering Xander’s last public punishment.

“Well there’s still a few more hours ‘til dawn. Plenty of time for Xander ta get ‘imself into more trouble,” Spike quipped. Tara laughed.

*Hey!* Xander thought.

“Did I miss something?” Lorne asked as he stepped out of the bathroom with a glass of water in one hand and wet washcloth in the other.

*Only me being sold down river,* Xander thought.

Lorne held out the glass of water to Tara. She accepted it and took a long drink.

“Thanks. I n..needed that,” she said as she handed the glass back. Lorne smiled and then handed her the rag. She wiped her face quickly and then handed it back to Lorne.

“Feeling more pert now, pumpkin?” Lorne asked. Tara nodded.

“So we can get down ta business?” Spike asked.

“There’s th..that s..steel, Master Spike,” Tara teased.

“Oi!” Spike growled.

“Well we only have about twenty minutes before the dinners arrive,” Lorne replied.

*Twenty minutes?* Xander silently groaned and his stomach noisily rumbled.

“Better tell us quick, luv, Xander’s likely ta die of starvation in the next few minutes,” Spike said.

Xander glared at Spike and then looked at Tara. He was more than a little nervous to hear how the spell went. The possibility of getting his voice back was at stake.

“Well,” Tara began. “I didn’t get as m..much as I w..would have liked.”

Something cold and hard settled in Xander’s throat. It threatened to smother him.

“I just didn’t have a lot of t..time. I didn’t have a l..lot of tools…”

“It’s OK, luv,” Spike reassured Tara, “just tells us what you know.”
“It is a restorative of some sort,” Tara said as she looked at Xander. “It does have healing properties. It’s very powerful. Th..that’s about all I can tell you.”

The lead lump fell from Xander’s throat to his stomach.

“I’m s..sorry, Xander,” Tara said. “I’m sorry I didn’t get more information.”

Xander smiled weakly and squeezed Tara’s hand.

It’s OK, Xander thought.

“Tara, did you sense anything dangerous about the potion?” Spike asked. “Would it hurt Xander to take it?”

Tara shrugged. “I didn’t s..sense anything. It is p..powerful though. Anything used incorrectly can be d..dangerous. Too much s..salt can be a poison.”

Xander looked at Spike. We don’t really have a choice though, Xander thought. Angelus expects you to give me this potion.

Spike growled and got off the bed. He began to pace.

“Lemon drop…” Lorne began.

“I’m not going to risk it!” Spike barked.

Xander got off the bed and stood in front of Spike. He stared into Spike’s angry yellow eyes.

“NO! That’s final, PET!” Spike growled.

Xander shook his head and held out his hand. It’s a restorative, Xander thought as he stared at Spike. It might work. And even if it doesn’t…Angelus made his orders clear.

“Don’t push me on this, pet,” Spike warned.

Don’t push me on this, Xander thought as he pointed at himself before holding out his hand again.

“We don’t know what it will do to you!”

Xander shrugged and thought, We don’t have a choice!

“No!” Spike said again.

Xander looked at Lorne and snapped his fingers.

“Cupcake…” Lorne began to sputter.

“Don’t you try and go around me!” Spike snarled and grabbed Xander by the shoulders.

Then be the Master of Las Vegas and do the right thing! Xander thought and snapped his fingers and pointed at Spike.

Spike shook Xander a moment and then let him go. He turned away and once again began to angrily pace around the room.

Xander looked at Tara.
“Xander…”

“So help me Xander I will turn your arse a new shade of red if you keep this up!” Spike snarled.

*Fine, if that’s what it takes,* Xander thought and began to unbutton his pants.

“Xander!” Tara squealed.

“Cupcake!” Lorne shouted.

Spike stared at Xander. Xander paused and stared back

“Xan…” Spike said softly.

Xander sighed and held out his hand again. Spike leaned his head back and looked at the ceiling.

“Button up your drawers,” he said.

Xander buttoned up his pants. Spike looked at Tara.

“Give me the vial, luv.”

“M..Master Spike…”

“Give me the vial, Tara,” Spike ordered again.

Tara nodded and slid her hand under a pillow behind her. She pulled out the vial and offered it to Spike. Spike took it and then walked back over to Xander.

“Ya sure?” Spike whispered.

Xander nodded and held out his hand. Spike placed the vial gently in the palm of Xander’s hand.

“Right,” Spike said. Xander looked at Spike.

*Right,* Xander thought and then uncorked the vial. A faint odor wafted up from the vial. It smelled old and musty like something wet and dark long forgotten.

“Bottom’s up,” Spike said and tapped the tip of Xander’s nose. Xander smiled.

*Over the teeth and through the gums watch out stomach cuz here it comes,* Xander thought, tipped back his head and swallowed the liquid.

The first thing he noticed is it tasted worse then it smelled. It tasted like an unwashed pair of gym shorts left in someone’s locker too long. He knew that taste thanks to seventh grade and Larry. Xander gagged and coughed.

“Xander,” Spike said worriedly and wrapped his arms around him.

The next thing Xander noticed was the cool feeling in his mouth and down his throat. It felt like he just swallowed a really cold glass of ice water but instead of fading the sensation was growing. The cool sensation was growing icy and he felt numb. He cast panicked eyes to Spike.

“Xander?” Spike asked.

The numbness faded into a bitter cold; one that bordered on freezing and moved quickly into aching. Xander’s teeth began to chatter. The cold was pooling in his stomach.
“Lorne!” Spike yelled.

“Xander?” Tara asked.

“C..cold,” Xander mouthed to Spike.

So cold! Xander thought before he opened his mouth in a silent agonizing scream as the aching cold turned into a fiery ice that seemed to slice at his throat and burn through his blood. The last thing he remembered was Spike shouting his name while wrapping his body and Tara’s comforter around him.

TBC
Chapter 45

Spike threw his empty glass against the wall and snarled, “It’s been hours!”

“And it may take days,” Lorne said softly. “You heard what the Pocklas said.”

Spike spun around and looked toward the suite’s bedroom door. His pet…his Xander was in the other room dying and he was helpless.


“I know.”

“How long is this gonna take?” Spike asked changing the topic back to Xander.

“The Pocklas need to set things up to do what they can to keep him alive while the Norjub works its way through his system,” Lorne said. “Which is very little since magic has a destabilizing effect on the potion once it’s ingested.”

“How long?” Spike snapped.

Lorne shook his head. Spike growled again and headed for the bedroom. Lorne rushed across the room and put a hand to Spike’s arm. Spike roared and threw Lorne off.

“Lemon drop,” Lorne pleaded, “let them work. They know the price for failure. They need to put in an IV…and other things in place to sustain him while his body…while it…”

“Dies!” barked Spike.

“Nearly dies,” Lorne corrected. “Lemon drop, the Pocklas explained, the Norjub will take him close to the point of death and then will begin to heal him. When it does, it will heal the damage to his voice.”

“If he survives!”

“He will,” Lorne said.

“You read that?” Spike asked his voice cracking with too much emotion.

“Xander’s strong. He won’t give up,” Lorne replied.

“Because he has so much to live for?” Spike asked bitterly as he made his way to the bar to fix himself another drink.

“Spike…lemon dro…”

“He’s been raped, abused, and repeatedly tortured, Lorne,” Spike said. “He’s a Pet in a world of demons. Why…what does he have to…”

“He’s Xander and he’s not just any demon’s Pet, he’s your Pet.”
Spike turned and looked at Lorne. He studied him. Lorne didn’t have to be an empath to read the pain in the vampire’s shimmering blue eyes.

“I can’t lose him and I don’t have a trick ta cheat my way through this, green bean,” Spike said softly.

“You don’t need one. Just trust him, Spike. Trust Xander.”

“And in the meantime?”

“Be the Master of Las Vegas.”

“Lorne…” Spike began as he shook his head.

“You have to be. You can’t let this be seen to slow you down or change your routine. You know you can’t! You know that’s what Angelus is waiting to see. He wants to know just how much of an Achilles heel Xander is to you. You know this.”

“I don’t know anything!” Spike said angrily and downed his drink. He really didn’t know anything anymore. He stopped knowing anything the moment Xander went still and deathly cold in his arms. He barely remembered Lorne prying him away from the human so the Pocklas could examine him. Lorne still looked bloodied and bruised.

He remembered carrying Xander’s nearly lifeless form upstairs to the suite and laying him gently on their bed. He remembered tenderly undressing him and then being led away from Xander to the other room as the Pocklas began to work. Lorne had forced a drink in his hand and had told him what the Pocklas had managed to find out.

The vial contained Norjub which was indeed a powerful restorative and healing potion but it was dangerous. In order for it to work it poisoned the subject and shut down their vital systems almost to the point of death. Then, if the subject survived, it slowly began to restore and heal all damage.

If Xander survived, any physical damage his body had sustained would be healed. Spike growled softly. He’d had to remove Xander’s earring and nipple ring as the Pocklas said the Norjub would see the piercings as wounds and heal those as well. Even Spike’s scars from when he first made Xander’s his Pet would be erased.

*I’ll give ‘em all up though, Spike vowed, if my pet comes back to me.*

“Spike,” Lorne said softly.

Spike looked at the Pylean.

“Tara said that humans hear, even when their unconscious. She said…’talk to him.’”

Spike nodded. He swallowed and then ground out, “He’s not to be left alone. If I can’t…if…when I can’t be with ‘im either you or Clem are ta be with him, yeah?”

Lorne nodded.

“He’s never ta be left alone! Don’t want ‘im ta think…want ‘im to know…boy needs company is all,” Spike finally said and then turned his back to Lorne. Lorne closed his eyes and tried not to feel the wave of searing sorrow flowing from the vampire.

The silence and the sorrow were interrupted a few moments later when the Pocklas exited the
bedroom entered the living area. They bowed low before the silent vampire. Spike stiffened and turned to face them. He cocked an eyebrow.

“M’lord,” one intoned, “your Pet rests comfortably. All is in place. We will check on him every four hours or as often as your lordship desires. Until then we shall be outside your suite doors. Wards have been set to alert us if his condition changes or should he need urgent care.”

“Will he survive?” Spike barked.

The Pocklas shuffled and looked at each other before answering.

“We have done what we can m’lord,” the speaker replied. “We will continue to do all that we can. Your Pet is strong and devoted. Those qualities improve his chances of surviving the Norjub.”

“Get out!” Spike ordered.

The Pocklas moved quickly and left. Lorne studied Spike.

“Spike,” Lorne finally said after the healing demons had left, “they are on your side.”

“Not now, Lorne,” Spike said hoarsely before marching to the bedroom. He slipped inside and shut the door without another look or word to his friend.

***

Spike moved silently through the room as he approached the bed. His vampire hearing and sense of smell told him Xander was alive yet he looked dead. The human was still and his breath was so shallow it looked almost non-existent. An IV stand was by the bed and full bag of fluid dripped slowly into the tube that snaked down and was attached to Xander’s arm.

Carefully Spike pulled back the covers and looked over Xander’s pale naked body. He could sense the blood slowly pumping through his Pet’s veins. He had the strong urge to turn him then and there but he knew all too well that if he did, he’d lose his pet for sure. Everything that he loved about Xander would be blackened, tarnished, perverted and gone if he turned him.

Xander would make an awe inspiring fledge but he wouldn’t be the White Knight Spike loved. Spike gritted his teeth and swallowed.

Couldn’t even try the cursed soul trick, he thought. Angelus has destroyed all Orbs of Thesulah he knew of and he couldn’t risk searching for any that might be hidden. All other options are...well there aren’t any anymore.

Spike continued to study Xander’s body. He hissed when he saw the condom strapped to Xander’s lax penis. It had a tube at the end that led to a bag hanging from the bed. Yellow liquid pooled at the bottom of the bag. Spike gently pulled the covers up over Xander’s body.

“I’m so sorry, pet,” Spike said softly as he brushed his fingers through Xander’s hair. “I shouldn’t of let ya drink the potion. Shoulda known better. Shouldn’t of risked ya.”

Xander breathed softly but otherwise remained still. Spike sighed.

“Gotta an idea, pet,” Spike said and then began to strip off his shirt and shoes. “How about we use this time ta catch up on our reading, eh? Been awhile since we checked up on our friend Ivanhoe. Somewhere in chapter twenty-eight I believe. Rebecca was tryin’ ta cheer ‘im up after his injuries at the jousting tournament.”
Spike grabbed his glasses and the book. Then he carefully crawled up on to the bed next to Xander. He stretched out his body next to the still human and opened the book. He looked at Xander.

“Come back to me, Xan. I need you. I…I love ya,” the vampire whispered before he turned his attention to the book and began to read, “Thou hast been restored to thy country when it most needed the assistance of a strong hand and a true heart, and thou hast humbled the pride of thine enemies and those of thy king, when their horn was most highly exalted, and for the evil which thou hast sustained, seest thou not that Heaven has raised thee a helper and a physician, even among the most despised of the land?---Therefore, be of good courage, and trust that thou art preserved for some marvel which thine arm shall work before this people…”

***

A slight knock woke Spike three hours later. He scented the air. He could smell the healing herbs he associated with the Pocklas.

“Yeah,” Spike answered softly. Two Pocklas entered the room and bowed low before the prone vampire.

“We have come to check on your Pet, m’lord,” one said.

Spike nodded then added, “I want ta see how you put on the condom thing.”

The Pocklas stared at Spike.

“Yer touchin’ what is mine,” Spike growled. The Pocklas bowed again.

“Of course m’lord,” the other one answered before heading toward the bathroom. The other Pockla moved toward the bed and unhooked the empty bag from the IV line in Xander’s arm.

“Wot’s that for?” Spike asked gruffly.

“Fluids to keep the human hydrated, m’lord,” the Pockla answered as it pulled out another bag from beneath its robe.

“Does it ‘feed’ ‘im too?” Spike asked.

The Pockla shook its cowl covered head and answered, “Only hydrates m’lord. Our hope is the human will not be unconscious long enough to warrant tube feeding.”

“How long is that?”

“If he is not regained consciousness in five days, we would seek your permission to run a tube down through his nose and into his stomach to provide him liquid sustenance, m’lord,” the Pockla answered as it attached the new bag to the IV line and hung it on the stand. Then it moved to the side of the bed.

The other Pockla returned from the bathroom carrying a basin of water, soap and towels. It moved over to the bed and reverently pulled the covers back from Xander’s body. Then it looked at Spike quietly seeking permission. Spike nodded. Tenderly it unwrapped the strap holding the condom in place and rolled it down Xander’s penis.

It detached the condom from the tubing connected to the drainage bag and wrapped the used latex in one of the towels. The other Pockla detached the used drainage bag and hung a new one with fresh tubing to the side of the bed.
“Some of these can be sanitized and reused, m’lord. I will always use a fresh one when I change him,” the Pockla said putting the wrapped condom aside.

“When will that be?” Spike asked.

“In eight hours, m’lord,” the Pockla replied.

“I’ll do it. You’ll watch and make sure I do it correctly, yeah?” Spike ordered.

The Pockla bowed and replied, “As you desire, m’lord. The drainage bag will also need to be changed.”

“You can show me how to do that as well,” Spike growled. Again the Pockla nodded. Then it grabbed the wet washcloth floating in the basin. It soaped the rag then gently began to clean Xander’s penis.

“It is important to cleanse the area thoroughly,” the Pockla explained as it soaped and rinsed Xander, “to prevent any infection. Your Pet is cut so there is no foreskin to pull back and clean. However, once the Norjub begins to work that may change.”

“Wot!” Spike asked as the Pockla began to dry Xander’s penis.

“The Norjub heals damage done to the body. Your Pet was cut. It is not outside the realm of possibility that the Norjub will regrow your Pet’s foreskin. If that happens, m’lord, you will need to pay extra care to clean under the skin. Once you have cleaned the area be sure to dry it thoroughly before putting the new condom catheter on over the penis.”

Spike shook his head still trying to understand the ramifications of what the Norjub would do to his Pet. Apparently all injuries from the recent to the very old would heal if he survived. Spike took an unneeded breath and refocused on the Pockla who was finishing patting dry Xander’s nether regions.

“Always pat, m’lord, never rub,” the Pockla said. “Humans are delicate and rubbing can chafe and irritate the sensitive skin. Chafing and irritation could lead to infection as the skin is exposed to the trapped urine in the warm and moist environment of the condom.

Spike nodded. Got it, mate, he thought. Vamp physiology ain’t changed that much from a human’s.

Then the Pocklas pulled out a clean catheter from under its robe. It rolled it up Xander penis, then firmly but delicately strapped it to Xander’s shaft. Next it attached the drainage tubing to the tip of the condom. The Pockla checked the drainage line for any kinks and then looked at Spike.

“Be sure there are no kinks in the line, m’lord,” the Pocklas said and then it pulled the covers back up over Xander. It bowed to Spike before asking, “Do you have any questions?”

“How often does this need to be done?” Spike asked hoarsely.

“The catheter should be changed ever eight hours, m’lord,” the Pockla said. “A fresh drainage bag should be in place as well.”

“Next time I do it,” Spike ordered. The Pockla bowed briefly then picked up the basin and the used towels. It moved swiftly to the bathroom. The other Pockla stood silently by the bed and watched as Spike sat back down and stared at Xander who remained still and quiet throughout the whole procedure.

The other Pockla returned from the bathroom and stood by the first Pockla. They bowed low again.
“Will that be all m’lord?” they asked. Spike nodded and waved them away. They bowed again and then left as quickly as they came.

Spike leaned down and brushed a kiss across Xander’s nose. He leaned back and looked back at Xander’s still form.

“I know ya don’t want ta be ‘fondled.’ I know that’s not what they are doin’ but…I don’t know what it feels like ta ya or what you know, yeah? So don’t worry, Xan. I won’t let anyone touch ya, pet. I’ll take care of ya. I’ll be good to, yeah? I know how ta do that. Took care of Dru didn’t I? You know I did. I’ll take care of you too Xander. Trust me Xan…like I…like I….Xander I’m countin’ on ya. I’m trustin’ ya…ta come back to me.”

***

Spike managed to lie down next to Xander and sleep a couple of more hours. Then he’d gotten up and phoned Lorne.

“Want Clem up here in thirty,” Spike had barked. He looked at Xander’s still form and continued, “and tell ‘im to bring that beast of his.”

Then Spike had hung up the phone. He’d walked over to the bed and held Xander’s hand for a moment.

“Don’t want ta leave ya, pet, but green bean’s right. If I don’t do my job, Angelus is gonna play us even harder. So gonna take care of business. Not leavin’ ya alone though. Gonna have Clem and his pet monster keep ya company, yeah? I’m just gonna pop into the shower. I’ll be in and out like Jack the Ripper with a two dollar doxy….er right then. Maybe I should work on my metaphors, eh?”

Spike’s shower had been quick and he’d been dressed and ready by the time he’d heard Clem’s tentative knock on the front door of the suit. Spike smiled at Xander.

“That’ll be Clem then. Just goin’ ta get there door. Be right back,” Spike said before he dashed from the bedroom the front room. He opened the front door and let Clem inside. Once again the saggy skinned demon carried a large bag that made him look like some macabre Santa Claus.


“Clem,” Spike replied. “Lorne fill ya in on what’s happened?”

Clem nodded as he put down the bag. Immediately Ante wiggled himself out of the narrow opening. He squinted at Spike, hissed and then zoomed out of the room and headed for the bedroom.

“Oi! Don’t go messin’ with any of the tubin’!” Spike shouted after the kitten that’d gotten much larger than the last time since he’d seen him.

“Tubing, Master Spike?” Clem asked.

“C’mon,” Spike ordered as he picked up Clem’s bag and marched toward the bedroom. Clem followed. The kitten was cautiously walking and sniffing around Xander when they entered the bedroom. Clem gasped at the sight of the still and pale human.

“None of that,” Spike growled. “Tara thinks he can hear us.”

“He c..can?” Clem asked as Spike set the bag down. Spike shrugged.
“Maybe he can…maybe he can’t. I’m erring on the side he can. So, we’re going to treat him like he
can. That means someone’s with him at all times. That means someone’s talkin’ to ‘im, reading to
‘im, tellin’ ‘im to fight and ta come back. Whatever it takes ta remind ‘im that he’s got a life worth
livin’. You think you can do that?”

“Yes, Master Spike!” Clem vowed. Spike narrowed his eyes and studied Clem.

“What’s in the bag?” Spike asked.

“Comic books…DVDs…toys for Ante,” Clem said. “Brought all the Spiderman comics I could
find.”

Spike smiled and nodded. It would do.

“Right then. Any problems…”

“…I’ll call you immediately!” Clem cut Spike off.

“Pocklas will be in a couple of hours to check on him. I should be back in about six hours.”

Clem nodded again.

Spike looked at Xander. Then he moved quickly over to the human. He bent down and whispered
into Xander’s ear, “Won’t be gone long. Gonna go take care of business. Specifically put an end to
Zorn. I’ll videotape it just in case you want to see it when yer better, yeah? Come back ta me. Come
back Xander.”

Then Spike stood. Somehow he left the room and suite without a look back.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

I used the Texas Catheter as the model for the one in this story.
Lorne was waiting for Spike when he reached his office. He tried not to wince at the sight of Lorne’s swollen eye and mouth. He could only imagine the bandages covering Lorne’s chest hidden under the crisp clean shirt and bright purple jacket.

“You should be resting,” Spike said gruffly as he walked to his desk.

“Apology accepted…but it wasn’t necessary,” Lorne replied. “You were worried about Xander.”

Spike grunted and picked up the phone.

“Yeah,” he barked into the handset after pressing a speed dial number, “want Zorn brought down to the lions. I’ll be there in ten.”

Spike clicked the receiver off and put the phone back down on the desk. He turned and looked at Lorne.

“You coming?”

“Lemon drop…” Lorne began to decline.

“Lorne,” Spike simply said.

Lorne stared and Spike then sighed. He shook his head. Spike wasn’t nearly as calm as he pretended. A scene would be just what Angelus was looking for and just what Spike couldn’t afford to make. He had to be Spike, Master of Las Vegas. He couldn’t be Spike, the Incredibly Brassed Off Vampire on a Bender.

“Right. But I reserve the right to cover my eyes,” Lorne finally said.

For the first time in hours Spike smiled slightly, “Ya really sure you’re a demon?”

“Well, my parents always did say they ate the wrong son,” Lorne replied with a small smile of his own. Spike laughed bitterly and led them out of the office and out towards the lion habitat.

***

Predators in the wild are sensitive to weather changes and the whims of bigger predators. It was no different in the demon in world. Spike’s minions and customers knew something dark was brewing with the Master of Las Vegas. They were all more careful and obsequious than normal.

The minions guarding Zorn were at attention and waiting for Spike when he arrived at the lion habitat. Even the Primals were restless. The paced and growled softly. Their eyes flashed green and they sniffed the air.

Zorn’s scales looked less shiny then they had in the casino. He stank of fear and the cells. He looked at Spike and then bowed low.

“Master Spike…” he tried.

“Shut it!” Spike ordered. Zorn quickly fell silent. Tremors coursed through his body.

Lorne tried to shield himself from the other demon’s terror, Spike’s anger and the Primals’ hunger.
There were too many powerful and raw emotions here and the scene was only going to get worse.

Spike looked at the minions. “Leave us!” he snarled.

The minions turned and left without another world or glance. Zorn looked at them as if they were his last hope and refuge.

“You ever been to Africa?” Spike asked Zorn.

“Wh..what?” Zorn replied.

“You been to Africa?” Spike repeated the question.

Zorn shook his head. Spike stepped closer to the glass of the lion habitat.

“It’s an amazing place. Cradle of civilization. The birth place for both demon and human alike. Course the humans bollocks it all up like they do everythin’ else. Plundered the continent of it resources and yet it’s still beautiful.”

“Y..yes, m’lord.”

“Step closer,” Spike ordered. Zorn moved as slowly as he dared.

“See them?” Spike said as he pointed to the three lions in the habitat. Zorn nodded.

“The largest of the males. His name is Ntchwaidumela. It means ‘He Who Greets with Fire,’” Spike explained. “The female is Matsumi which means ‘Hunter.’ Ntchwaidumela’s brother…well I never did get his name.”

“Master Spike?” Zorn tentatively questioned.

“Follow me,” Spike ordered as he walked along the glass enclosure until he came to a gated door. He keyed it opened and stepped inside. More tremors wracked Zorn but he followed Spike.

“They look like just like all any lions you’d see in a zoo or National Geographic special don’t they?” Spike asked as he paused before another door leading into the habitat.


“They’re not though. They’re demons,” Spike continued as the keyed the inner door opened. The lions turned and looked at the door. Their eyes flashed green again.

“Primals. Pure meld of demon and animal. Raw and ancient like Africa,” Spike said as he slid the door open.

“Master Spike…please,” begged Zorn.

“No trappings of protocol or vestiges of humanity about ‘em,” Spike continued as the lions began to slink toward the open door. “They don’t care about power or privilege. “

Zorn dropped to his knees and continued to beg, “Master Spike…whatever I have done…I am sorry. Forgive me.”

“They care only about their territory and their pride…and when I say pride I don’t mean their ego. I mean their family. What’s theirs. What belongs to ‘em. Understand?”
“Y..yes!” yelled Zorn as the lions were now close enough he could feel the power emanating from them. He could feel their heated breath.

Spike finally turned from the lions and looked down at Zorn. He arched an eyebrow.

“Angelus is pissed you sullied something that was his,” Spike said calmly.

Zorn bent over and put his face to the floor. His body shook.

“I…I…s..s..sorry. Wha…whatever..I’m sorry,” Zorn gibbered.

“Yeah, mate, I know you are,” Spike acknowledged.

Zorn gulped and looked up at Spike. A faint glimmer of hope shown in his incandescent eyes.

“But that’s not the worst thing you done, mate,” Spike said cold bitterness dripping from his voice. “You sullied and hurt what was mine!”

“Master Spike?” Zorn cried. The lions growled. Zorn turned his face in fear toward the predators.

“Bon Appetit,” Spike said to the large cats before he backed up and shut the door behind him.

“MASTER SPIKE!” Zorn cried in terror and in pain as Ntchwaidumela pounced on the prone demon.

Spike continued to exit the habitat. He didn’t look back. Zorn’s anguished cries were short lived and soon the air was filled with scent of fresh blood and the sound of flesh rending and bone crunching.

Lorne looked at Spike.

“I’m going to the arenas at the Mandalay,” Spike said before Lorne could say anything. “You’ve got the floor tonight.”

Lorne nodded and remained silent as he watched Spike leave. He tried to ignore the sounds of the lions feeding.

***

Spike limped back to his suite with thirty minutes to spare. He had time to get cleaned up before the Pocklas checked up on Xander and he had to change Xander’s bag and a catheter. Spike nearly groaned as he moved across the suite toward the bedroom.

He’d feasted well in the stables at the Mandalay after his bouts in the arena but he’d taken a lot of damage. His wounds were slow to heal. He’d wished he could have made all his bouts death matches but that would have been too out of character. He’d kept the first and last bouts to the death and the rest he’d just left his opponents a living pulsing mass of bloodied flesh on the floor.

The crowds had loved it. He’d put on a good show as Master of Las Vegas and he’d been able to find an outlet for his fear and anger. He wouldn’t be able to do it tomorrow night.

“…know not supposed to touch you without permission,” Spike heard Clem say.

Spike silenced his growl and crept toward the bedroom door which was slightly ajar. *Gonna rip ‘im a part if his touchin’ my pet,* Spike vowed as he peered into the bedroom. Spike froze. Ante was curled up asleep snuggled between Xander’s chest and arm. Clem was holding Xander’s hand.

“Don’t even know if you can feel this,” Clem said as he gently squeezed Xander’s hand, “but maybe
if you can hear, you can feel. Just want you to know you’re OK, like when you had to wade in the pool. Knew you were scared, but held your hand. Just in case you’re scared now, I’m holding your hand. Don’t need to be scared though, Xander. Master Spike is taking good care of you.”

“Even if he wasn’t Ante and I would. Demons like me Xander we were never much in the Before and we certainly aren’t much now,” Clem continued. “But…well even if being your Companion hadn’t given me a higher status I’d still be here for you Xander because you’re my friend. I really mean it. Who else would play Candyland with me or enjoy comic books or even know so much about Star Trek? Tell ya a secret Xander, I really liked the Before. Sure humans and demons alike shunned me. Demons thought I was weak and humans thought I was freak with a skin condition but there was so much to do. Ya know? And I didn’t have to worry about so much about who was in charge of what where and maybe…well I’d like to think if we’d met on the streets you’d have been my friend. You would have seen past the floppy ears and we could have traded knock-knock jokes. Bet you know a bunch of them.”

Clem paused and smiled. Ante opened his eyes and yawned. He peered at the bedroom door. His eyes narrowed.

“Knock Knock!” Clem said. “Doris. Doris, who? Doris locked, that’s why I had to knock!”

Spike rolled his eyes. Ante stretched and stood up.

Clem laughed, “See, I know you gotta have more. Or how about this one? Knock Knock!”

Clem paused and Ante jumped off the bed and began making his way toward the bedroom door.

“Who’s there? Norma Lee. Norma Lee who? Normalee I don’t go around knocking on doors, but do you want to buy a set of encyclopedias?”

For the second time that night Spike bit back a groan. He then flashed fang at Ante who was in front of the door with his ears back.

“Ante?” Clem called.

Spike slipped back quietly into the front room. He went back to the front door. He opened it and closed it loudly.

“Master Spike?” Clem called out.

“Yeah!” Spike barked. “Who’d ya think it was the postman?”

Clem appeared at the bedroom door. He looked over Spike who still looked bruised and blood spattered.

“Are you, OK?” Clem asked softly.

“Just did a few rounds in the arena. Keep Xander company while I get cleaned up, yeah?” Spike said as he marched toward the bedroom and bathroom.

Clem nodded. Spike paused at the bedroom door and turned to look at Clem.

“Oi! And try squeezin’ Xan’s hand now and then. If he can hear he might be able ta feel. “

Clem face folded back into a large grin as he nodded. “Right, Master Spike.”

Spike nodded and proceeded into the bathroom for his shower.
Spike was cleaned and ready when the Pocklas arrived. He dismissed Clem and his hellkitten. The Pocklas watched as Spike tended Xander. He’d done it well. When he was done he dismissed them and curled back up with his pet.

“Zorn’s dead,” Spike said to Xander. “Can’t hurt you anymore. One more reason for you to come back now, yeah?”

Xander lay quiet and still. Spike sighed.

“How about some more *Ivanhoe* then, eh?” Spike asked as he fished for his glasses and the book from beside the bed. “We were just about to read of Front-de-Boeuf end and Ulrica’s part in it and her revenge for her imprisonment, rape and the murders of her family.

Spike’s injuries were mostly healed by the Pocklas next visit. It wasn’t time to change Xander’s drainage bag but the Pocklas did change his IV. Spike watched them as the healing demons worked in silence. Only when they left did he let himself drift back to sleep snuggled securely around his Pet.

The next time the Pocklas came Spike’s eyebrows were arched in concern. Xander’s drainage bag wasn’t as full as it had been the last time it needed changed and he looked “puffier.” His skin felt odd and slight indentations were left when Spike touched him.

“What’s happening?” Spike barked.

The Pocklas looked at each other briefly then looked at Spike.

“The processes pertaining to elimination is shutting down,” said one of the Pocklas.

“And that means?” Spike asked.

“His body is not eliminating waste as it should. Specifically his kidneys are beginning to cease to function,” the second Pockla replied.

Spike whole body went stiff. For a moment he thought he could feel his long dead heart thump briefly with fear. Even Spike knew that was bad.

“DO SOMETHING!” Spike roared.

The Pocklas bowed low.

“There is nothing we can do, m’lord,” they said in unison. “This is the way of the Norjub.”

“Get out!” Spike ordered in a fierce whisper. The Pocklas bowed low and left. Spike looked at his pet. He sat down gently next to him and began to run his hands through Xander’s hair.

“Xan,” Spike began softly. “Xander...please. Please don’t do this to me...to us. We were just startin’ ta get along, yeah? It was startin’ ta be good, yeah? Please...I’m...”

Spike leaned forward and gently kissed Xander’s lips. A tear slipped from one shimmering blue eye and snaked a trail down Spike’s perfect cheek.

“I’m *beggin’* ya,” Spike whispered against Xander’s lips. “I know I have no right ta ask ya to comeback. I know it’s selfish. But I’m the Big Bad...yeah? So I’m gonna be selfish Xander. I want
I want ya for more than any plan. I want ya for more than just the mark ya bear or the collar you wear. I want ya for more than just the fact Angel gave ya to me all those years ago. I just want you, Xander. I have since the moment I laid eyes on you. You were a gangly kid with no coordination and no super powers but with the bravery, loyalty, and love like from one of those stories about Arthur and his woofers my Mum told me about and I wanted you for my own.”

Spike took a breath and then gently kissed the tip of Xander’s nose. He smiled at the unconscious man.

“I can’t lose ya, Xander…now that you’ve been mine. Dru was my destiny Xander and when she died…well I thought that was it. No more humanity left for me. No more love…but I was wrong. I was so wrong, pet. Come back and let me show you how wrong I was. Come back and let me love you, Xander.”

***

Eventually Spike had composed himself. He’d called Lorne and arranged for Clem to sit with Xander again and he’d made it down to the casino. He’d drank, he’d caroused, he’d won at cards and he’d settled disputes with his fists. He’d been the master of his city.

Then he’d made his way to the red stable to drink his fill before closing out the night on the casino floor. The one thing he didn’t do was talk to Lorne. There was nothing to say. His Xander was dying. He was ‘living it large’ like a master vampire. His heart was breaking.

At the end of the evening he returned to the suite. Clem looked teary eyed and the furry demon spawn disguised as a tabby barely spared Spike a glance. Xander looked slightly yellow. The Pocklas shuffled in and bowed low before Spike.

“The jaundice…” Spike managed to ask.

“His liver is beginning to fail, m’lord,” the Pocklas explained.

Spike nodded. He let the Pocklas work. When they were done he curled up around his, pet.

“How about something different today,” Spike said softly as he lay his head on Xander’s chest and then began to hum before beginning to sing, “Early one morning, just as the sun was rising, I heard a maid sing in the valley below: Oh don’t deceive me, Oh never leave me, How could you use a poor maiden so?…”

***

The next evening began pretty much as did the previous evenings. Spike changed Xander although his output of urine was almost nil. He called for Clem and he showered and changed. He said goodbye to Xander and promised he’d be back later. Then he’d left the suite without looking back. By the time his elevator reached the casino floor he was “Master Spike.”

He began the evening with talking to customers and wheeling and dealing. He gambled and drank. He visited the blue stables. He was returning to the floor when Lorne approached him.

“You have a call, Master Spike,” Lorne said.

“Yeah?”

“It’s Angelus, m’lord,” Lorne replied.
Spike turned and flashed gold eyes at the green demon. Lorne met Spike’s gaze.

“I’ll take it in my office,” Spike said gruffly and began to storm his way there.

“Sp…Master Spike,” Lorne called out softly. Spike stopped and turned.

“He…You…”

“If you think I need a lesson on how to deal with my Sire,” Spike barked out, “you’re welcome to join me.”

Lorne nodded and hurried after Spike. The other demons whispered and stared as Lorne followed Spike. The little exchange fueled the rumors about what Lorne had done to end up beaten up by Spike earlier in the week.

Spike didn’t waste time shutting the door behind him when he entered his office. He marched quickly to his desk, sat down, and picked up the phone. He punched the “talk” button.

“Sire,” he said smoothly as Lorne entered the room and shut the door behind him.

“Spikey!” Angelus’s voice drifted across the phone line. “How are you?”

“Good. Just had a nice buxom blonde.”

Angelus giggled. Spike gritted his teeth.

“Nothing wrong with the classics, my boy,” Angelus replied. “So I hear you delivered my message to Zorn.”

“I hope it was to your pleasure.”

“Feeding him to your pets was a nice touch,” Angelus said. “Speaking of pets…howz Xander?”

Spike clenched his fist. Lorne shook his head.

“Bit under the weather,” Spike replied. Angelus laughed. “You could have warned me, sire.”

“Spikey, then it wouldn’t have been a surprise!” Angelus said.

“Well it was,” Spike said failing to keep the snarl out of his voice.

“Now Spike don’t be that way,” Angelus warned.

“He’s my Pet…”

“And he may continue to be,” Angelus interrupted. “You should know better than I Xander’s more balls than brains.”

Spike raked his nails across the top of his desk hard enough to gouge the wood.

“If he’s strong enough, he’ll survive…if not…well I’ll give you Lindsey. Howz that?” Angelus asked. “You’d like that right, Linds? Just wiggle your toes for ‘yes’.”

“That’s…generous, sire,” Spike ground out.

Angelus laughed, “Anything for you my boy. Anything for you. Though I have to admit Linds is a bit ‘broken in’. Not as tight as he used to be. See, now that’s one of perks of the Norjub. Just think, if
Xander lives…while he’ll be virgin tight again.”

Spike stood up swiftly and Lorne raced across the room to lay a soothing hand on Spike’s arm. His eyes pleaded with Spike for calm.

“Spike?” Angelus voice oozed through the phone line. “You still there? Everything OK?”

“Everything’s fine, sire. Just dropped my pen.”

Angelus laughed, “You always were so clumsy. Hope you’ll take good care of Xander…if he lives. I mean with that completely healed body. Hear tell he’ll even grow back a foreskin. Tell me, Spike. Will you cut him again if he does?”

“Hadn’t given it much thought,” Spike managed to say.

“Could be fun. He’d have his voice. Could do it right there on the casino floor. Be a big draw. Maybe even auction off the leftovers,” Angelus suggested.

“I’ll keep that in mind,” Spike choked out past his rage. “Course that depends on if he makes it, sire.”

Angelus laughed, “Well ya have me there, Spikey. Still, the offer stands for Linds if he doesn’t make it. I’ll even throw in another vial of Norjub so you can regrow Lind’s hand and tighten him up. Trust me, Lindsey’s too stubborn to die. Got it in his head he’s gonna kill me some day. Aint’ that right, Linds?”

Angelus laughed again. “Whoo boy! You should see those toes wiggle, Spike! Might have to bite ‘em off.”

“Whatever you think is best, sire,” Spike replied with his eyes closed.

“This little piggy went to market,” Angelus said and there was a loud but muffled scream on the line.

Spike shook and shouted into the phone, “Sire!”

“Mmm?” Angelus replied.

“Will that be all?”

“Yeah,” Angelus said. “Let me know how things go with Xander. Looks like I might have to give Linds some Norjub anyway.”

“Yes, sire,” Spike said.

“This little piggy stayed home,” Angelus said followed by another agonized scream.

“Goodbye, Sire,” Spike said.

“Mbye, Spike,” Angelus said after he spat something out of his mouth. The phone went dead. Spike hurled it across the room and it shattered to pieces.

Next Spike put his hands under the edge of his desk. He heaved and up ended it. Lorne moved to a far corner as Spike next picked up his chair and flung it across the room. He looked around his office and spotted the metal filing cabinet. He pounced, grabbed it, lifted it up over his head and sent it after the chair.

Lorne was terrified. Spike never uttered a sound as he completely trashed and dismantled his office.
Even the paneling wasn’t safe as Spike ripped and shredded it from the wall. Spike was as Primal as the lions he kept in the habitat.

The sound of Lorne cell phone ringing stopped Spike in mid frenzy. He paused and looked at Lorne as if he realized for the first time the green demon was there. Spike tilted his head. The ringing continued. Lorne let it ring until it switched to voice mail. He wasn’t sure he should move. There was silence for a moment and then ringing resumed.

“Answer it,” Spike ordered in voice that was almost alien.

Lorne dug in his pocket and pulled out his phone, “Lorne here…”

His answer was cut off and he looked at Spike with panic. Spike didn’t need to wait for an explanation to know the call was about Xander. He didn’t wait for it either. He immediately headed for the door.

“We’re on our way, Clem,” Lorne said as he followed the out of control vampire out of the office.

***

Lorne had to wait for the elevator to come back down. Spike had beaten him there and already taken it up. Lorne paced nervously and called Clem.

“Clem…”

“Master Spike’s here and he’s not letting the Pocklas work!” Clem shouted in the phone as soon as he answered.

“Clem you’ve got to pull him off,” Lorne ordered. “He’s not in control! You’ve got to make him back off.”

“The..the wards went off! Xander stopped breathing,” Clem continued as if he hadn’t heard Lorne. “The Pocklas rushed in..they started to beat on Xander’s chest and they put this bag over his mouth…and…and I called you. Then…Then Master Spike…and Lorne he…”

“CLEM!” Lorne shouted as the elevator finally arrived. “Spike isn’t thinking clearly. You’ve got to pull him away from Xander. If you want to save Xander…”

Just then Lorne heard a hideous yowl and an unholy growl. It made the hair on the back of Lorne’s neck stand on end.

“ANTE!” Clem screamed and then Lorne could hear Spike growling as he stepped into the elevator.

“CLEM!” Lorne shouted as the doors shut. All he could he was growling and snarling. There was hissing and Clem screaming.

_Doyle love, Lorne silently prayed, if you’re up there watching I could sure use a hand._

“CLEM!” Lorne tried again as the elevator approached the top floor. He could still only hear the sounds of a vicious struggle. Lorne hung up the phone as soon as the doors opened. He ran into the suite and rushed into the bedroom.

The sight was chaos as the Pocklas were frantically trying to keep Xander alive. One was doing chest compressions while the other was using a bag to pump air into Xander’s lungs. Clem was struggling to hold back Spike whose face was a mass of deep bloody gouges. One eye looked like it
had been raked over with a claw.

“LORNE!” Clem cried feebly as Spike shoved him away.

“SPIKE!” Lorne screeched at an inhuman pitch. Spike and Clem, grabbed their ears and nearly fell to their knees. Ante limped from the room on three legs leaving a bloody trail.

Lorne grabbed Spike and ceased his screeching. The Pocklas continued to work on Xander.

“Spike! You’re not helping!” Lorne yelled at the yellow-eyed vamp. Spike stared at Lorne for a moment before falling to the floor.

Lorne took a deep breath and looked at Clem who was shaky and bruised.

“Go find Ante. He looks hurt,” Lorne said as he needed the gentle demon focused elsewhere. Clem nodded and followed the blood trail out of the room.

Lorne dropped to his knees and looked at Spike. Spike raised his head and looked at Lorne.

“I’m losing ‘im, green bean,” Spike said softly. “Angelus…he wins again. He’s taking my…”

“Spike,” Lorne said softly and touched the vampire’s bleeding face. “The Pocklas are still working on him. It’s not over yet.”

“He’s not breathing! He’s heart’s not pumping! Death…I’m a vampire! I can smell it lurking, Lorne!” Spike yelled.

The sudden movements of the Pocklas startled Spike and Lorne. They both looked up. The Pocklas stepped away from the bed, shook their heads and bowed low.

Spike stared at them for a moment in shock. Everything inside of him froze in fear, sorrow and anger. Tears poured down Lorne’s face. Then Spike began to shake. It started with his hands and spread through his whole body.

“NO!” he roared as he stood up and rushed to the bed. He leaned over and looked at the yellow, bloated and still Xander. “NO!”

Spike picked up the abandoned bag the Pocklas had used and he put it back over Xander’s mouth. He began to pump it.

“DAMN IT, XANDER! NO!” Spike raged as he forced air into Xander’s still lungs. “Yer MINE! Do you hear me? Huh? You think death changes that? Do you? It doesn’t! There’s no place in hell your soul can hide that I won’t find you. You think of that? HUH? Pick any hell dimension and I’ll be there to haul yer arse back! YOU HEAR ME, PET?”

“Spike,” Lorne tried to say as he laid a hand on Spike’s arm. Spike shrugged it off.

“And if yer soul goes to heaven?” Spike asked as he continued to pump. “You think that changes anything? HUH? DO YOU? WRONG! You think Michael and his nancy boys will stop me from slippin’ by those pearly gates and huntin’ you down? **You know better!**”

Spike snarled as he lay down the bag and began to pump on Xander’s chest.

“C’mon XANDER!” Spike yelled. “Yer MINE! I marked ya! I collared ya! I’m gonna Claim ya! Heaven, Hell…Death ain’t gonna stop me. So save us both the time and trouble and **COME BACK TO ME RIGHT NOW DAMNIT! RIGHT NOW! RIGHT NOW, XANDER!**”
Spike abandoned the chest compressions and resumed pumping air into the Xander’s lungs. He gave the bag a few more squeezes and then pulled it away. He stopped and stared at Xander and then went still. Eyelids twitched and then fluttered.

Suddenly brown eyes stared into shimmering blue. Spike smiled and Xander’s mouth opened. He sucked in a large and loud breath of air. The Pocklas rushed back to the bed side. Spike took Xander’s hand as the Pocklas checked Xander’s pulse on his other wrist.

“That’s it, pet,” Spike said softly. “That’s it.”

Xander blinked once, twice and a third time before his eyes settled closed again. He breathed easily. Spike looked at the Pocklas. They bowed lower then they’d ever bowed before.

“He has passed the Turning Point, m’lord,” they said in unison. “The Norjub will now heal all.”

Spike nodded and waved them out. He looked at Lorne.

“Spike…” Lorne began.

“You did good, green bean,” Spike said tiredly. “See the Pocklas take care of Clem and his kitten, yeah?”

“And you?” Lorne asked pointing to Spike face. Spike turned and looked at Xander whose color was already beginning to improve.

“I’m gonna be fine, Lorne. Better’n fine.”

TBC

Author’s Note:

Ntchwaidumela (En-tWI-do-meLA) and Motsumi (Mot-sue-ME) come from a National Geographic special I saw years ago called National Geographic: Eternal Enemies: Lions and Hyenas. It was one of the best ones I’ve ever seen and one of the most heartbreaking and brutal. I confess it has completely jaded me against hyenas since. I recommend watching it but it is not for the faint hearted. Ntchwaidumela is very aptly named. If you want to see the scene where he is the death bringer to the hyenas taunting his pride and Motsumi gets revenge (and yeah I do mean revenge) you can see a clip of the special here.

I got the knock knock jokes from here.

Yes the song is the one Spike’s mother sang to him. It’s the alternate lyrics here.

Arthur of course is a reference to King Arthur and Michael is a reference to Archangel Michael who is often seen as the commander of God’s Amy and leader of the other angels.
“I still can’t believe you broke his paw!” Xander said for the umpteenth time as he ran a hand down Ante’s back. The kitten stretched and purred. It moved its bound paw awkwardly.

“Oi!” Spike said as he rolled his eyes, “Already said I’m sorry. Wasn’t personal. Was a bit balmy at the time. ‘Sides ‘e gave as good as he got. Shoulda seen my eye!”

“Uh huh,” Xander replied and looked suspiciously at Spike.

“I give up,” Spike said as he threw up his hands and moved away from the bed. “I’m goin’ ta fetch yer din.”

“Don’t forget some tuna for Ante.”

“Wouldn’t dream of it,” Spike said drily as he left the room. He paused at the doorway and watched his pet. Xander was smiling at the kitten. Spike smiled. Xander had come a long way in the three days since he’d “died.”

***

The first day had been spent with Spike just silently watching Xander breathe except when it was time to change his pet’s bag and catheter. Spike had actually smiled at the strong smell and steady output of urine Xander was excreting. It meant he was getting better.

Lorne had made one feeble attempt to get Spike to leave Xander but had given it up before he got more than two words out of his mouth. Spike’s body language said it wasn’t going anywhere until Xander woke up.

“Ante’s going to be OK,” Lorne finally said instead.

“Hmm?” Spike replied never taking his eyes off his sleeping pet.

“Seems the blood he was trailing was yours.”

Spike laughed. “Sure there ain’t such things as Primal Kittens?”

“You did break his paw though,” Lorne continued. Spike had looked away from Xander then and at the green demon.

“Xan’s not going ta be happy about that,” Spike said softly.

“Pocklas are taking care of him as you ordered,” Lorne said. “They’ve bound his paw and he seems to be getting around just fine on three legs.”

“And Clem?”

“Bruised but otherwise OK. He’d like to see Xander.”

Spike nodded and replied, “Yeah. That’ll be good. Short visit. Kitten can stay though. Might as well let them convalesce together.”

Lorne arched an eyebrow at that. “You think the kitten’s going to like you any better now?”
“No…but we might as well get used ta each other. Make peace. Seems the brat cat likes Xan and any beastie willing to face an out of control vampire to protect Xander…well…”

Lorne laughed at that and replied, “Careful, lemon drop. Your s…”

“Lorne,” Spike had growled.

Lorne laughed again and replied, “I’ll let Clem know.”

**

The second day Spike had been reading more of *Ivanhoe* to Xander when he’d felt like he was being watched by more than just the malevolent yellow-green eyes of the kitten which had planted itself next to Xander and hadn’t moved except to visit the litter box. Spike and it had worked out a truce. Spike didn’t touch the kitten and the kitten didn’t swat Spike. They both slept curled around Xander.

Spike looked at Xander and found wide brown eyes staring at him.

“Xander?” Spike whispered just as the wards in the room caused the sounds of bells of chiming.

*Spike*, Xander thought and blinked.

“Pet,” Spike said softly, “try and say something.”

Xander’s eyes went wide. He swallowed then nodded.

“D..did I die?” Xander forced out as croak. His eyes grew wider at the sound of his own voice and his hand reached for Spike’s.

“Almost,” Spike smiled as he clenched Xander’s hand.

*Liar*, Xander thought and then remembered to speak. “Liar.”

“Oi!” Spike chuckled.

Xander’s brow furrowed. “Y..you were yelling at me,” he’d said in a voice growing stronger.

“You were trying ta leave me,”

Xander snorted, “Wouldn’t get far.”

Spike smiled and then bent down to kiss the tip of Xander’s nose.

“And don’t ya forget it,” Spike whispered.

“I..like you’d let me,” Xander said as the Pocklas had entered the room. Spike withdrew a bit but he’d never released Xander’s hand. He let the demon healers examine Xander and reassured Xander as they did. They removed the catheter and bag as well as the IV.

When the Pocklas had finished checking Xander they’d bowed and looked at Spike. “He has healed, m’lord,” they’d said.

“Good,” Spike had said.

“And *he’s* thirsty,” Xander had interjected.

Spike and the Pocklas both looked at Xander. *What?* Xander thought then added, “M’lord..er
Spike rolled his eyes. *Boy needs ta learn a new set of manners now he’s got his voice back,* Spike thought.

“Ice chips for now, m’lord,” the Pocklas said ignoring Xander. “If your Pet does not display any signs of distress from the chips then broth in a few hours.”

“Oh no…not back to a liquid diet!” Xander had groaned. “Please! Let me go back to being half dead.”

“Xander!” Spike warned.

“What?”

“Quiet!”

“Wh…?” Xander hadn’t been able to finish his statement before Spike put his hand over his mouth. The vampire looked at the Pocklas.

“You’ve done well. Take your reward from the stables,” Spike ordered.

The Pocklas bowed low and left. Spike looked at Xander who was glaring at him.

“We need ta talk about when Pets talk, when they don’t talk and *how* they talk, pet,” Spike said.

Xander rolled his eyes. *Great!* He’d thought. *Gag me now.*

***

“Fetching lunch again?” Lorne asked.

Spike whirled around to see the green demon holding out a tray and looking amused. “What would your denizens say?”

“Nuthin’ if they wanted to keep all their fingers and toes…not to mention their head,” Spike growled.

Lorne laughed and held out the tray to Spike.

“Did ya get the tuna?” Spike asked.

“And the grilled cheese sandwhich and tomato soup for Xander.”

Spike nodded as he reached for the tray.

“You did good, lemon drop,” Lorne said as Spike took the tray.

“I got lucky,” Spike argued.

“Luck didn’t bring Xander back.”

“Neither did I,” countered Spike.

“You have more to do with him being here then you realize,” Lorne said.

Spike snorted and turned toward the bedroom door. Lorne rushed around and opened it wide for
“Din’s ready,” Spike said as he strolled into the room. Lorne strolled in after him.

“Yes!” Xander said and sat up. “Please say it’s more than chicken broth!”

“How about tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich?” Lorne asked.

“Lorne,” Xander replied with a big grin. “I think I love you!”

Spike couldn’t stop the snarl that escaped his lips. He flashed golden eyes at Xander.

“Spike?” Xander asked nervously.

“What’s eating blondie? He wondered.

“Uh, Xander that…” Lorne tried to interject.

“I’m your Master, pet. You don’t express affection toward any other demon! Got that!” Spike said as he slammed the tray down next to the bed.

“It’s just an expression,” Xander argued. “It doesn’t mean anythin…”

“I love you’ always means something!” Spike said before storming out of the room.

Xander looked at Lorne. Lorne sighed and moved to the tray. He uncovered it. A good deal of the soup had spilled but not all of it. Lunch was salvageable. He took the small bowl of tuna and put it on the floor by the bed. Then he lifted a now wide awake Ante off the bed and set him on the floor by the tuna. The kitten glared once at the door where Spike had exited before turning his attention toward the flaky fish.

“Lorne?”

“Xander, now that you can talk you have to be careful about what you say,” Lorne said covering for the real reason fueling Spike’s anger. Once again he didn’t need to be an empathy demon to know how Xander’s casual ‘I love you’ thrown at Lorne had hurt the romantic and deeply besotted master vampire.

Xander sighed, “I know. Spike gave me the lecture, complete with the promises of dire punishments.”

“Do you know, Xander? Do you really? I’ve yet to hear you address him as ‘Master’ or you to call me ‘sir’.”

“B…but we’re alone in the suite!” Xander argued. “It’s just us.”

“So you think that really makes a difference? You think creating a bad habit in the suite is going to help you on the casino floor?”

“Spike doesn’t seem to mind.”

“Spike’s still getting over how close he came to losing you. He’s being overly indulgent,” Lorne said and held out the half empty bowl of soup to Xander.

“Well if he doesn’t care why shou…” started to say as he accepted the bowl.

“Because I care about both of you,” Lorne said interrupting Xander. “I don’t want to have to see him punish you severely for behavior he could be correcting now.”
“He wouldn’t!”

“He would…should…and will have to!” Lorne insisted. “You know that.”

Xander fell silent and slurped up a few spoonfuls of soup. He didn’t want to admit Lorne was right, but he knew he was. If Xander behaved badly on the casino floor, Spike would have to punish him. *Why does this seem to get harder instead of easier?* Xander thought.

“I can’t,” Xander whispered.

“Can’t what, pet?”

Red and brown eyes swirled toward the bedroom door where a much more composed Spike stood staring at Xander. The vampire’s blue eyes were fixed on Xander.

“What can’t you do, pet?” Spike asked. He was barely in control of his demon from Xander’s earlier slip but if Xander had more adjustment problems he had to know. Lorne was right. He’d been over indulgent and he had to stop, for Xander’s sake.

Xander closed his eyes and pushed the bowl away. “Finish this.”

“Liar,” Spike said as he entered the bedroom.

“Spi…” Lorne began.

“Tell the truth, pet, before I lay stripes to ya,” Spike ordered.

“How do you know I’m not?” Xander asked.

“You lookin’ to mar that pretty new skin so soon?”

“Spike…” Lorne tried again.

“You got until the count of three and I’m startin’ at two, pet,” Spike warned.

“Fine! You wanna know the truth you bleached bully?” Xander yelled.

Lorne hissed in concern and looked at Spike. Spike face was unreadable.

“It’s the master thing, OK? I don’t think…no…I know there’s no way I’m going to be able to call you Master…at least not without a ‘menace,’ ‘moron,’ or ‘meathead’ afterward.”

“Spike…” Lorne started to say.

“Out!” Spike ordered, “and take the creature with you!”

“Lemon dro…” Lorne tried again.

“OUT!”

*Shit!* Xander thought as he stared at Spike. The vampire was rigid but his eyes were solid gold. *Why or why did I have to get my voice back?* Xander wondered as Lorne scooped up a hissing Ante and headed for the bedroom door.

“I’ll let you know when I want to be disturbed,” Spike yelled as Lorne exited the room and then the suite. Xander put his soup bowl back on the tray.
“Spike…” Xander began.

“Shut it!” Spike warned.

“So…I’m Master Menace…Moron…Meathead?” Spike asked.

“That’s not what I said…” Xander argued.

“But it’s what you thought.”

“Hey there’s no crime against thinking!”

“You sure about that, pet? This isn’t your world anymore. Lots of demons read mind. Even spells for that,” Spike said.

Xander paled for a moment. “Spike…”

“What else, pet?” Spike asked as he moved closer to the bed.

“Huh?”

“What else …Master Mutant? Is that one of those thoughts?”

“Maybe…I don’t know!”

“You don’t?” Spike growled as he grabbed hold of the covers and yanked them away from Xander. Xander was stretched out naked on the bed.

“Hey!” Xander yelled. “Is that your answer for every…”

Spike’s hand wrapped around Xander’s throat silenced his protest quickly. Spike’s hand merely rested around Xander’s throat but the message was clear.

“Pets speak when spoken to. If they have something to say they ask permission to speak,” Spike snarled.

Fine! Xander thought and snapped his fingers loudly.

“No! Not interested in what you have to say at the moment, Pet,” Spike said.

Xander glared at Spike. I hate you, he thought.

“Hands above your head,” Spike ordered. Xander narrowed his eyes but obeyed. Spike snorted and unwrapped his hand from Xander’s throat.

“Keep still,” Spike ordered then moved to open the drawer of the nightstand. He dug around and a few moments later pulled out a set of soft leather cuffs attached to a chain. Before Xander could move or protest Spike had the cuffs secured snugly around Xander’s wrists. Then he looped the chain around a slot in the headboard pulling Xander’s arms above his head. Spike locked the chain in place and looked at Xander.

Xander glared at Spike. This isn’t helping, SPIKE, Xander thought.

“This isn’t a punishment,” Spike said as he began to strip. “This is a lesson.”

Goody, Xander thought, a lesson in why I should never trust a vampire or let my guard down
around a demon.

Xander tried not to look at Spike once the vampire was completely nude. As angry as he was at the master vampire, he still couldn’t deny the attraction he’d developed for Spike. Just the promise of Spike’s nude and lithe body stretched out on top of his had Xander’s skin humming with a need he really wanted to deny at the moment.

“Eyes on me, pet,” Spike ordered as he climbed up on the bed.

Xander let out an exaggerated sigh and focused on the blond vampire. He couldn’t help but bite his lip. Ghods Spike was a beautiful creature. He was lean and hard muscles and he moved like he was sex incarnate.

*Should have been an incubus,* Xander thought as he couldn’t help but let his eyes trace the lines of Spike’s pelvic muscles down to the sandy brown curly thatch that framed the long penis that was a hard as the rest of the vampire but sheathed in the softest silkiest skin.

As Xander stared at Spike’s cock it began to rise and grow. Xander licked his lips and was mildly disappointed. They weren’t as silky as the skin on Spike’s penis. Xander curled his hands into fists.

Spike leaned his head back and breathed deep. He loved the scent of his boy. He drank in the air soaked with the release of Xander’s pheromones. Whatever the situation between them when they stripped it all down to skin there was always this mad singing of the flesh for which Spike was eternally grateful.

“Spread yer legs,” Spike softly ordered.

Xander’s eyes flew back to focus on Spike face. *What’s Spike going to do?* Xander wondered.

“Spike…?” Xander began.

“One more word without permission,” Spike warned, “and I will gag you.”

Xander snapped his mouth shut and looked at Spike.

“Spread’em, pet.”

This time Xander obeyed. He spread his legs wide and Spike crawled up between them. Then he leaned over Xander bracing himself with his hands on either side of Xander’s head. He smiled and sniffed the air.

“You want me, Xan,” Spike said.

Xander shook his head. Spike laughed and then leaned down and began to nibble on Xander’s neck. Xander braced himself to be bitten. Spike felt the tension and hummed against Xander’s skin sending dancing tendrils of awareness down Xander’s spine.

“Not gonna bite ya tonight,” Spike murmured against Xander’s skin as he continued to tease and taste the side of Xander’s neck. Xander focused on breathing normally. Spike trailed his kisses around to the base of Xander’s throat. Xander let his head fall back and Spike teased the hollow there before sliding his sinful lips up to cover Xander’s Adam’s apple.

Xander gasped and dug his fingernails into his palms. Spike hummed against the lump in Xander’s throat. Xander chocked back a moan.
Spike sat back on his heels. Xander’s skin was flushed and his cock was more than half hard. The tip was beginning to peek out from the new foreskin. Brown eyes blazed defiance, denial and want. Spike trailed finger tips lightly down the inside of Xander’s forearms. Xander bit his bottom lip and then almost arched off the bed when Spike trailed those same fingertips lightly down Xander’s side. The vampire smiled at the squirming human in his power and thrall. He leaned down and began to suck and tease Xander’s right nipple while his fingertips plucked and lightly twisted Xander’s left nipple. A moan escaped Xander even as he shook his head frantically trying to deny what Spike was doing to him. Spike curled his tongue around the peak of flesh and lapped at it like it was the sweetest candy. Xander’s breath was ragged now. His moved his legs restlessly and the brushed against Spike. Spike reveled in the heat pouring off his pet. He lifted his mouth away from the nipple he’d been enjoying and looked at Xander’s face. Xander’s eyes were closed in his battle to feel more and deny all. Spike pinched Xander’s left nipple.

“Eyes on me,” Spike reminded Xander.

Xander eyelids flew open and he locked gazes with Spike.

*Spike, Xander’s silently mouthed. Spike grinned and tugged on Xander’s nipple again.

“Gonna get ya pierced again,” Spike said.

Xander shook his head.

“*Yes,” Spike argued as he now lightly stroked the abused nipple. “*Yer mine. Need ta make sure yer marked. Gonna pierce your ear and nip again.”

Xander half sighed and half moaned. *Fine! He thought. Can we just get on with this?

Spike chuckled and then leaned down again. This time he traced the lines of Xander’s muscles in a slow sensuous exploration with his tongue. He let the muscles guide him down to the thick thatch of dark curly hairs that made a bed for his pet’s thick and heavy cock which was hard and leaking.

Xander tugged at his restraints as Spike sniffed hungrily where Xander’s scent was strongest. *FUCK! Xander silently screamed in Spike ran the tip of his tongue over the tip of Xander’s cock licking up the sweet juices leaking there.

Spike wondered if Xander was aware of the little mewling sounds he was making. He enjoyed them almost as much as he enjoyed the taste of his pet. *Gonna Claim ya good, Xan, Spike thought. Not tonight…but soon.

Spike shifted down and used his hands to spread Xander’s leg open more. He began to lick at the juncture where leg met ass. Xander hissed in shock, need and surprise. His eyes focused on Spike. Spike licked again and looked at Xander. Then with a twinkle in his eye he urged Xander to lift his leg.

Xander paled for a moment. What did Spike want?

“Pet,” Spike said softly. “Lift up.”

Xander swallowed and lifted his leg. Spike smiled hungrily and then began to kiss the exposed curve of Xander’s left ass cheek. Xander sucked air greedily as his body flushed with a fiery need and overwhelming sensation. He panted as Spike laved, kissed and lightly bit his ass. Meanwhile Spike’s
thumb was lightly stroking the crease of Xander’s ass creating a whirling aching need that went straight to his leaking cock.

“Lift yer other leg, pet,” Spike ordered.

_Huh?_ Xander thought.

“Gonna open ya up,” Spike said as he urged Xander’s right leg up.

_Open me up?_ Xander thought in a slight panic. He looked at Spike nestled between his legs kissing and stroking his ass. Spike raised his eyes. His blue eyes were hungry with need but they flashed reassurances at Xander.

Xander lifted both his legs and bent his knees. He panted. His hands were bound above his head. He was fully exposed and vulnerable before Spike.

“Yer so incredible, Xander,” Spike whispered before began to explore the tender flesh on Xander’s right ass cheek. Again Spike explored Xander’s newly exposed flesh. Both of his thumbs were now tracing the crease of Xander’s ass and with each pass they eased the flesh a little wider apart until Xander felt cool air dancing over hot and usually hidden skin. He moaned. Spike hummed and began to kiss his way to this new area of tender flesh.

“Sp…” Xander nearly called out the vampire’s name. He stopped himself and let out another moan as Spike’s soft lips gently touched his puckered skin.

“Gonna taste ya, Xan,” Spike whispered just before his tongue snaked out and lapped at Xander’s pink hole.

Xander screamed and tugged on his restraints.

“Shh,” Spike murmured against Xander’s sensitive skin before he resumed kissing and tasting his pet. Xander moaned and panted. There was no thought of denial or shame. He was raw feeling as Spike laved and adored his little hole.

“My pet, my good sweet pet,” Spike whispered as his thumbs rubbed circles around Xander’s pucker opening it up just a little. Spike tongue quickly returned to its task of tasting Xander. It began to work and burrow its way inside Xander’s whole sending sparks of pleasure and need up through Xander’s nervous system.

Xander began to pant, _“Please! Please! Please!”_ in his head. Spike worked his tongue in deeper inside of Xander. He thrust it slowly in and out taking his time and enjoying tongue fucking his pet. He snaked an arm up and wrapped a firm hand around Xander’s cock.

_Not gonna cum till I say so_, Spike thought.

“You taste so good,” Spike said giving his pet a brief respite. “Could eat you out all day long.”

Xander didn’t know whether to shake or nod his head. He moaned instead and thrust his ass toward Spike. Spike laughed.

“Eyes on me,” Spike said.

Xander watched Spike as he slid his middle finger into his own mouth. He began to finger fuck his own mouth and Xander’s own mouth watered for a taste of the digit. Spike smiled and swallowed his finger down to its base. Then he eased it out. Xander could see it was well coated with saliva.
Spike bent his head again. Once more he began to work his tongue in and around Xander’s hole. Xander arched and pulled angrily on his restraints. *FUCK!* He thought desperately as he wanted… needed to cum. Then he still as he felt the tip of Spike’s finger at the breach of his hole. Spike’s was still eating him out but now the vampire’s finger was gently trying to burrow its way inside Xander. Xander froze.

“Shh, pet,” Spike whispered against Xander’s pucker. “Let it happen. Let me in just a little.”

Xander continued to be frozen as Spike kissed, stroked and tongue fucked him. He could feel Spike’s finger still pressing against his hole slowly sinking inside of him and then with a gasp he suddenly felt his ring give way and Spike’s finger slid in up to its first joint.

“That’s it, Xander,” Spike crooned as he twisted his finger gently. Sensation swept through Xander and despite the somewhat full feeling he found himself thawing. He moaned. Spike continued to eat him out as his finger continued to twist, turn and work its way deeper. Xander wasn’t sure when it slid to the next joint. He only remembered feeling both full and desperately hungry for more. He ached for Spike to be deeper inside of him. He ached for Spike’s touch. He ached to cum. He bucked in frustration and Spike’s finger slid inside all the way and brushed against Xander’s prostrate.

Xander screamed and Spike kept a tight grip on his pet’s penis. Xander tossed his head side to side and began to buck against Spike. He began to fuck himself against Spike’s finger trying to find that sweet spot inside him again.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said as he withdrew his finger back to its first tip.

Xander moaned in protest and shook his head. He continued to try and buck against Spike. Spike held still and crooned comfort to Xander until his pet calmed down. He didn’t blame the boy. He was also hard and ready to cum. Xander’s scent was overpowering him and the sight of Xander tied up, flushed with need, sweating and open before him had his demon raging to just fuck Xander and fuck him NOW.

Spike took an unneeded breath and calmed himself. He waited until Xander was calmer and stared at him with the expressive chocolate brown eyes he so loved to watch.

“Ya with me?” Spike asked when Xander seemed to focus on him.

Xander was panting but he nodded. Spike smiled. Slowly he eased his finger deep back inside Xander. Xander groaned.

“Don’t move, pet,” Spike ordered. Xander bit his lip and whimpered.

“Now I know what you need,” Spike said before quickly lapping at the tip of Xander’s cock for more of the sweet juices leaking there. Xander arched off the bed and groaned a long sound of frustration and need.

“But,” Spike said as he waited for Xander to calm down, “there’s only one way yer gonna get it.”

*No, Spike,* Xander thought. *You fucking bastard.*

“You have to say the magic word,” Spike continued.

Xander groaned and shook his head.
“Otherwise, pet,” Spike said, “I’ll leave you like this and will start over again in a few hours after you’ve had a chance to calm down. We’ll keep trying until you get it right.”

You wouldn’t! Xander thought and looked at Spike. Blue eyes were bright with their own need and resolution. You would!

“So I want you to think about this, pet,” Spike said. “You get one chance. You say the magic word and I’ll make ya see stars. Ya don’t, I leave ya here trussed up here alone for a spell while all systems reset themselves. Then I’ll be back again to give ya another go. We’ll keep doin’ it until ya get it right, yeah?”

Spike, Xander pleaded with his eyes, please…I…

“So ya ready, pet?” Spike asked as he brushed his finger against Xander’s sweet spot inside. Sparks flashed behind Xander’s eyes.

“What’s the magic word?”

Spike licked the top of Xander’s penis again. Xander groaned.

“Pet?”

Xander panted. He stared at Spike. I hate you, he thought even as he hungered for him. I hate what you can do to me. I hate that…Oh Ghods….

“Master!” Xander cried as Spike brushed that spot inside Xander again. “MASTER!”

“YES! Xander,” Spike cried turning his tight grip on Xander’s cock into a firm stroke. “Yes, pet. I’m your Master. “

Xander screamed as Spike began to finger fuck him in earnest never missing stroking his prostate. Then Spike swallowed Xander’s penis down to its root. Spike began to swallow letting this throat muscles milk Xander’s penis while his free hand began to caress Xander’s balls.

Xander’s world became just the overwhelming pleasure Spike was giving him. He tugged on his restraints. He arched his back. He panted and screamed.

“Master! Master! MY MASTER!” Xander cried as he began to spill down Spike’s throat. “MAAAASTER!”

Spike swallowed ever drop of Xander’s seed and his demon crowed at the sound of Xander’s submission. Need and love raced through Spike and he came humping against the sheets as thoughts of My Pet…My sweet sweet Xander, rolled through his soul.

TBC
“It’s not a toy,” Xander half groaned as Spike once again delicately slid Xander new foreskin back from the head of his penis. Spike turned his head and looked at Xander. He arched an eyebrow.

“Ya ask fer permission ta say somethin’, pet?” Spike asked.

Xander groaned and rolled his eyes. He shook his head. Spike chuckled and kissed the tip of Xander’s nose.

“I guess I can give ya some leeway when were in bed,” Spike said.

“Oh thank you, master,” Xander replied.

“Oi!” Spike growled and tucked Xander close under him. He loved the feel of Xander stretched naked and hot underneath him.

“What?” Xander asked. “I called you ‘master.’”

“Yeah, and I’ve heard you swear with the same tone.”

“So?”

“Pet do you want ta feel the sting of the lash? Do ya have some secret fetish yer not tellin’ me about?”

“Sp…Master…I don’t know what you want from me! I’m calling you…master.”

Spike sighed then looked Xander in the eye.

“I need you to say it like you mean it, pet.”

Xander closed his eyes. *How can I do that?* He thought.

“Pet?”

“Sp…mas…I…what you are asking me to do…”

“Is something ya did just a few minutes ago.”

“That was different,” Xander mumbled.

“Why?”

“Because you forced me to!”

“So you didn’t mean it?”

“I would have said anything, dammit!”

Spike sighed and rolled off of Xander. He sat up. Xander followed suit.

“Pet,” Spike began, “how were you feelin’ when you called me ‘master?’”

“What?” Xander asked incredulously. “What do you mean how was I feeling? You were..uhm
“Pet, why does everything have ta be a battle with you? Just answer the bloody question!”

Xander sighed and then blushed. The orgasm he’d had earlier was one of the most intense he’d had up to date. He’d never known he could feel that undone or that he could get so hard from just ass play. His whole being had narrowed down to just the sensations Spike had teased and tasted from his body.

“I...well...well I was feeling good. Turned on like...well...uhm... Oh c’mon Spi...mas...,” Xander sighed and crossed his arms. He was blushing.

“You were on fire, yeah? You wanted more and more until ya were flying...until ya found release, yeah?”

Xander nodded.

“And who could give you that release?”

“You,” Xander almost spat.

“And do you really hate it that much?”

“Ye...no...I hate you can use it against me!” Xander said honestly.

“I never said I played fair, pet. Especially when it comes ta protectin’ ya.”

“Protecting me? Humiliating me is protecting me? I will never understand demon logic,” Xander huffed.

“Pet, you have ta call me ‘master.’ That’s who I am and that’s the way it is. I’ll use whatever I have ta use to get you ta call me by my title.”

Xander closed his eyes and shook his head. He knew Spike was right. He’d come this far in understanding the world he in which he was living. He also knew Spike wasn’t like the other demons. Spike had been stepping out on some pretty thin limbs to make the world as bearable for him and the humans in his care. *Hell he faked Larry’s death with Angelus!* Xander reminded himself. He opened his eyes and looked at Spike.

“I just...”

“Pet,” Spike interrupted, “you know yer both my pet and my Pet, yeah?”

“Huh?” Xander asked.

It was Spike’s turn to sigh.

“Xander, yer my Pet with a capital ‘P.’ That’s yer title, but yer also my pet with a little ‘p’.”

“See...not tracking here. Never took a class in demon logic.”

Spike growled took a hold of Xander’s chin.

“I’m your Master but I can also be your master,” Spike said. “If you feel nuthin’ else for me at least draw on what I can make ya feel like in bed. Use that if ya need to bring yerself to call me ‘master.’ I don’t care just make sure ya do! Cuz if ya don’t I’m gonna have ta do things neither of us are gonna
Spike growled again and released Xander’s chin. He flopped down on his back and threw an arm over his eyes. He fought an internal war with himself. Part of him just wanted to keep forcing Xander to submit until the word “master” rolled easy off the boy’s tongue. The other part of him just craved all the same love and affection from Spike he felt for the human.

Xander rubbed his chin and stared down at Spike. He was sure Spike didn’t always know his own strength, especially when emotions were involved and Xander was starting to suspect emotions were involved. He wasn’t sure exactly which emotions, but it was starting to become even obvious to the professionally clueless like Xander that Spike was wrestling with his heart about something.

Of course that would mean he’d have a heart to wrestle with, Xander thought. At one time Xander wouldn’t have believed the vampire had a heart but now he did. Xander sighed.

Spike didn’t just want Xander to call him ‘master’ he wanted him to have some sort of ‘feeling’ behind it. Why? Xander wondered. There’s more than just wanting me to sound respectful. Is it because of mind reading demons or spells?

Xander studied the naked vampire stretched out next to him. His muscles were no longer loose from their earlier romp. Instead tension vibrated through Spike. He was like a tightly wound spring. Or a land mine, Xander thought. One false move and he could go off.

Xander closed his eyes and thought about what Spike had said, “If you feel nuthin’ else for me at least draw on what I can make ya feel like in bed.”

There was no doubt Spike could make Xander feel incredible in bed. Spike had driven the horrors of the Azora demon into the deepest corners of Xander’s mind. It was because of Spike Xander had learned to reconnect to his body and his own sexual pleasure. And what pleasure it’s been! Xander thought.

Xander opened his eyes and looked back down at Spike. Spike had certainly been his master in bed. He’d guided him, coaxed him and led him and Xander had come out the stronger for it.

If not slightly addicted to the blond bastard, Xander admitted as he couldn’t help but once again hungrily feast on the sight of a naked Spike stretched out next to him.

Seems like the more I have of him the more I want, Xander thought and blushed at the memory of the feel of Spike’s lips on his most intimate of places. Is that such a bad thing?

Xander curled his fingers into fists. He found he ached to touch Spike to map that cool skin and to taste it. The smell of sex was still strong in the air and it was starting to have an effect on Xander.

Pet with a little ’p,’ Xander thought. What does that mean? Does Master with a capital ‘M’ mean Master Spike…Master Vampire of Las Vegas? If so what would master with a little ‘m’ mean…master Spike?

Xander shook his head. Yes, he was used to thinking of Spike as almost two vampires now but could he stretch it out to a third? Or did he have to? Was this just an expansion of one the vampire’s roles he’d come to know?

“Spike,” Xander whispered.

Spike shook his head and growled softly. He lifted his arm away from his eyes and looked at Xander.
“Pet…” he began.

“Will I ever be allowed to use your name again or once I start calling you…master will it always be master?”

Spike narrowed his eyes and studied Xander. He sensed Xander was on a precipice and he had to answer carefully.

“I think I would miss hearin’ you call my name,” Spike said honestly. “But for the time being ya need ta get used ta callin’ me master until it becomes natural for you. ..until you won’t slip.”

“Like Lorne?” Xander asked. “He calls you Spike in private.”

Nuthin’ like Lorne, pet, Spike thought. My name on his lips doesn’t stir my blood the way it does on yours.

“Sumthin’ like that, yeah,” Spike replied.

Xander studied Spike. There was guardedness about the vampire as if there was a vulnerability he was trying to hide from Xander. The realization shocked Xander. What could make Spike vulnerable around Xander?

“Uhm…” Xander began and then faltered.

“Yes, pet?” Spike asked.

Xander looked down at Spike again. He couldn’t, he just couldn’t call Spike ‘master’. At least not without some practice, a part of him whispered.

“Pet?”

“I need some practice,” Xander admitted.

“Practice?”

“Practice calling you master,” Xander said.

Spike hid a smile. Instead he cocked an eyebrow.

“I’m all ears, pet,” Spike said.

Xander sighed. “That’s not exactly what I meant.”

“What did ya mean?”

“Spi…master!” Xander growled. “You know…you said the thing about what I feel in bed!”

“Oh,” Spike grinned and then stretched. “Well…I’m all yours.”

“What!” Xander chocked.

“I’m all yours. I’m your master…have at it!” Spike said as he stretched, put his hands behind his head and spread his legs.

“B..bu..but…!” Xander sputtered.

“I have a nice one of those,” Spike said. “Want me to roll over and show you?”
“Sp..Master!” Xander cried.

“Wot?” Spike said. “I’m your Master. Yer my Pet. Yer job is ta please me and I’m supposed ta take care of you. If you need ta practice well that would please me ta help take care of ya!”

“What?” Xander sputtered again.

“More demon logic,” Spike grinned and wagged his eyebrows.

Xander rolled his eyes. “This is not what I meant,” he said.

“Trust me, pet,” Spike said. “Or…perhaps there’s another problem?”

For a moment Spike was concerned that Xander might be too tired to play. After all he almost died just three days before but the Norjub had seemed to restore him to complete health.

Xander shook his head. “No, I’m fine.”

Spike narrowed his eyes and studied Xander. Perhaps his pet was only turned on when Spike revved him up. Perhaps he really doesn’t want me? Spike thought briefly and his demon nearly roared into control at the brief thought.

“Pet?”

“Well..I just..where would I begin?” Xander blushed as he looked at the bounty before him.

Spike caught a whiff of pheromones and his demon settled. He grinned.

“Wherever ya like. There are no rules. Ya did a fine job back in the museum,” Spike reminded Xander.

Xander laughed and blushed again. He remembered.

“But I thought you were the master,” Xander goaded.

“And that’s why I shouldn’t have ta do all the work,” Spike countered.

Xander laughed and then rolled on top of Spike in a straddle. Spike nearly groaned at the wonderful feel of the heat and weight of his pet on top of him.

“So..earlier that was all work?” Xander asked.

“Loads,” Spike said as he nodded.

“You must be tired,” Xander said as he finally uncurled his fingers and gave them their wish. He began to trace the muscles defining Spike’s chest. Spike nearly purred with pleasure.

“’M a vampire. We recover quickly,” Spike said.

“OH…so you’re ready to go back to work then?” Xander said as he began to explore Spike’s nipples urging them into hard little peaks.

“Oi! Even vamps get time off,” Spike said as he watched Xander enjoy playing with his body.

“What you have some sort of union or something?” Xander asked as he slid his hands down and explored the rigid bumps that were Spike’s abs.
Spike laughed.

“Are you ticklish?” Xander asked.

“No. Just picturin’ labor negotiations with vampire reps,” Spike said.

Xander laughed too. He then leaned down and covered Spike’s lips in a fierce kiss. Spike’s laughter soon turned into a moan as he pulled his hands from behind his head and wrapped his arms around Xander. He could kiss his pet a million times and never get tired of Xander’s taste.

Xander’s tongue burrowed its way into Spike’s mouth and mapped the familiar territory. His hands framed Spike’s face and he breathed in the scent of the vampire. The unnatural coolness of the vampire should frighten him or remind him that Spike was something undead. Yet, all it did was temper the fire igniting in Xander’s own body. He craved Spike’s coolness as much as he craved his touch, his smell and his taste.

Xander groaned and broke the kiss. Blue eyes and brown eyes once again locked. Spike arched an eyebrow.

“Who are you?” Xander asked.

Spike smiled then kissed the tip of Xander’s nose.

“I’m your master, pet,” he said.

“My master,” Xander whispered.


Xander leaned forward and kissed Spike again.

“My master…my master Spike,” Xander murmured against Spike’s lips.

“Yes, pet. Always.”

“Always,” Xander repeated and gave himself over the wonderful sensations of need only Spike could ignite in him.

***

Spike watched Xander sleep and sighed contentedly. He hated to wake him up but they’d pleasured each other through the night and into a new day. Xander had had lots of practice calling Spike master. Even the memory of it caused a stir in Spike’s penis.

*Down boy,* Spike thought. Only to groan silently at the memory of Xander’s warm lips wrapped around him and milking him dry. Xander had mapped and teased Spike’s body with his lips and Spike had melted. Xander may have called him master but it was Spike who’d been the slave.

*I’m so owned,* Spike thought as he brushed a lock of hair from Xander’s forehead and then leaned down to kiss Xander’s nose. *And I don’t bloody well care. He’s mine. I love him and I’m gonna keep him and the whole bloody universe can kiss my arse.*

Xander stirred and opened his eyes. He blinked and looked at Spike. He snapped his fingers.
“Oi! Someone’s awake and thinking this morning,” Spike said.

“Someone’s gotta pee,” Xander replied.

Spike laughed and pushed Xander out of the bed.

“Get before you wet the bed,” Spike ordered.

Xander laughed and then groaned when he stood up.

“Ugh!” he said. “I’m crusty.”

“Hazard of frottage without showering afterwards,” Spike replied.

“Right. So then uhm….”

Spike sighed and got out of bed.

“You pee, I’ll get the water warm,” Spike said.

“Thanks…master,” Xander grinned. Spike rolled his eyes and smacked Xander’s butt.

“Hey!”

“Move ya get,” Spike ordered and Xander made a run for the bathroom. Spike followed him. He never missed a chance to ogle his pet’s arse.

_Gonna lay claim to it, _Spike thought. _Gonna make him forget all the bad stuff and only show him how good and wonderful he is. Gonna please him._

“Are you watching me pee, _master_,” Xander said cheekily.

“Wot if I was?”

“Then we seriously need to talk about your fetishes,” Xander replied.

“Finish stinkin’ up the bathroom and get in the shower!” Spike growled to cover his amusement. He stepped into the shower and turned on the water. He set it for a temperature he knew Xander liked. He heard the toilet flush and Xander stepped into the shower a few moments later. Spike stepped aside and let Xander stand under the water. Xander sighed. Spike grabbed the soap.

“Sp..Master you’re not going…”

“I’m the master,” Spike said as he worked up a lather and then began to soap Xander’s back and arms.

“I’m perfectly capable of doing this myself,” Xander argued.

“This pleases me, _pet_,” Spike said.

Xander sighed. “You just want an excuse to play with my foreskin again.”

“A,” Spike said, “I’m your master and I don’t need an excuse to touch you. B, I seemed to recall you like me playing with your new foreskin last night.”

Xander blushed. He wouldn’t have thought it but his foreskin had added a new sensation. He’d been more sensitive. He’d been sensitive enough not to think about having a foreskin.
“Pet?” Spike asked.

“It’s a little odd,” Xander said. “Suddenly waking up and having…a foreskin.”

“Does it bother you?” Spike asked as he washed Xander’s ass and legs keeping his touch strictly clinical.

“Creeps me out a little,” Xander confessed.

Spike gently turned Xander around and began washing his neck and chest.

“Do you…well we can get it re…”

“NO!” Xander said and covered his genitalia. “I mean. It’s there now and…”

“No man wants someone cuttin’ on his todger, yeah?” Spike said as he gently soaped his way down to where Xander’s hands were.

“Yeah,” Xander admitted.

Spike smiled and gently moved Xander’s hands. Then he washed Xander’s penis. He was careful to pull back the skin and wash there.

“S…Master…”

“If yer gonna keep it ya got learn ta take care of it. It’s good to pull back the skin and wash it from time ta time. Don’t want ta get any infections, yeah?”

Xander blushed and then whispered, “Yeah.”

***

Lorne had been waiting for them after their shower. Spike had let Xander wear only his belt.

“Company’s comin’,” Spike had said. Xander had sighed and nodded.

Lorne had brought Xander breakfast and Spike had fed it to him while the vampire and the green demon discussed casino business. Xander tried to focus on his oatmeal and orange juice. He didn’t want to think about the company.

When he was finished eating Lorne collected the tray and took it to the suite’s kitchenette. Then he’d looked at Spike.

“Pet,” Spike said.

Xander looked at Spike.

“I need you to be on yer best behavior, yeah?”

Xander groaned and then nodded. Whatever was coming he wasn’t going to like it. Spike tapped Xander’s nose then looked at Lorne.

“Send ‘em in,” he ordered.

Lorne nodded and went to the suite door. He opened it and let in a familiar vampire and his slave.

Xander bit back a groan. It was the vampire who did the piercings. The vampire bowed low before
Spike. Spike nodded.

“Pet needs pierced again,” Spike said.

“I heard about the Norjub, m’lord,” the vampire said.

Spike looked at Xander and snapped his fingers. He pointed to a spot in the room. It was where Xander had stood the first time he’d been pierced.

Did I mention that I hate you? Xander thought as he rose to his feet and moved to stand in the spot. OK, might not have mentioned it...but I have thought it!

Xander stood silently as the vampire approached. His slave followed quickly behind and opened the wooden box he carried. Xander tried not to flinch at the familiar instruments.

“Is he to be placed in the same places, m’lord,” the vampire asked.

Spike nodded.

“The stones?”

“Diamonds...blue if you have them,” Spike said.

The vampire fidgeted and bowed low.

“M’lord, forgive me. Blue diamonds..they are rare. I do not currently have any in my inventory…”

“Then the white ones ‘ll do..until you can get some blue ones,” Spike growled.

“Yes, m’lord!” the vampire bobbed and bowed again.

Xander looked at Spike. Blue diamonds? Are there such things? He wondered. Spike smiled at him.

“Cut up the Hope diamond if ya have to,” Spike said.

“Master Spike!” Lorne said.

“Wot?”

“There are other blue diamonds. That one’s cursed.”

Spike grunted.

“It is,” Lorne insisted. “I know ya want the best for your Pet, but trust me, m’lord, that one isn’t it.”

“Fine. Get on with it,” Spike growled.

Xander blinked. Spike was gonna cut up the Hope diamond, for him? The thought distracted Xander up until the needle pierced his nipple. Then he let out a yelp.

“Easy, pet,” Spike said suddenly close to Xander’s ear. Xander bit his lip and hated vampires. He hated their customs and he hated their vampiric speed.

Meanwhile the other vampire worked the silver of the nipple ring into Xander’s flesh and closed it with a diamond. Spike bent down and gently laved and cleaned Xander’s blood away.

I am NOT finding this erotic, Xander thought even as he was comforted and slightly turned on by the
familiar feel of Spike’s cool tongue on his heated flesh.

Then the other vampire began to numb Xander’s ear. Xander braced himself for the pain. This time it wasn’t as bad. He was still feeling the run of endorphins from the first piercing. Once again Spike cleaned away the trace amounts of blood once Xander’s new jewelry had been secured. Then Spike had stepped back and let the vampire put the healing salve on Xander.

When the vampire was done he bowed before Spike. Spike nodded then said, “You may take your payment from the red stables. Also, leave your box here.”

“M’lord?” the vampire asked.

“I said leave yer bloody box here! Ya hard of hearin’? Lorne ‘ll get it to ya later.”

“Yes, Master Spike!” the vampire said and then quickly led his slave from the suite. Lorne and Xander both looked at Spike.

“Lemon drop?” Lorne asked.

“Think there’s a breakfast tray to return to the kitchens,” Spike said.

“Spike?” Lorne tried again.


“Fine,” Lorne said. “But please do remember you have a business to run.”

“Xan and I will be down later,” Spike promised.

Lorne looked at Xander. “It’s good to see you up and about cup cake,” he said before picking up the tray from the kitchen. “You’ve been missed.”

Xander looked at Spike and snapped his fingers. Spike nodded.

“It’s good to be seen, sir,” Xander said.

Lorne nearly dropped the tray and stared at Xander. Xander winked.

“Oi! Ya cheeky git!” Spike said. “Ya can’t be wakin’ at other demons!”

“Yes, master,” Xander sighed. Lorne laughed and then left the suite shaking his head. Once they were alone Spike stripped off his shirt and then sat down in his chair. He looked at Xander.

“Grab the box and c’mere,” he said. Xander frowned but did as he was told.

“Climb up and face me,” Spike ordered as he tapped his lap.

Xander swallowed. He’s not gonna pierce me again?

“Sp..master,” Xander said as he climbed up and straddled Spike’s lap.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said as he took the wooden box from Xander’s hands and set it on the side table. He opened it and pulled out the long piercing needle. Xander’s eyes opened wide and he stared at Spike.

“This is just between you and me, yeah?” Spike said. “Mum’s the word.”
Xander frowned but nodded. Then Spike handed the needle to Xander.

“Master?” Xander said.

Spike slapped Xander’s butt lightly and said, “Ask permission!”

Xander rolled his eyes and snapped his fingers.

“Should make ya tap yer foot like other slaves, but yes pet?”

“Master,” Xander said, “what is this?”

“A piercin’ needle.”

Xander rolled his eyes again and made a growling sound of his own. Spike smiled and pulled Xander close. He looked him in the eyes and his smile fell away.

“I want something from you, pet. Want something that’s just between us. I want ya ta pierce me,” Spike said softly.

Xander’s eyes widened and he stared at Spike. Are you serious? Xander thought and then looked at Spike’s flawless skin covering his perfect chest. He shook his head.

“Yes, pet. I want ya to choose the nip of yer choice and I want ya ta pierce me and put in a ring.”

Xander snapped his fingers.

“Permission to speak till we leave the room pet or I tell you otherwise,” Spike said.

“Why?” Xander asked.

“Because I’m your master and I want it.”

“Sp..Master…”

“It pleases me, Xander,” Spike said softly.

“I don’t want to hurt you,” Xander said.

“Ya won’t, pet. Trust me.”

Xander looked at Spike. “What about your vampiric healing Spike..I mean master? Won’t this bother you?”

“Not as much as yer slip ups,” Spike growled then tapped Xander’s nose. “Xander…I’m the Big Bad and I know what I want so please will ya bloody well shove that needle into one of my nipples before we turn this into an argument?”

Xander studied Spike. He then looked at the needle and then at Spike’s chest. He didn’t understand. Why was Spike doing this? Why was it so important to him? Xander looked at Spike again and then nodded. If this is what Spike wanted, he’d do it. Spike smiled.

“What’s it ta be then? Left or right?”

Xander looked at Spike’s chest and then looked at his own. If he was going to do this then somehow he was going to do it right. Whatever that means, he thought. He looked at Spike face to find the
vampire watching him.

“Left,” Xander said. Spike smiled.

“Any particular reason, pet?”

Xander shrugged. “Seems right. Fitting somehow. And besides if we pierced your right nipple our rings my get tangled during frottage.”

Spike leaned his head back and laughed for a moment before leaning forward and capturing Xander’s mouth in a breath stealing kiss. Xander moaned and his toes curled. *Damn him*, Xander thought as he felt all systems sliding into the red.*How does he do this to me every time?*

Spike released him and then tapped his nose.

“OK, then pet. Get on with it,” Spike ordered.

“Uhm..don’t you want me to disinfect or numb it first?” Xander asked.

“No need,” Spike said.

“Well...Ok then. Uhm..first I’m gonna need a pen though. Gotta mark where I pierce,” Xander said handing the needle to Spike and reaching for the pen in the box. Then he quickly made his marks on Spike’s nipple. He could feel the vampire watching him the entire time. Next he grabbed a clamp from the box and attached it to the nipple. He pulled it taunt. Then he took the needle from Spike, he bit his lip and gave one last look at the vampire.

Spike smiled and nodded. Xander took a deep breath and began to push the through the marks. He stared into Spike eyes the entire time. The vampire stared back and when Spike’s flesh gave way and the needle was through the vampire smiled. Xander let out his breath and retracted the needle. Next he grabbed a ring from the box and quickly began to work it into the new hole.

“Stone?” Xander asked.

“You choose, pet,” Spike answered.

Xander looked at the selection of stones and quickly thought about what would be right for Spike. A black round stone caught his eye. It was smooth and lustrous. He pulled it out and held it up to Spike.

“A black pearl,” Spike said. Xander smiled and attached it to the ring and undid the clamp. That’s when he nodded the red drop of blood snaking down Spike’s pale skin. Xander remembered how Spike had comforted Xander’s own pain and blood away. He looked at Spike.

“Pet…” Spike began to say but before Xander could finish he leaned forward and began to gently lave at the red drop of blood and the sore nipple. *I’m gonna do this right!* Xander thought before he got lost in the taste and feel of Spike.

Spike leaned his head back and groaned long and loud. He should stop Xander but it was too much and too perfect. He’d wanted the piercing. He’d wanted to wear Xander’s mark and now his pet was tasting him, *really* tasting him. It wasn’t enough blood to put Xander at risk of turning but the symbolism was too much for the demon.

Spike growled. His eyes turned gold and his face rippled. He grabbed Xander’s cheek and pulled his mouth to him for a deep kiss. He bit lightly at Xander’s tongue so he bled just a little. He moaned
at the taste of his blood and Xander mingled in his pet’s sweet mouth.

He roared and picked Xander up. Xander wrapped his arms around him and held on with his nails digging into Spike’s back. Spike continued to ravage Xander’s mouth as he carried him into the bedroom. They crashed on to the bed and Spike still continued to kiss Xander while his pet’s nails scoured Spike’s back.

Finally Spike lifted his head so Xander could breathe. Spike scented the air drinking in the combined musky smell of their desire. He shook his head and let his face revert back to human. He stared down at Xander who lips were plumb and swollen from Spike’s kisses. Blood flecked at the corners.

“I want to Claim you, pet,” Spike said.

“Huh?” Xander replied still trying climb out a fog of raw desire.

“I want to Claim you. I want to make you completely mine.”

“Claim?” Xander asked.


“Ma…Spike!” Xander cried as the implication began to sink in and a shiver went down his spine.

Spike leaned in for another breath stilling kiss. Then lifted his head and kissed the top of Xander’s nose.

“I can’t force you, coerce you or anyway bribe you, pet. The ritual won’t work unless it’s absolutely your choice. I’ve always wanted to Claim you..even that first night. I schemed and I planned. I needed your voice and I needed this Claim because of other plans.”

“Plans?” Xander asked growing increasingly confused.

“But all that’s bollocks because all that matters right now Xander is that I want you. I want you completely. Angelus and the rest of the world can sink deeper into hell for all I care at the moment. I just want you to accept my Claim.”

“Your plans about Angelus involved Claiming me?” Xander struggled to process what Spike was saying.

“Xander,” Spike whispered and then stopped. What could he say? Coward, he silently called himself as he leaned down to kiss Xander again. “Think about it, yeah?”

“C..can I talk to Lorne about it?” Xander asked.

Spike studied Xander for a moment then nodded.

“Tara?”

“Talk ta the bloody cat if ya want,” Spike growled, “just tell me that you’ll give it some thought, yeah?”

Xander nodded and then whispered, “I’ll think about it.”

He ignored the feeling of dread in the pit of his stomach. Willow, he thought. Spike wants to bind my soul to his demon!
TBC
Chapter 49

Xander knelt by Spike’s office chair still trying to process Spike’s proposal.

*It was a proposal, Xander thought. I mean…a demonic proposal of sorts…a real ‘with my soul I thee wed.’*

“Xan?” Spike said.

Xander looked up but remained quiet.

“You OK?”

Was he? Xander wasn’t sure. Physically he was great but mentally and emotionally he wondered if he wasn’t losing it. He should be scared, angry or just plain wigging. He wasn’t. He was just confused. Why? Why did Spike want to Claim Xander? More importantly what was Xander going to do? What answer was he supposed to give his master.

“I am fine..master,” Xander replied.

Spike studied Xander for a moment then grunted, “I have some clients to meet in the casino. Thought I’d send Clem in to keep you company for awhile before Lorne takes you downstairs ta have lunch with Tara.”

*My chance to talk with them, Xander thought. He’s not wasting anytime.*

“Uhm..yeah. OK. Thanks.”

Spike arched an eyebrow.

“Uh..thanks master,” Xander tried again.

Spike shook his head then leaned down. He grabbed Xander gently by the chin and tilted his chin to the perfect angle for Spike to devour Xander’s mouth in a hungry kiss. Xander sighed and parted his lips. He let Spike take what he wanted. He closed his eyes and lost himself to the feel of Spike’s kiss.

*If only everything were this easy, Xander thought.*

Too soon Spike withdrew. Xander opened his eyes. Spike was staring at him; his blue eyes were rimmed with gold.

“I’m never gonna get enough of you, pet,” Spike whispered. Then as quickly as he could Spike stood and fled the room. Xander felt like all the heat left with him and he shivered where he knelt.

***

“Give me any sevens,” Clem said after studying his hand for nearly two full minutes.

“Go fish,” Xander quickly replied. Clem moaned and drew a card from the pile. Xander smiled. He hadn’t needed to ask Clem for permission to speak when he’d shown up. The floppy eared demon had walked into Spike’s office, put Ante down, pulled out a deck of cards and said, “Xander you’re going to need to speak freely if we are going to play ‘Fish.’ So I give you my permission to speak.”
“Thank you Cl..sir,” Xander had said. Clem had blushed then said down cross legged on the floor.

“Ready to get the socks beaten off you?” he had asked.

“I don’t wear socks,” Xander had replied as he sat down opposite Clem on the floor and they had begun to play.

“So you really feeling, OK, Xander?” Clem asked as Xander looked at his cards.

“Yes..sir,” Xander smiled. “Got any aces?”

“Go fish,” Clem replied. “Good. I was really worried about you.”

Xander drew a card. He drew a five of hearts to go with his five of diamonds, clubs and spades. He showed the set to Clem and put the cards face down beside him.

“Lucky,” Clem said.

Xander laughed, “Well you know..if you can’t be smart at least be lucky.”

“Hmm,” Clem grinned. “You know Lar…er someone else said the same thing to me the other day.”

Xander caught Clem’s slip. Larry!

Has Clem been keeping Larry company as well?

“Really?” Xander asked.

“Jus..well..I sometimes play ‘Old Maid,’ Candy Land, ‘Fish’ and ‘War’ with this..uh..fellow down the street. I think he’s a bit lonely..if you know what I mean,” Clem stammered and blushed. He didn’t look Xander in the eye.

“He’s definitely lucky then, sir,” Xander said. “I’m sure if he’s lonely and …isolated visits from you probably save his…sanity.”

Clem blushed again. Then said, “He is a bit grumpy though.”

Xander shook his head. He could imagine Larry being confined to the bare cell with MREs to eat and occasional visits from Clem. Larry was always a man of action. It had to be driving him crazy.

“Don’t take it personally,” Xander said.

“Give me your jacks,” Clem said then shrugged. “I don’t. Just wish there was more I could do for him.”

Xander slid two jacks over to Clem the said, “What you are doing now is really great Cl…sir.”

Clem sighed at the sir. Then he pulled out four cards, showed the suite of jacks to Xander and laid the cards face down next to him.

“Any twos?” Clem asked.

“Go fish,” Xander said. Clem drew a card.

“Sir…” Xander said as he stared at his cards.

“Yeah, Xan?”

“Can I ask you a question?”
“Well..that’s how the game is played!” Clem replied then began to rock in a fit of laughter at his own joke.

Xander smiled and waited for the gentle demon’s amusement to wane. Finally Clem wiped the corner of his eye and he looked at Xander.

“What do you need Xander?” Clem asked.

“What do you know about Claiming?” Xander asked.

“Claiming?” Clem asked in a hushed whisper. He lowered his cards and stared at Xander. Xander nodded.

“Has Master Spike..I mean does he..well did he ask you to accept his..Claim?” Clem whispered.

Xander nodded.

“Oh Xander!” Clem said in a rush of barely suppressed excitement. “What are you going to do?”

“I don’t know. I really..what is it?” Xander asked.

“Didn’t Master Spike tell you?”

“He said it was a ritual to bind my soul to his demon,” Xander replied. Clem nodded.

“And do you know what that means?”

Xander shook his head and said, “That’s why I am asking.”

Clem sighed, “Well…provided he didn’t turn around and well turn you..which I don’t think Master Spike would do or kill you..again something I don’t think Master Spike would do…well..you’d be …well it’s hard to explain.”

“Try?” Xander pleaded and tried to be patient.

“Demons, we’re all about who’s on top. Who’s got status and where we rank. Humans, sorry to say Xan, don’t have any. Because you’re Master Spike’s Pet you get some favor and privilege but at the end of the day you’re still just a human. You accept Master Spike Claim and you become..well something a little more.”

“I won’t be human anymore?” Xander squeaked.

“I don’t know,” Clem answered honestly. “All I know..is..well think of it this way..as a human you don’t even get a rung on the ladder of demon status. If you’re Claimed…you’re now on the bottom rung of the ladder.”

Xander paled. Oh Willow, he thought. I don’t want to be part of the demonic world. I don’t want to climb the demonic ladder of success.

“Xander?” Clem asked.

“Got any kings?” Xander asked desperately needing to change the subject.

***

Xander lost to Clem. He just couldn’t concentrate on his cards. Thoughts of not being human any
more knotted his stomach. By the time Lorne had come knocking on the door to take him to lunch all semblance of an appetite had fled.

“Xander, are you all right?” Lorne asked as they stepped into the elevator.

Xander started to nod then shook his head.

“What’s wrong?” Lorne asked as the elevator doors closed and the lift began to lower.

“Lorne…sir,” Xander asked looking the green demon straight into his red eyes, “if I accept Sp..Master Spike’s Claim will I still be human?”

Lorne sighed and hit the stop button on the elevator. The box lurched to a stop.

“Cupcake…”

“Please..I need to know,” Xander said. “He said I could talk to you. Talk to whomever I wanted.”

“Xan, listen to me,” Lorne said. “A Claim won’t make you less human.”

“But it will change me,” Xander pressed.

Lorne paused for a moment then nodded. “Yes.”

“How?” Xander asked.

“It’s hard to explain…” Lorne began.

“Look I’ve already heard the ladder and the rung speech from Clem,” Xander said. “What I need from you is something a little more specific.”

Lorne studied Xander. He shook his head.

“Spike really should be telling you all this,” Lorne said.

“Well he didn’t and he’s not here right now,” Xander argued.

“Lemondrop’s always good with the big romantic moments but a little short on the mundane follow through,” Lorne sighed.

“Yes, we all agree Sp..Master Spike has his flaws,” Xander said.

“Cupcake,” Lorne began, “he did tell you he couldn’t force you to accept his Claim, right?”

“Yeah. Said he couldn’t force, bribe, and a few other big words but the sense was it had to be my idea. Oh, and that originally it had to do with his big plan against Ang…that angle problem. You know the damned mad geometry thing.”

Lorne sighed. “He probably shouldn’t have mentioned that.”

“Why?”

“Because that could unduly influence you.”

“And if I did say yes…”

“And you didn’t do it because you really wanted to accept Spike’s Claim but because of the angle
problem, as you put it, then the ritual would reject you.”

“Would that be bad?

“Do failed demon rituals ever end well?” Lorne asked.

Xander opened his mouth then closed it.

“It depends on your point of view. Before the ‘Before’ I witnessed plenty of failed ones that meant the world was one more day Apocalypse free,” Xander finally said.

“Yes, Cupcake,” Lorne said, “but what about those participating the ritual.”

Xander paled as he looked back on his memories with a new light.

“I see your point,” he said.

“But back to your original question,” Lorne said. “If you go through with the ritual then yes you will be changed. Your soul will be bound to Spike’s demon. The bond will make you more suitable to be a companion to a demon.”

“And that means?”

“You’ll be able to take more pain and damage,” Lorne answered plainly. “You’ll recover more quickly from wounds and you’ll live a little longer.”


“Xander,” Lorne said softly. “Humans..they aren’t meant to be with demons for very long. Demonic tastes…desires..they…”

“Humans..are too fragile,” Xander finished for Lorne.

Lorne nodded, “In most cases. Spike isn’t most cases.”

“Does this affect his..status?”

“Cupcake don’t you worry about that!” Lorne said sharply. He knew Xander and he feared what lengths Xander would go for the greater good his accepting the Claim could not be about the greater good. “Spike can take care of his own status issues.”

“But…”

“No buts, Xander.”

Xander swallowed. If humans got increased stamina and longevity out of this Claim what did the demons get?

“L..Sir..what do the demons get?”

Lorne winced. He’d hoped Xander wouldn’t ask that question but he knew he would.

“Xander, if you accept Spike’s claim, you won’t be able to leave him…”

“I can’t leave him now,” Xander muttered.

“If the resistance stormed in right now and whisked you away there’s nothing keeping you bound to
Spike,” Lorne continued. “You accept his Claim, you’re his you cannot leave him without his permission. You are bound to him. You try and leave him without his permission and the bond will begin to burn you from the inside out. You’ll be in excruciating pain until you die, if you are lucky.”

Xandir swallowed again and shook his head.

“Furthermore, if Spike dies; you die.”

“What?” Xander yelled.

“Cupcake this is a demonic bond. If the demon that binds you dies, your soul goes with it.”

“And after death?” Xander whispered.

Lorne shook his head sadly and said softly, “I don’t know cupcake.”

Xander hugged himself. Why? Why would Spike think he’d even consider saying yes?

“Xander?” Lorne said gently.

“Why?” Xander said. “Why would Spike even think I’d agree to this?”

“Because he lo...cares about you,” Lorne said.

“This! This is caring?” Xander cried.

“Claiming is often a step to something else. Sometimes vampires do it to humans they are thinking of turning..humans they hope to be more than just minions.”

“Spike wants to turn me?” Xander asked in a panic.

“No, cupcake!” Lorne said quickly. “But demons...vampires often use Claiming as a way of signaling that they may turn the human. It’s a trial period.”

“And what happens if the human fails the trial? Huh? What then ..sir?”

Lorne looked away. Another question burned in Xander’s mind.

“You said if the demon dies the human dies. What happens if it’s the other way around Lorne? Huh? What happens if it’s the human who dies? What happens to the demon?”

“Nothing,” Lorne said honestly.

Xander paled and then flushed an angry red.

“NOTHING! They get a more beefed up toy able to last through all their kinky games...unable to leave and checks out with them but if the human dies..oh well it’s off to the pet store for another human chew toy?”

“Cupcake this is a demon ritual…”

“And Spike wants me to participate in it?”

“Xander, if you accept his Claim you aren’t just a Pet any more. You’ll be his Claimant. You’ll not only have his protection but the full protection of his clan..his house…”

“Angelus’s protection!” Xander spat.
Lorne sighed.

“Xander…” Lorne tried again.

“NO!” Xander said and turned his back to the green demon. He couldn’t hear any more. He wouldn’t.

Lorne closed his eyes and shook his head. He’d handled this all wrong. Spike was losing Xander and it wasn’t even the vampire’s fault. Lorne opened his eyes and hit the stop button again. The elevator lurched into motion and continued toward the basement.

_Maybe lunch with Tara will help_, Lorne thought and hoped.

TBC

**Author’s notes:**

Fish, Old Maid and War are all children’s card games. More information can be found [here](#).

My brother and I played all three of them as kids.
Chapter 50

Xander's appetite still hadn't reappeared by the time they entered Tara's rooms. His normally buoyant good mood hadn't either. He flopped down on the floor at the foot of Tara's bed, crossed his legs and leaned his head back against the footboard. Tara sent a worried glance at Lorne.

"I'm afraid to say anything else at this point, pumpkin," Lorne said as he shrugged.

"Xander?" Tara asked as she turned her gaze toward her lanky friend.

"He wants to claim me," Xander ground out as he continued to stare at the ceiling. Tara's eyes opened wide. She looked back at Lorne and silently mouthed the word "Claim?" at him.

Lorne nodded. Tara took a deep breath and then slowly let it out. Cautiously she moved over to Xander and then settled next to him.

"It..it's good t..to see you," she said softly.

Xander sighed and lowered his head. He turned to look at Tara. She smiled softly at him. He couldn’t help but return the smile with a small one of his own.

"It's good to be seen," he said.

"Yo..you ha..have a very nice voice," Tara said.

"Oh yeah. This is the first time you've heard the Xan-man speak!" Xander said a little more excitedly. Tara blushed a little and nodded. "Well I have you to thank."

"That's n..not what I heard," Tara said before she looked at Lorne. Xander followed her gaze. "I heard you almost d..died. M..Master Spike b..brought you back."

Lorne flushed. Xander looked away.

"More liked bullied me back." 

"Y..you're still here," Tara insisted.

"Well that's just because he wants a glorified chew toy," Xander said bitterly.

Lorne gasped and opened his mouth. Tara raised a finger and Lorne's mouth snapped shut.

"M..master Lorne," Tara said softly, "could...w..would you give Xander and I..."

"They say the bathroom is one of the best places to practice one's singing," Lorne said in an over exaggerated sigh as he turned and headed for the bathroom. Tara suppressed a smile. Xander watched the green demon leave then looked at Tara.

"Th..thought you would b..be more comfortable speaking without Lorne here," Tara said.

"Does it really make a difference?" Xander said.
Tara shrugged and said, "I don't know. I'm not the one who has been asked to accept a Claim."

"And would you?" Xander asked.

"From Spike?" Tara replied. "No."

Xander stared in shock at Tara's answer. He didn't know what he expected but such a frank and honest denial wasn't it.

"Only because it isn't me he really wants to Claim," Tara explained.

Xander snorted, "So what makes a difference."

"With Spike? I think it makes all the difference."

"Do you even know what a Claim is?" Xander asked.

Tara closed her eyes for a moment as if remembering something too painful for words. Color left her cheeks and the air of serenity which always seemed to dance around her vanished. She looked raw and exposed. She swallowed and nodded. She took a breath, exhaled then opened her eyes. Her color and serenity returned.

"Tara...?"

"I know what a Claim is," Tara said. "I also know Spike is not like other demons. He doesn't want a 'glorified chewtoy.'"

"Then what does he want?" Xander spat.

"He wants you," Tara said simply.

"He has me!" Xander yelled and pointed to the collar at his neck.

"Not the way he wants," Tara said softly.

"So because he wants more he wants to take everything away from me?"

"Xander he can't take this away from you. He wants what only you can give him...yourself."

Xander growled and stood up. He shook his head. None of this made any sense to him. He began to pace.

"If he Claims me what happens to my soul Tara? Huh? It's bound to his demon!"

Tara shrugged and said, "What happens to your soul if you aren't Claimed?"

"This isn't funny," Xander snapped.

"It's not meant to be," Tara replied. "I just think that if you are worried about your soul that it still will stand on its own merits. If I were to handfast with another witch for forever and a day...and she should turn dark would my soul be any more at risk?"
"It's not the same! You didn't go into the relationship...the ritual knowing she was a blood sucking fiend!"

"And you aren't either."

"What?" Xander stopped his pacing and stared at Tara. Was she honestly sitting there implying that Spike wasn't a vampire!

"Y..you know very well Spike isn't like the other v..vampires. He's not like the other d..demons."

"That's doesn't mean he isn't one."

"Was Jeffery Dahmer still human d.. despite how well he m.. might have fit in this demonic world?" Tara asked.

"Wha..?"

"Xander, sometimes you have to judge a being not by what they are but what they do," Tara said as she stood up. "You kn.. know Spike is different. Could it be his Claim w.. would be d.. different?"

"So you are saying I should let him Claim me?" Xander asked in shock.

Tara sighed and shook her head.

"I'm saying you should figure out what you want..not let fear get in your way," Tara said softly. "Leave the rest to the powers that be."

"What I want?"

Tara stepped close to Xander and stared at him.

"Spike cannot Claim you without your consent. He wants you Xander. He cares for you. He isn't like the rest of the monsters in this world. What you have to decide is do you want to accept his Claim," Tara said.

"So he has more power over me? So that my life is tied to his?" Xander said desperately.

"Xander, isn't your life already tied to his? How long would you...or I survive if he were to d.. die? As for power over you he already h.. has it and has he abused it?"

Xander stared at Tara for a moment before turning away. He couldn't answer her. He wouldn't!

"Are you w..worried about not leaving h..him? Can you d.. do that n.. now? Would you if c.. could?"

"I might!" Xander snapped spinning back around to face Tara.

"And p.. put those who you were with at r.. risk? Because that's what you w.. would be d.. doing. If you le.. left him n.. now he'd have to h.. hunt you d.. down and not only p.. punish you but h.. hurt those who 't.. took' you."

Xander paled. The ramifications of what Tara was saying were terrifying. Not only would Spike
have to hurt anyone who might help Xander escape but anyone with whom Xander was taking refuge. The demon world would see Xander as Spike’s property. Spike would be expected to reclaim "it" should "it" come up “missing.”

*Had I even gotten around to escaping!* Xander thought bitterly.

"How? Why? What can he want from this?" Xander said sadly as he looked at Tara.

She shook her head and smiled sadly.

"He cares for you."

"This is caring?"

"Yes," Tara replied. "He's offering you a Claim. Offering you a ch..chance to be more than just 'meat' in a demon world, Xander."

"But..."

"But what?"

"I don't want to be Claimed," Xander whispered.

Tara sighed and wrapped her arms around herself to keep from hugging her friend. She didn't need to have her scent on Xander when he returned to his possessive vampire.

"Then tell him," she said.

****************************

Xander paced Spike's office. He had never eaten his lunch. After he had let Lorne out of the bathroom he had asked to be brought back to Spike's office right away. He'd made his decision and he just wanted to get telling Spike over with as soon as possible.

*Let him get his rage and roaring done, Xander had thought. I'll just take my beating..punishment or whatever and we can put this behind us. Go back to being Master and Pet with all the groiny benefits and humiliating side dishes.*

Except, as usual, things hadn’t quite worked out the way Xander imagined. Lorne had left Xander in Spike's office and Spike had never showed. Clem never showed either. Xander had simply waited and waited and waited. He'd paced and muttered. He replayed the conversation with Tara in his mind over and over again until he thought he could stage it as a one act play.

He paced, clenched his hands and bit his lips. *Where was Spike?* Xander wondered. *Why can't we just get this over with?*

Just when Xander thought he had paced a permanent track into Spike’s carpet the office door opened. Xander turned. Spike entered. His bottom lip was bruised and bloody. His shirt was torn and he was limping.

“Spike?" Xander asked worriedly as he rushed to the vampire’s side.
Spike arched an eye brow over a black and blue eye.

“Master Spike,” Xander corrected himself. “What the hell happened to you?”

“Went toe to toe with an Oni who had a little too much sake,” Spike said as he dabbed at his lip with the back of his hand and continued to limp towards his desk.

“Oni?”

“Japanese demon. Your basic evil-soul hunter,” Spike said as he sat down in his chair. He opened a drawer and pulled out a bottle of whiskey. He twisted the top off and then poured a generous amount down his throat.

“And why were you fighting an Oni?” Xander said as he made his way to Spike and gently tugged the bottle down away from Spike’s mouth.

Spike arched an eyebrow and let Xander lower the bottle.

“Taking liberties there, ain’t ya pet?” Spike asked.

“Sp..Master Spike..just not seeing how a bottle of whiskey is going to help,” Xander said.

“Numbs the pain,” Spike said and tugged the bottle back away from Xander. He took another generous swig.

“Are you hurt?” Xander asked.

“Am I hurt what, pet?”

“Are you hurt, Master Spike?” Xander said while rolling his eyes.

“If I was, would ya kiss it and make it better?” Spike grinned. He was finally starting to feel the affects of the whiskey.

“That an order…sir?” Xander asked.

“No…that was flirting ya git,” Spike growled affectionately.

“Oh,” Xander said then looked at the floor.

Spike frowned. Something was bothering his pet.

“Oni are not real happy with Angelus,” Spike said.

“Huh?” Xander said and looked backed at Spike.

“Ya asked why I was fighting with an Oni,” Spike said. “I was explaining they aren’t too happy with Angelus. They were pretty happy with the old world. Lots of bad men corrupting their own souls. In the Before, Vegas was a rich feeding ground. Now, either most people don’t live long enough to soil their souls beyond a dingy gray or the really bad ones have already been spoken for.”

“So..this Oni..”

“Got tanked up on sake and went on a tear in my casino,” Spike said with a smile. “Good times!”

“Good times!”
“Onis...big ugly brutes with horns and long nails. Know how to fight down and dirty.”

“And this is a good thing?”

“This...is...a..good..thing...” Spike prompted.

“This...is...a...good...thing...” Xander sighed.

Spike laughed, “Yeah. Was quite a show. Worked out some kinks too.”

Spike rotated his shoulder for emphasis before finishing off the bottle of whiskey.

“So is he...did you kill him, Master?” Xander asked.

“Nope!” Spike said then stood up and moved to stand next to Xander. He leaned close. Xander could smell the whiskey the vampire just drank. “Knocked him cold and had him shipped back to Japan.”

“Oh...” Xander said as Spike leaned forward and began to nuzzle Xander’s neck. “Uhm...Sp...Master.”

“Hmm?” Spike said as he began to delicately trace his lips slowly up the side of Xander neck questing for that sensitive spot just behind his pet’s ear.

“What...I mean...are...Master!” Xander tried to concentrate but suddenly Spike was gently nibbling on his ear lobe while the vampire’s fingers were tracing patterns on Xander’s bare stomach.

“You’re tense, pet,” Spike murmured when he released his little morsel. He kissed his way from Xander’s ear to his yummy lips. He feasted there awhile while he his fingers moved up to tease Xander’s nipples to hard fleshy nubs until he could smell Xander’s pheromones mixing with the thick whiskey fumes in the air.

“Yes...well...uhm I had something to...tell you,” Xander managed to get out when Spike finished claiming his mouth. Spike began to undo the button on Xander’s pants. Xander groaned and tried concentrate. He tried to think about his conversation with Lorne and Tara and not about Spike’s hands slipping past his leather pants to cup his ass. Spike lightly dug his nails into Xander’s firm cheeks.

“Master!” Xander cried and clutched at Spike’s shoulders. Spike chuckled.

“Guess I’m not helping with that ‘tense’ thing am I, pet?” Spike asked.

“You’re evil, master,” Xander said in a husky whisper.

“’M a vampire,” Spike replied in a husky voice of his own as he finished stripping Xander’s pants off. Then the vampire took a step back. He raked his eyes over Xander dressed only in a silk shirt and his chastity belt.

Spike dug into his pocket and dug out the key to Xander’s belt. He tossed it to Xander.

“Strip,” Spike ordered.

“Sp...Master,” Xander said as he tried to clear the sensual fog in his head. “Please...I wanted to talk.”

“You can talk and strip at the same time,” Spike said with a grin as he sat on the corner of his desk to watch the show.
This isn’t the way I wanted to do this, Xander thought.

“Master Spike, please,” Xander tried again.

Spike frowned. The demon in him wanted Xander and wanted him now. He wanted his submission. The alcohol in him sided with the demon. Spike sighed.

“What is it, Xander?” Spike asked.

*Thank you, Spike,* Xander thought as he took a deep breath.

“I wanted to talk to you about the Claim.”

Both the demon and the alcohol rolled inside of Spike. He used all his control to tap them both down.

“What about it, pet?” Spike asked in a deceptively calm voice.

Xander looked at Spike. Now that the moment he’d been wanting all evening was here he was nervous. He was very nervous. Spike was horny, drunk and on a rush from a fight.

*Perhaps I should rethink my timing,* Xander thought.

“Well…well on second thought perhaps now isn’t the best time,” Xander said.

Spike’s eyes flashed gold. This didn’t sound good.

“No, pet,” Spike growled. “Now.”

“Well…uhm…can I at least put my pants back on first?” Xander asked suddenly feeling far too naked.

“NOW!” Spike barked. Xander jumped and took a stepped back.

“Look, I talked to Lorne,” Xander began. “I spoke to Clem and I spoke to Tara.”

Spike remained still and silent.

“It’s…look I know that this Claiming this is like a big deal and all. I get it’s like a demon commitment thing and really I’m glad to know you don’t have commitment issues. So many guys do.”

Xander smiled at his weak joke. Spike did not.

“But,” Xander continued, “I…just…I don’t want to be Claimed.”

Spike let the pain flow through him. He should be used to it but even the greatest poets had no real advice on how to get used to unrequited love. The demon roared and demanded pain for pain. Spike kept it under control.

“I see,” he said in a deadly flat tone.

“Look Spik…”

“MASTER!” Spike roared as he stood up.

“Master Spike!” Xander said and took a step back. “I just…we’re talking about my soul!”
“No, we’re talking much more than that,” Spike said.


“What do you understand, Xander?”

“You want to bind my soul to your demon. You want to bind me to you. Make me linked to you so that if you die..I die. I get strong enough to handle being your lover but…but..”

“But what?”

“What do you get?”

“I thought love,” Spike said quietly.

“Love?” Xander asked.

“Yes, Xander! You think I want to Claim you just because I wanted a glorified chew toy? Am I really just another fucking soulless vampire to you? Really? After all this?” Spike said as he swept his arm across his desk sending papers, pens, phone and laptop flying.

“Sp..”

“MASTER SPIKE!” Spike roared as he charged Xander and grabbed him by the lapels. “You reject my Claim..my love and you still want to get away with liberties, PET?”

“L..love?” Xander asked as he stared into Spike golden eyes.

“Love,” Spike said.

“But…you can’t…love,” Xander said.

Spike paled. His eyes flashed blue and gold then back to blue again. He released Xander and pushed him away. Xander stumbled but kept on his feet. Spike stared at Xander as if he hadn’t seen him before.

“You..” Spike began then stopped. He took several unneeded breaths than began again, “You don’t get to tell me what I can and can’t feel! You can laugh at me..reject me but you don’t get to tell me what I can or can’t feel!”

“Sp…Master Spike..” Xander tried to say something. There was a raw pain in Spike’s voice he’d never heard before.

“Just because you’re too bloody thick to see or believe I love you doesn’t mean what I feel isn’t real.”

“Master Spike,” Xander tried again.

Spike turned away and marched to the door. He paused and looked back at Xander.

“Believe it or not, I wanted to Claim you because I love you. I do you know. I bloody well love you, but right now for the unlife of me I can’t remember why,” Spike said before he slipped out of the office slamming the door behind him.

Xander wasn’t sure how long he stared at the door. There was so much said and unsaid hanging in the air he kept waiting for something more but there was only silence and the smell of whiskey and
Spike’s leather coat. Eventually Xander moved.

Xander sat down on the couch and stared at Spike’s desk. Spike’s, declaration was still ringing in his ears.

“Huh,” he said.

TBC
Chapter 51

Xander wasn’t sure how long he sat on the couch. It was long enough for his butt to feel as numb as his brain. Eventually he stood up. Spike still hadn’t returned. He began to pace. He tried not to think about Spike’s declaration of love or the pained look in his eyes.

He tried not to think of the mess he’d made of Spike’s proposal. Yet, Spike’s words and looks did haunt him. Several times he turned and reached for the office door. He wanted to follow and look for Spike.

*Even if I was allowed to go and look for him, Xander thought, and even if I did find him…what would I say?*

Xander sighed and shook his head.

“Fuck!” He shouted to the empty office before once again pacing the office.

Eventually Xander dressed and resumed pacing. For “kicks and giggles,” as well as a way to distract himself from the stirring in his bladder, he picked up the papers and items shoved from Spike’s desk. He did his best to put everything back in order and was careful not to look at the papers.

“No telling if there’s security cameras pointed in here,” Xander muttered, “And I do not want to be accused of reading any of Spike’s stuff.”

When the office had been straightened Xander looked around. *Maybe there’s a hidden door to an executive bathroom I’ve missed,* he thought…he hoped. Much to his bladder’s disappointment he could only spot one door.

“Damnit Spike!” Xander muttered again as he eyed Spike’s personal bar, “don’t leave me reduced to peeing in a whiskey bottle or something.”

Just about the time Xander was reaching for a half empty bottle of expensive looking bourbon from Spike’s private stock he heard a light knock on the office door. Xander turned around and looked. The door opened and Clem poked his head inside.

“Uhm…Xander?” Clem asked tentatively.

“Cl..sir!” Xander cried in relief. “Please tell me you have permission to take me out of here...preferably to someplace with a toilet!”

“Xander!” Clem shouted as he stepped inside and opened the door wider. “I’ve been looking for you everywhere! Lorne’s been so worried! Master Spike left hours ago. Lorne was busy with an argument between a Strom demon and Frovalox over dinner. Seems the Frovalox threw up its dinner and the Strom claimed the smell of the entrails were from a…”

“Cl…Sir!” Xander cried as he danced from foot to foot torn now between needing to pee and needing to puke. “Can’t you explain..well skip the entrail parts…”

Clem laughed, “Entrail..parts…that’s…”

“CLEM!”

“Oh..right..sorry, Xander,” Clem said as he motioned Xander out the door. “I’m just so relieved to
find you!”

Xander quickly exited the room. Clem led him toward the private elevator and Xander didn’t think he’d ever been so grateful to see the grey metal box.

“….so anyway,” Clem’s nervous and happy voice continued to drone on, “once Lorne had arranged for a complimentary meal for the Strom demon and sent the Frovalox’s ‘mess’ home with him in a doggie bag for its second consumption he’d been told Spike had left the casino in a big angry and inevitably messy hurry. Course than Lorne had to order a cleanup crew to move the bodies…."

The elevator doors closed and Xander dug his nails in to his fists.

“…dead customers are bad for business,” Clem continued. “Only after everything was all tidy and a few rounds of drinks on the house had been served did Lorne send a tray up to the suite for you. That’s when we realized you weren’t there! Lorne didn’t want to make an unseemly fuss searching for Master Spike’s ‘Pet’. That’s the kind of gossip Spike doesn’t need. So Lorne had me go search for you. I’m sorry it took me so long to find you.”

The doors opened and Xander burst out of the elevator. Clem rushed to catch up with him. Quickly he keyed open the doors.

“I never even thought to check Spike’s office.”

“It’s OK,.sir,” Xander said through gritted teeth. Clem opened the doors and Xander took off on a run through the living room toward the bedroom. He almost missed the shiny key to his belt. With a grateful sigh he paused to pick the key up off the bed and then continued his mad dash to the bathroom.

His belt was designed so he could relieve himself while wearing it. There was a little hole where he could tuck a rubber extension to allow for drainage but it was between his legs, it was awkward to manage and frankly he didn’t think he had time to mess with it.

Xander never thought the act of urination could feel almost orgasmic and he prayed he wasn’t developing a new kinky fetish but when he finally managed to strip his pants down, unlock the belt, pull it off and pee it had felt so good! He’d nearly groaned with relief!

***

Xander was more composed and better able to deal with Clem when he returned to the front room. He’d relieved himself and taken a few precious minutes to wash his face while mentally regrouping. When he stepped back into the main room of the lavish suite, he found Clem wasn’t alone. Lorne was with him.

“Xander,” Lorne sighed in a mix of worried welcome. Xander bowed his head.

“Sir,” he replied softly.

“Ordered ya mac and cheese with some hot dogs,” Clem offered trying to ease the tension he could feel beginning to rise in the room. Both the green demon and Xander smiled.


“Do I need to ask what happened?” Lorne asked.

“Not unless you’ve had a drastic IQ drop since the last time I saw you,” Xander replied then quickly
added, “sir.”

“Why, Xander?” Lorne almost cried.

Xander finally looked up and met his friends red eyes for the first time since entering the room. He realized he had no real answer for the demon and even if he did he knew he couldn’t share it with him. What was between him and Spike, well was between him and Spike. Xander shrugged.

Lorne took a deep breath and shook his head.

“How can you two tear each other up like this?” he muttered.

“Human..demon..it’s the natural order of things,” Xander replied softly.

“Well it doesn’t have to be!” Lorne shouted angrily. Clem and Xander stared in shock at the unaccustomed outburst. “You two break the mold and you can continue to break it but you both are too stubborn and too...scared to rise above this damned universe and circumstance!”

“Lo...sir...” Xander tried to speak.

“NO! I can’t..I won’t! Do you hear me, Xander! Do you think you’re the only one who’s been afraid? The only one who’s been damaged and hurt? Do you think you’re the only one who’s been asked the impossible and to trust Spike?”

“I think this goes a little beyond trust!” Xander shouted back.

“Does it? Can’t you give him some small measure...”

“You call this a small measure?”

“Xander look around!”

“Don’t tell me to look around! My eyes have been wide open just like my ass every time that Azora wanted a taste of me! Don’t ask this me of Lorne! I know what it’s like to be property! I know what it’s like to be owned!” Xander screamed as he clenched his fists.

“And you think that’s what Spike wants?” Lorne asked softly suddenly reeling from the waves of pain emanating from the brave young man he’d learned to care so much about.

Xander’s head fell back and he gulped air while he tried to rein in his temper and his emotions. Slowly his fingers uncurled. Slowly he lowered his head and shook it. Yet, it was what he was afraid of, being owned. He was afraid of being owned more than just in body and in soul and it was that fear driving his anger.

Beneath the fear was an even deeper truth Xander hadn’t wanted to face. It was a truth that had blinded him to the pain in Spike’s eyes.

“No,” he finally whispered. Demon and human stared at each other trying to judge the depth of each other’s pain and the details of their unspoken pasts that led to their outburst. A knock interrupted them.

“Um, that would be dinner,” Clem interjected nervously as he scrambled to get the door hoping to get things back to more familiar and safer ground.

“Right,” Lorne said as he gave a small shake and once again adopted the air of the casino’s affable host.
“I’m starving,” Xander said trying to make it sound like the truth. He smiled weakly at Lorne. Lorne smiled back. Clem quickly returned with a tray. Xander tried not to recoil at the smell of food. His emotions and thoughts were all over the place but nowhere near eating.

“Thanks…sir,” Xander said to Clem as the floppy eared demon set the tray down. Xander looked at Lorne then asked, “Do you think I could dine…in private, sir?”

“Xan…?” Lorne began to ask. He really didn’t think the human shouldn’t be left alone and he knew Spike wouldn’t like it.

“Look, sir, I really need time to think about things. I need some time to myself..time that doesn’t involve wondering if peeing in the corner gets me a cookie or knock upside the head with a rolled up newspaper.”

Lorne smiled weakly at the just as weak joke.

Xander sighed before continuing, “I just need some quiet time. That’s all I’m asking for.”

Lorne narrowed his eyes. He couldn’t sense any deception in Xander’s words. He did sense Xander’s longing to be alone for awhile. Finally he nodded.

“Clem will be outside the door if you need him.”

Xander sighed as his shoulders relaxed. “Thank you, sir,” he said.

“You will try and eat..won’t you, Xan?” Clem asked.

Xander nodded even as his stomach twisted at the thought of food. Clem smiled.

“Well than I’ll just be outside if you need me,” the floppy-eared demon said before turning slowly away and heading for the door.

“Cupcake,” Lorne began. Xander smiled at the nickname.”Sorry about the outburst. It’s been a long evening..and…”

“Emotions are running wilder then Spike in a street riot.”

Lorne laughed.

“I’ll check in on you later,” he said then left the suite with Clem.

“Alone at last,” Xander whispered as he sank to his knees and began to let himself go numb. He was stripped bare and his deepest fears about being “claimed” washed over him.

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Xander stared at his reflection in the glass against the backdrop of the city lights. He almost didn’t recognize himself. He was lean and muscular. With his new foreskin, even his penis seemed long, lean and yet oddly muscular.

The diamond at his nipple glinted brightly. It signaled not only his was owned, as did his collar, but that he was worth something. A collar gave him worth as property but the nipple ring gave him worth as “pampered property.”

A Claim would make me more than property, Xander thought to his reflection. I wouldn’t be completely human..and I wouldn’t be demon but I wouldn’t exactly be property.
Xander shook his head. Was that the best he could hope for in this new world? It was a better promise than he had a month ago and he owed that to Spike. It was because of Spike the reflection before him wasn’t of that of a shell of a man.

It was because of Spike he was healthy, shaven and had a voice. It was because of Spike he’d learned to laugh again and had even made friends. It was of Spike he’d even learned to reconnect to his own body and to even find pleasure in sex again.

When Xander’s emotional overload had passed and the numbness had receded he’d gotten to his feet. He’d moved the tray of cold, unappealing food to the kitchenette and he’d gone into the bedroom. He stripped out of his belt and done what was once the unthinkable. He’d showered. There had been no panic attacks or fear. It had simply been a long hot shower to wash away his confusion for short while.

Then he’d dried off and wandered back out to the front room to stand naked in front of the large windows overlooking the city. He was calm now. His fears and anger were burned out. What remained were simple truths.

He’d stared at his reflection recognizing the familiar stranger. He was no longer the lanky teenager hopelessly in love with a doomed slayer. He was no longer a shattered young man trying to keep the resistance together and raise a newly acquired little sister. He was no longer the half alive bottle of an Azora demon.

There were parts of all those men inside him. They made him Xander just as his love and friendship with Willow did. A friendship and love he still needed and leaned upon even now as he began to rethink Spike’s proposal.

*Spike isn’t like the other vampires, Willow,* Xander thought. *In some ways it would be easier if he was but he’s not. I’m not saying he can be trusted because..well hello..”He is a vampire.” Yet, he saved me, Will. He saved Tara. Hell, he saved Larry!*

Xander smiled. He remembered a time from Before when bullies seemed like the worst thing he had to face.

*You know he even lets me keep a kitten who hates him? I know, cats are very perceptive animals,* Xander thought. *You’d like Ante and Dawn would never let him out of her sight!*

Xander clenched his fists and drew in a deep breath as a deep pain of truth slammed through him.

*Willow, I miss you. I miss Dawn but I can’t be with you! Xander’s vision grew blurry. Even if I could escape..I couldn’t. Spike would have to hunt me down. I’d endanger you..put the resistance at risk. A single tear began to trail down his cheek. Willow, I’m tired. I don’t want to be property anymore. I don’t want to be anyone’s bottle, next meal or Pet. Another tear slipped away and sob stuck in Xander’s throat. Willow, I’m tired of being angry. I’m tired of being afraid. The only times I feel safe are when I’m in Spike’s bed..and I know how wrong that sounds to you but damnit Wills from where I’ve been it’s so far from wrong!*

Xander swiped his hand across his cheeks.

*I know. I know. We’re talking my soul here. It’s the one thing that hasn’t been taken or stripped from me. Would it be so wrong to give it to Spike before that happens too?*
Xander took another deep breathe.

*I know you say that’s giving up, but Wills you aren’t here. You haven’t been here. Here there’s only one wrong word or gesture away from some demonic faux pas and then there’s a price to be paid.*

*Wills I’ve paid enough. I really have. I’m broken. I’m more broken than I realized. I may be more broken than Spike realizes.*

The sound of the suite door opening and closing interrupted Xander’s thoughts. He shifted his focus. He couldn’t see Spike’s reflection in the window but he heard the vampire soft steps as he entered the suite.

“Nice view,” Spike said softly. “Much nicer than when I left.”

Xander let escape a quiet chuckle at Spike’s familiar words. He turned around to face the vampire. Spike was battered, bruised and bloodied. He reeked of bile, booze and smoke. Xander snapped his fingers.

Spike arched an eyebrow, “Yeah, pet?”

“You, Ok..master?” Xander asked worriedly.

*No, Spike thought. You broke my undead heart, git.*

“Fine,” Spike said as he eased his dirtied duster off his shoulders and let it fall to the floor. Then he stumbled to his chair. Xander moved immediately and knelt by his feet. Spike narrowed his eyes and studied him.

Again, Xander snapped his fingers.

“Permission to speak until I say otherwise, pet,” Spike said.

“Let me help you with your boots, master,” Xander said as he began tugging at the vampire ick encrusted boot.

“Why so helpful, pet?” Spike asked as he straightened his leg out to help Xander.

“Well by the look of your swollen knuckles and broken fingers, it would be easier for me to do this than you..master,” Xander said as he successfully freed one foot and began to work on the other.

“That doesn’t really answer my question,” Spike softly growled.

Xander sighed and paused in mid-tug. He looked up at Spike and locked brown eyes with blue.

“Look, master, it’s been a long and emotional day..evening..whatever for both of us. Everybody but Clem has gotten angry and said harsh words they didn’t mean, and that’s only because he hasn’t seen my uneaten dinner yet. So why don’t you let me play “pet”, strip you naked, scrub you clean and curl up around you in bed. We’ll hit the reset button and tomorrow we’ll retry this whole “claim” thing,” Xander said as he finished tugging off Spike’s remaining boot. Then he reached for Spike’s hand.

*Reset button? Spike thought. What does that mean, pet?*

“BLOODY HELL!” Spike’s yelled as Xander tugged one of Spike’s broken fingers into place.

“You lookin’ for a beatin’ whelp?”
“Not really, master,” Xander said as he grabbed Spike’s hand again. The vampire growled as Xander reached for the other broken finger. “Just thought you’d rather me do this now before we are comfy naked, clean and warm in bed.”

“Naff off already!” Spike growled and snatched his hand away from Xander who’d quickly reset the other finger. “I’ve tortured men for weeks, feasting on their entrails and drinking their tears for looking at me the wrong way let alone pokin’ at my wounds!”

“Yes, master, and I’m sure it was all very bloody, gory and will give me nightmare material for weeks,” Xander said as he stood up and offered a hand to Spike. “You can tell me all about it in the shower.”

“Xander,” Spike growled as he studied his pet. This was not the same Xander he’d left in his office all those terrible soul wrenching hours ago.

“Spike,” Xander whispered.

Whatever coals of anger remained unburned by Spike’s frenzied binge of violence turned to ash with Xander’s whisper. He was calling to Spike, needing Spike and the vampire was helpless. He had to answer. He stood up. He took Xander’s hand.

As the early light of dawn crested over the city and spilled into the suite, Xander gently stripped Spike. Then Xander tenderly soaped and cleaned Spike. He kissed each bruise and sore until Spike nearly vowed to go out and get a new set of battle wounds just to feel his pet pamper him all over again.

Then Xander led Spike to bed and as he promised he curled up around him before falling into a deep sleep.

TBC
Chapter 52

Spike watched Xander sleep as the late afternoon light retreated from the bedroom. He tried to kill the hope currently burning as brightly inside of him as the rage had burned inside of him the night before.

*I won’t be played a fool again,* Spike silently vowed even as memorized Xander’s face at rest. Spike fought the pleasure at seeing Xander at peace. He fought the need to want to give Xander that peace no matter the cost.

*I’ve become as poncy as Angel!* Spike chastised himself then chuckled. *Strike that. No one could be as poncy as that sorry bastard!*

Xander stirred and as his breathing grew shallow, *He’s waking up,* Spike thought suddenly in a near panic. What happened next? What had Xander meant by “reset button?”

A growling noise emanating from Xander’s stomach interrupted Spike’s panic. Xander yawned and opened his eyes.

“Can’t believe we didn’t feed that thing before we went ta bed,” Spike said. Xander grinned and snapped his fingers. Spike rolled his eyes, “Permission ta speak ‘til I say otherwise.”

“Wasn’t hungry before we went to bed,” Xander replied.

“Oi! Quick! Time and date stamp the occasion. Xander wasn’t hungry!”

“Oh hardy har har,” Xander said as he rolled over.

“Oi! Where do ya think yer goin’ whelp?”

“To the little boys room, master,” Xander replied.

“You and yer bodily functions!” Spike growled.

“That’s one of the drawbacks of pets, master, we’re messy,” Xander replied airily as he headed for the bathroom. “Could be worse, I could have litter box!”

“Yeah! And you’d be the one changin’ it too!” Spike hollered after his human before muttering, “Cheeky git!”

Spike sat for a few minutes trying to collect his thoughts. It was useless. They were too scattered and yet too centered on one annoying human. He ran his hand over his face then opened the nightstand drawer to get a cigarette before he remembered he gave up smoking.

*Well anywhere near, Xan that is,* Spike thought as he closed the drawer. Instead he stood up and foraged in the wardrobe until he found a clean pair of black jeans. He pulled them on and left the top unbuttoned.

“Going somewhere?” Xander asked as he came back into the room.

“Thought I’d order you up some brekky,” Spike said.

“Uhm..do you have to, master?”
Spike turned around and looked at Xander he cocked an eyebrow.

“I mean..well..I think we should talk,” Xander said.

“Cuz that went so well yesterday, pet,” Spike said.

“Reset button, remember?”

“And what does that, bloody well mean?”

“It means we deal with this Clai..your proposal the way we should have, master,” Xander said. “You and I talk to each other.”

Suddenly Spike wasn’t sure he wanted a reset. He’d begun to come to terms with Xander’s rejection last night. He wasn’t sure if the city couldn’t handle him going through that again.

“Xan…” Spike began.

“Spike, please,” Xander replied.

“I know yer hungry, pet,” Spike desperately reached for an excuse.

“I can eat last night’s dinner for breakfast.”

“And you say my diet’s disgusting!”

“Trust me, cold mac and cheese and day old hot dogs are not the worst meal I’ve ever had. I’d have thought it was gourmet dining when I was growing up,” Xander said.

*If his ‘rents are still living, they’re dead,* Spike thought.

“It’s not how *my* Pet eats,” Spike growled.

“OK, Sp..master,” Xander conceded with a sigh. “Can we make a deal. If you order a ‘Pet worthy’ breakfast can you and I just spend the evening up here talking about this Claim until..well we’re good?”

“We’re good?”

“Yeah..no fang faces..no broken bones..no rampages.”

“Xander…”

“Master,” Xander said with a plea in his voice Spike had never heard.

*I am Angel poncy,* Spike thought as he nodded.

“Thank you,” Xander whispered before heading to the front room to wait for his first meal of the evening.

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Xander was still lying back on his pillow rubbing his stomach contentedly when Spike returned from handing off the empty food tray to a minion outside the suite door. Spike fought back the urge to sweep down and scoop his pet up. He fought the warmth spreading through him at seeing a happy, contented Xander.
“You know I can feel the weight of your stare,” Xander said never opening his eyes.

“Right,” Spike scoffed.

“Prey becomes highly attuned to the whims of predators in the area,” Xander replied.

“Ya think ya know what my whims are, yeah?”

“I think I have some clue,” Xander said with a sly smile.

Spike laughed then sat down in his chair. He wanted to continue with the light flirting but both his soul and demon cried out for answers about what Xander really wanted in regards to his Claim.

“Thought we were gonna yap?”

Xander took a deep breath then slowly let it out. He sat up then assumed the kneeling position Spike had maneuvered him into the first night.

“Right. Time to make with the talkage,” Xander said.

For a moment there was a still silence. Xander knew it was a corny and over used analogy but it really did feel like the calm before the storm. It was a storm put on hold and held back for several hours.

*Sorta like the towering waves in ‘The Abyss’, Xander thought. Only this time I don't think there will be any friendly aliens to stop them from crashing down.*

“Pet?” Spike said trying to keep the growl out of his voice.

“Spike…Master, this isn’t easy,” Xander said.

Spike nodded. *Gonna keep myself in check. Gonna hear what he has ta say,* Spike thought.

“First, I gotta know. Did you mean it?”

“Mean what, pet?”

“That…well that..you..you l..love me?” Xander finally forced out.

A weight plummeted deep into Spike stomach. An instinct for self preservation and a need to keep from taking any more hurt demanded he lie and deny. Yet the clarity of the moment demanded the truth.

“Yeah, pet, I did. I meant it, Xander,” Spike said compromising with admitting what he said without repeating it.

Xander stared at Spike for a moment then begun to shake his head as a small laugh escaped.

“Pet?” Spike growled barely keeping his demon in check. His love wasn’t a source of amusement.

“This world really is a bitch, you know that, Sp..master?” Xander finally said. “I mean. I believe you. Really, I believe that you’re capable of love.”

“And you don’t love me,” Spike ground out.

“No, I don’t,” Xander said simply.
Spike dug his nails into his chair easily tearing through the leather. His eyes shifted to gold.

“But then again I don’t think I can love..not in the way you want me to,” Xander said then gave a short bitter laugh. “See the humor. You’re a vampire who can love..and I’m a human who can’t.”

“What does that mean, Xander,” Spike snarled. “Yer the ‘White Knight’ and one of the Scoobies. I know yer lot. I know yer capable of love.”

Xander looked directly at Spike then answered, “I love Willow, yes. I love, Dawn and Faith. I have love from before..but the kind of love you want..you deserve, Spike, I can’t give..not now. Maybe I won’t ever be able to give.”

“Why? Because I’m a vampire?” Spike sneered.

Xander laughed bitterly, “If only that were the problem! Damnit Spike! Look at me! Really look at me! I’m not the Xander from Before! I’m not the same gangly kid Angel offered up to you as a snack! Hell I’m not even the angry lovesick fool that was so jealous of a souled vampire I damned the world by destroying the only means that might have stopped Angelus before he destroyed it!”

“Wot?” Spike looked at Xander in shock.

“You think we didn’t have another plan? You think Buffy and Giles..Willow were just gonna stand by and let Angelus open a portal to hell? You think we only had plan, ‘A’..send Buffy in to kick Angelus’ droopy ass?”

“Xand…”

“We had an Orb of Thesulah…”

“Pet!” Spike shushed and covered Xander’s mouth while he sniffed the air for the presence of any demons close enough to hear what Xander had just said. “Gelus doesn’t like to hear those words.”

“I’mmbet,” Xander muttered behind Spike’s hand. Spike shook his head and withdrew his hand.

“Don’t worry. It’s gone. Willow was trying to do the..well you can guess only it was her second attempt and I was angry. Angry we were even bothering trying to save someone..thing who didn’t deserve it. So..I smashed the ..it against the wall and stormed off after Buffy to help her..only that plan worked as well as all my others.”

“Xander, this world is not yer fault. Is that why ya think you can’t love?” Spike asked softly.

Xander shook his head and whispered, “No, but its reason enough not to deserve love.”

“Ah, pet…” Spike said as he reached out to stroke Xander’s cheek. Xander flinched and pulled back.

“Don’t,” Xander whispered.

“Pet.” Spike said softly.

“Spike, I can’t. I need you to understand. I believe you can love, OK? But, I think it’s been a looooong time since you’ve been human.”

“And what’s that supposed ta mean?”

“Spike!” Xander said as he shifted into a more natural position. “I’m broken.”
“Xan…”

“Please listen to me,” Xander begged with fists clenched. “I know you don’t want to see it. I didn’t see it…but…”

Xander hung his head and gulped deep breathes. He fought the shaking feeling deep in his gut threatening to overwhelm him.

“I’m listening, pet,” Spike said.

“How long have I been here? Huh? A few weeks? A month? How long was I with the Azora, Spike?” Xander barked.

“Pet…”

“Do you know what it was like? I was raped, Spike. Not once…not twice..but repeatedly! Raped publicly. I was made to stand there and take it while my body was..milked for that thing’s pleasure!”

Xander stumbled to his feet. The feeling inside of him was clawing and writhing in his gut. He backed away from Spike.

“I was a thing, Spike! I was reduced to being an object. Reduced to standing still while it crawled inside and around my body and when I fought..or resisted?”

Xander began to pace his arms wrapped tightly around his stomach.

“When I resisted I was put into ‘the Tank,’” Xander almost whispered. “I was put into the drowning deep darkness where all there was was the sound of my heartbeat…the blood rushing in my ears. It was the only way I knew I was alive.”

Spike slowly stood up. His demon was howling for vengeance and blood. It didn’t matter that he’s already killed Vr’xkl, he wanted to do it again..and again. Perhaps all the Azora need to die! Spike thought.

Cautiously he moved toward Xander. As his demon cried out for vengeance, his soul cried for Xander. Spike wanted to hold his human. He wanted to take Xander in his arms, comfort him and offer him all the protection and love Spike could give him.

Xander turned frightened and haunted eyes to Spike.

“How long was I there, Spike? Huh? How long was I a fine wine to a demon? How long did I fight to keep from becoming just the mindless body they wanted me to be?”

Spike halted his steps and returned Xander’s gaze.

“I used to think the worst was watching Buffy die. Seeing my town swallowed up by the pit and lake Angelus created out of it until nothing remained but the damned island in the middle with Acathla's open mouth. I thought the worst was watching Giles waste away and losing the will to live or the fear of losing Willow and Dawn..the demon hordes hunting us. I used to watch Fa..the others as they slept..selfishly hoping I would die before they did.”

“Xander,” Spike said and reached for his pet.

“It wasn’t the worst though, Spike,” Xander said frozen as he began to shake. “It wasn’t the worst. I think the worst was when they stripped my voice away. You know what’s like to scream in agony…
to open your mouth and pour out your soul...and nothing but air comes out? Do you, Spike? Do you know what’..th..th..cuz..I..used to…I tried…I was…they took it…they took it all Spike!”

Spike grabbed Xander and pulled him close. Tremors wracked Xander’s body. He pushed against Spike but Spike held him tight.

“They..to..took..my..my fr..freedom,” Xander cried as shook and fought. “They…took..my..my home..my…friends..they..to..took my in..in..innocence..they..hu.hurt me and they la..laughed! They laughed, Spike!”

Spike’s eyes were a shimmering gold as he buried his face against Xander and tried to soothe him with soft purrs.

“Th..they ra..raped me..an..and th..they laughed, Spike,” Xander said.

_They aren’t laughin’ now, pet_, Spike thought as he ran a soothing hand up and down Xander’s spine.

“Th…they dr..drowned me, Spike,” Xander said finally clinging to Spike instead of fighting him. “Th..they drownedme!”

“I know, pet,” Spike whispered.

“A..and…wh..when that was..wasn’t enough,” Xander cried, “OH GHODS!”

Xander sagged in Spike’s arms. Gently he eased them both to the floor and rocked them.

“Yeah? Pet? What?” Spike softly prompted knowing Xander needed to say what he was thinking.

“SPIKE! Th…they..THEY TOOK AWAY MY VOICE!” Xander yelled.

Spike buried his face into Xander’s shoulder and rocked him.

“MY VOOOOICE!” Xander yelled again. “MY VOOOOOO....”

Xander screamed. It was incomprehensible. It was the sound of rage and sorrow blended into one agonizing note. Tears streamed down Xander’s face while he mindlessly alternated between beating on Spike’s back and clawing at it as if he needed the vampire closer then skin to skin.

Spike’s soul and demon silently howled in harmony to Xander.

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Xander blinked. There was a ceiling above him. It was a familiar ceiling. It was the bedroom ceiling.

“Feelin’ better, pet?” Spike asked softly.

Xander turned his head towards the vampire’s voice. Spike was lying on his side, head propped up on his hand watching him. Xander nodded.

“How..?” Xander tried to ask then swallowed. His throat was sore.

“Ya screamed and cried yerself out. Then brought ya in here. Thought it be more comfortable to sleep it off here then on the floor.
Memories of his breakdown came rushing back to Xander and he blushed. *So much for talking things through,* Xander thought.

“Oi, none of that now,” Spike chastised gently.

“None of what?”

“Feeling embarrassed about wot happened,” Spike said.

“And how do you…”

“I know you, pet,” Spike replied cutting Xander off. “I also know ya needed what happened out there. Yer right, I’ve been a demon too long ta remember what it’s like ta be human.”

Xander blushed again.

“Spike…”

“But I disagree with you, pet.”

“What?” Xander asked in confusion. “Disagree with me?”

“Ya said you were broken.”

“I am,” Xander sighed feeling sore, achey and very tired.

“No, luv, yer not broken. *Damaged,* but not broken,” Spike insisted.

“Didn’t you hear anything I said, blondie?”

“Every word, pet, but trust me Xander, I’ve seen broken. As you pointed out, I’ve been a demon a long time. I’ve seen broken people and *I’ve broken* people.”

Xander gasped and stared at Spike.


“I feel like I am,” Xander whispered.

“I know,” Spike said softly, “and I understand now that’s why you can’t accept my Claim.”

“Huh?” Xander said suddenly sitting up. “No wait.”

“Pet?” Spike said sitting up to meet Xander gaze.

“Spike, I know I fell to pieces out there before I could explain but..look..this Claim thing..I’ve thought about it..and I’ve changed my mind.”

“Wot?!”

“I mean if you still want me,” Xander whispered.

“Pet, wanting you is *not* the problem,” Spike growled, “but I am very confused. Explain it ta poor Spike! How do ya go from a banshee screeching breakdown ta wantin’ ta accept my Claim?”

Xander gave a tired but heartfelt smile.
“I guess it is a bit confusing,” he admitted.

“Xander!” Spike growled.

“Well…it’s like I said. They…the Azora..it took everything from me..well almost everything,” Xander began to explain. “It never took my soul. It wasn’t interested in that.”

“Luv…”

“Look..I get it now. I’m in a demon world..and it’s run by demon rules. I fought so long against it because fighting it was the only way I knew how to hold on to me. Except, I don’t have to fight to hold on to me any longer, do I Spike?”

“Xan…did you hit yer head on something when I wasn’t lookin’?”

“Spike, you don’t want me to be a bottle. And when you want me for a pet..the Pet parts for show.”

Spike closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. He used to be able to decipher Dru’s prattle, he would learn to decipher Xander’s.

“You want to Claim me, Spike,” Xander concluded, “but you don’t want to own me.”

“Xander, a Claim would mean you’d belong ta me,” Spike said patiently, “body and soul.”

“Yeah, but I’d still be me.”

“Well it’s not a bloody transmogrification spell!”

Xander laughed. Then he reached out and touched Spike’s cheek. He really was achey, sore and tired but he needed Spike to understand.

“You want me, Spike,” Xander said simply. “I get that now. You want the person I am broke..damaged as I am. I’m not going to lie to you. I’m not going to say I’m thrilled about the idea of belonging to anyone. I can’t say I want my soul bound to your demon.”

Spike fought the need to growl.

“However, I can say that I have only one thing left in this world that’s mine. One thing left that hasn’t been taken, my soul. I’m a human in demon world that plays by demon rules, Spike. That doesn’t mean my soul can’t be taken..that I get to keep it.”

“Ya think I wouldn’t honor my word just cuz you’d reject my Claim?” Spike growled and started to move off the bed.

“NO!” Xander reached out and grabbed Spike’s arm to keep him with him, “but that doesn’t mean you can’t be beaten or defeated!”

“Oi!”

“I thought Buffy was indestructible,” Xander said.

Spike stilled.

“I can’t go through any of this again, Spike. I can’t end up belonging to someone…something else,” Xander said.
“Xander…”

“So I want your Claim, Spike,” Xander said. “I want to give you the one thing I have left so you will keep it safe.”

Spike felt both his soul and demon leap to honor Xander’s request. They both wanted the job.

“Xander I would end my existence ta keep you safe,” Spike said softly.

“I know,” Xander said, “and if you failed then I wouldn’t have to worry about becoming anything else’s toy or property.”

It was Spike’s turn to reach out. He cupped Xander’s cheek.

“Look..I know this isn’t what you wanted. You wanted me to love you back. I get that, blondie. I do,” Xander said.

“I really should make you stop with the ‘blondie,’ pet,” Spike said acknowledging in his own way what Xander was trying to say.

“Later..master,” Xander smiled happy that Spike understood. Spike leaned forward and kissed Xander’s nose.

“Later,” he promised. “Be sure about accepting this Claim, pet,”

“I am,” Xander said. “Are you OK…”

“Xander, I won’t lie. I want your love. As much a treasure as yer soul may be it isn’t a substitution fer yer love. But I can wait for that,” Spike said.

“And if it never comes?” Xander said.

“Then I’ll have a long time showin’ ya just how deeply a vampire can love,” Spike said.

“Thank you, Spike,” Xander said as he collapsed back down on the bed among the pillows. Spike settled beside him before pulling the tired human into his arms.

“It won’t be easy,” Spike said.

“The Claiming ritual?” Xander asked.

Spike nodded.

Xander chuckled, “Of course not. It’s a demonic ritual.”

“Once it’s begun we can’t stop it. We see it through, luv,” Spike said.

Xander nodded.

“You afraid?”

“Petrified,” Xander replied as he snuggled closer and buried his face into Spike’s shoulder. Spike wrapped his arms tighter around Xander.

“You?”

“Only of losing you, pet, only of losing you,” Spike said.
TBC
Chapter 53

Xander tried not to bite his bottom lip. He didn’t want the minions waiting on him to reapply the lip gloss. He tried to stand still to keep from inadvertently rubbing off any of the sparkling body powder that covered every inch of him. Yet he was nervous and he needed an outlet for his energy.

“It won’t be much longer, Xander,” Lorne tried to reassure him.

Xander nodded. It’s already been too long as it is, he thought.

He sighed. He didn’t know what to expect after agreeing to Spike’s Claim, but being sent to the green stables wasn’t it.

It had been three days since he’d seen last seen Spike. It had been three days since the evening after his breakdown, the evening he accepted Spike’s proposal.

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After they’d slept he’d woken to Spike standing by the bed and staring at him.

“Gonna have to send ya to the stables now, pet,” Spike said simply.

“What?” Xander muttered still groggy with sleep.

“You’ll stay there till it’s time ta do the ritual,” Spike continued.

“Spi…”

“MASTER!” Spike immediately corrected Xander.

Fear raced through Xander at Spike’s sharp voice. He shook the sleep off and sat up. He’d snapped his fingers.

“Permission ta speak,” Spike said coolly.

“Master, why am I being sent the stables?” Xander asked trying to keep the fear and hurt out of his voice.

“Pet, I am your master, and I do not have to answer any of your questions,” Spike replied, “but you have pleased me so I will indulge you. Preparations for the Claiming have begun. They require us to be separated until the ritual begins. You will be kept isolated in the green stables until it is time for the ritual.”

Isolated? The stables? Xander thought. Memories of the vault began to seep into his consciousness. He fought the tremors that wanted to wrack his body.

“PET!” Spike growled. “This is a separation! It is not permanent and you will be given little gifts to help the time pass.”

Xander nodded and forced out, “Th..thank you..ma..master.”

Wills! I’ve made a mistake, Xander thought. This isn’t right! I shouldn’t have agreed!

“Pet,” Spike said more softly, “the ritual demands total submission on your part.”
Xander looked up and met Spike’s crystal clear blue eyes.

“You need ta think about that and prepare for it while yer in the stables. You need ta focus on that, on submitting ta me. Ya need to be able to submit to any commands or demands I make of ya during the ritual.”

Xander felt cold. Spike reached out brushed his cheek gently.

“Trust me, Xander,” Spike whispered. “That’s the secret. Obey me out of trust..not fear. I promise, ya pet, I will not demand more than ya can handle. The ritual can be harsh, but trust me, Xander. Trust I will take care of ya. Submit in the belief of me, pet. Can ya do that?

“I..I don’t know,” Xander whispered.

Spike leaned forward and brushed a kiss across the tip of Xander’s nose. Then he leaned closer and put his mouth next to Xander’s ear.

“I do,pet,” he softly whispered. “I do. Yer bloody amazing, Xander. I know you can do this.”

Then Spike pulled back from Xander, turned and left the room.

***

“Xander, tilt your head back,” Lorne commanded bringing Xander back to the present.

With a sigh he leaned his head back. A minion ran yet another brush through his hair.

“That’s good,” Lorne said. “You may stand straight now, Xander.”

Xander stood straight.

“Legs apart,” Lorne ordered. Xander shifted his legs and tried not to blush as Lorne began another tour around his body-inspecting him.

_We’ve been at this for hours, Lorne, Xander thought. How much longer do you stare at the hairless, glittery guy in a thong?_

“Here!” Lorne ordered from behind Xander. “There’s a smudge above the right hip at the back.”

Xander steeled himself for the tickle of the brush the minions used to coat his body in the glittering body powder.

“Perfection people! Perfection! This is a Claiming ritual, not some off Broadway Saturday matinee show!”

_I think the analogy’s a little lost on them, Lorne, Xander thought as he felt the glitter being applied again to his body._

“Good!” Lorne snapped as he once again resumed his inspection. When he made his way back in front of Xander he slowly raked his eyes over the human. He paused to study Xander’s groin for a long time.

_Oh please, not again, Xander silently begged. They’d already gone through fifteen pairs of thongs to settle on the one he was wearing now. Each had been more embarrassing and revealing than last._

_Don’t understand why I just don’t go naked at this point, Xander thought as he looked down to the_
The thong was a simple design. Thin straps went around his hips held together by a small silver circle pressed tightly to his lower abdomen. Hanging from the bottom of the ring was a pouch where Xander’s penis and balls had been gently tucked away. From the bottom of the pouch was another small strap that went back across his perineum and back up the crack of his ass to connect to the strap around his waist.

Xander wasn’t sure what embarrassed him more, that all of his manly bits had been tucked away into a pouch or that he’d been shaved “down there”. Somehow the getup left him feeling more naked and vulnerable then actually being naked had ever left him feeling.

“Mmmm, yes, I think it will do,” Lorne finally said.

Xander could have sworn he wasn’t alone in his sigh of relief.

“All right, good job people!” Lorne said the snapped his fingers. “You can leave now..but remember to scrub your hands thoroughly. You may have had Master’s Spike permission to touch his Pet and future Claimant in preparation for the ritual, but that doesn’t mean he’ll like scenting his Pet on you.”

Xander fought back a giggle as he saw vampires actually get paler at Lorne’s warning. Didn’t know they could get any paler, Xander thought.

Minions shuffled at out of the room while Lorne made another circuit around Xander. Xander rolled his khol lined eyes. When the minions had shut the door behind them, Lorne stood in front of Xander and smiled.

“You look breath taking, cupcake,” Lorne said.

I look like an escapee from a glamrock concert. Who’s officiating this ritual? Ziggy Stardust?

Lorne smiled and said, “At first I wasn’t happy with lemon drop for commanding you to remain silent today until you are presented to him...”

You and me both, Xander thought. But then..hey..had a lot of practice with the whole Marcel Marceau routine.

“...but I’m getting the sense it was probably a wise decision.” Lorne continued.

Xander shrugged.

“Xan,” Lorne began again suddenly very serious, “remember rituals are all about intention.”

This isn’t my first time at the rodeo; I’ve been part of rituals before, Xander thought.

“You have to want Spike’s Claim,” Lorne said. “You have to really want it.”

I do, Green Jeans, I do.

“The ritual will test your intentions. It ..Spike’s demon will look for weaknesses in your resolve.”

Please tell me that means we’re gonna play a mean game of putt-putt.

“Your submission throughout is vital.”

Spike’s already given me the low down on this, Commander Adama.
“Once begun there’s no stopping it. You either are Claimed...,” Lorne paused and then shook his head. “I’m not going to think negatively, cupcake. You and lemon drop..you’ll make it through.”

Xander took a deep breath and nodded. Lorne smiled and nodded in return.

“Well then, nothing left to do but take you to Spike,” Lorne said as he picked up Xander’s leash and clipped it to his collar.

Goody, time for my walk.. at last! Xander thought.

“Not going to risk this messing up your glitter,” Lorne said as he held on to the leash instead of letting it dangle. “I’ll be leading you to Spike.”

Xander bowed his head in submission.

“Oh cupcake,” Lorne said a bit breathlessly before leading Xander from the room.

***

Spike stood on the same dais where Xander had been punished. He wore his standard black leather pants and a red silk shirt. He was, as always, stunning.

There was a crowd gathered around the dais and through the casino. It parted as Lorne led Xander toward Spike. Unlike when he was punished, Xander’s ankles weren’t shackled and it was easy to keep pace with Lorne.

They strode through the sea of demons hungrily staring at Xander. He could feel them staring at him, taking in his all but naked flesh coated in glittering dust. He could imagine them cataloguing his gleaming lips and his accentuated eyes. He knew they’d be staring lustfully at the leather pouch covering his genitals.

Not like they haven’t seen them before though, Xander thought remembering the last time he was paraded in front of the casino like this and lead to the dais where Spike stood waiting for him. He swallowed but kept his head down. I will get through this, he thought. I want Spike’s Claim.

Spike watched Xander being led slowly to him by Lorne and he fought the need to scoop his pet up and run. He hated the leers on the other demons’ faces. He hated the smell of lust in the air for what was his but ceremony was ceremony. He had to make his intention to Claim Xander publicly.

But bloody hell don’t have ta do it publicly, he thought. Won’t put Xan through that! Not ever again!

Lorne finally reached Spike. He held out the end of Xander’s lead to him.

“My lord,” Lorne said solemnly.

Spike took the end of Xander’s lead and Xander dropped gracefully to his knees in front of Spike. He presented himself in perfect position offering Spike access to all that was his. He never lifted his head.

Spike’s demon silently roared in dominance as he clenched the lead tightly in his fist. MINE! Spike thought. MINE!

Spike shifted into his vampiric visage and faced the crowd. He snarled and the scents of lust immediately turned to fear.

“Since the moment my sire offered the pet to me years ago in the Before this human has been
MINE!” Spike roared. The crowd was silent. “He has been my Pet since I have reclaimed him and I have punished those who have dared to touch him. He has been disobedient and he has been punished. Yet, always his flesh and his blood have pleased me.”

Spike bent over and unclipped the lead from Xander’s collar. A murmur rippled through the crowd. He handed the lead to Lorne.

*Oh Ghods! Here it comes,* Xander thought. He steeled himself for what was to happen. He fought the tremors at the thought of being “claimed” publicly. *It’s not the FIRST time!* He thought to himself.

“So, up, Pet,” Spike commanded.

Xander rose quickly to his feet. He stood with his head bowed and his hands to his side.

“Tonight I intend to Claim my Pet!”

This time it was a chorus of clicks, warbles, and words that quickly spread through the crowd as demons wondered and gossiped at this latest turn of events. Spike allowed the news to spread and sink in a few moments before speaking again.

“So, Xander!” Spike barked using his Pet’s name for the first time in public. The crowd fell silent.

Xander lifted his head.

“I offer you my Claim, do you accept it?” Spike asked firmly.

Xander stared at Spike for a moment. The human visage Spike normally wore was completely gone. All that remained were the fangs, the ridges and the shining golden eyes of a vampire. Xander fought the shudder of fear that wanted to race up from the bottom of his spine.

“Yes, Master,” Xander finally said.

The crowd roared and Spike smiled around his fangs. Xander lowered his head.

“SILENCE!” Spike ordered and the room fell still. “My Pet has accepted my Claim. I intend to Claim him tonight. During the Claiming ceremony feel free to indulge in the usual amenities my casino has to offer. When the ceremony is complete, Lorne will present the news and drinks will be on the house!”

Another roar went through the crowd and Xander frowned. *Why will Lorne have to give them the news?* He thought. *Won’t they be able to see for themselves?*

“What, Pet, follow me,” Spike ordered and began to walk away from the dais. Once again the crowd parted before the master vampire. Xander followed behind in silent confusion.

***

Spike led Xander to a room in the casino Xander had never seen before. As they entered it the feel of heavy magic danced along his skin. He shuddered.

The room was lit by the multitude of candles lining the walls and that formed a large circle in the middle of the room. They must have been black candles because they blended in with the walls, ceiling and floor. They were completely dark except for the yellow and orange flames which danced on top of them.
Spike led Xander to stand just outside the ring of candles.

“Stay here a moment, pet,” Spike commanded. Xander remained still as Spike slipped behind them and closed the door. Then he returned. Only then did Xander let go of some of his fear.

Whatever is going to happen, Xander thought in relief, we won’t have an audience.

“Xan, look at me,” Spike ordered. Xander obeyed.

“When we step inside the circle, the ritual begins,” Spike explained.

Xander nodded.

“You are allowed to utter only three words throughout the ritual: ‘Yes’, ‘No’ and ‘Master’. Do you understand?”

“Yes, Master,” Xander said. Spike smiled. He leaned down and brushed a kiss across the tip of Xander’s nose. Then he straightened again.

“This ritual will test your commitment and your intention,” Spike said. “Trust me, Xander.”

Xander studied Spike for a moment. Spike still wore his demon’s face and yet there was still something there of Spike’s “gentler” side. There was still something of the Spike that read Ivanhoe to Xander and teased him. Xander found he did trust Spike.

“Yes, master,” Xander whispered.

Spike’s demon thrilled at Xander’s words and found a slight footing over his soul. This was demon ritual and Spike’s demon was going to be in charge of it all the way!

“Follow me, pet.” Spike ordered coolly as he stepped inside the ring of candles. Xander followed.

Again Xander felt the ripple of magic sluice over his skin. Then he was inside the circle and for the first time he could see what was inside the circle. There was a large comfy bed with candles on either side but that wasn’t what finally loosed the shudder of fear that tore through him. There were restraints of various kinds attached to the floor, the bed and hanging from the ceiling. There was table with paddles, floggers, and whips of various styles lined up ready for use. There were knives and bottles of unknown ingredients as well. There were other things he couldn’t identify and he didn’t want to!

For the first time, Xander began to wonder if he could go through with it. Could he really accept Spike’s Claim? Could he submit?

I can’t do torture! I can’t Spike!

“Raise yer arms, Pet,” Spike ordered. Xander stared at Spike but raised his arms. He swallowed as soft but unyielding restraints were buckled to his wrists.

Spike moved away for a moment. Xander heard a noise and then suddenly he was being pulled upwards. He was being pulled until his feet barely touched the floor. Immediately he could feel his arms and shoulders protest against his weight.

“Spread yer feet wide,” Spike said. As Xander complied he felt another set of restraints being applied to his ankles. A slight shift in his feet proved he couldn’t move them. Xander looked down to see a spreader bar between his feet.
“Master,” Xander groaned.

Spike circled Xander and smiled.

“Ya look lovely, pet, all trussed up and waitin’ fer me,” Spike almost purred. “Ya know Dru and I used ta play these games fer days.”

OH Ghods! Xander silently screamed.

“Yer human though. Fragile bit of flesh,” Spike murmured as he began to delicately trace a finger tip down the center Xander’s sternum down to his naval. “Course after tonight ya won’t be quite so delicate, will ya? Ya’ll be better equipped ta play these games, won’t ya pet?”

“Yes, Master,” Xander forced out as Spike began to play with Xander’s pierced nipple. He was really beginning to feel the pain in his arms and yet he couldn’t help but notice teasing sensation Spike was creating around his piercing.

Spike grinned then moved his seductive fingers to trace the thin straps of Xander’s thong. Delicately he mapped out the strap. When he ghosted his fingers over Xander’s ass, Xander couldn’t help but flinch from the teasing. The movement caused pain to radiate down his arms and across his shoulders.

“MASTER!” Xander cried.

“It’s an interestin’ dance ain’t it, pet,” Spike mused as he ghosted light touches over Xander’s pouch. “This dance between pleasure and pain?”

Xander hissed. His cock began to twitch and his legs ached.

“Ya know I find ya beautiful both ways?”

“Master?” Xander asked in confusion.

“I like the look of bliss that passes over yer face when I pleasure ya,” Spike said as he stroked Xander’s balls through the leather covering them. Xander’s mouth fell open in want and need.

“Yet, I’m a demon, Xan and can’t help but enjoy that look that passes over yer face when I cause ya a bit of pain,” Spike said as he slapped Xander’s ass leaving a red hand print.

“MASTER!!!” Xander cried out as his butt cheek burned and his weight rocked from his arms.

Spike purred. He returned to fondling Xander’s cock and balls until Xander breathing settled from painful gasps to tiny pants of need.

“Get used ta the dance, pet,” Spike said.

I can’t..oh..Ghods! Xander thought.

“Course when ya do, ya’ll begin ta find out the line between pain and pleasure blur and soon you won’t know where one begins and one ends,” Spike continued as he stroked Xander to hardness.

I’ll know Master Sadist! Xander thought definitely.

“Now, before we begin with some of the real fun,” Spike said. “Do you accept my Claim?”

Xander stared at Spike. He knew he was too far gone to stop and yet he began to understand what
“Yes, master,” Xander said.

Spike swooped in and grabbed the back of Xander’s head. He covered his lips with his own and hungrily mapped Xander’s mouth. He didn’t give the human an opportunity to kiss back. Greedily Spike claimed Xander’s mouth and with his fangs gently tore Xander’s lips until they bled. Spike sucked noisily on the taste of his pet. When he finally released Xander, his pet gasped for air and in pain.

The zing of Xander’s blood was still on Spike’s lips as he turned his attention away from his pet and to the bench. It was time to begin the dance in earnest.

Neither Spike’s demon nor his soul wanted to really hurt Xander as he studied the instruments at his disposal. The ceremony required Xander be tested not beaten or broken.

I will make this bloody good for him! Spike vowed. He selected a red and black flogger with suede straps.

Spike moved behind Xander and gave the flogger a quick snap in the air. Xander jumped at the sound and gasped at the pain in his arms.

“Xan, you’ve agreed ta accept my Claim. Everything that happens here on out is because ya agreed ta accept my Claim. This is all part of that Claim. Don’t fight it. Just accept it. Ya can’t do anything about it anyway and if ya truly mean ya want to be mine you wouldn’t want to anyway.”

Is this the “relax and enjoy it” speech Master Kinky? Xander thought.

“Remember what I told ya the day ya agreed ta my Claim,” Spike whispered.

Trust you, Xander thought, though that’s a little harder to do at the moment.

“Yes, master,” Xander said.

“Good,” Spike purred as he slowly caressed the long then straps of the flogger down Xander’s back.

“Very good.”

Xander bit his lip. The suede both tickled and soothed. It also promised danger. Spike moved forward and laid a delicate kiss on the back of Xander’s neck.

“Just submit, Xander. Just accept,” Spike purred as he raised his arm back and let the flogger fly. Stinging pain raced through Xander’s back and his cock instantly wilted. He arched away from Spike and dull pain shot down his arms.

“Master!” Xander cried.

Spike again caressed Xander’s back with the soft leather.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said and then struck another stinging blow. Tears formed in Xander’s eyes and once again Spike soothed the sting.

Pain flared across Xander’s ass and before he could fully register the bite of the flogger he felt the cool swipe of Spike’s tongue tracing the red tracks left behind. Xander gasped. He was confused. He couldn’t tell if it hurt or felt good.

Another crack rent the silence of the room and before Xander could register the pain he felt Spike’s
finger tips dancing along his skin. *Master,* Xander thought and his cock began to harden.

Spike scented the return of his pet’s pheromones and smiled. He traced the thin strap of Xander’s thong covering the crack of his ass with his tongue. Xander bit back a mewling sound.

“It’s ok pet, I like the sounds of your pleasure..and your pain. It’s what this dance is all about,” Spike whispered against Xander’s warm skin. “Let me hear them.”

Spike bit down on one of the slight welts left by the flogger and Xander groaned.

“That’s it, pet,” Spike said and then peppered the place where he bit with soft kisses. Xander gasped. Then Xander’s mind went blank for a moment as Spike rained down a series of stinging strikes across his back.

“ARRGGh! MAAASTER!” Xander cried as he the flogger bit at his skin in quick succession. Before Xander registered the blows had stopped he felt the cool press of skin and against his back.

“Ahhhh,” he sighed in relief as Spike’s body absorbed some of the heat from his back.

Spike nuzzled Xander’s neck and played with his nipples. He soaked up the heat and the sounds from his pet.

“You taste and smell so good,” Spike whispered against Xander’s skin.

Xander could feel the precum wetting the pouching covering his dick even as he could still feel the raging agony in his arms and the stinging in his back.

“Master,” Xander pleaded.

“It’s only the beginning, pet,” Spike purred as he smoothed his hands over Xander’s chest and stomach. He marveled at the smooth hairless skin. Lightly he ran his nails over the unblemished canvas.

Xander's breath hitched. He wasn’t sure whether he wanted Spike stop or continue scratching down his body.

“You accept my Claim, pet?” Spike asked as he nibbled on Xander’s ear.

“Yes, master,” Xander answered without hesitation.

Spike smiled then lightly bit Xander’s shoulder. Xander groaned in pleasure. Then he felt lost as Spike stepped away from him. His body was bereft and he was suddenly overcome with the need for Spike.

*Please! Don’t leave me!* Xander thought.

“Master!” Xander cried worriedly.

“Shh, pet,” Spike said as he stepped in front of Xander the flogger replaced with a silver knife. “Still here.”

Xander paled at the knife. He met Spike’s eyes and silently pleaded with the master vampire.

Spike reached out with his other hand. It was closed but he brushed Xander’s cheek with the back of his knuckles. Xander leaned into the touch.
“Time for me ta see all of ya,” Spike said as he traced the knife tip down Xander’s side. Xander held his breath. His heart beat in fear of the knife yet his skin sang with the sensual touch of the silver snaking down his body.

“Don’t like ta see any part of ya hidden from me,” Spike whispered as he slid the blade of the knife under the strap of the thong as Xander’s hip. The strap gave way and the ends fluttered away.

Spike smiled and slid the knife seductively low across Xander’s abdomen until it nestled under the strap on Xander’s other hip. One again, with the slightest of pressure Spike cut the strap. Now only the pouch remained covering Xander’s jutting penis.

Xander gasped as the master vampire knelt in front of him. He laid the knife down on the floor. Then he carefully peeled back the leather to reveal Xander’s hard and aching cock.

Spike sniffed the air. His own cock was hard and uncomfortable trapped in his tight black leather pants. He ignored it as best he could. There was still so much he wanted to do to Xander yet. Spike tugged on the ruined thong. The strap up Xander’s ass pulled away and Xander was hanging naked before his master.

“Yummy,” Spike growled as he threw the thong aside. He leaned forward and ran his tongue over the tip of Xander’s cock. His pet still tasted of cedar and cinnamon.

“MASTER!” Xander cried and arched forward for more despite the pain in his arms.

“Hmmm,” Spike mused. “Can’t give ya yer gift when yer all like this.”

_Sniff_, Xander wondered.

Spike picked up the knife and then traced the silver blade over Xander’s penis.

“Master!” Xander cried in alarm. His cock wilted a bit in fear.

“So predictable,” Spike chuckled then put down his knife. He opened his other hand which held a gold ring with a strange arrow link indentation on one side. The ring was too large for a finger. Xander groaned.

“It’s called a Penis Crown, pet,” Spike said as he slipped the ring on over the crown of Xander’s cock. It settled just behind the glans. It was heavy but didn’t constrict too tight. “My gift ta ya.”

_Couldn’t just go for a regular wedding ring could you, blondie?_ Xander thought as Spike began to stroke his penis rubbing his thumb up and over the golden ring.

“Master,” was all Xander could say. His cock began to respond again to Spike’s ministrations. The ring felt a little tighter, but it wasn’t like a cock ring designed to keep him from coming.

“Beautiful, pet,” Spike said then began to kiss and nuzzle Xander’s penis.

“MASTER!” Xander cried in pleasure at the feel of Spike’s cool lips and tongue bathing his cock. The pain in his arms, shoulders and back was forgotten as Spike teased and tormented him. Xander began to leak again and Spike quickly sucked the fluids all always leaving Xander breathless and aching for more.

“Massster,” Xander whimpered unable to stop himself from gently thrusting his penis towards Spike’s devouring mouth. He yearned for Spike to swallow him down completely.
“I like ta hear ya beg, pet,” Spike teased as he licked and mouthed Xander’s heavy balls.

“Master! Master!” Xander begged shamelessly when Spike sucked one of Xander’s heavy sacs into his mouth and then gently began to roll the treat it held in his mouth. He laved it with his tongued and gently rolled it between his teeth.

Spike reluctantly gave up his tasty morsel. He looked up at the nearly weeping Xander.

“You accept my Claim, pet?”

“YES! Yes! YES MASTER!” Xander cried.

“Don’t cum until I tell ya,” Spike ordered.

Xander moaned, “Yes, Master.”

Then Spike undid the restraints on Xander’s ankles. He removed the bar.

“You may put your feet together,” Spike said. Xander moved his feet slowly so they felt in a more a natural stance. As he did he felt the chains holding him up lower. He cried out in painful relief.

Spike moved quickly and undid the restraints on Xander’s wrists. His arms fell numbly to his sides. The pain and pleasure of release warred inside of Xander.

“Kneel,” Spike ordered. Xander slid gracefully to his knees.

Once again Spike disappeared from Xander’s sight. Xander gulped deep breaths trying to bring control back to his body. He was buffeted by so many different sensations; pain, pleasure and unquenched desire.

Spike returned barefooted and shirtless.

“Know yer arms are useless right now, pet,” Spike said, “but that doesn’t mean ya can’t undress yer Master.”

Xander stared at Spike in confusion.

“Use yer teeth, pet,” Spike explained, “and remember..if ya bite..I bite.”

Xander swallowed then nodded.

“Yes master,” he muttered before sitting up on his knees and leaning forward to try and work open the buttons of Spike’s fly with his mouth.

The next few minutes were heaven and hell for Spike. The sight of Xander kneeling and undressing him only with his mouth was enough to make the vampire want to slake every thirst he had in his pet. Yet, it wasn’t just the sight but the fumbling feel of Xander’s mouth at his crotch as he tried to figure out how to work the buttons open with only lips and teeth.

Fanfuckingtastic and double fuck! Spike thought as he clenched his hands into fists. I’m supposed ta be sensually torturin’ him!

Spike fought back every moan and groan elicited by the scrape of Xander’s teeth against his skin as he tried to work the tight leather pants down Spike’s body. He wanted his pet so badly and there was still much more they had to do yet.
Finally when his scruffs were down around his ankles he held up a hand to Xander.

"'Nough, pet," he ground out as he stepped away from his kit. He was hard and aching. Xander’s golden crown gleamed proudly in the candlelight and tight against his cock. They were both ready for the next game.

"Up on the bed," Spike ordered. “Flat on yer back, arms at yer side and legs spread open wide!”

Xander moved quickly to obey. He winced as he reddened back met the silk sheets. However, soon their cool satiny softness soothed him and he sighed.

“Will ya lie still like a good, pet,” Spike asked suddenly.

“Master?” Xander asked not sure he understood the question.

“Do I need ta restrain ya, or I will ya lie still?” Spike asked. “Restraints, yes or no?

A shudder went through Xander. He didn’t want any more restraints.

“No, master,” Xander said vowing to somehow keep still.”

“Such a sweet, obedient, pet,” Spike purred as he climbed up on the bed. Again he had the knife with him. He could feel Xander’s shudder of fear as he straddled his pet.

“Shh, Xander,” Spike crooned. He laid the knife by Xander’s head. Then he let his eyes travel Xander’s body.

“Ya have any idea how beautiful ya are, pet?” Spike asked.

“No, Master,” Xander answered honestly.

Spike chuckled. His pet wouldn’t. Spike began to trace his hands down Xander’s body as he spoke. “Yer so beautiful every demon in this place wants ta fuck ya or eat ya..some both,” Spike said.

Xander gasped. It was a frightening picture Spike was painting and yet the way Spike said it with his hands caressing Xander it made him feel heady and sensual.

“There’s somethin’ about ya, pet, it calls ta demons,” Spike continued as he leaned over and began to map Xander’s body with both kisses and caresses. “There’s this goodness in ya every demon wants to corrupt..ta devou..and yet we can’t.”

Xander moaned. He fought the need to arch up into Spike.

“No matter what happens ta ya, yer still the ‘White Knight’. Yer still ready ta charge inta battle on the side of the angels and lost souls everywhere,” Spike continued. He bowed his body over Xander and let his penis slide and dance over Xander’s.

“M..mm..master,” Xander stuttered.

Spike slid his cock through Xander’s precum and continued to snake their manhoods around each other in a dance of need and ownership.

“They want ya..I want ya,” Spike crooned against Xander’s pierced nipple before he began to tongue fuck it in a promise of what was to come.
“MASSSTER!” Xander hissed. He fought the urge to move. He wanted to wrap his legs around Spike’s waist. He wanted to fuck himself against the master vampire but all he could do was lie still and let Spike play with his body.

“They want to taste that innocence ya somehow keep in this hell,” Spike said before he began to lightly drag his fangs down Xander’s side and low across his abdomen.

“MAAAAAASTER!” Xander begged!

Spike grinned as he greedily lapped up the little drops of blood left in his wake. Again the bloody taste of his human sang through Spike. He growled low in his throat. He wanted more!

Xander tried to breathe. Fear and want were lodged in his throat. His body was on fire. It was overloading.

Spike settled his groin firmly atop Xander’s. His pet groaned. Spike once again picked up the silver knife and idly traced a pattern under Xander’s left nipple.

“Do you accept my, Claim, pet?” Spike asked.

“Yes, Master,” Xander replied. His teeth chattered slightly. He was afraid of the knife. He was afraid of what was coming next.

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Spike traced the pattern deeper into Xander’s skin. Blood welled. Pain flashed through Xander and then Spike was tracing the pattern with his tongue. Need burst through Xander even as he felt the tell-tale traces of magic dance along his skin.

“So sweet, pet,” Spike whispered before his lips came crashing down on Xander’s. Xander could taste his own blood as Spike once again laid claim to his pet’s mouth. Xander moaned and Spike swallowed the sound up. He kissed Xander until he cleaned away every trace of blood. He left Xander gasping for air.

Spike sat back and began to trace the knife along Xander’s chest and down his stomach. He circled Xander’s naval.

“Master,” Xander pleaded caught up in the strange web of fear and desire.

“Alright, Xander,” Spike said as he scooted back to straddled Xander’s thighs. He traced the knife lower until it hovered at the sweet spot where his cock began to swell up from his body.

“Love this spot, pet,” Spike said as he sensually traced another pattern with the point of the knife.

“Yes, master,” Xander said lost at knowing what else to say and fearing what was to come next.

“Do you accept my Claim, pet?” Spike asked.

Ghods, not again, Xander thought fearful of more cutting. He thought of the first time the Azora raped him. He thought of Spike cutting off those hated tentacles. Despite his fear, he knew this is where he wanted to be.

“Yes, Master,” Xander answered honestly.

The knife cut easily through his skin. Blood welled. Spike feasted. The magic felt stronger. Again Spike kissed Xander forcing him to know the iron taste of his own blood.

Next Spike moved to caress Xander’s balls.

Please! Don’t cut me there! Xander silently begged.

“Had ta have ya shaved fer the ritual,” Spike said as he continued to roll one of Xander’s fleshy plums between his thumb and forefinger. “Miss yer short and curlies though. They’ll itch growin’ back but I think we’ll let them, yeah?”

“Yes, master,” Xander ground out in frustration. Spike chuckled and released his treat.

He slid the knife blade down Xander’s right leg. Then he began to trace a pattern on the inside of his thigh over the femoral artery. Xander’s relief that his genitals wouldn’t be cut morphed into a new fear. If Spike cut him too deeply there, he could die!

“Accept my Claim, pet?” Spike whispered.

“Yes! Yes, master!” Xander cried wanting this next pattern done and over with.

As Spike cut the new pattern, the magic seemed to envelope him. It felt more tangible. When Spike kissed him, Xander tried to keep from choking on the taste of his own blood. The taste was thicker,
richer and it seemed to permeate Xander’s senses.

Spike forged another trail with the knife. It went back up Xander’s leg, across his abdomen and down his left leg. He traced yet a fourth pattern over his left femoral artery.

“Accept my Claim, pet?”

“YES!”

Spike cut and the magic closed around him like a second skin. Xander was on fire! His skin burned and ached for touch, for Spike’s touch! When Spike kissed him, Xander suddenly sucked greedily at Spike’s lips and tongue. He ignored the taste of his own blood. All he could taste was the whiskey smoke flavor of Spike!

“MASTER!” Xander screamed when Spike broke the kiss.

There was a loud “THUD” as silver knife hit the far wall after Spike flung it away from him. The patterns were complete. He wouldn’t have to cut Xander anymore! Already he could see the patterns were fading as the magic sank deeper into Xander. The binding had begun, and when it was complete, the patterns would only show on his soul, not his body.

“Xander,” Spike sighed as he reached for a bottle of oil by the bed.

“Master!” Xander begged and fought the urge to move. He fought the need to press against Spike.

“Gonna stretch ya now, luv, get ya ready for me,” Spike said as he poured a generous amount of oil into his hand.

“Yes, Master!”

“Lift yer legs up and hold ‘em over ya,” Spike ordered.

“Yes!” Xander replied as he quickly obeyed. He knew now what had to come next. There were traces of fear from his past but as Spike gently coated his anus with oil and teased his pucker with caressing strokes the fears faded away.

This was Spike who was gently massaging his thumbs around Xander’s hole. This was Spike who was lovingly bending over and beginning to lap at that little hole sending tremors of desire through Xander which had nothing to do with magic.

“Mmmaster!” Xander cried as Spike lazily began to tongue fuck his tight little opening.

“Yes..yes…yes..Yes,” Xander repeatedly lost in haze of need as Spike worked his tongue inside of Xander.

“YES! MASTER!” Xander yelped as Spike tongue breached Xander’s guardian ring.

Spike growled at the heady taste of his pet. The scent of his blood and lust filled the air. His pet’s virgin tight ring closed tight around Spike’s tongue. Spike’s cock ached to be bury deep in his pet..his human...his Claimant!

With a patience for which Spike was never known he slowly worked a finger inside Xander along next to his tongue. Xander whimpered in need. Spike’s tongue retreated while he sunk his finger deeper inside his love.

“My Xander,” Spike purred. “My sweet..sweet Xander. So precious..so beautiful..my nummy treat.”
“Master,” Xander whimpered and begged.

Spike worked a second finger inside of Xander. He slowly twisted them around stretching his boy out.

“Ya OK, pet?”

“Yes! No! Master!” Xander cried as he tried to convey his desperate need for Spike in what few words he could use.

“In pain?” Spike asked in concern.

“No!” Xander yelled afraid Spike would stop. The vampire smiled and pressed deeper into Xander’s body.

“Sp…MASAAAA..mmm..MASTER!” Xander screamed as Spike danced over Xander’s prostate.

“So yummy, pet,” Spike answered working in a third finger. “Love it when you cry out for me, pet. Love it when you beg me.”

“Master..master…master,” Xander begged.

Spike chuckled. He continued to work his fingers in and out of Xander. He twisted and rotated. The Norjub made Xander a physical virgin again. Despite the ritual, Spike was going to treat him that way. He was going to treat him with all the slow loving and gentleness his pet deserved.

“Master,” Xander begged again.

“Just a little more, luv,” Spike said, “Want this ta be good for ya, yeah?”

“Yes, master,” Xander said marveling at the restraint and tenderness the master vampire was showing him.

Finally the vampire withdrew his fingers. Xander ached for the loss. Tears leaked from the corner of his eyes. He silently pleaded with Spike.

“Shh, luv,” Spike said as slid up next to Xander positioning his own aching and leaking cock at Xander’s ready hole. “Almost there. Ain’t gonna leave ya like this. Promise ta take care of ya.”

“Yessss,” Xander sighed. He was awash in fear and excitement. He could feel the tip of Spike’s cock pressing against his hole. He knew the ritual would soon be complete. He could feel the magic burrowing inside of him.

Yet, more importantly, he could felt something else. He felt something warm and solid inside of him. He felt trust in Spike.

“Xander,” Spike said softly as he looked earnestly into Xander’s eyes, “do you accept my Claim?”

Xander suddenly knew the question wasn’t just about the ritual. Spike was honoring his promise from long ago. He promised he’d never take without permission and even now in the midst of a demonic ritual he was honoring that promise.

The feeling of warmth and trust burst inside of Xander and spread throughout his entire being.

“Yes, master, yes,” Xander answered. Damn the ritual, he wanted Spike. He wanted this.
Slowly, but steadily, Spike pushed into Xander. It stretched and burned. New tears formed in Xander’s eyes but he welcomed the sensation. This was his choice, it wasn’t rape. This wasn’t a tentacle milking him as if he were just a thing. This was Spike taking him. This was Spike taking him slowly with love showing in the golden hues of the vampire’s eyes.

Xander’s ring gave way and Spike was suddenly sliding deep inside of him. Xander gasped. He felt full. Spike was inside of him. This time it wasn’t a show for Angelus, this time it was for them. Xander’s ass throbbed but he didn’t care. He smiled up at the vampire.

Spike nearly came undone at Xander’s smile. He’d expected a lot of things at this moment, tears, angry words, a painful moan but a smile had never been even in his dreams. His demon wanted to howl and his soul weep.

“Yer amazing, luv,” was all Spike could say. Xander blushed.

Then Spike slowly began to move. He set up a gentle but shallow rhythm rocking in and out of Xander. He reveled in the heat of Xander. He loved the way the human’s tight passage clung to him.

Xander was sinking. He was falling into an abyss of need. He was losing all grasp of himself except the need centered where he was joined to Spike. It hurt. It felt so good. He wanted more. He needed more.

“MASTER!” Xander cried begging for something only Spike could give.

Spike began to fuck Xander a little faster, a little deeper. Xander gave out whimpers of delight.

*Please! Please! Spike! Oh please! More! More!* Xander thought. The pain was receding. Yet the need for Spike to go deeper, to fuck him harder was increasing. It was as if the Norjub had left places unhealed inside of Xander, places only Spike could heal.

Need was beginning to consume Spike. The need to fuck and the need to posses warred with Spike’s need to love Xander. They fought and battled until they blurred into one sensation and Spike began to pump in and out of Xander in a tight, fast rhythm.

“YES! YES! YES!” Xander yelled in time to Spike’s pounding.


“Pet, wrap your legs down by my waist!” Spike ordered.

Xander gladly complied. He nearly wept as the new position changed the sensation.

“Get ready, luv,” Spike warned.

*Ready for whaaAAAAA!!!* Xander never finished his thought. Spike had reached down and scooped Xander up so that now he was sitting in Spike lap, impaled by Spike’s penis.

“MAASSSTER!” Xander screamed at the deep and wonderful penetration.

“Permission ta move,” Spike said as he wrapped his arms around Xander’s waist and began to thrust up deep into his channel.

Xander wrapped his arms around Spike’s neck. He buried his face in Spike shoulder and rode the vampire for all he was worth.

“Master..master..master,” Xander panted as Spike slammed into his prostate and his dick was stroked
between their two stomachs.

“Offer yer self to me,” Spike growled.

Xander tilted his head so his neck was bared to Spike.

“Xander, once last time, luv,” Spike managed to force out. He was so close.

“Xander, do you accept my Claim?”

“YEEEEEEEEESSSSS!” Xander screamed.

“Then cum, pet,” Spike ordered as he gave over to all of his needs.

Spike bit down deep into Xander throat tearing it and letting the blood spurt into his mouth. Xander screamed again. Pain and pleasure had no meaning to him. Spike’s cock convulsed deep inside Xander feeling him with cool seed. Xander’s hot spunk coated their stomachs.

“MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAASTER!” Xander cried as his body was rocked with the most powerful orgasm he’d ever known. Blood flowed steadily from his neck and what the greedy vampire didn’t drink the rest coated the two men. There was the smell of blood, sex and the magic which was sinking deeper and deeper into Xander.

Xander sagged into Spike’s arms as his body gave way to release and blood loss.

“Master,” Xander said softly as he slipped away into darkness. His consciousness suspended there wrapped into a cocoon of blackness.

***

*Spike?* Xander thought.

Something moved in the darkness. It was a shadow, a shadow more dark then the blackness around him. Fear surged through Xander.

*Spike!* Xander cried out again.

The shadow moved closer to Xander. Xander tried to move away but couldn’t. The shadow was hunger. It was rage and violence and long strands were unwinding off of it, reaching out for Xander.

*Spike!* Xander shouted out in blind terror.

*Right ‘ere, Pet,* the shadow as a tendril of hunger touched Xander’s chest.

*NO!* Xander thought.

*Yer mine now,* the shadow replied as another tendril traced a trail just above Xander’s groin.

*NO! NO!* Xander screamed as the hunger and rage pierced him. *NO!*

*You reject my Claim?* The shadow asked.

*You’re not Spike!* Xander replied struggling against the tendrils trying to dig deeper inside him.

*Oh, I am,* the shadow laughed. *I really am!*

*No! This isn’t right! I didn’t wan...*
Careful Pet. Sure ya want to reject me? The shadow snarled angrily as two tendrils whipped out and caressed the inside of his thighs.

It’s not supposed to be like this! Xander yelled back just as angrily. I don’t wan…

XANDER! Spike yelled again only this time his voice didn’t come from the shadow.

Xander looked around. There was a small bit of light behind the shadow.

What? Xander thought.

Reach out for me, the voice said. It was Spike’s voice but different. It sounded more like Spike when he was reading Ivanhoe, soft and cultured. Xander, please.

Xander reached out for the light. The light grew stronger forcing the shadow back a bit.

Yer always such a bleedin, ponce! The shadow yelled, Naff off he’s mine!

Not yours alone, the light replied growing strong.

Spike? Xander asked. Which of these things was really the vampire?

Yes? Both the shadow and the light replied. The light was all around Xander now and the tendrils were only touching Xander through the light. They were gray and they didn’t pierce him anymore. They began to retreat leaving only scars from where they had touched him.

I don’t understand, Xander said.

Yer mine, growled the shadow.

And I know you want me to make sure you do not hurt him, the light said.

Well, he’ll last longer that way, the shadow grumbled acknowledging the truth in what the light had said.

Oh yes, that is the only reason…

Oi! OK, I admit I’m love’s bitch! The shadow snapped, but at least I’m not some nancy boy can only go round leavin’ scribblin’s on paper ta express his love!

Ouch! Xander thought.

Never him any mind, Xander, the light said. He is an uncouth boor.

Xander chuckled. He then realized he wasn’t afraid. He didn’t feel bound any longer but cocooned.

I don’t understand, am I Claimed? Xander asked.

Do you still accept it? Both the shadow and the light asked.

Yes, Xander answered before he thought about it. He wasn’t afraid any more. He felt oddly at peace.

Then the Claim holds, whispered the shadow as it began to retreat.

I dare say you are the bravest man I ever met, whispered the light as it retreated with the shadow.

Spike! Xander shouted. Spike!
“SPIKE!” Xander opened his eyes. Spike was staring down at him. His blue eyes were filled with worry.


“Spike?” Xander asked trying to process what had just happened.

“Yes, pet. The ritual is over. You were bloody amazing, pet! I’m proud of ya!”

Xander struggled to sit up. Spike helped him. Xander was sore. He was tired and he was very confused. He studied the vampire.

“Xander please, answer me! Are you OK? Do you need the healers?”

Then, the dime dropped. The refrigerator light went on! The clue bus arrived!

“YOU!” Xander cried angrily as he struggled out of Spike’s hold.

“Xan! What?” Spike said as he let go of the panicked pet.

“YOU!” Xander repeated as he scooted back from Spike.

“Me what Pet?” Spike asked worriedly.

“You have a SOUL!” Xander accused loudly before he delivered his best right hook to Spike’s jaw.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Marcel Marceau was a world famous mime.

Green Jeans is a reference to Mr. Green Jeans, Captain Kangaroo’s sidekick.
“PET!” Spike yelled as he reached for Xander with one hand and cradled his jaw with the other.

“Don’t ‘Pet’ me!” Xander yelled back as he swatted Spike’s hand away. “You, Bastard! All along..from the very beginning you’ve had a sou…”

Before Xander could finish his latest screech he found himself flat on his back, pinned under a vampire, and a hand firmly over his mouth.

“NOT another word, pet!” Spike snarled.

“Asmsolm!” Xander accused from underneath Spike’s hand.

“XANDER!” Spike growled. “I swear if you don’t shut yer trap right now I’m gonna have yer jaws wired shut!”

“Youmwndn’tdarre!” Xander yelled against Spike’s palm.

“Keep testin’ me, pet! Just keep testin’ me!”

Xander fell silent but continued to glare at Spike. Spike tried to ignore the throbbing building in the back of his head. Vampires did not get headaches. Then again, most vampires did not have Xander as a pet. And a Claimant, both his soul and demon whispered in unison.

“I’m going ta remove my hand now, Xan,” Spike said. “Ya think you can keep that gob of yours shut?”

Xander nodded while continuing to send Spike looks deadlier and more piercing than stakes.

_Oh! Spike thought. Guess this means no post Claim grope and a cuddle._

Spike let out an unneeded breath and removed his hand. Xander pursed his lips and continued to stare defiantly at Spike.

“Look, I don’t know what ya think ya know…”

Xander grunted. _Don’t try and deny it Master Pants on Fire!_

“..BUT throwing around accusations like that is dangerous, pet,” Spike continued. _I’ll bet, _Xander thought.

“Do you have any idea what Angelus would do if even the rumor of me having a ..well ya know..got back ta him?” Spike asked sharply. “Do ya?”

Xander went pale. Spike’s words washed through him and over him like ice water.

_SPIKE! _He thought panicking. He didn’t _not _want to imagine. The images would be beyond gruesome. _Beyond Romero gruesome! Shit! I wasn’t even thinking! Angelus!

“Shh, pet,” Spike suddenly sighed. “’S OK. It’s a big bash goin’ on outside these walls. They’re all mashed and battered out there, plus room’s magicked ta keep out eaves droppers looking for a cheap peep, yeah?”
Xander nodded. The worry still hadn’t left his eyes.

“Ya done throwin’ punches?” Spike asked.

Again, Xander nodded.

“Ready ta sit up and have a yak about what happened..without the ‘s’ word?”

Xander nodded.

“Right then,” Spike said as he moved off of Xander. “Up with ya. Permission ta speak.”

“Spike!” Xander cried. “Are you sure about..?”

“Sure as I can be, luv,” Spike said softly.

“Fuck, Spike! I’m sorry!”

“Bout hittin’ poor Spike?”

“Not on your undead life blood-breath!”

“Oi! Pet, ya keep wrackin’ up reasons ta be punished!” Spike said rubbing his chin again for emphasis.

“PUNISHED! You lying BASTARD! You have a…”

“Don’t say it, pet!”

“…a…damnit! You know what you have!”

“A very disobedient, pet and Claimant!” Spike growled.

“You lied to me!” Xander yelled.

“Oi! Did not!”

“You did!” Xander insisted.

“I never claimed ta be anything other than I am,” Spike retorted.

“You never told me…about…the other stuff,” Xander said.

“Not tellin’ ya is not the same as lyin’!”

“Oh!” Xander sneered. “What next you are going to parse what the definition of ‘is’ is?”

“Pet, I have plenty of paddles over there from which to choose to redden that sweet ass of yers!” Spike said as he pointed to the bench of ‘toys.’ “Want me ta make ya choose which one I should use on ya?”

“You wouldn’t…”

“Just because ya think I have…”

“I KNOW!” Xander angrily insisted.
“Just because ya think that I have that special..something..doesn’t mean I’m not still a Master Vampire! I’m not still your Master Vampire and that I won’t punish ya properly as need be! What ever happened ta ya..whatever ya think you learned in the Claiming ritual does not change the fact that I am the Master of Las Vegas! I am still Spike…William the Bloody, grandchild of Angelus and of the line of Aurelius! Nothing between us has changed!”

*Everything has changed,* Xander thought.

 Spike sighed then reached out to brush sweat matted hair from Xander’s forehead. Xander let him.

“Xan, please remember the world we live in,” Spike said softly.

“How can I forget?”

“Then don’t expect things to change. The rules are the same. Our positions are still the same. My *promises* are still the same,” Spike said.

“But how…”

“Because it’s the only way. Ta do what I do…ta keep you and the city the way I do I must be the vampire..the demon Angelous expects me ta be. I have ta be the vampire I proved ta be. Anything less..any deviation..and all of this,” Spike said as he waved his arms around, “is removed from my control. And I won’t let that happen!”

Xander’s eyes widened as understanding began to creep past his anger and feelings of betrayal. He closed his eyes. *It’s still a demon world. It’s still demon rules,* Xander thought.

”Xan?” Spike asked. Xander opened his eyes again and looked at Spike.

“I understand,” he said softly. “I just..I mean I wish..well it might have been easier you know?”

Spike leaned forward and kissed Xander’s forehead then whispered in his ear, “I know.”

Then Spike leaned back. He studied Xander. His pet looked less shaky, angry and less homicidal.

“You gonna tell me what happened? What gave ya the *delusion*?”

“Delusion?”

“Pet, there has ta be some reason for this insanity? Ya humans..so fragile..yer minds snap just as easily as your bones,” Spike said dismissively.

Xander ground his teeth.

“Maybe I’ll tell you all about my *delusion* when you tell me all about how you came to be so *special* master,” Xander said between clenched jaws.

“Pet!”

“Master!”

“At this rate yer never gonna get your other prezzie,” Spike said.


“OI! That’s it!” Spike snarled and launched off the bed.
“Spike!” Xander yelled in a panic.

“Too late, pet.” Spike said as he picked up something from “the bench.”

“Wait!” Xander cried.

“Hands and knees,” Spike ordered.

“You can’t be serious not after…”

“You really want ta make this worse, Pet?” Spike asked. “Can restrain ya.”

Xander rolled over onto his hands and knees. He looked back at the vampire. His deadly glare had returned.

“Told ya, nuthin’s changed,” Spike said as he stepped closer to the bed. He then raised his hand and used it to slap something against the palm of his left. “We’re gonna start out with a twenty count with this for the punch and usin’ bad language.”

Xander groaned. Spike held out the paddle in his hand. It was a short leather paddle with the letter’s ‘B,’ ‘O,’ and ‘Y’ emblazoned across it.

“Should leave quite an impression, don’t ya think pet?” Spike asked with a grin.

Fuck you! You Sade wanna be! Xander thought.

“We’ll finish up with ten swats over my knee,” Spike said as he moved to the side of the bed. “That’s for bein’ mouthy and a general pain in my arse.”

Again..”Hardy har har!”

“Ya will keep count, pet,” Spike said as he raised his hand. “And if ya loose track, we’ll start from the beginning!”

Xander heard the smack a fraction before he felt it! It slammed into his ass and stung him.

“ONE! Master!” he yelped barely before the next blow landed.

“TWO! Master”

Xander’s breath caught on the third strike and he knew it was going to be a long session.

***

“Shh, Xan,” Spike purred as he rubbed a cool soothing gel over Xan’s stinging bottom. “It’s all over now. Ya did good. Proud of ya.”

Xander still trembled under Spike’s hands. Tears were still drying on his cheeks. He’d already kissed the vampire’s hands. Now he just wanted to lie still and forget.

“Ah, pet,” Spike said softly. “I know this world is harsh, but I try Xander. I do.”

“I know,” Xander whispered turning his face to bury it against Spike’s side. He did. He knew Spike pushed the limits as much as Xander did. He really did know how much worse his life could be...had been without Spike.
All of this, the punishments and the rules were part and parcel of the life he’d chosen with Spike. He hadn’t forgotten Spike had once offered him the opportunity to live in the stables. He’d given him a choice about the Claiming.

Still, Xander was Xander. He couldn’t change. He hadn’t survived the Azora to lose himself under Spike. And blondie wouldn’t want me to either, Xander mused.

Spike began to softly caress Xander’s back. He purred softly giving Xander time and space to collect himself.

“May I sit up, master?” Xander finally asked.

“Yes,” Spike replied as he immediately began helping Xander to a seated position on the bed. Xander winced.

“The pain should fade sooner than ya expect, luv,” Spike said.

“Huh?”

“The ritual, pet,” Spike gently reminded Xander.

“Oh!” Xander replied. He wasn’t sure if that reassured him or disturbed him.

“Ya OK?” Spike asked.

“Yeah,” Xander said. “Not feeling like making with the gabby at the moment, but otherwise I’m Xanderiffic.”

Spike smiled and kissed the tip of Xander’s nose. Xander blushed.

“Ya ready for your other prezzie?” Spike asked.

“Does it involve needles, whips, chains or in any other way marking the Xan-man?” Xander asked.

Spike chuckled and shook his head.

“No, pet. Promise nothing shiny or pointy involved,” Spike said.

“Then, yeah. OK. Prezzies would be nice,” Xander said.

Spike stood up and offered his hand to Xander. Xander took it. He winced some more as he got to his feet.

“We’ll need some kit,” Spike said as he walked back over to ‘the bench.’ Xander tensed. Spike bent down and pulled something out from under it. He came back to Xander. It was a pile of fresh clean clothes.

“Thank you, master,” Xander said happy to have clothes to wear whenever they left the ritual room.

“Don’t want them ta get dirty,” Spike said as he took Xander’s hand again and began to lead him across the room. “So thought we might want ta get cleaned up.”

“Cleaned up?” Xander asked just ask Spike opened a door. He flipped a switch and light flooded to illuminate a luxurious bathroom with a large shower in the center.

“SPIKE! Thank you!” Xander yelled excitedly.
“C’mon pet, let’s go scrub up,” Spike said as he led them to the center of the room. His soul and
demon purred. There was a time when Xander would not have been so happy at the prospect of
stepping into a shower with or without him.

***

Xander was dressed in soft leather pants with a deep purple silk shirt hanging open off his shoulders.
Spike had helped him to wash off all the khol and other makeup. Xander was immensely grateful;
he felt much more “human” and less like a strip-o-gram. Not too much less, but still less, he thought.

Spike was back in his traditional red and black. He looked Xander over then smiled.

“Ready, luv?” Spike asked.

“Yeah,” Xander replied.

“Then follow me,” Spike ordered as he began walking toward the far side of the room away from the
door they used to enter. Spike passed his hand over the wall and a door slid open to the side.

Whoa! Xander thought. Who knew Spike was so Trek?

Spike moved forward into a lit corridor. Xander followed. The door to the ritual room closed. They
walked silently together a few feet before they came to another door. Again Spike passed his hand
over a panel in the wall. A lock disengaged and Spike turned the handle. He pulled the door open
and there were a set of stairs going down.

“C’mon, pet,” Spike said as he moved quickly inside the door. Xander followed. Once again the
door swung shut behind them. They went down three flights of stairs before they found another
doors. This time spike pulled a key out of his pocket. He looked at Xander.

“Ready, Xan?” Spike asked.

“Yeah,” Xander said burning up with curiosity. “What..who do you have done here…the Phantom
of the Opera?”

“Not quite,” Spike chuckled as he unlocked the door. He opened it and step back holding it open for
Xander. He motioned for Xander to go first.

“After you, pet,” Spike said.

“Sp..master?” Xander asked hesitantly taking a step forward.

“Trust me, luv,” Spike said with a wink.

Body and soul, Xander thought with a sigh and moved forward into a well lit gray room with
concrete walls.

“XANDER!” Tara’s voice rang out and bounced off the walls.

“HARRIS!” Larry’s voice boomed at the same time as Tara’s!

Xander blinked. Tara and Larry were in the room along with Lorne and Clem.

“Cupcake,” Lorne said cheerily.

“Xander,” Clem said happily. He held a chain that connected to the collar around Larry’s neck and
manacles. “Ante misses you.”

“Wha..Spike? Mast..” Xander began and turned to the vampire entering the room closing and locking the door behind them.

“Surprise, pet,” Spike said.

Larry grunted in disgust.

“Congratulations!” Tara exclaimed with a smile and moved forward as if to hug Xander. She looked at Spike and plead silently for permission. Spike rolled his eyes.

“Oi! Get yer human greetin’s out of the way!” He growled half-heartedly.

Xander and Tara wrapped arms around each other and hugged tightly. Xander ignored the pain in his back. It felt so good to see and hug Tara. She laughed and cried into his shoulder.

“What’s this, Tara?” Xander asked in surprise.

“I always cry at weddings!” Tara sniffed.

Xander laughed and squeezed her harder.

“HARRIS! ARE YOU CRAZY!” Larry yelled! “You married this thing!”

“SHUT IT!” Spike roared as he charged Larry and slammed him against the wall. “Need ya alive! Nuthin’ says I can’t break yer jaw!”

“Spike! Master!” Xander yelled suddenly releasing Tara and running up behind the vampire. “Please! Don’t! He doesn’t understand!”

“You’re damned right, I don’t!” Larry grunted defiantly in the vampire’s face. Spike growled and bared fangs.

“Larry! STOP provoking him!”

“Harris…”

“STOP! Just shut up for a second! I know it’s hard for you but use that football battered and malfunctioning brain of yours and think! You are alive and Spike’s kept you that way! Don’t make him regret it!”

Spike snarled and Larry growled back but he didn’t say anything more.

“Master..Spike, please,” Xander said softly. “My present? Remember?”

“Right!” Spike finally said as he suddenly released Larry. The man staggered and fell. Clem rushed to his side and helped him stand up. Spike stepped back and turned toward Xander.

Xander looked at Spike. Spike shook himself and once again his face was smooth and human looking. He looked at Lorne.

“Ya got it?”

“Right here lemon drop,” Lorne said as he stepped forward and handed Spike a rolled up piece of paper. Spike then moved around Xander and over to Tara.
“M..master Sp..spike?” Tara asked as Spike held the scroll out to here.

“Take this,” he ordered. Tara accepted the scroll and stared at Spike in a silent question.

“It’s a copy of the Manuscript of Steganographia signed by Trithemius,” Spike said answering the unasked question.

Larry gasped. Xander stared at him.

“Wh..I don’t understand,” Tara said.

“I want you and this window licker here to take it ta Willow,” Spike said.

“What?” Xander and Larry asked in unison.

“M..master Spike?” Tara asked.

“Larry over there, when ‘e isn’t tryin’ ta count past twenty without removin’ his shoes and knickers, is a member of the Resistance. They’ve been looking for this.”

“They have?” Xander asked.

“It’s supposed to lead us to the Key,” Larry growled.

“You know about the manuscript?” Xander asked Larry.

“Oi! Of course they know,” Spike said.

“And you’re giving them a copy,” Xander asked Spike.

“Yeah? What’s the catch bleached, blond and batty?” Larry asked.

“How about you fer din din?” Spike growled.

“SPIKE!” Xander yelled.

“Catch is I wanna meet,” Spike said.

“A meet?” Larry snorted.

“Yeah a meet, tit-head,” Spike repeated, “with Willow.”

“Wills,” Xander whispered.

“Master Spike?” Tara asked. “Who is Willow?”

“Leader of the Resistance..and my best friend,” Xander answered with tears in his eyes.

“What makes you think she’ll meet with you fang face?” Larry asked.

“Cuz, I’ll bring Xander to the meeting,” Spike replied.

“Spike,” Xander whispered as he almost sank to his knees. Spike was arranging for him to see Willow!

“M..mas…Master Spike!” Tara cried.
“Lemon drop!” Lorne shouted.

“Is that safe?” they both asked in unison.

Spike reached out and gently rubbed a thumb pad across Xander’s cheek. He smiled.

“Yeah. Tara’ll make good and sure Red understands I’ve Claimed Xan,” Spike said softly.

“And what’s that got to do with anything?” Larry barked.

“It means if she...h...hurts...Sp...Master Spike...ki...kills him...she’ll kill Xander,” Tara replied.

“Harris!” Larry exclaimed.


Spike sighed. “Wish I could say it was all just fer you, pet, but then I would be lyin’. Need ta meet with Willow. Need ta make nice with the Resistance.”

A chill went down Xander’s spine. Spike wouldn’t. He couldn’t. He took a step back from Spike.

“Cupcake, it’s all right,” Lorne said quickly.

“Trust me, pet. Trust me, Xander,” Spike said softly.

“With my life, yes...but Willow’s...Dawn’s...F...the Resistance!” Xander replied shakily.

“Xan, I can’t do this alone,” Spike said.

“Do what?” Larry asked.

Oh Ghods, Wills, Xander thought as he studied Spike. He means it. He really means it! He wants an alliance!

“But how?” Xander asked.

“In a few minutes Lorne’s gonna go out and announce the Claiming ritual was a success. Drinks’ll be on the house. Those not fully good and wellied will soon be. You and I will go out and make a scene. Join in on all the merry-makin’. Lorne’ll slip away, take Tara and Larry outside the city limits and leave ‘em off with a couple of day supplies.”

“Couple of days?” Xander wondered if that would be enough in the desert.

“Pet, I’m sure Larry’s got instructions tattooed to the back of his eyelids on how ta contact the Resistance. Two days is all I dare give ‘em. Should be enough.”

Xander looked for confirmation. Larry stood stock still. He didn’t say a word.

“Larry?” Xander asked not wanting the man to betray anyone’s location but needing to know Larry and Tara would be all right.

“Larry!” Xander insisted. The big man finally sighed and looked at Xander.

“Harris. I think you should worry more about the ‘scene’ Spike here wants you to make then about me and the girl being free of this place,” Larry said.

Xander studied Larry. He looked at Lorne. Lorne smiled. It was all the answer Larry was going to
give, but it was enough. They’d be all right.

“Sure we can trust this oik with Tara?” Spike asked Lorne. “Don’t want his paws all over her!”

Before Lorne could reply Larry spoke, “A: I’m a gentleman and Tara will be safer with me than anywhere in this damned city. B: She’s not my type.”


“Definitely too much woman,” Larry replied coolly, if not a bit challengingly.

“GAY!” Xander gulped as understanding dawned on him and he pulled his shirt closed. “Larry. You’re gay?”

“Harris! This isn’t Sunnydale anymore!” Larry growled.

“But gym! The locker rooms! The wedgies!”

Spike knew he shouldn’t laugh or tease but something about seeing his pet so of kilter amused him.

“Like pulling pigtails?” Spike asked Larry. It was Larry’s turn to look uncomfortable.

“Wait!” Xander squeaked. “All those ‘I’m gonna break your face, Harris’ Hallmark moments were really ‘I wanna suck your face, Harris’ moments?”

Spike laughed. Xander blushed and Larry looked like he wanted to go through the floor.

“Oh boy, dimples,” Lorne said to Larry. “We really need to get you out of here before Spike stops being amused and starts being jealous!”

“ME!” Xander squeaked. Larry crushing on him did not compute.

“Harris!” Larry snapped.

Tara giggled and Spike pulled Xander to him. He wrapped his arms around Xander’s waist and nuzzled his neck.

“OK, now I’m gonna be sick,” Larry said.

“I’d better go make that announcement,” Lorne excused himself and headed for the door. “Lemon drop, let Xander go so he can say goodbye.”

Spike made an exaggerated sigh. He winked at Larry and let Xander go. Xander made a beeline for Tara.

“Take care, Tara,” Xander said. “Tell Willow…tell Dawn…tell…Oh…just…”

Tara squeezed Xander back as he choked up on the words he wanted to so desperately say they couldn’t squeeze past the emotions.

“I will, Xander. I will,” Tara promised. Xander stepped back. He turned to Larry. The two men looked at each other awkwardly. Finally Larry held out his hand. Xander reached out and shook it.

“Get her to Willow, Larry,” Xander said.

“I will,” Larry promised. “You…you be careful.’K? Willow’s not gonna like me leaving here
without you.”

“I’m gonna be fine. Just fine. Make her understand will you?”

“How can I when I don’t understand it myself?” Larry asked.

“Try?” Xander pleaded.

Larry took a deep breath then squeezed Xander’s hand. He nodded and let it go. The two men stepped back from each other.

“Clem, stay here with these two ‘til Lorne gets back, yeah?” Spike barked. “And remember…”

“I don’t know anything, Master Spike,” Clem said. “I never do...and I don’t ever want to.”

Spike smiled. Clem was a keeper.

Lorne unlocked the door and headed out. Spike motioned Xander to follow leaving Spike the last one to leave the room. He locked the door behind him. As Lorne began to head up the stairs, Spike grabbed Xander around the waist. He gently spun him around until they were face to face.

“Like yer prezzie?” Spike asked before kissing Xander’s nose.

“Yes,” Xander whispered. *Spike was letting Tara and Larry go! Spike was wanting to meet with Willow! Spike wanted an alliance with the Resistance!*

Spike smiled then ghosted a kiss across Xander’s lips.

“Just remember, pet. No matter what, I love you,” he whispered before leading them upstairs and back to the casino.

TBC

**Author's Note:**

Xander's "Romero gruesome" refers to [George Romero](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Romero); creator of the "Dead Series" beginning with *Night of the Living Dead*.

The inspiration for the paddle Spike used can be found [here](https://example.com).
Chapter 56

“Ssspike!” Xander cried with a bit of a drunken slur, “Will you look at mmmhy assh!”

Spike smiled as he watched his naked pet twist around in front of the bathroom mirror. Xander’s back was to the mirror and his head was craned over his left shoulder to look at himself.

“I’m lookin’, luv,” Spike said.

“Boy! It ssayss ‘boy’ all over my assh!” Xander cried while using a flailing arm to point out the offending word emblazoned in patches of white untouched skin on a backdrop of red and purple skin. “You don’t ssee annythang wrong with thhasht?”

“Well now that ya point it out, pet,” Spike said as he sauntered into the room to stand behind his inebriated Claimant, “yer right. I do.”

“You do?” Xander blinked slowly in an effort to slow the world’s rapid rotation.

“Think the letter’s ‘P,’ ‘E,’ and ‘T’ need ta be there instead.” Spike whispered huskily.

“SPIKE!” Xander cried indignantly as he spun around to face his master vampire. Strong arms quickly wrapped around him and pulled him close to keep him from crumbling to the floor. “Thasht’s not wh..what. I meant!”

“Think I’ll order yer new paddle first thing tomorrow,” Spike whispered into Xander’s ear. “Be your special paddle for when yer very naughty.”

A shiver raced down Xander’s spine and it had nothing to do with fear.

“Spike,” Xander whispered into the vampire’s skin where his face rested against the Spike’s shoulder.

“Master,” Spike corrected as he ran his hands over Xander’s ass.

“MASTER!” Xander cried as he wrapped his arms around Spike’s neck and tried to pull him closer.

“Yer were amazin’ tonight, luv,” Spike said as he lightly raked his nails in circles over Xander’s bruised flesh. Xander hissed and felt his cock stir. He moved his head breathed heavily into Spike’s neck.

“Ya let me tease and taste ya in front of the crowds,” Spike purred as his nails slid up Xander’s back.

“Yes!” Xander hissed. Was there Mashter Toucher..Torturer, he thought as images from earlier in the night flooded his brain.

After they had left Tara and Larry downstairs, Spike had brought them back out to the casino via the “Claiming room.” He’d marched Xander to the dais, stripped off his shirt and presented him to the roaring crowd as his “Claimant Xander!” The bruises and welts were plain to see, not to mention the wound on Xander’s neck.

The rest of the evening was a bit of blur for Xander. He lost it somehow in a haze of Spike’s kisses, caresses, and endless drinks.

“Liked the way you tasted tonight,” Spike murmured against Xander’s neck as if reading the
human’s mind. “Liked the way you offered me your neck and opened your mouth to share what ever
toast to your Claiming was offered.”

Xander moaned in memory. Spike didn’t just offer Xander’s sips of drinks from his glass he shared
those drinks in kisses burning with heady alcohol and desire.

“Ya liked that didn’t ya, luv?” Spike asked as he danced his delicate lips up Xander’s neck, under his
chin and finally across his bottom lip.

“Mmm yeah,” Xander said before laying claim to Spike’s mouth with aching lips. Xander sent his
tongue sliding between Spike’s teeth. He twined it around the vampire’s restless tongue while
searching out the flavors of the whiskeys, beers, and wines the he’d consumed.

Spike dropped his arms under Xander’s ass. Xander obeyed the unspoken command and lifted his
legs to wrap around his master’s waist. Spike growled in approval. Carrying the human still clinging
to his neck and devouring his mouth Spike marched into the bedroom. He laid Xander on the bed
and broke the kiss.

“Knees bent, arms down and don’t move!” Spike commanded.

Xander whimpered and nodded. Stretched on his back and in position he watched his master
vampire strip. Xander licked his lips while his hard cock twitched.

“Thought I told ya not ta move, pet?” Spike growled revealing his own ready cock leaking with
need. Xander could smell the musky scent of his vampire and moaned again.

“Please,” he whispered. His head was whirling and he no longer knew if it was from drink or lust.

“Yer gonna beg, pet. Yer gonna beg,” Spike promised. “But first there’s gonna be a bit of
punishment for moving.”

Xander groaned while trying to control his wayward cock’s desire to dance at the vampire’s promise.
Spike chuckled and crawled up on the bed. He knelt between Xander’s legs and sniffed the air.

*MINE!* His demon silently roared at the heavy scent of Xander’s personal musk. He reached out a
finger and traced the skin just under Xander’s metal crown. Xander whined.

“Gonna have ta do something with this hardon before we can remove yer bit of pretty, pet,” Spike
observed as he continued to trace the skin above and below Xander’s ring.

“PLEASE!” Xander begged again.

Gently Spike spread Xander’s legs wider apart. Then he leaned down and began to roll Xander’s
balls, one by one, with just his tongue.

“Spike! Master! Please! Please! Uh...oh! OHOOOOHOOH!” Xander screamed while trying to keep
from arching his pelvis. He fought the need to demand Spike swallow his cock instead of playing
with his balls.

“My pretty, pretty pet,” Spike crooned between licks. “My sweet sweet pet.”

“MASTER! SPIKE!” Xander panted and begged.

“Someday, pet,” Spike accentuated each word with a teasing kiss up and down Xander’s cock, “I’m
gonna tie ya spread eagle across the bed. Tie ya tight so ya can’t move at all. Then I’m gonna spend
hours tastin’ and teasin’ ya until all ya know is my touch and the sweet release I can give ya.”

“PLEASE!” Xander screamed again not sure whether the “please” was for his release now or for Spike to make good on his threat.

Spike chuckled and moved away.

“NO!” Xander yelled in panic.

“Shhh, Xander,” Spike said. “Just grabbin’ the lube.”

Spike quickly rifled through the drawer in the bed stand. He found the tube of slick he was looking for and brought it back to the bed with him. Quickly he greased his fingers.

“Now the punishment, pet,” Spike said.

“Huh?”

“Yer gonna have ta come from ass play alone, pet.”

“Sp..Master?” Xander asked in confusion.

Spike began to play with Xander’s pucker and his pet’s confusion faded to wild sensation. He whined and moaned. Carefully Spike began to work one finger inside Xander’s ring.

“UH! Spike!” Xander cried at the sensation. It wasn’t enough.

Slowly Spike worked his finger in deeper until he was all the way inside his boy. Then he began to fuck him in a gentle rhythm; in and out.

“PLEASE!” Xander screamed as Spike made sure each stroke in brushed that place inside Xander.

Xander’s body was shaking from fighting the urge to move and the need building inside of him. He was panting, pleading and nearly crying. He felt as if his whole body was on the pinnacle of the tallest hill on the best roller coaster he’d ever been on but the cars were stuck. Only Spike could give the signal to let him go flying down that hill and the bastard wouldn’t.

“SPIKE!” Xander screeched when the vampire added a second finger. “Oh..OH..I need…OH please!”

Xander’s body was covered in a fine sheen of sweat. He almost shimmered in the light. Spike couldn’t resist and as he continued to stroke his Xander deeper and harder he leaned down to taste his pet’s skin.

Fire raced across Xander’s skin. The cool slick of Spike’s tongue was sliding at the spot where his leg met his groin. The vampire was soaking up all the flavors while mercilessly wringing Xander out.

“I..uh..OGGHUGG…,” Xander tried to form the words. He tried to remember he wasn’t so supposed to move. His dick hurt. His dick was on fire. He was at the top of this hill. He wanted to fly. He felt so damned good!

“SPIKE!” Xander screamed again when the vampire added another finger which Xander’s ass greedily swallowed and welcomed deep inside him.

“Ya can come any time, pet,” Spike mumbled against Xander’s skin, “just can’t touch yerself when ya do.”
“I ca..I can’t,” Xander panted.

Spike lifted his head and looked at Xander.

“Ya can, pet. And when ya do? I’m gonna slide into, fill ya up and spill,” the vampire said.

“Uh..Uh…UH.GH..” Xander panted as tremors wracked through him.

“You want that, Xander?” Spike asked. “You want…”

“YES! YES! OH…Spike…FUCK!”

“Then all ya gotta do, luv, is cum,” Spike said as he twirled his fingers and pressed just right on that spot.

Xander’s world slipped a gear. His vision blurred and he plunged downward.

“FUUUUGGH! SPIIIIIIIIIKE!” Xander screamed as his body took over. His cock began to shoot and dribble. Spike pressed once, twice and a third time more before quickly pulling his fingers out of Xander’s tight hole.

“NOOOOOOO!” Xander screamed at the loss of Spike even as he was still lost in his own ride down the hill and around the curves of his private roller coaster.

With the speed and dexterity only a master vampire could achieve Spike quickly moved into place and buried his cock deep into Xander. The sensation of being filled almost threw Xander off the tracks and into an abyss of delicious ecstasy.

“Spike, Spike…Spike!” Xander panted as the vampire pumped in and out of him. Just as Xander’s own body was settling he felt Spike tense. He looked into the vampire’s blue eyes.


“Master,” Xander sighed as his body went limp. Spike smiled and gently pulled out of his pet.

“No,” Xander protested.

“Shhh, luv,” Spike said as he lay down next to his human and gathered him into his arms.

Xander reached for Spike’s hand. With the last of his energy he placed a tiny kiss on the back of the vampire’s knuckles.

“Thank you,” he whispered as his eyelids drooped and closed over his eyes. His breathing became deep and regular. Exhaustion and alcohol had surrendered him to sleep.

Spike smiled and brushed sweaty hair away from Xander’s forehead. Then carefully, so as not to wake his Xander, he removed the penis crown from Xander’s limp and slick cock. He reached behind and put the ring on the bed stand. Then he grabbed the covers, pulled them up and cuddled close. Xander’s heart was beating slow and steady.

The vampire fell asleep wrapped in the feel, smell and sounds of his love.

***

Xander still wasn’t used to walking around the casino without his lead swaying and bouncing off his chest. That too had been part of the ceremony the night before. At some point, Spike had removed
his lead and tossed into the celebrating crowd.

Apparently, while Claimants still wore a collar, they did not wear leads. *Guess that make sense,* Xander thought. *Can’t leave him without dying now anyway.*

The word “dying” reverberated around in Xander’s head and he winced. Despite the vile drink the Pocklas had made for him, which Spike had ordered he drink, Xander still had a residual of his hangover. The lights were still too bright while the noises were still too loud.

*The smells were always this bad,* Xander thought as he looked around. The casino had been cleaned but already there was a fresh crowd of demons feasting, drinking, gambling and availing themselves of what pleasures *The Slayer’s End* offered. Xander sighed.

“Won’t be here too long, pet,” Spike whispered as he ran his hand down Xander’s leather covered ass. The human was grateful for the belt his vampire still wanted him to wear. It kept him from embarrassing himself.

“Lorne!” Spike hollered out. Xander winced again.

“My Lord,” Lorne replied as he quickly trotted up the master vampire. “You and your Claimant look well.”

“Oi! Didn’t ask ya here ta chat, want ta know if there’s any pressin’ business the next few hours?” Spike said sharply.

Lorne bowed. It was important Spike not be seen as behaving any different after the Claiming then he was before.

“Nothing, I can’t handle, my lord,” Lorne said.

“Right,” Spike barked. “Then I’m taking my pet around the city. It’s important everyone get used to seein’ him as my Claimant.”

“Off course, my lord. I’ll order the car?”

Spike nodded. Xander looked at Spike. *Where are we going?* He wondered. Spike winked.

Lorne bowed his head then quickly left. Spike sauntered through the casino with Xander in tow. He stopped now and then to make small talk with the idle demon or to down a drink. Xander’s stomach roiled at the smell of booze. *Maybe I’m not the Harris I thought.*

Eventually they made it to the garage where Lorne and the limo were waiting. Spike crawled in first, followed by Xander who curled up at his feet.

“I’ll be back in a few hours,” Spike said to Lorne.

“I’ll be here,” Lorne said the closed the door.

Xander snapped his fingers as the car pulled away.

“Permission ta speak, pet,” Spike said cheerily as he dug out a bottle of water from the limos fridge and handed it to Xander.

“Thanks,” Xander said then looked quizzically at the bottle.

“Pocklas said ya needed to keep hydrated. Ya gave me a lot of blood and ya drank a lot last night.
“So…drink up.”

“OK,” Xander said before taking a long swig of water. He hated to admit it did feel good. Then he looked at Spike. “So where are we really going?”

“Oi! I’m showin’ ya off around the city,” Spike replied.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it fer now,” Spike purred with a grin.

Xander rolled his eyes and concentrated on drinking the water.

***

The tour of the city had been a whirlwind. Spike hadn’t given Xander anything but water to drink and he hadn’t stripped him of his shirt.

He had kept his touches light and Xander hadn’t been sure whether to feel grateful or disappointed. His ass was still a little sore from the night before, and yet he now had a new hunger for Spike. He knew what it felt like to have the vampire buried deep inside him and he couldn’t deny that he had liked it.

There was still a part of him that felt like he shouldn’t enjoy being with Spike that way. The memories of the Azora were just around the dark corners of his mind. They still haunted his dreams. Yet each time Spike had “taken” him, he’d always asked Xander. He’d always sought Xander’s pleasure not as a means to an end but as the end itself.

Spike cared about Xander. He loved to tease and torment him until Xander was wrung out and breathless. Xander felt treasured, not owned.

He sighed and Spike ran his hands through his pet’s hair.

“Almost back to the End, luv,” Spike said.

They were done with the hours of parading around each casino in Vegas. Xander had seen so many different types of demons they all blurred into a bad Rorschach inkblot when he closed his eyes.

“Why the parade?” Xander asked.

“Pet,” Spike warned.

Xander snapped his fingers.

“Oi! Want ta make sure there isn’t a demon in the city who has heard that you’ve been Claimed,” Spike answered.

Xander snapped his fingers again.

“Permission ta speak.”

“Wasn’t last night enough?”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Not playin’ the odds on this one.”

_For Angelus’s sake or Willow’s_, Xander wondered. He knew the show was much more than just
about the Vegas demons.

“So now where?” Xander asked. “Back to the office?”

“Eventually,” Spike replied.

Xander rolled his eyes and Spike’s enigmatic response. He wondered if he’d ever get used to Spike’s non-answers, lies by omission and secrets. The car swung into the garage at the End and stopped. The driver got out and opened the door.

Spike got out and then waited for Xander. Instead of leading back upstairs to the casino floor, as Xander expected, Spike began to head a different direction through the building.

*Lead on, Master Agent 86!* Xander thought as he followed Spike.

The two walked in silence as the vampire lead Xander on and through new parts of the casino building he hadn’t seen. Xander couldn’t help but take in the sights. He wondered if he always be that way after having spent months locked away in a tiny white room with nothing to do.

Eventually Xander noticed a theme building. It was vaguely African and there was a new smell in the air. It was animal. Xander’s senses strained and before he could quite recognize what kind of animal he heard a growl.

Xander stopped and stared. *LIONS!* His mind screamed as he faced two males and a female lion in a glass lined habitat.

The biggest male lion growled again and his eyes flashed green. Old, old memories ripped through Xander.

“Primals!” He whispered.

“Pet?” Spike asked spinning around to face Xander.

“They’re Primals, Spike!” Xander replied pointing an accusing finger at the lions. The smaller male lion roared. Memory almost laid claim to Xander and made him want to answer the challenge with a high laughing cry of his own. Instead he turned to look at Spike. “Do you have any idea how dangerous these things are?”

“Yeah, but right now I wanna know how you know!” Spike asked searchin’ Xander’s haunted face for answers.

Xander shook his head. He didn’t know whether he wanted to laugh or lie. The male lion roared again.

“Oi! Can it!” Spike roared back and the lions fell quiet. They did begin to pace.

Xander sat on a bench.

“Pet? Asked ya a question,” Spike said as he sat down beside Xander.

“Ancient history,” Xander said without looking at Spike. “Was from the Before..even before the Before. You know, before you came roaring into town.”

“I’m listening.”

“Was a field trip. Some bullies were pickin’ horsin’ around, picking on one of the other kids…”
“And you pulled a yer White Knight routine,” Spike interjected. Xander nodded.

“Only didn’t know I was charging into a ritual as well. Ended up being possessed by a Hyena spirit..demon.”

Spike fought the growl at the back of his throat. He didn’t like the fact another demon of any kind had dared to lay claim to Xander.

“Me and the bullies. All of us..we were a pack. I..we..people got hurt,” Xander struggled to explain.

“It wasn’t yer fault,” Spike said softly.

Xander let loose a bitter laugh. “You know the only reason why I didn’t take part in the killing and eating of our principal? Was cuz I was just a little too busy trying to rape Buffy!”

Spike hissed. Not Xander! Not his pet! It would eat him up to do that! He wrapped his arms around, him.

“NO!” Xander struggled.

“It wasn’t yer fault,” Spike said and held tight.

“I tried to hurt Willow,” Xander said. “I was the leader. The pack came for me! I would have hurt her and I couldn’t stop!”

“Shhh,” Spike crooned.

“When it was done..the ritual to cast them out, I lied,” Xander said.

“Lied, pet?”


Spike grabbed Xander’s chin and forced the human to look at him.

“It wasn’t yer fault, Xander,” Spike said.

Xander looked at Spike. He tried, he really tried to soak in Spike’s words. He’d always felt guilty about what happened. He’d felt guilty about the things he done. And maybe, something deep down inside of him whispered, maybe that’s why…


“STOP!” Spike growled. “Don’t even go there, pet. You did not deserve what happened to ya..the Azora because of what ya did while you were possessed. Do you hear me, Xander? What happened ta you was not some great Nancy Boy in the Sky’s punishment!”

“But..but..why?” Xander whispered. Spike hugged him tight.

“Cuz Angelus’s is the world’s biggest arshole and his turned this world to a turd pile,” Spike whispered in Xander’s ear. “Now we all live, eat, and breathe in the stink of his trouser coughs. What happened ta you was just another layer to the shit cake his eatin’ up with a spoon.”

Unbidden a small giggle took root. Xander couldn’t help but crack the slightest smile.

“Wot?” Spike asked.
“Could you possibly add any other feces related phrases?”

Spike laughed, “Oi! That turn ya on, luv? Ya a bit of a scat queen?”

“No! NO and let me think about it..NO!” Xander replied.

Spike laughed again then dropped a kiss on Xander’s nose.

“Ya gonna drop all this crap then about deservin’ yer time with the Azora?”

“YES!” Xander cried wincing at Spike choice of words again.

“Right then, don’t let me hear another bag of shit like than again or I’ll keep up with a string of whoopsie until ya papyer pants!”

“SPIKE!” Xander shouted.

Spike laughed again than asked, “Now ya want to know why I have lion primals ‘ere?”

“Yes,” Xander sighed.

“Well first bend yer head forward so yer offerin’ me the back of yer neck,” Spike ordered.

“Spi..Master?” Xander asked as he leaned forward and did as Spike said.

“’S OK, luv. Just want ta show the lions what’s wot,” Spike said before he leaned over Xander and then bit the back of Xander’s neck.

“MASTER!” Xander cried out as Spike’s teeth sank firmly into his neck.

Spike growled. He didn’t draw blood as much as he just held Xander into place with his teeth. He snarled and growled around Xander’s torn and angry skin. It hurt, but not too badly. Xander sighed and tried to relax. Suddenly Spike released.

“That was perfect, pet,” Spike said as he licked at the blood around his lips.

“What was?” Xander asked in exasperation.

“Look,” Spike said as he pointed to the lions. They were staring at Xander. Their eyes flashed green and then all the tension and aggression they had been exhibiting since Xander walked into the hall faded away. They lay down, stretched out and yawned.

“Spike?” Xander whispered.

“Just like all the other demons in this city, had ta let them know ya were mine. Had ta make ‘em see yer my mate, yeah?”

Xander nodded back and looked at Spike. Tender emotion was shining in his eyes.

“They won’t ‘arm ya now, Xander. They’ll respect ya. You’ll be safe with them.”

“Th..thank you,” Xander whispered. “But why…how? I mean…”

“Well,” Spike said as he pulled Xander close. “I told ya, Angelus found out I betrayed ‘im, yeah?”

Xander nodded.
“After Dru, died, he exiled me. Forced me to wander. Many a demon tried ta kill me to win his favor, and he didn’t exactly discourage this thinkin’.”

Xander hissed.

“Ya know me, though. Too stubborn ta given in..lay down and die. Ended up in Africa. It was there I heard of a demon that lived in a cave, wot could give ya what ya truly desired..if ya could pass it’s bloody tests. And I do mean that literally, luv.”

Xander stared at Spike. His eyes began to widen. *He’s not telling me what I think he’s telling me, is he?* Xander thought.

Spike returned Xander’s gaze and continued speaking. “Well, pet, by that time I knew what I wanted. Wot I *really* wanted. So I went and saw the demon. I played his games..went through his trials ‘til I lost count of the days and the dead. My body was more bleedin’ wound and bruise then flesh and still I was fought. Still I took on every test. I fought ‘til I was left fightin’ on my knees but I won, pet. I won. In the end the bastard had ta give me what I wanted..and he did.”

*Your soul!* Xander thought as Spike laid a quieting kiss on his lips to make sure the words didn’t slip out in even the tiniest whisper. Finally, Spike ended the kiss.

“The demon mocked me for what I won, but he didn’t mock long. Wasn’t about ta let ‘im spread the word about what he’d learned of Master Spike. I made sure ta kill one more thing in that cave. Then I brought the mountain down on it and sealed the cave tight. When I turned around there was this Massai medicine man starin’ at me.”

Spike paused for a moment. He swallowed remembering how he’d been so confused, so torn between demon and soul. Memories of both had made him weep with pain and howl with joy. He hadn’t known who or really wot he was; Spike or William. He’d been vulnerable. He’d been frightened. Killing the demon had been an instinctual act of self-preservation, and not the clever plan he portrayed to Xander.

The medicine man, Thabiti, had been unafraid and compassionate. He’d led Spike away from the cave and brought him back to the village. There he’d used his magic to protect Spike. There he’d used his wisdom to heal him.

“Spike?” Xander asked gently as the vampire had lapsed into unaccustomed silence.

“Thabiti, the medicine man,” Spike continued. “Well, ya can imagine how grateful ‘e was ta be rid of such a powerful demon.”

*You have powerful enemies,* Gatimu, the Massi man had said. It had been a long time since Spike had remembered the name he’d been given, Gatimu.

*You will need powerful allies,* Thabiti had continued. *I will send Ntchwaidumela and his small pride with you. Just his brother and his mate, Matsumi. They will serve you. Through them this land, the Mother and her people, will help restore the balance.*

Xander squeezed Spike’s hand.

“Oi! He sent these three back with me,” Spike said.

“How..long..I mean…”

“Doesn’t matter,” Spike said suddenly getting to his feet. He reached out a hand to Xander and
pulled him up to him. “Just wanted ya ta meet ’em properly. Give ya some background. Understand?”

Xander reached up a hand a laid it against the vampire’s cool cheek. No, he really didn’t understand, Spike and he didn’t think he ever would.

“Yeah, I get it,” Xander said then leaned forward to kiss his master. Warm lips met cool ones. Lions and vampire purred.

***

Spike was almost still purring when he and Xander approached his office. Lorne was waiting outside. He looked nervous.

“Lorne?” Spike asked. Xander paused behind him.

“There’s someone in your office to see you,” Lorne said softly.

“Who?” Spike barked. His eyes narrowed to a golden gleam.

“Wouldn’t give me a name, only said he was a messenger.”

“From who?”

Lorne shook his head. “Again, wouldn’t say. Thought it would be best not to let him mingle. Put him in your office.”

“Xander,” Spike barked as he moved to the door. “You stay here.”

Before Xander could argue, Lorne interrupted, “He said he wouldn’t give the message without Claimant Xander.”

“WOT!” Spike nearly roared. “I’ll rip the message out of him!”

“Might not be easy lem..my lord,” Lorne said.

“Why not?”

“He’s a wolf..well werewolf anyway,” Lorne said.

Werewolf? Xander’s heart became to beat rapidly.

“Pet,” Spike turned his attention back to Xander at the sound of he rapid heartbeat. “Won’t let him hurt you.”

Xander snapped his fingers.

“Permission ta speak,” Spike said.

“Master..please,” Xander managed to say. “Your office. Now!”

“Xan…”

“Please!” Xander said nearly trembling.

Spike bit back another growl, spun around and threw open the door. He charged inside.
A short twenty-something man with unruly reddish brown hair and just a hint of reddish fuzz fanning across his upper lip sat perched with one hip on Spike’s desk. He looked up at Spike with unconcerned brown eyes.

Xander rushed in right behind Spike. He stared at the figure and just for a moment the world spun away. He was back at Sunnydale. He was back with Buffy, Cordelia, Willow, Giles and…

“Oz,” Xander whispered.

“Hey,” the man said with a crooked smile.

TBC

Author’s notes:

Thabiti – pronounced (ta-BEE-tee) means “A genuine man”

Gatimu – pronounced (GAH-tee-mo) means “Spear”
"Oz," Xander whispered again.

"Heard ya got your voice back," Oz said. "Be a total trip if 'Oz' is all you could say."

Xander laughed. Spike growled.

"Knees, pet!" Spike ordered. "In position, hands behind yer back."

Xander slid to his knees while Spike shut the office door. He struggled to keep his eyes on the master vampire instead of drinking in the happy sight of an old friend.

"Wolf," Spike spat.

Oz looked at the calendar on the wall then replied, "Well really not for a few more days yet."

Xander bit back a smile.

"Ya think yer funny?"

"No..not really," Oz said with a lazy drawl. "My humor's kinda of a zen thing."

Xander hid his laughter behind a cough. Oh, how he missed Oz!

"Pet!" Spike snapped.

"He fetch slippers too?" Oz asked.

"If I bloody well order him too!" Spike snarled. He wasn't sure why he was so defensive. Maybe he wasn't quite as ready to reunite with Xander's past as he thought. Can't lose 'im! Bloody well won't!

"Neat," Oz replied. " Tried to get my cousin Jordy to do that. No dice."

"Look mate, do you have something useful ta say?"

"You gonna let Xander up off his knees and give me a chance to find out he's all right?"

"You can smell 'im," Spike growled.

"Yeah...I can," Oz suddenly growled back. "And if he were part of my pack that might be enough but as is..."

Whoa! Xander thought. That's not the Oz I remember.

"Up, Xander," Spike said his eyes glinting gold. Puppy's gotta pack, he silently noted. "Permission ta speak."

"Woof!" Xander said with a wink at Oz.

Oz dropped the growling and began snickering.

"Pet..." Spike warned.

"Oz! How...where...Willow...Dawn...Fai...I mean," Xander started babbling as he approached the
young man. Oz smiled and hopped off the desk to meet Xander.

"Slow down," Oz said holding up a hand. "Been a long time since I had to decipher Xander-speak."

"It's like a bike, man," Xander grinned.

"Dude, you ever see me on a bike?" Oz asked.

Both men started to laugh. Spike rolled his eyes and marched behind his desk. He plopped into his seat. *I need a drink!* He thought.

Xander looked at Spike and controlled his giggles. His master vampire looked grumpy and almost "hurt." Xander sighed, moved around Oz and stood at his place by Spike's desk. Blue eyes met brown.

*Doesn't mean anything,* Xander thought. *Just doing my part to keep the peace.*

"So..uhm," Oz began. "Willow says 'Hi'!"

"Wills!" Xander cried shifting his gaze back to his old friend. "She's OK?"

Oz took a deep breath then let it out slowly.

"Oz?"

"She's had it rough, Xander. When you didn't come back from the rescue mission..."

"I had to buy them time, Oz," Xander interrupted feeling a desperate need to explain. "The team and the people wouldn't have made it out otherwise. There were kids in that truck! I couldn't let them end up on the slaver's block."

"But you could let yourself?" Oz asked. Xander slowly nodded his head as he continued. "In a choice between them or me..."

*That's my Knight..my Scoobie..my bleedin' do goodin' Xander!* Spike thought as his human trailed away his explanation into silence. This was the first time hearing how Xander got caught in the first place too.

"Yeah, guess that is what you would do," Oz said then continued. "Willow..when she found out you'd been caught well she went a little nuts.. not just Almond Joy kinda nuts"

"Wills," Xander whispered.

"She tried scrying to find you. She used ever locator spell in Giles' books, but she couldn't get a bead on you."

"Slaver's didn't make the same mistake twice," Xander said as he hung his head. "They called in heavy guns to ward the markets after our raid. Then when the Az..when I was sold..my new ow..the demon who had me well he 'put' me in a well warded and guarded place."

"Willow...she started to go through every book she could find," Oz said softly.

Xander looked up and faced Oz. *What was he trying to say?*

"Some of those books..were brought back from raids. They were a bit dar..."
"NO!" Xander shouted. "Not Willow! She wouldn't!"

"She would have done anything for you, Xan," Oz said.

Pain lanced through Xander. *Wills! You didn't! You didn't start using dark magic!*

"For awhile it was dicey. Faith was about ready to go all Slayerfest," Oz continued.

Xander stared at Oz in shock. Faith? Fighting Willow? Xander couldn't accept it.

"By then Willow was pretty scary. She was ready to justify anything for one spell that might bring her a step closer to you. Rumors were Faith was slayin' captured vampires..just to put them out of their misery."

"No!" Xander shook his head. "This doesn't make any sense! Spi...Master?"

Spike looked at Xander and shrugged. He'd heard rumors awhile back. He'd known Red had gotten real powerful and borderline.

"He doesn't smell like 'is lyin', pet," was all Spike could say.

"It was Dawn who held it together," Oz said.

"Dawnie?"

"She pulled her best Xander impersonation, gave them the whole speech about what you would have wanted and you *would* want when you got back. Told Willow she was becoming someone you wouldn't know..wouldn't need when they got you back. She told Faith not every fight was won with fists. Anyway, Dawn threatened to take all the toys and go home. Well home being anywhere but with them. *That* seemed to get through to both the witch and the slayer. In the end, she got Willow off the bad ju-ju and Faith to back down."

_That's my girl_, Xander thought his heart still hurting for his friends. Guilt washed through him. _I should have been there. Dawnie! I'm sorry._

"Things were starting to come back together again when we got the word," Oz said.

"The word?"

"You had surfaced in Vegas."

Another refrigerator light went off as Xander put some pieces together.

"You're the one who's been spying on Spike!" Xander accused.

Oz shrugged.

"Vegas is a good place for a werewolf. Just had to be careful..skulk along the edges out of the sight of Spike. Only go to the seediest casinos..get the latest gossip."

"You were the informant...," Xander said.

"I passed the word on..never thought they'd be foolish enough to send in a squad..."

"Not 'they'.Larry," Xander corrected.
Oz lifted an eyebrow. "That actually explains a lot," he said. "You know he had a crush on you in high school?"

Xander blushed.

"So this bit of gossip about who's been doin' what when?" Spike said finally losing patience along with another twinge of jealousy. "That my message?"

"No," Oz said.

Spike looked at Oz. Oz looked back.

"Listen dog boy!" Spike growled.

"Better write this down," Oz offered helpfully.

"Wot?"

"The message."

"Won't need to! Now spill!"

"36 53.405N; 116 50.088W," Oz said. "Oh and...0400."

"Wot?"

"That's the message."

"That's gibberish."

"It's coordinates," Xander whispered.

Oz smiled and arched an eyebrow.

"Well...all but the last number. That's the time," Xander continued to decipher.

"Clever," Spike said finally catching up. Then he cast a puzzled look at Xander.

"Long story," Xander sighed.

Spike arched an eyebrow.

"Cliff notes version? Halloween when you almost had a slayer snack?"

"Good times," Spike nodded as he remembered. Xander scowled.

"Anyway..my costume..well..made me soldier boy..."

"And he got left some of the memories," Oz finished explaining.

"Well aren't you full of fun and useful surprises, pet," Spike purred.

Xander tried to scowl again but was overcome by a bright red blush instead

"But 0400 when?" Spike asked Oz back to business.

"0400," Oz said as he began to move toward the door. "That's all I was told."
"It's 1am now!" Spiked barked.

Oz shrugged again before heading toward the door.

"Wait!" Xander cried as Oz put his hand on the doorknob. The werewolf paused. Xander scrambled around Spike's desk and dove for his stash of crayons on the floor. He dug through the box and cried in triumph when he found the one he wanted. He rushed over to Oz.

"Give this to Willow...if..well..assuming she's around..and you're going to see her," Xander said as he held out a yellow crayon.

Both Spike and Oz arched an eyebrow.

"She'll know what it means," Xander said.

"Pet?" Spike asked as Oz took the crayon with a curt nod.

"Trust me, Spike. Trust me," Xander replied.

Spike rolled his eyes but turned away. He began to dig in his desk drawer for something. Oz opened the office door and let himself out.

"LORNE!" Spike barked. "Where's my Atlas?"

Xander watched Oz's mop of unruly curly hair bob and weave through the crowd until he disappeared.

***

Xander really wasn't liking this plan. In fact he was really hating this plan. He'd dare to whisper how he felt to Spike but he had a rubber ball shoved into his mouth and buckled behind his head to hold it in place. He closed his eyes. *Never should have agreed to this, he thought.*

"Shove off," he heard Spike growl. Xander could make out sounds of shuffling feet, tentacles and various appendages as he imagined the crowd of demons making way for Spike.

The Master of Vegas was hauling him over his shoulder through the casino floor at the Luxor. Once again they were heading toward the King Tut exhibit. Except this time Xander was bound and gagged.

*No just, bound, Xander thought, practically mummified! Now I have a new insight to Ampata's teenage angst!*

Xander thought about the Incan mummy girl who’d nearly drained the life out of him with a single kiss back in high school. *She may have been a monster, but being bound up like this would turn anyone homicidal!*

“MMPTHG DNW!” Xander screamed from behind the ball gag as he squirmed. Spike swatted him soundly on the ass. The force of the swat rattled Xander all the way from the tips of his toes to the golden ring around his cock. He growled against the back of his gag.

“No Claimant of mine’s gonna be taken’ on airs, Pet,” Spike roared and gave Xander another swat as he continued to haul him through the casino. The crowd jeered and laughed. Xander ground his teeth into the gag. It was as close to grinding them together as he could get.

Spike smirked. He unzipped a special opening in the back of the tight sleepsack covering his pet
from neck to toe. The opening gave him access to play with and caress Xander’s ass. Xander squealed and squirmed some more. This time Spike spanked bare flesh.

_You blond bastard!_ Xander silently screamed as the crowd laughed again. They were getting closer to the Tut exhibit.

Spike nodded at a few patrons while he lightly stroked Xander’s exposed cheeks. He hoped the play was keeping his pet distracted from what was coming. Xander had agreed to this plan, the subterfuge to allow them to sneak out of the city to meet Willow unnoticed. Yet, Spike knew his beloved was not comfortable with the plan.

_He’s petrified,_ Spike thought as he could smell the fear under Xander’s outrage at being hauled around and fondled like a piece of “ass” in front of the Luxor’s patrons. Spike forced a smile and waved with his friend hand at the guards to the exhibit.

“Pet’s given me some lip,” Spike barked at the guards. “Gonna remind him of his place.”

The guards snickered. Xander glared. He was trapped in a spandex like material, only with less give. It was black and had an inner sleeve which molded close to his body but kept his arms and hand from touching his own flesh. He was zipped up tight. He could struggle and move but there was no way out. Worst yet, there were strategically placed zippers which when unzipped allowed Spike access to “play areas.”

“Yer gonna see no one but me goes IN or OUT of this place, yeah?” Spike ordered.

The guards drew to attention and nodded. Spike marched forward and Xander’s heart beat faster. He’d agreed to this plan. He’d known what was coming but now, now he didn’t think he could go through with it.

_I can’t, Spike!_ Xander thought as he began to really squirm in earnest. _It’s too much like the “Tank!” I’ve changed my mind!

“Shh, pet,” Spike whispered as he walked deeper into the exhibit back toward the room with the tomb.

_“NNNNM!”_ Xander cried against the gag. _“NNNNM SMMMKK!”_

“Just a little farther, pet,” Spike whispered hating the smell of fear rolling off Xander. Tut’s sarcophagus gleamed in the artificial light. Carefully Spike rolled Xander off his shoulder and laid him on the ground. Xander began shaking his furiously.

_“It’s the only way, pet,”_ Spike whispered. _“It will be all right.”_

Then he slid back the elaborate coffin, pulled out the fake mummy. Using one of the exhibit’s spears he easily punched a hole in the far side of the bottom of the tomb. He then looked at Xander.

Xander was shaking and trembling. Sweat covered his brow and his eyes were glazed in fear. Spike swiftly knelt and gathered Xander into his arms. He kissed his forehead and rocked the terrified human.

_“Xan, please,”_ Spike whispered, _“please we have to play the game. It won’t be long, I swear. No water. I swear.”_

The human turned his face into Spike’s chest. He breathed deep the scent of Spike and tried to calm his fears. He knew they had to play their part. They had to have a cover. Spike couldn’t be seen
leaving Las Vegas, especially with his Pet. Too many questions would be asked.

Willow’s rendezvous deadline had left them little time to plan. This was the best they could come up with on short notice. Spike would "leave" Xander in Tut museum for punishment while he dallied in the stables. As far as the demon world was concerned they never left Vegas.

Xander took a deep breath. *I'll do this,* he vowed and nodded his head.

“Right, luv,” Spike whispered into Xander’s ear before giving him quick kiss on the nose. Then he swooped Xander up in his arms, stood up and strode to the empty sarcophagus.

“I think spending the rest of the evening in here might remind ya of yer manners,” Spike yelled angrily as he put Xander in the coffin.

The room began to reek of Xander’s fear and sweat. Spike could hear the guards at the entrance laughing. He fought the urge to rush out and shove their heads down their necks. Instead he began to slide the lid closed.

“NNNNNMMM! HLLLLLLLLLMMMM!” Xander screamed.

Spike bit his lip and continued to shut the lid encasing Xander in total darkness. Xander began to shake and rock in the coffin. He continued to scream from behind the gag.

“When I come back…but if I come back,” Spike snarled, “I want ya quiet and behaved!”

“SMMMMMMIIII!” Xander screamed as Spike strode quickly at of the room. He was in full vampire form when he reached the entrance where the guards were.

“Not one visitor! You here!” He began to yell! “NO one! No even you two living piles of scum or to go back there! He may be out of favor right now but he’s still my Claimant and he won’t be out of favor long! He still has too much life left in ‘im for that!”

The guards began to pale as Spike continued to rant.

****

Xander felt like he was choking, drowning on the darkness all around him. He couldn’t move. He could barely breathe. He thought any minute now liquid would begin to fill the tiny sarcophagus.

“SMMMMMIIII!” He screamed feebly against the gag again. He was drenched in sweat. He was terrified and then the was a sound. Xander froze. He strained to listen. He could make out Spike still ranting and raving at the guards about securing “his pet.”

There was the noise again and this time it was accompanied by a sliver of light. Xander’s heart began to beat a new rhythm. The plan was working! Xander held his breathe for a moment and suddenly the lid to the coffin was gone.

“You OK, Xander?” Clem whispered as his face came into few over the edge of the coffin.

Xander let out his breath in a huge of relief. He nodded furiously as he quickly hauled Xander out of the fake tomb. He set him on the floor then quickly slid the lid back in place. Then he picked Xander up before tapping the painting causing the wall to swing quietly forward. Quickly Clem carried Xander into the storage area. He hit the button which swung the wall closed, then carried Xander to the room where Larry had been held.
Once Clem had worked the lock and door open he carefully put Xander down. Then he quickly undid the gag’s buckle, freeing Xander to speak for the first time since he’d left the suite.

“Clem! Thank you!” Xander managed to say working out his sore jaw.

“Master Spike said to be here,” Clem blushed. “What…I mean..are you? Is he? Well should Ante be worried?”

Xander smiled and shook his head.

“You did just fine,” Xander said reassuring the demon.

“I know it’s not really my place to say, but that’s a strange place for Master Spike to leave you.”

“It’s OK..really, Clem,” Xander said. “It’s probably better you don’t know the why of it.”

“Well, OK, then,” Clem said. “Can I help you out of this thing?”

“Please!”

Clem smiled and unzipped the master zipper letting Xander roll out of the sleepsack. He sighed with pleasure to finally be free. Clem quickly scrambled to the bathroom and came back with a stack of clothes. Xander frowned. They were “real” clothes. Boxer shorts, jeans, a t-shirt, sock and tennis shoes.

“Clem?” Xander asked.

“Master Spike said to bring them. Make sure you had them to wear,” Clem explained as he still held his armful of treasure out to Xander.

Xander shook. It had been so long since he’d dressed so “human.” He’d come to feel so natural being naked or in his belt. Even now, wearing nothing more than his piercings and penis crown in front of Clem he felt no embarrassment, not guilt.

“Figued ya want ta meet yer old mates wearing some real kit,” Spike said softly from behind Xander.

Xander spun around and stared at the vampire. The human had tears in his eyes. He nodded.

“Thank you,” Xander whispered before turning back to Clem and grabbing the clothes. Following an impulse he didn’t quite understand, Xander dashed to the bathroom to change.

After he’d dressed Xander came out to the main room. Clem was gone. Spike was standing with his back to the bathroom door.

“Sp..Master?” Xander whispered.

Spike turned around. Xander looked ravishing. He was the boy he remembered and all the man he’d become. The jeans were a tight but comfortable fit which accentuated Xander’s lean legs and tight ass. The t-shirt hugged the planes of Xander’s chest and abs. Spike’s mouth watered.


“Everything ready?” Xander asked.

“Crowds think I’m off carousing in the stables,” Spike said. “Lorne’s got it covered.”
Xander nodded.

“You ready?” Spike asked.

“Almost,” Xander replied. “Just one more thing.”

“Wot’s that?”

Xander took a deep breath then looked Spike square in the eye.

“I know I’m not the smartest man who never got the chance to graduate from Sunnydale High,” Xander began, “but I didn’t ride the short bus to school either.”

“Pet..?”

“The Claim..you always wanted it. From that first night..you planned it. It was your in..your insurance. A powerful witch like Willow, she wouldn’t risk killing you if it meant killing me.”

“Pet…”

“That was the plan, wasn’t it, Spike?”

“Yes,” Spike finally admitted but rushed forward to grab Xander’s arms. He stared deeply into his pet’s eyes. “But you know that changed. You know that, Xander.”

Xander studied Spike for a moment then nodded. Spike was so relieved he thought his undead heart might start to beat again.

“Xander…”

“Spike,” Xander interrupted, “There’s more you’re not telling me isn’t there?”

Spike closed his eyes and turned his head. Xander sighed then leaned forward until his forehead rested against Spike.

“Promise me you aren’t setting up the Resistance. Promise me this is about bringing down, Angelus,” Xander whispered.

Spike turned until Xander and he were resting forehead to forehead. For a moment he soaked in the heat and closeness of his pet then he opened his eyes.

“I promise this is about bringing down Angelus,” Spike softly whispered.

It was Xander’s turn to close his eyes. Spike hadn’t promised he wasn’t setting up the Resistance. Did that mean anything or not?

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Xander’s sleepsack.

The coordinates are real..if you want to spoil yourselves and try looking them up to see where the
meeting is taking place.
Xander gripped the edge of his seat with white knuckles as Spike spurred the speeding Suburban over the rough desert terrain. Despite the heavy vehicles shocks and off-road designed suspension Xander still bounced. He’d never been so grateful for a seatbelt in his life.

“SPIKE!” Xander yelped.

“Wot?” The vampire replied casually as he steered the half ton vehicle around a small boulder and over a large dip in the desert floor.

“C..can we p..please slow down?” Xander managed to stutter.

“Oi! It took as an hour ta get out of Vegas and Red’s coordinates were at least a three hour drive outside the city,” Spike said. “That doesn’t give us much time to make it, pet. You don’t wanna be late, do ya?”

“I don’t...w..want to be d..dead either!”

Spike laughed and eased up on the gas pedal a bit. The truck slowed just marginally but it was still speeding faster through the dark desert than Xander would like. He wasn’t sure if was better that he couldn’t see the desert blur by through the deep tinted window or not. Guess even if the windows weren’t tinted it would be too dark to see much anyway, Xander thought.

“Why didn’t you take the DeSoto?” Xander asked trying to distract himself with aimless conversation.

“Too suspicious. ‘Gelus knows how much I love that car. Knows I got it kevved up just the way I like it,” Spike explained. “If that went missing from the garages it be suspicious.”

“‘Kevved’ up?” Xander asked.

“Oi! Ya know. Sported out! Styled up and fixed up,” Spike said.

“Riiiight,” Xander replied. “I think I would have gone with another word.”

“Pet,” Spike growled softly.

“Just saying your idea of a tricked out car and mine are completely different. I mean mine wouldn’t include black paint all over the windows.”

“OI! Gotta keep the sun from fryin’ me! Was a time we didn’t have ‘Gelus’ fancy mo-jo glass ta keep a bloke from dustin’ at dawn!” Spike said.

“And now?”

“My car’s a classic! Ya don’t mess with a thing of beauty!”

Xander coughed to cover his scoffing laughter.

“Cheeky git!” Spike barked just as the destination alert sounded on the GPS unit. Xander felt the Suburban start to slow immediately as Spike eased off on the gas and applied pressure to the brake.

“Spike?” Xander asked.
“Had Lorne program this thing to sound an alert when we were close,” Spike explained as the truck rolled to a stop. The vampire cut the engine. A blanket of silence fell around them. Xander looked over at the vampire whose hair still managed to gleam faintly in the dark.

“Ready for a reunion, luv?” Spike asked as he opened his door.

Ready or not, Xander thought as he fumbled to undo his seatbelt and open his door, here I come.

Xander stepped out into the cool desert air. He could help but stare up at the star field sky and soak in the wonderfulexpanse of it! After the Azora, he’d never take the simple pleasure of being out in the open for granted again. He jumped when he heard the loud slam of Spike’s door.

“Oi! Red!” the vampire yelled as he moved in front of the truck his arms out and away from his body. “We’re here! Thought we were gonna meet!”

Suddenly the air bristled with powerful magic. It came from every direction and no direction. It singed around and past Xander as if its aim were somewhere or someone else.

“SPIKE!” Xander called and spun around to look at the vampire.

The master vampire of Las Vegas was holding very very still. Over a dozen wooden stakes floated in the air and surrounded him. There was a tension around them as if they vibrated to bore right through the vampire.

“I owe you PAIN!” a cold voice rang out through the night.

Xander turned toward the voice. He saw a shadowy form take shape and move closer to them.

“Willow?” Xander whispered.

” Lucem lunae depono!” Willow commanded.

Light, moonlight, flooded the area. Xander gasped. They were standing in the remains of an old town. There were a couple of structures slowly being claimed by the desert. One looked to be the remains of an old jail by the bars on the window. What spooked Xander more than being in a genuine ghost town in the middle of the night was Willow.

His Willow was nowhere in sight. Instead he was faced with a dark version he didn’t know. Her hair was coal black instead of the fun fiery red he loved. Blacker than her hair were her eyes. There was none of the love and compassion he was used to seeing dancing in her green eyes. There were no green in her eyes. They were just black, solid black!

Her skin was pale and looked paler in the eerie magical moonlight. Xander could see veins of black making a pattern up her skin.

“Wills!” Xander cried.

“Red,” Spike said desperately wishing he had a fag in his pocket.

“Vampire,” Willow said in a light voice void of humanity. “You took something from me.”

“More like I won something,” Spike said evenly keeping his eyes on the witch and not at the stakes surrounding him.

“Willow,” Xander pleaded.
“You think you’re funny?” Willow asked as she tilted her head. “You think taking my Xander… binding him to you is funny?”

“Nothing about Claiming Xander was funny.”

“You had no right.”

“Had every right and the boy accepted.”

“You coerced him!”

“Ceremony doesn’t work that way.”

One of the stakes whipped forward and pierced through Spike’s shoulder inches from his heart. The vampire screamed in agony.

“WILLOW STOP!” Xander yelled and tried to rush toward Spike. The angry witch turned her head toward Xander and suddenly an invisible wall held him still. He yelled, “NO!”

Spike growled and the witch turned her attention back to the vampire.

“You angry enough at me yer gonna risk killin’ Xan?” Spike barked.

Willow smiled. It was a cold smile. It reminded Spike of his grandsire and the vampire couldn’t stop the shiver that went down his spine.

“I would never hurt Xander,” Willow said.

“You’re hurtin’ him no…”

Another stake shot forward. This one buried itself in Spike right leg just below the knee. The vampire screamed and crumpled to the ground as his wounded leg gave out.

“Wills, please!” Xander begged immobile to help the vampire.

“Tsk..tsk..tsk,” Willow said as she shook her head. Then she waved her wand and suddenly Spike was suspended in mid air.

“Th…This all ya..w..wanted out of this meeting, Red?” Spike ground out. “Just a slap and tickle session with old, Spike?”

Willow laughed. It was so alien to Xander he felt nauseous.

“At least you’re not boring,” Willow said. “When I get bored…I get cranky.”

“Well wouldn’t want that ta happen now would we?”

“Well, you wouldn’t.”

“Dimitto!” Tara’s voice suddenly rang out and Xander found himself stumbling free.

Willow hissed and spun around. Tara stepped out from behind the crumbling barn.

“I should have known you couldn’t be trusted!” Willow screamed while raising her hand. “Incendo!”

“Aegis!” Tara yelled as fire raced from Willow’s outstretched arm towards her. Flames spread out
around Tara as if they hit an invisible shield. The blonde woman paled under the assault. She stumbled backward then disappeared behind the building and out of sight.

Willow smiled and turned her attention back toward the vampire when Xander’s arms closed around her from behind.

“NO!” she screamed.

“Wills,” Xander begged, “please, please stop!”

“I owe him pain!” Willow screamed and fought to break free of Xander’s hold.

“No! No you don’t! You owe me, Wills. You owe me!” Xander cried.

“But that’s what I’m doing!” Willow explained her voice bearing the tiniest crack. “I’m doing this for you, Xander.”

“This? This is not what I’m owed,” Xander said tightening his hold on Willow. “I thought you understood, Wills. Didn’t you get my message? Didn’t you get the crayon?”

“I…yes…but you can’t be OK…it’s not enough…I didn’t find you I…” the crack in Willow’s voice grew. A small tear began to form in her eye.

“Willow,” Xander said softly, “you don’t owe me any of this. None of what happened is your fault. All that I need…really need is my Willow. I need my best friend. I need the girl who broke up with me when I was five because I stole her Barbie.”

There was a choked gasp from Willow.

“Please, Willow,” Xander said. “I’ve needed a hug from you for so long…just a hug. All I’ve ever needed from you is just to know that you were all right and no matter what I could go on because my best friend was all right.”

“X…Xander?” Willow cried in voice Xander at last recognized. He loosened his hold and Willow turned in his arms. Color was returning to her cheeks and the black was leeching away from her hair returning it to the red Xander dreamt about every night in the Azora’s vault. “Xander?”

“Hey, Will,” Xander said softly as tears fell down his cheeks. He stared into Willows watering green eyes. Suddenly her arms wrapped around him hugging him tight. She buried her face under his chin and Xander held her tight. They both wept.

“I tried…I tried,” Willow cried. “I c..couldn’t find you! No..no matter wha..what..I couldn’t find you!” Willow cried.

“I know,” Xander whispered. He hugged his friend tighter.

“I was afraid. Afraid I’d n..never see you..afraid Angelus wo..would find you,” Willow sniffed.

“Shh, Wills,” Xander said. “He didn’t. I’m fine.”

“You’re bound to Spike!” Willow said finally pulling back from Xander a little to look him in the eye.

“And it was my choice,” Xander said.

“Why? Why..?”
Xander sighed. Now that he was here with Willow the reasons why weren’t so clear anymore. If he hadn’t agreed to Spike’s Claim he could stay here with his friend. Stay and help her. Yet he had accepted the Claim and now he couldn’t stay with her. *Not without Spike's permission,* he thought.

He looked over Willow’s shoulder and stared at Spike. The vampire still hung suspended in air with two stakes in his body. *You didn’t give me the option to be with Willow until I had your Claim,* Xander thought. *My choice...but you manipulated me.*

Spike narrowed his eyes and jutted out his chin as if he could read Xander’s thoughts. Xander could read Spike. The vampire wouldn’t apologize for the game played. *He has a plan,* Xander thought and hugged Willow tighter.

“Xa...Xander?” Tara’s voice called out.

“TARA!” Willow and Xander both called out at once.

“Oh Ghoddess Tara! I’m so sorry!” Willow cried and began to rush toward the old barn. Xander followed right behind her.

Tara stumbled out behind the building as they approached. She smiled and held up a hand.

“I’m tired b...but OK. J...Just d...don’t think I’m ready fo...for another r...round of D..dark Willow to...tonight,” she said.

Willow looked at the ground and mumbled, “I’m so sorry. I...just...please...”

Tara reached out a finger and lifted Willow’s chin. She smiled at Willow and the red-haired woman blushed.

*Oh ho!* Xander thought and smiled watching the two women together.

“W...we’ll work on it...to...together,” Tara said. “You...ne..need help grounding..focusing your energies rooted in lo...love and compassion..in the Earth.”

“OI!” Spike yelled. “And while she does that would someone mind lettin’ me down?”

“Oh!” Willow cried turning to face the vampire. The remaining stakes surrounding the vampire fell away.

“Not the best way ta start a meetin’!” Spike growled.

Willow waved her hand and Spike fell to the ground. He roared out as the pain from the fall and the embedded stakes shot through him. Xander rushed to his side.

“Everything going as planned, master?” Xander asked with a slight grin once he saw Spike was really OK.

“Quit bein’ a prat and pull these boards outta me,” spike growled.

“BLOODY HELL!” Spike screamed as Xander jerked the one out of Spike’s leg. “Yer makin’ it worse on purpose!”

“Would I do that, master?” Xander asked as he grabbed the stake in Spike’s shoulder and yanked.

“Fucking hell!” Spike screamed. Xander knelt down next to Spike and set him up to lean against the front tire of the Suburban. He looked the vampire over.
“How bad?” he finally asked.

“Offer me a nip?” Spike said softly. Xander rolled his eyes and draped himself in Spike’s lap.

Willow gasped moving quickly forward. Tara laid a gentle hand on her shoulder and stopped her.

Xander smiled at Spike then tilted his neck offering it to Spike. The vampire didn’t waste any time. He pulled Xander closed and bit into Xander’s flesh. Quickly he began to siphon the needed sweet blood of his love and pet.

“Xander,” Willow cried trying object.

“He won’t hu..hurt him,” Tara said. “Sp..Spike’s hurt. He..he needs this. Xa..Xander ca..can give it to him.”

Suddenly Spike’s words came back to Willow. She understood now what the vampire meant. In hurting him, she had hurt Xander.

“Well..now this is a sight I normally put a stop to,” Faith’s voice broke through the darkness. Spike lifted his head and snarled from around his fangs still dripping with Xander’s blood. Xander quickly sat up and put his body between Spike and the slayer.

“Faith?” Xander asked.

“XANDER!” another voice cried and before Xander could process it he had an armful of young woman in his lap clinging to him for dear life.

“Pet?” Spike asked from behind him.

“DAMPH!” Xander said against the neck of the woman that clung to him with all her might.

“You may have Claimed Xander, fang face,” Faith said as she hunched down to look at the vampire. “But you were second in line. That girl’s had him wrapped around her pinky since the moment he shined his light on her.”

Spike narrowed his eyes and growled low.

“Is this your vampire?” Dawn finally asked as she looked over Xander’s shoulder.

Xander grinned, “Yep. My very own master vampire.”

Spike grunted.

Dawn laughed and got up. She pulled Xander to his feet. Faith got up and offered a hand to Spike. Spike ignored it. Faith smiled and shrugged.

“Xan? You OK?” Willow asked.

“He’s OK,” Oz’s voice drifted through the night as he finally came into view. “Spike didn’t take that much.”

“How can you tell, dog boy,” Spike growled feeling now very overwhelmed and outnumbered. An eerie low snarl pierced the night. Spike whirled around trying to get a bead on its source.

“She’s early,” Spike snapped scanning the night for the female werewolf.

“It happens,” Oz shrugged.

“You two still together than?” Xander asked.

“Wolves mate for life,” Oz said. Xander didn’t miss the lack of Willow’s flinch. Nor did he miss the way how Tara moved just a fraction closer to her at the mention of “mate.”

A part of Xander warmed with happiness. It had been painful for both Oz and Willow when they realized their young romance was through given their realities. Oz was attracted to and needed a female werewolf. Willow was realizing she was just more attracted to females.

In the end Oz had gone off with Veruca to immerse himself in being in his beast and his mate’s life. Willow had been left alone to lead a resistance. The times the two Oz and Willow had seen each other since had often been marred by Oz’s contentment and acceptance with his life and Willow’s highlighted loneliness.

As Xander stared at the way Tara hovered near Willow, he realized that perhaps Willow’s loneliness was over. Tara looked up and saw him staring. She smiled and blushed. Xander smiled while giving her a thumbs up sign.

“So are we gonna meet before the sun up and rises or are we just gonna sit around and make googly eyes at each other?” Spike growled.

“Gee, grouchy much?” Dawn asked.

“All the time actually,” Xander replied. Dawn giggled.

Spike rolled his eyes.

“You wanted this meeting,” Willow said.

“Testing us?” Faith asked.

“As if,” Spike grunted. “Knew what a bunch of prats yer were in high school..”

“Not me, you didn’t blondie,” Faith purred as she pulled out a wicked looking knife. “I’m not like the rest of kddies. I didn’t waste my time with teacher’s dirty looks.”

“Faith,” Willow warned.

Faith smiled and backed down.

“I gave ya the copy of the Manuscript of Steganographia,” Spike said.

“And?” Willow asked.

“Well I would have thought ya would have made some head way in translatin’ it by now,” Spike growled.

“What makes you think we could do that?”

“Don’t play coy with me, Red. Know ya got one of the best resources around in dead and demonic languages. Slayer’s former watcher, that Weasley bloke.”
“Wesley,” Faith hissed.

Dawn gasped and paled. Xander frowned at her response.

“Wot?”

“Wesely, can’t help,” Willow said.

“Can’t or won’t?” Spike asked.

“Can’t!” Snapped Faith.

“Why not?”

“Because he’s blind,” a voice said as a figure moved out of the shadows of the jail.

“Wes?” Xander gasped as Faith moved quickly to her watcher and put one of his hands on her shoulder. Carefully she guided him toward the center of the ghost town where the others were.

“You shouldn’t have come,” Faith whispered.

“I am still your watcher,” Wesley insisted.

“Well you watchin’ me from afterlife won’t do me any favors,” Faith hissed.

“I care about you too,” Wesley said.

“Well I am going to kill who ever helped you get this far,” Faith replied.

“Mmm,” was all Wesley said.

Xander stared in horror as the watcher shuffled forward. A large cloth was wrapped around his eyes. Xander looked at Willow.

“You weren’t the only one we lost in a raid,” Willow whispered.

“Fortunately, though the Resistance knew where I was,” Wesley explained as he stood now next to Willow. “Unfortunately they could not get me out before the interrogators had seen me reading their prisoner list.”

“Wesley…” Xander said praying that the man hadn’t been looking for his name. He couldn’t bear the guilt Wes might have lost his eyes while trying to find him.

“It does not matter, Xander,” Wesley said holding up his hand to stop Xander from saying any more.

“It bloody well does matter!” Spike snapped. Dawn hit him in the arm. “OW! You annoyin’ little bit!”


“Or Wot?” Spike yelled.

“Or there are a lot more painful places I could shove a stake then where Willow did!”

“DAWN!” Faith, Xander and Willow cried in unison. Dawn ignored them.

Dawn and Spike continued to glare at each other until finally Spike grunted.
“You’ll probably end up being someone’s hors d’oeuvres before all this is over anyways,” Spike muttered.

“Don’t bet on it, Billy Idol,” Dawn replied as she crossed her arms.

“Awnda,” Xander began to say in pig latin, “tia otna ota ickpa noa …”

“I know it’s not nice to pick on the vampire, Xander, but he’s being a brat,” Dawn said. Xander rolled his eyes. Spike growled to cover a laugh.

Xander glared at Spike. Wesley cleared his throat. Spike sighed.

“So I take it you had hoped we would be able to decipher the manuscript?” Wesley asked Spike.

“Was kinda plannin’ on it,” Spike said. “Gelus has got the original, and his solicitor monkey’s ‘ill have it sussed out soon enough, but I thought you might give us an edge.”

“Us?” Willow asked suspiciously.

“Yeah..US,” Spike growled.

Willow looked at Xander.

“I believe him, Wills,” Xander said.

“Why?”

“I’ve seen his operation. I’ve seen what he does with the people in his stables. He saved Tara… Larry…he saved me.”

“Saved you, Harris! He enslaved you!” Faith cried.

Xander shook his head violently. “NO!” he cried. “NO! NO, he did NOT!”

“Xander..,” Willow started.

“Spike, saved me. You don’t know what it was like. How I was like when he fou…won me. I know what it’s like to be enslaved..to be pro..property! No matter the trappings Spike’s puts on me..no matter what manners I have to adopt or rules I have to follow Spike has not enslaved me!”

“He’s Claimed you,” Faith said.

“And that’s by my choice!” Xander cried.

“Was it really, Xander? What options did you really have?” Wesley asked. “Didn’t he only set up this meeting with us after you accepted his Claim? If he really wanted to give you a choice wouldn’t he have done it before?”

Xander looked from Wesley to Spike. Spike stared back at Xander. For a moment they held each other’s gaze then Xander turned back to Wesley.

“Maybe. I don’t know. What do I know? Is if Spike hadn’t Claimed me before he came here than he’d be a pile of dust right now, wouldn’t he, Wesley? Faith? Willow?”

Silence affirmed Xander’s answer.
“Seems to me what’s done, is done,” Dawn said softly. “We either accept it…”

“Or we wa..waste the opportunity we’ve be..been given,” Tara said.

“Whatever we decide we better do it soon. Sun’ll be up in twenty,” Oz said.

Willow looked at Xander. Xander smiled.

“I can’t lose you again,” she said.


“Oi! I’m getting’ itchy over here,” Spike said. Dawn hit him again. “Will you stop that!”

Dawn arched an eyebrow.

“So what was your plan?” Willow asked.

“Told ya, fer Wesley here to read the scroll and get a bead on the Key a’fore ‘Gelus does,” Spike said.

“And I believe we told you that is not possible now,” Wesley said stiffly.

“What? Cuz yer missin’ a set of eyes?” Spike said then quickly jumped out of range of Dawn’s next swing. He stuck his tongue out at her.

“SPIKE!” Xander yelled.

“Wot?”

“Eyes..well they just don’t grow back,” Xander said trying to refocus the vampire on the issue at hand.

“Well it depends now doesn’t it,” Spike said. “We could always find a bit of Norjub…”

“I’ll pass,” Wesley said sharply. “I do not want to risk dying just to see again.”

“(…or I could give him a pair of ‘Seer’s Eyes’,” Spike finished.

Tara, Willow and Wesley gasped.

“Di..did you say ‘Ss..Seer’s Eyes’?” asked Tara.

Spike nodded.

“Hmmm,” Wesley said.

“What?” Faith asked.

“And they are in good condition? What breed?” Wesley asked.

“Excellent condition and they’re from a half-breed. Was half human and half Brachen demon,” Spike said.

“Half human..yes, that could work!” Wesley said suddenly excited.

“Wes?” Faith asked.
“With a set of ‘Seer’s Eye’s’ I would be able to read the manuscript,” Wes said.

“What you’re just gonna stick some dead demon's eyes in your head and see?” Faith asked.

“Well, yes. They’re ‘magical’. They’ll work for those who..’wear them.”

“And what makes them magical?” Faith asked.

“Whatever powers their visions,” Willow said somberly. “We can’t trust them, Wesley.”

“I’ll only use them to decipher the script,” Wes said.

“You know it doesn’t work that way,” Willow said. “You’ll have a vision when..whatever behind their power wills it.”

“And is that bad?” Dawn asked.

“Depends on the power,” Willow said.

“Or ‘Powers’ in this case,” Spike said.

“Powers?” Wesley asked.

“Do…the seer..the eyes' original owner, said the visions came from ‘the Powers that Be’,” Spike explained.

Wes paled a bit.

“Wes…”

“They’re just rumor and speculation…mythological well wishing,” Wesley mumbled.

“Yeah, well when ‘Gelus found about Do..the visions he was pissed enough he had …the seer killed…tortu…,” Spike fell silent and looked away.

Spike? Xander thought and moved toward his vampire.

“..it wasn’t pretty,” Spike said in a muffled voice still facing away. “Made a right and pr..prop… proper example of ‘im!”

“Spike?” Xander said softly as laid a hand on Spike’s shoulder. The vampire stiffened then turned around. He was in full game face.

“Ya want the eyes or not,” he growled.

Xander wasn’t fooled. Spike was covering for something.

“If they’re genuine,” Wesley said.

“Wes!” Faith and Willow said at the same time.

“I'll trust you and Tara to make sure they’re not a trap,” Wesley said to Willow. The witch stared at Wesley for a moment then nodded. She looked back at Spike.

“I’ll send ‘em to you with the wolf, eh?” Spike said.

Willow nodded again.
“Then you let me know when you have the manuscript deciphered. From there we’ll figure out the next step in finding the Key and getting it to Sunnydale,” Spike said.

“How do we know we can trust you?” Willow said.

“You don’t,” Spike said, “but you know you can trust Xander.”

Spike then looked to the east. He really was starting to get nervous.

“Make yer goodbye’s, pet,” Spike ordered. “We gotta get back.”

Spike turned to get back in the truck but was stopped. Tara threw her arms around him and hugged him tight.

“Thank you,” she said. “Thank you for everything.”

Spike smiled in the blonde witch’s hair.

“Yer welcome,” he whispered. Then Tara let him go. Spike climbed inside the truck and shut the door. He felt better being safely behind the magical glass and Detroit hardened steel which would keep the sun’s rays from burning him.

“Xander!” Willow cried as she once again latched on to Xander in a tight hug. Dawn and Faith followed until Xander was could barely breathe. He was in heaven. His girls were safe and sound.

“I love you,” he said to one and all. One of them sniffed.

“Don’t go,” Dawn cried.

“Have to,” Xander replied.

“The spell,” Willow explained.

“We could keep him here. Bury Spike in a pit or something,” Faith said.

“And bring Angelus looking?” Xander replied.

“We can take him,” Faith barked.

“Not until we have the Key,” Dawn said.

“AIR!” Xander gasped.

The girls laughed and backed off. That’s when Tara made her move. She too hugged Xander.

“Thank you,” she whispered to him.

“Take care of her,” Xander whispered back, not needing to explain who her was.

Tara smiled and let go of Xander. She nodded and moved back to stand by Willow.

“Xan,” Oz stepping forward to shake Xander’s hand.

“Oz,” Xander replied while shaking the werewolf’s hand.

A howl rent the early morning air. Oz tilted his head in sound’s direction.
“Gotta go do…”

“Yeah…me too..” Xander said as he nodded his head back toward the truck.

The two men parted. Oz began to trot off into the lingering darkness. Xander wasn’t sure if it was his eyesight or the early morning shadows but it seemed as if from one moment to the next Oz’s shape flowed from a short young man to a loping four legged beast.

“Ah…Xander,” Wesley’s voice said.

“Wes,” Xander said turning to face young watcher.

“Be careful,” Wesley said.

“Watch Willow,” Xander said.

Wes nodded. They briefly shook hands then Xander turned and headed for Suburban. He climbed inside just as the first rays of dawn were climbing over the eastern horizon. Spike grunted.

“Ready to go home?” Spike asked.

Xander just nodded. *I was already there,* he thought as Spike put the truck in gear in pulled out in showery spray of stone and dirt.

TBC

**Author’s Notes:**

Latin help provided by my EX (he has his own geekdom which requires he be able to know Latin among other languages).

*Lucem lunae depono* = To bring down the moonlight

*Dimitto* = To disband, detach, breakup

*Incendo* = To Burn

*Aegis* = shield

The coordinates to the meeting lead to [here](#).
Chapter 59

Despite the spelled glass, Spike squinted against the early dawn light. They were in Vegas proper pulling closer to the Luxor.

“Been awfully quiet,” Spike said turning away from the sun for a moment to look at Xander. Xander shrugged. What was there to say? He’d been home. He’d seen his girls and now he was back with Spike in a world of demons.

“Pet,” Spike half growled.

“What do you want me to say, Spike?” Xander sighed.

“Maybe tell me what’s goin’ on in what passes as that brain of yers.”

“Funny..master,” Xander replied.

“Xander!” Spike barked.

“What! You want me tell you that I miss them? Miss them so much that it hurts to have left them? You want me to tell you how scared I am for Willow? How much she needs me and where am I? I’m here with you getting fuc…”

“Don’t’ say it!” Spike warned.

“Why? You wanted to know..master! You wanted to know what I was thinking!”

“And you can tell me without crossing lines, pet,” Spike said.

“Can I? Can I, Spike?”

Spike pulled into the underground garage under the Luxor. He eased the truck into a parking spot and put it in park before shutting off the engine. He turned toward his Claimant.

“There’s no sense you feelin’ guilt about bein’ here with me, Xander,” Spike said softly. “You don’t have a choice.”

“Don’t I?” Xander asked.

“NO, you don’t!” Spike said. “Yer my Claimant and you go where I tell you. I want you with me and that’s where ya are.”

“I had a choice about being your Claimant,” Xander argued.

“Yeah, and how do ya think tonight would have played out if ya hadn’t accepted my claim,eh?” Spike asked. “Ya think ya would have seen yer friends?”

Xander hissed.

“My choices may be cruel and calculated but I have my reasons.”

“I was just a shield..a means to an end,” Xander gasped.

“Yer more than that, pet,” Spike said softly, “so much more. But I won’t deny yer my insurance.”
Xander tugged on the door handle. It was locked. He turned back and glared at Spike.

“I do love you, Xander,” Spike said.

“Funny way of showing it,” Xander snapped.

Spike shrugged and said, “Still a demon.”

“With a so…”

Spike snarled and pounced. He covered Xander’s mouth with his hand as he shoved his pet hard against the Suburban’s seat.

“Be very very careful, Pet,” Spike said in a deadly whisper. Xander narrowed his eyes. The vampire and the human glared at each other in a chilling contest of wills several long moments before Spike carefully lowered his hand from Xander’s mouth.

“It doesn’t really make a difference, does it,” Xander whispered.

“It makes all the difference in the world, pet,” Spike whispered before claiming Xander’s lips in a gentle but firm kiss. One kiss became two. Two kisses slid into three and three kisses became infinite.

Xander tried to resist. He tried freezing the vampire out. He tried not responding, but his body betrayed him. This was Spike pressing against him! This was Spike’s cool lips taunting and teasing him! This was the Master of Las Vegas, his master, who was seducing his lips in to parting.

Xander gasped and Spike pressed his advantage. He slipped his cool tongue inside to remap the warm moist cavern of Xander’s troublesome, endearing, mouth. Xander groaned. Spike swallowed the groan while snaking his hands up under Xander’s shirt. Nimble fingers danced down Xander’s ribs. Just like his lips, Spike’s fingers taunted and teased.

Xander panted and arched his back. Fire was racing across his skin with each stroke. A fire only Spike could start and only Spike could put out.

Spike slid his torturous lips away from Xander’s mouth down to his human’s neck.

“Damn you,” Xander moaned as he clutched the back of Spike’s head while the vampire ran the pads of his thumbs over the peaks of Xander’s firm nipples.

“Too late, luv,” Spike said against the hollow of Xander’s throat as he pulled the human under him so he could grind their denim and leather covered cocks together. They were both hard.

“SPIKE!” Xander shouted needing this and hating it all at the same time.

“Master,” the vampire reminded his keening human.

“Master!” Xander sighed as Spike began to work the buttons open on Xander’s jeans.

“Never gonna let ya go, pet,” Spike said as he wrapped his cool fingers around the hot skin of his human’s cock.

“I know,” Xander nearly screamed as he thrust up into his vampire’s grasp.

“Not gonna apologize fer it either,” Spike vowed as he started to milk Xander.
“Ghods!” Xander moaned. He should be stronger. He shouldn’t want this. He shouldn’t need this but this was Spike and this was so damned good!

“Yer beautiful, pet. An angel, Xander,” Spike crooned as he took his time driving his pet mad.

“No,” Xander denied as he shook his head.

“Yes,” Spike insisted. “Don’t argue with me.”

“Unh!”

Spike smiled. He breathed deep the scent of his pet so close. The close quarters of the truck were flooded with smell of Xander. Spike’s human mask slid away.

“Gonna make you cum, Xander,” Spike growled from around his fangs.

“YES!” Xander responded in a mix of a cry and a whimper.

“Gonna make you spill. Gonna drink from you while yer spurtin’ hot over my hand.”

“FUCK!” Xander arched and Spike’s tight grasp was the only thing stopping him from coming at the vampire’s erotic words.

“You want that, pet? Huh? You want to feel me drain ya, pet?”

“SPIKE!”

“Pet…”

“Master!” Xander somehow remembered. Spike laughed then licked a pulsing spot on Xander’s neck right where he wanted to bite.

“Well, pet?” Spike asked.

“YES! Yes, master!” Xander cried lost to himself, lost to Spike.

Spike grinned and pumped Xander in a quick rhythm. Xander screamed as his balls tightened and lightening flared down his spine. His world went white. Even as he began to feel his cock spill into Spike’s fist he felt the vampire’s teeth sink into his neck.

“MASTER!” Xander cried as he felt his blood rush while his cock continued to twitch. He was total sensation. He was total pleasure bordered with pain. He was a blaze of need at its pinnacle tumbling forward into giving up everything. He was giving up everything to Spike and the vampire gladly took it.

The master vampire reveled in the taste, the feel, the smell, the sound and the sight of his pet in the throes of his orgasm. The vampire used all of his vampiric senses to drink in all of his pet’s responses. He’d never get enough of Xander. His pet was passion incarnate and even if he wasn’t he was still Spike’s love.

Spike lapped at the tear in Xander’s neck where he’d stolen some of Xander’s precious life fluid. He suckled and nursed it tenderly until every precious drop was cleaned away and the wound closed. Then he raised his hand where Xander’s seed was cooling. He lapped and cleaned away every precious drop of that fluid as well. When he was done he noticed brown eyes watching him. Spike smiled around his fangs.
Xander reached out a hand and touched the vampire’s face. He marveled as Spike turned his face into Xander’s palm and nuzzled it. The vampire purred as his golden eyes nearly blazed with their own internal light.

“What about you?” Xander hoarsely asked. It was all he could think to say.

“I have all that I need,” Spike replied.

***

Neither vampire nor human had said a word as they left the truck and made their way back to the storage room where Clem waited for them.

“Ya have ta go back into the sack now, pet,” Spike said.

Xander couldn’t suppress his shiver. He didn’t want to back into the damn thing. He knew he’d be bound and helpless. He knew he’d just be put back into the tomb again. He nodded and began to strip.

“You’ll take care of ‘im?” Spike said gruffly as he turned to look at Clem.

“Of course, Master Spike,” Clem said quickly.

“Right then,” Spike said then quickly went to the room’s small bathroom. He had to wash Xander’s scent off him. He couldn’t smell like his pet before he entered the exhibit. In fact he’d have to change clothes down in the stables when he met up with Lorne. He’d have the clothes he was wearing burned. No sense trying to explain why his blood was all over them.

When he came back out into the main room Xander was already trussed up in the sack. A thin sheen of sweat was forming on his brow. The stench of fear was beginning to build around him. Spike tapped back on his demon. They had to stick to the plan.

“Give me ten then put ‘im in the tomb,” Spike barked and took off. If he had to watch Xander any longer he’d be tearing the black Darlex material off his pet. Spike took off out of the secret room in a run.

Clem knelt down by Xander. He resisted the urge to stroke the human’s forehead. Somehow he didn’t think it would be a good idea to leave his scent on Spike’s Claimant in any way at the moment.

“You’ll be OK, Xander,” Clem said.

Xander nodded. He tried believing the friendly demon but fear was beginning to claim him.

“Master Spike won’t let you stay in that tomb too long.”

“I.I know.”

“I’ve never seen a vampire take such good care of human before,” Clem said.

Xander tried to force a smile. He failed.

“If I’d been thinking, I’d have brought some Spiderman comics.”

“Beginning to have a better appreciation with his relationship to Venom,” Xander replied.
“Should I start ringing a bell?” Clem asked.

“No,” Xander started to laugh, “I think Spike’s yelling should be loud enough to scare the suit off.”

Clem started to laugh too, “Master Spike can be earsplitting.”

“Deafening…”

“Blaring…”

“Bigmouthed!” Clem dared and covered his mouth with his hands.

Xander let loose with a belly laugh and nodded his head vigorously. Clem joined him. For a moment the two friends forgot where they were and lost themselves to the image of Spike yelling at symbiotic alien life form until it cowered away in terror from the noise.

Eventually they composed themselves and Clem smiled at Xander. Then the demon looked at his watch. He smiled sadly.

“It’s time, Claimant Xander,” Clem said.

Xander nodded and said, “Let’s get this over with.”

Clem carefully put the ball gag in place before scooping Xander up into his arms and carried him off toward the tomb.

***

Spike entered the stables and was a little surprised to find Lorne wasn’t waiting for him. Everything was in order. There was a change of bloodied and soiled clothes as well as a list of who was next to go in the red stables, but no green demon. Nor was there any word as to why the other demon wasn’t there.

There were also towels from around town with remnants of various bodily fluids from both human and demon alike. *Where was Green Bean?* Spike wondered as he quickly stripped, showered and dried with the reeking towels before changing into the soiled clothes.

Next Spike roared and stumbled his way to the rooms in the red stable, making a splashy showing for the guards, before giving the occupants a quiet dispatch. He regretted using the poor sods like this, but he added it to his tab of regrets. Then he made a beeline for the Luxor.

***

“Bloody hell!” Spike yelled as he entered the casino. “Nearly forgot about my, Pet!”

The morning crowd roared with laughter. They’d heard about the “show” from the night before, how the Master had left his Claimant in the tomb.

“Time for bed and no bed warmer! No nummy treat!” Spike shouted as he made a point to shove and push his way through patrons to get to the King Tut exhibit. The guards were standing at attention. Their fear was easily scented. Spike grinned evilly.

“Any one go in or out?” Spike asked.

“No, sir!” They said in unison.
“Anyone tempted?” Spike asked.

“Huh?” one guard started to say. Before he could finish Spike had embedded a knife deep in his throat. The guard’s eyes bulged as he black blood gurgled and bubbled out.

“NO!” The other guard said quickly as his former partner fell dead to the floor.

“Right then,” Spike said with an easy smile as he retrieved his knife, cleaned it on the dead guard’s body, and hid once again within the folds of his coat. “Carry on.”

Spike straightened and strode forward into the exhibit. He made his way back to the tomb as quickly as he could. He all but shoved the lid off. The stench of Xander’s fear greeted him.

“Xan,” Spike softly whispered as he lifted Xander into a seated position. He quickly undid the gag.

“Please, master,” Xander whispered. “Please get me out of this thing.”

“Even if it meant you’d be paradin’ around starkers?”

“I don’t care!”

Spike smiled and reached into the folds of his coat. There was one more thing the mysteriously missing Lorne had made sure to include with the booty in the stables.

“My belt!” Xander whispered happily. He’d gladly walk through a casino of demons clad only in his chastity belt if it meant being rid of the "mummy" wrap. It wouldn’t be the first time gone out like that amongst the hordes.

Spike leaned forward and kissed Xander. Xander returned the favor. Then the vampire helped his pet out of the sleepsack. Xander resisted the urge to throw the hated thing in the corner.

“Leave it,” Spike warned as he helped Xander into his belt.

“I want to burn it,” Xander whispered.

“We may need it again,” Spike said.

“No…”

“Pet,” Spike said sadly. Xander sighed and laid his head against Spike’s forehead.

“Some days I think I hate you,” Xander whispered.

“Oi! That’s a good sign then,” Spike rumbled.

“And how do you figure that, Master Genius?”

“Prat!” Spike said as he pinched Xander’s ass.

“Ouch!” Xander hissed.

“Hate’s the flip side of love,” Spike explained as Xander rubbed his sore cheek.


“Now, one more thing before we head out,” Spike said as he nuzzled the spot on Xander’s neck where he’d bit earlier.
“What?”

“Gonna have to have another nip,” Spike mumbled against Xander’s skin.

“Why?” Xander squeaked.

“Gonna be suspicious if you have a bite on yer neck and my breath doesn’t smell like yer blood now won’t it?”

“I think you just want seconds!”

“That too,” Spike said just before his teeth sank gently into Xander’s tender flesh. Xander froze and then gasped. Desire flared through him as Spike teased and tasted the blood out of him. His cock began to try and swell within the confines of his belt. His skin flushed and he grabbed hold of Spike.

“Master,” Xander gasped.

Spike wrapped his arms around Xander as for the second time that night he suckled and laved his bite closed on Xander’s neck. Xander melted in his arms in a mix of desire and mild blood loss. Spike picked him up. Xander was bulkier then Spike, but the vampire was stronger. He reveled in being able to sweep his human off his feet.

“You’re a closet romantic,” Xander softly accused as Spike carried him out of the tomb.

“Oi! Not in the closet about anything, luv,” Spike retorted as they entered the casino, the vampire carrying Xander in his arms.

***

Xander walked into the Slayer’s End. He’d had a little time to recover from the vampire’s bites. He followed Spike through the garage entrance. The closer they had gotten to Spike’s casino the tenser Spike had gotten. The teasing demeanor from the tomb room had disappeared.

Spike was worried Lorne hadn’t been there in the stables to greet him. There could have been a good explanation for it, like an emergency at the casino, but Spike didn’t like it. It wasn’t according to plan. Spike got nervous when things didn’t go according to plan.

I remember how Spike’s plans used to go, Xander thought as he trailed his master up to the door that lead to the casino floor.

The crowd was quiet. Well they were at least subdued anyway. The slot machines whirred away. The dealers dealt cards and the roulette wheel spun but the demons mumbled and whispered.

“Oi! Wot’s goin’ on here!” Spike thundered. “Someone lose ta me big time?”

“Master Spike!” Lorne’s shaky voice rang out across the floor from near Spike’s office. The master vampire turned his head and looked at the Pylean demon. “May I speak to you…in your office?”

Spike frowned. He didn’t need the green demon’s empathic abilities to know something was wrong. The other demon was very afraid.

“Right! Ya spill my best whiskey again, Lorne?” Spike barked as he headed for his office. He fought the urge to tell Xander to go to the suite. He wanted Xander away from whatever was scaring Lorne, but he also wanted Xander where he could see him; where he could keep him safe.

Lorne was a pale green by the time Spike threaded his way through the quiet crowd to reach his
office door. Lorne slid his eyes once toward the door and then back to Spike. That was the only signal Spike had that the danger was in his office.

“Well, ya wanted me!” Spike said. “Ya got me! Let’s go in!”

Spike cranked his head to the right and to the left. He loosened himself up, ready to spring into battle the moment the door opened. Lorne opened the door and led the Master Vampire inside.

“SPIKEY!” Angelus voice rang out from inside.

Lorne stood to the side as Spike froze in the door way. Xander brushed up against his back.

Angelus was sitting behind Spike’s desk with his feet were propped up. He had a drink in one hand and a dead red head draped across his lap.

“Surprise!” Angelus shouted with a big grin.

TBC

Author's note:

Venom was/is the alien symbiote black liquid that was "new" suite for Spiderman for awhile that covered him from head to toe. Spidey eventually drove it off with the overwhelming sound of bells ringing in a bell tower. Its vulnerable to sound and flame.
Chapter 60

“Sire,” Spike replied as he tried to force his body into a semblance of relaxed submission. “This is a surprise.”

Spike heard Xander gasp from behind him. His pet’s heart rate shot up. It didn’t take a genius to figure out he had seen the dead body.

“DOWN, PET!” Spike barked. He wasn’t sure whether he should be relieved or scared at how quickly Xander obeyed.

“Surprised?” Angelus asked before taking a sip from his drink. “Probably not nearly as surprised as I was to find out you went and claimed ol’ Xander here!”

Spike studied the body across the older vampire’s lap. It wasn’t the remains of the witch.

“It was sudden,” Spike explained weakly. “I wanted to strike while the iron was hot..so to speak.”

“Still, Spikey, could have told me! Would have made a proper celebration of it! Might have had one of Wolfram’s mediums conjure up Rupert’s ghost. Whoo boy! Would have loved to see the look on that shade’s face! Imagine what Rupert would have thought of his beloved Donut Boy willingly taking your dick up the ass..pledging his soul to your demon.”

Spike could feel Xander trembling at his feet. He knew it was rage not fear. He had to get control of the situation again somehow.

“Well despite missing the actual event, it looks as if you’ve haven’t missed the chance to celebrate,” Spike said nodding his head toward the corpse still draped over Angelus's lap.

“This?” Angelus said as he idly began to stoke the dead girl’s hair.

“Yeah,” Spike said as he stepped fully into the office. He moved away from Xander and over to his private bar. “She one of mine?”

“Nah,” Angelus said with a smile as he motioned with his one glass for a refill. “This lovely creature, here? I picked her up at a little stand just outside of San Bernardino.”

“Hmmm,” Spike said as he filled Angelus's glass and then his own. He risked a glance at his, pet. Xander was still shaking, but his heartbeat wasn’t quite as wild.

“Yeah, you know how I never liked to travel outside LA anymore. Needed something to pass the time. She was a cute little thing. Eager to please. Wide eyed and innocent. Turned out to be quiet the cocksucker!”

Angelus laughed then downed his drink.

“Course I think that had to do with her somehow believing if she was good enough I might let her live.”

“Perish the thought,” Spike said dryly from around his glass. He watched as Lorne hovered at the door unsure whether to stay or to go. Spike honestly didn’t know what signal to send.

Angelus grabbed the dead girl by the back head of the head. He pulled her by her hair so Spike could clearly see her face.
“Looks a little like that Willow bitch did back in the Before, don’t you think?”

Xander’s heart fluttered.

“Fair resemblance,” Spike conceded.

“She was lovely when she broke. The light of hope just bled away from her eyes with her tears. For a rush job, it was a thing of beauty,” Angelus said studying the corpse’s still face.

“Ya were always a master craftsman, ‘Gelus,” Spike said as he finished his drink.

“Didn’t come all this way to talk about a used up juice bag, though,” Angelus said casting the corpse aside. ‘Came here to celebrate! Wish you congratulations! My Spike! All grown up with a Claimant of his own!”

“Sire,” Spike bowed his head with a deference he did NOT feel. He knew Xander was studying the corpse as it lay twisted in the corner where it fell. He knew his human was thinking of his friend. He knew this situation was far from being controlled.

Angelus stood up and walked in front of the desk. He studied Xander who still knelt in the doorway.

“Up, boy!” Angleus barked. “Let’s get a look at you!”

Xander looked at Spike.

“Ya heard my sire!” Spike snarled.

Xander fought the need to clench his fists. He stood up.

“Closer!” Angelus ordered. “You come to me. Not the other way around!”

Xander wasn’t sure how he did it, but somehow he found the will to beat back his natural defiance. He forced his feet to move. He ended up inches away from Angelus. He stared with a feeling beyond hatred at the vampire’s chest, right where he longed to drive a stake.

Angelus laughed. He could feel the enmity and the anger radiating off the human. It tickled his senses and stirred a hunger which was never satisfied in him.

“Bring back memories, Xan?” Angelus whispered. “Remember another time you tried to face me down?”

“And I remember how it turned out too,” Xander replied raising his eyes to stare into Angelus’s.

*DAMN the stupid stubborn GIT!* Spike thought as he growled and made a move for Xander. He stopped when Angelus held up his hand. The older vampire smiled and lean close to Xander.

“Ya only delayed me boy, that night at the hospital,” Angelus whispered in Xander’s ear. “I still ended up killin’ yer precious Buffy anyway.”

Spike bit the inside of his lip. Angelus was never more dangerous and unpredictable then when he’d fallen back into his Irish lilt.

Xander stiffened. His fists clenched. His body flushed with rage.

*Don’t do it, pet!* Spike screamed internally as he watched helplessly while Angelus tried to goad Xander into a mistake where the blond couldn’t protect him from the fallout.
“Every dog gets a lucky bite now and then,” Xander hissed between clenched teeth.

“I’m gonna kill ‘im!” Spike thought even as he was calculating how he was going to take Angelus down hard enough he could Xander out of the casino and out of the city before the older vampire could hurt him.

Angelus laughed and looked at Spike.

“Still has lots of that old Scoobie spirit!” Angelus cried.

“It amuses me,” Spike growled and sent a warning look to Xander.

“I have to admit, Spikey,” Angelus said. “I almost envy you!”

Spike took an unneeded breathe and bowed his head again. ‘Gelus was backing off, for now.

“Lorne! For Doyle’s sake just don’t stand there! Come in!” Angelus said as waved in a come hither manner to the green demon. The Pylean stiffened but entered the office. He shut the door behind him. Spike risked sending Lorne a supportive look. Lorne ignored him. The younger vampire didn’t blame him.

Angelus once again turned his attention back to Xander. Spike tried not to wince. His grandsire waved at him. Spike moved closer. He positioned himself behind Xander, this time he’d be ready to snatch his Pet away if his human’s mouth got them into any more trouble.

“Wearing a belt?” Angelus asked.

“I told ya. I don’t share.”

Angelus raked his eyes up and down Xander. He moved just a fraction closer. Spike couldn’t help but follow suit. Suddenly Xander felt himself sandwiched between two very powerful vampires. One who’d do anything to protect him, the other who’d do anything to break him. A tiny kernel of terror and self preservation began to take root under all his anger.

“Pity,” Angelus whispered.

Spike arched an eyebrow.

“I know the perfect way to welcome Xan here into the family,” Angelus continued.

“Sire?” Spike forced himself to ask. He had to keep playing the other vampire’s game.

“Picture it, Spikey,” Angelus voice dropped into a seductive murmur. Memories pulled at Spike. He hated Angelus still had so much influence over him. He hated there were parts of him that were like Pavlov’s dog; they would always respond to ‘Gelus.

“You’re lying back and Xander here’s riding your cock. He’s bouncing up and down…tight and hot. His hungry ass is milking you. Holding you tight.”

Spike tried to fight the pull. He didn’t want to think of the image of Xander riding him, not painted by Angelus’s words. It would taint it.

“You pull him down to lay on top of you,” Angelus continued.

Xander didn’t like where this was going. He wanted to step back into the safety of Spike’s arms.
“Don’t!” Spike said hoarsely. He didn’t want Xander touch him now. He didn’t want him to know the affect the other vampire could have on him.

Xander froze and Angelus chuckled.

“I slide up behind your boy. I see how his hole is so hungry. It’s so tight and I know it can take more.”

Xander’s eyes widened. The fear inside of him began to blossom.

“And I move in..my cock’s hard and slick. I grab you boy’s cheeks and I just push innnninside, Spike.”

NO! No fucking way that’s every going to happen, blood breath! Xander thought.

“And there we are Spike. One big happy family…”

One big fucking perverted, emphasis on the “fucking” and the “perverted,” family! Xander thought.

“You and I. Our cocks sliding against each other in Xander’s hot channel. We’re stretching it. We’re pounding it. He’s screaming and we’re moaning. Blood’s pumping and it feels sooo good!”

Spike could feel his fangs descend as he remembered. He remembered this “game.” Angelus and he had played it before and it had been good. His demon had loved it!

But NOT with Xander! His soul screamed.

“We could make it good for him if wanted to, William,” Angelus said around his own fangs. “He’s your Claimant. He’s part of the family. We can take turns hitting that spot inside him. We could drive him over the edge with the pain of being split in two and the pleasure of being pounded by two.”

Xander was cold. He was covered in a cooling sweat. Why wasn’t Spike putting a stop to this?

“Think of his hole filled with our cool spunk and his hot blood. Before he had a chance to come down from his high we could have him on his back. I could have my cock down his throat and you could have your tongue up his ass felching out all that heady cream…”

“STOP,” Spike snarled. He had to stop this. He didn’t want this image in his head. He didn’t want to play these games with Angelus and certainly not with Angelus and Xander.

It was the dark haired vampire’s turn to arch an eyebrow.

“I DON’T SHARE,” Spike ground out.

Xander released a breath he didn’t know he was holding. Angelus scowled for a moment before laughing. He looked at Spike and Xander then laughed some more. He moved away from the pair and over toward Lorne.

“Ohhh! Whoo! That was fun!” He said to Lorne, “Not like I really thought Spikey would go for it. Just had to ask though. Knew I should probably have brought Lindsey if I wanted to play that game.”

“Lindsey?” Spike asked trying to get control of himself. “You didn’t bring him?”

“Nah. His back hanging around in L.A.”
Xander didn’t want to think what that meant. Spike turned to look at his grandsire. The anger and need still hot inside him.

“Still hasn’t broken then, eh?” Spike asked. He was torn between satisfaction and regret for his barb when his saw the other vampire’s left eyebrow twitch. His barb had found its mark.

“He’s like a fine wine, he’ll break when it’s time,” Angelus said. “Tell you the truth, I haven’t had this much fun with breaking someone since...I don’t know...Dru?"

Spike drove his fingernails deep into his palms. Angelus smiled as he saw his return volley had found its mark.

Stake him, Spike! Xander thought. What are you waiting for? Why the games, the elaborate plots? Just fucking take him!

“Perhaps...” Lorne broke in trying to ease the tension building between the two vampires. The situation was getting very serious. They’d come too far for Spike to lose it now. They still needed Angelus in one piece, not a million little dust particles.

“Lorne!” Angleus turned his attention back to the Pylean. “Almost forgot!”

“Forgot?” Lorne asked.

Angelus gave another cool smile before explaining, “I wanted to thank you for doing such a fine job.”

“Job?”

“Gelus,” Spike growled. He had a bad feeling.

“I know your Spike’s right hand demon. I know Spike couldn’t run a city like this on his own! Spike doesn’t have a head for business...well unless that business involves crass violence and broken bones.”

Angelus laughed. Lorne paled.

“Sire...” Spike tried to say something but was stopped when Angelus raised a warning hand.

“See, I know Spike, Lorne,” Angelus purred. “I know he’s impetuous and impatient. He never thinks through and planning? Well, really not his forte! But you? You, Lorne? You are the cat’s meow!”

“Th..than..”

“Shhh, no need to thank me, Lorne,” Angelus said cutting off the demon. “Let me continue.”

Lorne nodded. He sent a look to Spike. Spike closed his eyes and snaked a hand around Xander’s waist.

Spike? Xander thought.

“So I don’t really blame Spike for not letting me know about ‘the Claiming,’” Angelus purred. “I’m sure he was all caught up in the moment. But you? You Lorne?”

Lorne looked at Angelus. The vampire smiled, shrugged and before Xander could fully register what happened a blade shot out from under Angelus’s coat sleeve. There was blur of moment, a swishing sound followed by sickening thud and then Lorne’s headless body fell forward spurting green blood
like a fountain.

“LORNE!” Xander screamed struggling to move toward the fallen demon. Spike held him firm.

“You, Lorne. You I blame for not letting me know,” Angelus told the corpse before turning to look back at Spike. The blond vampire struggled to keep control of Xander.

“DOWN! DOWN, XANDER!”

“YOU! YOU FUCKING BASTARD!” Xander screamed at Angelus as he fought Spike. “YOU KILLED HIM! YOU KILLED LORNE!”

“Seems puppy’s unhappy, Spike,” Angelus said as bent over to wipe his blade on Lorne’s dinner jacket.

“I’M GONNA DRIVE A STA…” Spike covered Xander’s mouth before he could finish issuing his threat. Angelus laughed then shrugged again. His blade disappeared.

“Think puppy needs to be put in the corner,” Angelus advised.

“Gimme me a moment?”

Angelus nodded as he poured another drink. Spike dragged Xander past Lorne’s body, out of the office and onto the casino floor.

“Get CLEM, NOW!” Spike barked. Both demons who worked and didn’t work for him scattered. Xander still fought and struggled.

“Xander,” Spike hissed. “STOP IT! STOP IT, right NOW!”

“MMPHP” Xander screamed from behind Spike’s hand.

Spike snarled and spun Xander around. He slammed him up against the wall. He slapped him once, twice and a third time across the face. Red angry marks flared across Xander’s cheeks as blood trickled from the corner of his mouth. He stared silently at Spike.


Xander still stared blankly at Spike.

“Pet..Xander,” Spike said. “It’s going ta be all right.”

“He killed Lorne,” Xander finally whispered back.

“I know,” Spike said.

“Why..why don’t you…” Spike gently put his hand over Xander’s mouth again.

“Shh,” Spike said softly.

“M..Master Spike?” Clem’s voice came tentatively from behind Spike. Spike closed his eyes and thanked whatever powers that be for the saggy skinned demon. Spike turned around to look at him.

“I need you to take Xander straight upstairs to the suite,” Spike ordered. “No one sees or talks to him but you or me. Got that?”
Clem nodded. He looked at Xander and his skin turned a little greyer.

“Stay with him until I call for you! You hear me Clem?”


Spike looked back at Xander’s red and now tear stained face. He cursed the Powers That Be for his fate.

“Have that damned feline pest brought up too,” Spike said as he moved back from his pet. He had to go back to the office. He knew he is grandsire wasn’t done with him.

“Spike?” Xander whispered.

“Go!” Spike ordered then left Xander to Clem. He walked back into the office.

***

Angelus had taken off his coat when Spike walked back into the office shutting the door behind him. He was still by Lorne’s body. Spike looked around for the demon’s head. The blood and spatter trail indicated it had probably rolled under the couch.

“Ya always were a bit of drama queen,” Spike said evenly as he stepped over Lorne’s body and moved towards his desk.

“Now ya didn’t think there wouldn’t be any consequences, did ya?” Angelus said in his brogue.

“I guess not, ya mick bastard,” Spike hissed.

Angelus laughed then watched as Spike went to sit in his chair.

“Wouldn’t get too comfortable if I were ya,” the older vampire said.

“Plans?” Spike asked pausing.

“Told ya, came ta celebrate!” Angelus said as he casually unzipped the front of his pants. His half hard cock easily slid out.

“Sire,” Spike said as he stood back up. “Where do ya want me? Bent over the desk with my kit down around my ankles?”

“Tsk..tsk, so borin’!” Angelus said as he bent down. He scooped up a handful of Lorne’s blood. He crooked his finger at Spike. “Where’s yer imagination, lad?”

“It was never quite as good as yers, sire,” Spike said as he approached Angelus.

“True,” Angelus said as he pointed to Spike’s crotch. Spike got busy opening his own fly. His cock wasn’t nearly as ready for fun as his grandsire’s.

“Poor wittle Spikey!” The other vampire exclaimed as he reached out his blood soaked hand to wrap it around Spike’s cock. “Not in the mood ta play?”

“Got things on my mind?” Spike hissed as Lorne’s cooling blood acted as slick. “Gonna have ta get a new floor manager.”

“Don’t ya be worrin’ about that none, ma boy,” Angelus said as he moved in close enough to wrap
his slick hand around both their cocks. “Got ya a weddin’ present. Lilah’s gonna be yer new manager.”

“Ahh,” Spike said as Angelus twisted just right. The combination of cocks and blood and Pavlov’s dog took over. Spike’s body was responding. “Ya shouldn’t have, sire.”

“Only the best fer you, Spike,” Angelus leaned in to whisper into Spike’s ear. Spike closed his eyes. He didn’t want to do this. He didn’t want to feel this. He had no choice.

“Ya know,” Angelus said. “One of these days ya are gonna share yer little lad with me.”

Spike shook his head. He didn’t dare trust his voice. Angelus giggled, “And I don’t mean the one I have in ma hand at the moment.”

Spike tried to growl. He tried to take himself outside of where he was. Yet, Angelus was talking about Xander!

“One of these days,” the other vampire crooned, “one of these days yer gonna have no choice and yer gonna give him ta me.”

Spike shook his head again. Angelus continued to stroke his maddening rhythm against their cool, slick cocks. The blood, the pressure and the other vampire were all having an effect. Spike was hard.

“Oh yeah, William,” Angelus whispered, “ya’ll give him ta me. I won’t break him. I will respect yer Claim, but ya know what I will do?”

Spike just shook his head. He didn’t want to hear this. He didn’t want to know this.

“I’ll take him. I’ll take him and he’ll fight me, Spike,” Angelus stressed each word in time with each stroke. Spike could feel the other vampires cock twitching against his own. “Ya know he will. No matter what ya tell him. He’ll fight me and that’s just the way I’ll want it.”

“Sire…”

“Shhh,” Angeuls murmured. “Ya really don’t want to stop me do ya? Ya don’t want ta interrupt our game?”

NO! Spike shook his head again fearing what the other vampire might do next. His grandsire was too damned unpredictable. And too predictable other times.

“So he’ll fight me,” Angelus said as he thumb smeared blood and cool pre-cum around their crowns. “He’ll bite, scratch, claw but in the end I’ll pin him down.”

Spike could see it. He didn’t want it to, but he could.

“He’ll try and buck me off and I’ll laugh,” Angelus said. He changed his rhythm. Spike gasped. He was sinking into palm, velvet skin, thumb, slick blood and ugly, foul words.

“I’ll tear his pants down off his arse and he’ll scream! He won’t scream in fear though. Not our Xander. Na, our boy’ll only scream in rage, won’t he, Spike?”

Spike nodded. He could see it. He could see it as surely as he could feel the slide of Angelus cock against his own.

“I’ll push his head down. I’ll drive my knees between his own,” Angelus continued. He squeezed harder now. Spike couldn’t help but pump into the grasp. Angelus pumped back and a lightening
began to build at the base of Spike’s spine.

“I’ll use my knees to force his wide. His cheeks’ll part and I’ll see the prize…his dusky pucker. He’ll be cursin’ me. He’ll be promisin’ ta kill me and then I’ll just dive…right….in!”

NO! Spike shook his. He growled around his fangs. He opened his eyes and stared at his sire.

“I’ll pound ‘im until I make ‘im bleed, Spike!” Angelus cried as he began to really milk their cocks. There was no more soft seduction. No more steady build up. Just the incessant need to pull an orgasm out of both of them.

“NO!” Spike cried as he felt his balls tighten.

“Yes,” Angelus cried. “Yes..and ya’ll make it happen Spike. You’ll give him to me. It’ll happen someday. Cuz someday it’ll be safer fer him ta be with me than with YOU!”

“NOOOO!” Spike cried as his body spilt to the image of Xander bent and bleeding under Angelus.

“YESSSSSS!” sighed Angelus as he came over his blood soaked hand and Spike’s cock. “YESS!”

“No,” Spike sighed as his cock twitched in Angelus’s hand. It spurted the last of its spill then lay quiet while Angelus’s cock still pumped to its finish.

“Remember this,” Angelus whispered into Spike’s ear, “the next time ya try ta keep secrets from me!”

***

Time moved funny after that for Spike. He knew Angelus had left him then. He knew his grandsire had done up his pants, picked up his coat and then just left. He remembered doing up his own pants. He even remembered calling Clem.

He didn’t really recall what he’d said when the floppy eared demon had shown up. He’d remembered the demon’s wild emotions when he’d seen Lorne’s body. Spike had remembered growling at Clem. He couldn’t take it. He just couldn’t deal with any of it.

He knew he’d given Clem very specific orders about what to do with Lorne’s body. He couldn’t remember why, but it was important how Lorne was treated. He remembered to tell Lorne…Clem no one was to know.

Then somehow Spike was in the suite. He was just standing in the suite. He didn’t know how long he’d been standing there. He didn’t remember getting there. He was just there.

“…please, Spike,” Xander was softly whispering to him. “You’re starting to scare me blondie.”

Spike crooked his head and looked at Xander. He blinked. My Xander doesn’t get afraid, Spike thought. He’s a bloody white knight. He’s Ivanhoe.

“Spike?” Xander called softly.

“Xander?”

“Yeah, the one and only. The world as we know it couldn’t survive more,” Xander said with a weak smile.

It was the smile that did it. Xander’s ability to find humor in the darkest of places broke Spike. He
crumpled to his knees.

“SPIKE!” Xander screamed and suddenly he was there. He was real and he was warm. His arms wrapped around the vampire. Spike lay his head on Xander’s shoulder. He shook.

“Spike! Spike! Please! What’s wrong fang face? You gotta tell me!”

Spike shook his head. How could he tell Xander? How could he tell him the truth? That’s what shattered Spike, the truth. Angelus had painted a picture. He promised what would happen. Spike wouldn’t be able to stop it. He had to keep secrets. Angelus would find out. Angelus…

“XANDER!” Spike cried and pulled his human tighter to him.

“Spike, please, tell me,” Xander whispered.

“I can’t…”

“What do you mean you can’t? You’re Spike, the ‘Big Bad,’ you can do anything,” Xander whispered against the vampire’s ear. He’d never seen the blond man like this before. Whatever Angelus had done, it had hurt the vampire deeply.

“I’m gonna lose you,” Spike whispered.

Lose me? Xander thought.

“I’m not a penny, Spike,” Xander said. “I’m pretty difficult to lose. Just ask my parents. They tried for years. No matter what mall or grocery store they left me in..I still managed to find my way back home.”

Spike hugged Xander tighter. Some part of him wanted to go out and torture Xander’s parents. Some part of him wanted to laugh. Most of him just wanted to hold his, pet.

“C’mon Big Bad,” Xander whispered.

“He…he..Angelus,” Spike said softly against Xander’s skin.

“He what?” Xander asked with a chill going through his body.

When Spike had first walked into the suite after summoning Clem away, Xander had been furious. He’d wanted an explanation and he’d wanted it now! Then he’d grown cold. Spike had just stood there. He’d just stood staring into the room absently. Green blood stained the front of his pants and when Xander had gotten closer to him he could smell the musky scent of sex.

He knew Angelus and Spike had done something. He knew better than anyone a body can do a lot when the spirit isn’t exactly willing. Xander didn’t know what he wanted Angelus in ashes for more, Buffy’s death, Lorne’s death or Spike’s rape.

“Spike?”

“He.. said I’d,” Spike pulled back and looked into Xander’s eyes, “Oh , pet, I can’t stop! I can’t!”

“Stop what?”

“The secrets,” Spike whispered.

“Your plans?”
Spike nodded.

“And…”

“And…and…he said…he promised…if he found out I had more,” Spike looked at Xander with tortured blue eyes, “he’d make me give you to him!”

Xander stared at Spike for a moment. He couldn’t imagine all that had happened in Spike’s office. He didn’t have Angelus’s depraved mind. Yet, he knew one thing. In one shattering moment, he’d made Spike believe a truth that would never happen.

“That’s what he said, huh?” Xander asked with soft smile as he began to stroke a hand gently through Spike’s hair.

“Xan…” Spike tried to pull away. Xander held him firm.

“Is that what Angelus said? He said you’d give me to him?”

“It would be safer for you to be with…him…than m…me,” Spike admitted. He silently pleaded with the Powers not to make him paint a picture for Xander. Not to make him be the one to make Xander understand how manipulative Angelus could be. Spike, knew. Spike knew Angelus could make it so the choice would be so damned easy!

Xander wrapped both arms tight around the vampire. He pulled him close. What he felt for Angelus was so beyond hate! What he felt for Spike…well he just didn’t know yet. What he did know was that he cared. He cared deeply and it hurt. It hurt that Spike was shattered at the thought he might betray Xander. Spike thought he might betray Xander to a monster because it was the best thing for him, even though it would be the worst thing. Angelus had hit Spike where it hurt, and where it hurt was Xander!

The older vampire could go to a lower hell! No way would Xander be an instrument of torture against Spike!

He leaned his mouth very close to Spike’s ear and he whispered, “You know old nutty forgot one thing, dontchya?”

Spike went very still. He clung to Xander as his mind raced. He knew Angelus better than anyone. There wasn’t anything he’d forgotten.

“Pet…”

“He forgot about me,” Xander whispered fiercely.

Spike pulled back and looked at his pet. He grabbed Xander’s shoulders. He stared his human in the eye. Xander smiled his old familiar smile. It was the smile Spike knew from the days of Before when Xander would go into battle side by side with Buffy with only a stake in hand. Xander didn’t have magic, wits or super strength on his side. He only had his undying loyalty and his sense of right and wrong to see him through.

“I won’t let you give me to him, Spike.”

“Xander…”

“Do you hear me? Let it soak into that peroxide addled brain of yours; I won’t let Angelus use me to HURT you! I promise, you can say the words. You can do the deed, but no way, Spike! No way
will I let you give me to that bastard! Do you hear me?"

Spike stared at Xander for a moment. Angelus’s words and Xander’s collided in his brain. He continued to stare for a moment. Xander growled. He leaned forward and kissed Spike ever so sweetly. The kiss was brief. It was just a caress of lips upon lips. Then Xander sat back and stared at Spike.


“Oi! Course I heard, ya! ‘M a vampire! Got super hearing,” he finally said.

Xander rolled his eyes even as relief began to flood his body. His vampire was coming back from whatever brink Angelus had pushed him. Spike pulled them both to their feet and began to tug on Xander.

“Now where are we going Master Kimosabe?”

“Need a shower, pet,” Spike said tiredly, “and you make a good back scrubber.”

Xander smiled. He’d be all too happy to scrub Angelus's touch and filth away from Spike! There would be time to talk later, about Lorne and other things. Right now, Spike needed him and he needed to take care of Spike.

“Rub a dub dub,” Xander said as he followed Spike into the bedroom.

TBC
Chapter 61

Spike was far from back to normal as they showered. He was better than when he’d entered the suite. He was on the path back, but as Xander traced Spike’s flesh with his soapy hands, he could feel the tremors which still rocked through the vampire’s body. Xander tried to make each sudsy stroke a comforting caress. He tried to gentle the tortured soul and demon inside the lean man.

When Xander tried to clean Spike’s bloodied penis, the vampire growled and shoved the human’s hands away. Instead, the vampire angrily scrubbed at the limp appendage until Xander winced in empathy at the pain it must be causing the other man.

“Shhh,” Xander whispered to Spike, “you don’t need to hurt yourself.”

Spike growled again. Xander placed a light kiss between Spike’s shoulder blades.

“Please, master,” Xander said. A shudder tore through Spike. He stopped his jerky motions and turned around. He wrapped his arms around Xander then pulled them both under the hot, heavy spray of the shower.

Xander buried his face under the vampire’s chin as the water poured down around them. He let Spike hold them as the soap and filth rinsed free of their bodies. He continued to remain passive in the vampire’s arms even as the hot water turned to cool. Only when Xander began to tremble from the affects of the cold water did Spike move.

“Sorry, pet,” he whispered as he turned around to shut off the water.

“Is, OK,” Xander managed to say past slightly chattering teeth, “not m.my..first..c..cold shower.”

Spike spun back around. He stared at his pet. Xander smiled and a small laugh escaped the vampire.

“I drive ya ta distraction, eh?”

“Who s..says..it’s all a..about you, Master F..Full of H..Himself?”

Spike’s jaw dropped for a moment then he snarled. He swept Xander up and threw him over his shoulder. He swatted his ass as he carried him from the bedroom. Xander bit back a giggle of relief and amusement.

“You better not be taking a shower over anyone but me, pet!” Spike snapped.

“I d..don’t know. L..lot of s..sexy demons in V..Vegas,” Xander quipped.

“WHO?” Spike roared as he dropped Xander on their bed. The vampire’s shock, grief, shame and anger were forgotten as his demon howled for the blood of any demons who’d caught his Pet’s fancy.

“Well, I didn’t catch their names!” Xander said as he lay on his back and tucked his hands under his head. His teeth were no longer chattering. “It's not like we were ever introduced!”

“You, can bloody well tell me what they look like!” Spike snarled as he crawled up on top of the bed and Xander.

“Well…” Xander stalled as he looked into Spike’s golden eyes.
“Pet!” Spike barked.

“Hmmm well one’s pretty lean. Really muscular, but not bulky. He moves fluidly like he’s just been poured into his skin…”

“You’ve seen him without his kit?” Spike growled.

Xander waggled his eyebrows.

“Gonna rip his head off!” Spike spat. “Won’t be movin’ too fluidly after that now will ‘e, pet?”

Xander shrugged.

“What else!”

“Well, he’s got this smoky voice. Just slides down your spine…”

“I’ll rip his throat out!”

“His eyes…they almost seem to shine with a light of their own. They’re intense. Can catch you in their gaze like a snake.”

“Ever hear of Riki Ticki Tavi, pet?”

“He’s a cute mongoose!” Xander cried. “Oooh! I loved the cartoon! You don’t happen to have that DVD hanging around anywhere do you, Spike?”

“He was a snake killer!” Spike growled trying to make his point.

“Oh!” Xander said softly.

“Where is he, Pet?” Spike demanded.

“Hmm?” Xander asked staring up into the full fanged face of his vampire.

“Where’s this demon you’ve been talking about?”

“In Vegas,” Xander replied with a smile.

“XANDER!” Spike roared leaning over his prone pet and shoving his face close to Xander’s. “Now is not the time to play games!”

“I disagree, master,” Xander said as he quickly pulled his hands out from underneath his head to bury them in Spike’s hair. “Now’s the perfect time.”

“Pe…”

Spike’s growl was cut short as Xander claimed his master’s mouth in a searing kiss. It was gentle but insistent. The vampire groaned and Xander snaked his tongue out to caress his master’s fangs. It was the trigger Spike needed. In less than the blink of an eye the kiss changed from Xander kissing his master to his master kissing him.

Xander sighed in satisfaction as Spike lay claim to his mouth. He relaxed. He let Spike take what he needed. He let himself fall submissive. The vampire deepened the kiss. He growled and angrily ravaged Xander’s mouth. The human groaned and welcomed the rough assault.
Spike took his time. He needed to show Xander who was his master. He needed to drive any desire for anyone else from Xander’s mind. He ground his body against Xander. He gripped Xander’s neck and shoulders until he knew there’d be bruises in the shape of his fingers. He bit the inside of Xander’s lips until there was blood then he lapped the sweet fluid up.

Xander moaned as Spike stepped up his assault. He could smell Xander’s pheromones rolling off him but the vampire ignored them. This wasn’t about sex, this was about ownership. This was about reminding Xander to whom he belonged.

A satisfying scream of bliss and pain tore through the air as Spike bit into Xander’s unpierced nipple. More blood flowed. Spike lapped at it. Pleasure and pain flared in that one spot on Xander’s chest. His whole body rocked against Spike.

“Master!” Xander finally managed to find the ability to speak. “Master please!”

“You belong only to me!” Spike barked as snaked his tongue down towards his pet’s belly button.

“YES! Yes master!”

“You will tell me who this demon is!” Spike order as he let his fangs tear the flesh around the sensitive spot on Xander’s abdomen. “You will tell me where he is!”

“You!” Xander managed to pant. “YOU! Here!”

“What?” Spike growled. He lifted his head and stared at his pet. Xander’s eyes betrayed a lot of what his pet was thinking and feeling. Among the swirling mix the vampire could find no signs of deception.

“Pet?”

“Ok. Maybe I lied,” Xander whispered. “Maybe it is you, Master Full of Himself…Master fluid muscles..smoky voice…”

“Intense eyes, eh?” Spike said suddenly smiling as bright understanding cleared away the fog of jealousy.

Xander rolled his eyes. Spike laughed. It was a real laugh; one full of love and understanding. Once again, the human had brought him back from a dark place where he had wandered when they’d showered. Xander reached up hand and stroked the vampire’s face.

“You think you can sleep now?” Xander asked. He looked to the windows. It was nearly noon.

Spike smiled and shook his head. He looked at the human once again.

“Almost,” he said, “there’s a matter of punishment though.”

“Punishment?” Xander groaned.

“You did lie to me, pet,” Spike said with mock seriousness.

“But…” Xander began to argue. Didn’t Spike understand what the deception had been about?

“Shhh,” Spike softly ordered, “just lie still.”

Xander sighed and did as he was told. Then Spike proceeded to “punish” Xander. For the next hour there was no place the vampire did not touch or kiss the human. The gentle caresses weren’t about
seduction. They weren’t about ownership.

Spike simply touched Xander for connection. He simply touched the human to remind themselves they were both still there. They were both in one piece and that Angelus hadn’t won. Xander melted. He’d never felt so relaxed. Somehow he felt safe and the horrors of the evening faded. He closed his eyes then drifted in the feeling of the vampire just worshiping him with touch. When Spike was done, Xander was practically lulled asleep by the vampire’s soft ministrations.

Still, Xander remembered to kiss Spike’s hands. He remembered to slur a thick and almost unintelligible, “Thank you.”

Then Spike had curled up around Xander. He snuggled as close to the human as he possibly could. As the vampire finally succumbed to sleep he whispered, “Please Xander, please pet, remember your promise.”

The sleeping vampire didn’t hear Xander’s unconscious mumble, “I will, Spike. I will, master.

***

Xander’s leg was trapped! He couldn’t move it! There was a soft, warm, but immoveable weight keeping him from stretching his leg. He panicked!

“SPIKE!” Xander cried and sat up. A pair of green eyes blinked balefully at him from behind a stripped tail. Ante was curled up in a tight ball by Xander’s leg. Xander blushed. He’d been trapped all right. He’d been trapped by a sleeping kitten!

“Sorry about that, Ante,” Xander said as he reached down to scratch behind the kitten’s ears. A soft purring sound indicated all was forgiven. The green eyes started to disappear behind grey furry eyelids when the door flew open. The eyes opened and the head shot up to swivel around to look at the door.

“Claimant Xander?” Clem’s voice came from the doorway.

“Clem?” Xander looked around. Spike was gone. The light outside the windows showed it was only late afternoon. “Where’s Sp..Master Spike?”

“He had some early business to attend to,” Clem said. “He asked that Ante and I stay with you.”

“Is he..was..I mean…” Xander fumbled for the right words. He needed to know if Spike was OK. He needed to know if Angelus was still in town. He needed to know what Spike was going to do without Lorne.

“Xa..Claimant Xander, Master Spike just had to meet with his new floor manager,” Clem said softly.

“New floor manager?” Xander asked! *Lorne’s body hasn’t even cooled and he’s replaced him!* Xander thought angrily.

“She arrived shortly after Master Angelus left,” Clem said softly.

“She?”

“Ms. Morgan,” Clem answered. “Master Angelus has left her..given her services to Master Spike as Claiming gift. She’s to take over as Master Spike’s new floor manager.”

*Damn him!* Xander thought as he pictured Angelus’s laughing face. The vampire meant to leave his
mark beyond just killing Lorne.

Xander threw back the covers. Ante gave out a protest “Meow” as they fell on his head.

“Oops! Sorry about that,” Xander said quickly uncovering the affronted kitten. Ante glared and jumped off the bed. He hobbled out to the front room Xander flushed at the seeing the kitten’s limp.

“Don’t let him milk that injury too much, Claimant Xander,” Clem said seeing the guilt on Xander’s face. “The Pocklas say he is healing very nicely. He’s just trying to see how much tuna he can get out of the situation.”

Xander smiled, “Well as far as I’m concerned, as much as he wants.”

“You’ll create a monster!” Clem said in horror.

“Wouldn’t be the first one in this town,” Xander quipped as he headed for the bathroom. How was Spike going to deal with Lilah as his floor manager? How could his plans move forward with Angelus’s own personal spy underfoot? He wondered.

***

“And I want this carpet replaced by morning,” Spike spat another order out at his new manager as he circled his office.

“Morn..?”

“Ya don’t think yer up ta the task, tart?” Spike barked.

“Sp..Master Spike,” Lilah quickly corrected her mistake, “I have barely begun to settle in let alone get to know the resources at my disposal.”

“Not my problem.”

“I am sure you would like…”

“Dripping with the excuses already?” Spike asked. Lilah stared at the vampire. She dug her well manicured nails into her palm until there were half moons. Spike was putting her on a short leash and seeing if she would prance. She wasn’t a bitch in heat to be put on parade! She was on track for a partnership!

“Your carpet will be replaced,” Lilah finally ground out. Spike arched an eyebrow. “Your carpet will be replaced, Master Spike.”

The phone rang interrupting Spike’s moment to enjoy Lilah’s capitulation. They both reached for the phone on Spike’s desk. The vampire growled and Lilah stepped back. Spike picked up the phone.

“Yeah!”

There was a pause as the vampire listened to the voice on the other end. Lilah watched the call with interest.

“Oi! Eggs I guess! Ask the kitchen what Lorne used ta order for, Xan,” Spike snapped.

Lilah sighed. The call was obviously about Xander. She turned her back on Spike and began to take mental measurements of the office floor. She noted the shade of the large green stain left by Lorne’s blood. If she could, she’d see to it Spike’s new carpet was all that same color.
While Lilah’s back was turned to him, Spike palmed the wooden box with Doyle’s eyes off his desk. He deposited it safe within in the folds of his jacket. Clem nattered on about Ante and his monstrous appetite for tuna.

“Right, well give it to him if that’s what he wants!” growled Spike. What did he care what the kitten ate? “Mean time, see Xander’s ready fer company. Bringing Lilah up in a few.”

Lilah spun around at the sound of her name. She frowned at Spike. The blond vampire smiled as he hung up the phone.

“Sp..Master Spike we have a business to ru…”

“Xander is part of my business!” Spike barked.

“Xan…”

Spike was across the desk with his hands around Lilah’s throat before she could finish saying Xander’s name.

“CLAIMANT Xander,” Spike corrected here. Lilah swallowed. She blinked slowly at Spike.

“Claimant Xander,” she began again, “is pleasure, not business.”

“Pleasure, is the business of Vegas,” Spike crooned as he stepped back and released Lilah. He made a show of wiping his hand against his pants.

“Your pleasure is not…”

Spike let loose a loud bark of laughter.

“Ya really are nuthin’ but a piece of skirt are ya?” Spike said. Lilah bristled. “Angelus just must be keepin’ ya around until he tires of puttin’ it to his knob-jockey, Lindsey! Then it’s wham! Bam! Thank you Lilah! And he’s gonna be switchin’ over ta put it to his own personal welly-top!”

Lilah flushed. She reminded herself of her purpose in a Vegas and with whom she was dealing.

“Master Angelus has greater confidence in my ski…”

“Oh I’m sure he does, ducky, I’m sure he does,” Spike purred. “But let me enlighten you on what ya need to know about doing this job beyond just spyin’ for my grandsire.”

Lilah hissed.

“Part of the draw to Slayer’s End and ta Vegas is me!” Spike explained. “It’s a dangerous city ruled by vampire with a dangerous reputation. Demons and the like come here ta get a glimpse of me, ta tangle with me or ta even challenge me. Some wanna know if the rumors are true. Other’s just want to see me as a way to get close ta the great Angelus himself without ever havin’ ta put themselves at that great a risk.”

“You have a rather high opinion…”

“I have the facts! I know this city. I know the clientele. I know they want blood. Mine if they can get it or ta see me spill blood if they can’t. They like ta watch me toy with Xander and they like ta watch me kill over ‘im.”

Lilah tried to keep her doubts of Spike’s on estimations from showing. She schooled her features to hide her contemptuous feelings.
“My pleasure...my pain...is their pleasure and pain, ducks,” Spike said. “Now, let’s go tour the floor again before we see Xander.”

***

Xander had just settled back down on his pillow by Spike’s chair when the suite door opened. He looked up to see Spike enter the room followed leisurely by Lilah. Bile and bits of scrambled eggs gathered in the back of his throat.

“Pet,” Spike called. Xander swallowed back the bitter ick while rising gracefully to his feet. His was naked except for his body jewelry sans his penis ring. He had discovered the vampire liked to be the one to put that on and take it off. Plus, owing to his new foreskin it usually was most comfortable when he was hard and his skin pulled back.

“Master,” Xander answered as he moved to kneel in front of Spike. Lilah was here. Now, was not the time to ask Spike questions. Now was the time to be a “good pet.”

“You remember, Lilah?” Spike asked. Xander nodded.

“Xan...” Lilah began only to find herself slammed up against a wall with Spike’s hand wrapped tightly around her throat.

“Are you just terminally stupid ya tart or are ya gaggin’ ta taste the hot end of a whip in front of the house?”

“You wouldn’t dare,” Lilah managed to hiss back before Spike cut off her air completely. Her eyes bulged as she struggled.

“Oh I would, ducks, I would,” Spike purred as Lilah movements became sluggish and uncoordinated. Then he released his hold. She crumpled to the floor as she sucked in big gulps of air. The vampire made a motion and Clem ran for the kitchenette.

Lilah had managed to get to her feet by the time Clem came over with a glass of water. He held it out to her. She smacked it away.

“Right then,” Spike said as he waved Clem back. The demon stepped back. “Do I have yer attention, Lilah?”

The woman was rubbing her throat. Her eyes were fixed on Spike.

“My pet, is not 'Xander' to you, he is Claimant Xander! Do ya understand?”

“Sp...” Lilah tried to say before once again finding a hand on her throat. There was no pressure, just a promise.

“Master Spike,” she whispered. “I...”

“YOU,” Spike sneered, “are just a human, Lilah. Yer a slave. Yer services have been bought and paid for by Angelus. Those services might give ya some status, but not like my pet here.”

Xander bit the inside of his lip to keep from smiling. It looked like the wheel of Karma was about to roll over Lilah Morgan and he couldn’t find it in himself to feel the slightest bit sorry for her.

“I am not a slave. I am...”

“Yer not a Claimant either,” growled Spike. “Yer just a human. Yer meat. Yer a hole. Yer nuthin!”
“I am with Wolfr…”

“Yer a solicitor who thinks she’s got power cuz of the name on her business card. Xander here, he’s mine! He’s not just a pet or a slave, but he’s bound to my demon which makes him part of me… which makes him part of the line of Aurelius…part of Angelus’s line!”

“That…”

“That means, ducks, he’ll never be on his knees ta you! You’ll never address him as anything other than Claimant Xander and you’ll treat him with the respect he deserves!”

Spike stepped back from the woman. He looked at Xander. His pet kept his features perfectly neutral, but his heartbeat was fast.

“Up!” Spike barked. Xander stood up. “Got some new orders fer ya pet.”

Xander nodded.

“If this bitch ever forgets ta call ya by yer proper title..if she just ever calls ya Xander, yer ta tell me immediately! Understand.”

Xander nodded again.

“If she treats ya with less respect than your companion demon, Clem, does, yer ta tell me immediately, yeah?”

“Yes, Master,” Xander said.

“You think Angelus won’t hear about this?” Lilah hissed. Spike spun back around. He reached into his jacket and pulled out a cell phone. He held it out to her.

“Call him!”

“What?”

“Call him. You think ‘Gelus is really gonna care?”

“I am here to see…”

“We both know why yer here, ducky. Yer a message. Yer a point. Angelus is watchin’ me. He wants me ta be a good boy.”

“I don’t just represent Angelus but Wolfram and Hart…”

Spike laughed. He put his whole body into the laugh. He rocked forward and backward with his laughter.

“Ya think my sire cares two shakes about Wolfram and Hart?”

“They are a very powerful firm with interests…”

“And you think Angelus really cares? It’s a game ya daft tart! He plays along and dances ta yer bloody partners’s tunes because it *amuses* him! Nuthin’ else!”

“Master Spike…”
“Ya really think he cares? He calls no one master! He dances to no one else’s tune but his own! You and yer stupid firm are just one more set of pawns for him. One more set of pieces for him to set up and use! Sacrifice or just sweep off the board if he wants ta! Ask yer friend Lindsey how much …”

“Lindsey had questionable loyalties,” Lilah said.

“If that’s wot let’s ya sleep night, ducks,” Spike said as he suddenly sidled up next to Lilah. “Ya know though, when ‘Gelus does grow tired of ya. When he wants ta change the game up, I think I’ll ask him fer ya.”

Lilah looked a Spike. She couldn’t quite keep the fear off her face.

“After all, he did give ya ta me as a pressie,” Spike purred. “And somehow, I think ya’ll break too quickly…too easily for the old paddy. Na, I think I’ll take ya. Think I’ll make sure ya know exactly what the difference is between bein’ a human and bein’ a Claimant is.”

“That will never happen,” Lilah said forcing herself to believe it.

“Tell me, Lilah,” Spike crooned. “Who do ya think is more likely ta sell ya out to the beasties? Angelus or the Senior Partners? Ya gotta know by now that what’s good fer them isn’t always good fer you.”

Lilah stiffened. Her words were caught in her throat. Her mind raced for an answer but no coherent thought formed.

Spike laughed then shoved her away from him.

“Get out! I’ll meet ya downstairs in ten!”

The vampire enjoyed the smell of the lawyers fear mixed with the expensive smell of her perfume as she practically fled the suite. He smiled. He had no doubt she’d call Angelus. He had no doubt his sire would love the sound of her terror.

“Master Spike?” Xander asked.

“Pet!” Spike said as he turned around and quickly hugged his human to him. His pet’s heartbeat was still fast. “You OK?”

“That was intense! I mean that was Jack Nicholson Joker intense!” Xander laughed.


“Have both of ya gone daft?”

“Just ‘Batty,’” Xander said which sent Clem into a full on chortle.

“Oi! I don’t have time for a pair of silly buggers!” Spike barked trying to hide his amusement. “Clem!”

The grey demon scurried over to Spike. The laughter fled from his face.

“Yer gonna take Xander out today,” Spike ordered. “Gonna take him swimin’.”

Xander went from amusement to fear.

“Master?”
“Wading, really,” Spike said softly. “I need you outside this afternoon. Away from the floor ..away from Lilah and me.”

Clem nodded. Xander once again swallowed bile and egg. Spike reached into his pocket and pulled out the box from his office.

“While yer out, I need you ta deliver this,” Spike said to Xander. The human looked at the vampire in confusion.

“I promised delivery on this,” Spike said.

Xander’s made a silent “OH” with his lips as he finally understood. The box must contain the Seer’s eyes Spike had promised to get for Wesley.

“But..I mean how..”

“Yer clever, pet,” Spike said as he leaned over to give Xander a kiss. “I’m sure you’ll think of something.”

“Master Spike?” Clem asked. “What…”

“Just stick with Xander, Clem,” Spike said. “Keep him safe, and when he’s ready bring him back to me.”

Clem nodded. He understood just enough to get that he didn’t want to understand anymore.

Spike kissed Xander again then left. Xander looked at Clem. Clem looked at Xander. Ante crawled out from under Spike’s chair and looked at both of them. He meowed.

“Right! Tuna!” Clem said

TBC

Author's notes:

Rikki Tikki-Tavi is one of my favorite Kipling stories and was made into a great cartoon in the 70s.
“You sure Angelus has left town?” Xander asked Clem as he stared at the shimmering pool of water sparkling in the later afternoon sun.

“Very sure, Claimant Xander,” Clem reassured the human.

“Cuz another round with Deadboy is looking real good right about now,” Xander said clenching his hands in a tight ball in front of him.

“Xan…you don’t mean that,” Clem said softly as he laid a gentle hand on the young man’s bare shoulder.

“Oh, I do! I really do. Do not doubt the Xan-man’s preferences for mind-numbing terror. Water’s here,” Xander said as he raised his right hand above his head.

“Captain Low Brow with the lucky charms accent is here,” Xander raised his left hand so it was about an inch below his right hand.

“Claimant Xander, I won’t let anything happen to you,” Clem said.

Xander sighed as he dropped his arms. He looked back over his shoulder and smiled at the floppy skin demon.

“I know,” he said.

“Master Spike would skin and make a new set of luggage out of me.”

“I wouldn’t let him.”

The grey demon smiled. “I don’t doubt that, Claimant Xander.”

Xander smiled again then turned back to face the water. Memories of “the Tank” pressed in on him. Despite the desert sun and the dry heat his skin felt cold. He took several deep breaths.

“Try thinking about how you are going to deliver the box for Master Spike,” Clem suggested.

“Well that is definitely something to think about,” Xander replied as he forced himself to take the first steps into the pool.

There was an odd moment of where his mind and memories warred. Xander remembered a time when water wasn’t terrifying. He remembered swimming in high school. He even remembered the last time he’d come to this pool with Clem.

Yet, he also remembered all the times he’d drowned. He remembered all the times he struggled alone in the dark against liquid in the tank. He remembered how he’d fought to hold on to every precious second of oxygen in his lungs until his body’s natural need to breathe overwhelmed his mind and fear. He remembered inhaling thick liquid, choking and hurting! He remembered wondering if this would be the time he really died.

Xander forced himself to stumble forward. He forced himself to feel the water rise higher on his skin. He forced himself to note all the ways in which the pool was not the tank.

He was not alone! It wasn’t dark. The water was just pool water not some strange thick liquid that
would keep him floating in the dark. He couldn’t take the water into his lungs and breathe it.

He took a few more steps and the water was above his belt. He swallowed. Xander looked around. Realization slammed through him with the thundering pulse of his heartbeat. He wasn’t in the Tank! He was not in the Tank!

He was Spike’s Claimant not a bottle. He was no longer still! He was no longer quiet.

Things had changed. He had changed. It was time for this to change.

Xander leaned his head back and looked at the sky. Suddenly, despite his fear, he wanted more. He needed more! He felt something instinctual pull at him and he knew either he was going completely mental, about to do something monumentally stupid on the Xander scale of stupid or all of the above. Still, he took a deep breath and continued to move.

He could see. He could hear more than just his heartbeat. He could smell the exhaust of the city, the chlorine in the pool and the smell of old print he associated with Clem. The water was up past his navel now.

“You can stop now if you want, Claimant Xander,” Clem said.

NO! Xander thought as he clenched his hands into fists and kept walking.

“XANDER!” Clem yelled as he crashed through the water to be at his friend’s side. Xander didn’t stop walking. “C’mon! What are you doing?”

“S..swimming,” Xander ground out as he let the memories of the fun parts of being on the Sunnydale swim team break past his more recent and darker memories.

“But Master Spike said you didn’t have to! He meant you only had to go wading!”

“Not about him,” Xander said as he could remember the feel of a spandex Speedo across his groin instead of his metal belt. “It’s about me.”

“But…” Clem tried to say before Xander did the impossible. He raised his long arms above his hands, gave a little jump and dove forward submerging in entire body in the water!

For one impossible moment Xander became agonizingly aware of absolutely everything. He was aware of how his entire lizard brain was in complete panic mode. He could hear Clem screaming his name. He could feel the water swallowing every inch of his skin.

He could feel himself beginning to sink. He knew his options. He could sputter, tuck his feet under him and stand up, Clem would help him back to the side of the pool. He could dry off and he could forget about this insanity. Or, he could force his arms and legs to move. He could find that simple rhythm of stroke, stroke, breathe, stroke, stroke while kicking.

“Huh,” Clem said as he watched Xander’s body suddenly shoot through the water. Then he smiled wide as he realized, Xander was swimming! Xander was really swimming!

***

“My arms feel like jelly!” Xander complained as rolled on to his stomach.

“No sympathy, Claimant Xander,” Clem said as he dug another Ho Ho out of his bag.

“Aw c’mon!” Xander said.
“You shouldn’t have over done it,” Clem said.

“It was just a little swim.”

“You did several laps around the pool! You were in there for over twenty minutes!”

“It felt good,” Xander pouted as he snatched a Ho Ho.

“Well I think we’ll both think differently when Master Spike finds out about it,” Clem said.

“Why? Why’s Master Overbearing gonna have problem?”

“Sore muscles,” Clem replied as he unwrapped his chocolate snake food cake.

“Sore..ohhhh,” Xander said the refrigerator light in his head went off. “Well it’s not like I really hurt myself.”

Clem just shot Xander a look that said, Like that matters, while he munched on his treat.

“Oh..look I don’t want you to get in trouble, Clem,” Xander said as he suddenly sat up. “I mean you couldn’t have stopped me without..well..I was determined..and I wasn’t gonna stop..and if Blondie thinks…”

Clem held up a hand to stop Xander’s babbling. He smiled revealing grey chocolate coated teeth.

“It’s OK, Claimant Xander. Whatever happens, it will be worth it. You swam!”

Xander’s panic stilled for a moment. He let Clem’s words sink deep inside. Then he tore open the package on his Ho Ho.

“Yeah,” Xander finally said just before gobbling up his own Ho Ho, “I swam.”

Clem laughed as he watched Xander relish his treat. Then he reached inside his bag and pulled out the box Master Spike had ordered his pet to deliver. He held it out to Xander. The human wiped his hands on his towel to remove all chocolate crumbs. He would have liked to lick them off his fingers but he knew from past experience chlorine soaked skin and chocolate weren’t a good combination.

He took the box from Clem and studied it. Xander had no desire to open it. He knew what was inside it. He didn’t want to lose the Ho Ho he just eaten by looking on a pair of eyeballs. He looked at Clem.

“Do you have any ideas of how to deliver this?” Clem asked.

Xander looked around. He scanned the horizon before looking back at Clem. It was getting darker. Evening was approaching.

“Truthfully I was kinda hoping for a pick-up,” Xander said.

It was Clem’s turn to look around. He shook his head.

“We’re alone, Claimant Xander.”

Xander studied the box for awhile longer. Spike had told him to get it to Oz. The werewolf was their link now to the Resistance. He’s my link to my girls, Xander thought.

Xander ran a hand through his still damp hair. Oz had said he’d been lurking around Vegas, staying
out of Spike’s sight, but still keeping tabs on the vampire and his human pet.

*I can’t seek him out, Xander thought, not with the She-Monster-from-LA in town. Angel knew Oz too. Can’t take the risk of being seen with him or him being seen at all.*

Xander looked at Clem. He realized they couldn’t exactly go strolling through the seedy sides of Vegas or any obvious “werewolf” hangouts without Spike either. The grey demon was his companion. He was supposed to watch over Xander and keep him entertained, not put him at risk.

Once again a bright light of understanding flashed in the cobwebbed corners of Xander’s mind. He grinned at Clem while he jumped to his feet.

“Xa..Claimant Xander?” Clem asked as he scrambled to get to his feet as well. Xander handed the box back to Clem who quickly buried it back in his bag.

“Vegas still have any video stores?” Xander asked.

“Vid..uh..yes. Several in fact,” Clem said. “But Master Spike has several DVDs already…”

“Great!” Xander clapped his hands together. “I need you to take me to them.”

“You want a movie?”

“Yep! A special movie. An old movie!” Xander said hoping Oz was keeping close tabs on him.

***

Spike paused outside the suite door. A strange voice was singing, “Rikk-Tikki-Tikki, the ivory-fanged, the hunter with eyeballs aflame!”

*Rikk-Tikki-Tikki?* He thought. *Someone’s singing Kipling?*

The vampire entered the suite to see his pet and Clem sitting on the floor eating popcorn and starring at the telly.

“Pet?”

“Shh!” Xander replied as he stared enraptured at the screen. Ante lifted his head up off Xander’s lap and hissed at Spike.

*Shh!* Spike snarled and charged forward. On the telly was a cartoon! A cartoon of a…?

“PET!” Spike barked. It was nearly dawn and he’d only had a few hours of sleep since Angelus’s visit. He was sore. He was tired. He’d been running the bitch Lilah ragged and now his Xander was “shushing” him over a cartoon?

“Please, master!” Xander whined without looking at Spike. “This is the best part!”

Spike stared at the TV. He frowned. He was still covered in blood and ick from the arenas.

*Not as much as Lilah though,* the thought with a slow deadly smile. He remembered the look on her face as he tossed her the head of a Froctor demon after it lost its bout to him. His pressie to her had landed in her lap.

Suddenly Xander and Clem cheered. Ante jumped off Xander’s lap disgruntled by the sudden noise and euphoria. Spike rolled his eyes. The bloody mongoose had killed the cobra. Xander finally
turned from the boob-tube to look at him.

“Spike!” Xander cried and stood up.

“Now yer concerned fer your master?” Spike growled.

“Are you OK?” Xander moved close looking for any wounds.

“OI! Thought you told me to ‘shh?’”

Xander then had the decency to blush. Clem paled. Ante groomed his outstretched back left paw.

“M..master S..spike,” the saggy skin demon began to sputter.

“I’ll deal with you later,” Spike said.

“Erhm..look, master,” Xander began.

Spike arched an eyebrow. He wondered what Xander’s mouth could possibly say to get him out of the trouble it had gotten him into?

“Claimant Xander swam today!” Clem suddenly blurted out.

Spike blinked. That was not he what he expected to hear. He turned to look at Clem. There was no scent of deceit coming from the demon, only an earnest desire to ease the tense situation.

“Swam?” Spike asked.

Clem nodded. Spike turned back to look at Xander. His pet was flushed again.

“Pet?”

“I..It..Well it was the band-aid principle,” Xander finally said.

“Wot?”

“I couldn’t do slow any more. It hurt too much you know all the adhesive pulling one little hair at a time..tugging the skin by the scab. It was just time to yank it off. Get it all over with at once.”

“Clem did he hit his head? His brain’s feeble ’nough without more injury.”

“No, Master Spike!”

“If I didn’t just go for it..starting swimming now,” Xander tried to explain again pointedly ignoring Spike’s jab, “I don’t think I ever would do it. It was just too much, Sp..master.”

“You swam, pet?” Spike asked softly.

Xander smiled and nodded. Then suddenly he was swept up in the gore covered arms of his master. Spike spun him around.

“THAT’S MY PET!” Spike hollered!

“SPIKE!” Xander squealed hung on to the vampire for dear life.

“Uhm..I’ll uhm..Claimant Xander’s had his dinner and well I’ll be going,” Clem said as he scooped up a protesting Ante, who had yet to finish his bath, and headed for the door.
Spike ignored the demon and the troublesome kitten as he began to carry Xander to the bedroom. The sound of the suite door closing behind the demon barely registered with the vampire.

“Master!” Xander cried.

“Wot?”

“Please, put me down?”

Spike laughed and set Xander on his feet.

“Undress me,” Spike ordered.

Xander rolled his eyes but quickly obeyed. He’d rather have a happy bossy Spike than cranky bossy Spike.

“Ya swam then?” Spike asked as Xander tugged of the vampires boots.

“Yes,” Xander grunted wondering how many times he’d have to answer the question.

“Think yer still afraid of the water?”

“Uh...duh, Master Clueless. Yes! “ Xander said as he began to tug on Spike’s belt.

“You’ll swim tomorrow,” Spike said as if it was a foregone conclusion.

Xander sighed as he undid Spike’s fly. He should have expected this. The vampire wouldn’t be satisfied with one swim. He’d want Xander to practically be Aquaman before he’d be satisfied.

The vampire stopped him as Xander reached for the hem of his shirt. He gently clasped Xander’s chin and tilted his head.

“I’m proud of ya, pet,” Spike said.

Something warm blossomed inside of Xander’s chest. It shouldn’t matter that the vampire was proud of him, but it did. It mattered very much.

“Proud enough to forget about the ‘shushing?'”

“Not a chance, pet,” Spike grinned evilly before placing a kiss on the tip of Xander’s nose. Xander could already feel the welts forming on his backside.

***

Spike was gentling running his cool palms over Xander’s burning and bruised cheeks. Xander sighed. He hated that he loved Spike’s comforting touch when it was Spike who’d marked him in the first place. Yet he did. He couldn’t help that he scooted his butt just a little toward Spike to encourage more touching.

“P-E-T definitely looks better than B-O-Y,” Spike said.

“Glad you’re happy,” Xander muttered into his pillow.

Spike sighed. He knew demon rules were hard on his Xander. Part of him wanted to be more lenient, but he knew that was a disaster waiting to happen especially with Angelus’s gal Friday sniffing around.
“I do love ya, Xander,” Spike whispered as he placed a delicate kiss with his cool lips on a bright red stinging spot on Xander’s ass. The human curled his hands into fist. He fought the need to beg for more of those soft kisses. It didn’t stop little Xander from waking up and thinking about waving, “Hello.”

“You know what they say..you only hurt the ones you love,” Xander said.

“And in this world sometimes the hurt is proportional ta the love,” Spike murmured against Xander’s hot skin. “Think how much worse it would have been if Lilah had been with me when ya ‘shushed’ me?”

Xander gasped! He’s eyes flew open as he forced himself to roll to his side. He looked at Spike.

“I didn’t even th…!”

“I know, pet,” Spike said as ran a finger down the tip of Xander’s nose. “Ya rarely do.”

“Oh hardy har har!”

Spike laughed.

“So where is the pin-up girl for soulless shysters everywhere?” Xander asked.

“Probably whinging to Peaches about her bloodstained Ferré,” Spike said as he peppered kisses up Xander’s side until he was lying face to face with his pet.

“How’d she get her car bloody?”

Spike laughed! “Not her car ya git! Her suit! I said ‘Ferré’ as in designer label not Ferrari!”

“Oh..so now you’re Master High Couture? Dru give you lessons?”

Spike growled and pounced. Suddenly Xander found himself flat on his back, a burning ass pressed flat to the mattress with a very irritated and aroused master vampire pressed flat to his front.

“Ya don’t want ta know the lessons Dru taught me,” Spike whispered. “And livin’ in Paris for a time, yeah, I did pick up a bit here and there about fashion tips.”

“Why?” Xander found himself asking before he could remember to short-circuit the wiring from his brain to his mouth.

Spike shook his head. His pet’s ass and mouth clearly did not have the same agenda.

“Angelus had a taste fer the highlife,” Spike said before claiming Xander’s mouth in a breath stealing kiss. Time to save the man from himself, Spike thought as he freely plundered the warm sweet recess.

Xander groaned. There were many constants about Spike; his mercurial nature, his arrogance, his leather jacket and the way he kissed. Without thought, Xander’s hands crept up and coiled themselves behind Spike’s neck urging the vampire closer, begging him to deepen the kiss. Spike obliged his pet with a possessive growl.

The growl was answered by a definite wave from Xander’s cock. He parted his legs and the vampire slid into place. Xander began to thrust against the cool lithe body pressed against him.

Spike broke the kiss. Xander moaned.
“Ah..ah..ah,” Spike said.

“What?” Xander whined.

“We need ta talk first,” Spike replied.

“Talk? Now?” Xander pressed little Xander against silky Spike. The vampire had the grace to gasp before barking.

“Xander!”

“What?” Xander asked innocently while batting his long eyelashes.

“Oi!” Spike said rolling off the sweet troublesome temptation that was his pet.

Xander laughed, rolled on to his stomach and tucked his arms under his head. He turned his face to the side and watched Spike.

“Ya hump the bed I’ll swat yer arse,” Spike warned.

*Curses, foiled again!* Xander thought as he pouted.

“So Master Tease, what do you want to talk about?” Xander asked.

“The package. Did ya deliver it?” Spike growled failing to ignore his pet's not so subtle taunt.

Xander frowned. He really wasn’t sure how to answer that question.

“Pet?”

“Well I’m not sure, master,” Xander finally said.

“Yer not sure?” Spike growled.

“It’s not like I handed it to Oz myself.”

“Well I know yer not that daft!”

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” Xander said drily.

“Ya’ll take that as an order ta continue.”

“However, I assumed Oz or members of his pack are watching us.”

“Stands ta reason,” Spike agreed.

“So…” Xander paused trying to figure out the best way to tell the vampire what he did.

“So?”

“Well I thought a drop would be the best idea,” Xander explained as he began picking at the covers.

“A drop?”

“You know..leave the box some place where Oz will know to pick it up.”

“You left the box?” Spike growled.
Xander nodded.

“You just left it for anyone to find.”

“Well sort of…”

“PET!”

“Well see Oz was in this band…remember? They played the Bronze a couple of times. Had the whole sexy guitar playing thing going for him. Plus he drove the van,” Xander began to babble, “which was way more cool points then should be allowed. But hey who am I to comp…”

“Xander!” Spike snarled.

“Dingoes ate my baby!” Xander blurted as he jumped up into a seated position.

“Wot?” Spike asked as he looked at Xander as if he’d sprouted two heads and a tail.

“Dingoes Ate My Baby..that was the name of the band!”

“And what does that have ta do with the bloody package? The drop?”

“It’s from a movie!” Xander said hurriedly. “Well actually more to the point it’s from a case in Australia. A woman claimed a dingo stole her baby right from out of their tent. No one believed her of course. Cuz you know no one believed things like that from the Before. She went to prison and everything before…”

“I’m about a count of three from gettin’ the paddle, pet!” Spike warned.

“She claimed that dingos ate her baby and they made a movie about it!” Xander cried.

Spike frowned. He looked back toward the front of the suite. Clem and Xander had been watching a movie he didn’t have in his library. He looked back at Xander.

“I figured if I went to a video store…” Xander started.

“…where they had this movie…” Spike continued.

“…Well I’d have Clem slip it into the cassette box,” Xander finished and rolled to the other side of the bed. He fished in the bed stand drawer and pulled out a VHS cassette tape. A label with “A Cry in the Dark” was plastered on one side.

“Yer thinking Oz sees or hears ya went into a video store…”

“Well he’s gotta wonder why? Right? Especially since we went to five stores before I got anything!” Xander explained. “He’ll have to know I..well..I was telling Clem to look for something specific.”

“And what makes you think he’ll know about this movie?”

“Uh? Hello? Pop culture reference to Master Spike? Where do you think the band got the idea for their name?” Xander said as he dropped the cassette back into the drawer.

“I don’t know. Maybe the dingo’s a distant relative.”

“Oh very funny Master So Funny I Forgot to Laugh.”
“Oi!” Spike said then pounced once again. This time Xander was flat on his stomach. Then Spike’s weight was gone.

“Master?”

“Hands and knees, pet,” Spike growled.

Xander obeyed. He closed his eyes. Once again his mouth had done it again and his ass was going to pay for it.

He nearly jumped and broke position when he felt Spike’s cool tongue begin to give tiny licks down the crease of his butt cheeks.

“S..spike?”

“Ya did good, Xander,” Spike said as he carefully parted Xander’s cheeks so he could work his tongue deeper to taste and tease his pet.

“Uhm?” Xander replied as the delicious sensations began create havoc with his senses.

“But..I think yer mouth has gotten ya inta trouble enough for one evening,” Spike said between licks as he worked his way deeper toward Xander’s private pucker.

“Unh!”

“So as a good Master I’m gonna have ta find away ta both reward ya fer doin’ a good job and make sure ya keep yer mouth from getting’ ya into any more trouble,” Spike murmured just before he swirled the tip of his tongue around Xander’s little hole.

“UHN UH!” Xander screamed.

Spike smiled and sent his tongue questing. He planned on making his feast last. It would be a long slow task of eating Xander out. He’d reduce his human to a mass of mewling hungry need denying him the chance to cum until the vampire was sure he was beyond all reason.

Then Spike planned on dipping his wick into all the sweet luscious heat that was Xander. He’d fuck him just as long and slowly as it took to eat him out. Xander would be panting, shaking and too far gone for begging.

Only when the vampire was sure his pet was on the brink of oblivion and time itself had no meaning to him would he let his sweet love find release.

As Spike’s tongue slipped past Xander’s guardian ring and Xander screamed with pleasure, the vampire vowed he’d wait to spill until his pet was tumbling ecstasy first into blissful sleep. He’d let the cool release of his seed be the last thing Xander felt before sliding into unconsciousness.

Somehow he was sure Xander wouldn’t have any complaints.

TBC

Author's note:

Wiki entry on A Cry in the Dark the movie starring Meryl Streep about the Azaria Chamberlain case (true story).
"Gnah," Xander said in response to a cool finger tracing the edge of his ear.

"Time ta wake up, pet," Spike rumbled in amusement.

"No, pets here," Xander buried his face deeper into the soft pillow.

"Xander," Spike tried again.

"Beep. Xander's not here right now. Please leave a message."

"Oi!" Spike barked with a laugh, "then who's bogartn' my pillow?"

"Goo. Sore, tired and happily wrung out, Goo," Xander said as he scissored his legs into a more comfortable position. He winced as dried, flaky reminders of the previous evenings spend tugged at his short hairs. "Make that Crusty Goo."

Spike gave a full throated laugh. He was wrong, his pet could complain about last night and his complaining left Spike wanting to tumble him all over again. He'd never get enough of Xander.

"Well 'Crusty Goo' had better move his lovely arse before it gets tanned a rosy shade of red!"

Xander groaned and finally rolled over. He blinked owlishly at Spike.

"It's not even sundown yet!" Xander whined.

"Course not! Yer not swimmin' after dark unless it's with me."

Xander sat up and yawned. He went to stretch and winced again. His muscles were not happy about his exertions from the day before.

"Swimming?" he asked.

"Clem will be here in fifteen ta collect ya," Spike said as he studied Xander's body. He could read the tightness in the human's muscles. *Pet needs ta stretch 'fore and after workin' out*, he thought.

"Fifteen!" Xander shouted as he stumbled out of bed. He hissed as his leg muscles joined in the protest his arms had begun. He hobbled toward the bathroom. "That doesn't give me much time to clean up!"

"Yer goin' swimmin'! Why ya need ta clean up?"

"Hello! Crusty Goo here!" Xander yelled from the bathroom.

"So..water in the pool will wash it off!"

"OOOOOH! That's just..beyond even demony ewww!" Xander shouted just before the sound of running water came from the shower.
"Humans!" Spike muttered as he lay down in the warm spot left behind by his pet.

***

Ten minutes later Xander was back in the bedroom and working to pull his belt up over his legs. Spike was watching his every move. Xander couldn't stop the flush that crept up his body at the vampire's open and hungry appraisal of him.

"Thought I was supposed to go swimming this morning," Xander forced out as he moved to the bed so Spike could lock the belt.

"Doesn't mean I can't study ya. Can't plot and plan," Spike said as he ran his finger along the edge of his pet's belt. Mysteriously Xander's bottom lip was suddenly became trapped between his teeth and fire was dancing down his nerve endings. The vampire chuckled at the sudden rush of lust rolling of his pet.

"You're evil," Xander flatly accused.

"I'm the Big Bad, pet," Spike grinned.

"Maybe not sooo big," Xander dared with a slight grin of his own.

"Oi!" Spike growled. Xander once again found himself in the familiar position of being pinned under Spike. "Big enough ta drill ya good an hard last night!"

"That was last night," Xander said with a waggle of his eyebrows.

"PET!" Spike snarled as Xander started to laugh. "Didn't last night teach ya anything ya balmy git?"

"That sometimes my mouth can get my ass into all kinds of really fun trouble," Xander replied.

"Cheeky prat!" Spike grumbled as he pinched Xander's still bruised cheek. "That was not the lesson ya were supposed to have learned!"

"OW!" Xander pouted as he rubbed his butt."Then maybe you should teach me another one!"

Both men froze. Once again Xander’s mouth had put out the welcome mat for his foot.

Spike smiled. Xander smiled back. They stared at each other for a long moment. Suddenly a moment which had been full of playful lust changed to a moment charged with something more. The look between the two men held a deeper meaning. Spike took an unneeded breath while Xander held his. Then, almost as if they’d rehearsed the move a thousand times in preparation for this moment they slowly began to move toward each other.

Cool lips met warm lips. Mouths opened. Tongues danced. Breaths exchanged and a unified moan filled the air. There was just the one moment. There was just the one kiss. There was no master or pet. There was no vampire or human. There was only Xander and Spike. They were together and not just their bodies sang with the awareness of each other. The kiss deepened as the men clung to each other.
Finally, the kiss broke and Spike rested his forehead on Xander's. He listened while Xander gasped for air.

"We're way in over our heads," Xander finally said.

"Just now figurin' that out, luv?"

Xander shifted. Spike lifted his head. They stared at each other. There were some things Xander wasn't ready to face yet. He decided to deal with the ones he could.

"You ever going to talk to me about Lorne?" Xander asked softly.

Spike stiffened. Xander tightened the hold he had the vampire's waist to keep him from pulling away.

"Xan..."

"Please...talk to me."

Spike stared at his pet. He hated this. He hated the fate he'd been cursed with and the game he was playing. Once again he desperately wished he could just run away. He wished he could just scoop Xander up and find some place far far away and leave the rest of the world to Angelus's hell.

"Spike..."

"I can't, Xander."

"Sp..."

"Pet, just leave it."

Xander stared at his vampire. Spike was keeping things from him again. He didn't know what the vampire was hiding or why but he knew he was hiding something. Why was Lorne's death off limits? Was it because of what Angelus had done to the blonde vampire?

_And if it is, do I really want to know?_ Xander wondered. Before he'd finished pondering that question something inside him fiercely answered, _YES!_ Something deep and primal in him needed to know whatever he needed to know to help Spike.

"Lilah then?" Xander asked switching topics. "Can you talk to me about her?"

"What about her?"

"What's the plan?"

Spike's fingers itched both for a fag to smoke, to wrap themselves around the annoying bint's neck or both. Instead he ran the pad of one thumb down Xander's cheek.

"Gonna try and keep her busy. Stay one step ahead of her," Spike began to explain. Xander arched
an eyebrow in question. "Figure if I keep her wound up..too busy to sniff around it'll buy us time."

"Time for what?"


Xander frowned. What did Wesley have to do with anything? Before he could ask a cool finger pressed against his lips in a silencing gesture.

"Pet," Spike said, "the less you know the better."

"You can trust me," Xander said against the finger.

"Not about trust, pet."

"But..."

A loud knock on the suite door interrupted Xander's next question.

"YEAH!" Spike hollered already knowing it was Clem. He slid off Xander. He offered his hand and pulled his pet to his feet.

"Xan..Claimant Xander! Master Spike!" Clem yelled from the front room.

"Spike?" Xander whispered feeling the special moment which had cocooned them slipping away.

"Go swim, pet," Spike ordered. Xander stared for a moment then nodded. He turned and headed for the door. As he stepped through the doorway Spike called out, "Oi! And don't forget to stretch...before and after you swim!"

***

Xander dropped his arms and shook them out. He hated to admit when his bossy vampire was right but he did feel better. He'd stretched before swimming and after. Once again his muscles were jelly, but they weren't tight. He flopped down on the beach towel by Clem.

"Took you less time to just get in the water," Clem said as he dug into his bag.

Xander shrugged.

"Easier today."

Clem smiled as he handed Xander a Twinkie.

"Still afraid?" the demon asked.

"Oh yeah!" Xander replied as he began to peel the cellophane away from his spongy golden treat. Clem wasn't sure whether the exclamation was an answer or response to the treat. In either case it didn't matter. Once again the demon dug back in his bag. He pulled out a carrot stick.

Xander was in the middle of denial of how his tongue swirling around in the middle of the snack cake scooping out all the creamy white sweet goo was way too similar to what Spike's tongue had
done to his asshole the night before when he heard a loud "crunch." Xander's eyes shifted to Clem. The demon was munching on a carrot.

"Uhm, Clem bud," Xander said after he'd extracted his tongue from his Twinkie. "What's with the unholliness of the good-for-you carrot stick?"

Clem darkened to the color of dirty concrete. He looked down.

"My punishment," he muttered.

"Punishment?"

"For 'shushing' Master Spike," Clem explained.

"Sp..Master Spike's making you eat carrots?"

"Oh it's much worse, Claimant Xander!" Clem cried. "No junk food for a week! No chips! No Ding Dongs..chocolate bars..gummy bears..pizza..not even a hot dog!"

Xander stared in horror at his friend.

"B..b..but that's monstrous!" Xander finally cried suddenly content with his sore butt. He knew what it was to go without the nectars of hydrogenated oils, sugar and monosodium glutamate and he'd prefer to sit gingerly on his tush than to once again deprive his taste buds.

"Master Spike is evil," Clem agreed as he nodded. "He even took Ante's tuna away for the week."

"Well..that's just taking his undead life into his own hands," Xander replied.

Clem nodded and said, "If I were Master Spike, I'd sleep with my boots on..Ante has a habit of biting toes."

"I'll be sure to warn him," Xander said with his fingers crossed behind his back.

***

The green of the new carpet irritated him. It was exactly the shade of Lorne’s blood. Spike forced his annoyance down deep. He’d be further damned if he’d give the slag, Lilah, a gander at his feelings.

“Will there be anything else, Master Spike?” she coolly asked him.

“I want ya to go down ta down ta the old Outlet center south of ’ere on the boulevard,” Spike said. “Want ya ta talk to T’resh, head of the Boretzs down there.”

“Boretzs!” Lilah spat.

“Boretzs,” Spike smiled. Boretzs smelled like week old trash that had been left rotting in the sun. They dressed just as stylish. In the Before they passed easily among the homeless and the indigent.

Their bite was poisonous. It was a long slow death for humans similar to, but far more potent, then the brown recluse spider. It decayed the flesh within causing it to blacken and fall off in little pieces.
“And why am I…”

Lilah’s question was interrupted by a knock on the office door.

“Wot?” Spike called. Though he knew it must be Clem with his pet. Only the grey demon would interrupt him at the moment.

“M..master Spike,” Clem said as he opened the door..

“Clem,” Spike said as he motioned the demon inside. The demon entered followed by Xander.

Once again Spike found himself struggling to hide his emotions though he couldn’t stop his nostrils from flaring at the scent of his pet. He could still smell the hint of Vegas air and chlorine under the fresh soap from Xander’s shower.

He noted how Xander stiffened when he saw Lilah.

“Claimant Xander,” Lilah managed to ground out.

“Lilah,” Xander said as he moved gracefully across the room then knelt at Spike’s feet. The vampire couldn’t stop himself from letting a hand automatically begin to stroke its way through his pet’s thick hair.

“Has Xander been fed?” Spike asked.

“Yes, Master Spike,” Clem answered

“Good. Yer excused fer awhile.”

Clem bowed then quickly exited the office. Xander leaned his head against Spike’s leg and watched Lilah. Her face started to turn a faint shade of purple.

Somebody’s getting frustrated, Xander thought. He smiled and made a purring sound. Lilah’s face turned a darker color.

Cheeky git, Spike thought not failing to notice the wordless interplay between his pet and the bint.

“As I was saying…” Lilah began to say.

“Yer goin’ cuz I said so,” Spike barked.

“Am I just supposed to have a drink there?” Lilah snapped.

“Have several fer all I care,” Spike said as his hand moved from stroking through Xander’s hair to down his neck. “Just as long as ya get a down payment from T’resh on wot he owes me.”

Xander bit back a chuckle. He recognized the name T’resh. The longer Lilah spent with the Boretz demon, the more the stench would soak into her clothes, her hair and even her skin.

“A down payment?”

“Yeah, tell T’resh I want piece a what ‘e owes me tonight. And tell ‘im ta get ready ta pay up in full when I call in his mark,” Spike ordered as he worked his hand lower down Xander’s back. His pet arched his back into his master’s touch. The vampire smiled.

“Why not collect in full now?” Lilah asked.
Spike grunted and snapped his fingers. He needed Lilah to deliver the message and not think about what it meant. It was time to use his pet for fun and strategy.

Xander stood up. The vampire unlocked his pet’s belt. Once again his nostrils flared. Although he knew his pet preferred to play in private, the scent of his pheromones filling the room told him the human wasn’t just acting the part of the “good pet.”

“Ya really must a climbed yer way up ta power on yer back, eh, Lilah,” Spike said as Xander stripped his belt off. “Yer too much of a plank ta get there by yer brains.”

Lilah hissed. Spike snapped his fingers and pointed down. Xander dropped to his knees again.

“The longer the debt goes unpaid, the more interest I collect,” Spike purred as he slipped a finger between his pet’s parted lips. Xander began to suck greedily and nosily upon it. This time the vampire didn’t bother to hide his feelings. “Bloody wonderful, pet!”

“And what’s to keep, T’resh from paying his entire debt tonight?” Lilah demanded.

“Fucking Hell!” Spike snarled as he glared at Lilah. Xander froze. “Can’t ya do one simple task without the bleedin’ twenty questions? I know ya don’t give Angelus this much guff!”

“I know Angelus’s…”

“MASTER ANGELUS!” Spike growled, “And yer not workin’ fer ‘im right now!”

“I still represent his interests…”

“One can’t serve two masters, Lilah,” Spike warned.

“Oh, I don’t,” Lilah replied smoothly.

“No, of course not ducks,” Spike said in a low dangerous voice. Xander tentatively resumed teasing the vampire’s finger with his tongue.

There was silence for a moment with only the slightly obscene sounds of Xander nursing on Spike’s finger to break the tension. The sounds soothed Spike. They annoyed Lilah.

“T’resh made a sucker’s deal,” Spike finally explained. “He’ll pay the debt in full only when I call in my mark. Until then, he makes little ‘payments.’”

Lilah was quiet for another moment as she thought. She arched an eyebrow then gave a tight smile.

“Clever..you’re bound to collect far more than you were originally owed,” the woman finally said.

“At last, signs of intelligence,” Spike said. Xander smirked around the vampire’s finger.

“Now get out and don’t come back till I’ve got my money..don’t care if it takes all night!”

“Master Sp…”

“GET!” Spike roared!

Xander took satisfaction in seeing Lilah jump. Then she turned with a sharp click of her heels before quickly exiting the office. He couldn’t help but chortle around Spike’s finger.

“Think that’s funny do ya?” Spike asked as he looked down at his pet.
Xander let the vampire’s finger fall from his mouth. He nodded. The vampire growled again then leaned forward and claimed possession of the kneeling man’s plump lips.

Submission was easy for Xander. He relaxed into Spike’s claim and let the vampire thoroughly reassert his ownership. He moaned. The vampire tasted of whiskey.

The vampire released Xander’s lips. He kissed a teasing trail of delight to Xander’s ear then whispered, “Bint might of bugged this room…”

“Then let’s give her a show,” Xander interrupted with a whisper of his own before he pulled free from the vampire’s hold.

Spike arched an eyebrow. Xander waggled his then pushed lightly on the blond man’s chest indicating he should lie back.

“Pet?” Spike mouthed silently as he lay back. Xander just grinned and leaned forward. He trailed long fingers down the vampire’s white t-shirt. It was Spike’s turn to arch his back like a happy cat.

Xander’s fingers kept going and going and going until they reached Spike’s belt. Deftly they undid the buckle and began to undo the fly.

“Xan,” Spike whispered as he tried to bring his hands up to cradle his pet’s face. His pet shook his head and shooed the vampire’s hands away. The message was clear; this was going to be all about Spike.

The vampire groaned as hot hands gently pulled his aching cock free from its prison. Xander smiled then licked his lips. The sight of that sweet tongue dancing across the plump lip was almost too much. It took all of Spike’s control to remain relaxed in the chair and not pounce on his pet. He reminded himself if he was a “good” vampire those lips and that tongue would soon be put to a better use.

“Master,” Xander sighed just before he leaned over and blew a hot warm breath over Spike’s hungry leaking nob.

“PET!” Spike moaned then snarled in delight as that tantalizing tongue lapped at his tip.

The vampire’s musky flavor exploded in Xander’s mouth. It was cool, salty, smoky but most of all it was SPIKE! Hunggrily Xander began to bury the tip of his tongue dipper into Spike’s slit seeking out more of the delicious cream.

Spike grabbed the sides of the chair. He drove his nail into the wood. Xander smiled around Spike’s flesh and sent his tongue swirling down the vein under the vampire’s penis. He let the ridge of the glans dance just behind his lips.

“PET! FUCK!” Spike shouted.

Xander used one hand to work the base of Spike’s cock while the other began to play with vampire’s heavy balls. They were round and firm. They were covered in cool soft flesh. Xander began to roll them gently between thumb and forefinger.

“XAN..XAN…”

“Mmmm,” the human hummed around Spike’s cock in reply.

“XANDER!”
Spike’s pet worked his cock in a steady rythym with mouth and hand. His balls were dancing in
need. He could feel the tingle at the base of his spine. He should have more control than this. He did
have more control than this. Yet, he didn’t want it. He didn’t want control! He wanted Xander. He
wanted the hot mouth milking him. He wanted the tongue lapping at him. He wanted the scent of his
pet filling the room.

“PET! PET! Gonna..XAANDER!” Spike tried to warn.

Xander worked his tongue harder against the vampire’s cock. He loved the desperation in the
vampire’s voice. He loved the need he heard. He loved he was about to get more of the essence of
Spike in him.

“AAAAAAAAHHHH!” Spike screamed. Cool smoky musk pumped into Xander’s mouth. Greedily he
slurped and swallowed as much as he could.

“Pet! Pet! Xander!” Spike continued to pant as his orgasm rocked through him. Xander continued to
nurse and stroke the vampire’s pulsing cock until the tremors started to subside. He gently licked
until the penis went limp and only then did he let the member fall from his mouth.

Strong arms pulled him up into the vampire’s lap. Cool lips covered his own. Xander’s tongue
battled with Spike’s to keep the vampire from stealing the precious flavor he’d collected. Eventually
though, the human surrendered and let vampire take what he wanted.

Spike kissed and nuzzled Xander until the brunette lost track of time. At some point the vampire
settled. He looked at Xander. Xander looked back. For one heartbeat it was just them, Spike and
Xander, again.

“Yer a good Pet,” Spike said in that heartbeat.

What he meant, and what Xander heard, was I love you.

TBC
Chapter 64

Xander just needed a few more precious moments of distraction. Fortunately, Clem was well up to the task. As Xander’s nimble fingers quickly worked open the seemingly ancient cassette tape box the shaggy skinned demon had sent the two shaggy haired vampire clerks on a mad scramble to find a rare and possibly lost copy of *Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone*.

“Master Spike was very specific about wanting this film. I think he said something about a new attraction,” Clem mumbled. The vampires paused and stared at the demon. “If I remember right there’s this elaborate gauntlet in the movie, full of metal spikes, rotating, blades, shooting fire and other exciting obstacles. It’ll be a real crowd pleaser! Just not sure who Master Spike plans on using to test it on first?”

Xander bit back a chuckle as the two vampires began to tear cassettes cases off the shelves in a terrified frenzy to find the missing tape. Clem turned his head and winked at Xander.

The box opened. For a moment ice seemed to flow down Xander’s spine. It appeared the box was empty! It seemed completely empty! While that may have meant Oz had picked up the eyes, it could have meant someone or something else had.

He took a deep breath and tried to control his heartbeat. He didn’t need the freaked out vampires to notice his freak out. He opened the box wider. There was a slight rattling sound as if something small and light were loose in the box. Quickly he jerked the box wide open.

*B-I-N-G-A-H!* Xander thought as spied, nestled in the bottom corner of the box, a small yellow guitar pick. Xander grinned. Sometime in the last three days since his and Clem’s last visit, Oz had picked up the Seer’s Eyes.

Another glance confirmed the vampires were still searching for the lost sci-fi video. Xander shook the plastic box and the pick fell into palm of his hand. He didn’t risk examining the pick for any possible messages from Oz.

*That will have to wait,* Xander thought as he quickly tucked the pick just inside his chastity belt. It pressed reassuringly against his skin.

He smiled as he slipped the *Dingoes Ate My Baby* tape back into its box and reshelved the movie. *Delivery made,* Xander thought. He smiled. Spike would be pleased.

Xander blushed and his cock twitched against its prison. He’d learned that when Spike was pleased it usually meant a night of long satisfying “Happy” for Xander. Some vestige part of himself from “Before” flashed concern at how much Spike’s touch and company had come to mean to him. Xander squashed it. He’d worry about what a Spike addict he was becoming later. For the moment he’d just settle into the glow of *anticipation*.

“Here! Here it is!” one of the vampires shouted as he held a video tape above his head. He nearly scrambled over his partner to get to Clem. “Please..please tell Master Spike ..we’re always happy..I mean I hope he’s happy…whatever his viewing pleasures…”

“I’ll be sure to tell Master Spike how helpful you were,” Clem said. He turned to look at Xander. The human shuffled quickly to the demon and smiled.
A night filled with a long ‘Happy’ and a cheesy sci-fi starring a teen-aged Molly Ringwald! Xander thought. This may just end up being a perfect night…as perfect night’s go in Angel’s Demony Wonderland.

***

Xander was still grinning and nearly humming with expectancy when he and Clem arrived back at the Slayer’s End. Clem easily navigated them through the crowds towards Spike’s office. Demons, human slaves, vampires and various creatures Xander couldn’t even begin to indentify quickly shuffled out of his way.

In some ways it was a little spooky they way they all practically tripped over themselves to make sure they weren’t even close enough to accidentally brush up against Xander. Sometimes he wondered exactly what Spike had done to stress the point no one was to touch him without permission. Other times he was glad he didn’t.

Still, occasionally, like today he almost felt the need to play. He wondered what would happen if he “tripped” and fell towards the crowd. What would they do to get away from the accidental touch? What would happen to them if they let him fall and he was injured?

_Bad Xander_, he thought with a sly smile.

“Claimant Xander?” Clem whispered as if somehow guessing what was going through his human charges mind.

“What?”

“Don’t,” Clem said earnestly.

“Ah, you never let me have any fun,” Xander said in a perfected mock whine.

Clem chuckled, “I want to be able to eat Ho-Hos and potato chips again.”

Xander laughed! The crowd moved back as if startled by the unexpectant sound. Clem picked up the pace and his charge followed him. They arrived at Spike’s office. Clem knocked on the door.

“Enter,” Lilah’s voice breezed from the other side. Xander and Clem exchanged a look.

_Why isn’t Spike answering?_ Xander wondered as Clem took a breath and opened the door.

“Claimant Xander,” Lilah coolly greeted him as he entered the office behind Xander. Spike was no where in sight.

He nodded in response, unsure how to address her.

“Ms. Morgan…” Clem began. One perfectly manicured hand raised to halt his speech.

“Spike has been called away to the Mandalay,” Lilah explained as she leaned back against Spike’s desk. “A large number of Pisaka demons arrived in town. They wanted suitable women as brides and the appropriate amount of decaying flesh for several wedding feasts.”
Xander grit his teeth and tried to keep the bile climbing up the back of his throat down. He prayed Spike was going to stop these Pisakas.

“I had order…” Clem tried again his eye narrowing a bit at the casual use of Master Spike’s name from the woman’s lips.

Lilah’s cool smile silenced Clem.

“Obviously, Master Spike will be delayed. It will take some time to either find or drive several young women mad enough to take the Piskas as husbands. Plus there’s raiding the arena’s waste areas for putrid human flesh.”

“Shut U…!” Xander’s scream was cut off by Clem hand covering his mouth. Lilah arched an eyebrow as she noted Clem’s liberties with Xander then crossed her legs.

“Did you have something you wished to say, Claimaint Xander?”

Xander swallowed from behind Clem’s hand. His eyes flashed hatred at the woman who was inhuman enough to speak casually of giving women to flesh eating demons to “marry.” They flashed with pain at another atrocity Spike would participate in “for the greater good.”

“Well?” Lilah asked.

Xander moved Clem’s hand. He took a deep breath and let it out before replying, “Did my Master leave any order or instructions for me?”

Lilah laughed as she gracefully rose to her feet. She crossed the room to stand in front of Xander. She was close enough he could feel her heat and smell her faint musky female scent hidden beneath the expensive perfume she wore. She licked her lips and whispered, “Be a good pet and wait for him upstairs.”

The lawyer’s words burrowed into Xander’s mind leaving a tainted trail. Goose pimples raced down his arms. An image of him sucking Spike’s cock flashed into his mind. This time there was nothing sweet or natural about it.

Xander saw himself as one more naked human on his knees servicing a demon grateful to be alive another day, grateful to be of service. The bile in his throat flooded his mouth. He choked and tried to swallow it down.

Lilah smiled and stepped back. Clem put a worried hand on Xander’s back between his shoulder blades.

“Claimai…” Clem began.

Xander shook his head not only to silence the demon but to clear his head. He wasn’t just a pet! He wouldn’t let Lilah undo him with Spike’s words!

“What else would I be for my Master?” Xander finally ground out forcing himself to meet Lilah’s haughty gaze.

Lilah laughed, “What else indeed?”
She then waved her hand dismissing them. “Go!” she ordered before turning her back to them and moving back to Spike’s desk.

Clem took gentle hold of Xander’s arm and tugged him backwards. Xander stared at Lilah for a moment. He hadn’t thought it possible for him to hate another human being as much as he hated the vampires and demons who’d taken over his world, but he did. He almost shook with the hate he suddenly felt for the red haired woman.

“Claimaint Xander,” Clem whispered as he tugged again. Xander clenched his fists then let Clem lead him out of Spike’s office. He stayed close by the demon as he shut the door behind them then led them through the crowd toward the elevator they used to get to the suite.

This time Xander barely noted the movements of the crowd as he followed Clem. His playful mood of earlier was gone. All he could think of at that moment was getting away from the Hell all around him. All he could think of was talking to Spike. He wanted to beg him to tell him he found away to save the young women from being “claimed” or married by these Pisakas or that Lilah would soon be leaving.

Clem stepped into the elevator. Xander followed. The doors whished close. Clem pressed the button to take them to the suite. Xander took a deep breath to try and calm his emotions. The elevator began to rise with a tiny lurch.

“Xander?” Clem whispered.

“I’m OK, Clem,” Xander replied with a half smile. Clem returned it.

Suddenly there was a loud pop and hiss above them! Clem and Xander jumped back while looking up at the same time. A thick white cloud was spraying down from one of the tiles in the roof of the elevator.

“GAS!” Clem coughed.

“DOWN!” Xander shouted as he dropped to floor of the elevator. He pushed at the button for the next floor. The elevator sailed by it. Xander’s eyes went wide. The gas spread out above them.

“Cover your mouth and nose!” Xander ordered as he used the edge of his shirt to cover his face. Clem began to cough but did as he was told. Next, Xander pushed the emergency stop button. Again nothing happened.

“FUCK!” Xander shouted.

“Xa..Xa..Xander,” Clem sputtered as his eyes began to shift rapidly right and left.

“CLEM!” Xander screamed and scrambled over to check his friend. The demon was drooling and coughing through his shirt.

“G..Gas..gas,” Clem gasped and then collapsed to his stomach on the floor.
“HEY! Don’t! Stay with me!” Xander ordered as he shook the grey demon. Clem coughed violently. His eyes rolled up into the back of his head then closed. “CLEM!”

Xander stared at the demon then shook him again. The thick cloud of white continued to grow denser. Xander’s eyes began to water. The tickle at the back of his throat was turning into a scratch. He started to cough. Clem was motionless.

*LILAH!* Xander silently screamed as he scrambled back to the front of the elevator panel. *Only she would have the balls to do something like this!*

The cloud of gas was so thick Xander could barely see. His eyes burned and his throat ached. He scratched at the panel door to gain access to the emergency phone. He wasn’t surprised to find it was dead.

His arms and legs were beginning to feel heavy. Xander pressed his face to the floor and gasped at the few remaining breathes of relatively clear air. He was getting tired. He resisted the urge to cough. He had to think!

Whatever the gas was it obviously hit Clem harder and faster than Xander. *Maybe demons are more susceptible?* Xander wondered. He tried to look back at Clem through the thick white fumes to see how the demon was doing. He couldn’t see him. He thought about crawling back to him.

He shook his head. It didn’t matter. Clem was out and soon he would be too. He was running out of time. Soon they’d be at Lilah’s tender mercies. Cold fear formed like ice in Xander’s gut at that thought. He had to do something! He had to think!

He coughed. Good air escaped his lungs and contaminated air rushed in to fill the vacuum. The room spun. Xander collapsed completely to the floor.

SPIKE! Xander thought as he fought the suffocating and exhausting feeling he felt from breathing the gas. SPIKE!

Images of Spike cascaded through Xander’s mind; Spike kissing his nose, Spike dancing with him, Spike’s look of joy and wonder as his seed flooded into Xander, Spike’s pale skin glowing under the desert sky…

*The pick!* Xander’s groggy mind suddenly remembered. His fingers dug clumsily at his waist. They brushed against the pick under his belt.

*Have to deliver the message!* Xander thought as he managed to work the pick back out into his palm. He squinted his eyes and tried to focus. The room was a white blurt. He felt along the wall for the panel. The door to the emergency phone was still open.

“Spike!” Xander coughed as he slipped the pick into the corner lip on the inside of the door before closing it.

Xander’s eyes closed. He saw Spike smiling at him just before everything went black.

***

His mouth was dry. It was so dry it felt like he was prying his tongue out of cement just to move it. He tried to swallow. There was a bad taste. He coughed.
His eyelids tried to flutter but they were sealed shut with more cement. He tried to rub them. Something gripped his wrists.

“Ngggh,” he groaned.

A sharp stinging pain bloomed across his cheek as a loud “SNAP” brought him closer to consciousness.

“XANDER!” a voice barked.

Perfume. He smelled perfume.

Another blossom of pain reddened his other cheek. Then his whole body spasmed as it was drenched with painfully cold water. He tried to jerk away from it but his arms were pulled back straight behind him and somehow secured. He was on his knees bound in place with something metal around his ankles and across his calves. His head was fixed upright. It felt like it was secured to something as well.

“Li…laah,” Xander groaned as he tried to open his eyes while licking the water dripping off his lips.

Water hit him again. Xander screamed and bucked against it. There was nowhere for him to go. He arched his back. He realized his hands and neck were tied to some pole like thing behind him. He also realized he was stark naked.

Lilah’s cold smiled waited for him as he worked his eyes open. He couldn’t help but stare down at his own nakedness.

“You didn’t really think Spike had all the keys did you?” Lilah asked running her finger down Xander’s cheek focusing his attention back on her. He hissed.

She laughed and snapped her fingers.

“You remember Mr. Keffler don’t you?” Lilah asked.

Xander hissed again as a large orange gecko looking demon slithered out into his view. The demon hissed back then raised up on to its hind legs. It dangled a set of keys from one of its “fingers”.

“Xxxander,” it hissed. “I made ssssure to make another sssset. You tasssted ssso good. I hoped for another chancce to meet you.”

“Spike is going to kill you,” Xander growled.

“Spike is going to have other worries,” Lilah said as she took the keys from Keffler.

“What do you want, Lilah?” Xander demanded.

“To know what Spike is up to.”

Xander paled. What did she know? What did Angelus know?
Keffler’s tongue slipped out and flitted through the air. He slid close to Xander. The thin dry reptilian tongue flitted across Xander’s unpierced nipple.

The demon whispered, “Panic.”

“Don’t touch me!” Xander yelled.

“I’m afraid he has to Xander,” Lilah replied as she brushed a her fingers lightly through Xander’s hair.

“Get away from me!”

“You see you do know something. You do know Spike is planning something and I want to know what that something is.”

“And I want you to drop dead. Guess Santa forgot us both this year!”

Keffler slid his tongue low across Xander abdomen. It both tickled and repulsed Xander.

“Stop it!” Xander ordered.

“He can’t. He’s taking a baseline reading,” Lilah explained as she stepped back away from the prone man giving the demon greater access.

“Baseline?” Xander gasped as the demon flicked the tip of his tongue into recess of Xander’s belly button.

“Mr. Keffler’s race are a master at reading others. Their sense of ‘smell’ is highly developed. They use their tongues to detect the chemical molecules that produce various scents; in addition they’re highly attuned to detect vibrational changes.”

“What?”

Keffler slithered closer. His head bobbed between Xander’s spread legs while his tongue began to dance lightly through Xander pubic hairs sending tremors dancing through Xander’s skin.

“He tastes scent. Chemical changes in the body. He can feel the vibrations of your heartbeat or how your breathing changes.”

“Don’t!” Xander cried as Keffler braced his forelegs on either side of Xander’s knees while letting his tongue dance on the delicate skin covering Xander’s shaft.

“Once he begins to familiarize himself with your scent and how it changes based on emotional stressors and cues…well Mr. Keffler can literally taste a lie.”

Xander’s eyes widened. NO! he silently screamed.

“Oh yes! And the best part,” Lilah said with an conspiratorial wink, “he loves it.”

Xander began to struggle against the bonds. He was both angry and afraid. Keffler’s tongue flitted happily first around his balls and then through the inside of his legs.
“Spike! SPIKE! SP…” Xander screamed.

“Is up to something and you are going to tell me what it is!” Lilah said.

Xander laughed bitterly.

“I didn’t think it was possible, but you are stupider than you look, Lilah,” Xander barked. Keffler shuffled around Xander’s body and began to dance his tongue down the side of the human’s neck. Xander tried to ignore the tickling sensation. “If Spike were up to something what makes you think he’d tell me?”

“Spike’s made deals with humans before when betraying Angelus,” Lilah said. “I wouldn’t put it past him to do it again.”

“Is that what you and Deadboy think? I’ve got some big secret alliance with Spike?” Xander asked as he tried to ignore Keffler questing tongue. “Newsflash Princess Pinhead I’m just Spike’s favorite hole. The only alliance he’s made with me is the one where his dick goes up my ass!”

Lilah looked past Xander to Keffler. The gecko demon lifted its head away from Xander.

“I need more time,” it hissed. “Too many strong emotions. Too much of the U’tal gasss on him. Need to tassste him more. Know hisss ssscent when answersss truthfully.”

Lilah nodded. Xander whimpered in pain as he reflexively arched against his restraints. Keffler was once again flicking his tongue lightly over Xander skin. This time the demon was working his way down Xander’s spine.

“Lucky you,” Lilah said to Xander. “Looks like you get to spend some more time with Mr. Keffler.”

“Go to hell!” Xander snapped.

“Haven’t you heard?” Lilah said, “We’re already there.”

Then she turned from Xander and headed for a door. Xander tried to ignore the light touches drifting across his ass. He focused on Lilah. She wouldn’t get away with this. Spike would find out he was missing. Clem would…

_CLEM! _Xander’s mind kicked into gear. He cast his eyes around the room. He didn’t spot the demon.

“LILAH!” Xander growled. The lawyer stopped halfway out the door. She arched an eyebrow as she stared back at Xander.

“Clem?”

“Dead,” she said with a cool smile before shutting the door firmly behind her.

“NO!” Xander screamed in denial as Keffler’s tongue began to work its way between Xander’s cheeks.
Author's Notes:

Spacehunter: Adventures in the Forbidden Zone
Chapter 65

Spike was in a bad mood as he entered The Slayer’s End. He hated Pisakas. It wasn’t so much their eating habits as their mating habits. Every one of their “brides” reminded him of Dru. They were all mad. Only an insane or insensible woman would “marry” a Pisakas. Marriage meant to mate with them. It meant being a brood mare and dying painfully in childbirth as the demon offspring ripped its way out of their womb. It meant being a feast for the infant monster over the next few months as the demon feasted on its own mother’s decaying flesh.

Spike growled. Dru had once confided she thought she’d make a good mummy for a Pisaka. He knew that if Angelus hadn’t of turned his Dark Princess she’d have happily accepted a Pisakas proposal. That was the perverse catch with the mottled skinned bastards; their mates had to say “yes.”

Spike had no way to tell if it was a twisted joke with them getting some sort of verbal agreement to wed from their intendeds or whether it was part of a curse on their race. Frankly he couldn’t give a shave off a rat’s arse. He hated the Pisakas and it’s one of the reasons Lorne made sure they never came to Vegas.

He snarled as he thought of Lorne and a Glurgg demon scrambled away from him trailing pus behind it. Spike tried not to think of the green demon. It didn’t do him any good. The die was cast and they had to play the game out. Still he missed the demon and not for just the way he helped Spike run his city.

Spike snatched a drink off one of the waitress trays as she tried to pass him. She barely surppressed a scream as she froze. He downed the drink before slamming it back down on the tray.

“Get!” the master vampire ordered. The woman squeaked as she quickly tried to run through the packed crowd.

*Lorne would have made sure those wankers stayed outta of my city,* Spike thought not managing to push the empathy demon out of his thoughts. *Wouldn’t have had ta get my hands dirty dealin’ with ‘em.*

Spike’s hands clenched reflexively at the memory of handling the Pisakas. Waves of ire rolled of him. His customers scattered.

*Don’t care what ‘Gelus has ta say,* Spike thought as he continued his march to his office. *Not dealin’ in birds with those dicksplats! I’ll give ‘im all the body rot they can eat until sundown tomorrow but then they better be outta my town! They want brides, they can go to LA and have ‘Gelus’s sloppy seconds!*

“LILAH!” Spike barked as he tore open his office door.

The redhaired lawyer barely blinked. She continued to stand poised by Spike’s desk as she listened to a voice on the other end of the phone she cradled to the ear.

“I understand,” she said coolly as Spike snarled and slammed the door.

“Get off the phone ya twat!” Spike barked.

Lilah sighed as she hung the phone up. She focused on Spike.
“If you ever left Pis…” Spike began to growl.

“We have a problem,” Lilah interrupted.

“WOT?” Spike snapped as he closed in on her. His temper was a good two feet past short.

“Xander’s missing,” Lilah replied.

***

His feet were dragging. His head hurt. His skin itched.

“Here’s as good as spot as any,” a voice said. He face first fell to the floor. Thankfully it was a short distance.

He tried to blink. He’s eyes felt crusted close, like that time he’d had too many Fuzzy Navels and woken up in bed with a slime demon.

“Ungh,” he said around his thickly coated tongue.

“He’s starting to come around,” another voice said.

“Good! Was afraid he was gonna miss out on all the fun,” the first voice said as he dropped something on the floor.

A familiar scent flooded his senses. It was human. It was Xander’s scent!

Clem forced his eyes open with a painful snap. Xander’s shirt was in front of his face. As were two pairs of feet.

“Wakey wakey!” the first voice said again.

“Don’t want to sleep through your death do you?” the other voice laughed.

Clem looked around in a panic. He was in a grey room with a concrete floor. As far as he could tell Xander wasn’t with them.

“Xander!” he croaked as he tried to get to his knees.

“Ahh, ain’t that sweet!” one of the voices said before kicking him in the chest. Clem gasped in pain and for air as he collapsed back to the floor.

“Spike’s Pet,” the other voice said spitting on Clem with the last word, “is no longer your concern.”

“What have you done with him?” Clem asked.

“Us? Nothing,” a voice said as another vicious kick slammed into Clem side. He not only heard but felt something crack.

“Master Spi…”

“Master Spike is clueless!” the other voice spat once again. “He’s let himself be led around by the dick…by a screw and a chew.”

“No!”

“Yes!”
Clem groaned as another kick sent pain shooting through his body. He had to think! He had to do something! Xander was in danger! It was his job to take care of him!

“Claimant Xand…”

“We don’t recognize that vampire hocus pocus bullshit!” a voice ground out. Suddenly one of Clem’s assailants squatted in front of him. It was a Q’uartha demon. They were a hairless pale grey demon which excreted no bodily fluids or left any scent. They were mercenaries, always worked in pairs and had only one weakness Clem knew about it.

“Humans are like kleenex,” the voice said as he grabbed Clem’s chin and forced him to meet his eyes. “You use them to clean up your spunk then throw ‘em away. Keeping used ones around is just…gross.”

“So’s this,” Clem said before shifting his face into the visage he always hid from Xander. Snake like tentacles shot out from his face. Two wrapped around the wrist holding his chin while another set of two stabbed at the demon’s eyes.

Both Q’uartha demons howled in agony as Clem’s tentacles dug in deep. The one demon tried to pull away from Clem as the other delivered a flurry of kicks. Once again something inside of Clem cracked painfully, but he didn’t let go.

Blood began streaming from the one Q’uartha eyes while the other’s began to water badly. Clem grabbed hold of the crouching demon to use as leverage to help pull himself up as the other demon’s kicks began to miss their target.

Clem could feel something “pop” first underneath one tentacle then another. Blood and ichor spurt out from the crouching demon’s eye sockets. Once again both the Q’uartha howled in unison.

In a move that was more graceful then Clem expected he simultaneously withdrew his appendages and kicked the blinded demon in the face. It was the demon’s turn to “crack.”

The second demon fell to floor as he grabbed at his face. Clem backed up.

“Where’s Xander?” he managed to ask without a scared stutter.

“Dead!” the second demon spat as he shook his head as if trying to clear it. The other demon lay on the floor whimpering.

NO! Clem thought. He looked around for a weapon. The room was bare except for him, the two demons and Xander’s shirt. The uninjured demon looked at him.

I’m running out of time, Clem thought as he snatched up Xander’s shirt. Q’uartha pairs were empathetic to each other which meant they could feel each other’s pain. It also meant they could heal one another. The injured demon’s whimpering was beginning to recede. I need to find Master Spike!

Clem turned. The cracked things inside him gave once again. For a moment it seemed as if Clem breathed in pure fire. His lungs burned. He moaned, bit his lips and stumbled toward the door.

“We’re gonna enjoy grinding you into a meaty paste,” the one Q’uartha shouted as Clem slipped through the door.

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“Where is he?” Spike ground out as Lilah’s face turned purple. She was about six inches off the floor
with his hand wrapped around her throat. She shook her head.

“You’re a liar!” Spike snarled as he threw her across the room. She bounced on the couch then fell to the floor.

Once again Lilah shook her head as she coughed and put her hand to her throat. Spike tilted his head. Her heartbeat had changed very little since he’d charged into the office. There was no smell of fear just the stink of her scent and perfume.

Whether or not she was lying, she was cool and unafraid. Spike snarled. He picked up the phone off his desk, threw it at the wall behind her and felt a small bit of satisfaction when she flinched as it shattered behind her sending shards flying everywhere.

“Master Sp…” she began to croak in a hoarse voice.

“You got something to say ta me tart?” Spike barked as he was suddenly once again holding her up with his hand around her throat. This time her feet touched the floor and he allowed her to breathe.

“The…the security cam…” Lilah spat out as she pointed to the wall.

Spike growled and dragged Lilah behind him. He held her with one hand as he brought up security video with another.

“Elevator,” Lilah whispered.

Spike pushed a few buttons. Suddenly the interior to the private elevator came into view. It was empty. Spiked pressed a few more buttons. Images and figures blurred and moved in reverse. Then he paused. The time stamp was for about an hour earlier in the evening.

Clem and Xander came into view. They appeared to be in good spirits. Clem led the way. Xander followed. Clem turned around pressed a button and the doors closed. For a moment everything looked normal then Xander looked startled. He looked at Clem. Clem turned around and backhanded him so hard Xander stumbled back against the wall. He tried to say something and Clem hit him again. This time Xander’s eyes rolled into the back of his head and he crumpled.

Spike growled as he released Lilah. Hot rage was boiling through him. He couldn’t believe what he was seeing. He couldn’t believe Clem would not only betray him but harm Xander. This had to be a trick!

The doors opened and Clem dragged Xander out of the elevator.


“We only discovered Xander was missing a few moments before you returned,” Lilah explained swallowing painfully. “When the staff went to deliver his dinner.”

“WHERE ARE THEY?”

Lilah shook her head.

“We know the elevator let off on the subbasement level, near the garage…” Lilah tried to continue. Spike shoved past her and stormed out of the office. Lilah struggled to keep up with him.

Spike pounded his fist into the walls of the elevator as he waited for the doors to close. It stank of Lilah’s perfume, the strong smell of the cleaning solution the janitors used and underlying it was a
hint of Xander’s fear. He paced as the elevator descended.

As soon as it stopped he pounded on the doors to open. He spilled out into the garage. A security
detail was already waiting for him. Lilah stumbled out the elevator after him.

“Have you found him?” Spike barked at the vampire guards. They shook their heads. Spike grabbed
the nearest one and twisted it’s head until it snapped off. Ash and dust sprayed the other two vamps.

“Have you found anything?” Spike asked.

“This…sire,” one of the other vampires said nervously then pointed to a corner.

The scent hit Spike before his eyes could focus. He rushed past the other vampire and snatched at the
object on the floor. His rage boiled over. The entire world was tinted red.

“FIND HIM!” Spike roared as he held Xander’s chastity belt. Only Clem had access to the keys!
He’d been betrayed and Xander was in trouble!

“AND FIND CLEM! I WANT TO MAKE HIM PAY!”

The vampires scattered as Spike stormed out of the garage looking for a lead. Lilah successfully
fought back a small smile before turning to go back up to the casino floor.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Yes, Clem DOES have tentacles. They are revealed in Buffy season 7, in the episode “Potential.”
“They say Master Spike disemboweled two of the Strom demons from Clem’s last poker game,” the Boretz demon said as he leaned against the wall near Clem’s hiding place.

“No!” the vampire replied.

“Oh yes! He was furious they couldn’t tell him where Clem was.”

“Well how would they know where that worm was?”

“Hey, that’s not the point! The point is Master Spike wants his Pet back. He’s out for blood. Clem’s blood and anything that he even thinks gets in his way…” the demon trailed off leaving the obvious unsaid.

For a moment there was just an ominous silence where Clem fought to keep from whimpering. The pain in his side and the fire that flared in his chest each time he drew a breath was almost overwhelming.

“Still it’s an opportunity ya know?” the vampire whispered.

“Oh yeah” the demon replied with a loud smack of his lips.

“Bring in Clem…”

“And Master Spike will be grateful.”

There was another pause. Then the Boretz said, “You know what was to make Master Spike even more grateful?”

“What?”

“Getting his Pet back.”

“Claimant,” the vampire corrected.

“Whatever,” said the demon.

“Yeah. Ok but how…” the vampire began.

“Well, let’s suppose an enterprising duo were to find the traitor who took the tasty bit? Made him talk? Give up the prize?”

“OH!”

“Yeah,” said the demon. “Think about it. We get Clem. Convince him it’s in his best interest to give up the human and then…”

“We bring the Pet…”

“Claimant…”

“We bring ‘the treat’ back home to Daddy!” The vampire concluded with an excited yell.

“With the traitor’s head in tow,” the demon added.
“Master Spike would be reallly grateful,” the two said in unison then laughed. Clem closed his eyes and dared to pray to whatever angels were teetering on the edge of grace to risk falling for a demon like him.

“I heard old saggy face has a place over on Sierra Vista,” said the vampire.

“Fuck! What are we waiting for?” the demon yelled.

Clem held his breath as he heard the two scuttle away from the wall and down the street. He leaned his head back.

Xander! He thought. What am I going to do? Master Spike’s in a rage! Demons are hunting me and not just the ones who are trying to kill me!

Clem let out a slow breath. This time he couldn’t hold back a whimper. He was hurt. He was hurt bad. He wasn’t sure how much longer he had before his body gave out. He’d navigated his way out of the mini-warehouse where the Q’uartha demons had kept him. Somehow he’d even managed to get over the security fence.

Now he was cowering behind the wall of pub on the corner of Arville and Spring Mountain Road. He was still over two miles and hundreds of blood thirsty demons from Spike.

He wasn’t sure why Master Spike thought he’d betrayed him but he was sure it had to do with why he and Xander had been kidnapped. He was also sure the two departing schemers weren’t the only ones who’d figured on a “Torture Clem First” plan.

If I made it to Master Spike I at least have a chance of getting him to listen to me, Clem thought miserably as images of Spike pounding away at his already battered body while he tried to get the vampire to listen haunted him. If the others find me though I’m more likely to end up dead or, worse the only leads to Xander killed, before Spike finds out.

A clattering sound to the right startled Clem. He looked down the small alleyway. He didn’t see anything but he knew something or someone was near. He steeled himself.

Better to face my fate head on, he thought.

“Come out,” Clem ordered

A small thin human holding an empty can stepped out from behind the dumpster. Clem let out a painful breath he didn’t know he was holding.

The youngster looked at Clem. Its eyes widened behind the matted and knotted hair hanging down into its snot and filth covered face. The muscles in its legs bunched as if it were getting ready to run.

“STOP!” Clem commanded wincing at the agony flaring out from his side.

The human froze. Clem panted a moment trying to still the pain as he studied the mangy looking person. He/She/It was somewhere in the range of twelve to fourteen. It was covered in a long lose tunic and thick brown unkempt hair. It studied him.

Wild child, Clem thought. It happened sometimes. The very young wandered off from the pens. Sometimes they managed to survive a surprisingly long time before they became a snack, a toy, or ended right back up on the auction block. Amazingly this one looked like it had been surviving on its own a long time.
“Come here,” Clem ordered softly.

The human eyes darted right then left. Its muscles bunched again.

“Please,” Clem tried again. “I won’t hurt you.”

The adolescent scowled.

“My name’s Clem..Clement,” said. “What’s yours?”

The youngster tilted its head then shrugged. It was Clem’s turn to widen his eyes.

“You don’t have a name?”

The human shrugged again.

“Or you don’t want to tell me?” the demon continued.

The teen remained still. Clem smiled past the burning in his chest. Then he bit back a frown as a terrible idea occurred to him. He’d never do this, except he was desperate. Xander was in danger and it was the only plan he had.

“You’re hungry?”

The human narrowed his eyes. Once again he looked as if he was about to run.

“That would be a mistake. Running. You know that. I’ve found you, I can claim you. Running now would make you a runaway.”

The child stilled. Clem felt he deserved the burning in his lungs.

“You’re hungry?” Clem asked again as he motioned at the can.

The human nodded.

“You know your way around the city? You know where the Master of the City lives?”

A tremble went though the teen as it nodded.

“Good because I’ll tell you a secret. The Master of the City..Master Spike? Has the best human food in town.”

The adolescent frowned but moved closer to Clem.

“Oh, it’s true! He has chocolate! You ever have chocolate?”

The human shook its head.

“Potato chips?”

Again the teen shook its head.

“You are in for a treat!”

The human jutted out its chin and held out its hand.

“You have to be very brave, clever and do as you’re told,” Clem said as he winced as his side sent
up another bright flare of pain.

The teen pursed its lips for a moment then squatted before Clem. Once again it held out its hand.

Clem tore off a corner of a Xander’s shirt. The human’s eyes darted from Clem’s hands back to his face.

“It’s a friend’s,” Clem explained in a hoarse voice as he placed the torn fabric into the teen’s palm. The human raised an eyebrow.

“I need you to take this to Master Spike…” Clem began.

“Spike!” the teen exclaimed in a boyish voice.

“You can speak!”

“You want me to see Spike!” the boy spat.

“Please! A young man’s life is in danger,” Clem pleaded trying to ignore the building agony banking inside of him.

“And why do you care?” snarled the boy.

“He...he’s my friend,” Clem said softly.

The boy laughed bitterly, “Demons and humans aren’t *friends.*”

“He’s my ward,” Clem tried again.

“Your Pet?” the human asked as he stood up and began to pace. Suddenly Clem felt a chill. The human was circling him, like a predator. Clem had been at the bottom of the pecking order all of his life to know when he was in the presence of something bigger and more dangerous than himself.

“Not mine,” Clem said softly.

The boy’s eyes blazed brightly for a moment with an inner fury that was startling.

“Clement...long for Clem, right?” the boy asked.

Clem nodded. The boy had heard the other two talking.

“You take your Master’s ‘Pet?’” the boy asked with a snarl as he suddenly jerked Clem by his lapels.

“NOOOO!” Clem screamed in agony as something shifted once again.

The boy frowned and froze. He studied Clem.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“Q’uartha.. Q’uartha demons,” Clem panted. “Tried to kill me.”

“Why?”

“Frame me? I don’t know,” Clem said thickly. He tasted something bitter at the back of his throat. “Throw Master Spike off. Give them more time to hurt Claimant Xander.”

“Why?”
“I don’t…please!” pleaded Clem.

“You want me to help a human who’s only helped himself?”

“Huh?” Clem asked staring at the angry face of the teenage boy. His thoughts were fuzzy. His finger tips were growing numb.

“I know the tales. Only a willing human can become a Claimant to a vampire. What did he get? Better living? Food? Higher status?”

Clem closed his eyes. He was so tired. The pain was almost paralyzing.

“He got Master Spike,” Clem sighed. “He got over his fear of swimming. He got Ante.. Riki Tiki Tavi, dingoes and Ho Hos. He got..he got..he…”

Clem’s voice trailed out of to a wet whisper as his eyes closed. The teen studied him for a few moments. He studied the torn piece of fabric then sighed.

Then the young man opened the lid to the dumpster. He lifted the unconscious demon, put him inside and tossed the rest of Xander’s shirt in with him. Then he shut the lid. The insensate demon moaned but did not regain consciousness.

The young man trotted off.

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Xander’s skin was peppered with goose pimples. It rippled with revulsion and sensation. His joints screamed and ached. His knees felt like bruised meat. He was covered in a fine sheen of sweat. Keffler’s tongue flitted under his chin. Xander ground his jaws together.

“Talk to me Xxander,” Keffler hissed as he tongue flitted down Xander’s neck. Xander swallowed. “You are sssoo quiet.”

_Not telling you anything, Kiester, Xander thought. I heard what you told Lilah. You need a truthful answer well I don’t give you one and you don’t get a baseline on the Xan-man._

Keffler slunk around Xander. Once again the tongue was flitting down Xander’s back. He hated this the most. He hated how Keffler like to map and explore until he caressed the insides of Xander’s cheeks. The lizard demon never penetrated him but to Xander’s shame it worked at him until Xander’s body betrayed him. He’d get hard then Keffler would slither back to “taste” and tease Xander’s dick.

The demon never brought Xander off. He just kept tormenting Xander with quick strokes of its dry tongue up and down Xander’s shaft or across his crown. Xander hated that his body responded. He knew rationally it was physiology. He knew he had no more control over what was happening than he had with Azora.

_But damn it I had!_ Xander thought angrily as once again he felt his body respond. He bit his lip. He winced as he tasted blood. His lip was practically tattered.

“Sssoo00 ressonssive,” Keffler whispered against Xander’s fleshed. “Dessire, lusst, anger, fear…”

Xander tried to tune out the demons cataloging of his emotions.

“I could feassst on you for dayssss tassty Xxander,” cooed the demon.
And Spike could string out your death for days, Xander thought as Keffler slid around lap at Xander’s dick.

“Takess less time to bring you to hardnesss,” Keffler said.

It’s just physiology, Xander reminded himself. It doesn’t mean anything.

“Do you want releassse, Xander?” Keffler asked.

I want “released”, Xander thought.

“Perhapssss ssssomething new?” Keffler asked.

Wilow! NO! Xander thought as Keffler began to rub the side of his head in a slow stroke against Xander's shaft. Xander couldn’t stop the low whimper that escaped as his body reacted to the first solid touch since his torture began. He couldn’t stop how his body almost drank up the sensation of something firm pressing against him rather than the quick feather like touches he’d been subjected to over and over again.

“Good, yess?”

Fu..NO..Won’t...Can’t! Xander struggled to keep his mind from betraying him; from betraying Spike. He panted through the sensation.

“More? Tassty Xxander? More touchess?” Keffler asked as he slid his whole body to press close to Xander. He stood on his hind legs and rubbed his smooth scaly abdomen against Xander in an obscene parody of frottage.

SPIKE! Xander thought frantically as Keffler caressed Xander’s cheeks with the stubby little finger like appendages on his short forelegs while he continued to hump against him.

“Ssooo good,” Keffler hissed.

Xander’s body was confused. It was a mass of conflicting sensation. Pain and pleasure were all twisted around and it wanted relief from one or the other.

“One anssswer tasssty Xxxander,” Keffler whispered. “Jussst one ansswer and I can make it better.”

One two, Spikey’s coming for you, Xander thought frantically.

“You don’t even have to ssssay it aloud. Ssshake your head yesss or no.”

Three, four he’s gonna roar.

“You don’t even have to ansswer a quesstion about Ssspike or how you feel.”

Five, six you'll take some kicks! Xander tried to refocus all he had left on the rhyme in his head and not how Keffler’s rhythm was increasing or how his fingers were mapping his face.

“It could be as ssssimple as vanilla,” Keffler said tapping Xander’s right cheek, “or chocolate.” He tapped Xander's left cheek.

Xander’s eyes slid to his left then froze. He hadn’t meant to give an answer! It was just a stupid reflex! It was chocolate versus vanilla! He locked eyes with Keffler.

“Very good tasssty Xxxxander,” Keffler hissed his amusement at his victory clearly evident. “Now we
can really begin your interrogation.”

NO! Xander thought. He had to do something!

Seven, eight you’re something I ate! Xander silently screamed as he turned his head just the fraction he needed to wrap his mouth down on two of Keffler’s finger. He bit down hard and held tight.

“AARRRRRRNNNNNGN!” Keffler screamed as Xander’s teeth sunk deep into his flesh. He tried tugging free and his skin only ripped further.

A cool spicy fluid filled Xander’s mouth. He swallowed.

Nine, ten you taste like..chicken, he thought.

“GUARDSSS!” Keffler screamed as he began to beat at Xander’s face with his one good foreleg. Xander bit down harder. He heard several things snap and something inside him soared.

I’m not your victim or tasty plaything! Xander thought as two pale grey guards rushed in to help the struggling gecko demon. I’m Xander! Donutboy, Scooby, White Knight and Spike’s Claimant!

It took three blows to Xander’s stomach before he released his hold on Keffler. He smiled as he watched them help the hissing demon out the door. Several “fingers” on its right foreleg were mangled bits of broken flesh and oozing streams of bright purple blood.

Taste like chicken..tacos, Xander thought as he licked his lips then smiled.

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Spike had stormed through the casino trailing blood and slime. He had needed to get cleaned up and go back out again. No one had seemed to know where Clem was but someone had had to know! It was just a matter of finding them!

Just a matter of applying the right pressure to the right places! Spike had thought with a savage grin which had sent customers fleeing in panic. Already he’d applied a lot of pressure; pressure which had left him awash in geysers and fountains of literal dead ends.

His anger had carried him through riding up to his suite in the crime scene. He’d wanted to tear the elevator apart. Though he’d made sure his demon continued to convey its permission for Xander’s absence. To deny it would mean agony for Xander; where ever he was. It was an exercise he’d had to remind himself to do in between interrogations.

How DARE Clem betray me! How dare he force me to part with my pet! He’d raged.

The rage had burned out as soon as he’d stepped inside the empty suite. Then he’d almost succumbed to an overwhelming grief. Xander was gone. Xander was in trouble. He’d failed to protect him. One moment Spike had been in command of himself and his city. The next he’d been on his knees weeping.

He didn’t know how long he’d been locked in grief. He knew a gentle rumbling sound had begun to at first soothe him, then annoy him then finally stir him. He’d finally focused to see Ante sitting in front of him purring.

“Mew,” the cat had said then got up and walked away.

“Right!” Spike had said getting to his feet. “Time ta get back ta work and find him. Time for the
soddin’ water works later.”

That had been a shower and half a bottle of whiskey ago. Now he was back in form. The rage was a smoldering set of embers in the pit of his gut. The grief was a wet lump of clay in his heart. The rest of him was focused.

“Gonna find ya, pet,” Spike whispered. “Gonna find ya, bring ya home and gonna make those who took ya wished they’d never walked this hell hole.”

The doors to the elevator slid open. Spike stepped inside. Once again it smelt of the cleaning solution and Xander’s fear. It smelt of Spike’s earlier visit as well. He growled low under his breath and pressed the button to go back down.

*I’ll find ya, pet,* Spike vowed as the elevator lurched into motion. *Hang on.*

He’s nose twitched. The stench of the cleaning solution was strong. Now that his head was clear he noticed it more and it bothered him.

*Bloody hell,* he thought. *Lorne's not even gone for a week and already the staff’s gone back to over doin’ it.*

He shook his head. Lorne had always made sure the staff went lightly on the cleaning solutions. They were sometimes irritating to a vampire’s senses. Plus they masked or confused other scents.

Spike slammed his hand against the stop button on the elevator.

*I’m a bloody stupid git!* He thought. *What if the staff didn’t just bollocks it up?*

The vampire stood very still. Then he opened his mouth and took a deep breath. Immediately his eyes began to water. For a moment the harsh lemony scented chemicals were all he could “taste” or smell. He closed his eyes and concentrated.

He’d caught a whiff of Xander’s fear before in the elevator. He tried finding that scent again. Slowly he began to move around the elevator trying to find it.

*There!* He thought as he moved closer to the doors. He took another deep breath ignoring all the other scents except that of his pet. It was stronger lower to the floor.

Spike squatted down. He followed his nose and leaned toward the panel door over the emergency phone. Carefully he opened the door. He looked around then smiled grimly. Tucked in the corner of the door was a yellow guitar pick. He plucked it out of the corner and examined it.

On one side the numbers and letters were “36 53.942N” were scratched into the plastic and “116 49.772W” were scratched on the other side. More importantly the pick smelled like Xander. He held the pick closer to his nose and took another sniff. He could barely make out the scent of the wolf boy, Oz.

*Lilah YOU lying sack of shite!* Spike silently howled as he stood up and palmed the pick. He shut the panel to the emergency phone. The video Lilah had shown him hadn’t shown Xander hiding a pick. A pick he could only have gotten from his trip to the video store he and Clem had been planning to take that day. A pick Xander wouldn’t have hid unless he was afraid of it falling into the wrong hands.

Spike clenched his fists. It was a setup; the Pisakas, Clem and the video tape. He’d been right the first time. The twat Lilah was behind this!
She’s gonna wish I’d given her to Angelus! Spike silently raged as he hit the release button setting the elevator back in motion once again. When the doors opened he stormed out heading for his office.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Xander’s rhyme was inspired by the Nightmare on Elmstreet version of this popular children’s rhyme.
Once again Xander’s scent haunted him. He froze then scented the air. He tilted his head then scanned the casino. Along the far wall he caught side of a filthy dirty teenage boy. The boy jutted out his chin, smiled then held waved a torn piece of blue fabric.

*XANDER!* Spike’s demon howled as he launched into motion without thinking. The boy turned and ran. Spike pushed, slammed and rammed his way through the crowd. The attempts to get out of his way were to slow. Bodies were pushed to the side and under feet as the enraged vampire made his way across the casino floor and to the door opening to a stairway leading to the garage.

The young human was moving faster than Spike thought possible. He was taking the steps six or seven at a time. Spike roared then leapt down.

He crashed into the young man. Vampire and human went rolling, bumping down the stairs. The stairwell filled with the echoes of snarls, moans and angry shouts. Bare knuckles pounded into soft flesh.

“Ugh!” the kid grunted as Spike finally hauled him up by his collar and slammed him back against the wall.

“WHERE IS HE?!” Spike snarled!

“You want me to talk are you want to drain me?” the kid spat.

“Both!” the vampire roared as he pressed close. He stared at the boy’s neck and flashed teeth.

“You kill me,” the boy said coolly, “you won’t find out what I know.”

“Will if I turn you,” Spike said in a low and dangerous sounding whisper.

“I don’t think you can afford to wait the three days for me to rise,” the boy snapped.

“WHERE IS HE?” Spike yelled again as he once again slammed the boy against the wall.

“I..I don’t know,” the boy finally stuttered. “But I know someone who does.”

Spike stepped back a fraction of an inch.

“Take me to him!” he ordered.

“Not without some guarantees!”

“At this rate you’ll be lucky if you get to live out the day!”

“My life, some food..and the life of my informant!”

Spike narrowed his eyes. He studied the boy. There was the tiniest trickle of blood from where the boy’s lip had been split during the fight.
“If your informant had anything to do with Xander’s disappearance the best he can hope for is a swift death,” the vampire growled.

“You need to hear him out before you do anything,” the boy insisted.

Once again, the vampire studied the young man. There was a vague sense of familiarity about the scent of the boy’s blood. He asked, “He your master?”

“NO demon is my master,” the boy snarled.

Spike cocked an eyebrow.

“So you care..why?”

“You’re wasting time..Spike,” the boy said with a fixed an unflinching gaze.

“You have your life,” Spike finally said.

“The food and the informant?”

“You’ll get the food if the information checks out. Your informant lives if he had nothing to do with Xander’s disappearance.”

Then Spike released his hold on the human. He took a step back.

“Follow me,” the boy said as he once again started off. He paused briefly only to look back at Spike.

“Oh! And try and keep up,” he said with a half smile before he began running.

Spike froze for a moment. Something about the smile was familiar. He shook it off, growled and began to run after the human who was much faster than Spike expected.

***

The human led Spike through twists and turns of back alleys, service entrances and even through a few tunnels. It was as if he was as concerned about being followed as Spike. His amazing pace never faltered.

Spike felt a grudging respect for the boy blossom. Whoever he was, where ever he had come from, Spike recognized a powerful potential when he saw it. He just wished he’d had time to puzzle the mystery of the boy out instead of worrying about Xander.

The master vampire wasn’t so far gone in his own concerns or the mystery of the boy to not pay attention to his own surroundings. He knew they weren’t being followed. He also knew they were running parallel to I-15 and going north on South Valley View Boulevard which might be a problem because a set of railroad tracks and an old construction cut that street half.

However, when the street ended the human zigged and zagged his way through past the old equipment and obstacle course until they were back to where the street started up again. The boy led him through abandoned stripmalls on Wynn Road before he weaved and dodged through the
shadows of more buildings. Finally they were near a Pub on the corner of Arville.

In all they hadn’t traveled but a few miles yet it seemed to Spike they had been loping along for hours. He had been growing frustrated with the cat and mouse game. He glanced around and sniffed the air.

Bugger! He thought. It had only just then occurred to him he might be walking into a trap.

The boy smiled as if he suddenly sensed the vampire’s concern.

“Slippin’ master Spike?” He drawled.

“Where’s yer bloody informant, git?” Spike barked not picking up any traces of an ambush at the moment. He only smelled garbage, decay and the rancid odors left behind when demons and humans met in the shadows of Vegas.

“In here,” the boy said as he scrambled over to a dumpster. He lifted the lid.

The vile scents of more rank and filth struck Spike, but so did two other familiar smells: fresh blood and Clem!

A slight groan echoed up from the bottom of the dumpster.

“Clem!” Spike shouted as he dived into the dumpster. He landed carefully as if to avoid hitting the demon lying prone before him. It was obvious the fresh blood was coming from Xander’s keeper.

“P..Please Master Spike,” Clem begged in a wet whisper. “Give me a cha..chance to explain…”

Clem’s words were suddenly interrupted by a spasm of coughing. Spike lurched forward only to be grabbed from behind.

“Remember your promise,” the boy growled.

“If ya want ta keep that hand, whelp,” Spike growled back, “I suggest ya move it!”

“I want your word you ain’t gonna…”

“I’m not going to kill Clem ya daft git! Now let go!”

The human grunted but released Spike. The vampire leaned forward and began to delicately run his hands over Clem’s face then torso. The demon screamed as Spike’s hands traveled over the place where the Q’uortha demons had caused something to snap inside.

Spike felt a hand at his collar but shrugged it off. He stared down at Clem’s pain filled eyes.

“Shh, mate,” Spike said soothingly. “Ya have ta calm down. Yer broken up inside. The more excited ya get the worse its makin’ it.”

“X..Xander...” Clem began.

“Where is he?” Spike asked gently as he stripped off his coat.
“W..warehouse,” Clem answered.

“Good. Good..Clem,” Spike said as then stripped off his shirt. “Where?”

“Close..nearby,” Clem said then began to cough again. Spike ran his hand soothingly over Clem’s forehead until the spasm passed.

“I..I didn’t..take him,” Clem finally said when the coughing stopped.

“I know,” Spike said as he smiled softly at Clem. “That bitch Lilah framed ya.”

Then Spike leaned over Clem. He looked at the wounded demon then gently wrapped one arm under Clem’s neck.

“Spike,” the boy growled in warning from behind the vampire.

“Oh! The boy,” Clem whispered. “You will feed him..won’t you Master Spike?”

“That the deal you made with the annoying twit?” Spike asked softly. Clem nodded.

“I’ll feed him,” Spike said.

“Ch..chocolate..and potato chips,” Clem insisted.

“Oi! His taste is as bad as yours and Xander’s!” Spike said teasingly.

Clem smiled weakly.

Then Spike grew serious again.

“Clem,” he said. “I’m gonna have ta wrap yer chest up before we can move ya. Gotta keep your insides from slipping around and doin’ any more damage. It’s gonna hurt.”

“But Master Spike..Xa…”

“You tell me what ya know,” Spike said interrupting the worried demon. “Then let me handle it from there. Tell me what ya know and then if ya want ta nod off, well than ya can. Yeah?”

“What about the Q’uartha demons?” Clem asked.

“Q’uartha?”

“Two. They..they were there..tried to kill me.”

“Were they with Xander?”

“Don’t know,” Clem said before closing his eyes. “Di..didn’t see Xander. Just..his clothes. Had to be nearby, Master Spike.. had to be!”

Spike could sense the desperation in the saggy skin demon. Clem needed to believe Xander was close and OK almost as much as he did.
“I’ll find him,” Spike promised. “Bring ‘im back so you two can watch more of yer silly movies, Yeah?”

Clem nodded weakly. He unclenched his fist and released his hold on Xander’s shirt.

“ Took this fr.. from the wa.. warehouse,” Clem whispered.

“Good,” Spike said. “You did good.”

Clem sighed.

“Ok, gotta do this now, Clem. Gotta get you to the Pocklas, Yeah?”

Clem nodded.

“Right then,” Spike said then using all the speed and dexterity he could muster lifted Clem into a sitting position. The demon screamed in agony. There was a loud thump as suddenly the strange boy was in the dumpster and crouching behind Clem. He was all but snarling at Spike.

“Ya can either help or get the hell out of here,” Spike barked as he began to wrap his shirt tightly around Clem’s chest. “Don’t care which but drop the attitude!”

The boy tilted his head to the side then began to help Spike. Clem groaned, hissed then fell unconscious. He sagged backward. The human caught him and held him as Spike continued to bandage him. When he was done, Clem was pale and his breaths where coming in quick short spurts.

“Can you handle him on yer own?” Spike asked the boy.

“What?”

“Can you carry, ‘im?” Spike barked.

The boy nodded. Spike grabbed his coat and draped it over the boys shoulder.

“I know you can find an unseen route back to the Slayer’s End, but you’ll need something extra to get in my stables”

“Your stables!” spat the boy.

“Look! His only chance are Pocklas, do you know what they are?”

“Healer demons,” the boy answered quickly. Spike didn’t waste time being surprised he just nodded.

“Wear my kit,” Spike continued. “It’ll get you into the green stables. Tell the Pocklas I expect to see both of you alive and well when I get back.”

“And the food?” the boy asked as he gently lowered Clem to the floor of the dumpster before donning Spike’s coat.

“Don’t worry,” Spike replied as he grabbed Xander’s shirt. “Only the best is served in my stables.”
Then without a backward glance Spike sprung from the dumpster. He scented the air looking for traces of Clem or Xander somewhere away from the Pub. He already knew he wouldn’t find any scent for the Q’uartha demons.

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Xander’s joints were screaming in agony. He was cold. He was thirsty. He was scared. Keffer was back and he brought friends. This time he was flanked by the two huge demons that’d come to his rescue when Xander had taken a bite out of him.

Xander tried to lick his lips but he’d been gagged. The pale, hairless and gray demons which were now guarding Keffer had shoved a swatch of dirty leather in his mouth then bound it tightly behind his head. It tasted salty causing Xander to drool and swallow. It made him thirsty.

Keffer meanwhile nursed his hand while glaring at Xander. He looked confused as if he weren’t sure what to do next. He had his baseline answer to begin questioning the human, but he couldn’t as long as Xander was gagged. Yet if he removed the gag, Xander might just bite him again.

Xander tried to smile around his leather bit. He liked seeing the slight fear in Keffer’s eyes. Now that he knew how easy the demon’s flesh gave under his teeth, he wouldn’t hesitate to bite him again if he had the chance.

“Thiss changess nothing,” Keffer finally hissed. There was a new light in his eyes; a new light which wasn’t fear.

Xander cocked an eyebrow. The Q’uartha growled. Keffer slithered forward toward Xander.

“You think I will sstop now?” the demon asked as it suddenly whipped its tale around and struck Xander across his lower stomach.

Xander arched and bit back a scream even as an angry red welt began to form on his exposed skin.

“I will get answers, Xxander,” Keffer hissed then struck Xander again. This time the tale sliced across the humans genitals. This time Xander did scream. Then to the human’s continued horror Keffer slid his tail and wrapped it around Xander’s waist.

Keffer began to rub the tip of his tail gently up and down Xander’s spine in a parody of gentle stroking. Xander’s eyes widened as unwelcome memories began to haunt him.

“Not quite a tentacle…” Keffer whispered.

“NO!” Xander screamed against the gag.

“…but maybe closse enough?” Keffer continued as the tip of tail began to slide along the crevice of Xander’s ass.

Xander froze. He wanted to fight. He wanted to scream. Yet suddenly all he could think about was the Azora, about being milked and about “the Tank.”

Keffer paused. He studied Xander. His tongue flitted in the air.

“It doesnn’t have to be thiss way Xxander,” Keffer said.
Xander risked looking at the demon.

“Promisse to behave. Let the Q’uartha remove the gag and I’ll stop,” Keffler said. He waggled the tip of tail for emphasis. Xander’s breath caught.

“Ansswer my questionss,” Keffler said, “promisse not to bite and I won’t touch you with my tail.”

Oh G…SPIKE! Xander thought frantically. He didn’t want this. He didn’t want any of this. He hadn’t wanted Keffler to touch him. He’d fought back and now…now the demon was threatening…

Keffler flicked the tip of tail again. Then he began to burrow it just ever so slightly between Xander’s ass cheeks.

SPIKE! Xander silently screamed. Memories were starting to collide. He knew what it would feel like. He knew the horror and the helplessness of it. Once again he’d be just a thing. Once again he was would be property to use.

“Xxander,” Keffler softly hissed.

Yet if he didn’t do this, if he cooperated he’d betray Spike! He’d betray Willow, the alliance and ultimately himself.

“Perhapss I would be careless,” Keffler whispered as he snaked ever so slowly towards Xander’s pucker. “Perhapss in my excitement of being nessteled in a warm human body I would forget mysself and releasse.”

Release? Xander thought in terror then blinked at Keffler.

“Mmm, yess. My kind find reproductive releasse in our tails,” Keffler began to explain.

WILLOW! Xander screamed silently in horror.

“Ssometimess that results in eggs,” Keffler continued.

“EMGGS!” Xander yelled against the gag.

“Yess!” Keffler sighed as the tip of his tail now circled teasingly around Xander’s clenched sphincter. “Eggss which will be cocooned and incubated in your body. My young will draw nourissshment from your flesh..feaststing from within and when they are ready…”

“NOOO!” Xander screamed again against his gag in horror as the very tip of Keffler’s tail began the slow steady process of breaching him.

“…they will hatch and tear their way out!” Keffler finished.

Xander fought the sobs caught in his chest. This was worse than the Azora! This was worse than anything he could imagine. His own body would be used to give life to his rapist’s progeny!

Keffler stilled to once again study Xander. Once again he flitted his tongue into the air.

“You can ssstop thiss, Xxxander,” Keffler said. “Jusst promisse to behave. Promisse not to bite.”
Promise to betray Spike! Xander thought. Buffy! Giles! Please…don’t make me… Xander prayed.


Tremors of terror, pain and exhaustion wracked Xander. How much more could he take? He looked at Keffler. He took at deep breath, and then as best he could he shook his head.

“FOOL!” Keffler hissed.

Xander braced to be breached. Suddenly there was a terrifying snarl. The door flew off its hinges flying into one of the Q’uartha as a bare-chested Spike barreled through the doorway and slammed into the other demon.

There was a loud snap and wet “POP” as Spike twisted and tore the head of the demon. The other Q’uartha yelled in agony

Xander barely noticed Keffler’s retreat away from him as he watched Spike covered in blood tear into the second demon. There was a bit more of a fight. The second Q’uartha managed to land a few blows but Spike only laughed with each hit taken. Eventually he closed in close enough to rip out the other demon’s throat in one bite. Gray blood showered and coated Spike.

Keffler was half out the door when Spike grabbed him by the tail. He dragged the screaming gecko demon back into the room. He lifted it up over his head.

“NOOOO, Massster Ssspike!” Keffler screeched just before Spike dropped it over his bent knee in a move Xander recognized from wrestling.

There was a loud snap just before the demon howled then lay on the floor. Keffler pathetically scrambled on the concrete floor with his forelegs while the lower half of his body remained immobile.

Spike then rushed to Xander. Though his eyes still blazed brightly with rage and bloodlust his touch was gentle. Carefully he untied the gag at the back of Xander’s head before easing the leather out of Xander’s mouth.

Xander’s vision grew blurry. Spike knelt before him then softly ran his fingertips over Xander’s face tracing each curve and hard plane as if it were a precious work of art. When he’d finished, he laid the faintest of kisses on the tip of Xander’s nose.

“I..I..”Xander finally began to speak in a broken and harsh voice. He didn’t know what he was trying to say, only that he needed to say it.

“Shhh…” Spike whispered.


Spike leaned forward and silenced Xander by laying his cool lips over Xander’s warm abused ones. Xander breathed deep the scent of his vampire. He ignored the smell of blood and concentrated on the scents of whiskey and smoke underneath.

“I know,” Spike whispered against Xander’s lips. “I know.”
Xander had stayed only a little while in his arms, and then he’d retreated. The vampire hadn’t wanted to let him go. His instinct had been to hold on to him. He had wanted to keep him close and yet his soul had whispered to yield to what Xander had wanted.

Keffler screamed as Spike ground his heel into the demon’s injured hand. The sound did nothing to soothe Spike’s own demon. Nothing less than Keffler’s dying whimper would; and only then it would be a temporary balm.

Spike still felt helpless. He’d been helpless to keep his Pet safe. He’d been helpless to stop this living bag of shite beneath him from hurting his Xander. He felt as helpless as Xander huddled in the corner with his arms wrapped around his stomach dressed in the remains of his shirt. Spike snarled and began tearing at Keffler.

The gecko demon screamed again as Spike ripped a belt sized strip of skin from the orange demon’s flesh.

“Spike,” Xander softly whispered. “He isn’t the one really responsible for all of this.”

Spike winced. *I know, pet. I am.*

“Lilah is the one we want,” Xander continued.

“I’ll use her bones ta make you a pretty, pet,” Spike growled.

Xander smiled faintly and said, “Well as romantic as that is, master, I think I’d much rather have her spill her guts.”

“From liver to spleen and everything in between,” Spike cooed suddenly springing away from Keffler and sidling up close to Xander. He gently reached out a hand to touch Xander’s cheek. Xander flinched.

“Pet?” Spike whispered in hurt confusion.

“We need to know why, Spike” Xander continued dodging Spike’s unvoiced question. “We need to know what her game is. Was this on Angelus’s orders?”

The vampire lowered his hand. His demon raged. His soul wept. He looked back over at the battered and tortured demon on the floor. He dropped the strip of flesh at Xander’s feet then grinned before moving back across the room to fish through the pockets of a dead Q’uartha. He pulled out a cell phone.

“You have one chance and one chance only at a peaceful death, Keffler,” Spike said as he stalked back towards the gecko. Keffler whimpered. “Convince Lilah you have the info she wants and it’s time to come back and see Xander.”

Spike had had to give it to the orange demon. He’d managed to sound convincing. If Spike hadn’t of tortured the demon himself he might have bought the performance too.

“What do you want?” Lilah had snapped into the phone.

Xander had hugged the corner at Keffler’s words. Spike had bit his lip to keep from growling. Keffler had kept his eyes focused on the floor. Lilah’s laughter had rung out clearly from the phone.

“So soon?” Lilah had asked.

“It wass wass easy,” Keffler had replied, “with the right perssssuasion.”

“I really do think Angelus has overestimated these two,” she had said.

“Hmmm,” was all Keffler had replied.

“Very well, I’ll be there shortly,” Lilah had said.

“I will be waiting,” Keffler had answered just before the line went dead. He’d looked at Spike.

The vampire had snarled, knocked the phone from the other demon’s uninjured hand and then began to pummel his fists repeatedly into the helpless demon’s face.

“Masster Ssspike, PLEASSSSE!” Keffler had screamed. “You promissssed an easy death!”

Spike had hoisted the demon up and threw it against the wall. There had been a hideous sounding crack as something else inside the demon had cracked and broken. Blood had spurted out of Keffler’s mouth. Spike had smiled and delivered a few more blows to the gecko, aiming for where the latest break had happened.

“This is an easy death,” Spike had whispered to the demon who was now beyond words. Its eyes rolled. More blood had sputtered and bubbled out of its mouth and nose as Spike continued to beat it to death.

“You deserve so much more for just merely touching what’s mine! Let alone for HURTING him!” Spike had growled and snarled as he’d continued to rain down his rage on the pulpy body of the gecko demon. “You! You’re not even fit to crawl in his footsteps!”

“Spike,” Xander had softly whispered. Spike had paused in his fury stilled by the one force that could calm him. “He’s dead.”

Spike had frowned. Keffler had died too soon. He’d died way too soon.

***

Xander was worried about Spike. The master vampire was still vibrating a murderous rage. Even though he was literally spattered with the blood of his enemies he wanted more. Xander was worried Spike would move too soon. He was worried somehow he’d give away their position; Lilah would escape.

NO! Xander vowed. I’m not letting her get away with anything more.

Focusing on getting Lilah was what was holding Xander together. It held him together as they hid the bodies of theQ’uartha and what was left of Keffler. It was what was holding him together now as he knelt posed and naked.

He could feel Spike watching him. He couldn’t return the look. He knew that only fed Spike’s fury. However, he just couldn’t face him right now.
A tremor raced through Xander’s body. He’d never felt so low or so dirty; not even when he’d been raped by the Azora. He could still feel Keffler inside him. He could still feel a trembling in his gut.

Xander would have lowered his head, but he still had to fake he was being restrained just as Keffler left him. He closed his eyes instead. Fear gnawed inside of him.

*What if?* Xander wondered. *What if something is inside m…?*

Xander pounded his head against the pole behind him. Spike hissed. A tear slipped down Xander’s cheek. It had all been so confusing. It had all been so painful. Keffler had been breaching him. He’d been threatening him.

Pain twisted through Xander. He groaned. He could have just promised to have been good. Keffler would have pulled out of him.

*If I had just remembered to tell Spike about what had happened that first time he’d touched me,* Xander thought. *This never would have happened! Spike would have taken care of him then! I was so stupid!*

Now Xander was afraid. He was afraid Keffler had left something behind; something growing inside him. Another tear streaked down his cheek. How could he tell Spike? How could he tell Spike he might be a host to Keffler’s spawn and he was partly to blame?

“Xander?” Spike whispered from his hiding spot behind the door.

Xander opened his eyes. He looked at Spike and for some reason it hurt to breathe. He shook his head. The vampire clenched his fists. Then both the human and vampire froze as they heard clatter of heels echo down the hall. Lilah was on her way.

The steps slowed as Lilah seemed to grow cautious.

“Mr. Keffler?” she called out.

“NO!” Spike answered as he charged from behind the door. “And I blame that on YOU!”

Lilah screamed and spun around. She tried to dodge Spike but the vampire was too quick. He wrapped his hands around her neck and began to slowly squeeze.

“SPIKE!” Xander shouted as he shrugged off the fake restraints and stood up.

This time Spike ignored Xander. He smiled as Lilah kicked and scratched at him.

“This time Spike ignored Xander. He smiled as Lilah kicked and scratched at him.

“Spike STOP!” Xander ordered

Lilah was turning an ugly shade of red. Xander ran over to Spike and laid a hand on his shoulder.

“Please,” he said softly. “We need to find out what she knows.”

Spike turned his head and looked at Xander. Lilah turned a purplish shade of blue.
“Please, master,” Xander said.

The vampire let go off. Lilah sagged to the floor clutching her throat as she coughed almost to the point of retching. Spike reached out to touch Xander. His pet pulled back.

“What the fuck was this all about?” Spike snarled as he turned back to face Lilah.

“In..Information!” Lilah coughed her answer as she looked around. Her eyes widened as she saw the pile of dead bodies.

“Oh that’s right, Lilah,” Spike crooned as he squatted down next to the lawyer. “You’re not walking away from this one.”

“You wouldn’t dare!” spat Lilah.

“Wouldn’t I?” Spike spat back.

“Did Angelus put you up to this?” Xander asked in as strong a voice as he could muster.

Lilah raked her eyes over his naked, bruised form and snorted. Xander paled and retreated to his corner to don his torn shirt again.

Spike grabbed Lilah by her shoulder and shook her savagely. She laughed.

“Spike,” Xander pleaded again.

“You’ve got one chance, and only one, to get a clean death from this,” Spike growled.

“As if that scares me,” Lilah bit back.

“It should. You’ve read my file.”

Lilah snorted again.

“This another one of Angelus’ bleedin’ games?” Spike barked.

“It’s one of mine,” Lilah sneered.

“Yours?” whispered Xander.

“You may have Angelus fooled, Spike, but not me,” Lilah said. “I’m on the fast track to a partnership and I’m not going to let you or your boytoy ruin it for me!”

Spike snarled as he backhanded the lawyer across the mouth. She fell backward onto the cold concrete. For a moment she lay still. Then her form started to shudder and shake. Xander’s eyes narrowed for a moment. Was she crying?

Then she sat up. Her mouth opened wide in laughter. She wiped blood away from her lips and looked at Spike.

“Angelus is a fool to trust you, Spike. I know you’re plotting against him. And while I really don’t give a good Belzebub damn about your family squabbles the senior partners like this whole hell on earth routine. And what they want? Is what I want.”

“That doesn’t make any sense,” Xander said.
“Oh grow up!” Lilah snapped.

Spike backhanded her again.

“Ohoo baby! I just love the foreplay,” Lilah laughed as she wiped at the blood flowing from her nose. Spike lifted his hand to strike her again.

“Spike, stop!” Xander ordered. The vampire looked at him.

“It’s what she wants,” Xander quietly observed.

Spike looked at Lilah then back to Xander and then back to the lawyer again. His pet was right. He scented her fear now just below the blood and bravado. It was a fear that she was using to goad him to give her a quicker death than she knew he’d otherwise give her.

“Right, pet,” Spike said as he stood up and backed away from Lilah.


“I don’t know what you are, Lilah,” Xander said as Spike opened the dead Q’uartha cell phone, “but I know you are not human.”

“Send a car, some vamps, some clothes for my Pet, and a blue drought from the Pocklas,” Spike ordered into the phone.

***

If Xander had had his way he would have scrubbed clean first before putting on fresh clothes. Yet, in keeping with the pattern of his life lately, he didn’t have much say. Spike had shielded him when the other vampires, the minions, had arrived. It really wasn’t necessary. There was no way they were going to cross Spike. There was no way they were going to peek at the Master of Las Vegas’ stripped and bared Claimant.

Still, Spike had growled, snarled and shielded Xander from prying eyes as best he could while Xander dressed. Xander hadn’t complained. He’d just dressed as quickly as he could and done his best not to throw up. He’d tried to keep his fear in check. He’d tried to tell himself the ache in his gut was from fear and abuse not from tiny gecko eggs hatching inside of him.

He felt sick. He felt dirty and somehow the clean clothes only seemed to make it worse. It seemed as if they mocked him; as if they reinforced the taint on, around and in him. He felt cold.

“What?” Spike asked softly. Xander shook himself and looked at the vampire. For the first time since he’d stormed into the room the vampire was no longer in game face. His smooth human face and hauntingly blue eyes stared at Xander. “You ready to go?”

Go? Xander wondered as just for a moment his chest tightened. The pain and the filth settled deep inside of him. Ugly, misbegotten life was clawing inside of him. He looked around. His chastity belt was on the floor.

“My belt,” he whispered.

“Burying it! Along with this whole fuckin’ place!” Spike spat.

Xander winced. Why would Spike want to protect him now? He’d been stupid. He hadn’t told Spike
about Keffler. Spike had repeatedly warned Xander about demons and Xander just hadn’t paid any attention.

“Pet..we gotta go,” Spike said softly.

“Yes, master,” Xander said as he stared at the floor.

If Spike’s blood circulated, it would have run cold. Something was wrong. Something was very very wrong with his Xander. He wanted to take him in his arms. He wanted to run away to the suite, tuck them both in bed and hold him until everything was all right but he didn’t have time. Everything was coming to head and before all the final pieces went into motion he had a few more plays to make.

“Let’s go!” Spike barked as he spun around and led the way out of the warehouse. Xander followed him with the minions dragging a bound and gagged Lilah behind them. Spike had one souvenir clutched in his hand. A belt sized strip of orange skin.

***

Lilah’s eyes widened and she began to scream into her gag as the limo pulled up outside the hotel where Pisakas were staying. Spike smiled as he pulled out a vial of blue liquid the minions had brought him. Then he literally pounced on Lilah. He pinned her to the floor of the car with his weight; his knees resting on her shoulders. She arched up, grunting in pain, as she tried to throw him off her. Her hands were bound behind and beneath her. Spike grinned into her face as he ripped her gag down with one hand.

“One chance, Lilah,” Spike said calmly, “what does ‘Gelus know?”

“Nothing!” Lilah said. “I told you. This was all me!”

Spike cocked his head. He opened his mouth slightly.

“Look, he suspects you’re up to something, Spike,” Lilah quickly babbled, “but he always does. I was just trying to prove it.”

“You know, Lilah,” Spike said with a boyish smile. “I think I believe you.”

“It’s the truth, Spike.”

“Thank you,” the vampire said before reaching up and pinching Lilah’s nose shut. “And now I believe congratulations are in order.”

“NO!” Lilah yelled then tried to clamp her mouth shut. Yet Spike had already jammed the tip of the bottled between her lips. Lilah thrashed her head and bucked. Spike continued to pour the liquid. It dribbled down her chin, her cheek and most importantly down her throat.

Lilah coughed, sputtered and her eyes watered. When the bottled was empty, Spike sprang back and off the lawyer. He sat next to Xander who watched everything like it was some late night feature on the Sci-Fi channel.

“Why?” Lilah shouted. “I told you what you wanted. I told you the truth!”

“I know ya did,” Spike said. He risked a glance at Xander. His pet looked pale. He needed to get him back to the Slayer’s End. He wanted the Pocklas to check him out.

“I..I..” Lilah paused as if suddenly she couldn’t remember what she was saying. She blinked. She
shook her head. She blinked again.

“Startin’ ta feel it, yeah?” Spike asked as he grinned. “Strong stuff. Pretty soon ya won’t know up from down.”

“Wha…?”

“Don’t worry though. Just a bit of temporary insanity,” Spike said. “Why I’m sure by tomorrow you’ll be right as rain. Course by then I’ll think you’ll be an old married woman and up the duff.”

“Wh…why? An easy…you promised,” Lilah managed to say as her head began to loll to the side.

Spike leaned forward and whispered in her ear, “I lied.”

“Nooo!” Lilah cried just before her eyes rolled up into her head. Spike laughed, untied her wrists then opened the door. Three Pisakas were waiting outside. He grabbed Lilah’s hand and led her out to them. She went willingly and giggling.

“Remember what I said,” Spike warned the three humming suitors each strutting for the drooling and laughing woman’s attention. “No returns!”

The demons all nodded their heads and bowed to Spike. He got back into the car, slammed the door shut and looked at Xander. *Now it’s time to take care of what’s really important,* Spike thought, *before it’s too late.*

TBC
Chapter 69

Xander was silent all the way back to the casino. Spike tried to reach out to his pet, but each word or touch seemed to send the human deeper into himself. The mood in the limo was thick with emotion and foul with Spike’s frustration by the time the nervous driver pulled into the garage.

Spike opened the door and motioned to Xander. The human quickly followed. If he was surprised to see his master chose to go down towards the stables instead of up to the suite once they got into the elevator, he didn’t show it.

When the doors opened, in addition to the standard Voynok guards, two Pocklas waited. Xander wasn’t sure whether or not he was relieved or resigned. He knew if anyone or thing could find what he feared was growing inside of him it would be the mysterious red robed demons with the long pale fingers. Yet if Spike had brought him directly to the basement, surely it meant he really had no more use for him.

“Master,” the Pocklas bowed and said in unison. “The other does well.”

“Take us to him,” Spike barked. He was relieved to hear Clem was still alive. He hoped seeing Clem would help Xander.

*Other?* Xander thought as he followed Spike and the Pocklas to the green stables. There were no children rushing out to greet the Master vampire as they entered the stables. It was silent and as tense as the limo had been.

Xander walked with his head down. His gut twisted, his skin itched and some part of him just wanted to curl up in the dark. He wrapped his arms tighter around his waist. He put one foot in front of the other and followed Spike.

The Pocklas led them down to Tara’s old room, Xander barely noticed. The guards moved quickly away from the door. Spike punched in the security code and marched inside. Xander followed.

“Xander!” Someone shouted and then groaned. Xander looked up. Sitting up in what had been Tara’s bed was Clem. Beside him was a teenage boy with half a brownie hanging out of his mouth.

“Clem?” Xander whispered.

“You OK? I tried to get to Spike as fas…”

“Clem!” Xander shouted and for a moment the malaise that had been with him since his rescue lifted. He rushed toward the bed to hug the demon when suddenly he found himself flung up against the wall by the boy.

Then the boy was flung across the room. Spike was growling in game face. The boy was quickly on his feet crouched in a fighting position.

“SPIKE!” Xander yelled.

“CONNER!” Clem cried.

“Conner?” both Xander and Spike asked.

“That’s my name,” the boy growled. His eyes were still locked on Spike. “Don’t wear it out.”
“Xa..Claimant Xander wasn’t going to hurt me,” Clem began to babble.

“Your ribs…” Conner interrupted.

“He doesn’t know about them.”

“Your ribs?” Xander said looking toward Clem.

“The Q’uartha worked me over pretty well before I managed to escape,” Clem escaped.

“They told me you were dead,” Xander whispered as he moved away from the wall to once again approach the bed. This time he moved slowly. Clem smiled. Conner growled.

“One more sound out of you and I’ll turn you inside out,” Spike warned the boy.

“You can try!” Connor replied.

“Who the fuck do you think you are?”

“Someone who’s not afraid of you, vampire!”

Spike’s flashed teeth.

“Master, please,” Clem cried.

“Spike,” Xander pleaded.

The master vampire turned his head slightly. Xander was looking at him. He was looking at him for the first time since they’d left Lilah with the Pisakas. Spike would give his city to keep his pet looking at him.

“Well..he..he started it,” Spike said as he relaxed his stance and shifted from game face.

“And I’ll be happy to finish i..” Conner began to say.

“Conner, why don’t you finish the brownies instead,” Clem offered. “It’s less messy and less likely for one or more of us to end up dead. Besides, it’s a tragedy to let good chocolate go to waste.”

For a moment Conner seemed as if he was ready to pursue his fight with Spike. He looked at Clem. The floppy eared demon was now holding hands with Xander and smiling at Conner. The teenager sighed and trotted back to his seat by the bed and began to wolfishly eat the remaining brownies on the tray next to a bag of half eaten potato chips.

Both Spike and Xander were struck by an odd sensation of familiarity. There was something about the way the boy moved and looked which was recognizable. However, neither of them could identify that “something.”

“Clem?” Xander asked as he shifted his focus from Spike toward the boy.

“Found Connor…” Clem blushed and he paused then continued. “Or rather he found me. Was half alive. Convinced him to go to Spike for help.”

“He claimed me as slave,” Conner laughed with his mouth full of chips and chocolate.

“Least he finally got a name outta ya,” Spike huffed. Conner flipped him the bird.
Spike growled but held still. Xander was talking. It had to be a good sign. *Even if he wasn't talking to me,* Spike thought bitterly.

Xander arched an eyebrow at Clem. Clem turned a deeper shade of pink.

“I was hurt real bad,” Clem exclaimed rapidly, “and I had to get what little information to Master Spike about you as I could. It was all I could think of...and well he was wild...and...”

“It’s ok, Clem” Xander said as he squeezed the demon’s hand. “I’m glad Conner was able to help.”

Conner grunted but continued to eat. Clem blushed again then asked, “Are you Ok, Claimant Xander?”

Xander froze. He heard the question this time. He felt the weight of Clem’s stare. He felt the weight of Spike’s gaze. It seemed even the smacking sound of Conner’s chewing fell silent. Xander paled.

“Claimant?”

“Pet?”

“I...I...” Xander wanted to say he was all right. He wanted to believe it. For a brief moment he’d forgotten it all. In the excitement of seeing Clem alive he’d forgotten the helplessness. He’d forgotten the violation. He’d forgotten the feel of Keffler’s tongue fluttering over him; touching him, exciting him, and reading him.

In the strained moment between Conner and Spike, Xander had forgotten about the gecko demon’s tail curled around him. Forgotten how it slithered up and over him. Forgotten how it explored him, stroked him, breached him...

Xander ran toward the bathroom. He barely made it to the toilet before he retched in body wracking convulsion.

“PET!” Spike screamed right there beside him. His hand brushed the hair away from his forehead. The gentle touch only ignited the self-loathing Xander had been feeling. STUPID! He thought as he vomited again. DUMB! XAN-MAN!

“POCKLAS! NOW!” Spike screamed toward the bedroom. He wasn’t sure who there would answer his command. The critically injured Clem or the arrogant Conner but he had to believe one of them would.

Xander heaved again. Bile choked out of him. Once again he felt like something was twisting in his gut. Once again he could feel Keffler inside of him. Whispering to him, “Perhaps in my excitement of being nessteled in a warm human body I would forget myself and release...”

Spike watched near helplessly while Xander clutched the toilet seat, his knuckles white with the strain of their grip, as he heaved again and again into the porcelain bowl. The vampire continued to kneel beside Xander and touch him.


“My kind find reproductive releasse in our tails,” Keffler’s voice continued to play in Xander’s brain. “Egss which will be cocooned and incubated in your body. My young will draw nourisssment from your flesh. feasssting from within and when they are ready...”
Suddenly there were more bodies crowding around the vampire and his human. Spike’s growl died mid-throat when he realized it was the Pocklas. He looked over his shoulder and saw Conner standing in the bathroom doorway. His eyes were bright with concern. Spike noted it before returning his focus back to Xander.

“Master,” one of the Pocklas said as it indicated it would like to touch Xander, “with your permission.”

“What are you bloody hell waitin’ for?” Spike said as he forced himself to move a step back from his pet and let the healers do their work.

The Pockla reached out and stroked a delicate line down the back of Xander’s neck. It intoned a word in some deep incomprehensible language. For a moment Xander stiffened then relaxed. He began to slide to the floor. He never made it: Spike caught him.

Tired, tear filled eyes stared up at Spike.

“Xa…” Spike began.

“Get them out of me. Please, Spike,” Xander begged as tears fell. “Get rid of me if you want. Kill me. I don’t care. I was dumb, I know. I should have told you about Keffler but I didn’t have a voice. I couldn’t. I didn’t….I tried but Lorne misunderstood and then when I did I forgot. I know. You… I’m slow. You took my belt away…I get it…no more protection.. I deserved that..but not this..not this, Spike.”


“Please..get them out of me!” Xander begged again. “Please, anything you want. Just don’t. I can’t…give me back to the Azora..just…”

“What the hell is he talking about?” Spike growled at the Pocklas a cold fear gripping him. “He’s going daft! Do something!”

Once again a Pockla reached out a finger and chanted again. It drew a line across Xander’s forehead. His eyelids fluttered then closed. His breathing slowed before becoming deep and regular. He was asleep.

“With your permission, Master,” the Pockla said, “we will examine him.”

“Yeah,” Spike said as he lifted Xander into his arms. “Not here though. Up in the suite.”

The Pocklas bowed low and backed away. Spike strode out of the bathroom. Conner backed up. He looked at Spike. Spike nodded his head, somehow he knew it had been the kid who’d gotten the Pocklas. Then he looked at Clem.

“He will be alright,” Spike told the worried demon. “Just see to your boy here and heal up. I’ll have work for you to do.”

Clem nodded. Conner narrowed his eyes. Spike carried his precious cargo to the door then stopped. He looked at Clem.

“Put Conner to use, I want a new belt for Xander and I want it now,” Spike ordered before he left the sputtering shaggy skinned demon to explain what it was Spike wanted and where to get it.
He was warm. He was safe. Soothing touches drifted gently down his cheek followed by the softest of kisses. He opened his eyes and nearly drowned in the blue ones staring back at him.

“Spike,” Xander whispered as a smile formed on his face.

“One and only,” the vampire replied with an answering smile.

Xander floated briefly in that moment of peace. There were no haunting memories. There was no twisting in his gut. There was only Spike and him. Then Xander moved his leg. Pain in his joints sent a flare of remembrance to his brain. He sat up. He was naked and in bed with Spike. Suddenly the dirty, tainted feeling came flooding back.

He could feel the gecko demon’s tongue all over him again. His heart raced and he jerked away from Spike.

“Pet, stop it!” Spike softly ordered.

Xander didn’t listen. He rolled way from the vampire and out of the clean bed with the gold satin sheets. He backed away before the stain could spread from him to their bed.

“Xander!” Spike called as he raced across the bed after his pet.

“NO!” Xander spun and ran for the bathroom. He couldn’t let Spike touch him again. He couldn’t spread his filth.

A hand wrapped around Xander’s arm. It held him firm.

“Xander!” Spike barked.

“Let me go!” Xander yelled back.

“Where?” Spike asked.

“Please...I...need...” Xander began to tremble. The memories began to overtake him.

Spike said something Xander couldn’t understand. He stroked a finger across Xander’s forehead and suddenly a feeling of calm flooded through his body. His heart rate slowed. His breathing became easier. He blinked.

“What did you do?” he asked softly.

“It’s a minor spell,” Spike replied. “The Pocklas set it, then taught me the key. Will help calm ya when ya start goin’ round the bend.”

Xander opened his mouth then snapped it shut. He wasn’t sure he liked being under a spell that instantly calmed him. Then again, don’t like being all panic boy either, he thought.

“Now, ya gonna tell your master what it is ya need before I decide if ya need t’be punished or not?”

“Punished?” Xander paled. Oh ghods! Was Spike gonna punish him for not telling him about Keffler?

“Xander,” Spike said softly as he gently touched the tip of Xander’s nose. “Was referring to jerking away from me in the bed. Nothin’ else. Talk to me, me, pet. Give me some of that Xander babble.
Let me help you.”

_The bed_, Xander thought then sighed. _I really am the poster boy for Mental Health month._

“I wan..I need a shower,” Xander said.

“Well now I know you really have gone balmy,” Spike said with a smile as he began to lead Xander gently to the bathroom.

“Huh?” Xan asked then laughed a little when he finally caught the joke. _He_ was asking for a shower. “Yeah, guess Keffler’s trauma outranks the Azora’s. Can’t wait to see what’s next up for the universe’s favorite butt-boy.”

“Nothing,” Spike vowed before kissing the top of Xander’s head. “NOTHING.”

Then, Spike let Xander go to fiddle with the faucet handles. Water started to spray. Next the vampire set the water temperature. When he was satisfied he stepped inside and gently tugged Xander in after him.

Xander hesitated. He was afraid to touch Spike.

“Pet, please,” Spike urged then opened his arms as he stood under the warm mist of spraying water. He was the image of sanctuary, strength, and cleansing.

Before he could think or register what he was doing, Xander accepted what Spike offered. He clung to the vampire and let the cool arms and the warm water flow around him.

“Spike,” Xander whispered against wet fleshed. “Spike wash it all away. Wash its touch away.”

“Anything you want, pet,” Spike vowed as he reached for the soap. “Anything.”

Then there was silence as Spike slowly caressed and cleansed his pet. Xander melted into his touch. He opened himself up and let the vampire wash him clean. The vampire was gentle and reverent. There was no lust or want in his ministration. Instead there was worship and love. He tried to say with his hands all the words he lacked. He tried to offer comfort, strength and healing.

He begged forgiveness for not being there when needed with gentle swipes of his thumb across bruises and welts until Xander pulled the vampire’s hands away and kissed each knuckle. Spike urged Xander to forgive himself with gentle kisses on each eyelid and the tip of his nose.

When his fingertips were pruned and wrinkly Xander finally rinsed. Spike made sure all traces of the soap washed away from Xander before rinsing clean himself. Then he turned off the water. They stepped out of the shower. Together they dried each other off. Next, Spike led them back to the bedroom.

Xander paused when he saw the sheets on the bed. He had lain on them while he was still “dirty.” Without a word Spike stripped the bed. He went to the wardrobe and pulled a set of green bed linen. Xander gave a half smile and together they made the bed.

Exhaustion hit Xander soon after. He yawned.

“Can you come back to bed now?” Spike asked as he held out a hand to his love.

Xander nodded as he accepted the vampire’s hand. Once again Spike pulled the human to him. This time he settled them both on the bed. He wrapped himself securely around Xander. Xander turned
his face into Spike's neck then sighed.

"Not giving you up, you know," Spike said. "Claimed ya. Made ya mine. Love ya, ya git."

Xander smiled into Spike's skin. He wasn't sure if it was the spell or the affects of the shower, but he felt good. He felt safe.

"You're such the romantic," he replied. Spike hugged him tighter.

"What made ya think I would give ya up?"

"You...I..the belt.." Xander tried to explain.

"Try something other than Xander speak, luv. Something like English," Spike gently goaded.

Xander nipped at Spike then froze. Spike slowly rolled his pet on his back and stared down into the frightened brown eyes. His blue eyes were ringed with gold.

"I'll return the favor," Spike purred in a voice that sent warm shivers down Xander's spine as he realized he *wanted* the vampire's bite. He needed it. He needed the connection of it.

"But you still have some explaining to do," the vampire insisted.

Xander swallowed slowly before beginning his confession, "Keffler...that first day when I got the belt. Lorne wasn't looking. He...he..touched me."

Spike hissed.

"I tried to tell Lorne," Xander continued on, "but he misunderstood. I mean I couldn't talk! Later when I could well..I forgot. It didn't seem to be that big of a deal. I know..I should have. You've warned me...and if it's any consolation I think I've finally aced this lesson about demons and yours and no touching."

"Still don't see how this equates to me not wantin' ya anymore?" Spike said.

"The belt," Xander whispered."You didn't want it..."

"Because it's been bleeding compromised! Need a new one. One where I *know* I have all the keys," Spike said.

Xander blinked. Spike wasn't getting rid of his protection.

"Though never thought I'd see the day when ya wanted the belt," Spike chuckled.

Xander blushed then replied, "I've come to see the advantages of it...like keeping touchy feely demons from..."

Once again panic started to sweep through Xander. *The eggs!* he thought.

"Pet, settle!" Spike said firmly.

"Spike! Keffler...he..he.."

"You're alright," Spike said.

"You don't understand," Xander began to tremble. "His tail...he breach..."
“I know,” Spike growled then ran a thumb gently down the side of Xander’s cheek, “I know and if I could kill him again, I would. I’m sorry, pet. I’m so sorry. I promised ta protect you and I failed.”

“Then they’re..inside of me..” Xander’s body began to shake. His heart raced.

“Bloody hell, pet!” Spike said before once again using the Pockla’s key to calm Xander. “You’re alright.”

“But you said you failed,” Xander said through a haze of forced placidity.

“I failed to protect ya from falling into Lilah’s grasp,” Spike said. “Didn’t mean you’re carrying Keffler’s spawn.”

“I’m not? There are no eggs...?”

Spike shook his head, “Nope. Never was.”

“You sure?”

“Oi! Ya doubtin’ the word of yer Master, Pet?” Spike mocked growled before kissed Xander’s nose.

“But…but..”

“He may have gotten inside of ya for a moment, Xander,” Spike said trying to keep the rage from his voice, “but he didn’t leave anything behind.”

Xander stared at him as if he still didn’t quite believe.

“Luv, while you were out I had the Pocklas examine ya…thoroughly.”

Xander paled. He wasn’t sure he liked what Spike was implying.

“I thought it would be easier that way, luv,” Spike explained. “I thought you’d been through enough. They examined you. No tearing..no damage..and NO eggs.”

“You sure?” Xander asked in a small voice.

Spike nodded then puffed up into full Big Bad mode, “Ya think they’re gonna make a mistake, with my Claimant?”

Xander stared at Spike. He wanted to believe him. He needed to believe him, but could he? Then logic overcame fear. Understanding began to beat trauma. Spike was right.

The Pocklas wouldn’t risk a mistake, not with Spike’s Claimant, he suddenly thought.

Xander rolled his eyes and tried to hide a smile.

“Oi!”

“What?” Xander asked innocently.

“Ya mockin’ me ya git?”

“Me? Never? Why would I mock you? Just cuz I’ve seen the ‘Big Bad’ get his arse kicked by a blonde and her teenybopper friends six ways to Sunday doesn’t mean I would dare…”
Spike’s eyes flashed then he attacked. Xander found himself pinned under a master vampire
determined to kiss the all mockery out of him. He didn’t object. Xander wrapped his arms around
Spike and let the vampire lay claim to his mouth. He moaned in surrender as Spike worked his
tongue inside and chastised Xander’s.

Each caress chased away a memory of Keffler’s touch. There was no comparison. However, Spike
didn’t press beyond kisses. He could feel his pet wasn’t ready for or wanted more. Eventually he
relented and gave Xander a chance to breathe.

“Now what were you sayin’, pet?” Spike asked.

Xander took a deep breath. He licked his lips and tasted Spike. He wanted Spike but he couldn’t, not
then. Yet he needed to be close to the vampire. He needed it desperately. In all the months with the
Azora he’d never really broken. He’d been damaged, but never broken. In the few hours with
Keffler, he’d gone beyond damaged. For a brief moment he had broken, and he needed Spike to help
put him back together again.

“Bite me,” he whispered.

Blue eyes flashed to gold. Uncertainty flashed briefly in their golden swirl before love chased it way.

“With pleasure,” Spike said just before he sank his fangs deep into Xander’s neck and gently
indulged until his pet fell back into unconscious bliss.

TBC
Chapter 70

Xander woke to the low rumble of Spike's voice speaking softly. He blinked his eyes open. It didn't take long for even his sleep fuddled mind to register his vampire was not curled up comfortably around him. Xander rolled over and whispered, "Spike?"

The blonde vampire turned away from the windows revealing a sunset sky. He arched an eyebrow and continued speaking into a phone.

"Thirty minutes," Spike ordered before flipping the small device closed. He tossed it on the bed and sat down. He studied his pet for a moment then continued speaking. "You need to get up and shake a leg, pet. Do your shower and human stuff. Be quick."

"Wha..."

"Go." Spike ordered gently but firmly.

Xander found himself moving even as his brain was whirling. He wasn't awake and yet he was obeying. He'd been through too much recently not too obey yet he was confused. He'd thought everything was all right. He'd thought he was all right. Clem was safe. What was the rush? Why was Spike ordering him up and to hurry?

Water splashed around Xander before he'd even realized he'd stepped into the shower. He shook his head then stood under the spray trying to let the warm water chase the cob webs of sleep, shock and a little blood loss away. He sputtered as water rushed over his lips. The slight adrenaline rush spurred him to action and he began to soap his body while his brain began to think.

What's going on? Why the rush? He wondered. Everybody's home safe and sound. Good guys won. Bad guys dead or ...

Xander froze. LILAH! His mind screamed. Lilah was what was going on! Spike got rid of Angelus' right hand bitch!

He fought the tremors of the fear that wanted to seize him as the ramifications of what his vampire had done began to take root and blossom in his imagination. There's no way Captain Cromagnon will let Spike off with just an easy round of rape and torture, Xander thought as he rinsed soap off and quickly stepped out of the shower.

He winced slightly as his sore joints from yesterdays abuse objected to his quick and jerky movements. However, the pain was manageable and he ignored it. In fact, he was less sore than he'd expected, if he had the time to give it much worry. He ran a towel through his sopping and dripping hair, then wrapped another around his waist. He stepped into the bedroom in time to see Spike crushing the cellphone he'd been using earlier under his booted foot. He took pains to make sure the SIMM card was utterly destroyed. He looked up at Xander.

"You feelin' alright?" Spike asked.

"A bit sore, but I'll live," Xander said with a smile.

Spike studied Xander a moment then barked out quickly, "We gotta move. No time for wobbles."
We'll be tear-arsing about from now until we hit the des..."

"In a language I understand," Xander interrupted with an upraised hand.

"We're leaving," Spike said. "We're leaving Vegas."

Xander's eyes opened wide.


Leaving? Leaving Vegas? Xander thought. For where? How long?

"Pet!" Spike barked.

Xander nodded.

"Then drop your towel and come with me," Spike ordered.

Xander's fingers released the damp cotton fabric circling his waist as his mind continued to try play catch up with Spike once again. He followed the vampire out of the bedroom and into the front room of the suite. Connor was waiting there with a new belt. Xander flushed at the state of his undress. The teen didn't even seem to notice.

Ante crawled out from under Spike’s chair and hissed. Xander’s heart leapt at seeing the not so small kitten. He smiled.

"Anything else, master Spike?" Connor all but sneered.

"Yeah," Spike said as he grabbed the belt from Connor and tossed it too Xander. "Tell Clem when it happens he's in charge and since you’re his I expect you to back him up."

"It?" Connor asked.

"That's all you need to know," Spike said as he turned to look at Xander. "Get it on, Pet. Now!"

"That's not a whole lot..."

"Keys!" Spike demanded as he held out his hand to the boy. Connor frowned but handed over three sets of keys to Spike.

Xander quickly scrambled into his new belt. It was the same design as the other. He couldn't help but wonder if the late Keffler had made it as well. His thoughts were interrupted by another hiss from Ante. Spike had swooped down, scooped the kitten up and was shoving the squirming mass into Connor’s arms.

"Master Spike..."

"Listen brat," Spike growled, "I know you have no reason to trust me but I haven't got the time or the patience to make nice or change your nappies till you do. Either help Clem or not, but personally I think he stands a better chance keeping things together with you along for the ride then without."
"Why?" Connor pressed as Spike strolled over to Xander and locked the belt. He struggled to keep hold of the kitten.

"Because when the shite hits the fan I know you won't go belly up widdling all over yourself. You'll fight and you'll fight for those around you. Clem's going to need that," Spike said as he headed for the door. He motioned for Xander to follow. “And keep hold of that kitten. He’s now your responsibility until I say otherwise.”

"What's going to happen?" Connor asked angrily while trying to avoid overzealous claws.

"Just head down to the stables, stay there, keep it together for as long as you can and if you can't..then get them OUT!" Spike ordered. “And don’t forget Ante there.”

"Sp..." Xander began to ask.

"Not a word, Pet!" Spike ordered as they entered the elevator. Connor and Xander exchanged looks as the lift doors closed. A countdown had begun, but to what? Ante growled and glared at Spike.

***

The ride in the elevator had been short and tense. Spike had made it very clear he wasn’t answering any more questions let alone making any idle chit chat. The moment Connor tried to speak Spike showed fang and growled.

Ante had just hissed and resigned himself to being held by Connor.

Xander had been silent and cooperative at first until he’d remembered about Oz message. He’d stared at the emergency box. The pick! He’d thought. Spike needs the pick. He needs the message from the resistance!

When Xander had tried to tell Spike about guitar pick hidden in the emergency box, the vampire had snapped his finger and pointed to the floor.

“But Ma…” Xander had tried to argue. Spike had only snarled and yanked his Claimant to the floor.

“What I say, when I say it and no gab!” Spike had hissed.

“B…” Xander had started to reply but the gold in Spike’s eyes stopped him cold. Spike had gone all Master Spike and was demanding not only Xander’s complete submission but all the trust that went with it.

Xander had relaxed into his kneeling position at Spike’s feet. He’s knees had been spread wide, his head had been down and he’d been silent. He’d held position even after the elevator had stopped and the doors opened. He’d held position until Spike had snapped his fingers and summoned him to follow.

Spike had exited the elevator first. He’d stopped to turn back to look at Connor.

“I don’t know where you came from..or even who or what you are,” he’d said very softly, “but you do what I’ve asked and when I get back we’ll talk. I suspect it will be a good story.”
“What makes you think I’ll share?” Connor had replied. Once again his tone and his bad language had tickled at something recognizable to Spike and Xander.

Spike had laughed, “Oh you’ll share. You wanna share. You been winding me up since the moment we met. You wouldn’t do that unless you have a reason and winding me up any more won’t be as much fun until I’m in on the secret too.”

For the first time since Xander had seen the young slave, Connor had looked surprised. Then he had laughed and smiled. The smile had been genuine. It was warm and for a moment it had made the young man look much younger and more innocent then he was.

“Deal. Master Spike,” Connor had said as the doors of the elevator closed before beginning its journey to take him back down to the stable.

“Deal,” Spike had whispered back before turn back to the crowded casino floor. He had motioned for Xander to follow and his Claimant had.

Post the elevator was a bit of blur. Spike was moving quickly through the casino and Xander was struggling to keep up. He was clothed only in his belt. He wasn’t wearing any pants, a shirt or even shoes. He felt raw and exposed. He might have been freaking out about it or even be pissed off about it if he wasn’t worrying about keeping silent even as he stepped on and in things which either hurt his feet or grossed him out.

The chatter around the casino was increasing. It wasn’t hard for Xander to pick up, especially when it was about him. Spike’s behavior was making a show of Xander. Here he’d been the missing Claimant whom the Master Vampire had torn through the city seeking and killing for and now he was being paraded through the casino as if he were on his way to being punished.

“Perhaps he hadn’t been kidnapped?” Xander heard something whisper as he passed.

“Perhaps he’d tried to run off with his Companion?” another demon snickered.

“Perhaps he is not the pampered favorite anymore?”

Spike stopped. He turned. He’s eyes were flashing. The crowd fell silent and stepped back. He snapped his fingers and pointed down. Xander dropped to his knees and assumed the position. Spike grabbed the back of his head by his hair and yanked it back forcing him to look up at the vampire.

“Have you accepted my claim?” the vampire snarled.

“Yes, Master,” Xander answered without hesitation.

“Do you still accept my claim?” Spike asked.

“Yes, Master.”

“Up,” Spike ordered.

Xander rose to his feet.

Spike looked around at the crowd then said, “What was stolen from me I reclaimed. Those responsible are either dead or wish I had been merciful enough to grant them death.”
Xander remained motionless and exposed. Spike began to walk around him, looking at him.

“Now I’ve had a shitty week. So I’m taking my Claimant and I’m going to have some fun. If that means slowly peeling the skin from his flesh for hours while I fuck him raw or dead for getting himself kidnapped then that’s what it means.”

A small tremor of fear went down Xander’s spine. He knew Spike wouldn’t but just to hear him say it caused something still raw and hurt in him to respond.

“Or maybe,” Spike went on, “I’m gonna move him to a new play pen. One where he doesn’t have to listen to winnits like you yack on about shite you know nothing about? Perhaps I’m going to feed him to my other pets; the lions. Or maybe I just like to see his near naked arse paradin’ around my city at my pleasure because it fucking pleases me!”

Xander forced himself not to smile.

“Whatever the fucking case I don’t not expect you fucking yobs to be yammering on and making it more difficult for me to have my bit of fun with my Claimant!”

Liars! Xander thought. If you didn’t want gossip and a scene then you wouldn’t have staged one. Nor would you have planted ideas in their heads.

“Pet!” Spike barked as he resumed moving across the casino floor. Xander quickly fell into step behind him. The crowd moved back and fell mostly silent. There were unintelligible whispers all the way out the door.

***

Xander was thankful a limo was waiting for them out in front. For a little while Xander had been afraid he’d have to walk barefoot on concrete and asphalt.

“Around back,” Spike ordered as he crawled inside. If the driver was surprised he didn’t indicate it.

Xander followed and curled up on the floor once inside. Spike didn’t signal for him to curl up. The door closed and in few moments the car began to move. Spike looked at his watch. He leaned down over Xander and bent close to Xander’s ear.

“I have one more small errand here,” Spike whispered very quietly. “Be good. Wait here. Don’t move and don’t say a word.”

Xander stopped himself from nodding. A few moments later the car came to a smooth stop. Spike opened the door and stepped out.

“Wait here,” he ordered the driver. Then he moved away from the car.

Xander held positioned and waited. He risked stealing glances at the door. Spike hadn’t closed it. They were parked in the garage area.

What did Spike need here, Xander wondered. Was there someone else he needed to get? If so, who? And where were they going? And how was he going to tell Master McGrowly about the pick if he the Blonde Bloviator never let him get in an word edgewise?
Xander took a deep breath. He let it out slowly. Spike had been gone a few minutes.

*What was so important?* Xander couldn’t help but wondering. Then he heard a roar. *The lions!*

Another tremor went through Xander. He didn’t actually think Spike would feed him to the Primals, but it didn’t make him feel any better to know Spike’s “small errand” had to do with the lions.

*This can’t be good,* Xander thought as he cast another worried glance through the open door. The lions were probably the most unpredictable and dangerous demon next to Spike in the city. The fact Spike’s small errand before leaving Vegas had to do with them gave Xander goose pimples.

It made him feel even worse when he noticed series of large shadows making their way out through the garage to merge into the pockets of darkness under the city’s night sky.

*He wouldn’t,* Xander thought even as Spike came back into view. *He wouldn’t let them go? Would he?*

Spike sauntered back into the limo and closed the door.

“To the Luxor,” he ordered without looking at Xander.

***

Xander had almost vibrated with questions as they had ridden to the Luxor. He’d found himself drawing back on all his “training” as a bottle to keep himself quite and in place as the limo smoothly traveled through the Vegas traffic to the Luxor.

Spike too had been quite and motionless. Only his eyes had betrayed him. Every now and then they would rest on Xander. Sometimes they had been filled with the aching sweetness Xander had come to associate with the vampire’s declarations of love. Other times they were blazing with a light Xander had come to know was the vampire’s fury and still other times they seemed to reflect a weariness the human had never seen in the vampire.

It was those moment which tried Xander the most. He had desperately wanted to break position and reach out to the vampire. He had wanted to touch Spike or say something which would make him laugh or infuriate him. In short, Xander had wanted to do anything to chase the look from Spike’s eyes. Yet, Xander had been “good” and when they arrived at the Luxor, he had continued to be good.

As they entered the casino it was obvious the gossip had travelled faster than they had. While the crowd of demons stared they kept their comments to hushed whispers. Spike strode quickly across the floor and Xander followed. It didn’t take him long to figure out where they were going, the King Tut exhibit.

“Exhibit’s closed,” Spike barked at the guards as he approached the entrance, “for private play time between me and my Claimant.”

The guards quickly nodded.

“I don’t want to be disturbed for *any* reason. Understand?” Spike continued.
“Yes, Master Spike,” both guards answered in unison.

Spike turned around and surveyed the floor. Then he said in a much louder voice, “If I catch anyone sniffing or spying around on my private time with my property…they’ll wish they’d been guilty of snatchin’ him in the first place!”

Then Spike had marched into the Exhibit. Xander had quickly followed. They walked all the way back to the replica of the King’s tomb. Then Spike stopped.

“Face the wall at arm’s length. Put your hands up against it and hold still,” Spike ordered.

*Spike?* Xander wondered as he heard the vampire move over to the sarcophagus. He heard him move the lid a jar and rustle around inside it.

“I think somebody has been disobedient,” Spike said with a low growl.

*Seriously,* Xander thought as his heart rate sped up. *You’re gonna punish me now? We’re fleeing from Vegas on some whacked out timetable of your making after I’ve been kidnapped, tortured and ra...humiliated and now you wanna have a game of “Punish the Pet?”*

“Xander,” Spike whispered low into his Claimant’s ear.

The human jumped. He hadn’t even noticed the vampire moving up close behind him until the seductive sound of his master voice was tickling across his skin.

“No counting,” Spike said as softly as Xander had ever heard him speak. “I need you to just scream raw. I’m not going to lie…this is going to hurt. It has to. We need the right show of scents and sounds. But I promise you...nothing more than you can handle. Nothing more than necessary and I will take care of you and when it’s done...we’ll be gone.”

Xander was so still he barely breathed. He didn’t like the sound of this. Maybe he had been a bit disobedient at first and maybe they did need some sort of show but he didn’t want to hurt. He was tired of hurting.

“Xander,” Spike softly whispered.

Something flipped heavily in his stomach. It fluttered in his pulse and brought realization. Spike wasn’t asking Xander’s permission. He didn’t need it, but he was asking for Xander’s participation. He was asking for Xander’s trust. He was asking for the human to give him a signal that this wouldn’t be just Spike doing something to Xander, but that this would be something they were doing together.

*You want me to give you some sort of sign this is all ok when I don’t even know why?* Xander thought frantically. His heart was racing. His breathing was becoming fast and shallow. He was beginning to feel panicky.

“Pet,” Spike whispered, “one last time. We need to bu…”

Spike’s voice suddenly stilled. There was the smallest of choking sounds. Suddenly Xander could picture Spike’s weary eyes.

*Spike,* Xander thought and before he realized that he’d even made a decision he was nodding his
head and forcing his body to relax in preparation for what was coming.

“Xan?” Spike said softly.

*Do it!* Xander thought as he nodded again. He felt a light kiss on the nape of his neck and then heard Spike move away.

“I *will* have obedience!” Spike snarled just before Xander heard a light whistling sound through the air. Then he felt and heard a loud snap several stingy strips of leather lashed across his back as a cat of nine tails marked him.

“Master!” Xander screamed as his body jerked in response to the pain.

Before he had a chance to take another breath three more strikes were laid across his back. Xander bucked and jerked.

“Thought I told you to hold still!” Spike barked.

*Oh ghod!* Xander thought then screamed as several more blows rained down on him. He fought to keep his body still.

“You will be obedient or you will be dead!” Spike roared. “I didn’t retrieve you because you were a Claimant I could be fucking undead without!”

Xander let out along anguished scream as two more blows criss-crossed across his back. This time he could feel something wet begin to drip down his skin.

“I retrieved you because you were MINE!” Spike yelled just before he began to cruelly lap at the wet drops on Xander's back. The vampire made sure to slide his tongue firmly across the welts. Xander moaned.

“Do you understand?” Spike asked.

“Yes, Master!” Xander screamed as Spike delivered another strike.

“What are you?” Spike asked with another blow.

“Your Claimant, Master!” Xander yelled.

“You live or die at my whim!”

“Yes Master!”

Spike then began to deliver a series of blows so quick and fierce Xander lost track of when one began and when another ended. His whole back began to feel as if a ball of flame and been born and was grown and was rolling across his back as it grew consuming all of him in its path. He began to scream and like the blows raining down on him it ceased to be one scream after another. Instead it morphed into one continuous scream of agony.

A depth of pain rose up out of Xander born not just from the flames consuming his back but from the memories of all he had suffered since Buffy had fallen. He screamed with pain for his short sighted anger in destroying the Orb of Thesula. He screamed for losing Buffy, Giles, and Cordelia. He
screamed for his own public debasement.

He screamed loudest and longest for all those times when he couldn’t scream. He voiced his fear and terror for each time he’d been in the tank. The exhibit was filled with the sounds of Xander’s pain and the scents of his fear and blood.

Xander continued to scream even after the blows stopped falling. He screamed for his helplessness against Keffler. He screamed until his voice was raw and fading.

He tried to scream even after a cool hand covered his mouth and a gentle voice murmured in his ear, “Shh, pet. All over. I got ya. It’s all right. It’s over now. Shh!”

Tears streamed down Xander’s cheeks. His muffled scream began to break apart with sobs and great gulps as his body for air. Through it all Spike held him until the worst of the storm had passed. Then Spike had pressed the painted image which caused the wall to swing forward.

Spike took Xander’s hand and led him quickly to the other side. He activated the mechanism to swing the wall back in place then led the shattered human back to the secret room which had been Larry’s cell.

Even in his befuddled state, Xander had noticed the room had been cleaned of all the old MREs and now had two new duffle and sleeping bags perched on the cot. Spike didn’t let him linger. He led him on to the bathroom with the small austere shower. There he set the water to warm and urged Xander to step inside.

Xander obeyed without question but not without thought. Yes, he was buoyed on some sort cloud he didn’t understand. Yes, his body and brain had been buffeted by too much pain and emotion and now it was being soothed by the same hands which had inflicted the injury. Yet, that part of Xander that refused to back down in front of Angelus while Buffy lay helpless in a hospital bed demanded he think through all that had happened. That part of him which had submitted to Spike’s claim raced to organize his thoughts and to piece together the puzzle in front of him. As he drifted on the care of warm water and cool hands Xander thought.

With all the gentleness Spike possessed he washed and tended Xander. He kept up a litany of endearments, though he doubted his pet heard him. He from experience his love must be riding a wave of endorphins. Still, he knew that when Xander came down he’d need all the reassurance Spike could give him. Spike vowed not to disappoint.

When Xander was washed and clean, Spike dried him as carefully as he could. He kept his own anger and self-recrimination in check as he saw the extent of the damage he’d done to Xander’s back. He knew he’d had to do it. He knew that it would heal.

However, staring at the fiery red, raw and mottled skin with ugly welts decorating Xander skin in an obscene pattern made the vampire curse himself. With angry and jerky movement Spike opened the small medicine cabinet and got out the analgesic, antibiotic and other creams he’d need.

As he turned back to face Xander, the human caught this hands.

“Xan?” Spike whispered.

Xander laid delicate kisses on each of Spike’s hands.
“Oh Xander,” Spike muttered as tears began to slip free and slide down his cheek. “I’m so sorry.”

Xander snapped his fingers.

“Yes!” Spike said quickly. “Permission to speak.”

“It was a cover wasn’t it?” Xander asked his voice rough from screaming.

Spike nodded.

“You needed me…Needed my real reactions,” Xander continued.

“We need all the time we can get. They need ta think they’ll have the devil ta pay for interruptin’ me,” Spike began to babble. “Demons they can smell deceit…especially on humans…on yo…”

Xander laid a finger over Spike’s lips. He smiled gently and said, “I understand.”

“Pet?”

Xander sighed. He straightened in Spike’s arms and winced. Spike began quickly, but gently, smoothing the creams on to his human’s abused back.

“We’ve done this dance before, Spike,” Xander said softly. “You have a plan. Part of it entails convincing our enemies, the demons around us, that you’re all ‘grr’ and ‘argh’ angry. You want them so busy gossiping about the reasons why but at the same time afraid of interrupting you or snooping around. You’re buying time.”

“And the dance?” Spike asked.

“You needed me. You needed me afraid, hurt and all my real reactions. What was it you once said?” Xander asked then answered his own question in a perfect Xander-Spike impersonation, ‘Pet, yer not very good at lyin’. One look in those big browns and the jig would have been up.”

Spike laughed softly, “You had me pegged from the beginning?”

“No,” Xander admitted.

“Then wh…”

“I trust you,” Xander said cutting off Spike before turning in the vampire’s arms and placing a gentle kiss across his lips. “I trust you.”

“Oh pet,” Spike murmured before deepening the kiss. Xander responded. The kiss was pure, organic and unrefined. It was simple passion going beyond fire to the groin but igniting the bond between them. It was promise and apology. It was forever sweet and too short.

“We have to go,” Spike said as he forced his lips to part from Xander’s.

Xander nodded. Spike led him to the other room. He opened one of the duffle bags and pulled out jeans, socks, shirts and a pair of shoes. Xander’s eyes widened but he remained quiet.

Quickly Spike helped Xander dress. Pain was creeping beyond just Xander’s back now. He was
beginning to feel the abuse everywhere as the adrenaline abated. He bit his lip and kept quiet. Once he was dressed, Spike grabbed both duffle bags, slung them over his shoulder by the straps then grabbed one of the sleeping bags.

“Can you manage the other?” Spike asked.

Xander nodded. His body protested as he bent over and picked up the bag but he said nothing.

“Right. What I say when I say it,” Spike reminded. He listened at the door before opening it then led them out into the hall. Then he began as quick a pace as he dared with Xander’s injuries. He led them through a maze of service and access tunnels until they were at another garage.

All along the way Spike checked for sights, sounds and scents of other demons or humans. The garage looked unused and abandoned. Still, Spike took few chances. He led Xander through the maze of dusty cars in a crouch until they came to a familiar looking Suburban.

It was sleek, glossy, black and the one they’d used the last time they’d gone into the desert. Something in Xander lit up with hope.

Spike motioned for Xander to stay still. He checked the garage thoroughly before sneaking forward. Then he moved to the back of the truck. He unlocked the double doors, opened them, then slid the duffle bags and the sleeping bag inside.

Next he came back for Xander. He took the last sleeping bag from his Claimant and led the way back to the truck.

Spike manually unlocked the passenger door and let Xander inside. He then moved swiftly around the back of the truck, deposited the last bag inside and then shut the doors. He locked them before quietly moving to the other side of the truck, unlocking the driver’s door and climbing inside.

“Lie down,” Spike said as he got behind the driver’s wheel and patted his lap. “It will be easier than on your back.”

Xander lay across the bench seat on his stomach. He let his head rest on Spike’s lap as the vampire turned the key in the ignition and the engine roared to life. A cool hand settled on Xander’s head and fingers began to card through his hair as the half ton truck eased forward.

“We’re on our way,” Spike said softly.

Xander nodded. He tucked his arms underneath him and closed his eyes and focused on the sensations of Spike’s long fingers gently massaging his scalp and caressing his skin. He tried to block out the dull and ache in his muscles and the burn in his skin.

He trusted in the creams and the healing ability of the Claimant bond to take effect. The sounds of traffic drifted inside the truck only to be quickly blocked out by the punch of a button.

“Night and day, you are the one,” Sinatra began to croon, “Only you beneath the moon or under the sun.”

Xander smiled. Spike began to hum along with the music. Eventually the rumble of the trucks engine, the elegant singing of Sinatra, Spike’s humming and his magic fingers had an effect on the Xander. Between one easy breath and the next he fell into a light sleep. Vague dream images of him
and Spike tumbled through his mind. They were pressed together as if dancing. They swayed gently in time to music and when the music stopped the dancing continued. It melded into a more intimate form of dancing where legs and arms where entwined skin to sweat slick skin.

Xander wasn’t sure how long he lightly dozed. He only knew he was awoken to a frustrating pressure in his belt and ticking touch down his nose.

“Pleasant dreams?” Spike voice rumbled with amusement.

“Seven of Nine and Princess Leia were trying to engage the Borg queens warp drive,” Xander replied with a happy yawn.

“Liar,” Spike laughed.

“You can read my dreams now, master?” Xander asked cheekily while turning his head to allow Spike easier access to stroke his neck.

“Just your scent, pet,” Spike replied.

“And my scent tells you…”

“When you want me,” Spike replied with all the arrogance and conceit for which Xander used to hate but now left him rock hard.

He groaned as the belt grew tighter. Spike lightly raked his nails over Xander’s neck. Unbidden memories of Keffler crept back into Xander’s mind. The pain in his back reminded him of the welts across his stomach and the enforced stress position.

He stiffened.

“Shh,” Spike said. “It’s ok, pet. Won’t take anything you aren’t ready to give.”

Xander sat up. He groaned with pain. His back hurt; though it was feeling better. His heart hurt. He had begun to move beyond his fears and had been enjoying his physical relationship with Spike and now he was back to square one.

“And who told you could sit up?” Spike asked in a slight reproach.

“Please?” Xander asked as he looked around. There were only a few lights here and there indicating they had moved out of the city proper and were on the outskirts.

Spike sighed, “Guess I could use your help. Open the glove compartment.”

Xander nodded and did as he was told.

“Grab the GPS unit Lorne setup last time,” Spike continued.

Xander fished around until he felt the chunky box. He pulled it out and handed it to Spike. The vampire took one hand off the wheel and flipped a button. The device flared to life. A small LED map lit up. Spike smiled then handed it back to Xander.

“Make sure we stay on course,” Spike ordered.
“On course?” Xander asked.

Spike smiled and tapped the side of the box. Xander turned the box and looked. Taped to the box was a yellow pick with the coordinates 36 53.942N scratched on the side.

“You found it!” Xander yelled with a grin.

“Course I did!” Spike said with answering grin of his own. “You were clever enough ta hide it where that tart wouldn’t find it, but I would. Gonna have to reward you nice and sweet for that, pet.”

Xander blushed. His heart raced as conflicting emotions almost overwhelmed him. He tried to get control of himself, squeezed the unit and asked, “This mean…?

“This means we’re going where that Oz bloke told us to go,” Spike answered. “Another set of coordinates are on the back of the pick.”

“And then?” Xander dared ask.

“Then?” Spike said. “Well, I don’t know about Red and the others but I plan on taking this world back from Peaches..if for no other reason then it’ll give him a bad hair day.”

***

Things changed twenty minutes after Connor returned to the stables and let grouchy kitten down to race down the hallway and hide under an empty cot. Exactly thirty minutes after Spike had hung up the now destroyed cell phone in the suite, a claxon sounded in the stables. Lights began blinking and the Voynok, Mofo and Pocklas began herding all the humans in all the stables away from the entrances.

Connor had at first sprang up to fight but had been stilled by Clem’s hand on his shoulder, “Wait, please. Watch.”

As suddenly as the alarms had sounded they stopped. They were followed by a rumbling which caused vibrations to ripple through the stables. Some men women and children began to scream or cry. The Pocklas rushed to the panic humans and began to soothe them.

There was a loud CLANG and then the rumbling stopped. The stables went quiet except for the sounds of crying and the Pocklas working their magic. The MoFos stepped forward and bowed to Clem.

“Master Spike has ordered the stables sealed and you in charge until his return,” they said. “No one is to be allowed out or in until his word is given. His stable is under your charge, what are your orders?”

Clem blinked. His mouth gaped. This was unexpected.

“Master,” Connor quickly spoke, “if you please, shall I speak for you? You are still very badly hurt.”

Clem nodded.

Connor turned to the Mofos and quickly ordered, “Prepare hot sweet drinks for the children,
“The kitchens are well stocked,” the Mofos said looking at Clem. The demon looked as if his mind was still trying to process he was in charge.

“Right, hot chocolate for the kids and coffee for the adults,” Connor continued.

“Candyland..” Clem whispered and understanding and acceptance settled.

“Candyland?” the Mofos and Connor asked in unison.

“Yes,” Clem said in a voice a little more strongly. “Candyland! Let’s look around. We should have it around here somewhere, if we don’t then we’ll make our own boards.”

Mofos and Connor blinked.

Clem grinned, “Trust me.”

TBC

Author's Notes:

Night and Day is a Cole Porter song. Lyrics are here and a video of Sinatra version I like are here.
Chapter 71

The long ride into the desert had been peaceful. Xander had clutched the GPS unit in his hands as if it were a newly found Orb capable of resouling Angelus and undoing the evil and harm the vampire had wrought in the last seven years.

*And who knows, Xander had thought, maybe in a way it is.*

Spike had been relatively quiet. He'd hummed along to the Sinatra still softly playing from the truck's CD player while twining his fingers around Xander's wrists or knee in light holds more about touch then ownership. Xander had soaked up those touches nor had he not been able to keep from seeking them out. Instead he had kept moving closer to Spike, making it easier for the vampire to reach him until he was nestled up against the cool lean side of his master.

Then Spike had purred and wrapped an arm around Xander's waist hugging him gently. Xander had sighed and lain his head on the vampire's shoulder. Then Spike would occasionally risk turning his eyes from the gravel path on which they were traveling to brush his lips lightly over Xander's hair. Although the heat of awareness which always lay coiled between them was smoldering, surprisingly for once Spike did not seek to fan it. It was as if the vampire was content to just bask in the warmth of the closeness of his Claimant.

After a few hours of traveling through the desert night Spike spoke, "Nearly there, luv."

"Mmm," Xander answered. He wasn't asleep or even sleepy. However, he was at peace. He was floating on a wave of calm he hadn't remembered he could feel. They had left Las Vegas! His healing back still ached, but he was warm, clothed and snuggled against a serene Spike. They were racing towards the Resistance; towards Willow, Faith and Dawn. He didn't want anything to mar this fragile sense of hope and tranquility he was riding.

"We should talk," Spike said quietly.

Xander closed his eyes. He didn't want to talk. Talking bad. He could do no talking. He done it well for six months.

"Pet," Spike tried again.

"You're harshing my mellow, master," Xander finally said with heavy sigh.

Spike chuckled then kissed the top of Xander's head again.

"That's one of them bits we have to talk about," he said.
"My mellow?" Xander replied lifting his head turning enough to face Spike.

"Master..pet...," Spike replied as if it was his turn to find it difficult to talk.

"Spike?"

"The world may be demon run but the Resistance isn't, pet," Spike said.

"Yeah that would be kinda the point. Else it would be kinda confusing," Xander replied. "Sorta like Vader running the Rebels' fleet."

"I almost understood that," Spike said as he shook his head. "Must be getting daft."

Xander laughed then studied the vampire who still hadn't looked at him during this strange conversation.

"You still haven't explained yourself."

"In Vegas I wouldn't have to nor would you expect me to," Spike pointed out.

Xander's brow furrowed. Spike was getting at something. Why couldn't the blond blow hard get to the point? He wondered.

"And..what...punishment time?" Xander tried to draw the Spike out.

"Pet, you really gonna make me say it? Spell it out in tiny words?"

"Well I know I didn't do well in school," Xander replied, "but technically I think you spell things out in tiny letters."

"You know what I mean," Spike growled.

"Stalling," Xander accused, "Look...Sp..Master jus..."

Spike drew an unexpected breath at the word Master. Xander's eyebrows shot up and disengaged his mouth. Master? Pet? He thought. Did he mean that he's letting me go?

Something inside of Xander panicked and he instinctively grabbed at his collar. A cool hand covered
his and gently pulled it away from his neck.

"Are you..I mean," Xander sputtered not sure he could ask let alone if he should.

"Do you want me to?" Spike asked.

"'A' I thought the whole 'Claimant' thing made it impossible and 'B' who are you want have you done with Spike?" Xander asked trying to use his old standby humor to help cover a new panic growing inside him.

"Removing your collar wouldn't make the ritual less binding, Xander," Spike said as stared out the front window his eyes peering into the clinging and ceaseless darkness. He didn't even bother addressing Xander's second point.

"Again...not big on the understanding here," Xander replied.

Spike sighed. Not for the first time he wished he hadn't tossed his fags.

"Pet, you think yer girls are gonna wanna see that bit of shiny around your neck? Ya think that nob Larry is gonna be any less of whinger with you following me around and calling me Master?"


It was his turn to stare out the windshield into the empty and blank darkness wrapped all around them. He tugged his hand free of Spike's and reached for his collar. He fingered it. It was as smooth as it had ever been. Yet it wasn't cool as Xander had first remembered. It was warm. Warm from Xander's skin.

Warm from Spike's love, something whispered inside of Xander.

He shook his head and looked at the vampire. Spike's face was inscrutable. He'd steeled it into a chiseled look of blankness. He's eyes were hidden.

Xander's fingers continued to caress the collar. He remembered how panicked he'd felt when Spike had removed the simple leather collar he'd came with that first night when the vampire had won him. He'd remember thinking he was going to die. Even now he couldn't stop the small shudder of understanding that went through him at what it meant to be an "uncollared" human in Angelus' world.

Sure, he'd never put it on his life plan to be a demon's pet or vampire's Claimant but being Spike's had saved more than just his sanity, but his life. Spike's gold band had protected him.
It had hurt him, something else whispered inside. Xander looked away from Spike.

Not as much as it saved me, something else argued back. Then Xander groaned. Great! He thought. I'm arguing with myself.

Still, images and memories of the all the times he'd been hurt since wearing Spike's collar came flooding through him. He thought of the first time he'd met Lilah, the visit from Zorn, and the public punishment of kneeling for hours naked and humiliated in front of a demon horde at the Slayer's End. The fading fiery pain in his back reminded him of the more recent 'punishment.'

Suddenly the thought of just ripping the collar off and throwing it in Spike's face was tempting! He was going back among humans! He wouldn't have to live this way! He wouldn't have to live by Spike's rules and if the vampire didn't like it...!

Xander frowned.

Well ok, they can't kill him, he thought and something twisted ugly and hard in his gut at thought of Spike dying. And I don't want them too! But they could...well...they could make him so he didn't have a thing to say about it one way or another!

Xander looked back at Spike. The vampire was still silent and unreadable.

Other memories filled Xander's mind. Memories of gentle touches, of passionate caresses and kind gestures. He remembered being held and soothed. He remembered being read to and he remembered a picnic. He couldn't forget their slow dance or Spike's anguished voice as he ordered Xander back from death. Searing memories were still fresh in his mind of the unholy fury radiating from the vampire as he beat Keffler to death.

Did he risk losing all that by removing the collar? Would he want to?

"NO!" Xander suddenly shouted without even really understanding what he was denying.

"Pet?" Spike asked softly as he turned to look at Xander.

"NO..NO you can't have it back," Xander babbled, "I can hide it under my shirt. They don't have to see it, but it's mine. You gave it to me and no take backs! No Indian Giving!"

"Xander," Spike said with a smile as he reached again for his pet's hand. "I'll never take anything you aren't willing to give."
"Then good, you can't have this," Xander said as he clutched Spike's hand. "'Sides when the world get's on its feet again this baby's gonna be worth a lot of mula."

"Yer gonna pawn it?" Spike asked with an up raised eyebrow.

"Maybe," Xander said with a shrug as he leaned back against his vampire again.

"Don't you need the magic word to get it off?"

"I'll worry about that when the time comes. Maybe I'll have Willow cook something up. In the mean time, you keep your grubby mitts off it!"

Spike chuckled and kissed the top of Xander's head. Then nodded. They continued to traveling in companionable silence a few more miles.

"What if I just called you Master in private or in front of other demons," Xander finally broke the silence.

"Do you want to?" Spike asked.

Xander closed his eyes. Did he want to? Did he want to continue calling Spike master? He wasn't sure what he wanted. He'd been living so long for just living he wasn't sure he knew what he wanted anymore.

*Going back to the girls...getting out of Vegas*, he thought. *That's more than I could dream, let alone want.*

"I don't know," Xander finally said. In all honesty he didn't. "Sides, even if I didn't want to I'm not sure that I could."

"Pet?" Spike asked trying to follow the Xander babble.

"Well, it's like this," Xander said as he sat up again. "I mean it's not like I want to think about it but really the truth is if you growl or bark or just even look cross the word's gonna be on my lips."

"Xan..." Spike tried to interrupt.

"No let me finish," Xander continued, "and even if you weren't cross it still would be there. I mean that's who you are isn't it? Master Spike? Master of Vegas? My master? I mean I can't just go from being a slave to what being a full fledged Resistance fighter, Xan-man and Scooby again? It doesn't work that way. Maybe in the beginning. Maybe if I'd gotten out shortly after being taken by the
Azora but not now. Not after...after...

For a moment Xander's throat seemed to close as other memories from some place locked away in a tiny box marked "Do Not Open" tried to creep out. He squeezed Spike's hand and forced the memories back.

"Not after...my t-t-tapping," he continued, "and certainly not after your Claim."

Suddenly the truck began to slow as Spike applied the brake. He brought the truck to a complete stop, set the emergency brake, put the engine in neutral and turned to face Xander.

"I won't lie. I won't say that I never wanted you. I won't lie and say that I don't want you now. I won't lie and say my demon doesn't purr every time it hears you call me master," Spike whispered as he suddenly caressed Xander's cheeks. "But we're headin' into the end game now, pet. Win or lose it all comes down to what happens next. We win, you're bound to me for life. We die, you might still be bound to me in death. All I can really give you...for all that you gone through...all that I've put you through..is this chance to face this final trick of the cards on yer own terms."

Brown eyes studied blue eyes in the faint dashboard light. Desire, love, and passion wrapped as tightly around the vampire and human as the night did around the black truck. Xander's hands began to caress Spike's face. For a moment everything faded away. There was no Angelus and the Resistance. There were no human rules and demon laws. There was just Spike and Xander.

In that moment Xander remembered what he saw and experienced in the Claiming ritual. He remembered the light which had reached out through the shadow to embrace him. He remembered how safe he'd felt. He'd remembered being equally claimed by the both demon and the soul. A claim he'd accepted and wanted because he knew Spike would honor it.

In that moment Xander understood, that together they were just Spike and Xander. Yet they were Master and Pet; Master and Claimant. No band and no titles could change it.

Spike was trying to give him something else. Even if it was just an illusion, because he thought Xander needed or wanted it. Once again he was trying to protect him from the shadow; even if the shadows were the vampire's own demon. Yet, who protected Spike? What would the illusion cost Spike? Xander was sure it would cost him something. He was sure the demon inside the vampire needed Xander's submission.

Xander wanted to laugh. It was almost too funny as he realized perhaps the demon needed Xander's submission more than Xander ever needed to give it.

Xander smiled.

"In case you haven't noticed, Master Martyr," Xander whispered. "I've always done things on my
Blue eyes flashed gold. A low purr emanated deep with the vampire. Then Spike laughed before kissing the tip of Xander's nose.

"Always thought you were just a git too bloody clueless to know better, Pet," Spike softly growled.

"I'll have you know I was always real good at Clue," Xander grinned.

Spike rolled his eyes and pulled the human close. He claimed his lips in a sweet kiss. It was Xander's turn to purr as he returned the favor by pushing back against the vampire as he deepened the kiss. Strong arms moved down his arms and shoulders to encircle his back.

Xander moaned and buried his hands into Spike's hair. Tongues began to twine and dance. The ember flared and heat pooled low in each man's belly.

"Say it," Spike all but begged as he pulled his lips from Xander's. "Please."

"Master," Xander answered and tugged Spike back against him to reclaim the errant lips.

"Peeeete," Spike groaned into Xander's mouth. Xander gobbled up the words before he ghosted hungry lips across Spike cheeks.

"My master," Xander said as a firm punctuation to each kiss he rained down on the vampire's face and neck. "My master vampire. My Spike. My Master Spike."

"Xan..." Spike started to say only to be silenced with another kiss. Xander invaded Spike's mouth and chastised him with punishing lips and tongue.

When he felt the vampire had thoroughly learned his lesson he withdrew only to mutter against Spike's neck, "Pet. I'm your Pet. Your Claimant."

"My love," Spike argued. "My Xander."

"Your Xanpet," Xander conceded as he nuzzled the sweet hollow spot at the bottom of Spike's neck. Spike laughed then grabbed his pet's wrists. With a burst of speed, strength and agility which was his to command more easily than his adorable Claimant he quickly, but gently, pinned Xander to the seat on his back.
Xander smiled in spite of his back's protest. This felt good. It felt right. He relaxed and looked up at Spike.

"Won't be this easy, pet," Spike warned.

"When was it ever?" Xander answered.

"They won't understand."

"Do they have to? I mean I don't understand," Xander smiled, "not really but it's the way it is."

There was brief shadow in Spike's eyes but it disappeared before Xander could question or even wonder about it.

"There will be punishments," Spike warned.

A sudden chill started to dampen Xander ardor. No, he thought. Not in front of the gir...

"Shhh, pet," Spike said as he brushed a kiss across the tip of Xander's nose. "Private ones, yeah? Just between you and me. None of their business."

Heat chased away the chill as memories of previous private punishments rushed back into Xander's mind. He remembered the taste of skin and chocolate as well as the long slow night of delicious torture where Spike had wrung every drop of pleasure and spill from him. He even remembered "P-E-T" emblazoned across his ass and the cool feel of Spike tongue soothing him afterwards. Xander's belt grew tight.

I really am a glutton for punishment, Xander thought as he smiled.

"Oi! Ya cheeky git!" Spike growled as he scented a new wave of pheromones rolling off his pet. "Gonna start making you wash my dirty socks for discipline!"

"Oh that's just darn cruel!" Xander objected with a pout.

"I don't know," Spike whispered, "maybe if I make you take 'em off my feet first...using just your teeth..."

Xander groaned and seized Spike's lips.

"You are a tease, master!" Xander accused when he was done kissing his vampire.
"You interrupted me, pet," Spike replied before leaning down to suck on the bottom of Xander's ear. Xander hissed and arched under Spike as his belt grew incredibly tight. The vampire laved, nuzzled and nursed on Xander's ear lobe until the human was panting and twisting underneath him.

"Should give you a proper snogging, wind you up good and leave you wantin' hard for days," Spike warned when he finally released his treat. "Not twenty-four hours out of the city and yer already forgetting yerself."

_Not much of a warning, master, _Xander thought as he struggled to catch his breath. _Considering you're already halfway there!

"Still," Spike muttered as he snaked a hand down Xander's side. "Why deny myself? I'm not the one bein' bad?"

Xander giggled then froze. Spike's trailed his finger low and soft across Xander's stomach. Suddenly Xander remembered other soft caresses across his abdomen. Suddenly it wasn't Spike's fingers but a tail; a scaly orange tail Xander felt.

"Pet," Spike said in a calm but firm voice as he sensed the fear possess Xander. "Yer safe, luv. Yer all right."

Spike released Xander's wrist, sat up and moved back away from his pet. Xander scrambled back against the passenger door. He blinked a few times then stared at the vampire.

"Spike? Ghod! I'm sorry..I just..you and then...suddenly," Xander started to babble, "it was him and I couldn't. I mean I know it wasn't but..and I'm..."

"It's ok, luv," Spike said. "Not yer fault."

"Fuck!" Xander yelled and hit the dashboard.

"Pet!" Spike gave an answering yell but didn't move. "You don't get to hurt what's mine!"

Xander looked at Spike and sneered, "What? 'Bottles' don't hurt themselves?"

"No," Spike said evenly, "and that's the last time I ever want to hear you even come close to comparin' me to that Azora winnit again. You hear me?"

Xander looked away but nodded.
"You don't hurt what's mine because I decide when you get punished, not you. That's my job. I take care of you and if you need to be punished, I'll punish you."

Xander looked back at Spike.

"You're having a flashback...that's not something you need to be punished for," Spike continued to explain.

"But I wanted...and then..." Xander tried to do some explaining of his own.

"I know and sometimes that happens, pet. But it's not yer fault."

"It's my memories! My body!"

"Your trauma. Your mind and body's timetable for dealing with it," Spike said softly.

Xander opened his mouth to continue arguing but stopped. There was a look of understanding in Spike's eyes; an understanding that wasn't just cognitive but visceral.

_Oh, Spike!_ Xander thought as he remembered what the vampire had looked like that evening back in L.A.. He remembered what Spike had told him about Angelus and Dru when he'd first been turned. Without thinking, only following some instinctive need, Xander dove for Spike's arms; as always the vampire caught him. Strong bands of sinew and muscle wrapped around Xander holding him tight and close.

"I'm so sorry," Xander muttered against the side of the vampire's neck wanting to chase all of Spike's ghosts away.

"Shh! Told you no need, pet," Spike said.

Xander shook his head but otherwise didn't argue. He wasn't apologizing for his own freak-out, he was empathizing for all of Spike's trauma. He was sorry for all the times Spike must have freaked out and no one cared because Xander knew that neither Angelus or Dru would. They had never cared or loved like Spike had, even when he'd been without a soul.

Warm arms wrapped around He vowed that was never going to happen to Spike again as he rested his chin on the vampire's shoulder.

"Xan?" Spike asked with worry in his voice.

Understanding flooded through Spike. Tears formed in the corner of his eyes. He hugged Xander even closer; as tight as he dared.

The two held each other for what seemed like a small eternity. However, it was just the few moments they needed to get their overwrought emotions under control. Then Spike slowly released his tight hold on Xander as the human eased his own grip on the vampire. They looked at each other.

"Punishment's over, pet," Spike said with a grin.

Xander bent down brushed a kiss across the back of each of Spike's hands. Then sat back as he returned a smile of his own. Spike ran a finger tip across his nose. Xander rolled his eyes.

Spike laughed then looked around, "Oi! Where'd that bloody whatchamacallit with the directions get to?"

Xander looked around then felt underneath the seat. He found the long forgotten GPS unit.

"Here," he said as once again he gripped it like an Orb of Thesulah.

"Right," Spike said as he released the brake and put the truck in gear.

Xander slid back into place alongside of Spike. An arm curled around him. Sinatra sang, "Ever since that night we've been together. Lovers at first sight, in love forever. It turned out so right, For strangers in the night."

TBC

Author's Notes:

"Indian Giver" - Ok..there's a term I personally really really do not like. Anyway, it is American slang and very school yard. It seemed to fit the scene and here's a nice historical background on the phrase, how it came to be and even how it's grown to have the more modern twist (which I think is more appropriate) in that the term was more appropriate to the settlers and the US government then it ever was to the Native Americans. I mean..not to get too political (but hey..there's a tiny bit of Blackfoot Indian in me and it's my LJ so I'll rant) we broke far more treaties and deals then the Native Americans ever did.

Sinatra's singing "Stranger's in the Night" at the end. Lyrics are here.

I found an "ok" video on youtube here if you haven't heard the song (not the best audio).
Chapter 72

The truck rolled to a smooth stop as the alert from the GPS system died. As before the area was dark and devoid of movement. Though this time Xander knew his friends waited for him.

Spike turned his head. His face was dimly lit from the glow of the dashboard lights. He cocked an eyebrow.

“How about ‘Claimants’ first this time?” Xander said as he reached to pop door handle. Spike smiled. Xander returned it with a grin of his own before gracefully easing out of the passenger seat.

As soon as his feet touched the desert floor light filled the area.

“Xander?” Willow’s voice cried out.

“Too early for Santa,” he replied.

There was a squeal of delight from Xander’s left followed by the sound of many running feet. 

Reindeer? He briefly thought before he was enveloped in the arms and cries of both Willow and Dawn.

“Some security,” Spike growled as he slid out from behind the driver’s side door.

“Some,” a cool and deadly voice said at the same time the vampire heard the slide of a cross bolt falling into place.

“Slayer,” Spike acknowledged as he froze in position.

“Vampire,” Faith answered as she moved out of the shadows. “You tripped our wards five miles back. We knew it was you.”

An insolent grin spread across the Master of Las Vegas’s face.

“Since you knew I was coming…ya bake me a cake?”

“No,” Faith said as she lowered her crossbow, “but I drew you a bath. Made sure a priest blessed it and all.”

“It’s a shame we’re both on the same side now, ducks,” Spike laughed.

“Yeah,” Faith said as she sauntered closer to the vampire; so close only the fading heat of the desert separated them.

“Woulda loved to dance with you,” Spike said in a smooth mix of a low growl and a throaty whisper.

“I would have been your last,” Faith purred.

“It woulda been good,” Spike replied his eyes flashing gold.

“One for the history books,” Faith said wetting her lips.

“Do you two need a room, Master?” Xander suddenly asked in a frosty voice.
Spike almost seemed to flinch. Momentarily there was a look which could have been guilt that flashed in his eyes before he looked down at his feet. Then he looked back at his Pet who was flanked by both the Witch and the Dawn Bit. Spike knew the Witch was more dangerous but the over-protective look in the Bit’s eye had him momentarily forgetting all about Willow.

“Pet,” Spike began to explain.

“It’s a vampire..Slayer thing,” Faith cut in as she moved away from the outnumbered Spike to place a quick peck on Xander’s cheek. “Sex, violence..it’s all intertwined for us.”

“And?” Xander prompted still sending an icy cool look towards his vampire.

“And now being on the same team ‘Trigger Finger’ and me are never gonna know who’d be on top,” Spike replied with a smirk.

“So they banter and posture,” a new voice interrupted.

“Tara!” Xander cried out turning toward the blonde woman.

“Xan..Xander” Tara laughed as she reached out to embrace her friend from Vegas. She wrapped her arms tight around him and pressed her hands to his back. Xander winced.

“Xander?” Willow and Tara both asked in unison as Tara quickly let him go. She looked worriedly at Willow.

“It..It’s nothing.”

“You’re hurt?” Dawn asked.

“Let it be,” Xander said softly while smiling at his girls.

Willow’s eyes narrowed.

“Xander…”

“Wills..please..let it go,” Xander pleaded once again.

The red haired girl stared at Xander for a moment. A chill went down his spine. He couldn’t help but feel she was somehow studying him, reading him, getting information about him in some way he didn’t want to think about.

Then her eyes shifted suddenly to focus on Spike. The light around the area changed to a dull red hue. Faith stepped back in front of Spike.

“Willow,” Xander quickly said, “you hurt him..you hurt me.”

“I don’t have to ‘hurt’ him,” Willow said as her eyes begin to cloud to black.

“Willow!” Tara whispered as she placed a hand on the witch's shoulder.

“I can bind him….bury him deep…lose him in a dark pit forgotten by even the damned and the lost…”

“Red,” Spike warned. He had never gone down without a fight and he wasn’t about to start now.

“And where ever you send him..you’ll have to send me too,” Xander said as he quickly joined Faith
“Xander!” Willow and Spike both hissed at the same time.

“I mean it Wills!”

*I made a promise he’d never have to be alone again,* Xander thinks.

“Pet, move!” Spike ordered.

“Not on your undead life, blood breath!”

*Somebody’s going over my knee!* Spike silently vowed.

“You’re protecting him?” Willow suddenly asked in a small confused voice.

“He protected me.”

“He hurt you!”

“He took care of me, Wills! I know you don’t understand. I didn’t...at first...but believe me...trust me...no matter what it looks...looked like...Ma...Spike has always taken care of me. He always will.”

Willow stared at Xander. Everyone could feel her power gathered around them ready to strike like an impending storm as she studied her friend. Xander returned her gaze willing her to understand. Trust, love, doubt, fear and other unidentified emotions played out across her face as she weighed Xander’s words.

Spike’s palms itched. He could feel the witch’s power. He could feel it focusing on him. Everything in him screamed to grab his Pet and run. His soul cried out to protect Xander and his demon cried out to eviscerate the threat to his Claimant. It took all of his will and trust in his love for Xander to remain still and to let the standoff between the two old friends play out.

*So help me,* Spike thought, *when we get through this I’m going to have him on his back gaggin’ for it and I ain’t gonna let him cum for a week!*

Willow continued to stare deeply into Xander’s eyes. She looked for any sign, any wavering in his resolve. What she saw was pure Xander. She saw all the loyalty and love she had always seen for her, Dawn, Buffy, Jesse. Only now it was for Spike. There was also something deeper; something she wasn’t sure she wanted to identify.

The blackness in her eyes to recede and the light began to brighten around them. She had begun to understand. What was between Spike and Xander was more than a vampire ritual; even though the results were the same. If she hurt Spike, she hurt Xander and there was no part of Willow that could do that.

“I...OK, Xan,” Willow finally said as she released the power she had summoned. It blew across the ground towards the four directions like a cool desert wind and took with it a secret sigh of relief from a master vampire.

“Well...now that that's over, “ a crisp voice in a clipped British voice called out. “Will someone please guide me over so I may join you?”

“Wesley! What are you doing here? I told you to stay back at camp until we were sure everything was safe!”
“Faith,” I am your Watcher, not your Ward,” Wesley replied from somewhere behind the light.

“Yeah…keeping pushing and you’re gonna be in one! And who do I gotta ice for helping you get this far anyway?”

Dawn smiled sheepishly and raised her hand.

“Should have known!” Faith snorted as she began to make her way quickly toward the blind man.

“Wait!” Spike asked in confusion. “Why does Weasley there still need to play Blind Man’s Bluff? Didn’t you get the peepers?”

“Tactful as always, William,” Wes called out.

Spike growled.

“For your information I have not tried the seer’s eyes yet. And will someone please assist me!”

“Hold your boxers,” Faith replied. “I’m nearly there.”


“Ma..Spike,” Xander started to say as he laid a hand on the vampire’s arm.

“It may not have occurred to you, William…”

“SPIKE!” the vampire barked out.

“Yes of course, Spike, but I’m not in the habit of putting randomly obtained body parts of dubious origin in my body without a little bit of research,” Wesley answered as Faith guided him into the circle of light.

“Research! Listen, Watcher while you research Angelus gets that much closer to the Key and when he finds it then you better bloody well get used to having ‘randomly obtained body parts’ getting put in your body because they’ll all be going up your arse!”

“Colorful way with words there,” Faith noted.

“Yes, records indicate he dabbled in the literary…” Wesley began to explain.

Spike snarled.

“Ok…time for an official Scooby Gang timeout,” Xander called as he pivoted to now step between Spike and the approaching Watcher.

“I d..don’t know what that is..b..but I second it,” Tara said.

“Uhm…you know..I think we have some cookies back at the camp,” Dawn said.

“Cookies?” Almost everyone replied.

“Biscuits?” Wesley asked. “Where did you get biscuits?”

“I’ve had them for a while. I was saving them for an emergency…I think this might qualify.”

“Are they chocolate chip?” Xander asked.
Dawn giggled.


“Master…” Xander warned momentarily forgetting where he was until he faced eight pairs of raised eyebrows. Only Tara’s had remained un-arched.

“Master?” Willow ground out.

“Er…” Xander replied as his hand unconsciously reached for Spike’s. The vampire not only met him halfway; once their hands were joined he pulled his Pet in close.

“Cookies? Excellent idea,” Tara said.

“Xander…you aren’t his slave anymore,” Willow said sharply.

“Wills, I’m his Claimant. Being here doesn’t change that.”

“But..you don’t have to c..call him ‘Master’.not here..not now.”

“No…I don’t,” Xander said honestly looking back at Spike. “But I do..I will and you should get used to it.”

Willow and Dawn stared at him. Some part of him felt like he should want to crawl under a rock and be ashamed. Another part of him felt like he should rage against the unfairness of it all. However, mostly he just felt relieved. This is what he was now and the girls would just have to accept him or not.

Please accept me, he silently prayed.

“I really hate this world,” Willow finally said.

“Wasn’t my top ten pick either,” Xander said with a small smile.

“You don’t deserve him!” Willow snarled at Spike.

“I know, Red,” Spike said quietly.

“Wills…”

“Is this what you want?” Dawn asked.

“Ah, Dawnie,” Xander said pulling himself away from Spike to wrap his arms around her without thinking. “Yes..No…Maybe? Depends on when you ask me.”

Spike tried not to let the pain of Xander’s uncertain answer show. He kept his demon in check. He knew his boy would have to get touchy with his old friends. After he’d been away from them so long to deny him the hugs and the reassuring touches when they were all around him would be like denying him water when he was dying of thirst

“Now?”

“Yes,” he said holding her tight and breathing in the clean warm scent of her.

“Why?” she asked pulling away from him so she could see his face. “Why?”
“Because…”

Because he was there, Xander thought. He saved me. Because I needed him. Because he needs me. Because…

Xander closed his eyes. Too many memories threatened to overwhelm. He felt for a moment like he was being lowered back into the Tank. His heart beat wildly. Once again he was unable to move, to speak, to breathe…

“Pet!” Spike called out softly but in a tone that demanded obedience. Once again he wrapped his arms around Xander. “Breathe…”

Spike ordered it. Xander obeyed.

Dawn stepped away with tears in her eyes. Spike cast a glance at the humans surrounding him and his Xander.

“Spike?” Faith whispered.

“He’s been living in a demon run world, Slayer….living on his own six months before I got to him,” Spike said in reply to her unasked question.

Xander took another breath and blinked.

*Damnit! Not again! He thought. Why? Why’s this happening to me now? Now when I’m back with the girls?”*

“I’m OK,” Xander said realizing the vampire was once again holding him close.

“Who shot first?” Spike asked.

Xander rolled his eyes, “Oh please. I’ve been tortured, enslaved and ravaged by demons but I haven’t completely gone Rain Main. It was Han.”

Spike grinned and released his, Pet He resisted the urge to spin him around and place a kiss on the tip of his nose.

“Right..so is the meet and greet over? Can we get on with going back to your secret rebel base and convincing Magic Man to play seer?”

“And what’s the hurry to get back to our camp?” Willow asked.

“Well someone did say something about cookies,” Spike said shooting a wink a Dawn, “and I’d like to get some place with a little shade before sunrise.”

“Vampires eat cookies?” Dawn asked.

“Oi..if you dip ‘em in a spot of blood first.”

“Oh…gross!”

“Not mine! Claimant or not..not letting you desecrate crumbly goodness like that!” Xander cried.

“Pet!”

“Uh..huh! Nope!” Xander said crossing his arms in front of his chest.
Tara giggled.

“Right, you two can argue about this later,” Faith said. “As much as I hate to admit it, Fang Face has got a point. Time to head underground.”

“What about the truck?” Spike asked.

“It’s got room for all of us. We’ll load up, ride to the site, and Willow here will cover our tracks… literally.”

“You ok with that?” Tara asked taking Willow’s hand. “You’ve c..called on…a lot of p..power already tonight.”

“Help me?” Willow answered with a shy smile.

“Always,” Tara replied taking the other girls hand.

“I think there are days I am glad my sight is missing,” Wesley said as Faith started leading him toward the truck.

“You’re only saying that cuz no one is making eyes at you,” Faith replied giving Wesley an unguarded look of her own.

“It’s like an episode of Eastenders around here,” Spike muttered as he climbed back up inside the truck on the driver’s side.

Xander and Dawn giggled.

As doors slammed, his friends settled into the truck and his Master started the engine, for a moment Xander felt as if the world had shifted. For a brief moment he felt as if all the horrors of the last seven years and the degradations of the last several months had fallen away. For just a moment he felt like he was home.

TBC

Author’s notes: The Han shot first argument is an old one in Star Wars lore. Eastenders is a long running soap opera in the UK. And “Weasley” was not a typo. >;)
Chapter 73

Spike tried not to pace. There was room enough in the tunnel but it was the principle. *Pet’ll be back,* he thought. Still, it was hard not for the vampire to worry just a little. It was daytime and his Xander was topside with his friends while he was stuck down deep in the mines away from the deadly sunlight.

The vampire let out an exaggerated sigh and forced himself to sit back down amidst the nest of sleeping bags. He ran a hand over his face.

*Xan will be back soon,* he told himself again as he leaned his back against the rock wall. He thought about their arrival to the resistance camp only few short hours ago. The drive hadn’t been much at all. It had been just about a quarter of a mile in the dark and they were in the midst of the ruins of a ghost town.

“Rhyolite,” Wesley had explained. “It was part of the Bullfrog Mining district. Beginning in 1905 it was one of several camps that sprang up in these surrounding hills during the gold rush. In its heyday it had electric lights, water mains, a stock exchange, opera house, rail road terminal and over fifty saloons.”

“Sounds like my kinda town,” Spike had replied. “Where we going?”

“Over there,” Faith had answered as she pointed out the remains of rectangular building with a second story in the middle and arches at the end. It was one of the most “complete” structures Spike could make out.

“That’s the old railroad terminal,” Dawn had said.

“Aperio!” Willow had commanded and a portion of a wall in the building had simply disappeared.

“There’s your parking space,” Faith had said.

“Right,” Spike had replied as he maneuvered the truck inside the building.

After that it had been a blue of unloading bodies and bags out of the truck while the witches had not only summoned a small dust devil to blow away all the tracks but to seal up the building. Then Dawn and Faith had shown Spike and Xander the secret entrance to the mines.

Oddly enough it had been Wesley who had led the way once they were in the mines.

“Just a matter of memorizing steps and turns really,” Wesley had explained as he guided the small throng.

“He’s our emergency evacuation plan if the lights go out,” Dawn had said with a smile.

“Wes is the man with the moves in the dark,” Faith had said with a sly grin.

“Good to hear it. I trust then there will be no more arguments about practicing your blind fighting with me.” Wes had countered.

From there an obviously old argument had played out between the Watcher and the Slayer as the party wound their way through the resistance’s underground camp in the old mine tunnels. Eventually they came to a small deadend alcove.
“T..this is yours,” Tara had said.

The floor had been swept smooth and a small kerosene lantern had hung from hook in the ceiling. There had also been few candles melted upright on a few rock outcroppings.

“Home sweet yet creepy abandoned mine,” Xander had said as the refugees had dropped their bags.

“Slept in worse places,” Spike had answered briefly thinking of Africa.

“Oh so not looking forward to those bedtimes stories,” Xander had replied.

“Which ones are you looking forward to, Harris?” a familiar voice had asked.

Spike had growled as he whirled around to see his former prisoner Larry standing behind the girls in the tunnel outside the alcove.

“Larry!” Xan had cried with a smile happy to see his former classmate well and alive.

The smile hadn’t been returned.

“Keeping my eye on you vamp,” the big man had said to Spike completely ignoring Xander.

“Wanna another close look as I give ya beat down number two?” Spike had asked with a lifted eyebrow.

“Master,” Xander hard warned.

“Cookies!” Dawn had chimed in starting to push against Larry. “C’mon..back upstairs. We’re raiding my stash to celebrate Xander’s return.”

Xander had looked to Spike as the others began to move awkwardly back through the tunnel. Spike had looked back. He had seen the desperate plea in his Pet’s eyes, the desire to go be with his friends and yet he stood still patiently waiting for some sign from Spike that he had permission to leave the vampire’s side.

Deep down Spike’s demon had crowed. His Pet was still his even outside the city and the demon run world. It liked it that way. As far as it was concerned Xander could stay curled at Spike’s feet while the rest of the human happy meals could gorge themselves silly on biscuits and ket. Yet, Spike’s soul ached. He could tell how much Xander loved his friends and wanted time to be with them.

“Get!” Spike had growled. “All this nattering has given me a headache. Need some time away from ya twits.”

“Thanks you, Master,” Xander had said with a smile as he followed a glaring Willow out through the tunnel.

Then Spike had slid down to the floor, made a nest of the sleeping bags and had waited for his Pet to return. He’d been waiting for awhile. He could tell he’d been gone for several hours now. Long enough that it was too late for him to go up top to fetch him back.

Should have never let him go in the first place, he silently growled.

“They all need this time you know,” Wes’s voice interrupted Spike’s thoughts.

“Ya all become bloody scentless silent ninjas down here?” Spike asked as he looked up at the Watcher hovering just outside the tunnel. He was tired of getting startled by humans.
“I dare say the echoing effect of the tunnels and intermingling of the scents of so many of us close quartered down here would make it difficult to discern and individual approach unless you were concentrating or were uniquely keyed into the individual.”

“You know I ate the last person who gave me a long lecture. Think he was from Cambridge.”

“Well..at least he wasn’t from Oxford,” Wesley answered with a half-smile. “Now that would have been a loss.”

“You here for a particular reason or do ya just want to bang on about something?”

“Actually there was something I wished to discuss with you. May I?” Wesley asked as he made a sweeping gesture with his arm indicating he wished to enter.

“Last I checked, I was the soddin’ vampire wot needed permission to come in,” Spike said with a nod.

“Apocalypse or not, a good Englishmen should not forget his manners. Was that a yes then?” Wesley asked.

Oi! Blind! Spike thought as he rolled his eyes.

“Yeah…that was a yes.”

“Thank you,” Wes said as he felt his way along the wall to enter the alcove.

“Oi..watch the bags to your three o’clock,” Spike called out.

Wesley smiled and shuffled his feet to the right.

“May I sit?”

“If you don’t mind getting your suit dirty. Nothing but dirt floor here.”

“I am accustomed to it,” Wesley said as he eased himself to the ground.

“So what’s so important we gotta have this little BBC America moment?”

“Well you were the one who eluded it to it. We are running out of time. Angelus has a head start on us with the scroll. If we want a chance to catch up to him I need to use the eyes.”

“Wot? Ya gonna pop ‘em in here?”

“Well I thought first you could answer a few questions first.”

Spike groaned. He hated the twenty questions game.

“Wil…”

Spike growled.

“Er..right..Spike…I am not being reluctant on this issue because I am squeamish. What you have given us is a very valuable resource; one which we might not be able to get our hands on for a very long time or ever again. Not to mention we do not have that much time to play catch up with Angelus. Before I proceed with using these eyes I need to know that I am the best possible candidate for using them; that we aren’t wasting on opportunity.”
“Listen, Percy, I gave ’em to ya because you’re the best hope for deciphering the scroll. Those eyes will let you see ta do that.”

“And those eyes are also a direct conduit to the Powers that Be. Humans aren’t meant to have that kind of access.”

“So ya just willing to roll over and spread for ‘Gelus then?”

“No but what happens if I put those eyes in my head and my mind is overwhelmed? It’s too much? What happens when I am reduced to being able to see but not able to think? Read? Speak? Communicate? What happens when all I can do is to sit and stare as my mind is trapped within vision after vision being pumped into my brain from the Powers until I finally waste away and die? How will that help us, Spike?”

*Watchman has a point, Spike thought reluctantly. Still, we don’t have much choice.*

“You didn’t seem this reluctant when I first pitched the idea.”

“The theoretical is often much more intoxicating then the certain,” Wesley sighed.

“That a fancy way of saying you got cold feet?”

“Perhaps...in a manner. Look, even blind I could have someone help me with translating. Someone could describe the symbo...”

“That would take twice..three times as long,” Spike interrupted.

Wesley sighed again.

“If we fry my brains it will take longer.”

“We don’t know that it will.”

“We don’t know that it won’t.”

“Is that what’s holding you back?”

“Believe it or not I am needed here, Spike. If this were just about me, I wouldn’t hesitate but...”

“Percy...you...them...me...we’re all running out time. How long do you think this Resistance of yours can last? Really? To what end? Angelus has got you on the run and look at Red. She’s almost darkside as it is now. What happens when she goes? Do you really think that the Resistance can survive fighting her and ‘Gelus? Finding the Key could be the last hope.”

*If I were in the city I could just make you wear those eyes, Spike thought briefly. Wouldn’t have to be playing agony aunt here.*

“And what’s your game, Spike huh? Why are you suddenly turning on Angelus? What’s in it for you?” Wesley asked suddenly on the attack.

“Same thing as I told the other Slayer,” Spike replied. “I *liked* the world the way it was. This...this dream of Angelus is not mine.”

“Seems to me you have everything you could want, Spike. You have Vegas and with it all the sex and violence you could want. You have your own personal pet. What are you missing?”
Spike’s face shifted. He stared at Wesley briefly before answering in a deadly quiet voice.

“Dru. I’m missing Dru.”

“Not good enough,” Wesley said pressing his attack.

Spike snarled and lunged for the man. Wesley didn’t move not even as the vampire’s hand closed around his throat.

“Say that again!” Spike growled into Wesley’s face.

“I need more, Spike,” Wesley said. “I need a lot more. You told me you knew where these eyes came from. I want to know. Tell me. Give me something that will make me believe that I should trust you. Risk everything in putting these eyes into my head.”

“If we were back in the city…” Spike began to voice aloud.

“But we are not,” Wesley said coolly cutting Spike off. “We are here…in the tunnels under a ghost town with the Slayer and the most powerful free witch are above our heads. We are here surrounded by the best of the resistance. We are here where you are a guest only because Xander is your Claimant.”

Spike used all his willpower to resist the urge to squeeze the air from the Watcher’s throat.

“And believe it or not, Spike,” Wesley continued. “I am on your side because I do agree with you. We are running out of time. You are right; the resistance is doomed unless we can change something drastically and soon. But I’m not Xander. I have no reason to believe in you just because you seem to be riding in to save the day.”

“Watcher…”

“Vampire…”

Spike shook his head and released the other man. He growled and paced the cave. He felt more trapped then ever. What could he say? There were still so many pieces at play on the board. One wrong move and it was Angelus’s game.

“The eyes belonged to a half-breed named Doyle,” Spike said softly as he finally reached some sort of internal decision. “He…he came to me once. Shortly after Angelus took over. Told me he had a vision that I would kill him one day…but that it was ok. He…forgave me. He confessed to me then that his visions came from the Powers.”

“You didn’t say anything to Angelus?”

“We were sorta not on speaking terms,” Spike said with a biter laugh. “On the account I’d just betrayed him to Buffy.”

“You believed this Doyle then?”

“Not at first.”

“But later?”

“Yeah…when I was stripping the skin off him,” Spike said happy Wesley wasn’t wearing Doyle’s eyes. Happy he couldn’t see Spike’s guilt. The guilt only a soul could feel.
“Why…why did he tell you…”

“Because he knew I was going to betray Angelus again, OK?” Spike snapped. “He saw it! He knew! This…this is all part of the Powers’ plan. Maybe not the ‘how’ but it’s definitely part of their end game.”

Wesley was silent. His head was tilted to the side as if he was listening really hard, thinking or both.

“Look, Percy. I’ve never worn Doyle’s eyes and the Paddy wanker never gave me much to go on so I have no real idea if you wearing his eyes is part of the great master plan or not. But what I do know is that they are tied into the Powers. The Powers saw me betraying Angelus a second time. They knew I was gonna kill their Seer and even sent him to tell me about it. Now you can believe me or not but them eyes are the best chance you have of deciphering the Manuscript of Steganographia and that manuscript is the best chance we have finding the Key…”

“.and the Key is the best chance we have of closing the portal…shutting Acathla’s mouth,” Wesley said as he sighed and rose to his feet.

“Promise me something, Spike,” Wesley said as he began fishing inside his jacket.

“Wot?”

“This goes wrong…you stay and fight with the until the end. The bitter end.”

“There’s nowhere else for me to go,” Spike said.

“That’s not a promise,” Wesley said as he pulled a slender case from out his inside pocket.

If Spike breathed his breath would catch.

“Right. I promise. I swear..I’ll stay with them…till the end.”

Wesley gave a nod and a tight smile as he reached up with one hand and began to unwrap the bandages around his eye. They fell loose and floated to the floor. He opened the case and nestled inside were Doyle’s eyes still shining fresh and still looking freshly plucked after all these years.

Wesley gently reached out and grasped one between his forefinger and thumb. He held out the case to Spike.

“Hold this for a moment?”

“Yeah, mate,” Spike said as he swiftly moved forward and took the case from the Watcher’s hand.

Then Wesley used his free hand to ease open his right eye lid. He took a deep breath, rotated the eye in his other hand and then slowly inserted the eyeball into his empty eye socket. He gave a quick intake of air as he let his eyelid fall.

He gasped and his hands curled into fists.

“Wes?”

“Give me a moment,” Wesley ground out as tears began to stream out the corner of his right eye. “It’s…painful…and yet…not.”

Spike stood still. Wesley took a deep breath then let it out very slowly. Then he reached out for the other eye. His hands fumbled for a moment as they sought to find the other eyeball. His right eye
was still tightly closed.

Once again he grasped the soft bit of flesh between his forefinger and thumb. This time he lifted his left eyelid. He took another deep breath and before he exhaled he quickly eased the second eyeball in place.

“AH…” Wes whispered as he backed up. His hands went to his face.

“Watcher?” Spike asked worriedly as moved to follow the other man.

“Just…it…” Wesley tried to explain. “Faith…really going to kill me. Told me..not to do this without her or Willow here.”

“Maybe you should have listened?” Spike offered.

Wes shook his head as tears flowed out from the corners of both eyes.

“Was ready to do this..just needed answers,” Wes gasped out.

“Maybe…”

“No! You were right,” Wesley said as he pulled himself up into the epitome of perfect posture. Then ever so slowly he began to open his eyes. “We are running out of time.”

Spike waved his hand in front of the Watcher’s face.

“Do stop, that Spike. It’s making the nausea worse.”

“Oi…wait..you see my hand?” Spike asked.

Wesley opened his eyes wider.

“Yes, that and your very bad bleach job. Did you kill all the stylists in Vegas?”

“Wha…You know I can always take those eyes back.”

“After spending all this time and effort convincing me to accept them?” Wesley said with a smile as he turned his head to look around. His eyes were now opened wide and a look of wonder was evident on his face. He spent a long moment studying the light lantern.

“I tried to keep the memories of how colors…things looked,” he said. “But…nothing compares to the vibrancy of actually seeing them.”

Spike wasn’t sure what to say to that.

Wesley turned back to face the vampire.

“I..I want to see the girls..go up..see the sun…see how red Willow’s hair is in the light. I want to see Dawn’s smile. I want to see worried look and then the flash of happiness in Faith’s eyes. I want to see how Xander’s changed. I’ve never seen Tara. I want to know the face that goes with her voice. I wan…”

Suddenly Wes doubled over. He clutched his head and screamed.

“Percy!” Spike shouted as he rushed over and grabbed the man by the shoulders. “Oi..don’t do this don’t go balmy on me! Not now!”
Wes fell to his knees. He moaned and rocked as he continued to cradle his head.

Spike continued to hold him as he snarled up at the ceiling.

“Don’t do this!” he yelled. “Don’t do this ya bleeding nob! Ya hear me!”

Wesley’s motions stilled but moans continued. Spike stared back down at him. He tilted his head back. Wesley’s eyes were wide open but they seemed to be staring at something unseen. Spike raised a hand.

*I’ll pluck ‘em out, Wes, before I let them send you completely starkers,* he silently vowed.

“Sp..Spike..wait!” Wes croaked just as Spike’s hand began to descend.

Spike paused as Wesley blinked. Spike eased him up into a seated position.

“Wes?”

Wesley turned his head. His eyes focused on Spike.

“Does a demon with saggy skin playing…Candy Land mean anything to you?” Wesley asked.

TBC

**Author’s notes:** For more information on Rhyolite go [here](#) or [here](#).
Xander bit into his second chocolate chip cookie. It was hard and difficult to chew. The chocolate chips had that white powdery coating chocolate gets when it’s sat around too long. Still, Xander thought it was the best cookie he had eaten.

Dawnie was leaning against his left shoulder. Willow was sitting to his right. Tara was smiling across from him while Faith was trying to steal his third and last cookie. They had all settled on to a tattered blanket spread out on the floor in the old railway terminal while Larry had stood watch.

Earlier they had hugged and cried. They had spent a long time talking. Delicate questions had been asked and even more delicately answered.

“How did…I mean..you and Spike?” Willow had asked failing to find the words to ask her question coherently.

“A poker game,” Xander had answered. “Believe it or not he won me in a poker game.”

“Oh, Xander,” Willow had replied with tears in her eyes.

“Hey,” Xander had said pulling her into a fierce hug. “Don’t cry, Wills. In hindsight that was the best thing that could have happened to me. I mean..if I had been with the A..where I was for too much longer…I…”

Images of “bottles” with vacant stares had suddenly flooded his mind. He’d hugged Willow tighter.

“There wouldn’t have been a Xan-man to return,” he’d whispered into her ear.

“Do you trust him?” Faith had asked later.

“Yes,” Xander had replied. “Do I think he’s showing us all his cards? No. But do I think he intends to bring down Angelus…yeah..I do.”

The most difficult question had been from Tara.

“How’s..wh..where’s Lorne?” she’d asked. Xander had paled and tears had come to his eyes. He’d taken both of her hands in his own and slowly shaken his head.

“N..No!” she’d gasped as her own eyes filled with tears.

“I’m sorry,” Xander had said quietly.

“What happened?”

“Angelus,” Xander had whispered. “He..he was unhappy about not being told about the Claim..he…”

Xander had shaken his head again and folded his arms around Tara. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders and began to cry.

“N..no…no..no,” she’d sobbed repeatedly.

Xander had run his hands soothingly down her back. Other hands had joined him as Willow reached out to touch her. Tara had then pulled out of Xander’s arms to seek solace with the other witch.
“Bad?” Faith had asked quietly.

“It could have been worse. But it was bad enough,” Xander had answered.

“He..he didn’t torture…” Tara had started to ask.

“No..no,” Xander had quickly assured Tara. “He killed Lorne quick.”

*The only one he really tortured was Spike,* Xander had silently thought. *Spike who always did his best to make sure Angelus didn’t hurt anyone else.*

That’s when Dawn had moved a decorative top off a wooden post to reveal a hollow inside. Then she’d reached inside to pull out a package of half-eaten chocolate chip cookies.

“Time for a break,” she’d called out. They’d all nodded and sat down to reminisce, share happier stories and to eat cookies.

“Touch that cookie..and you’ll have to sleep with one eye open the rest of the Apocalypse,” Xander warned the slayer as she nearly reached her target.

“Ah..c’mon, Xan-man,” Faith whined with a saucy wink. “I need to keep my energy up if I’m gonna slay all the baddies.”

“Grab a Gatorade,” Xander said as he snatched his cookie away from the brunette.

The girls laughed. Xander fought back tears. There weren’t enough words to describe how much he missed this...them.

“Heartless,” Faith accused with a grin.

“Greedy,” Xander replied with a smile.

“Surprised the cookies are up to your standard,” Larry said as he leaned against an archway a few feet away to keep watch.

Dawn’s quick intake of breath covered Xander’s low sigh. Tara shook her head.

“And what does that mean?” Willow asked.

“Means he got fed better food then most of us have seen in the last year and a half. Only the best for Spike’s Pet. Should have seen the spread in the gardens that was laid out when we came to rescue him”

The cookie suddenly tasted and felt like sand in Xander’s mouth. He forced down what was left in mouth down and left the last one in front of him untouched. He looked at the ground. What could he say?

“Xander?” Dawn asked in a small voice.

“It’s true,” Xander said forcing himself to meet Dawn’s gaze. “Spike...he fed me well.”

“Fed us b..both well,” Tara said a shooting Larry a look. “I w..wasn’t his pet and I w..was fed very well.”

“Yeah? So whose pet were you then?” Larry asked.
“Stop it!” Willow barked. She looked at both Xander and Tara before looking back at Larry. “You didn’t look too *starved* when you came back from being Spike’s prisoner. Something *you* forgot to tell us?”

It was Larry’s turn to gasp as if he’d just been stung.

“Being a vampire’s pet has its privileges.” Faith said. “Privileges I’m sure Xander didn’t have before he was with Spike.”

Xander closed his eyes. He didn’t want to think about what he ate or what he did before he was with Spike.

“I don’t care if you had corn dogs and candy canes the entire time,” Dawn said. “I’m just glad you are ok and here with us now.”

She wrapped her arms around Xander’s waist and gave him a hug. She squeezed him as tight as she could.

“Ugh…don’t think those cookies are going to taste as good the second time,” Xander teased as he returned the hug and opened his eyes to look at his girls.

Larry snorted.

“You gotta problem?” Faith asked.

“Am I the only one here who doesn’t worry, Xander here’s been compromised? Remember..I *saw* him in Vegas. I *saw* how he was with Spi…”

“And I saw how he saved your life,” Xander said.

“After he tortured me!”

“You think that was torture? Try a visit with Angelus and then we’ll talk torture!”

The girls gasped.

“Xander?” Willow asked as she laid a hand on his arm. “Did you…he..?”

“No..not in the way he wanted,” Xander replied, “but only because Spike made sure he couldn’t.”

“I’ll bet!” Larry snapped.

“What?” Xander said as he quickly untangled himself from Dawn’s arms and stood up. “What exactly is your problem?”

“My problem is we have a damned vampire in our camp. Not just any bloodsucker but Angelus’s right hand vampire and all anyone wants to do is make happy that the vampire’s pet is fine and well.”

“So what?” Xander asked moving away from the girls toward Larry. “You want to question Spike? Interrogate him?”

“Oh yeah,” Larry answered in a low snarl.

“NOT gonna happen,” Xander said with a snarl of his own his face now just inches from Larry’s.

“You protecting him?”
“Yes!”

“And you really think you can trust him?” Larry said to Willow looking over Xander’s shoulder.

“This is supposed to be a party,” Dawn said sadly.

“This is the end of the world..we don’t get parties,” Faith said laying a hand on Dawn’s shoulder as she stood up.

“So what do you want me to do?” Willow asked returning Larry’s gaze.

“What you would do to any other ridge head that we’ve captured.”

“Wills, no!” Xander said suddenly turning around to look at his old friend. He’d remembered what Oz had told him, how Willow had been torturing vampire prisoners.

“Master Spike is not like other v..vampires,” Tara said to Willow reaching out to take her hand.

“Master?” Willow asked. Tara blushed.

“I was a sl..slave for a long time.”

“She’s compromised too,” Larry said.

“You know what is it with you?” Faith asked. “The world isn’t enough of a shithole? You gotta go add another layer of crap on it?”

“I thought you…” Larry began to say.

“I haven’t seen much evidence you think at all,” Faith interrupted. “We have so few opportunities to have a moment to laugh..to smile..to simply enjoy the fact we are all alive and then you come in here sporting an attitude.”

“Maybe I want us to stay alive!”

“And you think we don’t?”

“Not welcoming a vampire in our midst!”

“A vampire that’s helping us!” Xander said.

“So he says.”

“He brought a copy of the manuscript and seer’s eyes!”

“So he says…”

“They are genuine,” another voice said interrupting the argument.

“Wes?” Faith asked whirling around to see Wesley emerging from the entrance.

“And what does that mean?” Faith asked with a growl somehow knowing what her Watcher’s answer was going to be.

“It means the eyes. They work,” Wesley said turning his head to look straight at his slayer.

“Get your vampire,” Faith ordered Xander without taking her eyes of the other man. “Tell him to
“Turn this idiot in to a bloodsucker so I can stake him!”

“Uhm…” Xander said raising his finger in the air as if he wanted to make a point of order. While Willow and Tara both cried, “Wes!”

“I think that move would be counter intuitive,” Wesley replied.

Dawn snagged Xander’s last cookie.

“Maybe but it would feel real good!”

“Are you all right?” Willow asked as she moved quickly to Wesley’s side. “I thought the plan was to wait until we were together! To do more research before you tried this!”

“I did more research,” Wesley said sidestepping Willow’s first point.

“What? Ask a magic eight ball?” Faith snapped.

Dawn giggled. Tara moved behind Willow and laid a hand on her shoulder.

“No, I asked Spike.”

“I woulda gone with the eight ball,” Larry muttered.

“You know next time we can just leave you in the tiny cell with the MRE’s and the electric shaver,” Xander said.

“Next time we won’t waste lives and ammo trying to rescue you!”

“I didn’t ask you to!”

“Yeah…too busy getting ready to stuff your face,” Larry said. “Tell me was it going to be with the food or Spike’s cock?”

A red haze descended over Xander and before he realized what he was doing his fist was plowing into Larry’s nose. Blood erupted and shot all over Xander’s shirt. Larry doubled over.

“My nose! You broke my fucking nose!”

“I’m sorry,” Xander heard himself say still trapped in the red haze. “I’m sorry people died for me. I’m sorry you were beaten and tortured because of me. But I won’t be sorry about Spike. You…you don’t know. You can’t know! Tell me something, Larry? Where were you when I really needed you? Huh? Where were you when the Azora demon was rap…milking me in front of his friends! Getting drunk of me…my humiliation and pain? Where were you when I was locked in a little white room fed nothing but gruel and water? Where were you when they took my voice away? Drowned me over and over and over again in the Tank? HUH?”

Xander sucked in a gulp of air. Vaguely he felt hands pulling on him. He jerked away.

“You don’t trust Spike! Fine I do! Why? Because he never took anything from me that I wasn’t willing to give. He might have punished me but he never did it without good reason…because he wanted to protect me or the others. You don’t know the lengths he’s gone to…what he’s risked…what he’s suffered!”

“Pet!” Spike’s voice rang out across the room.
Xander froze for a moment and then he’s eyes swiveled took look for the vampire. There was a dark shape just inside the entrance to the mine opening. It was back away from the light.

“Xander,” Spike called again from the entrance. “Say good night to your friends. You need to grab a few hours of sleep before we talk to the Watcher about his vision and we make plans.”

As if chased away by Spike's voice the red haze was began to leave him. As it did, Xander was reconnected with his body. He found his cheeks were wet with tears while his right hand ached and was wet with Larry’s blood. His chest was heaving as if he’d run a marathon.

He looked at Larry cupping a hand under his bleeding nose. He looked around at the pale and shell shocked face of his girls. Tara was whispering something in Willow’s ear. Xander wasn’t sure if his friend heard her or not. Her eyes were locked on him and a darkness swirled in the depths as if there was fight going on deep inside for control. Faith looked like a caged tiger. She was pacing back and forth between Wes and Larry, her fists were clenched.

Dawn’s eyes were wide and red rimmed. Her bottom lipped trembled.

Xander closed his eyes. His stomach twisted. He’d done this to them.

“Pet,” Spike said. “You don’t want me to tell ya again.”

“I..I’m sorry,” Xander whispered quickly to his friends. “I…good night.”

Then he moved quickly towards the mine entrance where his vampire awaited. Once down in the tunnels Spike wrapped an arm around him.

“Spike…”

“Shh,” his master ordered. “I know what you need, luv.”

Spike guided them back to their alcove, stripped Xander then pulled him down into the sleeping bags with him. Then he pulled out his reading glasses from one of the duffel bags.

“Now close your eyes, listen, and fall asleep,” Spike ordered gently. Next he pulled a book out of bag and began to read.

Xander did as he was told. He drifted into unconsciousness listening to Spike read Ivanhoe as he nestled against the vampire who stroked fingers through Xander's hair.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

The white stuff on chocolate when it’s gets old is usually from heat bringing out the cocoa butter from the chocolate. More info here. For all things chocolate visit the Chocolate Cult.

Just in case you don’t know, here’s information about the magic eight ball.
Chapter 75

Wes's head still hurt. The vision he'd received hadn't done him any favors. It felt like it had tried to rip apart his skull. The only images he'd gone from it was water; lots of water. Sinking down into it was a shock of blonde hair and as it sank so did any feelings of hope or victory. It was as if, more than the blonde was sinking beneath the dark waves but so was everything for which the resistance had been fighting.

With shaking hands Wesley popped open the top of the small white bottle and shook out two more red caplets. He’d quickly swallowed them down with a few sips of tepid tea. It had only been two hours since he’d last taken a dose of ibuprofen but he was willing to risk taking more so soon. He was close to finishing the deciphering.

“If only the blasted vision…” he muttered to himself as one again memories of it haunted him almost clouding his vision. The Watcher in him wanted to dissect it; understand it. The resistance fighter and friend in him did not.

Blonde? He wondered as she jotted down a few more notes translating the demonic script to Sumerian. Tara? Was this a vision about Tara?

As he made translated the Sumerian to English he shuddered. Willow was just starting to return to her normal self. She was just starting to shun the darker magics. Tara was a grounding influence, if they lost Tara what would happen to Willow?

Wesley took another sip of his tea. One crucial character seemed to elude him. He stared at again almost willing it to make sense. When it didn’t, he skipped and looked over another section of the manuscript.

Carefully he traced some figures with his fingertips almost as if touching them revealed additional clues to their translation. Again he made notes in Sumerian before actually translating the text to English.

Had the vision been about Spike? Wesley wondered as his pen continued to scratch out notes. But that didn’t make any sense. Vampires don’t breathe, so they can’t drown. Why would him sinking under the water be a defeat?

Wesley continued to write. His head continued to pound and still the thoughts continued to chase themselves around in his head.

And where is this lake? We are in the middle of the Nevada desert? How could either one of them ‘drown?’ And why would losing either one of them be the end…could it be that they are…?

Wesley sat up straight and rubbed his eyes.

“No…that isn’t right,” he muttered.

“What isn’t right?” Xander asked as he entered Wesley’s alcove a steaming teacup in hand.

“A…uh…,” Wesley fumbled for a lie then finally sighed, “would you believe me if I said my translations?”

“No,” Xander replied stepping forward offering Wesley the hot drink. “I thought you could use a fresh one.”
“Thank you, Xander that is very…thoughtful. I didn’t even know you knew how to brew tea,” Wes said taking the tea and sipping on it.

“I don’t,” Xander said. “But how hard can it be? Right?”

“Right!” Wesley choked as he tried to swallow the tea wondering how anyone can brew such an insufferable cup.

Xander smiled and took a seat idly looking over at the manuscript.

“So…tell me Bookman..what’s bothering you?”

One of Wesley’s eyebrows slowly rise. Bookman?

“What’s got you distracted?” Xander continued.

“Nothing,” Wesley sighed setting the undrinkable tea next to the undesirable tea.

“Yeah…well I think the sooner you talk about the nothing the better you’ll be able to concentrate on deciphering the manuscript,” Xander replied.

“Xander…” Wesley began.

“It was a vision wasn’t it?” Xander asked bluntly.

Both eyebrows went up in surprise as Wesley stared at Xander. The young man shrugged. 

“I’ve spent almost a year now among demons, Wes. For six months of that I was nothing more than a bottle. Couldn’t do more than watch and listen. I’m not saying it made me a sharper crayon in the box but in some ways it might have made me a brighter one. You look like a man who’s distracted and in pain. You have seer’s eyes. Doesn’t take a Willow IQ to figure out…you had a vision. So…share.”

“Xander..it was a brief one. Hardly much to share.”

“Then it won’t take you long to tell me,” Xander said meeting Wesley’s gaze.

Wes stared back for a moment then sighed. He picked up the cup of wretched, but hot, tea and forced down another sip.

“I had a vision of blonde hair sinking in deep dark water. It felt like a drowning but more. As if letting this person slip away meant the loss of everything.”

“Blonde?” Xander asked immediately thinking of Spike while trying to suppress his own memories and fears of drowning.

“Blonde..as it could mean Spike or Tara…or any number of remaining humans on this planet,” Wesley grounds out in frustration.

“Nothing more?” Xander asked.

“Nothing, I’m afraid,” Wesley said staring back at the manuscript.

“What do we do?”

“Be vigilant,” Wes replied. “Unfortunately that is the nature of visions and divination. There often is
nothing we can do until the moment unfolds before us. Then we must be prepared to act and hope we are acting for the best.”

“That’s a big fat serving of not much help,” Xander snorted as he leans closer to the manuscript and squints.

“Yes, well, complaints aren’t my department..only the visions and the skull splitting headaches that come with them,” Wes answered dryly.

“Wes,” Xander asked his finger pointing to a spot on the manuscript, “does this character look familiar?”

Wesley leaned over and cleared his throat, “Actually I have been having trouble with this section. Why? Does the character mean something to you?”

“I…doesn’t that look like Miquot…to you?” Xander said continuing to squint at the character.

“Mmm…” Wes answered now squinting as well. “Yes it could be. Maybe an earlier form…”

He stops speaking and begins to write. At first his scribblings are slow but then they pick up speed. His eyes begin to fly from the manuscript to his notebook and back again. He almost looks feverish.

Xander frowned concerned the slayer might be having another vision or at the very least be in danger of breaking his British stoicism.

“Xander!” Wes cried just shy of excited.

“Time to switch to decaf?” Xander answered.

“You have done it.”

“What?”

“We need to get the others, I know where to look for the key,” Wesley said the excitement in his voice giving way to something else.

“Wes?”

“Xander,” Wes said. “Please, go get Willow, Tara and Dawn. Have them meet us at the Bottlehouse. Tell them we need a silencing spell.”

“Shouldn’t I get Spike?” Xander asked nervous about going anywhere without his vampire’s permission.

“I will get him and Faith,” Wesley said.

“Right, but it’s not your ass…”

“Xander..please,” Wesley said not really wanting to hear any more about the intimate behaviors between the young man and the master vampire.

“On it watcherman. See ya at the Bottlehouse,” Xander said starting off to find his favorite girls.

Wesley took a few deep breaths to clear his head. Things were becoming more dangerously clear even as they were becoming even more confusing.
But at least we have a lead now, he thinks as he heads up top.

***

Spike stared out across the dark dessert while he smoked. He took a breath he didn’t need just inhale smoke but also the night air. He’d spent most of the day wrapped around his pet, holding Xander tight listening to him breathe and counting his heartbeats. It was the calm before the storm and he knew it. Soon it was all going to hit that fan. All the pieces would be in play. He was risking everything to win it all.

Once upon a time he didn’t know if it was worth it. However, with the lingering taste of Xander on his lips he knew it was. Angelus was going down or Spike would burn. There was no in between. He frowned. He’d left his pet below in the tunnels. The vampire in him hadn’t wanted to, but he knew Xan had needed more time with his friends. He needed it as much as he needed to eat or to breath and because he did; Spike could give him that time.

"So did ya figure it would be this simple?" Faith's voice floated out of the shadows.

Spike smiled around the forbidden cigarette and turned toward her before pulling it from his lips.

"Yer, good. Didn't even hear ya sneak up on me."

"It's why I'm still alive," Faith said stepping closer. She nods at the glowing tip of the cigarette. "You know the glow and scent of tobacco don't do you any favors. They give your location away."

"Yeah," Spike chuckled before taking another deep drag. "But...I figure the fix is worth it."

There's a pause as Faith sidled up next to Spike.

"You didn't answer my question," she said. "Did you think joining up with us would be this simple?"

"Who sayin' it was simple, luv?" Spike asked as he turned to look at her.

Faith smiled and snagged the cigarette from between his fingers before taking a long draw from it.

"Oi! Ya fag chorin' tart! That was my last one!"

"Let's call it even...for you aiding and abetting Wesley with the eyes," Faith's replied before inhaling tobacco smoke again. Spike rolled his eyes.

"It wasn't even my idea," he said.

"Yeah...and I'm sure you did your best to talk him out of it," she countered lifting an eyebrow.

Spike turned to face her and let out a sigh. He shook his head.

"Listen, slayer, if I had thought there was any other way...any more time...but there isn't. Percy is the best chance we got to..."

"I know," Faith's voice cut him off. It's high and it's tight and reveals far more than Shakespearean soliloquy.

Despite all the bloodshed, the violence and the horror; Spike's nature is rooted in the heart. It's too rooted in the romantic for him not to miss all that Faith doesn't say. He pinched his cigarette back and took a small puff.
"In another time..another place..I could have so much fun using that bit of fluff against ya."

"Another time..another place it would not..."

"Don't luv," Spike interrupted. "Don't wish it away or deny it. Every bit of love and affection that manages to take root..take hold in this hell is a thumb in the eye to Angelus. Accept it. Appreciate it. Protect it and enjoy it for as long as it lasts."

"That how you feel about Xan?" she asked.

"Vampires can’t love…no soul.." Spike lies as smooth as the smoke rising above his head.

He takes one more puff off the cigarette and offers what’s left of it back to Faith. She looks at him for a moment then takes it. She takes a deep draw burning it down to the filter then she throws it on the grown and twists it out with the ball of her foot.

The two stare in silence out over the dark desert. Sunset had just been a few hours away.

"Did his vision mean anything to you?" Faith finally asked breaking the silence.

Spike nodded. Faith crossed her arms over her chest waiting for an explanation. She continued to wait. Finally she ground out, "Well are you gonna share with the class?"

"He saw..Clem," Spike replied reluctance tingeing his voice. "He's a demon...a bit on the far side of cracking and too soft for this shitehouse but...he's one of mine. Trusted him with Xan."

"You left him behind?" Faith asked unable to keep a little of the disgust out of her voice.

"Do not judge me slayer," Spike hissed looking back at the dark-haired woman. "Taking Clem wasn't an option."

"And what happens when Angelus gets a hold of him?"

"He won't," Spike said turning to look back toward the dark horizon.

"How do you...."

"Because Angelus is going to be focused on looking for us. Once he realizes it's gonna take him too much time to try and breach through my stables' defenses he's gonna leave his minions to that task and he's gonna be huntin' us down himself."

_Do I even want to know what he means by stable? Faith thinks._

"What about Wes's vision?" she asked.

"It means the eyes are working."

"Is that all?" Faith pushed.

"It..has to be," Spike replied willing and almost praying. Going back for Clem and there others wasn't an option. It would doom them all. He had to trust the defenses Lorne put into place, he had to trust his Voynok guards and maybe even part of him trusted the strange new human with the familiar smile.

"You sure it doesn't mean we need to go back to Vegas?"
"It means....."

"The key isn't in Vegas," Wesley's voice calls out interrupting the other two. Both Spike and Faith whirl around.

"Watcher!"

"Wesley!"

"If I can sneak up on you..I believe you both need to spend some time practicing and sparring," Wesley said joining them from the shadows.

"And maybe you shouldn't get between a slayer and vampire..." Faith started.

"When they are sharing a cig?" Wesley asked.

Spike bit back a laugh while Faith let out a very unlady like snort.

"Eyes or not, Wes, I can still teach you moves you watchers wouldn't even know where to look to learn."

"And...as instructive as I might find that, Faith," Wesley replied smoothly, "perhaps we should all gather so I can tell you what I have managed to piece together from the manuscript?"

He steps forward getting very close to the other two.

"We do not have much time," he says in a very small whisper and a voice chillingly devoid of any levity. "If...if I have read the manuscript correctly then the key may be closer than we all think."

Both Spike and Faith eyes narrow. They stare at the watcher but he just shakes his head then steps back.

"We're meeting at the Bottlehouse. Willow and Tara should already be prepping a spell to shield us from scrying and eavesdropping."

"You..you're serious," Faith said.

"Deadly," Wesly replied before looking at Spike. "This could be our very last hope...chance for saving the world."

"I...I'll get Xander," Spike said.

"No need, he is with the girls," Wesley replied.

"What?" Spike growled.

"Spike," Wesley sighed, "I sent him ahead with the girls while I got the two of you.

"Why?"

"Because I thought you would be more comfortable with him going through the tunnels with the girls then stumbling around in the dark desert on his own looking for you."

"He’s got ya there," Faith grins.

"Could have had him wait in our room," Spike grumbled.
“And waste more time…as we are currently doing?” Wes added.

His turn was as abrupt as his speech. He walked swiftly back into the darkness fading from Faith’s sight and was just but a shadow in Spike’s. The vampire looked to the slayer.

Faith just nodded, her eyes still locked on to the spot where Wesley disappeared. Every instinct inside her screamed things were just about to get far more complicated and she wasn’t sure she was ready.

Spike was only slightly torn. A part of him wanted to stay and grumble some more. He did not like Xander going anywhere if it wasn’t under his orders, but Percy had been right. He sighed and started to follow the Watcher. This is why he had come and if that Fate bitch was about to serve them another knuckle sandwich, he wanted to be there with Xander to take as much of the hit for them as possible.

TBC
“Oi! Ya nobs actually meant a _bottle_ house!” Spike exclaimed as he stared at the house made of mostly glass bottles and adobe not much younger than him. He stepped closer and sniffed.

“And best part…they’re beer bottles,” Faith chirped as she slipped around the vampire to step lightly onto the sagging wooden porch.

“Beer bottles?” Spike asked shaking his head and staring dubiously at the porch having sudden visions of falling through the rotting wood midstep and ending up a swirling pile of dust.

“Yes, seems a Mr. Kelly began to build it in September 1905,” Wesley explained stepping up behind the vampire. “It is actually one of three bottle houses built in Rhyolite. However, it was the largest. Only took him five and a half months to build.”

Spike cocked his and head and turned to look at the Watcher.

“What are ya a bleedin’ tour guide?”

“No, just well informed,” Wesley sniffed as he stepped nimbly onto to the porch, “and not afraid of a little drooping lumber.”

“Poofter!” Spike growled under his breath as he marched onto the porch following the other Englishman.

“Oh, that’s an intelligent retort,” Wesley chimed as he led the way into front room of the house where the others waited.

“Oi, just because I’m buggering Xander doesn’t make me a big Nancy Boy.”

“Master..can we not talk about buggering in front of irlsga?” Xander pleaded turning a bright shade of red and forgetting all about not calling Spike ‘master’ in front of the others.

“Wha..now see what you’ve done! You’ve gone and made Xander feel like a great big batty boy” Spike glared at Wesley.

“Me? I am not the…” Wesley began to retort.

“One, there is nothing wrong with being a homosexual…liking men and I sooo can’t I believe we are talking about his in front of the irlsga and why does this always happen to the Xan-man? And two…just how many different slang words are there in the _British_ language for gay?”

Dawn giggled. Tara and Willow hid smiles and winked at each other. Faith cocked an eyebrow and looked expectantly at her Watcher.

“Uhm…well,” Wesley started to reply his face starting to turn red.

“Five..twelve..fif..” Spike silently began to mouth then shrugged. “A fair bit. Moren’ twenty less than a hundred.”

“Right. You people are obsessed!”

“Oi!”
“Xander!”

Xander just crossed his arms and stared at the vampire and Watcher.

“Well..maybe just a bit. But if it wasn’t so good..yeah?” Spike said sidling up behind his Pet to perch his chin under a deliciously tempting ear.

“Oh no you do…” Xander started to say as he tried to pull away. Spike gave a small growl and wrapped his arms around Xander’s waist pulling him tight and close to him. He nipped his ear gently then whispered.

“Telling their master ‘no?’ I believe somebody just earned a punishment later.”

Xander bit back a groan. It was Wesley’s turn to grow a bright shade of red. Dawn broke out in a guffaw of laughter. Tara and Willow hugged each other.

“I enjoy a good sausage fest as much as the next slayer, however that wasn’t on the agenda,” Faith said.

“Th..there was an agenda?” Tara teased.

“Mmm…,” Willow said nodding her head. “But it was set for self-destruct after reading.”

“Sort of like Xander and his mouth,” Dawn giggled.

Spike winked at Dawn. Xander groaned.

“Right,” Wesley said trying to gain control of the meeting before it spiraled down into further chaos. “I believe we need the silence and anti-scrying spells set before we can begin.”

“Don’t ya think we’d have better luck with the no scrying if we weren’t in a building made of bleedin’ glass?” Spike asked.

“Actually, that’s the beauty of this place,” Willow said with an excited smile. “We use the glass to our advantage. Instead of just trying to keep the scrying out we refract it back. So instead of just not seeing anything…”

“They see an infinite possibility of images!” Tara exclaimed her eyes dancing with sudden understanding. “Oh Willow…th…that’s brilliant!”

It was Willow’s turn to blush.

“It was noth…”

“Oh..it definitely is something! That’s a clever and amazing twist.”

“Thank you,” Willow said.

“You’re welcome,” Tara replied smiling back at the red-haired witch and quickly squeezing hand before letting it go.

“Shall we get started?” Wesley suggested.

Tara turned and faced the rest of everyone gathered. She nodded.

“Everybody take a seat…in a circle,” she said leading by example sitting down next to an small
dingy green backpack.

They all sat; Wesley, Faith Dawn, Xander, Spike Tara and Willow. Next Willow lit a candle and placed it in the center of circle. Then she took a braided length of sweet grass and lit it with the candle.

“Pass it around the circle,” she said. “Be sure to swirl the smoke around you before handing it off to the next person.”

She blew out the flame on the braid so that the grass now just smoldered. Then she passed it on to Wesley. As Wesley began to smudge himself Willow began to quietly chant in a strange language under her breath.

As the smoldering braid passed from person to person Willow’s eyes began to darken until they were a solid inky black color. A strange energy began to fill the room making the tips of everyone’s hair crackle. When the braid finally made its way back to her, Willow completed the smudging by swirling the sweet smelling smoke around herself. Now the small room was filled with a thin layer of smoke.

She set the grass aside and picked up a small brass bell. She rang it once and before the sound finished echoing she quickly wrapped the clapper in cotton muffling it. Then she set in the middle of the circle. Her strange black eyes staring at it as if bending it to her will.

The display made Xander shiver more than the crackling energy around him. This was almost a Willow he didn’t know; a Willow he didn’t recognize.

Next Willow picked up a small hand mirror from her bag. She peered into it while chanting. Her black eyes seemed to be magnified. Indeed the more she chanted, the larger their reflection grew until suddenly the mirror was filled with just the image of her eyes.

Then with a loud scream she slammed the mirror down into the center of the circle. Xander jumped and only the sudden feel of Spike’s hand on his neck kept him from jumping up and breaking the circle.

Xander looked back at the mirror. It had shattered into dozens of little pieces each piece reflecting a set of blinking black Willow eyes. Xander couldn’t stop another shiver. He looked at his best friend now her hair had also morphed from her vibrant red to the inky black. She looked at Wesley.

“We can begin now,” she said in voice that was hers but was somehow absent something uniquely Willow.

“Wills…are you OK?” Xander couldn’t help but ask.

Her head turned focusing her unearthly gaze on him.

“I’m fine, Xander. It really is quite a simple little spell. Not like some of the other ones I’ve done,” she said in that voice that unnerved him. In a voice that whispered of things as black as her eyes. He couldn’t help remember that night of their first reunion. The night she’d tried to kill Spike. He looked at Spike. He saw the vampire's eyes were firmly fixed on his best friend and he knew Spike was remembering too.

“We?” Faith prompted knowing the sooner they started the sooner they finished and the sooner they could get their Willow back.

Tara sent the slayer a grateful look.
“Yes..of course,” Wes said pulling his notes from his suit pocket. “I..managed to decipher the manuscript…thanks in part to some help from Xander.”

That’s my Pet, Spike thought proudly focusing his attention away from the dangerous and possibly unstable witch back to his Xander. Won’t go too hard on ’im tonight.

“And?” Dawn asked.

“Well it seems that the Key was an ancient very mystical energy said, at a certain time and place, to have the power to unlock the gates between all existing dimensions,” Wesley began to explain as he referenced his notes. “Now it isn’t all clear who, when or even why it was but according to the manuscript sometime in the twelve century, the Order of Dagon was founded by Tarnis in order to protect it.”

“Protect it from what?” Dawn asked.

“A hell goddess calling herself Glorificus,” offered Spike. Everyone looked at Spike

"Oi...Peaches told me about her...and ya don't need ta worry. She's gone back to her own dimension. Left 'Gelus a fruit basket. Seems she was looking for the Key so she could make good her escape. Peaches little stunt did her dirty work for her.”

“Right?” Wesley said looking back to his notes “So the point is the manuscript confirms what we’ve been thought about the Key. It can open a portal between dimensions. If it can open a portal, then one can assume it can close them. It may be the way to undo what Angelus did.”

“That’s it?” Faith asked. “That’s all? I mean not to rain on your geek parade but that ain’t much more than what we already knew.”

“Ah except for..pardon the pun..one key difference,” Wesley replied. Xander rolled his eyes.

“And that is?”

“The manuscript tells us where and when the key can be used,” Wesley said pointing to his notes emphasizing his point.

“Where?” Dawn asked.

“Well at first I had trouble translating a crucial word. It didn’t make since with the corresponding Sumerian I was using before translating to English but then Xander made an interesting observation that the characters looked remarkably similar to the demonic language Miquot…”

“Watcher,” growled Spike.

“Right,” Wesley said with a sheepish grin. “Simply put…the Hellmouth.”

“Of course…good old Sunnydale,” Xander said.

“Hey…it could be Cleveland,” Faith countered.

“No..no, I’m afraid Xander’s right. Based on the descriptions in the text…” Wesley began to explain.
“When?” Dawn cutoff another Watcher lecture.

“Well..that is a bit less certain,” Wesley replied.

“Meaning?” Tara asked.

“Well it is couched in your typical ‘when the time is right’ phrasing.”

“Meaning….?”

“There are some hints that it may have something to do with rotation of the planet around the sun.”

“Meaning…?” Tara asked a third time.

“Well…,” Wesley cleared his throat. “My best guess is on the night of the hundredth the day of the year.”

“And that’s when?” ask an exasperated Dawn and Tara in unison.

“Roughly April tenth.”

“It’s the seventh now!” Spike says.

“And we still don’t know where the Key is,” Xander said. “I mean if I was an Order of Dagoneit there’s lots of places I could hide my little bundle of mystical energy! Not to mention how would we even use it since Sunnydale was given the whole ‘Ten Commandments Red Sea’ treatment thanks to Angelus.”

“Not all of it,” Spike says.

“Huh?”

“Remember, pet, there’s the island. Where the mouth of Acathla stand? Guess Peaches is sentimental that way.”

“Yeah…” Xander snorts. “Tender hearted that one. So…we just need to waltz into Angelus' private monument to himself with the an magical mystery Key and perform a ritual..at a certain time...yeah..not seeing any obstacles here.”

"No one said it would be easy, pet."

“OK, so we’d have still have place to do the ritual. Still back to not having the Key,” Faith says trying to keep them on task.

“Well if the manuscript doesn’t tell us where so it means it doesn't tell Angelus where either …” Wesley began.

“Aradia! Dea perdita ostende! Ostende! Ostende! Ostende quod est occulta!” Willow suddenly commanded.

A pale opalescent ball of light began to form in front of Willow. It began to spin as it grew shimmering in a myriad of colors. It bounced in front of her then zoomed around her before pinging across the room. There was a burst of energy which shattered several bottles. The light grew bright like a magnesium flare, there was a burst of sound like a thunder clap and the flame of the candle extinguished as the ball burst up through the roof and disappears.
Dust and debris float down through the air in its wake. Tara, Dawn and Wesley coughed while Xander rubbed at his eyes.

“Well that was helpful, Red,” Spike mocked. “What? Was the plan to play Rover and fetch after the shiny ball?”

"Was bored," Willow said then cocked her head as if listening to something far away.

“Wi..Willow?” Tara asked catching her breath and daring to reach out now and touch the other witch. “C’mon..come on back. En..enough.”

Willow looked back up at the hole.

“Wills…” Xander began.

Suddenly there’s a giant “WHOOSH” sound and the opalescent ball was back. It was stronger. It was brighter and it hovered right above Dawn’s head.

TBC

Author’s notes:

There is a Bottle house in Rhyolite. You can read up on it and see pictures of it here.

I took a little creative license with the certain time for use of the Key so to fit the story. The episode where the Key was used was “The Gift” which was the 100th episode. So..the 100th day of the year is…April 10th..unless it’s leap year.

As for the Latin in Willow’s spell. It was my best attempt to do “Aradia, Goddess of the Lost, reveal! Reveal! Reveal what is hidden!” However, I broke up with my dead language expert a couple of years ago and while we are just recently back to speaking terms I’m not quite ready to call him up for translation advice so…sorry to all those who cringed at the poor Latin.
“Xander?” Dawn yelped as she stared at the shining glowing ball above her head. “Xander?”

“Willow?” Xander snapped at the witch. “You’re scaring Dawnie! Stop it.”

“Not Dawn…the Key,” Willow replied as stared at the young woman as if she wanted to open her up to see if a her insides were made of glowing energy.

“Th…the Key? No! I’m Dawn! I’m Dawn, Willow!” she cried.

“Wes?” Faith looked to her Watcher for help.

“I am afraid I do not understand either,” he answered.

“Bloody hell, Red!” Spike snapped. “She’s just bit! An annoying bit…but still nuthin’ more than a snack of a bird..what are you natterin’ on about?”

Willow tilted her head again her yes never ceasing their study of Dawn. An eerie smile graced her face.

“Somebody wished her to be a real girl,” she said. “Some Gepetto…or Gepettos…made her a real girl. I wonder…if her nose grows when she tells a lie.”

“Wil..Willow…are you saying someone…did…made Dawn?” Tara asked.

“NO! NO!” Dawn yelled shaking her head. “I’m a real person! I am a real girl!”

“And you are the Key,” Willow said calmly.

“Xander!” Dawn cried again.

“Willow….stop this!” Xander begged his friend.

“I did not begin it,” Willow said looking back at Xander.

“Look…Red, I realize yer a bit off yer chump right now,” Spike said, “but if it were as easy to find they Key as mumbling a few words in Latin and conjurin’ up a magical ‘You are Here’ sign ‘Gelus would have done it by now.”

“Would he? Could he?” Willow smiled. “I’m afraid I don’t play well…with vampires.”

Spike’s eyes narrowed. He remembered all too well how she’d played with him.

Wesley looked at Tara. There was a silent question in his eyes, Is she really that powerful? That unique?

Tara nodded with a hint of fear and sadness in her eyes. She turned and looked at Willow. Every magical sense, every instinct, inside Tara knew Willow was probably the most powerful witch she had ever seen. She was the most powerful witch she ever would see.

“Well…it still doesn’t make me..doesn’t mean anything!” Dawn cried suddenly standing up and breaking the circle.
Immediately there was another loud “whoosh’ as the silence and anti-scrying spells were broken and the energy dissipated with a concussive force shattering bottles in the walls, exploding the ancient adobe and knocking everyone back.

***

“Pet? Xander?” Spikes voice tickled at Xander’s consciousness.

“Mmmph?” he responded trying open his eyes.

“Yeah?” Spike said carefully easing his claimant into a seated position.

“Wha…what happened?” Xander finally ground out as he managed to get his eyelids to obey and lift. He looked around the room. Faith was helping Wesley sit up. She had a cut down her arm. He immediately began to look around for the others. “Dawn! Willow! Tara!”

“I’m…fine, Xander,” Dawn said as blood trickled down from a cut on her forehead.

“We’re Ok,” Tara answered her arms wrapped around Willow whose hair was back to its normal shade of red. She looked at Xander and gave him a thumbs up.

Xander breathed a sigh of relief then gave Willow a hard stare. The power behind her spells was terrifying. She looked away unable to meet his gaze.

“Oi! None of that,” Spike said observing the exchange. “If we’re gonna take down Peaches in the next three days were gonna need all the advantages we have..includin’ yer more raggy side.”

“That’s my, Spike,” Xander groaned. “Master of the charming vocabulary.”

“And you…you’re a cheeky git,” he said giving Xander a gentle squeeze.

“Hey…bruised claimant here!”

“Ya’ll live,” Spike said easing up on his hug.

“Right,” Wesley said before looking at Willow. “Is there anything more you can tell us? About the spell you did? About…what you meant by Dawn being the Key?”

“I…it…the intention behind the spell was to find what was hidden,” Willow began to explain. “I..uh…called upon the goddess Aradia..daughter of Diana and Lucifer…”

“Oh..there’s a right dobbling great pedigree,” Spike snorted.

“Spike!” Tara chastised.

“Well tell me the a daughter of the great boogedy boo and Zeus’ daddy’s girl ain’t gonna be a real peach?”

“You were saying?” Wesley prompted Willow ignoring the blonde vampire.

“Among other things she is the goddess of the lost…what is hidden…so…I…well the spell was to command her to reveal…to show what was hidden…,” Willow explained.

“Namely the Key…” Faith said.

“But I’m the not the Key!” Dawn cried looking at Xander.
“No…but maybe…yes,” Wesley said.

“What?” Xander and Dawn cried.

“Well…the manuscript said the order was committed to protecting the Key…” Wes began. “It also stands to reason they knew what they Key could do.”

“But how does that make Niblet there the Key?” Spike interrupted.

“As I was trying to explain,” Wes continued sending a pointed look to Spike. “What if after Angelus opened the portal to the hell dimension they meant to use the Key only they couldn’t?”

“Wrong time…wrong place?” offered Tara.

“Precisely,” said Wesley.

“What if they needed to hide it before they could use it?” Willow said. “The monastery where we found Dawnie had been attacked. Leveled.”

“And what better way…to hide it then…to make it human?” Faith said.

“Are..are you…you saying I’m not human?” Dawn cried tears forming in her eyes.

“No, Dawn…no,” Xander said suddenly getting up and hugging her, demon rules be damned. “We’re saying you are what we’ve always known about you…you are beautiful…special…and our Dawnie.”

Dawn hugged him back burying her face in his neck. Spike bit back a growl. This was one battle he wasn’t going to win. Slayer was right. Girl had a claim on his pet that he wasn’t going to be able to break. Instead he sighed and just nodded at Xander.

“So..so the monks…they were the order..and they hid Dawn…the Key..” Willow.

“So we found her,” Xander said.

“So…what do I have to do?” Dawn whispered finally turning her face back to the group.

“Well..based on what we know of how Angelus opened the portal…we will need your blood,” Wesley said frankly.

Dawn gasped. Xander’s face got the look Spike recognized all too well. It was his “White Knight” look. It was the one that always led to an argument and trouble.

“Good heavens, not all of it!” Wesley explained. “I will have to do some more research...perhaps Willow and Tara could assist but I think we just may need a small amount. A ritual cutting of some sort.”

“Oh,” Dawn said. Xander smiled and gave her a squeeze. Then he frowned again.

“What happens to Dawn after?” he asked.

“After?”

“Yeah..after we make with the big hocus pocus?”

“We put a band aid on her,” Wes said. “Look…Xander…she’s the Key…but she is human. I do not believe that will change after the ritual.”
“But you don’t know?” Xander pressed.

“No, not for certain but I don’t see…”

“Then we find another way…” Xander stated flatly.

“Pet…” Spike began to warn.

“No! We aren’t risking Dawn and that’s final!”

“Just how many punishments do you want to rack up?”

Punishments? Willow thought looking first to Xander then to Tara. Tara flashed Willow an “OK” sign but the red haired witch still looked dubious.

“Start a tab because I’m not letting Da…”

“Xander,” Dawn said straightening her shoulders and taking a half step back from his embrace. “It’s ok.”

“What..no, Dawn it isn’t.”

“Yes…yes it is,” she said firmly assuming a “White Knight” look of her own. “If..if I really am this Key..and I can help…stop..reverse what Angelus did. Drive most of the demons back…then I’m gonna do whatever it takes.”

“Dawn!” he said turning to stare into her eyes pleading with her. He couldn’t chance losing her, not when he just got her back.

“Xander,” she said countering with a pleading look of her own. She didn’t like thinking that she hadn’t always been human but she was human now. As a human and more importantly as a Scoobie, she felt she had to do what she could to help her fellow humans even if it meant she might cease to be. She had adopted more than just Xander’s last name.

They stood there staring at each other for a long moment before they both relented and just hugged. Xander would have to let her do what she thought was right. He knew he wouldn’t be able to stop her anyway.

“Uh..hey,” a familiar voice interrupted the moment. They all turned to stare at Oz who had poked his head into the now mostly ruined house. “Uhm…so unless you intended to light up the equivalent ‘we’re here sign’ with that magical display..in which case. Cool! Awesome job. Otherwise we might want to think about packing up and heading out.”

He took a good look around them and sniffed.

“Plus a few of you might wanna get patched up too.”

“He’s right,” Wesley said.

“He’s Oz, he usually is,” said Xander.

“Right then…evac plans?” Spike asked.

“Might as well. We have three days to get to Sunnydale” replied Willow.

“Reunion time?” Oz asked.
“Something like that,” Faith grinned.

“Larry’s gonna love this,” Oz said.

They all laughed and began to make their way back to the tunnels.

***

Spike glared at Larry. Larry glared at Spike. Neither had said a word nor had given ground in the “glaring contest” in more than an hour. For the umpteenth time Xander rolled his eyes.

“Look Lar, I’m really sor..” Xander began.

Spike’s finger shot up into the air shutting him up. His eyes never left Larry.

Right because this just makes riding in the back of a modified cattle truck over back roads that much more fun, Xander thought. He looked over to Willow for help. She glanced away.

Score another win…only not for the Xan-man, he thought. He sighed. Even though backing up the resistance camp had been a mad scramble Willow had still managed to take the time to corner him away from Spike.

“Punishments? Punishments? What does that even mean, Xander?” she had demanded.

“Wills…it’s not as bad as it sounds well except sometimes when it is,” Xander had tried to explain. “But it’s ok. Most of the time I earned it.”

“EARNED it? How do you earn it?”

“Wills…demon world..demon rules..not always..”

“You aren’t a demon!” she’d insisted.

“Yes, that’s true but I am Spike’s pet..Claimant actually and that means..”

“Not anymore,” she’d cried. “You’re back with us.”

“Will’s that’s not something that you can just turn off like a light bulb.”

“We’ll find away.”

“No, Wills,” Xander had insisted.

“NO?” Will had asked her eyes going wide. “What..you mean….you…want to be Spike’s Claimant? You like being his Claimant?”

“Wills…yes..no…I don’t know…it’s complicated!”

“No it’s not! You either…”

“What?” Spike’s voice had interrupted them. His eyes had been guarded and firmly locked on Xander’s. “What, Red?”

“He’s not yours,” she’d stated angrily.

“I thought we’d already had this discussion,” Spike had said calmly leaning up against the wall and crossing his arms over his chest. “Thought we’d established that he was.”
“You are only using him!”

“Is that what you think, pet?” Spike had said looking at Xander.

Xander had looked back at him. Then he’d looked back at Willow. He knew the answer and one of them really wasn’t going to like it.

“No,” he’d said honestly.

“Xander!”

“Wills! Please..I may be slow..but there’s not even room on that short bus for me. I know…I know Spike may have had plans initially…I know that maybe when he first won..found me he thought about just using me but I know that’s not why he asked me to be his Claimant. That’s not why he has taken care of me.”

“Xander,” she’d tried again.

“Willow..I know you don’t trust Spike..but trust me. Trust that I know. Trust that I trust Spike with my life..with my soul and we may fight..we may argue but in the end I know that he will always take care of me. I trust him, Willow. I trust him…even when I think I could stake him.”

“Oi!” Spike had said but the heated look in his eyes had nothing to do with anger. The demon in him had wanted to snatch up his pet then and there and shag him silly. It hadn’t cared if the witch watched or not. Maybe even it had even wanted her to so she finally got the point. However he hadn’t moved.

“And what about you, Xander?” she’d asked softly. “What about…?”

“He’s a pain in the ass, Willow but…,” Xander had looked back at Spike. In that moment something had tugged at him. He had felt it welling up inside of him. It had been powerful and more binding then the Claiming ritual and he’d feared giving it voice. For once Xander’s courage had failed him. “…but..he’s my pain in the ass.”

It had been as close as he had been able to get to say the words. Willow had stood there staring at him for a moment before withdrawing quietly.

Xander had turned to look at Spike. There had been something unreadable in his eyes. He’d nodded at Xander then had slipped away as well leaving him alone.

“Oh! I win!” Spike’s shout of victory brought Xander back to the present.

“Yeah, well that’s cuz the dead don’t need to blink,” Larry groused.

“Undead..thank ya very much,” Spike replied with a smile.

“Yeah..well how about we make you the formerly undead?”

“Uhm..gonna have to go with a ‘no’ on that plan there, Lar,” Xander chimed in.

Lar snorted. Xander rolled his eyes.

“Bloody hell!” Spike exclaimed as the truck rolled over a large bump setting the trailer and the occupants rocking. “Where’d the slayer learn to drive?”

“I think she was self-taught,” Dawn replied.
“Why was it Xander and I couldn’t take our truck from Vegas again?”

“Angelus would have been looking for it?” Wesley said his head still buried in one of the ancient books he’d managed to squirrel away in the hurry.

“I still say our odds of survival would be better,” Spike complained.

“Look, the cattle truck lets us travel on the highways,” Dawn says. “They think we’re just another slave transport.”

“With a slayer driver?”

“Spell for that,” Willow finally contributed to the conversation. “If stopped and checked, she’ll appear as if she’s a human possessed by an Ethros demon.”

“Yeah and that little magic won’t draw attention, Red?”

“Not as much as I’m betting your truck will, Spike.”

“Anyway, we should be stopping soon,” Tara said. “We’ve been traveling about five hours. That’s should put us near the rendezvous point for Oz and his pack.”

“We could have done the drive to Sunnydale in one day,” Spike observed.

“And risk going through Bakersfield?” Willow shuddered.

“You will never find a more wretched hive of scum and villainy,” Xander intoned.

“Besides, I still need to do more research,” Wesley said.

The trailer rocked again as the hiss of and squeal of the compression brakes engaged and the truck began to roll to a stop.

“Here,” Xander said handing Spike a blanket. “Put on your sunscreen.“

Spike rolled his eyes, slinked down into a far corner of the trailer not occupied by supplies and covered up with the blanket. Xander went over and tucked the corners around him. There was a loud knock on the trailer doors. Xander moved and positioned himself in front of Spike.

The trailer had been modified so that direct sunlight couldn’t get inside. They’d used lanterns for lights. However, the knock was Faith’s signal she was about to open the door flooding the trailer with daylight. Xander took a deep breath.

“We’re clear, Faith,” he yelled.

There was the clank and thud of the latch disengaging then slowly the door swung open. Light spilled inside. Faith stood there smiling.

“Welcome to the Sequoia National Forest,” she said.

“We clear?” Willow asked.

“Five by five,” Faith replied. “We’ve still got a few hours of daylight and the pack is due to rendezvous with us a few hours after sundown. Plenty of time for us to setup camp, set wards and get some rest.”
“Uh..Spike and I...,” Xander began to say.

“Yes,” Wesley said finally shutting his book with a snap. “It would be safest for you two to remain inside the trailer.”

Xander nodded. There was a motion under the blankets behind him.

“Right...so...let’s get started unloading what we need,” Dawn said grabbing a tent roll. “Sooner we clear out, sooner Spike can get out from under the blanket.”

“I don’t know,” Larry said. “Might be good to keep the Master vampire under wraps.”

“Get stuffed!” Spike’s muffled voice rang out.

“Let me help you, Dawnie,” Xander said grabbing another roll.

Tara laughed and even Willow couldn’t help but crack a small smile.

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It had taken them less time to unpack what they needed from the truck then it had to pack the truck. When it was done, Xander had been hot and sweaty. However, it had felt good to help his friends. It had almost felt like old times.

He, Faith and Dawn had set up the camp while Tara and Willow had set the wards. Wesley had continued to do his research while Larry had continued to keep guard.

It had been decided when they left Rhyolite that only their small group, and Oz’s pack, would go to Sunnydale. The less people knew, the less Angelus was likely to find out. Plus the smaller group could travel more inconspicuously.

For Xander, it felt almost like the “Before.” He was smiling when he knocked on the door of the truck for the last time that day.

“Yeah!” Spike’s voice boomed out. Xander pulled the handled and swung the door open just enough so he could slip inside then he shut the door. The door had barely latched shut when was grabbed and shoved up against the side of the trailer.

“Spi..wha..?”

“Shh!” Spike ordered his eyes glittering gold in the faint lantern light. “‘No,’Pet?”

“Mas...” Xander tried again only to have Spike lick a cool trail over his throat. The meaning was clear.

“No? Arguing with me? Someone’s been very naughty,” Spike growled.

Xander locked his eyes on Spike. Thoughts of the “Before” fled and all he could think of was “After”. Spike’s golden eyes shone with a fierce hunger; a hunger Xander recognized and it sent a hot flash of need straight to his cock.

Spike scented the air.

Yeah, that’s my good, pet, he thought.

“Someone’s been very naughty,” he said placing one hand on either side of Xander’s head and
leaning in like the apex predator he was. “And I have hours to punish you.”

Xander swallowed.

_Ghods!_ He thought and couldn’t help but nod.

Spike smiled. He leaned closer pressing his body close to Xander. He whispered in his ears.

“Not a sound, pet. Not one little sound…got it?”

Xander nodded.

_Oh yeah, I’m gonna get it, _he thought.

TBC

**Author’s Note**

Willow’s spell is based on a spell used in the episode _“Fear Itself”_. She calls on the goddess _Aradia_.

I’m doing my guess of where Sunnydale actually is based on conjecture. I used this [article](#) which theorizes it might be somewhere in the Bradley or Paso Robles area.

I tried to map out how long it would take them to travel from Rhyolite, NV to that area and bypass major cities. If you are interested here’s the [google maps](#) I used as a reference.

An _Ethros demon_ made an appearance in the Angel episode "I've Got You Under My Skin."
“Mmmm,” Spike said as he sniffed at along Xander’s collar. “Going to enjoy this. Gonna do something special.”

Then he pulled back just a bit so he could look Xander in the eyes. Brown and blue met. Heat rose between them.

“All the same rules apply, yeah? Understand?” Spike asked. There was gravity in the question begging Xander to understand the deeper meanings and he did.

Spike was letting him know his master still would not take more than Xander was willing to give. Spike would not hurt him; would not press him beyond any fears. Something twisted bittersweet inside of Xander binding him even tighter to his vampire.

He nodded trust and understanding shining in his eyes and something else burning in his heart. Spike smiled and placed a quick kiss on the tip of his nose.

Then Spike stepped back away fully from his pet. He flashed a predatory smile and fished the keys to Xander’s belt from his pocket. He dangled them from one finger.

“Time ta set the stage, luv,” he whispered. Then he cocked his head over to the corner. “Go make us a nice comfortable nest fer playin’ yeah?”

Xander licked his lips and trotted off to do as he was told. Quickly he cleared a small area. He laid out a couple of sleeping bags down as bedding and covered them with the blanket Spike had used to shield himself from the sunlight. Then he stretched out one of their duffle bags to use as a pillow.

“Oi, there should be some slick in there,” Spike said from behind him. “Fish it out.”

Xander nodded. He shouldn’t be surprised but he was.

*Leave it to blondie to pack lube for the apocalyptic showdown,* he thought as he fished around in the duffel back for the lube. He found Spike’s copy of *Ivanhoe* first and tossed it from the bag.

“Careful, pet,” Spike ordered from behind him.

Xander turned and looked at him.

“It’s special, yeah?” Spike said standing there bare chest gleaming pale in the half light and his jeans half undone.

Xander’s mouth went dry. *Sexy...domineering...arrogant...and a romantic,* he thought as he quickly stuck his arm back into the duffel back to hunt for the elusive tube of lubricant.

He almost let out a cry when he found it. He barely caught himself in time and only managed to cover it with a swallowed but somehow silent cough.

“That was close, pet,” Spike said as he slid around Xander to lie down on the sleeping bags. Xander’s heart almost stopped. Spike was completely stripped bare. He was a lean naked feast of flesh stretched out before him his long cock rising up half-hard from his thatch of hair.

“See somethin’ ya like?” Spike asked as he wrapped slender fingers around that same cock and gave it long slow stroke.
Xander nodded without thinking. Spike gave a throaty laugh that sent another sizzle of need straight to Xander’s dick. His belt was starting to get very uncomfortable.

“Got the slick?” Spike asked arching a perfect eyebrow.

Xander held up the tube in his hand his eyes unable to stop watching Spike fingers as they continued to dance and tease along the vampire’s pale shaft.

“Toss it here,” Spike ordered.

Xander’s pitch was perfect despite the fact he never stopped staring at Spike’s cock. Spike laughed as he caught the tube.

“And now, put on a show for yer master. Give us a nice little striptease, but keep yer eyes on me...and remember, pet. Not one sound.”

Xander licked his lips and began to slowly unbutton his shirt. Thoughts of Keffler, the Azora and all the traumas from his past disappeared as he watched Spike gently cup and roll his own balls. Xander knew the weight and feels of those jewels and suddenly he longed to feel them in his own hands. He fought to keep his actions slow and methodical as he eased his shirt off his shoulders baring his chest to Spike.

He bit back a groan when Spike licked his lips and ran a thumb pad over the tip of his cock. Xander’s own awakening rod pressed almost painfully against his belt.

As Xander began to undo his jeans Spike took the opportunity to stop fondling himself for a moment to coat his hand in cool thick lube. As Xander slid his jeans over his legs Spike slid his slick hand down his cock.

The pressure inside his belt was growing. He hoped Spike still had the key. He prayed he was going to use it as he toed off his shoes. As he lifted his right leg to pull off his right sock he lost his balance a little and stumbled.

Spike laughed.

“Oi...gonna have ta get some birds up from the floor ta give ya lessons so ya can do this proper!”

Xander glared at Spike as he struggled with his left sock. Spike smiled and went back to coating his dick.

When Xander was completely naked except for his chastity belt, Spike stopped touching himself. He fished the keys to Xander’s belt out from under him, tossed them to Xander and then stretched out on his back with his hands under his head. Xander caught the keys gratefully. Though he didn’t move to unlock himself. He stood, staring at Spike waiting for what was next.

Such a well trained pet, Spike thought with pride.

“Right,” he said. “Go ahead and unlock yerself. Step outta the belt and toss the keys back ta me.”

Xander did as he was ordered though he was now starting to get concerned. He wasn’t sure what game Spike was playing and he didn’t know whether to be scared or excited beyond belief.

Spikes eyes raked over Xander’s naked flesh greedily once the belt was gone. The look was so hungry it immediately fueled Xander’s own desires and his cock began to respond to its master’s gaze.
“You are such a nummy treat, pet,” Spike purred as he tucked the keys into the duffle back. “If I could I take us away to some place where it was just the two of us and I'd do nothing but shag ya until we both couldn’t walk.”

Heat rose through Xander’s body.

*Spike!* He thought. Once he would have fought his reaction. Once he would have fought his desire for the vampire, but not anymore. It was useless to deny it. He needed Spike. He *wanted* Spike. He lo...

Xander shook his head slightly to keep himself from finishing that thought.

“I know…we have the world ta save,” Spike sighed. “Still doesn’t mean we don’t have time for yer punishment.”

He grinned then crooked his finger signaling Xander to come close. Xander wasn’t sure why when it came to fighting or most things he was two left feet and the poster boy for the uncoordinated. Yet, when it came to getting close to a naked Spike, he was all grace, dexterity and speed.

“Straddle me, pet,” Spike ordered as Xander reached his side. With pleasure and anticipation Xander obeyed..

He had to bite his lip to keep from crying out as his overheated cock slid over Spike’s cool one. Spike laughed and ran his hands up over Xander’s thighs.

“Lift up a bit and spread ‘em,” Spike ordered as Xander’s eyes grew wide understanding starting to dawn on him.

*You can’t be serious!* He thought as he lifted up on his knees and slid his hands back to his ass to spread his cheeks.*I’m not even stretched!*

“Oh this is just the warm up round, luv,” Spike said as he took his cock in hand and rubbed it gently under Xander’s balls, over his perineum to point it’s slick fat head at his pucker. “Now at yer own speed, Xan, I want ya ta sink down on my tadger here. For the first part of the evening yer gonna ride me, pet. You set the pace but the rules are…no sound..and ya aren’t allowed ta shoot. Don’t mean ya can’t have a good time…but you can’t spill yer wad until I say.”

*Huh?* Xander thought staring down at Spike in confusion. The vampire grinned back at him. Gravity began exerting its pull on Xander.

“Oh pet, so much yer Spike is gonna teach ya..and one of ‘em is that you can get that eyes rollin’ in the back of yer head and toes curling up inta the balls of yer feet feeling without having to shoot. See once you spill well party’s over fer awhile..but…if ya learn ta separate the two..well…we can shag ourselves silly yeah?”

*If that had been in Klingon I might have understood it better,* Xander thought and then jumped a little as his body started to burn as it slowly began sinking onto the head of Spike’s dick.

“Oh…good,” Spike groaned underneath him. He grinned up. “I can tell by that Donut Boy look on yer face ya ain’t got a word I said. No matter. I’ll take care of it pet, fer now, until you learn how to control yer own spill.”

*That’s not pos…uh!* He thought as Spike’s tip breached him. For a moment he tensed expecting memories of Kefler but the sensation was nothing like what he’d been forced to endure. Xander hadn’t been in control of that thing breaching him. He was in control of the slow slide of Spike’s
penis pushing inside of him. It wasn’t the orange demon smooth scaly tail but the burn of Spike’s thick cool slick cock stretching his ring.

Xander’s mouth opened into a wide ‘O’ as suddenly his ring gave, his body relaxed and he found Spike sheathed completely and deeply inside. Spike’s nails scratched lightly on the inside of Xander’s thighs causing him to throw back his head.

The movement pushed Spike against that spot inside of Xander and he choked back a whimper even as he rocked slightly.

“Mmm…so good, pet,” Spike whispered in that voice born of sex, smoke and whiskey. Xander looked back at Spike. The vampire smiled.

“I want ya ta fuck yerself on me, pet,” Spike said. “I want ya ta ride me. Milk me. Come on, Xander..do yer best ta…ride me hard.”

Xander couldn’t help it. Each syllable and each word was a seductive pull. On instinct he began to rock, to hump and to fuck Spike. He held on to the vampire’s sides as he rocked and sought for an angle that would force Spike’s cock to bump and grind against that nub inside of Xander.

Deep exhalations of need burst from Xander’s chest when he found the angle and when he did he next began to search for a rhythm. He still wasn’t sure what Spike had meant, but he did understand one thing, Spike had told him to fuck his master and for once Xander couldn’t find one reason to argue with him.

As Xander bucked and rode on top of him Spike writhed underneath. He freely shifted from human to game face back to human face. He growled, he swore and most of all he softly called out words of encouragement.

“Yeah..that’s it…that’s it…that’s my good, pet..my Xander,” He said. “Fuck me..Xan..fuck me…fuck yer Master Spike..”

Spike! Spike! Spike! Xander thought. Master!

Xander motions grew more frantic and needier. His breathing was deep. He hands curled into Spike’s stomach, his nails biting deep. Spike growled his approval and scented the air. His boy was close. He could smell it and he could feel it. Quickly he snuck his hand up under his bouncing pet and pressed firmly right at the spot between Xander’s penis and perineum. He pushed on that muscle right there.

“Breath!” he ordered Xander even as his boy clenched.

Xander’s whole body locked. His toes started to curl. Still he tried to breathe just as Spike ordered while some small part of his brain split registering that while he was totally coming undone straining barely keeping from shouting out Spike’s name he was not actually coming.

“Breathe!” Spike ordered again. Some part of Xander conditioned to obey Spike did even as the rest of him was slowly collapsing and falling forward onto top of Spike’s chest. He felt wrung out. Spike’s penis was still rock hard inside of him. Oddly, his own cock was still rigid.

A cool hand slipped out from the base of his dick and then stroked a sensual line down his back.

“See..now we get to keep playing with the good pet,” Spike said with a chuckle. “You didn’t spill…but you did just have a good bang off yeah?”
Xander blinked. He pushed himself up and almost gasped as a jolt of pleasure rocked through him. He was so sensitive. He looked at Spike.

“Gonna teach ya so you can learn ta control that little muscle yerself,” Spike said meeting Xander’s eyes. “But fer tonight gonna help ya. Gonna keep blocking it for you. Trick is to stop you just before ya start ta shoot. Then slow ya down..wind ya back up…and then…”

Spike’s eyebrows waggled. Xander’s eyes grew wide as understanding finally flooded through him.

No, Spike! He thought. I can’t! I won’t survive it!

“Oh yes, pet, “ Spike said devilishly as he used his vampiric speed and grace to suddenly flip them while still keeping them joined. Xander’s eyes rolled back in his head and his bit his lip until he bled to keep from making a whimper let alone moan. Spike grinned again.

“And as long as you keep quiet…I promise ya I’ll let ya squirt some time before I’m through. However, one little peep, Xan and I put the belt on and I’ll be having all the fun. Understand?”

Fuck! Xander thought even as he nodded his head. That’s it. When this is all over…you wanna know about torture, Master Dearest? Private showing…Battlefield Earth. You are soooo overdue.

“For the next round, how about a long leisurely suck and a fuck?” Spike purred as he lifted Xander’s legs to wrap around his waist before slowly pistoning out of his pet's well stretched hole. Tingles of pleasure reawakened all through Xander’s body he opened his mouth in a silent cry of need and offered his throat to Spike. He resigned himself to an unending ordeal of sensual torture and knew if he survived it would be yet one more thing in Spike’s arsenal of delights he’d crave.

***

Xander had lost track of time of how long Spike had played with his body. He had no idea of it had been hours or days. He didn’t even know how many times Spike had kept him on that edge. He had no idea of how many time he’d sent him spiraling where his body locked up and released without cumming leaving him hard and totally wrung out.

All he knew was that somehow he’d kept from making a sound. Spike had tasted him. He’d fucked him. He’d drained him from the throat and from the thigh. Spike had even filled him up cum shooting explosively inside of him all the while keeping Xander from reaching that same peak.

Now Xander was once again flat on his back and Spike was between his knees. He was nuzzling and rolling his balls with his hands while blowing on the tip of Xander's purple and leaking cock. All Xander could do was beg with his eyes.

Please, Master! Please!

Spike just chuckled seeing the look. This was how he liked Xander. There was no worry or fear, just need. All of him was just narrowed down to the moment and focused on Spike.

Spike leaned over and wrapped his lips around the treat his pet offered. Xander arched and dug his fingers into Spike hair clinging to him.

Oh please! Please!

Spike hummed and swallowed his pet deep. Xander’s balls tightened and Spike withdrew.

Xander collapsed. Tears leaked from his eyes. He stared hopelessly as Spike, his master. He stared
hopelessly at the blonde blue-eyed angel of his salvation and damnation. He mouthed silently one word and one word only, “Master.”

“I love you, Xander,” Spike whispered staring into his pet’s wide brown eyes. “Never forget…never doubt. You have the love of William the Bloody. I am your master…and your lover.”

Gently he wrapped around his hand around the base of Xander dick. He smiled.

“This time, you can cum,” he said and then he swallowed Xander down.

Fire, ice, electricity all shot through Xander’s nervous system as Spike swallowed him almost to his root. He couldn’t help but arch up into it and when the vampire began to milk him with his throat Xander threw back his head, his fingers curled into tight fists, his ass clenched and balls pulled up tight. His orgasm ripped out of him raw and powerful shooting down Spike’s throat.

The vampire nursed on him, draining him of each sweet drop while Xander became nothing but pure bliss as his body pounded out the long denied release. Xander would never really know for sure if he kept quiet or not. He would not have heard himself anyway above the roar of blooding pounding in his ears. It didn’t matter. All that matter was the sweet ecstasy of pleasure Spike orchestrated out of him.

Eventually the storm passed and Xander’s body began to unclench. He floated back down from his high and lay there staring up at the ceiling of the truck trying to remember how to breathe. He felt Spike slowly pull his mouth away from his spent cock. The vampire stretched out alongside him pulling him close.

Xander lay there for several long moments just breathing and trying to reconnect to his body. Eventually he rolled over slightly and faced Spike. He smiled and feebly tried to lift Spike’s hand. The vampire grinned and cooperated offering the knuckles of both hands to Xander.

Never taking his eyes off Spike’s eyes, Xander lay a delicate kiss on each hand.

“Punishment’s over,” Spike whispered.

Xander snapped his finger.

“Permission ta speak, pet.”

“Spike I…” Xander said emotion welling up inside him so strong and powerful he suddenly found he couldn’t speak. Instead all he could do was just stare at Spike.

The vampire leaned forward, kissed the tip of Xander’s nose then curled up around him.

“It’s ok, pet. It’s ok. I’ll never take more than you can give. Promise.”

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Yes men can be multi orgasmic and can orgasm without coming. I pushed the boundaries of realities a little bit in this fiction..but hey Xander’s a Claimant now..so I took some license. For more information about how men can learn to do this here is one reference article.
Spike woke first his vampiric senses alerting him first to someone approaching the back of the truck.

“Pet,” he whispered into Xander’s ear. “Time ta wake up.”

“Mmph chocolate with Spike sprinkles on top,” Xander mumbled into their makeshift pillow.

Spike arched an eyebrow and wondered just exactly what his pet was dreaming about.

“Pet,” he said a little louder with a hint of a command. “Up.”

Xander’s long eyelashes fluttered and his lids lifted. He rolled to his side saw Spike and groaned.

“That’s hardly the way ta greet yer Master, is it?” Spike asked.

“Sore, tired and was dreaming of ice cream,” Xander replied. “If you’re gonna punish me just make it a good old fashion paddling and let me go back to sleep.

Spike laughed and leaned down to kiss the tip of Xander’s nose then sat up.

“Nope, no punishment. Just tryin’ ta save ya from a bit of humiliation. Someone’s comin'.Thought you might want to get dressed. Didn’t think ya wanted to wave yer meat and veggies at whoever it was.”

“What?! Oh!” Xander said suddenly beginning to move and dig himself out from under the blanket Spike had covered him with. “How…what time is it?”

The truck was much darker. The light from the lanterns seems to be even more faint then it had been earlier.

“After dark,” Spike said as he casually stood up and slid into his jeans.

“Just after dark? Can’t be any more specific than that…master?” Xander said as he tried to stuff a leg through the wrong pant leg.

“I’m a vampire, not a bleedin’ clock,” Spike laughed as he tapped Xander on the shoulder. “Need a hand?”

“I uh…” Xander said still sleepy and sore.

“Pet, I’ll do it,” Spike said as he stripped Xander’s pants off him, turned them right side out and handed them back to him. “Hold this.”

Then he dug around for Xander’s belt and keys. Xander’s heart couldn’t help but speed up a little seeing his belt in Spike’s hand. He smiled and blushed. Spike grinned.

_He’s a right proper Pet and still somehow the White Knight and Donut Boy he’d always been_, he thought as he helped Xander into it and then helped him finish dressing. _Wouldn’t want him any other way._

“Safe to enter or do I have to find an excuse to sniff around the truck again and please say no because…whoa…all I’m saying.. pheromones..is the least of what I’m smelling...,” Oz’s voice drifted from the back of the truck from behind the door.
Xander didn’t think it was possible to be anymore embarrassed. Spike just puffed out his chest and winked.

“All the good bits are covered,” Spike barked out. Xander rolled his eyes and Oz unlatched and swung open the door.

“No offense, but I don’t want to think about Xander’s bits,” Oz said smiling from the doorway.

“Oi, Why not? They’re nummy!” Spike said snaking a hand around Xander’s chest.

“Don’t answer that,” Xander said. “There’s no winning with him. If you did think about them... which by the way... wiggins... but if you did he’d just go all growly and start in with the threats then you’d have to go all growly and maybe furry...”

“Then it’s Wolfman versus Dracula,” Oz interrupted.

“With an Abbot and Costello slapstick,” Xander finished.

Both Scoobies laughed and it was Spike’s turned to look confused.

“Oi… there a reason you interrupted our nap?” Spike asked uncurling himself from Xander but not moving away from him.

“Yeah… now that me and the pack have arrived Willow’s calling a Scooby meeting.”

“She sent ya ta fetch us?”

“I drew the short straw,” Oz teased.

Xander knew better. Faith was probably the only girl really ready to risk seeing Spike and Xander in a compromising position but he knew she was smart enough not to be the one given her and Xander’s brief history. No need to tweak Spike’s possessive side. Larry wasn’t even an consideration. Wes was still probably buried in a book.

“Well then what are we waitin’ for,” Spike asked as he headed for the door. Xander followed. Oz stepped back and then made a face.

“Oi, now what?”

Xander sniffed and then made the same face. He looked at Spike and wrinkled his nose.

“Wot? So were a bit manky! Shagged ya good and proper! Proud of it.”

“Human world... human rules,” Xander said trying not to flush a bright red.

“And... wot... ya see a shower around here?”

“Actually there’s a small stream just about a half mile to the east,” Oz said.

Xander flashed his best puppy dog look, the one which always got Willow to give him her chocolate jello-pudding snack.

“Ain’t they hot fer a meetin’?”

“Given the circumstances, I think they’ll be happy for the delay,” Oz said.
Xander added just a hint of a whine.

“Oi! Go get the soap from the bag, ya git!” Spike said with a feigned growl.

*Big Bad Master Spike..no match for puppy Xan-man!* Xander thought as he happily bounded back into the truck to dig through the duffel bag. As he jammed his arm past two pairs of socks, a t-shirt and his toothbrush he turned his head to look at Spike.

Spike and Oz were talking quietly. Then Spike looked around, made a quick hand gesture as if to say “not now.” He looked up and saw Xander staring at them.

“Got the soap?” he asked.

Xander’s fingers curled around the bar and he drug it out of the bag. He held it up so Spike could see it.

“Let’s get a move on then.”

Xander nodded and trotted back out to them. He studied Oz for a moment sending a silent, *Whaz up?* Oz only shrugged before moving forward and leading them off into the woods.

***

Xander didn’t get a chance to talk to Spike or Oz on their walk to the spring. Of the three he was the only one without the ability to see well in the dark. So it took all his concentration to keep from tripping over the rocks and branches the other two so easily avoided.

He was also not blessed with their stamina and coordination. Still with a steadying hand, from time to time, from Spike he managed to keep pace and about twenty minutes later they came across a shallow flowing body of water. It was smaller than most rivers but larger than the average stream.

The bottom was sandy and at it deepest it was only up to Xander’s waist. Both vampire and human stripped down and waded out into the cool water. Oz kept watch while Xander and Spike bathed.

“Ya ok, Pet?” Spike asked as he listened to his Xander’s breathing and heart rate for signs of distress.

“I’m good,” Xander said. Getting in the water was never exactly *easy* but it wasn’t the terror inducing ordeal it had once been.

*Thanks to Clem*, he thought and wondered about the floppy eared demon.

Spike leaned over and gave Xander a brief kiss then began to soap them both down. Their bath was quick and perfunctory.

They held hands as they submerged under the water, Spike attuned to the slightest sign of panic from Xander. When they surfaced, his pet smiled at him.

“Gettin’ too soft,” Spike said softly.

Xander nodded as he pulled his vampire closer than wrapped his arms around Spike’s neck.

“Gonna get a reputation,” he warned.

Spike laughed then wrapped his arms around Xander’s neck.
“Guess I’ll just have ta go on a disembowlin’ spree..just ta prove I’m still the big bad.”

“Do the world a favor, start with Angelus,” Xander said before leaning down and claiming Spike’s lips for his own.

They stood there for several minutes held together by arms, water, moonlight and passion. Their lips meshed together until Xander’s need to breathe finally forced them apart. Then their foreheads rested against one another. Heat rose between them.

“I think we lost the soap,” Xander finally said.

Spike laughed.

“Think the puppy on the shores getting’ a bit impatient.”

Xander nodded.

“You need a few more minutes?” Spike asked with the barest hint of a leer in his voice.

“Belt’s not gonna let me sport one, master,” Xander answered.

“Not what I asked,” Spike said pulling back a bit and lifting Xander’s chin with a fingertip. “The boy back there maybe yer friend but he’s still a wolf. Can still smell yer need..yeah?”

Xander blushed.

“Yeah…gotta it. Might need…uhm..a moment to cool down.”

Spike nodded and stepped out of the circle of Xander’s arms.

“I’m gonna head back ta shore. You take a few moments. Follow up when yer cooled down.”

Xander nodded. Spike kissed the tip of Xander’s nose then headed back for shore. Xander sighed then leaned his head back. He looked up at the sky. The moon was nearly full. He marveled Oz was as much of himself as he currently was.

*He is Oz though, Xander thought. Probably adds a ‘dude’ after every growl.*

He smiled at the thought and turned to look back at Spike and his friend. Spike was jerking on his clothes and once again the two were talking. It was hard to see in the dim moonlight but again the talk looked serious.

Oz pointed to the woods. Xander couldn’t help but look around. He couldn’t see or hear anything. He looked back. The two had their heads together then finally Oz gave a terse nod. Then he lifted his head and gave a long howl. It didn’t take long before there were several quick answering howls.

Chills raised down Xander’s spine. He was definitely cooled down. Quickly he headed back to shore the world going eerily silent around him as he did. When he stepped sopping wet close to Spike he saw that Oz had already moved off a few feet. He looked at Spike.

“Master?” he asked softly.

“Leave it. It’s a demon thing,” he said without looking Xander in the eye. Instead he shoved Xander’s clothes at him. “Get dressed.”

Xander looked at Oz. Oz looked back at him.
“Pet, leave it and get dressed,” Spike ordered.

Xander quickly began to dress a small knot of dread forming in his stomach wondering just what it was he was supposed to ‘leave.’

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The knot had still not untied itself by the time they had settled around the fire with the girls and Wes. Oz was still quiet and while that was not unusual for the stoic young man Xander knew it was something different.

Spike sat close to Xander and Xander could feel his master watching and listening to him. Xander stared across the fire at Dawn and Willow.

“So uhm…what’s….I mean..the gangs all here…well all that’s left of us anyway,” Dawn finally said.

“Well…it’s more than we’ve had in a long time,” Willow said with a smile to Xander. It was a peace offering. Despite the knot he smiled back.

“Do we know how…what I need to do..to open the portal?” Dawn asked looking to Wesley.

“Almost,” Wes said. “Well, almost in theory. I believe we need to cut you with the sword Angelus used to in his ritual to open the portal.”

“The sword still stuck in the Acathla wanker?”

“The one in the statue..yes,” Wes said.

“The sword Angelus used?” Dawn said shivering.

“I’m sure it doesn’t have to..to be a big cut right?” Tara said quickly assuring the other girl.

“It’s not that..it’s just…eww..Angelus cooties!” Dawn replied.

The others laughed. Xander looked at Spike.

Yeah, Angelus ruins just about everything he touches but not you, he thought the knot in his stomach easing just a little. He trusted Spike. He did. He just didn’t like it when the vampire kept secrets.

Spike squeezed Xander’s knee.

“So how we gonna get there?” Faith asked. “To the island.”

“I..I could do a spell and levitate us.”

“Uh..again magical ‘we’re here sign,’” Oz said.

“We could be fast. In and out before Angelus knew what we were up to,” Willow argued.

“I don’t think he’d leave the island without defenses,” Wes said.

“What do we know about the island?” Xander asked looking at Spike.

“Peaches doesn’t like ta talk about it,” Spike said with a shrug. “I think the only way were gonna find out is if we take a look.”
“Recon,” Faith said nodding.

“I don’t know. I don’t think we should make a move on the island until we are ready to hike the ball,” Larry said from the dark.

“Oi! Thought you were on watch,” Spike growled.

“You think I’m gonna do a better job than Oz’s pack?” Larry laughed. “That’s high praise. Thanks! Spike!”

Xander laid a hand on Spike’s knee as the vampire’s mouth twisted then snapped shut with a loud snap for once lacking an appropriate retort.

“While that is one tactic,” Wesley interjected trying to keep peace, “I agree that more information is needed not only about the area around the island but about how best to approach. If we are not going to use magic to cross the water than it stands to reason we will need a boat. Where will we get one and how will we get it to the lake without drawing attention?”

“Back to basic recon,” Faith said scooting over so Larry could take a seat around the fire.

“Right then, so who goes?” he asked. “And who stays?”

Several hands went up around the circle.

“Oi! We can’t all bleedin go!”

“Right and we already know two who won’t be going,” Faith said looking at the vampire and Xander.

“Hey!” Xander cried stubbornly keeping his hand in the air even as Spike lowered his.

“Most demons are inactive in the day,” Willow said. “We recon during the day. Spike can’t go.”

“And if I can’t…” Spike said.

“Hey….no!” Xander said as Spike laid a hand on Xander’s arm and gently pulled it down.

“’No,’ Pet?”

“Uhgh…ok fine,” Xander relented but he stared mutinously across the flames at his friends.

“So that’s who can’t,” Oz said.

“You should,” Spike said staring at Oz. Oz stared back. The others looked at them.

“He’s a wolf…he slipped through my defenses in the city easily enough without detection,” Spike explained looking back at everyone.

Wesley, Faith, and Willow nodded.

“Yeah…but they were cra…”

“Don’t say it,” Spike warned. Oz grinned.

“I think someone familiar with magic should go as well,” Wesley said.

Willow smiled.
“Not you, Willow,” Wesley said.

“What? Wes? I…”

“If something goes wrong. We need you, Willow, back here at the camp. You are our best defense. Our best offense.”

“So you’ll be going?”

“No,” Wesley said shaking his head. “I have more research to do.”

He looked over at Tara.

“M..Me?” she squeaked.

“Oi..why not you, ducks?”

“You are a witch,” Willow said squeezing Tara’s hand.

“But..I’m not nearly as powerful as Willow,” she argued.

“We don’t need you to be,” Wes explained. “We just need you to sense what magic you can in the area.”

Tara looked at Willow then back at Wes. She looked at Xander and he gave her thumbs up.

“Ok,” she said. “I’ll…I’ll do it.”

“Then that leaves me,” Faith said.

“Faith..” Wes began to argue.

“You know I need to go. Right now you just have Oz, his pack and Tara. If anything goes down…” Wes nodded. “Just because I know doesn’t mean I have to like it.”

Faith grinned.

“So..it’s decided?” Xander asked.

Everyone nodded.

“We’ll leave at dawn,” Oz said.

“That doesn’t give you and yours much time to rest,” Spike said.

“Gives us plenty of time,” Oz said standing and stretching.

“I say the vamp gets watch tonight,” Larry said yawning.

“And Xander…since they slept all day,” Dawn added.

“I didn’t hear much sleeping going on,” Faith teased.

Everyone but Xander laughed. He just tried not to glow as red as the fire. There were a few more moments of good natured ribbing, some quick sharing of rations and then quiet good nights as everyone left the small campfire to go sleep leaving Spike and Xander alone together one watch.
“Sp…” Xander started.

He just lay a finger to Xander’s lips then whispered.

“We’re on guard. Time to watch and listen, pet. Watch and listen.”

TBC
“S...sorry,” Tara whispered for the second time in less than a minute as she once again stepped on a twig creating a loud snap. Both Faith and Oz turned back to look at her and had once again given her a strained smile.

They had left the truck a few hours ago and had been walking the last few miles towards what was left of Sunnydale. While Faith, Oz and the few members of his pack Tara could see, all moved almost like ghosts through the abandoned California countryside she practically lumbered around like a happy St. Benard off leash. She tried to be careful and quiet, but stealth reconnaissance was not her element.

Faith raised her hand up into a fist signaling them to stop. Tara managed to keep from bumping into the slayer. She smiled at the other girl. Faith smiled back then jerked her head over her shoulder.

“We’re close,” she whispered.

Tara peered around Faith’s shoulder. All she could see was trees and the remains of the few outlying homes destroyed after the fall of humanity. Oz pointed his nose in the air.

“Smells like water,” he said softly.

Faith looked at Tara and arched an eyebrow. Tara stared back confused for a moment then made a silent ‘O’ with her mouth when she understood with the slayer wanted. She nodded and closed her eyes.

She concentrated on slowing down her breathing and focusing her awareness. She focused first on her five senses. With her eyes closed there was nothing to see. There was nothing to taste. She could hear the soft inhalations of Faith near her, distant birds and the breeze through the trees. She could feel that same breeze roll gently across the skin of her face and arms. Faintly, underneath the earthen scents of the forest floor, she could make out the smell of water.

She took another slow deep breath focusing her awareness even further. She felt for the electromagnetic energy that radiated from all living things. She sought to sense the presence of that slim, but strong field, around the slayer. She sought to feel its difference from the more feral, yet tranquil, one around Oz. As her perceptions shifted she pushed “out” with her awareness searching for the presence of other energies. She felt for “absences” or lines of “intensity” that would indicate magical energies in the area.

She felt something! It was to the north and east of where they were. She opened her eyes and looked around. Faith and Oz looked at each other as Tara’s eyes swept the area. She smiled as she stepped to the base of an oak tree. She bent down and picked up a slim forked tree branch shaped like a “Y”.

“Roasting marshmallows later?” Oz whispered.

“Dowsing,” Tara replied smiling as she gripped the “handles” of the “Y” palms down. She took another deep breath then concentrated on the tip of branch centered in front of her. With a confidence she lacked earlier she moved carefully forward. Oz and Faith shrugged and followed.

As they moved Tara steered their direction by whether or not the branch seemed to dip down, up, to
the right or to the left. While they moved closer to the lake they never broke the cover of the trees. Sometimes they even retreated back deeper into the woods.

Tara didn’t speak. She barely even seemed to breathe as she moved. She didn’t seem to react to anything other than the dowsing rod in her hand.

Meanwhile, Oz and Faith found it difficult not to comment or to try and stop Tara as they passed two startling discoveries. The first discovery was to see a small herd of wild horses grazing just beyond the tree line.

During one of the passes where Tara had come dangerously close to leaving the tree line and stepping out on the to bare shoreline both Oz and Faith spied the delicate creatures. The herd had also seemed to spy their small group. A few of the horses had pawed at the ground.

“Some animals get a little nervous around me and mine,” Oz had said as he had tried to withdrawal. As he did the animals had returned to grazing lazily.

“Horses?” Faith had said in awe. She couldn’t believe something so gentle and beautiful could be found at the epicenter of so much heartbreak and destruction.

She had stopped for a moment and just watched the sleek animals, the black coats shimmering in the sunlight. She had frowned. Their manes and tails were tangled and full of weeds, leaves and bits of seaweed no doubt from spending so much time by the shore of the lake. Part of her had wanted to find a brush and comb them, knowing the animals would look even more magnificent with a little care.

“C’mon,” Oz had said tugging lightly at her sleeve. “Tara’s still moving.”

Faith had nodded and began to follow. Their next surprise was a short distance from where the horses grazed. A dock jutted out into the lake and next to it was small boathouse. Both Oz and Faith had frozen when they saw it.

“He wouldn’t...would he?” Faith had asked.

“If he needed to visit the island...maybe,” Oz had replied.

“Makes it a bit easy...”

“Too...”

“Shhh,” Tara had whispered as she kept moving following the lead of the branch in front of her. They had nodded and followed, eventually making a circuit of the whole lake slowing down only along the north and south sides as they encountered rubble, abandoned cars and large chunks of concrete and asphalt where the major highway leading into and out of Sunnydale had been.

Once they were done Tara had nearly collapsed. She’d set the branch aside and looked at her friends. She had shaken her head slightly. Oz and Faith had given her a few moments to recover and now they were waiting for answers.

“Good news or bad news?” she finally asked after the short break.

“Why does there always have to be bad?” Oz asked. “I mean why can’t it be better or best?”
“Edge of Hellmouth in a post demon apocalypse?” Faith answered with a grin. “We’re lucky there’s any good news at all.”

“Ah..good point, ok, bad news.”

“As far as I can tell there are no wards on the lake,” Tara said.

“But let me guess...wards all the way around?” Faith asked.

Tara nodded, “And there’s no telling what’s waiting on the island.”

“So...?” Oz asked.

“So...we report back to Willow,” Faith said looking at the darkening sky. “In detail, and we do what we always do.”

“Come up with a plan to do the impossible that could end with us all dying..if we are lucky?”

“Yes...but with a sense of humor!” Faith replied offering a hand to help Tara up.

“Humor is important,” Tara said.

“Yeah..demons hate that whole laughing in the face of horrible death,” Oz said leading the way back. “Makes ‘em feel like their effort is wasted.”

They all laughed as they slowly started back toward the truck.

***

Xander slipped out of the back of the truck and shut the door. He looked around. The sun was making its descent in the west. It would still be a few hours before Spike could safely wander outside. He knew the vampire was restless and missed the freedom to move about as he had in Vegas.

Xander also knew what it was like to be trapped, to stare at the same walls and not be able to go anywhere. A large part of him hated leaving Spike in the truck alone. Yet, another part of him wanted the time, the space, to talk with Willow.

“Go on ya, git,” Spike had said as Xander had stared at the door for umpteenth time.

“Master...”

“How am I supposed ta get any rest with you tossin' and muckin’ about? Get! I’ll see ya when it gets dark,” Spike had growled then had rolled over.

“Sp...” Xander had tried again.

“Oi!” Spike had said, rolled back over, sat up, kissed the tip of Xander’s nose and then had continued, “Go, pet. M’ a big bad and been in much worse places than this. Don’t be a ponce. Go talk ta Red! If I have ta tell ya a third time, someone ain’t gonna be sittin’ for a week!”
Xander had laughed, hugged Spike and then had sped off.

Now he was outside he looked back at the door. *Perhaps it would be worth it,* Xander thought as he contemplated not being able to sit versus talking to Willow.

“You remind me of cat,” Larry said. “When it’s inside it wants out and when it’s outside it wants in.”

Xander whirled around to look at his former classmate.

“Uhm...how...”

“It ain’t that hard, Harris,” Larry said. “You want two incompatible things and you don’t want to have make a choice.”

“I didn’t think you knew big words like...’incompatible,” Xander replied crossing his arms over his chest not liking where the conversation was going.

“Yeah...I do. Learned a lot in since the world went to hell,” Larry said stepping forward. “Like demons and humans...incompatible.”

Xander snorted. “You don’t know everything, Lar.”

“How do you think this is going to end, Harris?”

“Huh?” Xander asked blinking at the bigger man. “Kinda rooting for the good guys here. And you?”

“Yeah...and what happens when we do win?” Larry pressed the point.

“Twinkies and comic books for everyone,” Xander said. “Demons go bye-bye! The world goes back to the way it was. People live in freedom.”

Larry lifted his chin and motioned toward the truck.

“And what about him?”

“What about, Spike?” Xander demanded the White Knight rising to the front.

“He’s a demon...a vampire.”

“Yeah, kinda noticed that the first tim..” Xander began to retort and then his blood froze as he grew pale. He stared at Larry for a moment and then looked back at the truck.

“Knew you were slow but really, Harris...”

“Shut it, Larry!” Xander said turning back to look at him.

“He’s vampire, Xander. We win. It won’t be a demon world any more. Won’t be demon rules.”

“But...he’s helping! He’s one of the good guys!”

“You think it’s gonna matter?”
“Yes! To me...to Tara...Dawn...to...”

“Say...it matters to us? It ain’t gonna matter to everyone, Harris. All they are gonna see is one more bloodsucker. One that ruled one of the most notorious places in this hellhole.”

“Vegas was a lot better...”

“That’s not the reputation, Harris. So where is that gonna leave him?”

“I won’t let anything happen to him.”

“Course you won’t...because you are bound to him.”

Xander swallowed thickly. Larry was right. He was tied to Spike and if they won Spike wouldn’t be a Master vampire anymore he’d be hunted. Spike would be a target of human rage.

“See, you want two different things, Xander. You want to be with Spike. You want to be with your friends. You can’t have both. You really think Willow, Faith and the rest are going to want to spend the rest of their life protecting him. They would, to protect you, but do you want them to? Or do you really want to go on the run the rest of your life with Spike? You’ll have to choose.”

Xander stared bitterly at Larry. He didn’t have an answer not any good ones.

“Well in case you didn’t get the memo, Larry, I really don’t get a choice in the matter.”

“Yeah...funny that...Spike holds all the cards. What do you get?”

*Love, loyalty, protection...Spike!* Xander thought.

“You know...just when I was starting to like you, Larry...you had to go and open your mouth.”

“That wasn’t an answer,” Larry said with a shrug.

“Well...it really doesn’t matter does it?” Xander snapped.

“Just because you might not get what you want...doesn’t mean you don’t have a preference. Doesn’t mean you don’t know what you want.”

“You know what, Lar? What I want right now? It’s not much different than what I wanted in high school! Why don’t you disappear?”

Larry took a step back and looked at Xander.

“This ain’t high school, Xander and this ain’t the locker room. If you wanna go...walk. I’m not gonna stop you.”

Xander gave Larry another look, shook his head and walked around Larry heading for the where the camp fire had been the night before.

Larry watched him leave then looked back at the truck. He gently fingered his broken nose then turned away.
Xander sat there on one of the logs by the fire pit staring at ashen embers of the previous night’s fire for a long time. His thoughts were a jumble of “what ifs,” memories and broken dreams.

“Xander?” Willow called quietly.

“Hey, Wills,” Xander said looking up at her.

“You ok?” she asked. “Did you and Spike..I mean did he..”

“No..Spike and I are fine,” Xander sighed snapped in frustration. “And no he didn’t hurt me.”

Willow bit her lip and stepped back.

“Hey...no...I’m sorry,” Xander said scooting over a bit. “I’m just...sit with me?”

“Will that be ok?” Willow said point her head back in the direction of the truck.

“I wouldn’t ask if it wasn’t,” Xander smiled.

She nodded and sat down. She looked at him.

“It’s hard for me, Xan. Hard to understand...what...I mean...”

Xander looked back at her.

“Sorta like me and creepy-Willow thing,” Xander countered.

She frowned and looked at the fire pit.

“Guess that’s fair,” she said. “But..I didn’t mean to go all...dark and Edgar Allan Poe.”

“I didn’t mean to be a Blueboy pinup,” Xander said.

Willow blushed then laughed, “Guess they got it wrong in our yearbooks.”

Xander laughed with her then he reached out an arm, wrapped it around her shoulders and pulled her close. For a moment they just hugged, then very softly they both began to cry.

“I never thought I’d see you again..” they both started then laughed again.

“Ladies first,” Xander said. Willow sniffed.

“When you were taken..it was like the last of everything I knew from Before was really gone,” Willow said. “It was like if we didn’t get you back what was I fighting for? What were we fighting for?”

Xander squeezed her.

“The Azora demon..the one who had me before Spike won...got me...they had this T..Tank they
used to punish the bot...slaves who were bad.”

Willow looked at Xander with dread. She knew her friend.

“They don’t tell you what it does…it’s just dark and they lower you into it..seal you inside and it begins to fill up with this warm liquid. It keeps rising..and...”

Willow squeezed him.

“I thought I was gonna die, Wills. I thought I was gonna drown in some demon tank and all I wanted was to say goodbye to you. I thought about you, Wills. I thought about you, Faith, and Dawn. I thought about Buf..Buffy..and...”

“Xander, it wasn’t your fault!” Willow said emphatically. “I’ve told you that!”

Xander gave her a slight smile.

“You know that’s what Spike said when I told him, when I told him about it..about our plan..your plan that day to stop Angelus...to stop all of this and how I destroyed the Orb.”

“You told Spike?”

Xander nodded, “And you know what? He was there that day.”

“Yes, Xander, I know.”

“No, I mean...he was there...he and Buffy had made a deal.”

Willow’s eyes grew huge and round. She stared and Xander and then she began to shake her head.

“No, Xan..no..he..he twisted...lied..”

“No, he didn’t, Willow. He was there. He made a deal with Buffy and when she failed...”

“Angelus would have staked him!”

“Angelus wouldn’t do anything that...simple,” Xander said shuddering. Willow stared at Xander again. She noted his reaction. At first she was confused and then as an eerie dawning of understanding crept through her consciousness her eyes began to darken.

“Stay with me, Wills,” Xander said softly. “There were so many times I thought of you. You, Willow! The one who knows about the aquaman underwear incident! You, who saved me from the clown. You, Willow...not the black-eyed uber witch Willow.”

“I..should have..” she said starting to cry again as the black receded from her eyes.

“What been there?” Xander asked. “No way! I’m glad you weren’t! And besides...I..I was ok..as ok as one gets around Captain Crazy.”

“How can..?”

“Because...Spike, Willow,” Xander explained softly. “Spike was there and if you never believe
anything that comes out of blondie’s mouth...which is not necessarily bad advice...believe me...believe Spike when he says he takes care of me. He protected me. He doesn’t hurt me, Wills.”

“But he used you.”

“Yeah, he did. Never said he wasn’t a bastard,” Xander said with a smile. “But he’s on our side. He was on Buffy’s side.”

“Why?” Willow said.

Xander stared at her. He longed to tell her the truth. He wanted to reassure her, let her know what he knew and yet he couldn’t. Spike trusted him with the most precious secret Spike had and Xander couldn’t betray him.

“To piss off Angelus? To be different? Because it amused him?” Xander shrugged and sighed. “Because...when it gets right down to it..Spike is Spike. He doesn’t have a demon or a vampire agenda. He has his agenda. That day...his agenda was Drusilla.”

“And now?”

“And now? Payback, I think,” Xander fudged. “Angelus punished Spike...kept...him...well...Spike wasn’t there when Dru died.”

“And that’s a bad thing? Faith barely could take her...she might not of if Spike had been there!”

“Willow,” Xander said. “Spike loved her.”

Willow stared at Xander.

“C’mon you know that. They were the Sid and Nancy of the undead. It was creepy...but it was love, Wills...and...think of what it’s like not to be there when someone you love needed you.”

Willow sucked in her breath. She had lived with not being able to save Xander; without even being able to find him.

“I...it just. I mean he’s, Spike. I’m mean..Halloween...Parent Teacher night...,” Willow said beginning to tick off their early encounters with the vampire some part of her still clinging to what she knew of Spike from Before.

“Yeah..I know..but here we are,” Xander said.

“He really had a deal with, Buffy?”

Xander nodded.

“And he really..I mean...he doesn’t hurt you?”

“Willow...do you honestly think I’d be helping him...defending him...stay with him if he did?” Xander asked in that voice he rarely used. It was the one he used sometimes when he didn’t joke about his parents. The voice he used when he remembered Jesse. It was the voice he used when he stared down Angelus with nothing but a bouquet of flowers in his hands.
Willow knew Xander had always been willing to play the fool. He’d always been content to be thought of as the “Donut Boy.” Yet, Willow knew. Deep down, Xander had more strength and courage than anyone she had ever met, and that included both slayers. As guilt, fear and hurt cleared from her mind and heart she really listened to her friend. She finally found some peace.

She might not understand what was between Spike and Xander, but she knew without a doubt, if Spike did hurt Xander. If Spike was the monster she’d feared him to be, not only would Xander not be with him but he never would have put her, Dawn or the others at risk by bringing them all together.

Suddenly she threw both arms around Xander’s neck and squeezed him tight.

“Oh Goddess, I’ve missed you so much, Xander!” she cried in happy mix of tears and laughter. “I never thought I’d see you again. I...didn’t know how I could face all this post-apocalyptic Mad Max world without you!”

“Wills!” Xander croaked as he hugged her back.

“I mean..I never actually even saw Mad Max..and I fell asleep during Thunderdome!”

“Will..oow!”

“And vampires are kinda like terminators but I’m not exactly Sarah Conner...”

“Air!” Xander squeaked.

Willow laughed and loosened her hug. Xander drew in a big breath. She grinned at him. He grinned back as the color returned to his cheeks.

“I love you, Xander,” she said.

“I love you, Wills,” he said. “I love you too.”

TBC

Author’s Notes:

Aquaman underwear incident is mentioned in “The Killer in Me” episode.

Dowsing has a long fascinating history.

Blueboy was a gay magazine started in the 70’s that was sort of like Playboy that took a more ‘hard’ edge in the 90’s. It’s most famously referenced in the Cyndi Lauper song “She Bop”

“Well, I see him every night in tight blue jeans

In the pages of a Blueboy magazine”
Spike prowled around the camp. As soon as the sun had set low enough in the sky to cast shadows deep enough to give him cover he was out of the truck. First he checked on Xander. He snorted when he found his pet laughing and in the embrace of the witch.

Both humans turned to stare at him alerted by his non-verbal commentary. Xander’s eyes were bright, clear and expectant. They waited for Spike. The demon inside him almost purred contentedly despite how restless the vampire felt. Xander was still his.

“Oi…hope this means ya two worked it all out,” Spike said. “No more wastin’ time on threatenin’ me.”

“Yeah, I think we can say we are done wasting our time on vain threats,” Willow said with a smirk.

“Righhh…you implin’ sumthin’, Red?” Spike growled.

Xander and Willow looked at Spike’s hair and just giggled.

“You are..ya daft bird!”

“Now Master, Willow didn’t say…”

Spike just cocked an eyebrow. Xander couldn’t help it. He knew Spike would probably punish him later, and truthfully some part of him hoped he would, but it felt good to tease the vampire with Willow. It felt almost like old times.

The soul was pleased. Xander seemed to have found peace with his old friend. It kept the demon’s natural possessiveness at bay and refocused its attention toward more immediate priorities.

“Right..yer both gone stalkers,” he said peeling off he duster and tossing it toward Xander. “Guess that’ll be Percy and Wanker Boy’s problem ’til I get back.”

“Wanker Boy?” Willow asked in confusion.

“B..back?” Xander asked fumbling his way out from under the coat which had landed on his head. “Ma..Spike..where are you going?”

“Hungry,” he said rolling his shoulders back causing his black t-shirt to pull tight across his chest. “Can’t get all I need off you, pet and still expect ya ta be able ta have all the scintillating conversational skills of a twelve year old.”

“Hey! I resemble..resent that!”

Spike winked at him.

“Wanker Boy?” Willow repeated.

“Larry,” both vampire and Xander replied in unison.

“Oh,” Willow said then smiled. Larry was loyal, but she knew he could still be a bit of a jerk.
“So...what you’re just going to go wander off in the forest looking for little bunny foo-foo?” Xander asked standing up and gently laying Spike’s precious coat to the side.

“Precious bunny foo-who?” Spike asked.

“Not important. What is important is you...wandering off...by yourself,” Xander replied.

“Uh...pet...Big Bad...Vampire here.”

“Yeah...on the run from an even...bigger...”

Spike gave a warning growl. Xander rolled his eyes.

“...an even crazier vampire.”

“Be that as it may, luv,” Spike argued simmering back down to a smirk. “Don’t think Peaches is out there lurking in the forest.”

Then the vampire grinned. He stepped within arm’s reach to Xander, reached out a hand and then slowly brushed his cheek with a fingertip.

“Nice ta know ya care though, pet. Nice ta know ya worry...about me,” Spike said his voice dropping into a low seductive growl.

Something hot and fierce rolled through Xander. He wanted to wrap his arms around Spike. He wanted to taste the vampire’s lips. He wanted to bare his neck and offer the vampire a better feast than anything he might find out in the woods. In short, he wanted Spike.

Still, though, he couldn’t. Willow was right there. She was right there watching and some part of him which had just reconnected to the man he used to be didn’t want to play by the new rules right now. It didn’t want the people from his old life to witness the wants and needs of his new life.

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“Of course I do, Spike,” Xander ground out trying for the light snark that was so often between them. “You get yourself dusted; Xan-man gets a check out call too.”

Spike’s finger froze. Gold flecked in his eyes for a moment as he stared at Xander. The demon roared and the soul flinched. Human world; human rules, he thought as he let his hand fall just before he turned and marched away.

“Sp...” Xander started to cry suddenly panicked and regretting what he said.

“Later,” Spike said as disappeared into the darkness.

“Xander?” Willow asked as she stood and carefully placed her hand in to that of his. Xander remained quiet and motionless for several long moments just staring out at the dark woods.

***

“And you just let him go?” Faith asked as she tucked another knife on the inside of her boot. Wesley watched her with a hint of concern. His slayer and the group had only been back a few minutes and she was already reading herself to go after the vampire; a vampire who had only been gone for about an hour or so.

“There wasn’t any letting about it,” Xander countered. “Spike wanted to go and so...”

“You couldn’t do a spell to stop him?” Faith said tucking her pant leg back down over her boot
before standing up to look at Willow. Dark circles were starting to form under the slayer’s eyes. She, Tara and Oz and pushed hard to reach Sunnydale, scout it and be back but while the others had rested on the drive back she hadn’t. Her only concession was to bring the second vehicle they had pilfered outside the forest to use to drive to Sunnydale back to camp instead of ditching it as she might have normally done. Now she was gearing up to go look for Spike.

“We’d just finally reached a peace…I didn’t want to start up with all the fangs and curses again,” Willow said. Tara gave the redhead another squeeze. She hadn’t left Willow’s side since they had returned.

“Didn’t even call me,” Larry interjected.

“And what would you have done?” Xander snapped. “Offered to have your face introduce itself to his fist again?”

“Well I wouldn’t have just let him waltz out of here to potentially compromise us, Harris!”

“Spike isn’t compromising us..he’s hunting!”

“Hunting what?”

“Deer…from the smell of it,” Oz said quietly nodding his head to the right.

“Don’t have ta worry about getting’ lost with you lot around here,” Spike said stepping out of the shadows and into the ring of light cast from the campfire and lanterns. “Just gotta listen for all the yappin’ and banging on about shite. Lead me right back to ya nutter.”

There was blood ringed around the vampire’s mouth. His shirt was stained dark and clung to him.

“Sp..master,” Xander couldn’t help but whisper and moved quickly to the vampire’s side. Oz stared at Spike for a moment. The vampire returned his gaze.

“Don’t worry, wolf, ain’t gonna be a problem fer yer pack ta hunt tonight,” Spike said. Oz gave a terse nod then let out a howl and a short yip. Howls and more yips bounced around from all directions in the woods then quieted. Oz gave Spike another brief look then turned back to his friends.

“Probably best everyone stay close to the camp tonight,” Oz said. “Pack is restless and not everyone’s control is as good as mine this close to the full moon. “

Spike moved past Xander and headed for the truck.

“Where you going?” Larry barked.

“Going ta get a clean shirt…unless yer gonna do my dry cleanin?”

Larry gave Spike the single fingered salute. The vampire shook his head.

“Ain’t interested. Probably couldn’t even get a good price for ya in the arenas,” he said as he ducked into the back of the truck.

Xander stood silently. He tried to hide the hurt. Spike hadn’t even acknowledged him.

*What did I expect?* Xander thought. *Maybe I deserve it.*

Willow stared at Oz as did Wesley. There was something in the silent exchange between Oz and
Spike she didn’t understand.

“Oz?” she asked quietly.

Oz turned and gave her a half grin. Even though it had been a long time since they had been lovers they still could reach each other. A word or a gesture could communicate so much between them.

“Not used to hunting with another ..demon around is all, Willow. It’s a demon thing.”

Wesley’s eyes narrowed and he glanced at Faith. She glanced back and gave a slight nod of assurance then looked toward the truck. Her slayer’s senses were good. Nothing was “tingling” out of the ordinary. She wasn’t infallible and she wasn’t a hundred percent accurate at sensing vampires but like all slayers she had the innate ability to detect the bloodsuckers. Angelus’s hell on earth had given her ample opportunity to hone those senses.

Right now the only vampire she detected was the shirtless one climbing down out of the truck. As his feet settled on the ground, he looked at her. He arched an eyebrow.

“Th..thought you were changing your shirt?” Tara said.

“Wanna go get cleaned up first, ducks,” Spike said.

“Don’t do it on my account,” Dawn said with a wink.

“Dawnie!” Xander screeched snapping out of his hurt reverie to stare at her.

Spike grinned. He really was beginning to like the Nibblet.

“Well..don’t wanna be too much of a distraction when we all sit down for a meet, yeah? I sit around here with my kit half off pet will be pawin’ and slobberin’ all over me the whole yack session, not to mention the rest of you birds and the Slayer there. While I won’t mind..don’t think it’ll accomplish much.”

Dawn giggled. Faith snorted. Tara and Willow smirked. Larry rolled his eyes. Oz shrugged and Wesley sighed. Xander stared at Spike with hungry and hopeful eyes. Spike looked back at him. His gaze was guarded and yet, there was something warm there.

Then Spike headed off toward the woods once more.

“Master?” Xander called after him. Spike stopped and turned.

“Heard what the wolf said, pet. Too dangerous fer ya to be out wombling about right now. Stay here. I’m heading off fer a quick wash. When I get back, we can sit down and hear all about Glinda and the Slayer’s day, yeah?”

Then Spike disappeared for the second time that evening.

***

The vampire returned cleaned and fully dressed while the others were sitting around the fire eating reconstituted chicken ala king. Both Oz and Faith looked up from the fire at the same time noting his return. When Xander saw him, he put down his bowl, stood up and held out Spike’s coat like an offering.

“Ta, pet,” Spike said taking the duster and shimmying into it before taking a seat beside Xander. “Down..finish yer din, yeah?”
Xander smiled and happily did as he was told.

“So, ready for the four one-one?” Faith asked.

“Now that we don’t have to wait on his highness,” Larry grumbled.

“Master will do,” Spike said. Xander shook his head and shoveled in the last scoop of pale goop.

“Spike, please do not bait Larry,” Wesley instructed.

“He makes it so easy,” Spike purred.

“You know, there are plenty of ways to neutralize you without killing you,” Larry shot back.

“Think, I’ve heard that threat from you before, mate.”

“I’m not your mate! Thought that was Xande…”

“Haven’t we already wasted enough time?” Willow’s voice suddenly cut through the firelight and the darkness. “I mean…I know we could sit around and trade insults and barbs all night…and maybe it might even feel good…normal to do it…but we don’t have time for this.”

“It…it is the night of the ninth,” Tara said.

“And we don’t even have a plan,” Dawn continued.

“I…” Larry’s mouth popped open for a moment then snapped shut. He nodded.

Spike took an unneeded breath then said, “Listenin’, luv.”

Willow blushed a little then looked to Faith, Oz and Tara.

“So? What did you find?”

“Well,” the slayer began. “It’s a mix of terrain until you get close to town. We went through the forested side for cover. The road leading in and out is jammed with rubble, abandoned cars and lumps of concrete on both the north and south sides of a town. According to Tara, there are wards all around the lake, but didn’t appear to be any wards on the lake itself. Only two surprises.”

“Surprises?” Wesley asked.

“A boathouse and dock for one,” Oz said. “Who knew Angelus was the lake retreat kinda guy?”

Spike snorted.

“And the other?” Willow asked.

“Horses,” Faith said. “We saw a heard of wild horses grazing near the lake.”

“Horses?” many asked as Faith recounted that bit of their tale.

“That paints a rather unexpected idyllic picture,” Wesley observed.

“But…but possibly an opportunity,” Tara said.

“Why?” Xander asked.
“Well…the wards are…different where they are..they..well..I mean they have to be or I think the horses would be killed or something would have been summoned to eat them or something. They feel..redone like…”

“Maybe they were over written?” Willow offered.

“I don’t know,” Tara shrugged. “All I know..is that where the horses are the wards..they’re different. They’ve been reset..it’s like the wards are used to them are something. They don’t go off.”

“Maybe who ever set the wards got tired of coming out to deal with horses,” Faith asked.

“Yeah..like one too many false alarms,” said Dawn.

“I wonder,” Wesley murmured.

“Whoa..hey…they are not going to like me,” Oz said already thinking a step ahead of the watcher.

“Can’t say they’ll be that fond of me,” Spike chimed in, “though I at least do know how ta ride. What about the rest of you lot?”

Everyone but Faith and Wesley shook their heads.

“The slayer knows how to ride?” Spike snorted in surprise.

“Ridings one of my specialties,” Faith said with a wicked grin and a wink towards Xander. Spike growled. Xander blushed and laid a hand on Spike’s arm.

“Master..the rides closed,” he said.

“Wot?” Spike said whipping his head to look at Xander.

“Must be undead at least one-hundred and fifty years and have Billy Idol hair to ride this ride,” Xander intoned. Spike stared at him in confusion for a moment before shaking his head and laughing.

“Nutters. Always get stuck with the balmy ones.”

Xander squeezed his arm and looked back Faith. She grinned back at him then said, “But maybe we don’t have to ride them..or least maybe not all of us.”

“Huh?” Larry said.

“Well if we can lure them from the lake to the forest edge then maybe we can walk back with them to the lake. Use them for cover. I mean, it’s more practical anyway. They’re wild. They’ve probably never been ridden and we don’t have time to break them in if we want to get them and to the island and do the ritual before dark.”

“Ah…about that,” Wesley interjected.

“Don’t tell me,” Xander began.

“.we have to wait until dark,” Dawn finished.

“I am afraid so,” Wesley said.

“Demons,” Xander and Dawn said together.
“It is the nature of dark rituals,” Willow offered.

“Can we do it at sunset at least?” Dawn asked.

Wesley shook his head sadly.

“Of course not,” Xander said.

“We…we don’t make the rules,” Tara offered. “And not all magic has to be done at night. I know a lovely spell to make bread rise. You can do it at dawn or noon.”

“That’s great, ducks,” Spike said, “but I don’t think we’re going to be baking Angelus some bread.”

“More like’s he’s going to be baking some, with our bones, if we do not get back on track,” Wesley warned.

“Yeah…marrow always did add a bit of flavor,” Spike said with a sly smile.

“Eww…you know there are some things I really don’t want to know, Spike,” Xander said. Especially if I’m ever going to kiss you again, he thought.

“Right, so we may have a way around the wards,” Willow said trying to regain control over the Scoobie meeting. “Still..how do we get to the island?”

“There is the boat house,” Tara said.

“No,” Faith said. “Not trusting anything in there. That’s way too obvious.

“Well then we’ll have to bring our own,” Dawn said. “I mean surely we can find a boat or boats somewhere?”

“There are a few campgrounds nearby, Lake Success,” Oz said. “I can send some of the pack out tonight while they are hunting to scout and secure some canoes. Those should be easy enough to port once we get into hiking distance of old Sunnydale.”

“That could work,” Willow said.

“We still don’t know what’s on the island,” Faith replied.

“Probably won’t until we get there,” Spike said. “Which is why Pet and I won’t be going until night.”

“What?” everyone else asked in unison.

“Look, maybe ya can port me in one of those canoes all trussed up under a tarp or something, but I ain’t stepping a foot onto Angelus private little playground until its dark. I ain’t gonna lie under a bleedin’ blanket listening ta ya face whatever goody Peaches’ has stashed over there and I’m certainly not letting Xander face it without me either.”

“Our best bet is to attack during the da…” Wes began to argue.

“Is it?” Spike countered. “You’ll be one fighter down. One who knows Angelus..not just read about him in some musty journal. I’ve fought him..and I’ve fought beside him.”

The camp was silent for a moment.
“He has a point,” Faith finally said.

“That is what troubles me,” Wesley replied.

“Spike making of the sense…always leads to confusion,” Xander agreed. Spike gave Xander a quick swat on the butt.

“Hey!” he mouthed quietly at his vampire. Spike only cocked an eyebrow.

“I won’t be able to take the pack onto the island,” Oz said. “I…I think I’ll be ok…but.”

“They can cover us,” Willow said. “If…”

“The horses may not like it,” Oz grinned.

“How will we see? I mean to steer or row the canoes?” Tara asked.

“Spike can see in the dark and we have lanterns,” Willow said.

“Plus, I’ll be able to ‘smell’ shore,” Oz said.

“Hey…we’re heroes,” Faith grinned. “We’ll manage.”

“So…then that’s the plan?” Dawn said. “We hike in with some canoes and at sunset get the horses to walk us to the lake, then head to the island and then…what, hope we can take down what’s ever there, do the ritual at midnight and save the world?”

“Better than some of our previous plans,” Xander said grinning at Willow.

“Better than Spike’s plans,” Faith teased.

“Oi! Twat!”

The slayer blew him a kiss.

They all looked at each other. Whether they were ready or not, whether they liked it or not, this was it. Tomorrow, they would make their move to end Angelus’ reign.

TBC

Author’s Notes:

**Bunny Foo Foo** – is a popular children’s song in the states.

Lake Success is just outside the Sequoia National Park.
If Spike was nervous, he didn’t show it. Xander envied that trait as he watched his Master rock to the swaying movements of the truck as they traveled to the rendezvous point with Oz’s pack. The mood in the truck was tense and filled with silence.

Xander glanced around and briefly met Tara’s gaze before her eyes slid away to look at Willow who was glancing at Dawn. Next he spied Larry watching Wesley who in turn was staring at Spike. Xander looked at Spike and found the vampire’s familiar blue eyes observing him; almost admiring him. The look eased a tightness in his chest and warmed the cold pit in his stomach. He gave Spike a small smile.

“Worried, pet?” Spike asked softly.


Spike chuckled. Count on his Xander to make him smile before a climactic battle. He reached out hand a brushed a fingertip over his nose.

“Well, if it is the end love,” Spike said softly. “We won’t be goin’ out alone.”

Xander looked around the truck again. Everyone he cared about; loved was in this truck. Faith and Oz were up front and the rest were in the back with him and Spike. A lump formed in his throat and he swallowed.

This was so much more than he’d had a month ago sitting in the vault slowing dying inside. Then he’d been nothing more than a “bottle.” He’d been without his family; his friends. He’d been on the verge of giving up not only on the world and the fight but giving up on himself.

He’d been close to becoming just one more vacant-eyed bottle until Spike. He looked back at the vampire. Spike had changed everything with a turn of a card. He’d saved Xander: helped him come back from the edge. He’d protected and cherished him. He trusted him and more important the vampire loved him. Then, he’d returned Xander to what was left of his friends and family to fight alongside with them in what might be the last battle to save the world.

Xander’s heart began to beat just a little faster and yet a little stronger even as he suddenly found his chest tightening as the emotion he been denying and fighting since Vegas surged to overwhelm him.

“We’ll be together,” Xander said his voice thick and laced with so much unsaid. He looked back around the truck. “All of us.”

“To the end,” Willow answered meeting Xander’s gaze.

“The..the very end,” Tara said verbally casting in her lot.

Larry nodded.

“Most certainly,” Wesley added.


The truck rolled to a stop. There were loud squeaks and clangs of the cab doors being opened and closed. Then there was a bang on the side of the truck followed by the muffled sound of Faith
shouting, “We’re here!”

“Ready or not,” Spike said standing and wrapping himself in a blanket, “here we come.”

The doors of the trailer swung open letting in the afternoon sunlight. There was a long pause as the solemn group stared at the slayer.

“We’re not dead yet,” Faith said taking one look at the somber bunch. “And I don’t intend for that to change anytime soon. Oz’s pack is here with the boats. If we wanna make our date, we better move. I hate being late for a date. It’s good way to miss all the fun.”

“Right,” Wesley said standing and moving towards the back of the truck. Tara offered her hand to Willow. The redhead smiled and took the other witches hand and together they made their exit. Larry looked at Xander and Spike then rolled his eyes. He shook his head and began to follow the witches.

Xander looked at Spike who was standing in the shadows of the truck with the blanket wrapped tight around him.

“Ready to be a Spike burrito?” he asked.

“That mean you are gonna eat me, pet?” Spike replied.

“Let’s just get through this and worry about ‘what’s for dinner’ later?” Xander said with a groan and his master’s bad pun.

“Wot? Never heard about given a vampire sumthin’ ta look forward to after?”

After? Xander wondered. What does happen after?

He remembered what Larry had said earlier. If they won, this would be a human world again with human rules.

And no place for Spike, he thought. The emotions which had overwhelmed him seized control.

“Wha…pet?” Spike cried as Xander rushed forward and shoved Spike into the furthest and darkest corner of the truck.

Carefully Xander unpeeled the blanket from Spike’s face. Once more he stared into his lover and master’s eyes.

“You have something to look forward to, master,” Xander said softly. “We have something to look forward to…Spike.”

The blonde vampire stared at his Claimaint love obviously shining in his eyes.

“Pet…Xander,” he began.

“Shh,” Xander said laying a finger over the vampire’s lips. “Tell me…no promise me Blondie. Promise me we are gonna do this…we are gonna win. Promise me there’s a chance for after.”

“Xan, I promi…” Spike began to say when there was a loud bang on the trailer doors.

“We have the boats…time to go,” Larry’s voice boomed through the trailer. “Either move or get left behind. You already know which I’d prefer.”

“Get stuffed,” Spike snapped as Xander tugged the blanket back around the vampire.
“Yeah…well unlike some people I know when there’s a time and a place for that…and now is not the time or the place,” Larry replied.

Xander took Spike’s arm and began to lead him to the trailer doors.

“You know, Larry,” Xander said as he climbed down out of the trailer. “I’m beginning to wish we’d left you back in Vegas.”

“I’ve had similar thoughts,” Larry said.

“Right so if any of our wishes mattered right now I’m pretty sure none of us would be here;” Oz’s voice interrupted. “So let’s make like we’re all friends from high school and load up the boats. Pack nabbed three.”

He looked at Xander and the bundled and slightly smoking Spike standing just out reach of the direct sunlight.

“They also found a tarp. Think that will help with transporting the Blonde Sizzler over there.”

Xander looked back at Spike then back to Oz.

“Well, let’s get to packin,’” he said with a grin. “Get it…packing?”

“Now I have something to live for,” Oz groaned and shook his as he turned to lead the way to his pack and the canoes. “That will not be the last pun I hear before I die.”

***

Xander was hot and sweaty and not the good kind of hot and sweaty. They had been walking for a few hours.

Not walking, he thought. Hiking!

He might be faring better if weren’t for the fact he was one half of the two people porting the canoe with Spike.

Ok, Xander thought. The Big Bad needs to stick to a nice light type O for a while.

“Oooff!” he exclaimed as he nearly tripped over a root.

“Oi!” Spike’s muffled shout came from underneath his tarp in the boat.

The other porter, a member of Oz’s pack, stopped and waited for him to catch his footing.

“Shh!” came a chorus of voices from around him.

“You know, I could take over for a while,” Faith said softly dropping back from leading the group to help.

“No,” Xander said firmly as he rebalanced the boat on his shoulder and signaled he was ready to move forward.

“Xan, we are nearly there…” Faith began.

“Then help the other guy,” Xander said firmly.
“He’s a werewolf,” Faith argued. “He...he’s not as tired as you.”

“And I’m a Claimant...Spike’s Claimant,” Xander said he once again began walking. “And I’m talking the big Blowhard to the our final showdown.”

“Xander...”

“No, Faith,” Xander said firmly as they hiked. “The sun’s still up and while it is Spike is vulnerable and that means I need to watch over him...protect him...like he did me.”

Faith opened her mouth to continue her argument and then saw the look on Xander’s face. She recognized it. Short of physically pulling him out from under the canoe, he wasn’t going to leave. She nodded.

“Ok,” she said finally relenting. “Hang in there. It’s not too much longer.”

Xander nodded back then focused on watching his step. Inside the canoe, under the protective layers of the blanket and tarp Spike smiled. They’d come a long way since that first night.

* Luv ya, Xander, he thought. * * *

It was another thirty minutes of hiking and nearly sundown when the party stopped. There were fourteen in total; the seven Scoobies plus seven from Oz’s pack. Once they stopped the porters quickly lowered the canoes.

Meanwhile, Tara, Willow, Faith and Wesley moved forward to the edge of the clearing. They each had some dried fruit from their rations.

“Wot’s happening?” Spike from his cocoon.

“They’re trying to lure the horses,” Xander said as he tried to keep an eye on his friends and the last of the sunlight trickling through the tree leaves.

“Unwrap me,” Spike ordered as he began to roll out from under the blanket.

“Sp...Master the sun’s not completely down,” Xander argued even as he started tugging on the tarp of his vampire.

“It’s down enough,” Spike said as he shaded himself with the blanket and sat up to look around.

Tara and the others were making soft clicking sounds and focusing on the herd of the horses down by the water’s edge. Oz and his pack were pulled back from edge of the clearing. Quietly Spike crawled out of the canoe and kept watch on the group. Xander kept watch on the dying light.

It took just a few short minutes for the horses to notice their group. It took much longer for three of them to begin to slowly make their way towards the Scoobies. In the meantime the shadows deepened enough for Spike for to throw off the blankets and stand beside Xander.

As the sun dipped to fine a thin orange sliver on the horizon all but two of Oz’s pack slinked away into the shadows.

“Need to slip into something more feral,” Oz explained.

“They gonna...there not gonna. I mean...” Xander started to sputter. “I am a Scoobie...not a Scoobie
snack.”

“Again with the puns I’d like to out live,” Oz replied. “Nah...no Scoobie snacking.”

“Oi! What about vampires?” Spike chirped.

“Well..they’re a little more flexible on that option.”

“How flexible?” the vampire growled.

“Hey...yer gonna be on the island...they’re going to be patrolin’ the shore. You won’t have anything to worry about,” Oz shrugged.

“Keep ’em off me or I’ll put a leash on ‘em,” Spike warned.

“Uh...thought that was only for the Xanpets,” Xander said laying a gentling hand on his vampire’s arm while shooting a look at his old friend.

Oz just shrugged again. Spike muttered something under his breath.

“Oh look...pretty horses!” Xander said pointing back to the rest of the gang trying to refocus the vampire and werewolf’s attention. “See...pretty horses.”

Spike reluctantly turned to watch back at the shore. He didn’t like the thought of a possible werewolf attack from the trees, but then again he liked even less whatever tricks he was sure Angelus had waiting for them.

Dawn, Spike, Larry and Oz watched together as the horses plodded their way slowly toward the group. Eventually a large black stallion stepped in close to the slayer. Faith said as she slowly reached out her hand and offered one the stallions a bit of dried apple. The horse laid it ears back, stretched its neck and then sniffed at the slayer’s hand. It whinnied softly then pulled back its lips to nibble gently at the fruit.

Seeing the stallion feeding from Faith’s hand it didn’t long for the other two to follow suit. Tara glanced back at Xander and smiled as a horse began to eat a dried apricot out of her hand. Xander smiled back.

“I don’t like it, “ Spike rumbled in a low growl. “Something isn’t right.”

“Of course something isn’t right,” Xander quipped. “We’re standing at the edge of a flooded hellmouth getting ready to charge into Angelus’ lake house without an invite. What possibly is right with any of this?”

“I mean….” Spike trailed off into silence.

“You mean what...master?”

“I don’t know..just sumthin’ ain’t right,” Spike said slowly watching the woods as the third horse approached Wesley.
The three Scoobies began to whisper quiet words into the horses’ necks as they began to pet them and feed them more treats fished out of their pockets. Eventually a few mares began to walk their way to join the stallions.

By the time the sun was fully down the gang had managed to lure a total of ten horses that were now pawing at the ground and nuzzling the group for more treats. Faith slowly raised her hand and made a “forward” motion with two fingers. She trusted the vampire would see it.

“That’s our signal,” Spike said to those still standing deep in the dark shade of the trees. Spike and Xander hoisted one canoe up onto the shoulders; Oz and Larry hoisted another one. The remaining two members of Oz’s pack who had not disappeared picked up the final one. Dawn walked followed Spike and Xander.

Cautiously they moved forward to rejoin the rest of the party. As they approached the horses begin to neigh nervously. They stopped.

“It’s ok,” Tara said as she brushed her hand gently down the flat head of the mare leaning in close to her.

“There’s a boy,” Wesley said calming the stallion nearest him.

When the small off shoot of the main herd began to settle again the group carrying the boats began to slowly move forward again. Eventually the entire party was reunited.

“Are we ready?” Willow asked Xander as she picked at a bit of seaweed tangled in a matted mane. Its breath was blowing hot against her skin. There was something “off” about it. Instead of smelling sweet and warm like grass it smelt stale and stagnant like standing water.

“Ready as we’re gonna be,” Larry said.

“Ok, Dawn, and everyone carrying the canoes line up between the horses,” Faith ordered. “We’ll lead them down to the water."

“And hope we don’t trip the big ‘We here!’ sign,” Dawn said.

“That’s the plan,” Xander said as once again he hoisted the canoe on his shoulder.

“Hopefully the history books will make it sound better,” Spike said.

“They often do,” Wesley retorted as he laid his hands on the mare in front of him and started coaxing her back towards the lake.

“Who cares about the history books,” Xander said as he and Spike started to move. “I wanna know who’s playing me in the movie.”

“Oh! Maybe they can get Kate Winslet for me!” Dawn said excitedly as she followed along.

“Kirsten Dunst for me,” Willow chimed as she patted the side of her horse to get it move along.

“She..she would make a good you,” Tara said softly.

“I want someone bad ass, like Angelina Joile or Michelle Rodriguez,” Faith purred.

“I see we should have covered the definition of ‘stealthy’ before embarking upon this mission,” Wesley remembered the group in a hushed voice.
“For this group...this is stealthy,” Larry whispered.

A slight giggle went up and then quieted down until there was just the muffled sound of hooves and feet shuffling towards the edge of the water.

***

It was a short trip to the water’s edge and yet at the same time it was achingly slow. Once they had started to get the horses moving back to the lake, they moved fairly quickly. However, each step seemed momentous. It felt important and eerily final. It felt like a car crash in slow motion. It was happening faster than anticipated and yet awareness was keen in every millisecond as they careened toward their destination.

As they walked, Willow, Tara, Faith and Wesley kept a guiding hand tangled loosely into the horses’ manes. Dawn kept at the ready with a crossbow in hand as she followed Spike and Xander. The horses seemed to keep a little distance from the canoe being ported by Oz’s pack-mates, but not enough that they were excluded from the small herd.

The horses familiarity with the ground, a few guiding worlds from Spike and the slight light being offered by the waning crescent moon allowed them to make it fairly easily to the lake shore. Once there, the porters put down their boats and set them half in the water and half on the shore.

The others went to give the horses a final pat to scatter them. When suddenly the horses reared, let out a demonic shriek and began to charge into the water.

Tara screamed as she was jerked forward.

“Tara!” Willow cried as she too found herself being pulled into her water as her hands were suddenly sticking to the horse’s fur.

“Faith!” Wesley yelled hoping to warn his slayer as he tried jerking his hands free from where they were now entangled in a clingy black mane.

“Wes!” Faith answered while Xander quickly shoved Dawn down to the ground and began to run to Willow as she was now waist deep in the surf.

“Fucking hell!” Spike snarled running for Tara while Larry headed for Wesley.

Oz signaled his pack-mates and they began to shift.

Meanwhile the horses continued their charge into the water with the four Scoobies literally glued to them. As they trampled deep into the depths they too began to shift. Their fur turned to a sticky rough skin and their torso became more humanoid. The snouts grew longer and their blunt teeth sharpened into dripping fangs.

“Each Uisge!” Wesley cried as his head dunked under the water and then bobbed back up. He sputtered, “Water..demons! Drown.. ! Eat..!”

He sank again.

“WESLEY!” Faith screamed before she too was pulled under.

“Bloody hell! Pet don’t touch them!” Spike ordered as he wrapped his arms around Tara’s waist and pulled. She screamed in pain as her hands stayed glued to the demon. “Touch ‘em and you stick!”
A cold wind started to swirl around the lack. Clouds formed and red lightning streaked across the sky. The unmistakable crackle of powerful magical energy gathering could be felt. Xander tugged at Willow even as he could feel some of the energy swirling around her like water down a drain. It was if she was siphoning some of it to her. Then she began to mutter in a deep guttural language he didn’t recognize.

The Each Usige in front of her let out a high pitched agonizing howl as suddenly its skin was stripped from its body.

“Willow?” Xander cried in horror as the witch turned in his arms. Her eyes were solid black. Her skin was a pale ugly white except for the black veins of dark magic pumping through her. The Usige’s skin sloughed off her palms. She tilted head and looked over towards where Tara was starting to disappear among the waves.

“No!” Xander shouted in warning suddenly fearing what was about to happen. He was thrown backwards by an unseen force and landed flat on his back on the shore.

Willow’s arms shot straight out from her body as Tara slid screaming under the churning water. Slowly she lifted them and as she did the demon horse and Tara rose up from the waves. Willow tilted her hands palms out and for a moment the blonde witch and demon just levitated in the air above the lake. Then Willow snapped her arms apart.

Both the Usige and Tara screamed as they were ripped apart from each other. Spike’s hold on Tara was torn loose as well and he went flying back into the tree line. The Usige fell whining back into the foaming lake; black and red blood oozing down its side. Blue lightning swirled down from the sky illuminating Tara as she hung in the air, blood streaming from her palms as the skin had been ripped from her flesh. Eyes wide with pain and horror she stared at Willow.

Thunder crashed and lights began bending into purple spirals creating a vortex of wind and energy somewhere on the shore behind them. It swallowed up Tara’s feeble cry. Xander struggled to his feet. A sopping wet Larry climbed out of the lake to lend a hand.

“Willow! Stop!” Xander yelled over the force of the vortex. “You’re hurting her!”

Once again Willow turned to look at him. This time there was a hint of confusion in her alien black eyes. She turned back to look at the levitating Tara who was now cradling her bleeding hands to her chest.

Somewhere Oz and his pack’s howls of rage could be heard. In all the torturous nightmares he’d had in the Vault, Xander’s never had one as horrifying to him as this reality right now. He stumbled forward trying to reach Willow only to have Larry hold him back.

“We have other problems,” he screamed into Xander’s ear then pointed behind them. Xander turned and looked in horror as he saw figures moving out of the center of the vortex which was spinning wildly and growing. Xander looked around for Spike then Dawn. She was crouched on the ground by the canoes where Xander had left her. Spike was nowhere to be seen.

“Dawn!” Xander yelled back to Larry. “Get her out of here!”

Larry nodded and released Xander to go after her. Xander look back to Willow.

She was gesturing with her arms and as she did Tara’s sobbing form drifted closer. Willow tilted her palm again, this time to stop Tara. Then she studied the other girl like she was an ant under a telescope.
“Willow,” Tara sobbed her face streaked with tears and her hands arms and drenched red. “Pl..please help me.”

A beam of moonlight pierced the swirling chaos of lightning and energy. It was pure clean and illuminating. For the briefest moments it illuminated Tara’s face and reflected deep into the black void of Willow’s eyes. A burst of energy shot out through Willow like a shock wave once again knocking Xander to the ground. As it rippled and rolled away the black veins melted away from Willow's skin and the darkness receded from her eyes. Tara fell and landed at Willow’s feet. Willow sank down quickly beside her wrapping her arms around the weeping woman.

“Goddess! Tara! Oh Tara!” she cried.  “I’m sorry! I’m..so...so sorry!”

Xander rolled up to his feet and looked back at the vortex in time to see the werewolves charge. Several blue female demons with short spikes on their forehead surged forth to engage them. The fighting was fierce. The demons fought as if well trained. They were a tight unit and their weapons were vicious and sharp.

They forced the wolves back and as they did more figures emerged from the vortex. Xander looked for Larry and Dawn. They were moving quickly toward the treeline far from the battle. He started to look away to refocus on helping Tara and Willow when he notice Larry and Dawn suddenly stopping. They froze as if they had become two living mannequins.

“No!” Xander shouted, rose to his feet and began to run to them.

TBC
Chapter 83

Faith would scream in rage if she wasn’t submerged under the murky depths of the lake. She opened her eyes as she continued to struggle with all of her slayer strength to free her hands from the sticky coat of the horse demon. They wouldn’t budge. As she struggled the demon twisted and turned like a crocodile while it continued to dive deeper.

Wesley! She thought in frantic desperation opening her eyes vainly hoping she could get a glimpse of her watcher in the churning watery darkness around her. She saw nothing but the wake of her own struggles.

Time to break this horsey! She thought as she did some twisting of her own and managed to wrap her legs around the demon’s neck. She locked her ankles and then began to use her thighs as a vice. Ride ’em cowgirl!

The demon stopped twisting and began to buck. Its descent slowed as it tried to throw the slayer. Faith held on with a fierce ugly smile. It was the demon’s turn to begin to make desperate moves and with each one the slayer managed to squeeze the vice just a little tighter using the demon’s own sticky skin to her advantage.

White foam began to bubble out of the creature’s mouth as Faith started to see spots.

C’mon and die already! Her mind screamed as her lungs began to burn.

The bucking began to slow and as bubbles began to force their way out from Faith’s nose and mouth when she felt a ‘pop’ in creature’s neck. Suddenly her hands were free. Immediately she kicked away from the dead Uisge.

More bubbles escaped as her lungs convulsed and she fought the need to inhale. Then her face broke the surface and with almost a scream of agony she exhaled before quickly drawing air into her oxygen starved body. It hurt. She coughed and sputtered while looking around.

The world was chaos. Lightning was flashing and a vortex was swirling open on the shore like some sort of portal. She could make out snarls, howls and whimpers as she saw the werewolves battle a horde of blue she-demons. Xander was struggling to get to his feet while Willow was curled in a heap around who she thought might be Tara. She couldn’t see Dawn or Larry.

All the while she kept desperately gulping air. She did one more spin in the water.

“Wes! Wesley!” she shouted weakly panic rising through her veins. Her watcher was missing. The lake still churned around her. With a snarl she reached for the knife hidden at the small of her back.

Hang on Watcherman! She thought as she took a giant gulp of air and dove back under the water.

Bloody witch is gonna be the death of me yet, Spike thought as he pulled himself off a branch impaled through his spleen. With a groan he pushed with his feet against the trunk to give himself leverage and pushed forward. He slid off the branch with slick squelching sound and dropped to the ground.

“Pet!” he groaned at the sound of the vortex opening up on the beach. He gathered his strength and starting running back towards the water’s edge. He paused when he heard the growling of
werewolves. He turned and saw them attack the first round of demons coming through the swirling portal.

*Sisterhood of Jhe,* he thought as he saw the blue demons. *Gotta find Xander.*

He turned back to the lake and looked for his Claimiant as he ran. He spotted Red and Glenda and knew Xander had to be near them and he was. Only it didn’t look as if his pet was going to stay there. Spike turned to see what had Xander’s attention. That’s when he noticed Nibblet and the prat, Larry, frozen mid-step.

*Magic,* Spike thought as he spun around to see if he could spot the caster. He nearly froze himself when he spotted a wrinkled red demon surrounded by a large number of bulky red demons with tusks coming out of their mouths. *Vail! Peaches brought Vail!*

*With a snarl Spike turned back to continue to head for his Xander. He had to stop him from doing something incredibly stupid.*

*Like playing the hero,* Spike thought.

Xander was up on his feet and running toward Dawn before Spike could reach him. However, he didn’t get far before the vampire reached him. All around them chaos was growing. The growls of the wolves were now turning to howls and whimpers as the red Kith’harn joined with the blue Jhe demons.

“Pet, we have to go,” Spike yelled as he grabbed Xander’s arm.

“WE have to get Dawnie!” Xander yelled back as he struggled to jerk his arm out of the vampire’s grasp.

“Xander…it’s a portal..the wards…it’s triggered a portal. Angelus’s troops are pouring in,” Spike continued to yell. “We have to go.”

“Where?” Xander yelled! “This is it! This is the last stand.”

“Not for very much longer!”

Xander once again tugged at Spike’s arm and then suddenly the world seemed to rock and tilt.

“Bollocks!” Spike cried as he stumbled.

“Spike!” Xander cried in confusion as he stumbled and the earth shook beneath him. “Earthquake!”

“Tremblers!” Spike shouted as he too tried to keep his feet under him. He pointed toward the north and south where the rocky debris was. “Quake demons.”

“Quake de.de.demons?” Xander stuttered as he shook so hard his teeth chattered.

Spike pointed again while trying to help steady Xander. This time Xander saw what his master was pointing out; two large rocky creatures with long stalactite-like teeth and long heavy but nimble stone like tail which they were whipping around and smacking the ground to create the quakes.

“M..m..master!” Xander cried as the ground now shook so fiercely it literally rolled up under him and knocked him backwards.

“Xan!” Spike cried as he rolled and caught his pet. The rolling and quaking continued until the
vampire thought he was going to shake a part. He struggled to get to his feet but the ground refused to stay put eventually all he could do was try and curl up with Xander close to him and hope the bone rattling quakes ceased soon.

***

Faith was blind under the water but it didn’t stop her from searching for Wesley. She kicked out with her feet and searched with her free hand. If she encountered sticky flesh then she drove her knife into it until she was free again.

Each time she had to come up for air she let out a little cry of rage. She knew she was running out of time, if it wasn’t already too late.

**NO!** she thought as she dove under for a fourth time. *I will not lose him!*

Then the water began to roll strangely. It wasn’t just the churning from the Usige or her but it was something else. Waves began to build and throw her and Usige about crashing into one another. Instead of cursing the strange phenomena she used it as an opportunity to strike.

Then with another crash of water bodies she felt flesh that wasn’t sticky. It felt cold and clammy, but human.

**Wes!** She thought as she grabbed for it and felt her watcher’s face under her fingertips. With vicious speed she traced his arms down to find where he was stuck to the water demon. With more savagery than she’d shown since the world fell she killed the Usige and then quickly began to tug Wesley to the surface.

He was so cold and still it chilled her. When she broke the surface of the water she began to swim towards the closest shore to her but out of sight where the portal had appeared. As she swam she towed Wesley. It was rough going as the strange waves kept coming over and over.

Yet, she was a slayer and not only did she have supernatural strength but she had stamina. More important she was Faith and she had drive. She was not going to let Wesley die. She wasn’t!

Eventually she made it to shore as the strange waves died down. She was exhausted but she managed to drag Wesley out of the water. He still hadn’t moved. Quickly she rolled him over and pushed on the back of his lungs to try and expel any water. Then she rolled him back on his back.

“This isn’t how I wanted our first kiss to go down. Not even going to be any tongue,” she muttered with hot tears flowing from her eyes as she leaned over and began to perform mouth to mouth resuscitation.

TBC

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**Author’s Notes:**

- Horses based on a Scottish folklore
- Blue demons
- Tremblors
Chapter 84

After Spike thought his entrails had been shaken more than one of the late Zorn’s martinis the quaking stopped.

“Xander,” Spike hissed as he loosened his hold on his Claimaint and rolled away. “We have to move.”

“Nuh...I want the number of that truck,” Xander said as he struggled to his feet for the umpteenth time since their plan had so far south it crossed the border some where past Laredo. He felt worse than the time his parents had left him on the tilt-a-whirl. His head was spinning in one direction while his stomach was spending another and his eyes refused to focus.

“Believe it was ‘666,’” Spike said as he grabbed Xander’s arm and hauled him up with him. He looked around for a quick escape and was not surprised to find there wasn’t one. Both the Sisterhood and the Kith’harn were closing in on them in a tight circle. Still Spike didn't intend to go down without a fight. He let go of Xander's arm and fell into a fighting stance. He risked a quick glance over to Xander and saw his pet was struggling to follow suit.

_That’s my White Knight_, Spike thought as he slid into game face.

“You sure you want it to go down like this, Spikey?” a familiar voice called out as the encircling demons parted to make a small opening.

“You sure you want it to go down like this, Spikey?” a familiar voice called out as the encircling demons parted to make a small opening.

“Sire,” Spike ground out backing closer to Xander.

“The one and only, if I may be so humble,” Angelus said stepping into the ring of demons and looking around. “Ooo...hoo, quite a party. I’m so disappointed you didn’t invite me.

“Musta slipped my mind,” Spie growled. “Lorne was the one who usually saw to all those details.”

“Well, he _did_ have a head for those kind of things, didn’t he?” Angelus grinned back at Spike. “So, who’s all here?”

He spun around again; slowly this time. He grinned at Xander. Spike felt his human sidle closer so their sides were pressed together.

“Your lovely and spirited, Claimaint, Xander. No big surprise there.”

One of the Kith’harn demons stepped up.

“Most of the wolves are dead. A few escaped into the woods,” it reported.

“Tsk tsk,” Angelus said looking back at Spike. “I have to insist, Spike, no dogs allowed on the beach.”

He looked back at the demon.

“Take a group into the woods…and bring me back their pelts.”

“NO!” Xander yelled jumping forward only to be held back by Spike.

“You know...he really needs to be broken,” Angelus chimed.
“He’s mine,” Spike growled.

“Yes, he is,” Angelus said with a grin. Then he started to spin around again. “Surely there’s more! I mean it just can’t be you two and some dogs?”

A few more demons moved forward. A couple of the red Kith’har demons shoved Dawn and Larry in front of Angelus while a one of the blue Jhe demons walked forward. Tara and Willow walked in front of her. Malignant green glowing spheres of energy surrounded each of them.

Again Xander tried to surge forward again but Spike continued his hold. Xander looked wide-eyed and terrified first to Dawn and then to Willow. Willow looked pale and sallow. Her gaze was unfocused. Glancing at Tara Xander could see she looked the same.

“Willow!” Xander cried.

“Oh…don’t worry, Xan,” Angelus said suddenly whipping around to the other side of him and crooning in his ear despite the hiss of anger from Spike. “Just a little spell. It’ll keep her…and…now who is the other one? I don’t think we’ve been properly introduced.”

“Get the fuck away from me!” Xander snapped stepping back from the vampire even as Spike moved between them.

The two vampires exchanged deadly glares before Angelus spun around to stand between the two witches. He was grinning.

“Well…you can make the introductions later,” he said looking at Tara. “I can’t wait to get to know her better.”

“Not gonna happen!” Xander snapped.

“Keep mouthin’ off, boy,” Angelus sneered in his Irish lilt. “Please…because I’m gonna stuff my cock down yer throat for every time you do.”

Spike growled, “Not while he’s mine!”

“We’ll see,” Angelus said smiling as he looked to Willow. “She’s gonna make a fine addition ta my stables. Imagine the powerful witches she’ll breed!”

“Don’t think Red swings that way,” Spike said.

“Does it matter?” Angelus replied.

“You think you can get a witch ta breed when she doesn’t want to?”

Angelus looked over at Tara then back to Willow. Then he looked back to Spike and Xander.

“Sumthin’ tells me she can be convinced.”

“You’ll never control Willow,” Xander said.

“Never, never say never, boy,” Angelus answered as he stepped away from the witches to move closer to Dawn and Larry. Dawn sucked in a breath but didn’t flinch.

Stay strong Dawnie, Xander thought even as he began to crumble inside. His friends were at the mercy of Angelus and there wasn’t anything he could do.
The vampire paused in front of Larry and frowned a moment.

“Have we met? You look familiar,” he said spinning back to look at Spike.

“Go to he…” Larry started to say

The blonde vampire stiffened and tightened his grip on Xander’s arm. Xander looked at Spike then looked back to Angelus. Angelus grinned then looked at Larry.

“That’s right,” Angelus said interrupting Larry as his arm shot out and his hand grabbed them man’s throat. There was a terrible choking and wet snapping sound as Angelus squeezed crushing former football player’s larynx and windpipe. “You’re dead.”

The vampire released his grip and Larry fell to the ground making wet gurgling sounds while Dawn began to scream. Angelus put his hand to his ear as if he was listening to fine music. He winked at Spike and Xander.

“LARRY!” Xander cried knowing this time there was no trick. This time there was no saving him.

For several long minutes there was just the sound of Dawn sobbing and Larry dying. Finally when Larry was still and quiet Angelus again turned his focus on Spike.

“This it then, Spikey? A dead man? A girl? Some dogs? A couple of witches and the Donut Boy? This? This has been the big plan you’ve been spending all the time hatching against me?”

Spike sucked in an unneeded breath.

“You didn’t think I didn’t know?” Angelus asked moving back to the blonde vampire and wiping away a non-existent piece of fluff from Spike’s shoulder. He leaned in close and smiled. “It’s been fun though. Watching you play your games. Sacrificing Lorne!”

He spun away again and moved behind Dawn.

Xander jumped and Spike grabbed him with both hands.

“Leave her alone!” Xander screamed.

Dawn held very still but her body began to tremble.

“All of this for.. a key,” Angelus continued as he snaked his hands up Dawn’s shoulders and then slowly around her neck. “A key. And I gotta ask, Spikey. Where is it?”

“NO! NO!” Xander yelled.

Dawn’s wide and frightened eyes locked on to Xander’s. Angelus leaned down sniffed her hair.

“She smells so good,” he purred. “So innocent.”

Spike growled.

“They, key, Spike,” Angelus said squeezing his hands just a little.

Dawn let out a small squeal.

“Kill her and you’ll never find it,” Spike finally answered.
“Now don’t be greedy,” Angelus said before laying a small tender kiss to Dawn’s cheek. “You already have Xander. Why can’t I have this one?”

“Xa…Xan..Xander!” Dawn cried.

“Get away from her!” Xander yelled as he continued to struggle against Spike.

“She…she has nothing to do with this,” Spike lied.

Angelus’ eyes narrowed. He looked at Dawn then back at Spike.

“Cyvus,” he barked as he let go and stepped away from the frightened young woman.

A bald red demon, similar to the Kith’harn, stepped forward. He bowed low in front of Angelus.

“Who…or what is she?” Angelus asked stepping away from Dawn.

Xander looked in horror at Spike. What had he done?

Cyvus stared at Dawn then raised his hand. Brilliant purple light shot forth. She screamed as it engulfed her. Blue light exploded out of her briefly lifting her up off the ground. It was momentarily blinding. Then as suddenly as it appeared it winked out dropping the unconscious Scooby to the ground.

“DAWN!” Xander cried.

Cyvus turned to look at Angelus. He bowed again.

“The key, m’lord.” He said. “The human. She is the key.”

Angelus smiled then he bent down to pick up the unconscious girl. He carried her in his arms and yelled to the demons. He motioned with his head toward Spike and Xander.

“Grab these two and get Lindsey. We’re moving this party to the island,” he ordered as he began to head toward the boat house.

The demons pushed Spike and Xander forward. Xander stared in horror at Spike.

What had he done? Why had he done it? Why had he all but given Dawn away to Angelus?

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Faith wasn’t sure how much longer she could keep going. She wasn’t sure how long she had been going. The only count she had been keeping was the one she hoped was keeping Wesley alive; press thirty, breathe two.

Over and over she did the routine hoping, praying, he would begin to respond. All the while she tried to ignore how vulnerable she felt in their shadowed spot on the beach. It wouldn’t take much to be found.

And if we are, she thought even as she did another chest compression, Wesley is dead.

She could hear Xander’s screams. Every slayer cell in her body urged her to get into the fight; help him. She needed to help whoever was left and yet she didn’t. She continued to try and resuscitate her Watcher until her arms were so tired she couldn’t feel them anymore. Her head grew dizzy and still
she continued; tears streaming down her face.

She knew if it was anyone else she’d have given up by now.

*But not, Wes,* she thought angrily. *He never gave up on me, I’m not giving up on him!*

Once again she moved her hands from her Watcher’s chest. She placed one underneath his neck to make sure his head was tilted. The other she used to pinch his nose shut. She leaned over to cover his mouth when she froze.

“Uhunn,” Wesley let out a slight groan.

“Wes!” Faith hissed as loud as she dared staring at her Watcher’s face.

“Nnnn,” came another groan as she saw movement under his eyelids.

“That’s it!” she sobbed kissing his forehead lightly. “C’mon Watcherman. Come back to me. You’ve got a lot to teach me remember? Not many men can say that.”

Then she quickly cast her eyes to the beach. A blue light was bursting forth from Dawn. Quickly she covered Wesley’s body with her own hoping to keep their presence shielded from attention.

“Ga!” Wes grunted.

“Shhh,” Faith said putting her finger to the semi-conscious man’s lips while never taking her eyes off the action further down on the beach. When she saw the figures starting to move farther away, toward the boat house she cautiously eased off Wesley.

Then keeping low to the ground she snaked her arms under his shoulders and began to pull him slowly and quietly back toward the tree line. Every now and then she paused as another moan or groan escaped him. Then she would cover his mouth with her fingertips and keep watch until he settled again. Only when he was quiet did she begin to move.

By the time she had pulled Wesley into the tree line she was past exhausted. She knew the others needed her. She was the slayer; the chosen one. If anyone could bring them back from the edge of disaster it was her.

She took one last look at Wesley and then dug deep to find the strength to get to her feet. She looked toward the boat house and rolled her shoulders back. There was only one comfort any slayer had before going into a battle with overwhelming odds. She was *the* slayer, but she wouldn’t be the last.

Faith stumbled forward and then let out an aborted scream of rage as a large hand suddenly covered her mouth and even larger arm wrapped around her waist yanking her back to press against an impossibly muscled body. She kicked and bit, but it was like fighting a wall.

The mountain of flesh held her even as the last of her strength waned. Faith looked to Wes and saw another large demonoid shape bend down and scoop him up as the wall that held her drug her back deeper into shadows.

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Xander’s mind was almost numb. There was just too much for him to process. He stared at Dawn as she sat huddled near the front of the boat where Angelus had put her. She stared back at him with eyes wide with terror. Sitting next to her, absently petting her hair was the vampire himself. Lindsey knelt at Angelus’ feet with his hands cuffed behind his back.
Seated in the center of the boat was a Kith’harn demon who drove. Next to him was Cyvus who watched everything with a look of odd detachment. Across from him knelt Willow and Tara still engulfed in the same green spheres. The one Jhe demoness sat behind them.

In the back was Xander, on his knees in front of Spike who was surrounded by two more Kith’harn demons. Furthermore, Angelus had ordered a thick chain wrapped around the younger vampire which was hooked to a large concrete block.

Looking to the side of the boat Xander could see nothing but the dark spray of the lake. The dark water brought back unwanted memories of the Tank and Xander found he was half nauseous. They were moving quickly. He had no idea how close to the island they were, but he knew they were far from shore.

*Over deep water,* Xander thought with a shudder.

Dawn sniffed back another sob.

Xander tried to lift his chin. He tried to will her some comfort. Angelus just grinned and murmured something in her ear. She paled.

“Pet,” Spike hissed as Xander started to rise. “Down.”

Everything warred inside of Xander. Dawn needed him. Now wasn’t the time to play Spike’s games! Especially after he’d all but told Angelus who Dawnie was!

Yet, too much was between he and Spike. He’d been too long in Vegas; part of a demon’s world and he found himself settling down.

Angelus laughed and raised his hand fist signaling the Kith’harn demon to stop the boat. Xander surged forward and almost lost his balance as the boat’s engine came to an idle and the waves pushed the boat. The elder vampire got to his feet gracefully and walked to the back of the boat.

He looked at Spike and then at Xander. He shook his head then grabbed Spike’s chin.

“When are ya gonna learn, William?” he said his speech thick with the brogue of his native lands. “Ya can’t beat me. Yer too soft.”

“Unchain me,” Spike hissed. “Let’s just you and me dance, sire. We’ll see who’s soft.”

“Eventually,” Angelus grinned. “But right now I have a promise ta keep to ya. What kinda sire would I be if I couldn’t keep my promises?”

“Promise, sire?” Spike asked as fear started to stab at his gut for the first time since their capture.

Xander cried out as he was suddenly jerked to his feet by Angelus.

“Your little lad here, Spike,” Angelus said shoving Xander into Spike. Xander hissed as his body slammed into the hard chain wrapped around the blonde vampire.

“What about Xander?”

“Yer gonna give ‘im to me, William,” Angelus purred.

NO! Xander silently screamed looking at Spike. NO!
“You really are sixpence short of a shilling aren’t ya?”

“Most likely,” Angelus laughed. “Doesn’t change what’s going to happen.”

He snapped his fingers and one of the Kith’harn moved and lifted up the concrete block Spike was chained too. The demon then moved to the edge of the boat and held it out over the water.

“‘Gelus?’ Spike asked fear starting to creep into his voice.

“I know I should just kill you, Spike, but… yer family,” Angelus said turning the hold he had one Spike chin to a caress. “Call me sentimental but that means something. So, I think it’s time ta give ya another time out. Time ta think about what’s important ta you. Who’s important to you.”

Xander's heart felt like it was going to beat right out of his chest. He knew Spike had to hear it. He tried to take several deep calming breaths.

Spike has a plan, Xander thought. He always has a plan. However just in case Master Marvelous doesn’t…

Xander began to wildly look around the boat for anything that might help them He looked for anything that might give him any ideas. That’s when he noticed Lindsey. Lindsey was slowly edging his way up back toward the boat’s throttle.

What is he doing? Xander wondered. And why did Angelus even bring him?

Lindsey looked at Xander. His eyes widened for a moment. There was a message there: Be ready.

Ready for what? Xander wondered.

“I know who’s important ta me,” Spike said.

“Do ya, Spike?” Angelus said pressing close trapping Xander’s between them.

Xander had a dejavu feeling. He remembered the last time he’d been pressed between the two vampires. It was that horrible day back in Spike’s office when Angelus had killed Lorne.

He could feel Spike stiffen behind him and he knew Spike was remembering too.

“I’m givin’ ya a time out, William,” Angelus purred. “I’m gonna drop ya over board and let ya spend a few decades at the bottom of this lake to think about things and you’ve got a choice.”

Choice? Xander wondered as he watched Lindsey creep closer.

“Choice?” Spike asked.

“Ya can give Xander to me. Give him permission to go with me, I can kill him here and now, or you can say nothing and he’ll die a slow painful death the farther he gets away from you.”

BASTARD!

“Bastard!”

“I don’t think that’s actually a choice, Spikey,” Angelus said. “I guess I could have Xander breed some while yer gone though. Whaddya think? Think we should pair him with the witches?”

“Ain’t going to happen, Deadboy,” Xander snarled unable to keep silent any longer.
“Oh please, William,” Angelus cooed as he moved his hand away from Spike’s chin to stroke Xander’s. “Give him to me.”

“Don’t do it, Sp..Master,” Xander said jerking away from Angelus.

Xan! Spike thought as everything Angelus said came crashing back into his mind. Oh yeah, William, ya’ll give him ta me. I won’t break him. I will respect yer Claim, but ya know what I will do?

I’ll take him. I’ll take him and he’ll fight me, Spike Ya know he will. No matter what ya tell him. He’ll fight me and that’s just the way I’ll want it.

“William?” Angelus asked.

“I can’t,” Spike said in the smallest voice Xander had ever heard the vampire use.

“So..then what’s it to be?” Angelus asked as he wrapped his hands around Xander’s throat and began to squeeze. “Should I kill him now?”

Xander started to claw at the vampire’s hands as he made terrible wheezing and gasping sounds. Dawn screamed and the demon who’d been seated at the wheel of the boat rushed forward and restrained her. Lindsey slipped around and moved next to the throttle while the other demons were watching Spike and Angelus.

“NO!” Spike roared.

“So it’s the slow death then?” Angelus said as he pulled he hands away from Xander’s throat. Xander took great big gulping breaths of air. As he did he noticed Lindsey again. The look on his face was even more urgent.

What? Xander thought and then he had another run in with the clue bus. It ran right over his fears and barreled straight into his memories threatening to shatter him. Instead he stiffened like a statue. There was another choice but it was up to him, not Spike.

He stared back at Lindsey for a moment then gave an almost imperceptible nod. He began to slow down his breathing. He could do this. He could. He fought back the terror and the nausea threatening to rise up and veto his brain.

“No, sire,” Spike whispered.

“Well..yer runnin’ out of options here, Spikey.”

Xander pressed back against Spike. It’s ok, Spike, he thought and hoped somehow his body language conveyed the message. It’s ok.

Pet, Spike thought. In all of his plans, this was one move he didn’t think he’d have to make. This is one play he hadn’t seen on the board.

The heat of Xander’s body pressing close to him comforted him and yet tormented him. He knew what he had to do no matter the cost to his soul and demon both. I can’t let you die, Xander.

“Sire…will you…” Spike began and then faltered over his words.

“What’s that?” Angelus asked leaning back. “Louder, William. I can’t hear you.”

Forgive me, Xan, Spike thought.
“Sire,” Spike began again in a broken voice. “Will you...will you take my Claimant? I give him permission to part from me.”

“With pleasure, Spike,” Angelus said as he snapped his fingers and the Kith’harn dropped the cement block overboard.

“Pet!” Spike screamed as suddenly he was jerked over the side.

“Spike!” Xander screamed.

Angelus laughed then the boat bucked and leaped forward as Lindsey fell against throttle. The vampire stumbled and lost his hold on Xander.

Xander had time to send one last look to Dawn and then he took a deep breath and dove overboard after Spike. As the black water closed in all around him over his head so did the memories of the Tank. He opened his eyes and kicked.

He kicked against the water and the memories as he desperately searched for a shock of blond hair.

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“LINDSEY!” Angelus roared before turning around to see his toy defiantly leaning against the throttle. Lindsey grinned his hatred back at the vampire. Angelus charged forward. He grabbed the human by the throat and threw him to the floor.

Lindsey landed hard on his restrained hands. There was the dull crack of a finger breaking. Angelus snapped his fingers and pointed at the wheel of the boat signaling one of the other demons to take control while he ground his heel painfully into Lindsey’s sternum.

“You just ruined my evening, boy,” he ground out in time with the twisting of his heel. Lindsey cried out in pain. “I had such plans fer Xander! You didn’t need ta be jealous, Linds. I wouldn’t have left you outta the fun!”

He looked back at the demon driving.

“Circle back at around! See if you spot anything!”

The demon did as instructed and the boat made a wide turn to the left circling back around to where Spike and Xander had gone overboard.

“PRABHA!” Cyvus shouted and white light flared briefly high above the water. There was no sign of the vampire or his Claimaint.

Angelus growled and kicked Lindsey. He stormed over to Dawn and grabbed her chin. She struggled to pull away from him.

“Guess you’ll have ta take his place,” he crooned. Angelus looked back at Lindsey who was coughing and trying to sit up. “Whaddya think, Lindsey? She’s softer than Xander!”

“You...think..I’m gonna break over a girl?” Lindsey wheezed. “You don’t think I’ve seen..done worse working for Wolfram and Hart?”

“You went weak for Darla,” Angelus grinned spinning Dawn around in front of him and pulling her close.

“Let go of me!” Dawn yelled as she kicked at Angelus’ shins. The vampire laughed.

“I think we both know she’s no Darla,” Lindsey replied coolly staying back at the vampire.

“But she is the Key,” Angelus said his hand slipping low over Dawn’s stomach, “and her blood will open portals.”

Lindsey threw back his head and laughed.

“That why you brought me, Angelus? You think..you think I’ll actually tell you where to look for him?”

Angelus nodded at the demon driving. Once it again it turned the boat and it began to head back toward the island.
“Up ‘til now, Linds it’s all been fun and games but play time is over. When I cut her open and the blood starts to flow, make no mistake, you will tell me what dimension to unlock. You will tell me where you hid Connor…where you hid my son.”

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Black memories and water closed in all around Xander. He was lost in them. They threatened to choke him. Still, he forced his eyes open and his legs kicking. He swept the water away from him as he dived deeper.

_C’mon, Spike. Where are you?_ He thought as he strained his eyes searching for a shocking streaking of gold against the cloying blackness. _This is one time your hair makes sense!_

He ignored the slight burn beginning in his lungs.

_**I lasted longer in the Tank!**_ He dared to remind himself. _**This! This is nothing, Xanman!**_

Overhead he could hear the rev of the engine as the boat circled overhead. He gave another strong kick and pushed with his arms propelling himself deeper. Then suddenly there was a burst of white light.

_Dawn!_ Xander thought as he froze wondering what was happening. He looked up briefly half expecting to see another body come crashing into the lake. Nothing. He turned his head and looked around and just off to his right and below him his saw a garish bit of white-gold.

_Spike!_ Xander thought as he once again began to swim. His long arms, legs and years on the swim team gave him an advantage. It didn’t take him long before he was right over the top of the vampire.

Reaching out he grabbed at the vampire’s jacket with one hand. Spike jerked and looked up at him. Their eyes met as the light began to fade. The vampire shook his head furiously while Xander held on and as the weight of the block pulled them both under.

As they sank, Xander grabbed at Spike with his other hand. His lungs began to burn in earnest. He shook his head and ignored them. Quickly, like some spider, he crawled his way down Spike’s sinking body feeling for where the chain was hooked in the back.

The sound of the boat began to fade away as his hands roamed over the vampire’s jerking body searching and at the same trying to send a message: HOLD STILL!

_You aren’t making this any easier,_ Xander thought as he felt around at the small of Spike’s back with one hand while holding on to his jacket with another. _You throw me off its going to be that much harder for me to find you a second time and believe me, Master Leadweight, I’ll be back to search as often as it takes!_

Xander almost let out a shout, and some precious air, when his fingers finally felt the metal hook. Quickly he swung his legs through the water to wrap around Spike’s as an anchor. He squeezed tight. Finally Spike stilled.

Then Xander began to tug and pull at the chain trying to get enough slack to unhook it. His lungs were in agony and his head was starting to grow light.
I can hold out a little longer, he told himself as he tugged at the chain. Held out longer the third time in the Tank.

Small bubbles began to leak from his nose. Still he yanked and pulled.

C’mon! He thought. C’MON!

He could feel Spike grunt underneath him.

Sorry! He thought as he continued to struggle to get just a little more slack in the chain.

Bubbles were now starting to press out from his lips as the blood roared in his ears. He gave the chain another fierce tug then heard a muffled yell of pain through the water. The hook slid out from the link and the chain went lax around Spike.

Xander immediately released the vampire and began kicking up as fast as he could. More bubbles began to escape his mouth and nose as pain erupted in his lungs. Once again he was in the Tank. Once again he was drowning! There was no way out! He was going to die!

Then something strong and powerful wrapped around his waist. Suddenly he was moving faster through the water. There was another set of legs kicking with his pushing him up; pushing him out of the darkness.

"UHHHAHHHHAAHH!" Xander gasped as his face broke the surface and he exhaled while trying to inhale at the same time. He coughed painfully. The world spun around him.

"Pet!" Spike tried to say as he coughed and then retched water out of his own lungs.

Xander was oblivious. He was lost in the sensation air pulsing in and out of his chest. His wet skin was shivering cold in the night air and overhead the small twinkling light of the stars almost seemed blinding.

He was still for a moment. He was quiet.

"Xander?" Spike tried again.

For several long moments Xander lay still. He was quiet except for the sound of his blood pulsing through his veins and his lungs greedily sucking in much needed oxygen. Eventually though the sounds began to settle and finally his human spun around in his arms. He stared at Spike then leaned his forehead and touched it to the vampire’s.

“I didn’t drown,” Xander whispered. “I…I’m not in the tank.”

“You didn’t. You aren’t,” Spike said pulling him closer. He could feel small shivers racing down Xander’s body and cursed the fact he was undead. He could offer his love no warmth. “But you may freeze if we don’t get you to shore.”

Spike sniffed the air.

“Or worse, one of the Usige, may come back to try and take us down again.”

Xander nodded but did not move.
“Pet,” Spike said softly leaning back slightly so he could look at Xander. “You..you did good.”

“I did better than good, Spike,” Xander grinned as his teeth began to chatter.

“We gotta move.”

Xander nodded.

“I just…I beat ‘em, Spike. I beat ‘em!”

“I know..I know you did.”

Xander took a deep breath then looked around.

“I..I can’t see much of anything. Can you? You know which way to go?”

“I think I can us back to shore,” Spike said.

“Then what?” Xander asked.

“Let’s just do first things first, yeah?”

“Yea…yeah, Spike,” Xander said as his shivering started to get more pronounced. “Maybe moving will warm me up some too.”

Spike nodded.

“Stay close then,” he ordered as he released his hold on Xander. He turned to the right and began to swim. Xander followed close.

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Spike wasn’t sure how long they swam, but he knew it wasn’t long before Xander started to fade. While the human was a better swimmer than the vampire, he didn’t have the strength or the stamina. Plus, unlike Spike, Xander needed to breath and the near drowning had drained his Claimaint more than either one of them cared to admit. Additionally, while the cold was a nuisance to Spike it was something far more sinister to Xander.

After a while they were barely crawling through the water toward the shore.

“This isn’t going to work, pet,” Spike said as he stopped and treaded water as he waited for Xander to catch up.

“D..D..Don’t have…m..mu..much choice,” Xander stuttered as he made his way to the vampire.

“Let me help you.”

“I c..c..can do th..this.”

“Wasn’t a suggestion, pet,” Spike said suddenly wrapping his hand around Xander’s chest and up under his harms.
“Hey! Master McGrabby!”

“Relax!” Spike ordered as Xander started to squirm. Xander sighed and obeyed. Spike then turned and began swimming with one arm while pulling Xander.

“Y…you..just want to..to mooch m..m..my heat,” Xander said.

Spike closed his eyes momentarily. It was true. Swimming like this was warmer. He could feel the heat from Xander but it scared him. He knew Xander wasn’t as warm as he should have been.

“Good, Pet should warm his Master,” Spike said as he continued to swim.

“G…get….an electric b..blanket!” Xander laughed.

“Oi! Don’t need one. Have you. ‘Sides, don’t have to worry about a findin’ a bloody outlet.”

“G…guess..it…wouldn’t…w..w..work so well in the w..water either.”

“See. Yer much better than an electric blanket.”

“And my..gu…guidance counselor s..s..said I’d n..never amount..to much,” Xander laughed.

And what did they amount to, Pet? Spike wondered.

“Only my precious, Pet, Xander. Only my most precious, Pet,” Spike said softly his voice full of love. He pushed his body to move faster.

Xander shivered. He wondered how it was possible to be so cold and yet feel such heat burning inside of him. He wanted to turn in Spike’s arms. He wanted to wrap around him and kiss the vampire senseless. Instead he relaxed into Spike’s hold trusting him.

The water sloshed up around his ears. It pulled heavily on his clothes. The cold air bit against the skin poking up out of the water and the skin below it shivered as the cold seemed to sink inside. Xander thought of their bed back in Vegas. He thought of the hot shower where Spike had first helped him rediscover himself.

He thought of their bed back in Vegas. He thought of the sunny hours and how the demon had helped him with his fear of water.

He thought of Spike. He thought of the whiskey taste and smell of Spike. Xander closed his eyes. His thoughts were warm and he sank deep down into them.

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Something tickled his nose. It was soft and furry.

“Mnot nmow, Ante,” Xander groaned as he curled himself deeper and against the warm blanket.

“Xander?” Spike whispered.

“Mnnnn,” Xander said burrowing closer to the soft warmth pressed all around him.
“Are you sure he’s ok?” Spike asked in an urgent whisper. “Why isn’t he waking up?”

“Be patient,” another voice answered. “Hypothermia was close to setting in. This is the closet we have to heating blankets unless you want him to join Wesley.”

“Not bloody likely,” Spike growled. “Don’t want him smelling like dog.”

“Well, I don’t think that will be necessary. You can see he’s already responding,” the other voice said.

“We can’t wait much longer, ‘Gelus is on the island.”

Xander frowned. The other voice was familiar. Where did he know that voice from?

The blanket moved around him pressing closer. It was a heavy weight on top of him and to the side of him.

“And so is Dawn!” Faith snapped.

Faith! Some part of Xander thought. Faith! You’re alive! You’re pissed, but alive!

“I haven’t forgotten about Nibblet,” Spike replied.

“Like you have forgotten about telling us about your little back up plan?”

“Well,” Oz said softly. “He did mention they were in the woods.”

“A convenient detail you both neglected to share,” Wesley intoned.

The blankets shifted. Heavy sand paper stroked gently across the back of Xander’s neck.

“Hempgh!” he muttered.

“Without them, I would not have been able to track you,” the familiar but out of place voice said.

“You could hav..”

“I couldn’t!” Spike snarled.

Guess it’s time to get up, Xander thought sleepily as he pushed against the blanket, before Spike and Faith start doing that whole vampire versus slayer thing.

The blanket refused to move.

Xander frowned and then began to notice the blanket wasn’t really a blanket. It was furry, like a pelt.

But it’s warm! He thought suddenly doubling his efforts to open his eyes.

He was even more confused as the world slowly came into focus around him. It was a golden brown.
“..ike!” He croaked!

“Pet!”

“Xander!”

“Cupcake!”

Several voices cried out at once. Xander froze. He blinked as several realizations slammed into him at once.

One, he was stark naked. Two, he was squashed between two lions. Three, there were five people staring at him; Spike, Faith, Oz, Wesley and Lorne.

He stared at Lorne for a moment in shock.

Lorne! He thought as his heart raced. Lorne! The head’s connected to the neck bone and the neck bone is connected to the…

“Spike!” he yelled climbing to his feet forgetting all about the state of his undress. “You son-of-a-mpgh!”

Spike quickly covered Xander’s mouth as the vampire cocked his head behind him.

“Pet, demon rules.”

Demon wh..? Xander wondered for a moment then looked over Spike’s shoulder. Behind and around the vampire he could see gathered a number of Oni, Boretz, Voynock and other demons. Behind them were several unmoving Kith’ham and Jhe demons sprawled out on the ground.

Faith, Oz, Wesley and a couple of werewolves were surrounded by several bruised and battered Mofo demons. Xander bit Spike’s palm.

“Pet!” Spike yelled as he jerked his hand back sending a warning look to Xander.

“Cup…er..Claimiant Xander,” Lorne said quickly stepping between the pair. “Perhaps Lem… Master Spike can explain while you get dressed. I mean unless you really want to storm the proverbial castle in your birthday suit.”

“I…” Xander began to say then stopped. He glared at Spike who leaned over, picked up Xander’s wet clothes and then dangled them by a finger out to Xander.

“Pet?” Spike asked arching an eyebrow. Xander knew and understood that look well. Behave and play the part of the good Pet and everything will be explained in good time or don’t and get punished and then have everything explained.

“Please,” Xander ground out taking his clothes. There wasn’t time to drag this out with a punishment. “Explain.”

Spike arched his other brow.

“Master,” Xander added.
And this better be a good one or so help me you are gonna wish I’d left you at the bottom of the lake!

TBC
“It’s all part of the plan,” Spike began.

Xander looked around at the motley group of demons, the surviving werewolves, the half drowned Wesley, the pissed off Slayer and the still soaking Spike. His pants made a weight squelching noise as he shimmied into them.

“This is according to plan...Master,” he asked arching an eyebrow and straining to pull the wet denim together at his waist to button it.

“More or less,” Spike answered.

Xander arched his other eyebrow.

“Oi! Don’t be doutin’ yer Master, Pet!”

“Then perhaps I should offer my misgivings regarding our present conditions,” chimed in Wesley.

Xander pulled his shirt across the back of his shoulders his collar glittering faintly in the starlight.

“A little gratitude…” Spike started to say.


“For getting Angelus right where we want him,” Spike snapped. A chorus of demon growls joined him ready to act on his obvious displeasure with the small band of humans.

“And that’s him on the island protected by my little ponies from watery hell and us here,” Xander said pressing the issue.

“Tell them,” Lorne said quietly moving a half step closer to Spike.

“Lorne…” Spike answered softly.

“Yes, I am sure. He would have loved being the center of attention of all of this,” Lorne said casually waving a hand at the circle. It was gesture that belied the pain underneath his words. “He always did have a flair for the dramatic.”

“Right,” Spike finally said turning back to what was left of the Scoobies. “I was given a prophecy…”

“Doyle,” Wes and Xander whispered in unison.

“Who’s Doyle?” asked Oz after shifting back to human form.

“Oi! “ Spike growled a warning.

“I think we should save the Q&A for after the presentation,” Faith whispered to the werewolf.
Oz nodded then gestured to Spike to continue.

“Where was I?” Spike asked then before snapping his fingers. “Right. Prophecy. Doyle gave it to me. Well more accurately he left it for me. He wrote before he...before I killed him.”

Spike looked to Lorne.

“Our...last night together he left me a sealed envelope,” Lorne explained. “Made me swear recipe for a perfect Manhattan not peek. He said it was for the Master of Las Vegas. At the time I...well no one knew.”

Lorne looked back to Spike.

“Blood, torture, betrayal, foul language...we’ll skip that part of the story,” Spike continued. “What matters is what Doyle wrote. It was the key to changing everything. It was a vision on how to turn it all back; to defeat Angelus.”

“How?” Xander blurted out growing cold and impatient in his wet clothes.

“It’s here, Pet. Back where it started. Back to how it all started.”

“His blood!” Wesley said suddenly his eyes boring into Spike’s.

“Are you having a vision?” Faith asked quickly grabbing Wesley in concern.

“No, not exactly, but it is what makes sense,” Wes replied looking back at his slayer. “It was Angelus’s blood which opened the portal and it would be Angelus’s blood to close it.”

“You mean Dawn isn’t the key?” Xander squeaked.

“No, Pet,” Spike answered. “She is. Just...”

“Just not the key to closing the portal Angelus opened,” Wes said.

“Then what is she a Key to?” Faith asked.

“Other portals maybe,” Spike said with a shrug. “Doyle didn’t exactly detail everything.”

“I still don’t understand...how does that get us here?” Xander asked. “And more importantly how does it get us help us get the girls back?”

“Look around, Pet. I’ve been working and planning for this since the day Angelus gave me Vegas. I have assembled a group of demons who either owe me or want the same end I do. I’ve maneuvered Angelus back on the island with Acathla where we need him. Where we need his blood.”

“But the lies...the secrets...”

“To misdirect Angelus.”

“And Dawn? Willow and Tara? What are they misdirections too?”
“Sometimes there are casualties…” Spike began.

“CASUALTIES!” Xander snapped rushing up on Spike. “They are not casualties! They are our friends! Family!”

There was another murmuring of low growls from the demons around the group and answering set of growls from the surviving werewolves as vampire and claimant stared each other down.

**Someone’s in for a long punishment,** Spike thought staring at Xander.

Pray we don’t survive this, Xander thought returning the gaze. **Cuz you’re looking at hours of watching Andromeda over this!**

“Well we could stand here and fight about it,” Oz said calmly before looking back at the island. “Or we could take this small army and go get them. I mean I don’t want to jump to any radical conclusions or anything but I did get the sense that’s where this whole big reveal hasn’t changed anything? The plan is still a desperate, and most probably doomed, all out attack on Angelus and his perfect hair?”

“How?” Faith asked. “We still have the Usige in the water to deal with and the Tremblors along the shore.”

“The Oni can handle the Usige,” Spike said finally looking away from Xander to the leader of the gigantic ogre looking demons.

“Numfar and I will handle the Tremblors,” Lorne said.

“Numfar?” the scoobies asked in unison.

A green skinned demon with shoulder length reddish-pink hair and two small horns stepped forward and stood beside Lorne. He stretched out his arms and kicked his legs forward and back in a little jig. Behind him were several other green skinned demons all looking vaguely like Numfar and Lorne.

“Numfar and some folks from the old neighborhood,” Lorne said with a smile.

“How?” Xander asked remembering the awesome power of the Tremblors.

“Oh with something I like to call a high ‘C’. A really high C,” Lorne answered with a wink.

“Right,” Spike said looking to the other assembled demons. “We have a way over to the island?”

“We still have the canoes, Master Spike,” answered the chief of the Mofo demons.

“Then what are we waiting for?” the vampire asked his eyes locking once more on Xander. “I suppose if I ordered you to stay here with the lions and the wolves…”

“Let’s save you the wasted breath in ordering it and me the harsh public humiliation and punishment for disobedience,” Xander interrupted.

“Right then,” Spike said looking back at his motley army. “Let’s get moving.”
“And don’t think you’re getting out of further explanations, like how is Lorne alive, and where did all these demons come from,” Xander said.

“It’s a gonna be a long canoe trip across the lake,” Spike muttered.

Lindsey had thought he’d known pain. He’d thought he’d endured the worst of Angelus’s games by now, but he was wrong. He was so wrong.

“Just a hint,” Angelus crooned in the lawyer’s ear. “Just a wee hint, Linds. Just something to really get this party started.”

“Not really in a partying mood,” Lindsey ground out before letting loose an agonizing scream as Angelus eased the handle in his hand forward another notch. There was a small ‘popping’ sound in Lindsey’s right knee. Tears rolled unbidden from his eyes and he took deep gulping breaths.

Angelus stared at Lindsey’s naked body stretched taut on the rectangular table tilted at thirty degree angle. Every muscle was stretched andcorded. Joints and ligaments were just now at the breaking point. It was a thing of beauty.

“Call me sentimental,” the vampire said as he stroked a finger down Lindsey’s torso, “but I always did have a soft spot for the classics. You know what’s really great about the rack, Linds?”

“If I say...yes,” Lindsey panted trying to focus past the searing pain in his body now centered on his knee, “will you shut up?”

Angelus laughed.

“No,” he said moving down the table. “But if ya tell me what I want ta know, ya’ll never have ta hear me speak again.”

He studied Lindsey for a moment. The bound man only shook his head in defiance. Angelus sighed. He knew he was on a schedule if he wanted to open the portal tonight. Yet, he couldn’t deny he was enjoying himself.

“What’s great is that you can combine methods with the rack,” Angelus said. “A little bit of old…”

He tugged gently on the handle again. The rollers shifted pulling on the chains at Lindsey’s wrists and ankles forcing his body elongate. This time there was a ‘popping’ sound in his shoulder.

“...and a little bit of the new,” Angelus said before sinking his fangs deep into Lindsey’s vulnerable side. Instinctively, Lindsey’s body tried to arch away from the pain and bite but there it was stretched too tight. Still it tried causing a tearing sensation right oblique muscle. Blood welled up feeding the vampire.

“Bastard!” Lindsey yelled.

Anglus hummed and he nursed at the bite. He hated to admit it, but he would miss this annoying little pet of his. It never failed to to suffer so wonderfully for him.

“Now ta be fair,” Angelus said lifting his mouth away from Lindsey, “my mum may have been a
bitch but she was a properly wedded one.”

He stood up and admired his work again. Blood was oozing now thick and red from Lindsay’s side. A heavy sheen of sweat glistened on his skin.

“Tell me where my son is,” Angelus ordered looking at Lindsey.

“Hell,” Lindsey grunted.

“Which one?” Angelus sing songed.

“Why don’t you go on a tour and find out?”

“Lindsey,” Angelus began once again tugging on the handle again. The air was rent with more popping sounds and Lindsey’s screams.

“STOP!” suddenly came a sobbing cry from the far west corner.

Angelus turned to look. Dawn was on her knees reaching out toward the rack. She was being held back by one of the Jhe demons, it’s blue talons tangled in Dawn’s thick brown hair. Tears were streaming down her face.

“Please! Please, stop!” Dawn cried unable to witness the torture anymore.

“Ahh, hear that, Lindsey?” Angelus asked turning back to look at the bound lawyer. “Yer upsettin’ the fair young maiden.”

“You think I care?” Lindsey asked.

“I don’t know, Linds. Ya are weak.”

“Take me down off this damn thing and lets you and me see how weak I am!”

“Oh?” Angelus cried clasping his arms of his chest in mock distress. “Are ya not havin’ fun?”

He looks back to Dawn.

“Ya think we should play a different game with him...what was it Dim? Dumb? Dawn!” Angelus says snapping his fingers. “How about it? Do ya want ta play?”

“No! Just stop!” Dawn cried again traumatized from witnessing Lindsey’s torture and scared not knowing what happened to her friends.

“I can’t, Sunrise, because Lindsey here won’t tell me what I need ta know.”

“What? What do you need to know?”

“Tsk! Haven’t ya been payin’ attention? I want ta know where my wee lad of a son is!”

“S..son..I don’t understa..”

“Shut up!” Lindsey yelled at the young woman.
“Lindsey!” Angelus cried looking back at him. “Is that any way ta talk ta a young lady? If she were Darla would ya talk to her like that?”

“She isn’t…Darla!” Lindsey snarled.

“No, no she isn’t” Angelus said with a sigh as one again he pulled on lever.

“GAHHHHH!” Lindsey screamed out in agony.

“Lindsey, do ya really think she would have wanted this?”

“Fuck you!”

“Mmmm, now there’s an idea,” Angelus replied. “I’ve never tried that with anyone on the rack. We might have ta get inventive!”

“Whatsoever you got…I…can take,” Lindsey choked out with a forced smile. “Afterall, I took Darla and your son didn’t I?”

With a roar Angelus yanked on the handle forcing it to move up several notches. Lindsey let out a high pitch yowl of pure pain while more joints popped and corded muscled literally snapped under his skin.

“STOP IT!” Dawn yelled even as Lindsey’s cries choked off into silence as he fell unconscious.

“Damn!” Angelus muttered. “Cyvus! Wake him up!”

The bald red demon sidled forth and quickly examined the tortured man.

“He is badly damaged, my Lord,” he replied.


“Yes, my Lord. It may take some time,” Cyvus replied.

“Fine as long as it doesn’t take more than oh…say thirty minutes?” Angelus chirped. “Otherwise..I might have to put you on the rack!”

“Of course, my Lord,” Cyvus said bowing low before quickly moving over to Lindsay. He began chittering in a strange language. A dull red light began to suffuse Lindsay’s body causing it to tremble.

Angelus looked at Dawn as he walked over to her and crouched down. He waved a hand at the Jhe demon ordering her to let the young woman loose and move away from the human.

“Well, what are we gonna do until old Linds there wakes up?” he asks as he smiles at the terrified young woman.

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“All this time you let me believe Lorne was dead…” Xander hissed in a whisper. It was the twelfth
time since they left shore.

“Pet…told ya…” Spike once again try to explain.

“I mean..was it all an act? You? The Big Bad falling apart when Angelus..killed…? I mean lobbed off his head? Or was just another way to make me feel something for you? Toy with…?”

“NO!” Spike said fiercely raising his voice.

“Shh!” hissed the paddling slayer. Spike flashed two finger her direction.

“I was a wreck, Pet,” Spike explained in a whisper leaning closer to Xander. The canoe shifted and rocked under them at the disbursement of his weight. Wesley sighed but continued to paddle.

“Sure, Lorne had always said he’d be able ta survive a head chop but I’d never seen it,” Spike continued. “Plus he was very clear to survive it is his body had to remain intact. I..had no guarantee it was all going ta work out. And it wasn’t like in that moment I could hold his hand and reattach his noggin’ myself.”

“You could have told…. …”

“And what if it hadn’t of worked? Or what if Angelus had more plans for ya?”

“We’re talking about Lorne here,” Xander growled. “And more secrets! When were..are you going to trust me?”

“I’m trusting ya now,” Spike said peering at his Pet and all but begging him to understand. Xander looked away.

“Doyle warned me about Lorne’s ‘death,’” Spike whispered softly. “Neither one of us had wanted ta believe it but we had ta and we had to prepare for it. Doyle saw Angelus take his head. If he saw more’n that he didn’t write down so we came up with our own play and hoped the ‘death’ he saw wasn’t a permanent type. My job, when it happened, was ta make sure his head and body were intact, taken away and ta stay far far away from him until we made our final move.”

“So where has he been?” Xander asked trying to peer across the water to the shore which had gone eerily silent. Just before they’d left Oni had charged into the water disappearing among the waves while Lorne and his fellow green skinned demons had opened their mouths wide as if singing then stood still.

At that point Spike had rushed everyone into the canoes as all around them a strange vibration began to rise. At one point Xander thought it pushed right through him and caused his heart to stutter a beat.

He looked back at Spike for the answer to his question.

“Collecting my debts. Organizing the demons who were with me.”

“Against Angelus? They knew?” Xander asked his anger rising again.

“About as much as you, Pet. Less even,” Spike answered. “They knew I was planning ta make a play against Angelus and that was it.”
“And the lions?” Xander asked.

“Were a way to reach out to Lorne and guide him and our forces ta where ta meet up with us,” Spike answered.

“And you knew?” Xander turned and looked at Oz sitting next to him.

“Pack was picking up strange scents in the woods,” Oz said with a shrug.

“And you kept his secret rather than tell us,” Faith interjected.

“If he was lying,” Oz explained, “there were too many of them for us to take out alone. Figured to play it out until we had the advantage. If he was telling the truth…."

Oz shrugged again.

“’Sides...the primals. Pretty rad!”

“So what are you not telling us now?” Xander asked focusing back on Spike.

“Oi!”

“I mean it, Spike!” Xander hissed. “No more! We are charging in on Angelus who’s got Willow, Dawn and Tara. I don’t want any more surprises.”

“You know everything I know, Pet,” Spike said gently staring back at Xander.

“How do we undo it?” Wesley asked. “Precisely? How do we close the portal Angelus opened?”

“Run Angelus through again. Bloody up on old Acathla with it,” Spike answered.

“And what do you get out of it?” Faith snapped. “I mean, I get you have daddy issues. And I get you want to one up Angelus but why not just take him out. Why return the world back to humans?”

Spike looked at Xander. He knew his pet was angry with him. He knew he’d felt betrayed again. If ever he was going to spill Spike biggest secret now would be it.

Xander returned the stare. He knew he could say something. He could say one little word but then he knew it would be a false lead. Spike wasn’t doing this just because he had a soul. He wasn’t just doing it for revenge. This was Spike. His heart twisted a little. Part of him wanted to spill the beans though. Wanted to out Spike but he knew he wouldn’t do it. Couldn’t do it. Because when all was said and done, they’d been through too much. He’d felt too much. He was tied to Spike in ways he couldn’t begin to describe. He was tied in ways that simply left him shaking his head to let his Spike know his secret was safe.


“And you think humans will just let you be?” Wesley asked.

“There’s always goin’ ta be demons, mate,” Spike said winking at Oz. Oz sighed and looked away.
“Again how long do you think that’s going to last once the world’s returned from Angelus’ hell?” Faith asked.

“I think humans will be having their hands full just trying to rebuild,” Spike said. “And besides, I really don’t think one city out of the entire world is too much to ask for in return for saving the world.”

“What?” all the humans asked in unions.

“Vegas,” Spike said simply. “When this is all said and done, I still want Vegas. Oi, will still let humans visit, if they dare because it will be a demon run city with demon run rules but I don’t think most will really notice a difference.”

“And what makes you think we will agree to that?” Wesley asked.

“Because you are the good guys and you know it’s fair. Plus it won’t take too long for ya to see the advantages of it.”

“Advantages?” Faith snorted. “You know you’re seriously del…”

“Shh!” Oz hissed lifting his nose. “We’re getting close.”

Spike flashed a smile at Faith and fell silent. Xander’s mind whirled as he studied Spike in the dark. Vegas? A Demon city? What would that mean...for me?

TBC
“You know it’s times like these I really miss Dru,” Angelus said as he spun Dawn around. She clung tight to his arms not because she wanted to be close but because she was afraid if she let go she fly off and hit the far wall.

“D..Dru?” She asked as Angelus continued to drag her around in pantomime of a dance.

“She was such a Daddy’s little girl too,” Angelus purred. “How ‘bout it, Sunrise? You a Daddy’s girl?”

“N..No,” Dawn sputter her eyes desperately searching out Willow and Tara. They were still standing eerily still on the south side of the room. Their eyes were unfocused and they were still enveloped in the glowing green spheres of energy.

“Not tempted just a little?” Angelus asked jerking her forward and plastering her body to his. Now Dawn’s eyes locked on Angelus. She could feel the hard length of him. She began to tremble. She was on her own trapped with the vampire who plunged the world into hell. He was in a torturing mood and it was more than just her blood he wanted.

What would Xander do? she wondered. What would Willow or Faith do?

She swallowed and forced herself to take a deep breath.

“No even...a little,” she replied as coolly she could.

Maybe if I can get to Willow or Tara, she thought. Maybe snap them out of it?

Angelus’ eyes narrowed. His hold on her became bruising. He leaned forward then suddenly he released her.

“Oh but maybe there’s some life in ya yet!” he laughed.

Dawn stumbled away from him. Her mind desperately searching for a way to stall.

“And I plan to keep it that way for as long as I can,” she replied taking step back toward the ensorcelled witches.

“Well, gonna give ya the inside scoop,” Angelus said with a smile. “I wouldn’t be making in long term plans.”

She looked over at Lindsey. Cyvus was still working on him.

“You...you still don’t know what hell you are looking for,” she said.

“I will,” Angelus growled.

Don’t get him angry, she thought. Get him talking.

“Son? I didn’t think vampires...could...ya know..”
“Stalling. It doesn’t work and it just annoys me,” Angelus said as he began to move toward her.

“Doesn’t change the fact you don’t know the hell you are looking for and without it...killing me now might risk your chance of opening the portal to it once you know. I mean, do you even know how much of my blood you’ll need?”

“Probably most of it,” Angelus said pausing a moment to think. “But you do have a point. Don’t want to waste what I might need.”

“So it wouldn’t hurt answering my question,” Dawn asked risking another step back.

“You’re right. Vampires can’t reproduce the old.. ‘vanilla’ way.”

“Then how?”

“Lawyers,” Angelus said waving his hands airly.

“Lawyers?” Dawn asked in confusion.

“Lindsey’s old bosses. Long story short they wanted a way to control me,” Angelus laughs. “So they tried to bring back my sire, Darla. Only, she didn’t come back quite the way they expected.”

“She...came back..?” Dawn still inching back.

“I staked her,” Angelus said shaking his head. “Was a little out of my mind then. We all make mistakes.”

He shrugs.

“Anyway, the lawyers brought her back but she wasn’t a vampire. She was human.”

Dawn paused.

“Human?”

“Yeah...back to her old human self. Syphilis and all. And that’s how old Lindsey got involved,” Angelus said casting a look to the lawyer.

Dawn slipped back.

Maybe if I can just knock them away from the demon and out of the light? she thinks.

“Long story short, lawyer boy lets his nads rule his brains falls for Darla. I admit, I played along enough to turn her again, because I mean hey! Darla! Good times, right! And I owed her. She was my sire after all,” Angeleus said looking backing to Dawn.

“’Cept whatever the magicks they were messing with had a side-effect no one could have predicted. Damn if Darla didn’t end up pregnant! Now I thought she’d be just as thrilled as I would. We could have debated for hours to rip the babe from the womb and drain it or wait until it finished cooking but Darla?”
Angelus sighed.

"Seems the baby infected her and suddenly she was just all soulful and I had enough of that. Still I thought I could have her back. Wait for the baby to be born and then...it would Daddy’s little girl and baby makes three. Or at least Daddy’s little girl and a baby sandwich."

Angelus began to pace and Dawn shuffled back just a few more inches. She risked turning her head slightly to see what the Jhe was doing. The demoness was watching Angelus, not Dawn.

"Then Lindsey here and the soul stinking Darla interfered! Next thing I know Darla’s blowin’ in the wind and Lindsey’s on the run with the glimmer in my eye! I have to say that hurt. Ya know? I track Linds down in time just to see some blonde bint jump through a portal with my son! Managed to keep lawyer boy from going through but that’s it."

Angelus stopped and stared at Lindsey.

"In all this time the only thing I’ve gotten out of him was the blonde’s name, Kate.”

"M’lord,” Cyvus interjected. “He is ready.”

“Great!” Angelus said suddenly sidling over to Dawn and grabbing hold of her arm. “Ready to have some fun? Or did ya want ta continue with your plan where ya try and free the witches and only succeed in pissin’ me off?”

“N..No. I,” Dawn tried to stammer an objection while Angelus dragged her back with him towards the rack.

“Tell you what? Why don’t I make you my assistant? Huh? You can pull the handle when I tell you..or you can start stripping the skin from his flesh..your choice!” he said shoving a blade into her hand.

“I don’t…” Dawn started to cry when suddenly Angelus stiffened beside her. His head turned.

“Spike!” he hissed. He then looked back to Cyvus. “Watch them!”

He made a quick gesture and the guards at the door followed him out of the room leaving the Jhe demon spelling the witches at Cyvus with Dawn and the now groaning Lindsey.

***

The canoes slid silently up one the banks. Out in the deeper waters waves crashed.

*Oni vs Usige cage match*, Xander thought as he stumbled out of the boat. A strong hand gripping his bicep to study him saved him from falling face first into the shore. Xander didn’t even half to look to know who it was.

He clasped that hand and squeezed sending his thanks.

Spike longed to pull his Pet closer. Longed for more than just a steady hand or a gentle squeeze but it was approaching zero hour. He had no more moves. He had no more secrets. This was it. He spared one more moment to study the man he’d come to love.
Xander looked up. Their eyes met. Never in all his life or unlife had Spike wanted to just turn his back on everything as he did in that moment. Soul and demon alike wanted to just snatch Xander up and leave saving the world up to the rest of bloody ponces. Yet, neither soul or demon would because in the end it’s not what Xander would want.

*I love you, Pet,* Spike thought. *Love ya enough ta let the world rot in hell and love ya enough ta try and save it for ya.*

Xander’s heart beat a new rhythm at the look in Spike’s eye. Something scarred and mending inside of him healed a little more. It was strong and powerful and it scared Xander more than facing Angelus. Spike meant something to him. He meant something more than Xander dared to examine or to face. He meant something more than Xander dared to think or say.

*I l...* he started to think.

“We have to move, now!” Faith hissed breaking the moment between Master and Claimant.

Xander blushed and looked away. Spike growled then looked around the beach. All the canoes were docked. His army was assembled. Over the years he had assembled in through wheeling, dealing and just plain playing upon what he knew of demons.

The Oni were with him because under Angelus new world order there were very few pious souls. It was hard to corrupt the fallen. This world was almost as much as hell for them as it was for the all walking talking meat sacks.

The Voynok would do anything and go anywhere Spike commanded. A long time ago Spike had come up one their Queen. He’d hidden her clutch away automatically giving him an army in her brood who would do anything to ensure the safety of their next generation.

Spike grinned at the Mofo. He wished he could say he’d pulled one over on them in some way to as he had with the Voynok. Simple truth was though, they had fallen in with him due to Angelus.

*Mofo take contracts very seriously and Peaches not so much,* Spike thought. *Never break a contract with a Mofo. They will collect one way or another.*

He looked back to the shore where he’d left Lorne and the primals. The lions would serve him because of the old medicine man back in Africa. Lorne helped him because of Doyle. He could only assume Lorne had found angel with his fellow Pyleans.

Spike looked at what was left of the Scoobies. He had always known they could be counted on for the final fight.

*Just a bloody matter of getting them here without getting staked first,* he thought.

“Right then,” Spike finally ordered in a hush. “The poofter’s mansion should be up ahead. Mofos take point. Surround it and take who or whatever Angelus has guarding it. No one gets out of there and no one but us gets in. The rest of us follow me.”

“Where?” Faith asked.

“Ta storm the castle,” Spike said with a grin.”And remember we need Angelus alive...at least until we can get his blood on Acathla.”
“And where would he..it be?” Wesley asked.

“I know where,” Spike said as he released Xander and began to move out with the other demons.

“We don’t even have any weapons!” Faith hissed.

“Will soon enough,” Spike said with a grin. “Just gotta take ‘em off the ones we kill, yeah?”

*That’s what I love about you, Spike,* Xander thought. *You’re all about the details.*

“Tell me,” Wesley asked a bit breathlessly trying to keep up with the swift pace of the demons. “Did Doyle actually see us succeed?”

“Well…” Spike began.

“That would be a ‘no,’” Xander explained.

“Oi! He saw an attack on Angelus’ mansion! He saw the statue of Acatlha! He saw blood!” Spike said.

“Well that could have been our blood!” Faith argued.

“You know not to be critical,” Oz interjected. “But I think we really could work on the whole ‘sneak’ part of our sneak attack skills.”

Despite the circumstances Xander couldn’t help but giggle. Spike glowered. Faith smirked and Wesley nodded.

For a moment Xander almost felt like he really was back in Sunnydale back before it had all gone to hell before it had all caved in and become a lake. For a moment he felt like he had come home and it felt good.

As usual with this world, the feeling didn’t last long. Suddenly the air was filled with the sounds of angry snarls. Xander squinted trying to see up ahead. A strong arm shot out and pushed him back just as blue demoness pounced from the shadows to land on Spike.

Xander stumbled back and watched as all around him was an explosion of chaos. A red Kith’harn demon was trying to run Wesley through with a long curved blade. Faith was was ducking the arc of swinging blade wielded by another Jhe demon.

In the distance Xander could hear the sounds of more skirmishes. A low growl to his right drew Xander’s attention next. Oz was once again shifting into his wolf form.

“Bloody hell ya cacky tart!” Spike snarled as demoness tried to bite into his neck while bending over and grabbing at her dreadlocks. He slams her to the ground as she tumbles over the top of him. “Ya ain’t my type!”

“A little help here!” Wesley squeaked as he twirled out of the way of the Kith’harn’s blade.

Xander looked around. The others were engaged in their own fights and no where close to helping the former watcher. Thinking quickly he bent down, grabbed a handful of sand and rushed forward.
If I die, Spike is so gonna kill me, Xander thought as he whistled to get the Kith’harn’s attention. It looked up just in time to get a faceful of sand. As the demon instinctively went to wipe it’s face Xander tucked dropped and rolled.

Not gutter balls! No gutter balls! Xander thought as he envisioned himself as a Xander bowling ball barreling into a demon shape bowling pin.

There was a loud roar as Xander connected with the Kith’harn’s knee.

Strike! Xander thought as the demon went down.

“Wes! Get the blade!” Xander cried as he quickly scrambled up the demon hoping to briefly pin it.

“Already done!” Wesley replied right before a cool spray erupted all over Xander’s face as the ex-Watcher shoved the demon’s own blade into it’s throat. The Kith’harn bucked once under Xander then went still.

It was Xander’s turn to wipe his eyes and face. Clearing the slimy demon blood from them he looked for Wesley.

“Sorry about that,” the man said. “Should have warned you first.”

“It’s ok, not the first time,” Xander replied getting to his feet. The battle was still raging but it was moving forward pressing closer to the mansion.

“Shall we?” Wesley said motioning with his blade. Xander nodded.

Together the two charged forward into the chaos around them.

***

Dawn stood trembling over the unconscious Lindsey. Behind her Willow and Tara stood betwitched by the Jhe demoness. Across from her was the strange demon Cyvus. In her hand was the blade Angelus had shoved there before he had suddenly left. She swallowed.

Just then Lindsey began to convulse and cough. His limbs shaking violently against his restraints. The coughing grew labored as if his breathing was blocked. Dawn looked in panic at Cyvus.

“Do something!’

“Be quiet, slave!” Cyvus snapped back.

Lindsey spit up blood.

“He’s dying!” Dawn cried.

“He is not!

Suddenly Lindsey’s coughing stopped. His limbs locked up and his breathing ceased completely.

“Then what do you call that!” Dawn pointed at the dying man. “Do you think Angelus is going to
pleased if he comes back to find the one person who can tell him where his son can be found is dead?"

“He...it’s not possible. I restored him!” Cyvus said leaning over Lindsey’s body.

“Well obviously it is possible!” snapped Dawn.

“You will cease your insolence!” Cyvus said moving around the rack to further examine Lindsey.

“Or what? You’ll kill me? You can’t do that! Angelus needs me…”

“He needs your blood!” Cyvus said turning back to look at Dawn.

“And none of this is helping him,” Dawn said pointing back to the lawyer who was now completely limp.

“I ...restored him,” insisted the confused Cyvus.

“Look, unchain him and I can do CPR,” Dawn argued.

“What?” Cyvus asked.

“It’s...it’s a human thing. But we only have a small window,” she pleaded moving closer to Cyvus. “I need you to unchain him and let me do CPR. I can get his hearted started...breathe for him.”

“I …”

“Do you want him to die? Do you want to tell Angelus I could have saved him..” Dawn continued stepping close to argue to his face.

“Very well!” Cyvus said waving his hands. Red energy shoots forth and the chain around Lindsey’s hands and wrists pop free. Cyvus turns back to look at Dawn. “Now, restore him!”

“Already done!” Lindsey snarls as he sits up and grabs Cyvus from behind.

Without giving herself time to think or question Dawn shoves the blade in her hand into Cyvus chest hoping she hits what passes for his heart. The demon sorcerer stiffens as green blood oozes out of his body and down her hand. He sags in Lindsey’s hands then collapses.

There is a snarl from behind them.  Dawn jerks the blade from Cyvus body and whirls around. The Jhe demon is staring at them her face twisted in rage.

“You move or drop that spell those witches are gonna be on you and I don’t think they’re gonna be too happy,” Lindsey says as he lowers himself from the table. He winces and balances the majority of his weight on his left leg. He looks at Dawn. “Good job. How’d you know I was faking it?”

“I didn’t...exactly,” Dawn confessed her eyes locked on the Jhe demon. “I kinda hoped you were. I mean, it’s what Xander would have done.”

“Fair enough. So, shall we?” Lindsey said as he began limping towards the exit.

“Wait! We can’t leave! What about Willow? What about Tara?”
Lindsey paused. He looked at the Jhe demon holding the two witches and then looked back at Dawn.

“Seems to me we have a bit of a stand-off,” Lindsey said. “You move forward the Jhe can kill the witches. If the Jhe moves to kill the witches you can kill her.”

“There has to be another way,” Dawn said.

“There is,” Lindsey replied as he began limping toward the exit again.

“I can’t just leave them!” Dawn cried.

“Well then that’s your choice then, darlin’” Lindsey said as he reached to the doorway before disappearing.

TBC
Chapter 88

Spike counted as least a dozen punishable offenses his Pet had earned in the course of the battle to take the mansion.

_Nearly gettin’ himself killed is on top of the list things he should never do_, Spike silently groused as he snapped the neck of badly beaten and bloody Kith’harn demon. _Should have left him tied up neat and pretty back with the lions. Woulda kept him from doing...things like THAT!_

“PET!” Spike roared as he saw Xander charge yet another demon. This time it was an axe wielding Jhe demoness. He dodged under the swinging blade just in time to try and shove a dagger into her stomach only his blade tangled in her armor. Xander lost his hold and his balance sending him tumbling onto the hard earth.

“Xander!” Spike yells grabbing hold of the Jhe demon by the arm, swinging her around and throwing her into the red demon. “So help me, Pet. You get yourself killed…”

“I know! I know!” Xander yelled back as he crabbed crawled away from the tangle of demons. “I’ll have earned a punishment...and not the happy little Xander kind!”

A hand grabbed the back of his neck and hauled him to his feet. It was a familiar touch. Xander turned and stared his Master in his eye.

“Don’t!” Spike said in a broken voice caught somewhere between fear and anger.

“I’m not going anywhere,” Xander whispered remembering his vow.

A loud snarl broke the moment and Spike shoved Xander behind him. Both the Jeh and the Kith’harn were attacking; one was wielding a short blade and the other swinging an axe.

“Oi! Now ya just got me t’d off!” Spike growled as he leaped forward toward the attackers.

“SPIKE!” Xander cried not one to let his vampire, no matter how capable, charge into a fight two against one. Quickly he looked around and spotted a club lying next to one of the dead Voynoks on the ground. He ran for it even as he heard Spike cry out in pain.

Vampires were hard to kill but if the demons managed to sever the head from his body Xander knew it would be the end. He heard another snarl of pain as he surged forward to reach the fallen demon.

_Too high pitched for Spike_, Xander thought as he wrapped his hands around the shaft of the club. He
turned to see the red and blue demons circling Spike. The three moved around each other as if they were planets locked in some strange orbit with Spike being the center of the odd little solar system.

Still, the situation worked to Xander’s advantage.

_Feet_, Xander thought as he began to move as quickly and as silently as he could. I know we haven’t always been on speaking terms. In fact I know we’ve often been at some odd little war. However, just this once can we call it a truce? Can you not trip over each other and give our stealthy approach away and I’ll not stub you against anything sharp and pointy?

The odd dance between demons and vampire continued as Xander crept back to the fight. The demons still focused on taking down Spike. As Xander got closer he caught Spike’s attention.

_Xander!_ Spike thought forcing himself not to react and give away his pet’s presence. _What are you…?_

A stern look of determination settled on Xander’s face as he pulled the club back over his shoulder readying to swing it once a one of the two demons moved in range.

_Batter up!_ he thought as the the Kith’harn stepped in front of him.

The club smashed into the red demon’s skull with a squelching “thud!” At the same moment Spike rushed the Jhe grabbing the axe in her hands, pulling her forward and headbutting her with all the force he could muster.

There was a loud “crack” as the Jhe and Spike both shook their heads, stumbled and started to fall. Xander took another swing at the red demon’s head. There was another squelching sound as the right side of it’s skull caved inward. The demon sank to it’s knees and began to fall forward.

Spike yanked on the axe. It tore free from the Jhe’s hold. Swiftly Spike spun it around in his hands and with one quick swoop he cleaved the demoness’ head clean from her body. He then quickly looked around for Xander.

“Tell me that knocked some sense into you,” Xander said as he stepped close to Spike and offered a hand to help the woozy vampire to his feet.

_Thirteen punishable offenses_, Spike thought as he raised one bloody hand to his head.

“I’m not the one charging into trouble just after I’ve been rescued,” Spike said taking Xander’s hand while somehow still managing to keep hold of the axe.

“Two demons! No weapons! I’m not sure that was your most brilliant move. Oh, Master Hot Water!”

“I’m not the one in hot water, Pet,” Spike warned.

“Well another stunt like that and I won’t have to worry about anyone giving me any punishments will I?” Xander said suddenly realizing he wasn’t just worried for Spike but angry with him.

“Pet…”

“Don’t ‘Pet’ me,” Xander yelled. “You don’t just get to go off and almost get yourself killed! If
we’re going down we’re doing it together. You hear me?”

For a brief moment Spike’s demon flared at Xander’s insolence. It cried out to take hold and lay stripes to the boy’s backside immediately but it was tempered by the soul’s delight. Spike had a poet’s soul with a poet’s understanding of the heart and it had a hope and desperate suspicion where that sudden anger had come. It was that hope that gave the soul the strength to keep tight rein on the demon and to see how this played out.

“I believe pretty much everyone heard you,” Wesley interrupted.

Both vampire and human stopped and looked around. The raging battle around them had for the most part ceased. The could hear signs of fighting in the distance but around them stood the former watcher and several Voynok demons.

“It seems Faith and the others have moved the fight into the mansion,” Wes continued. “Thought you might want to know.”

For a moment Xander and Spike stared at each other. Then Spike spun around and looked at the Voynok demons.

“Oi! Whadya waitin’ fer? Go!” he ordered.

The other demons rushed off with Wes following, a smirk upon his face. Spike looked back at Xander. His pet closed his eyes. All the hot anger was suddenly gone. He opened his eyes and returned Spike gaze. The vampire was smiling.

That’s never good, Xander thought.

“Don’t...pet ya, huh?” Spike said in a low husky voice as he stepped close and leaned into Xander. His mouth was now just inches from Xander’s ear. “If we’re going down we’re doin’ it together?”

Spike! Xander thought as he groaned. A different heat was now flooding his body. Damn you! Why do you always have to fight dirty!

“Interestin’ choice of words, Pet,” Spike said as he stepped back grinning.

“Aren’t we supposed to be saving the world, Master?” Xander asked hoping at least his face wasn’t flushed.

“What’s the use in savin’ if can’t take a moment to tease my pet?” Spike asked.

Xander rolled his eyes, turned and started to jog towards the fight.

I win this round, pet, Spike thought as he laughed and ran to catch up with his Xander. I’ll always win as long as I have you.

***

The fighting was getting closer. Dawn could hear it yet she had no idea who was winning. She didn’t even know who exactly was out there fighting other than Spike.
And Xander! she thought. Please let Xander be with him!

She didn’t dare leave to go see. She feared what would happen to Willow and Tara if she did. The Jhe demon still holding her friends in a spell stood in the corner staring at Dawn. Dawn stared back her blood soaked blade still in her hand.

She swallowed. She really didn’t know what her options were. This might be her only chance to save herself; to escape Angelus. Some part of her argued they would want her to go; escape.

She shook her head. She couldn’t. She knew they wouldn’t. In the beginning they had stuck together because they were all they had. They were family. However, as time passed and the world fell deeper into Angelus’ hell it became something more. Humans, free humans, they stuck together because they were the Resistance. They stuck together because they had fight and they had hope. We stuck together because we were...are human, she thought as she looked at the Jhe. She had an idea.

“It’s tough, isn’t it?” Dawn asked the demon. “Being in here not knowing what’s going on out there.”

The Jhe hissed.

“I mean Angelus side could be winning...probably is winning...but…”

Dawn fell silent and looked over her shoulder towards the exit where fighting could be heard. The demon’s gaze followed for a moment before looking back at Dawn.

“But what?” she hissed in a dry crackling voice.

Dawn fought the urge to smile. She turned back to look at the Jhe.

“Well...the Resistance...we have some really good fighters. We have the slayer...we could be winning.”

“Not possible!”

“Not probable,” Dawn countered tilting her head slightly, “but possible.”

The Jhe looked towards the exit.

“It’s a tough call to make isn’t it,” Dawn asked.

“What?” hissed the demon looking back at Dawn.

“To stay or to run?”

“Why would I run?”

“Well if the Resistance is winning then when they get here you will be out numbered….”

“I’ll kill the witches!” the demon threatened immediately.

Dawn swallowed down the cold rush of terror that shot through her.
Can’t let her see me be afraid! she thought.

“And they would immediately kill you,” Dawn said.

The Jhe looked back at the exit and hissed again.

“And what if the Resistance is losing?” she asked.

“Well than I’m wasting my only opportunity to make an escape,” Dawn answered.

The Jhe laughed returned to watching Dawn.

“But I’m not really losing anything in that case am, I? I mean circumstances don’t change. Angelus meant to bleed me before and he’ll still bleed me but you…”

“Me what?”

“Well, if we’re..the Resistance..is winning then that changes everything for you doesn’t it?”

The demon growled.

“I mean instead of serving the great Angelus and maybe winning his favor you’ll be dead. No glory, no thanks….”

“I will have earned Lord Angelus' favor!”

“Rigggggh because that's mean a lot of if he is dead.”

“You will not be able to kill him!” the Jhe laughed.

“Maybe not. Maybe you’re right. Maybe we win and he lives but do you think he’s gonna come back for you? I mean look around,” Dawn says turning and gesturing around the room with Cyvus’ corpse and the rack on the other side. “It’s not like he thought to leave you back up.”

“He trusts me to do his bidding!”

“Yes, but that doesn’t mean you aren’t also…expendable,” Dawn turning back to face the Jhe.

A loud explosion of breaking glass and snarling erupted outside of the room. The sounds of fighting were drawing closer. The Jhe shuffled nervously.

“Like, I said..it’s tough…”

“It is not as if I have much choice!” the Jhe snarled. “I flee the spell falls and the witches kill me.”

Gotcha! Dawn thought.

“Not necessarily!” Dawn said.

The Jhe cocked her head and her eyes narrowed.

“Look, you flee...I’ll take care of the witches. They’re my friends if I tell them to let you go...they
“How can I trust you?” the Jhe hissed.

“How can you not? Look I’m offering you a way out! If my side is winning you can go...slip out and be gone. If Angelus’ side is winning you slip out and…”

“Be killed for leaving!” snapped the Jhe.

“Not if it looked like you left to join the fight! I mean..you were concerned! You knew the witches and I weren’t going anywhere. You could even say the resistance had made in far enough to attack and kill Cyvus and let Lindsey free!” Dawn said quickly. “You went after them knowing you couldn’t let Lindsey escape! You weren’t running but fighting!!”

“And they would believe me why?”

“Because they aren’t going to believe me,” Dawn sputtered. “I mean..I’m human. Who do you think they would believe?”

There were more screams and the sounds of furniture breaking. The demon once again looked towards the exit and back again to Dawn.

“You can ensure the witches…?”

“Yes!” Dawn pressed. “But if you are going to go...you need to decide soon.”

The Jhe nodded. She muttered a few phrases and the green energy around Tara and Willow blinked out. The demon ran for the exit as Dawn rushed forward toward the witches. The two woman blinked then gasped as if in agony. They stumbled and fell to the ground.

Willow’s eyes went black. She raised an arm toward the fleeing demon.

“Mor…” she started to yell.

“Willow! No!” Dawn screamed stepping between the witch and the demon.

“Dawn” Willow asked lowering her arm.

“Focus on Tara,” Dawn said moving toward her two friends. “She needs you. I need you.”

“I..” Willow started to say but then she paused. She took a deep breath and looked at Tara. The other witch was slumped over on the ground an unconscious. The blackness bled from Willow’s eyes. “Oh goddess! Tara!”

Willow quickly pulled the insensate woman to her. Only then did she realize the strange tingling pain in her extremities and the way it hurt to breathe. She looked back at Dawn the distress clearly showing on her face.

“It’s ok,” Dawn said as she crouched down next to her friends knife in hand. “I’m here. I’ll stay with you no matter what.”
TBC
Chapter 89

The fighting was even deadlier now that it was confined to the close quarters of the mansion. Spike and Xander fought back to back while Faith had somehow managed to force her way on point. Oz and Wesley were guarding the flank while the Mofo’s held the line outside.

Room by room they were sweeping the mansion facing Angelus’ minions. The floor was slick with demon blood. Still they fought. Their target not just to defeat their enemies but to find Angelus.

“You think he’s still here?” Faith yelled as she dodged left then brought her right kneed to slam into her opponent’s midsection sending it crashing through a window.

“There’s no where for him to go!” Spike yelled burying his blade into a Jhe demon’s throat.

“It is a rather expansive mansion,” Wes replied as he stumbled back a few steps from his latest attacker.

“I think that’s why it’s called...a mansion,” Oz interjected while slamming his fist into the blue chin of one of the Jhe. “They sorta are just...expansive.

“Well he’s running out of rooms to hide,” Faith replied rushing back to help Wesley.

“I doubt very much he is hiding,” Wesley cried before diving to his left to avoid being stuck by an axe. He let out a sharp cry as he crashed into a small wooden table shattering it.

“Then where is he?” Xander asked blocking a deadly strike with his club.

“Right here,” Angelus’ voice rang out from above.

Faith grabbed and twisted the head of the demon about to take another swing at her Watcher. There was a slight sound of bones crunching as she snapped its neck. It fell loose in her arms before she quickly dropped it.

“Gelus,” Spike greeted the other vampire as he hacked the head off the demon who’d been trying to kill Xander.

Faith helped Wes to his feet while Spike moved to stand slightly in front of Xander. Oz shook his wrists and rotated his shoulders. The remaining demons fighting with the Resistance closed ranks even as Angelus’ minions lay dying or scattered. They all looked up to see from where the elder vampire’s voice was coming.

Angelus stood halfway down a sweeping staircase angled to the right. He was grinning.

“Sorry I’m late. I really wasn’t expecting company,” he chimed.

“That’s ok,” Spike answered. “We made ourselves comfortable.”

“I see,” Angelus said still grinning. “Ordinarily I’d be entertained by a bit of rampant carnage in my front room, but I am kinda on a schedule.”

“We won’t take up much of yer time,” Spike said stepping forward.
“Oh, Spikey!” Angelus said mocking a shiver. “I just love when you get all defiant. Reminds me of the good ole days when ya were just William..and I had ta break ya.”

Spike flinched. It was subtle. The others may not have seen it, but Xander did and his blood ran hot again.

“You never did and you never could, Captain Numbnuts!” Xander yelled.

Spike blinked and looked back at Xander. His brow was furrowed and his mouth was slightly ajar. Had his pet been hit on the head too hard?

“It’s all I had...on short notice,” Xander shrugged sheepishly. “I mean I could have gone for the easy shot, An-Gel-Head. Get it...Gel Head...hair…”

“Always the nutters,” Spike muttered before turning to focus back on Angelus. While Xander looked to Faith and Oz for a little back up. They found a sudden need to inspect their weapons.

“It’s Ok, Spikey,” Angelus said taking step down the staircase. “He’ll find it difficult to speak with my cock down his throat.”

“Not gonna happen, Peaches!” Spike growled charging toward the stairs.

Angelus laughed and waved his hand. Suddenly the air was filled with a chittering sounds as large cockroach like demons began to swarm the ceiling, walls and stairs behind the dark-haired vampire. They were about five feet tall with large compound green eyes. Some stood erect on two of the four legs spouting from a long segregated torso. Also jutting out from under their carpass right at the juncture of their wings were two long appendages which folded and unfolded. The ends were tapered and looked like a long narrow bayonets with razor edges.

Spike came to a sudden stop and instinctively took a step back from the monsters on the stairs. He could hear the Voynok mutter nervously behind him.

“You didn’t think I didn’t I’d have some back up, did you?” Angelus said continuing to descend the stairs. “And these guys. They work so cheap. All they asks is for a few heads to lay where can they can lay their eggs.”

“Too bad we can give them yours,” Faith said stepping up to join Spike. “But I suspect they need more than a pile of ashes.”

“Spike! You brought me a slayer!” Angelus cried staring at the dark haired woman. The chittering demons continued to clambered down the walls and staircase. “I haven’t killed one of those in..what...seven years?”

“Buffy will be your last,” Oz growled as if he was fighting the urge to shift.

“And your only,” Spike taunted knowing he’d killed two slayers to his sire’s one.

Angelus hissed and leaned forward. The air was charged the tension of a battle about to begin when there was the sound of a footstep on glass. Everyone turned toward the noise to see a lone Jhe creeping out of a nearby room.
“Where are you going?” Angelus barked. “Where..are the witches?”

Witches? Xander thought. Willow! Tara!

“F..for..give me Lord...Angelus,” the Jhe stammered.

A Voynok screamed as one of the bug demons dropped from the ceiling and sliced through his stomach. Spike snarled and charged Angelus. Faith spun around and shoved Wesley back as she readied to ram her sword through a bug demon crawling off the wall.

Oz shifted. Xander began swinging his club and headed for the room where the Jhe had just exited.

For a moment the sounds of fighting stopped and both Dawn and Willow held their breath. Then Dawn rose suddenly to her feet as a loud chittering sound started overhead and could be heard moving down the walls outside of the room. She looked to Willow whose face was still pale and pinched with pain. Willow swallowed and focused her attention on Tara who was still unconscious. “We have to get out of here,” Dawn said urgently but calmly.

“I..I know,” Willow gasping in pain as she shifted to pull Tara into her lap.

“Can you do anything to help her?” Dawn asked?

“I..I’ll try,” Willow said. “I..think..my magic works..I just...my whole body feels..you know like when your legs fall asleep and you suddenly have to get up to answer the phone?”

“Oh...I hate that feeling,” Dawn said. “Its worse than hitting your funny bone.”

“Yeah..this feels like I did both...all over.”

There was another scream and the sounds of fighting began again.

Dawn looked at the exit readying her knife. Willow looked at Dawn. She took a deep breath, wiped long soft strands away from the sleeping witches face then dug down deep passed the pain.

“Resipiscis!” Willow commanded as she focused past the tingling pricking sensation in her body to call to tap into her magic. “Excitas!”

Briefly a soft golden glow surrounded Tara then it faded. Her body arched in Willow’s arms as she gasped then she moaned.

“Tara!” Willow called. “Please...wake up! Please!”

Tara moaned again. The chittering sounds grew louder. Dawn clenched the knife tightly in her hand while Willow gently stroked Tara’s cheek.

“Please,” the red haired witch whispered as she leaned close and pressed a soft kiss to Tara’s forehead. “We need you awake.”

“W...Willow?” Tara muttered as her eyes fluttered open.
“Goddess! Yes!” Willow cried happily.

“Ow!” Tara cried as she tried to sit up. “Wh...why...I feel like my whole body feel asleep.”
“I know...I think it’s a side affect of the spell.”

“Spell...?” Tara started to ask when Dawn let out a loud scream.

Both witches turned and stared in terror as a large cockroach looking demon crawled into the room on four legs. Impaled on it two front arms was a familiar looking Jhe demons. The Jhe looked to Dawn in terror.

“Help m...!” she started to cry only to fall abruptly silent as the bug demon spread its arms wide tearing the Jhe in half and feeling the pieces to opposite sides of the room.

Dawn stumbled back into the witches. Her face grey with terror. Tara struggled to roll off Willow’s lap while the other witch tried to get to her feet.

The bug demon chittered and turned it’s head towards the three women. It’s multitude of tiny green alien eyes forming two large compound eyes focused on the. It skittered forward trailing thick blue blood from it’s arm appendages.

Dawn stepped protectively in front of her two friends and held her knife in front of her. She wished she could think of something pithy to say the way she knew Xander would. However, even if she could think of something her mouth was so dry she would never be able to speak the words.

*Just let me be able to hold it off long enough for Willow and Tara to get away,* she silently prayed.

The bug reached out to strike when suddenly it let out a screech as stumbled as one of it’s back legs was knocked from under it.

“Hey, Dawn!” Xander’s voice called from behind the demon. “Is this guy bugging you?”

Dawn didn’t know whether to laugh or to cry.

“Xander!” Willow cried as she rose to her and the bug turned to face it’s surprise attacker. Xander swung his club again only it was blocked by one of the appendages.

Dawn rushed forward to help Xander. It was a blind rush borne of instinct. As she closed the distance she felt a sudden impact to her abdomen knocking off her feet and the breath from her. She flew across the room a feet as the bug demon hit her with one of her legs.

“DAWN!” Xander and the witches cried while Xander tried to swing again only to have the club sliced in two by one arm. The other arm swung it for an attack of it’s own. Xander tried to roll away. A searing hot pain shot across his back.

“NO!” Willow cried as she saw a red streak of blood blossom across his back. She saw Dawn on the floor flat on her back staring at the ceiling and gasping as if she was stunned and struggling to get her breath back.

“Hey...Hopper...Over..here!” Xander cried waving his arms trying to keep the demon’s attention.

Pain and fear were nearly overwhelming Willow. Her body hurt and her spirit was terrified. She
didn’t feel like a leader of the Resistance. She didn’t feel like a powerful witch. She felt like scared young woman about to watch to of the people she loved in the world die.

Then she felt a warm soft touch on her hand. It brought a gently pressure. A squeeze of reassurance, trust and more. Willow looked to her side and Tara was standing there with her. Her blue eyes staring into to Willow’s brown.

Tara smiled. The pain didn’t slip away but the fear did. Willow looked back at the creature reading to strike Xander again. She felt connected, grounded and more importantly she felt magical!

“INCENDIS!” Willow commanded while raising her other hand to point toward the bug demon. A hot wind rose up from around her and Tara and blew towards the demon igniting it in a hot spray of blue and purple flame.

It let out a roar of agony and skittered back away from Xander but the flames did not retreat. They continued to engulf the monster until it crashed onto it stomach and lay still as smoldering heap. Only then did Tara release Willow’s hand.

Willow took a moment to look back at Tara and smile before they each limped forward as best they could. Tara went to help Dawn while Willow made her way to Xander.

***************************************************************** 

Spike was in a near panic. In his rush to get Angelus he had lost Xander. In the chaos which was quickly becoming blood spattered floor and body parts Spike could not find his pet nor could he reach his sire.

“Just die!” Spike roared as he twisted the second arm off the one bug demon he was fighting.

“FAITH!” he heard the Watcher cry off to his left before heard a high scream. He didn’t have the luxury of looking.

Spike the severed arm in his hands and used the bladed end to jab into the bug demon’s eye. It let out a scream of it’s own. Spike twisted the arms and buried the blade deep until the creature fell. Only then did he leap back and look.

Faith was down on one knee her hands to her right side while Wesley was fending off another bug demon with an axe. Around them were piled body of dead Voynok. In the far east corner Spike make out the form of the great ginger wolf whimpering stomaching and snapping its jaws at the appendages trying to stab it.

“Now this is what I call a party!” Spike heard from behind him. He turned to see Angelus surveying the carnage from his spot still on the stairs. “Ya know, Spikey? It’s almost enough ta make me forgive ya….almost.”

Wes cried out and Spike turned and ran to help the Watcher.

Pet, he thought as he leaped on the back of the demon and tried to get a hold on it head. Please be far from this nightmare! I’m so sorry I failed you!

Faith was tugging Wesley out from underneath the demon with one hand while the other was still trying to hold pressure to the gaping gash in her side. Tears and blood were running down her face.
as pulled and prayed. She had seen her watcher go down when the beast had sliced the back of his leg.

“F..Faith,” he moaned while struggling to lift the axe still in his hand.

“I’m getting you out of here! she snapped. “No arguments!”

“For Spike,” Wesley explained still shoving the axe towards her.

She stopped pulling and stared at him. She looked into the eyes which were both his and not his.

“I love you,” she said simply as she grabbed the axe.

“I have wondered when you were going to say it,” Wesley said as he smiled despite the pain.

“SPIKE!” Faith yelled as she grabbed the axe and then threw it toward the vampire.

He caught it with one hand. The other was holding on to the edge of the demon’s carapace. With a snarl he brought the axe down between the middle of the beast’s strange insect eyes with the full force of his vampiric strength. Green ichor erupted all out of it’s head spraying over Spike. It reared back throwing the vampire off. The axe still embedded in it’s head.

It skittered forward a few steps then fell.

There was the sound of applause that could be heard of the din of the chittering dying. Spike stood and saw Angelus clapping his hands while the bug demons continued to slaughter his allies. He raced over to Faith and Wesley. Xander would never forgive him if he didn’t try to get them out of there. However, even as he got an arm around the Watcher and hefted him up he knew it was useless.

They were surrounded. They were unarmed. Both the Watcher and the Slayer were seriously injured. He could smell their blood pumping hot from their wounds.

*I am sorry, Xander!* he thought.

“When are ya gonna learn boy?” Angelus yelled.

Slowly the trio turned around to face the other vampire.

“I’m always gonna be two steps ahead of you? I’m always gonna win!”

“Not today, Deadboy,” Xander yelled.

*Pet!* Spike thought turning in terror to see Xander, the witches and Dawn, standing in the doorway of the room where the Jhe demon had fled. The four of them seemed to be barely on their feet. Spike even thought he could see blood on Xander’s shirt. *No! Run!*

“XAN….” Spike started to shout.

Suddenly the room began to fill without hot wind and two voices rang out in unison.

“INCENDIS!” the witches shouted, Willow’s eyes black with power, “VOS INCENDITIS!”
The chittering noises changed to high pitch screeches as the one by one the demon bugs began to burst into flame. The air sizzled and crackled as their exoskeletons popped from the heat.

“It smells like my Uncle Bernie’s giant bug zapper in here,” Xander said watching the demon bugs die.

Faith, Wesley and Spike moved as one towards their friends. Spike didn’t know whether he which he wanted to do more, kiss Xander or turn him over his knee.

*I’m gonna do both and more,* Spike thought. *Never gonna let him be in danger again!*

There was a happy yelp as the large wolf version of Oz limped over on the three legs to the group. The survivors turned and looked at the Angelus.

“INCEN..” Willow and Tara started to cry again, this time their focus on Angelus who for the first time since the assault had begun seemed confused and unsure.

“WILLOW, NO!” Xander cried!

The witches stopped and looked at Xander. Black still staining his best friend’s eyes.

“Explain,” she said in a voice that was both cold and lilting.

“We need him,” Xander said quickly. “He’s the key. It’s him...his blood that seals the portal.”

“I can make him bleed,” dark Willow continued.

“No, Wills, please,” Xander begged.

They stared at each other. Spike noted a slight movement on the stairs.

“I wouldn’t if I were you, sire. She can cast quicker than you can move.”

Angelus went stock still.

“It..it’s ok, Willow,” Tara said softly squeezing her hand gently. “You...you can release the en..energy now.”

Willow looked back at Tara. The blonde witch smiled and suddenly Willow began to sag to the ground as the dark energy left her. Tara sank to the ground with her. Both of them completely drained.

“Guess, I don’t have anything to fear after all,” Angelus said with a grin.

“I wouldn’t say that,” Lindsey’s voice abruptly rang out just as a crossbolt sailed through the air sinking deep into the vampire’s sternum.

TBC
At first the Scoobies were too stunned to react as they watch the arrow impale Angleus to the wall. They turned to see Lindsey step from the shadows clad in only in a long pair of loose baggy silk black pajama bottoms. In his hands poised to fire again was a repeating crossbow.

“You missed!” Angelus laughter cascaded down from the staircase as he grabbed at the arrow in the middle of his chest just an inch from his heart.

“Did I?” Lindsey asked his voice rough with hatred.

“Lindsey! Don’t!” Xander barked. “We need him!”

“I heard,” Lindsey said continuing to slowly move forward but not lowering his weapon.

“Then you are going to hold your fire?”

“Didn’t say that.”

“Ah...didn’t know you were the sentimental ty…”

Another crossbolt flew through the air nailing Angleus in the throat.

“Bloody hell!” Spike roared. “Are you off your chump? We need his blood to close the port to hell!”

“I heard,” Lindsey replied calmly as he came to a halt. Quickly pulling back the lever on the top of his crossbow. “I got eight more bolts in this bow and I only need one to dust Angelus. I can do it before you ever reach me.”

“What...do you want?” Xander asked trying to figure out what was going through the lawyer’s head.


“What?” Xander cried in shock not believing, after everything he had suffered, Lindsey would ever want to see Angelus again let alone want to keep him.

“No!” Spike yelled knowing his sire was too dangerous to keep around.

Dawn and the witches gasped.

“Ain’t gonna happen,” hissed Faith.

“Why?” asked Wesley calmly.

“You bleed him, you kill him..he only goes to some other hell, right?” Lindsey asked.

“It’s possible,” Wesley conceded.

“What of it?” barked Spike.
“Who’s to say he won’t find away to take over that hell? Find a way back?” Lindsey asked as he watched Angelus grin and finally tug the bold free from his chest. The vampire blew the lawyer a kiss as he began to work on pulling out the bolt in his throat.

“Th..that...oh goddess,” Willow said looking up to Xander. “He’s right.”

“He is?”

“So...what..we’re just gonna turn him over to the bollocky barrister here?” Spike asked.

“No,” Faith said emphatically staring at the dangerous vampire still working to get the bolt out of his throat.

“I will do it,” Lindsey said. “And I won’t miss.”

“But you have to know no matter how clever or how strong the prison you build for him..it’s just not going to hold him,” Xander said softly. “And not matter what you do...it will never undo what he did to you. It will never come close to hu…”

“I know where there is an Orb of Thesulah,” Lindsey interrupted.

Angelus stilled. The Scoobies fell silent. Lindsey kept his eyes and aimed locked on the black haired vampire.

“You do what you need to do to close the portal but when you are done, we’re resouling the bitch. That’s the deal. That’s the only deal,” Lindsey said.

“What? So we can just lose it all over again next time he gets a happy?” Xander snapped.

“You have powerful witches,” Lindsey argued. “I’m sure they can modify the curse.”

“This is insane!” Faith hissed.

“Actually,” Spike said as he watched his sire now frantically redoubling his efforts to get a hold on the crossbolt pinning him to the wall. “He may be on ta something.”

“What?” Xander and the women cried.

“A soulful Peaches maybe a big poncy poofter but he does make the perfect gaolor for Angelus. The demon side hates the soul and vice versa. It’s torture and…”

“And he’ll be contained...in his own private hell,” Lindsey. “And I’m the one that’ll make sure he’s put there.”

“You ain’t got the stones!” Angelus gurgled as he finally pulled the bolt out. “I oughtta know. I’ve seen them.”

There was another quick ‘snick’ sound as Lindsey let another bolt fly. Angelus cried out in pain as this time the bolt lodged itself into Angelus’ left knee.

“Where is this Orb?” Wesley asked.
“In the vaults of Wolfram and Hart,” Lindsey replied cocking his crossbow again.

“And how do we get it?” Faith asked.

“You don’t,” Lindsey replied. “I do.”

“And how’s that gonna go down, mate?” Spike asked.

“Simple,” Lindsey said. “The master of Las Vegas is gonna send his lawyer to ask for it as a personal favor.”

“Wot?”

“Spike...Master,” Xander said laying his hand gently on Spike’s arm. “Hear the crazy man with the sharp pointy wooden sticks out.”

Spike growled his face bearing his vampiric features.

“Its not like I want to be associated with another vampire,” Lindsey said, “but it will get us the Orb.”

“I will rip your spleen out and use your intestines to strangle babies,” Angelus threatened.

“Oi..like I haven’t seen ya do that a hundred times,” Spike shot back. “Get an original threat!”

“Master!” Xander snapped elbowing Spike in the side.

“You give me your word,” Lindsey explained. “You swear your side will keep their end of their bargain and I’ll believe you otherwise you’ll have nothing but ash to try and close the portal with.”

Another bolt snapped free.

“FUCK YOU, LINDS!” Angelus screamed as the bolt pierced his other knee.

“Been there...done that...not impressed.” Lindsey replied coolly. “So, Xander? What about it? Or does this next arrow end in a dust cloud?”

Xander looked at the rest of the Scoobies. They looked back at him. He looked at Spike.
The blonde vampire longed to give his pet the order but deep down in his soul he knew he couldn’t just as he knew he’d abide to whatever Xander agreed. Spike had gotten them this far. He’d navigated and protected them as best he could through the demon world. If they were truly to return to a human one, perhaps it was best the rest of the journey relied on a human.

*And there is no better human, no one I trust more than you, Xander,* Spike thought as he stared at his pet.

Xander swallowed at the look in Spike’s eyes. The trust and faith he saw there was almost overwhelming for the one time ‘donut boy’ and ‘zeppo.’ He took a deep breath and looked back to Lindsey.

“Oh,” he said. “We’ll do it your way.”

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In the end, the ritual and returning the world from hell was rather anticlimactic. Once the deal between the Scoobies and Lindsey had been struck, he had covered them while they’d quickly seized upon the screaming, struggling and vampire.

He had nothing to lose and it would have been all out fight but Lindsey’s crossbolts had weakened him and Faith and Spike had proved a slayer and a vampire could teamwork very nicely. In the end they’d had a chained and gagged Angelus before Acathala.

Spike had taken a sword from one of the fallen Voynok and run it through his sire’s stomach. Angelus had screamed out from behind his gag as blood jetted from his wound and splattered all over the stone demon with the gaping maw for a mouth.

The world around them had shuddered. The air had filled with a hot acrid smell and the sounds of an eternity of screams. Lindsey and the Scoobies had fallen to the floor covering their ears as the wind and the screams rushed over and around them.

A sick orange lightening, the color of a rotted pumpkin, had lit the air.

“Pet! Hold on to me!” Spike had tried to order over the din.

Xander had crawled to Spike who held pommel of the sword in one hand while the other had been reaching out to him.

Large ethereal black forms had begun to gather in the room and had been immediately sucked into Acathala’s gaping maw. The wind had increased and it had lifted up Angelus’ body threatening to pull it off the sword and sucking it down into the hell.

“NO!” Lindsey had roared grabbing hold of the vampire and anchoring it with his own body.

There had been a fierce high pitch howl as if in frustration and suddenly more blood had begun to pour out of Anelgus. His eyes, ears, nose and mouth had gushed thick red rivers that flowed directly into the stone demon’s mouth.

Dawn had looked away in horror. The witches held hands while Faith held Wesley up and steady on his one good leg.
After what had seemed like hours but had to have really only been minutes the portal had suddenly closed. The winds had ceased, the screaming stopped and Angelus’ body had dropped.

The silence had been eerie. Even the final peals from the vanished lightning had faded.

“Spike...look,” Xander had finally broken the silence staring at Angelus in alarm.

Lindsey had sat up from where he’d been covering the vampire while Spike had lifted his head from Xander’s shoulder where’d he’d buried it during the storm. They all had looked at the former hell on earth.

Angelus was a husk of dry tight skin pulled over taunt muscles and jagged bones. His body was rigid. It was as if every drop of moisture, of blood, had been pulled from him. Yet, the tips of his fingers had twitched. He was not dead.

“Bloody hell!” Spike had cried jumping back and dropping the sword.

All of them had moved forward and took a long look at Angelus. He was a living monstrosity. No one was sorry for him.

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It hadn’t been difficult to transport the vampires back to the truck. Lindsey had personally seen to carrying and securing the canoe with Angelus’ husk inside. Though, Xander was pretty sure he didn’t take a great care to make sure the vampire was jostled or shaken as Xander did with his precious cargo.

Navigating back to the desert base of the Resistance was a little more adventurous. While demons no longer controlled every stretch of highway it was chaos. Some demons had winked out of existence on the current plane once the portal had closed. In those areas humans gained control right away.

In others human had to rise up and fight back. It was different from town to town. In one town it could be sheer bloody fighting from street to street corner. The next it was a V-Day like celebration. In yet another was positively empty.

“We have to get back and organize,” Willow had said.

“We need to get to LA and find out whose jostling for power now,” Lindsey had corrected from his corner of the truck.

Xander had stayed quiet. Oddly enough so had Spike. Neither had looked at each other. The world was changing around them again. The last time Spike had lost Xander and it hadn’t gone well for his pet. Yet, how could he separate him from his friends again?

Despite the chaos they’d arrive safely back at the ghost town outside of Las Vegas. It was vacant. No lingering signs of Angelus’ demons or anyone. Just as Willow and Wesley had suspected.

“Who would suspect we would come back and who would look? Especially after the ritual?” Willow had explained.
“We’re not going back?” Xander finally asked as Spike ushered them down in through the tunnels towards where they had slept before.

“Not until this thing with ‘Gelus is done,” Spike groused.

“Why?” Xander asked.

“Cuz I ain’t bleedin’ trustin’ this lot not to muck up returning Peaches’ soul,” Spike answered. “Not going back ta Vegas until I know it’s back..or we buried the crozzled bit of remains somewhere out here in the desert.”

“But what about...Las Vegas?” Xander pressed. “What about Clem? The kids..”

“I’ll send, Lorne,” Spike said softly as he reached out and brushed a finger down Xander’s nose. *Always the bloody White Knight. Always thinking of others, ain’t ya?*

“‘Sides, don’t think he likes bein’ on the run. Not enough..amenities for him.”

Xander smiled and leaned into the touch. He needed it. He needed, Spike.

“Speaking of? You know where we can get a shower around here? Ya smell like...the arenas,” Spike said with teasing smile.

“Oh, way to kill the mood, Master Muttonhead,” Xander snarked then froze. Spike’s eyes flashed gold. He grinned.

“Fuck!” Xander cried and ran.

Spike followed. In the end Xander could barely find the breath to thank his master for his punishment. He hadn’t had the strength to walk back to their little part of the tunnels. Spike had had to carry his wet, satiated and very worn out body.

Xander didn’t have the spunk to even feel embarrassed. Instead, he’d just curled tighter into Spike’s arms breathing in the scent of his master and even stealing tastes with each tiny kiss he pressed to his neck.

TBC
“He’s late,” Spike grumbled.

“He’ll be here,” Willow replied.

“Ya really trust that punter?” Spike replied.

“I trust he wants revenge on Angelus,” Willow sighed turning away to look from the direction of the road to look at Spike. “So, yes, I trust he’ll be here.”

“What’s taken him so long then?”

“Traffic?” Xander offered hopefully.

Spike snorted.

“Well, you do have to admit there are a lot more cars on the road again,” Dawn said.

“It’s almost like people forgot there’s been a demon Apocalypse for the last seven years,” said Tara.

“Never underestimate the power of people to be willfully and stupendously in denial of the obvious and quick to forget,” said Spike.

“For once, I’d have to agree with, Spike,” chimed in Wesley.

“Wait! Did that just set off a new apocalypse?” teased Faith.

Everyone groaned. Xander leaned in closer to Spike as they stood looking for signs of headlights traveling down the dirt road that led back to the highway. Behind them was a concrete box about the size and shape of a coffin. It was topped with a heavy concrete slab for a lid.

A large circle had been drawn around the box in the sand. Strange and arcane symbols had been drawn within the circle and at a point for each of the four directions there was a lit candle.

Inside the box was Angelus. Even though he was still nothing but barely moving desiccated corpse, he was gagged and bound with thick heavy iron chains.

Spike turned back to look at container which had been holding his sire the last three weeks since they had defeated him. A little beyond the sacred circle was the truck which had brought them all out to the spot to meet Lindsey.

“Ain’t too late, Red,” Spike said. “I could still bury him somewhere deep out here in the desert. Some place no one would ever find.”

“We’ll wa…” Willow started to say.

“Headlights!” Faith interrupted.
Spike joined the others in looking to the horizon. Sure enough, he could spy in the distance the bob and weave of lights traveling down what was barely a road.

“You sure you’re up for this, Wil?” Xander asked knowing what was coming.

Willow nodded.

“Ya work out the kinks?” Spike asked.

“No happiness clause,” Tara assured.

“Right, then before Lindsey gets here and we get started I guess there’s just one more little bit of business we need ta finish,” the vampire said.

“Spike…” Xander started.

“We’ve had this discussion,” Willow said turning again to look at the vampire.

“We haven’t finished it.”

“You can’t expect me to just be OK with you..claiming an entire city..even if I had some sort of authority to do so,” Willow snapped.

“Don’t tell me that your lot, the Resistance and what’s left of the Watchers, ain’t going ta be somehow pulling the strings. I mean I’ve already seen ya measurin’ the curtains yer gonna be hidin’ behind.”

“And that doesn’t mean giving you Vegas,” Willow insisted.

“Why not?” Spike argued.

“It...it’s...there are people there!”

“There are demons there too and yer gonna need a place for the demons and the things that go bump in the night to go...well bump in the night unless you plan on huntin’ ‘em all down now?”

“Well call me an old fashioned girl…” Faith said.

“So what? Ya want to continue the war?” Spike snarled.


“So demons and vampires gotta die?” Xander asked.

“Xander?” Willow asked in surprise. “How can you say that? I mean…”

“Because I’ve met good demons, Wil,” Xander answered. “We wouldn’t be here now without Spike and without the demons who helped him.”

“He’s right,” Tara said gently putting a hand on Willow’s shoulder.

“But the people..”
“They can make a decision as to whether or not they want to stay,” said Spike.

“And you expect…” Faith started.

“I expect a fair bunch will leave. However, I expect there will be more than you think who will want to stay,” said Spike. “Some might even seek out Vegas.”

“You can’t be serious,” said Wesley.

“I am. Some people…they won’t know how to live back in the old ways in a human run world. They’ll be lost. They’ll need a demon run place.”

Xander looked at his feet. It scared him to know how right Spike was. The fear was so deep he was even afraid to ponder if he might be one of those people.

“Again, he’s right,” said Tara. When the other humans looked at her in shock she nodded her head insistence. “I m..m..ean maybe some people can get back in their cars and p..pick up their books and go back to the world the way it w..was but others can’t or w..won’t.”

“But that just means we leave a demon city where…they can be killed and demons can breed? Plot to overthrow us again?” Faith asked.

“Or maybe have a demon city where they can be demons and people that need to be there can be there,” Dawn spoke up. “Maybe a city run by someone who can make sure it stays in line and that it’s an ally and not a threat.”

“Ta,” Spike said winking at Dawn.

“Dawn has a point,” Wesley said.

“What?” Faith asked.

“Well, perhaps we have been doing it wrong. We’ve chased, fought and killed monsters in the shadows for so long and it got us an apocalypse. Maybe it is time we tried a different way.”

“Look,” Spike said. “It’s not like Vegas changed all that much in the last seven years…”

“Except for the arenas…the stables…the slavery…” Xander began to tick off.

“Oi! Pet, are you on my side?” Spike growled.

“Well I may agree you have a point but I’m not gonna sugar coat it,” Xander answered.

“As I was saying,” Spike continued. “Vegas didn’t change much. Ya had yer shows and yer casinos. I’ll still run it that way. I’ll even open it up to human tourists who might want a walk on the wild side. I’ll create human safe zones in the city and any demon who can’t abide by the rules will answer to me. However, Vegas will be a demon run city and the humans that choose to live there will then come under demon rule. No cries to the resistance.”

“And the demons outside the city?” Willow asked.
“Not my problem,” Spike answered. “Vegas is mine. I take care of mine and the rest…”

He shrugged.

“And if you can’t,” Faith asked. “If you can’t..take care of it.”

“You testin’ me slayer?” Spike growled as Xander stepped closer to lay a hand on his master’s arm.

“I’m being realistic,” Faith replied pointed looking at the box where Angelus’ husk twitched. “You aren’t the first vampire..to believe he could rule without opposition. Who couldn’t be defeated.”

“I ain’t my sire,” Spike spat.

“We know,” Xander said softly. Spike whipped his head around to gaze in his pet’s eyes. Was Xander doubting him now?

Xander smiled at him. It was soft and genuine. There was no doubt shining in his eyes only the hard won trust Spike had asked of him.

“But,” he said softly. “It would be a demon run city with demon rules and you know someone will try.”

“Let ‘em,” Spike said the snarl gone from him his voice as he reached out and ran the knuckles of one hand gently down Xander’s cheek. “I’ll fight dirty, hit ‘em hard and maybe even get bloodied but in the end I’ll keep what’s mine.”

“Yeah, of course you will,” Xander answered raising a hand to run it softly through Spike’s hair. “Just as long as it doesn’t mess your hair.”

“Oi!” Spike said as he grabbed Xander’s hand and brought it to his lips. Any other time he might let this moment lead to more teasing and sensual torture but not now. Not with the lights of the shyster’s car growing brighter. Not with the time to summoning Angel back getting nearer.

Not when we are getting ready to return to the city, both his soul and his demon whispered in unison.

“Ehm,” Wesley cleared his throat breaking the moment between the vampire and his clamiant. “But if you…”

“If I lose control of Vegas,” Spike turned back to face the rest of the Scoobie gang, “ya lot can come in and play the heroes. Sweep it clean of the monsters and the shadows under the bed.”

“But,” he said holding up his finger, “unless that happens it’s my city. Yeah?”

Tara nodded to Willow. Xander gave her a soft smile.

“Agreed,” Willow finally said curling her lips as if she had just bit into a lemon.

“Watcher?” Spike looked at Wesley.

Wesley looked at Faith. She swayed her hips gently back and forth as she thought. She looked over Spike then rolled her eyes.
“Fine with me,” she snorted looking back at her Watcher.

“Good. Then before we turn Gelus back into Peaches we’ll have Lindsey draw up the papers.”

“What?” Willow and Wesley said in unison.

“A contract. Write it up in a contract,” Spike explained.

“Are word isn’t good enough?” Faith asked edging forward just a little sparking Xander to move quickly in between vampire and slayer.

“Oi! Yer lots word is good enough. But what happens when ya do somethin’ incredibly stupid like run off to stop the next apocalypse and get yourself killed? Or just simply die from having a terminal case of being human?”

“Spike!” Xander cried turning back around and facing his master.

“Wot?” the vampire said drinking in every detail of his outraged White Knight.

“Well he d…does have a point,” Tara said. “What happens if.. when we die?”

“No! We just won the big battle with Captain Crazy,” Xander said turning to face the others. “We are not talking about anyone dying!”

“I hate to admit it…,” Willow started to say.

“Lalalalalalal I can’t hear you!” Xander said putting his fingers in his ears.

Contract, mouthed Wesley as Lindsey’s car rolled to a stop.

***

Will sat on the ground leaning against Tara bathed in the headlights shining from Lindsey’s car. Her hair was matted to her forehead with sweat. The candles around the ritual area were all burned out. The air was heavy with the smell of ozone and tension. Lindsey had brought the Orb as promised. Even though he’d been anxious to do the ritual he’d written up a quick draft of a contract giving Spike control over Vegas when it was clear Spike wouldn’t let the evening proceed without it. No one was surprised he’d actually had the tools needed to do it.

“A shyster’s like a boy scout,” Spike had observed. “Always prepared.”

As Spike’s representative with Wolfram and Hart he promised to file the paperwork when he returned to LA and thus would magically bind all parties to the contract with the law firm’s senior partners enforcing it a prospect no one wanted.

“Leave it to a hell run law firm to still be in business on the other side of an apocalypse,” Xander had muttered.

“Multiple hells, actually,” Lindsey had replied in his cool southwestern drawl.
Then they had all stepped back and let Willow and Tara do what they had been prepping for the last three days. Somehow the ritual was both longer and shorter than the witnesses had expected. It was almost anti-climactic and yet they had felt the power of it zing through them as it coalesced in the Orb and then shot out into the concrete box.

It had lit up the desert briefly and in the moment the faces of everyone present were revealed. Dawn hadn’t been able to hide her fear. She’d insisted on being there but her terror of Angelus was palpable. Faith had had a predatory look while Wesley’s concern had shown as his attention was fully on the slayer he loved. Tara and Willow’s faces had had a serene quality as they twisted and bent the magic to their will. Spike had worn a fierce look of protection even as he had one arm wrapped around Xander who had had a stake literally hidden up his sleeve, just in case. Only Lindsey had worn an inscrutable look.

“Well?” Dawn asked finally breaking the silence. “Did it work?”

“Only one way to find out,” Lindsey drawled his eyes fixed on the makeshift coffin.

“Right then,” Spike said letting go of Xander and stepping forward.

“Spike!” Xander cried grabbing hold of the vampire’s arm and tugging him back.

“Pet?” Spike mustered his best master’s voice as he cocked an eyebrow at Xander.

“Ple…,”

Don’t, he thought. He wanted to say it but he knew that tone. He knew that look Spike was giving him. Instead he took a deep breath and let Spike go.

“..becareful, master,” he murmured.

Spike nodded and moved to kneel by Angelus’ prison. He was surprised to find Faith joining him.

“Hey…am slayer,” she said with a grin. “If it’s gone down wrong just here to do my job.”

“Take a number,” Spike growled with no real malice before shoving the lid off.

Inside there was still just a desiccated corpse whose fingers twitched.

“Bollocks,” Spike said.

“Faith?” Wesley asked.

“Can’t tell. He’s still a husk,” Faith called out to the others.

“He’s gonna need ta feed before we know anything,” Spike said staring down at his grandsire.

“Great!” Xander said. “Let’s restore the possible homicidal, not to mention genocidal, maniac back to good health. Any volunteers?”

“I gotta it covered,” Lindsey said.
Several pairs of eyebrows shot up as everyone turned to look at Lindsey.

“What? No, I’m not opening a vein for him,” he said as he turned and headed back towards his car.

Willow got to her feet as everyone watched the lawyer. He was briefly swallowed by the dark of the desert as he walked behind the view of the headlights to the trunk of his car. When he returned he carried with him a small cooler.

“Blood packets,” he said dropping the blue insulated box outside the ritual space. “Should be enough to get him on his feet but not enough to get him to full strength.”

“Good thinking,” Faith said as she darted away from the coffin to grab the cooler.

“I’m a lawyer. I generally think through all the angles.”

“Ta,” Spike said as Faith dropped the cooler down next to him.

“Figured you knew best how to play nursemaid to him.”

“I’ve done it once or twice,” Spike nodded thinking of Dru as he open the lid on the cooler and pulled out a bag. Next he reached down into the coffin, yanked off the gag and then pried Angelus’ jaws open.

Waste of good blood, Spike thought as he ripped into the bag with his fangs before pumping the contents into Angelus’ mouth. At first there were no visible signs of improvement. Spike repeated the process while the others watched. It took three bags before the husk began to resemble something more like a body. By the sixth bag more than just it’s fingers were moving and by the eighth and final bag the older vampire’s eyelids rolled open.

The two vampires stared at each other. Spike’s blue eyes tinged with gold boring into the brown eyes of his grandsire below. He studied the older vampire for any sign to indicate whether the spell at worked or not.

“Spike?” the other vampire finally croaked breaking the silence. He blinked in confusion and then his eyes grew wide. Tears began to flow as his weak body began to shake rattling the iron chains still binding him.

“Spike…” he tried again.

The blonde vampire stood up and walked away back towards Xander.

“It worked,” he said wrapping his arms around his pet and staring off in the distance behind him.

***

They all had left Angel in the box for most of the night. They had all been prepared to return his soul but it was as if no one had really thought about what to do with him after it was done. For his part, Angel just lay in his concrete prison, silent, and shaking.

Xander held on to Spike who was also quiet and withdrawn staring off into the distance. He was worried and scared. He wanted to ask what was wrong but every time he took a breath about to say something Spike would tighten his arms around him or cover his mouth with a gentle kiss. It was
clear the vampire didn’t want to talk. So Xander held him as tight as he could and hoped it was enough.

It was Lindsey who finally freed Angel. No one had expected it. The lawyer hadn’t moved or said a word since he’d dropped the cooler not even when Spike had confirmed it was Angel and not Angelus. Then all of the sudden he’d dashed to the makeshift coffin and yanked the vampire up as far as the chains would let him.

“Linds...,” Angel said in a quiet voice before the lawyer slammed his fist into the vampire’s face. Angel tried to say something again only to have his face pounded a second and a third time. It would have been a fourth time but Faith had suddenly grabbed the lawyer and pulled him off.

“You should let him,” Xander said staring at Angel and remembering the things he’d witnessed Angelus do to Lindsey. Spike tightened his arms around his Claimaint.

“We didn’t give Angel his soul back so he could be punished for what Angelus did,” Wesley said moving forward to being unlocking the chains on Angel.

“No..don’t,” Angel begged staring at the watcher. “I..just bury me.”

“No. Not that easy,” Lindsey spit somehow breaking free of Faith but not moving toward the vampire again.

“It’s the least of what I deserve,” Angel said turning his head toward the lawyer without looking at him.

“There isn’t enough revenge or justice for what Angelus deserves,” Lindsey spit. “And I know he’s rattling around inside there with you.”

Angel flinched.

“So you tell him, he’s never going to know where his son is. Where Connor is. Ever!”

Angel’s head snapped up and he looked at Lindsey. If it were possible he turned paler.

Spike and Xander looked at each other and as if one they thought, Connor? The image of the boy with the familiar smile flashed through their minds. They turned to look at Angel and the lawyer in confusion.

“Lindse..”

“Don’t! Don’t say my name. Don’t ever say my name again,” Lindsey said. “And don’t you tell me you’re sorry. Don’t even try and find words to apologize for what that prick did to me. To the fucking world.”

Angel’s head fell.

“There is no absolution for what you’ve done and yeah it would be so easy to just bury you here in this fucking desert. Leave you wasting away in an unmarked grave forever alive but starving but you know, even that wouldn’t be enough because while it would be punishing the fucking demon it would also be pu...”
Lindsey let out a scream of frustration and turned his back on the vampire. His whole body shook with a rage only Xander could begin to understand. Another hush fell across the desert as Lindsey worked through the emotional storms rolling through him. Finally, just as Tara started to move towards him, he held up his hand.

“You want to try and make up for what Angelus did?” he asked in a hollow voice his back still to the vampire. “You can’t do it buried in the Vegas desert. He left a mess. Instead of feeling sorry for yourself, Angel, why don’t you help clean it up.”

Then Lindsey walked away. He kept walking until he reached his car and then he drove away.

***

Close to sunrise they had all returned back to the tunnels. Spike had barely said a word and Xander was more nervous than ever. Faith had escorted the subdued Angel who wouldn’t look anyone in the eye. He’d tried to say Spike’s name again but the blonde vampire had sent him a look that froze Angel mid-speech. Angel had then looked at Xander.

“Look at him again and you’ll be dust,” is all Spike said before he stepped between Angel and his pet. Angel kept his head and his eyes down after that.

Spike hadn’t given his sire another thought once he and Xander had slipped off to their little part of the tunnels. Instead he’d pulled the curtain tight over the opening and then lit some lanterns.

“Spike,” Xander said softly finally trying to get through to his vampire. “What’s..”

“Not now, Xan,” Spike answered once again pulling his beloved pet into his arms. “Just…let’s take a break from it all for a bit, yeah?”

“But..” Xander started to argue only to be cut off with a gentle toe curling kiss. Spike’s lips covered his own. The moved over his entreatings him. They begged him and he responded opening his mouth and letting the kiss deepen until Xander thought he could almost do without breathing as long as he could kiss Spike just like this.

When the kiss broke he stared at Spike in confusion.

“Are you, OK?” Xander whispered his voice stolen.

“Oi, why wouldn’t I be?” Spike answered with a brilliant smile. The one which sent tingles down Xander’s spine. “My plan worked. We saved the world and most of all I have my pet in my arms.”

“Bragging much?” Xander joked relieved to hear a little of the familiar arrogance in his master’s voice.

“Ain’t bragging if it’s the truth,” Spike said before swooping down and kissing the tip of Xander’s nose.

“You gonna set up a monument to yourself in Vegas? How you saved the world?”

“Maybe? And wot if I did? I’m the big bad master of the city,” Spike said snaking his hands up underneath Xander’s shirt.

“Bragging,” Xander grinned as a shiver of want followed where Spike’s hands touched him.
“Wrong consonants,” Spike murmured against Xander’s neck.

“Huh?” Xander replied as he entwined his fingers through Spike’s hair.

“S-H…bragging rhymes with…” Spike said as his fingers began to undo the buttons on Xander’s fly.

“Fuck!” Xander moaned as he Spike’s fingers brushed against the growing bulge swiftly being freed.

“Nope..doesn’t rhyme,” Spike purred snaking his hand inside Xander’s pants to wrap it around his warm cock.

*OK, some definite advantages of not wearing the belt all the time,* Xander thought.

“Spike,” Xander moaned pulling the vampire closer.

“Oi, now yer not even trying,” Spike teased as he eased Xander free and began to stroke him to full hardness.

“What?” Xander panted his forehead leaning against Spike’s as he watched the vampire take him in hand.

“What rhymes with bragging, pet?” Spike asked twirling a thumb over the spongy head of Xander’s penis.

“Uhm…nagging?" Xander answered thrusting himself forward into Spike’s grasp.

“Are you stallin’, pet?” Spike chuckled using his other hand to play with Xander’s nipple ring.

“If I am..” Xander panted. “Are you going to stop?”

“No,” Spike said before capturing Xander’s lips in a searing kiss. Xander grabbed Spike’s shoulders and fucked himself against Spike’s hand while he moaned and bucked shamelessly until his world began to go white.

“Xander,” Spike suddenly whispered stopping mid-stroke and stalling Xander’s climax.

“No,” Xander groaned then froze wondering what punishment he might have just earned. He opened the eyes he didn’t know he closed. Blue eyes bore into him.

“I want..” Spike said so softly Xander barely heard him. Xander’s eyebrows lifted and he tried to calm his breathing to better hear what the vampire was saying.

Spike’s brushed his hand from Xander’s chest to his cheek in a tantalizing caress. A slow gentle smile spread across his face. It was one Xander had never seen before and it caused something in him to just roll over and melt.

“Xander, will you sleep with me?” Spike asked.

“Wh…I thought..aren’t we..I mean, mas..” Xander began to babble in confusion only to be cut off with a soft kiss.
“No Master. No Pet. Just you and me,” Spike whispered when he finally broke the kiss to stare back into Xander’s eyes. “No demon rules. No human rules. I want...you, Xander. I want you to the core of me. I want to feel ya inside of me burnin’ me up with yer heat.”

For a moment Xander thought his heart stopped. It was as if Spike’s words had shut down all systems. Emergency sirens flared as everything ground to a standstill and all remaining power was diverted to central processing. Xander stared at Spike while his brain tried to decipher what the vampire had just said.

Then it was if everything had reset. Bells rang, lights blazed to life and systems were a go. All systems were more than a go; they were running in the red as understanding flared through him somehow making him ache not only with want and need but with something much deeper; something that wasn’t physical.

"Oh...OH!” Xander exhaled as he nodded nervously before covering Spike’s mouth with his own and kissing him with all of the tenderness and emotions he could not express.

TBC
Xander wasn’t sure how they got undressed. He only knew that one moment he had his hands fisted in Spike’s hair dragging him closer while he devoured his lips. He’d been molding his body to the vampire and still it wasn’t close enough.

Then the next thing he knew they were all bare arms and legs entwined in a nest of sleeping bags. Mouths were dancing over skin. They were flames burning hot and cold moving sinuously over one another in a familiar but always a new dance.

“Ghods Spike!” Xander moaned as the vampire laved at the slight scars of his bite from the claiming ritual. Then as if in answer he wrapped his hand around Spike’s leaking cock and began stroking it.

“Xander!” Spike groaned into his human lover’s skin. He peppered tiny kisses up to Xander’s jaw line then seized his mouth in a devouring kiss.

Xander bucked up and pressed his hard length against Spike’s stomach letting his precum paint the vampire’s skin. The vampire panted into Xander’s mouth as he broke the kiss. He gently took hold of Xander’s chin.

Blue eyes and brown met.

“I want you,” Spike said his voice smokey with need.

“I…” Xander licked his lips and Spike groaned. “I..don’t know. I mean. I only ever..the one…”

“Shh,” Spike said placing a finger gently to Xander’s lips silencing the babble. “That’s not the question, luv. The mechanics are simple. The question is do you want to?”

Xander’s breath caught in his chest.

Want blondie? Xander thought. I’m so past want I’m not sure we’re even in the same galaxy.

“I don’t want to hurt you. Mess it up,” Xander somehow ground out around Spike’s finger and past the bubble of air still being held hostage in his chest.

“Ya won’t, luv,” Spike said smiling down at Xander. “You and me we’re like bangers and mash. We go together.”

“I think I prefer peanut butter and jelly,” Xander grinned the hostage situation easing up.

“Blood and biscuits?”

“Ew!” Xander laughed his breath finally free.

“So?” Spike asked before kissing the tip of Xander’s nose.

“Yeah, I do,” Xander whispered as his cock twitched in answer under Spike. He was rewarded with a smile he could of sworn lit the small room brighter than the lanterns.
Then Spike sat and moved to the side.

“Hey..” Xander called pushing himself up onto his elbows.

“Just getting the slick,” Spike said rummaging through one of their duffel bags before scrambling back over to slide next to his love. He propped himself up next to Xander on his elbow. Then he lit the room again with another smile. “So...how do you want me?”

“Huh?” Xander asked his face turning a lovely garnet color.

“Hands and knees? Flat on my back?” Spike asked as he squirted a handful of lube into his hand and then began to ease it around Xander’s shaft.

“C..cold!” Xander stuttered wilting a bit.

“Feels hot ta me, luv,” Spike teased while he slicked Xander’s hot length in his hand.

“That was evil!” Xander accused.

“Big bad,” Spike said as he continued to pump Xander while at the same time stealing a kiss. He then leaned in closer and whispered into his ear, “So thought about it? How do ya want me? Face down with my cheeks spread wide for ya or spread out under you offerin’ myself up like a feast?”

“Oh fuck!” Xander groaned fully erect again. “You keep that up I won’t last to get to the main event and Spike…I really want to make it to the main event.”

Spike laughed and leaned back a little as his hand slowed its pace. He studied Xander as he waited for his love’s answer.

Xander stared back. He drank in the sight of Spike so open and offering him something he’d not even thought would ever be his to even fantasize about. The vampire was a sculpted creature of beauty whom Xander had grown to relish. He could never get enough of his touch or even just the sight of him.

“I want...I want to see you,” Xander said in a breathy voice.

“On my back then,” Spike said as he started to lay down.

Xander reached out and touched his shoulder.

“No,” he said softly. “I..want…”

“On top then?” Spike asked surprised but none the less delighted.

“I want to see and touch you and...is that ok?”

“It’s perfect, luv,” Spike said as squirted another handful of gel into his hand. Then he sat up and then gracefully slid a leg across Xander to straddle him. Xander lay back and gasped as he felt Spike’s cheeks rested just above that part of him that was slick and too ready for the vampire.

Spike leaned forward resting one hand beside Xander’s head. Xander groaned at the loss of contact.
“Shh. Just need a moment ta get ready,” Spike purred as he snaked his other hand full of lube back behind him.

“You...should...I mean...can I.?” Xander began again to babble unsure of what to do.

“You can kiss me..touch me,” Spike answered as he worked to ready himself growing harder just thinking of Xander’s heat inside of him.

Xander sat up to meet Spike and nibbled at his lips while running a hand down the smooth chiseled chest he woke up pillowed on top of every morning. Spike groaned swelling under Xander’s touch and the anticipation of what was to come.

Xander’s kisses deepened as his hand found their ultimate target. He smiled against Spike’s lips happy to know the vampire wanted this as much as he did.

“Yeah..ok...that’ll have ta do,” Spike said suddenly bracing himself above Xander with both hands.

“Wait? Are you sure?” Xander asked concerned the vampire hadn’t taken enough time.

“Luv, never been more sure of anything in my undead life,” Spike said before stealing one more kiss across Xander’s nose. Then he sat back on his haunches to hover over Xander before taking him in hand.

“Lean back,” he gently ordered as he lined up Xander to the perfect spot between his own cheeks.

Xander nodded and lay back. Hungrily he watched the vampire as slowly he began to lower himself down on to Xander. He watched as just the tip of his penis began to slide into Spike and he moaned as he felt it begin to press up against the vampire’s slick ring. Then with a slow pressure he watched as Spike breached himself and began to ease Xander inside.

“Unggh! Ghods!” Xander cried as Spike’s cool and tight ring slid around pulling him into tight sheath. He fisted his hands into the sleeping bags beneath him and fought not to thrust up deeper into Spike.

“Xander,” Spike whispered as if in prayer as he sank deeper on his love thick cock. “Xan...I..”

Xander was overwhelmed as Spike’s body took him in deeper. It was all at once too much and not enough. He wanted to close his eyes in ecstasy but he couldn’t stop watching the vampire who eyes were alternately flashing gold and blue. He panted in need trying to find the words while noting Spike was as speechless as he was.

Spike sank slower and more of Xander was pushing inside into those cool tight depths and it wasn’t enough. He reached out and touched Spike brushing his fingers across the tip of his leaking cock.

“XANDER!” Spike moaned and bucked suddenly seating himself completely.

“SPIKE!” Xander answered unable to stop himself from thrusting up into the vampire. “OH GHODS...SPIKE!”

“Do that again, luv,” Spike begged as he ground his hips down on to Xander.

Xander mewled and bucked thrusting himself deep into Spike.
“Yes! That’s it!” Spike urged as he began to set a rhythm and began to slowly ride Xander.

“I ...ca...Spike,” Xander moaned thrusting back in answer to the vampire. He licked his suddenly dry lips and reached to fully wrap his hand around Spike’s cock.

“Oh...sweet…! LUV!” Spike cried feeling himself at once full of Xander’s heat and enveloped by it at the same time.

Spike had wanted to make this last but it was too much; too good. His rhythm sped up and true to his nature Xander met him; followed him. The man under him trembled and became slick with sweat. He thrust his heat deeper and seemed to instinctively find that spot just inside Spike which lit him up from inside all the while he somehow had the presence of mind to continue milking him.

Demon and soul warred for control and he felt his visage slipping back and forth. The need to plunge his teeth into Xander began to build as great as his need to release. He tried. He tried with all of his years of experience to hold off just a little longer. He tried to hold off just enough so that he could somehow take note of each moan, each gasp, each sliding thrust and touch in perfect detail.

He watched Xander watching him neither of them wanting to miss this moment.

“Spike...I can’t...I’m...” Xander gasped pounding up into him his need rolling through him like demon of his own.

“Whenever yer ready, luv,” Spike somehow managed to say thrusting down to meet Xander.

“SPIIIKKKE!” Xander yelled out in his perfect beautiful voice and suddenly heat washed through the vampire as he felt his love come undone beneath him.

“Spike...Spike... Spike…” Xander cried out in litany as his climaxed raced through him too soon. It was too much and too perfect. He arced up into the vampire spurting all that he had inside of him. Yet it wasn’t enough. He needed more. Wanted more. Demanded more!

“Spike..please,” Xander panted as he began to stroke Spike in earnest trying to bring about the vampire’s release even as his was beginning to fade. “Please..not alone.”

“Never!” Spike cried his soul and demon weeping as he began to shake and the lightening of his own pleasure began zinging through him. He bucked and coated Xander’s stomach with his own powerful release.

Together they rode out the aftershocks which coursed through them. Then slowly Spike eased himself free of Xander. Once again his demon and soul cried out. He lay down next to Xander and pulled him close drinking in the sight and the smell of his human; his love.

“Spike…” Xander said after he could find his breath again. He turned in his vampire’s arms to look into his eyes. “...that was… Thank you.”

“Thank you, luv,” Spike purred nuzzling Xander.

“Kiss me?” Xander asked.

In answer, Spike rolled Xander under him and gently laid claim to his mouth mapping it as if it was
the first time. He tasted and teased until Xander was lost again and could only find himself by threading his fingers through Spike’s hair and pulling him closer.

When they parted Spike’s eyes were rimmed with gold. Xander brushed his fingers across Spike’s forehead and underneath them the vampire’s face began to shift.

“Ghods you’re beautiful,” Xander whispered.

In answer, Spike simply leaned his forehead down to rest on Xander’s. Silence fell between them as their ardor cooled and the moment of perfect tenderness cocooned them. Xander knew there was one more thing needed and somehow he knew Spike wasn’t going to ask it of him; not tonight.

“Spike,” he whispered gently tugging the vampire’s face up away to look at him. Spike was still golden eyes and vampire ridges.

“Please, Spike,” Xander said softly as he turned his head and offered his neck.

The bite was swift and the pain fleeting. Still, Xander gasped as the erotic pull as Spike drank deep. His hands wrapped around the vampire’s shoulders as the pull became impossibly stronger. He offered more of himself even though some part of his brain thought there should be a caution flag waving.

*Spike?* Xander tried to think to puzzle out why the vampire needed so much from him. *What…?*

Spike continued to drink down Xander’s lifeblood. The demon trusted his soul to keep him in check but it needed this. It needed this cinnamon cedar warm essence that was Xander’s life. He needed more of his warmth and vitality inside of him and he needed to remember every detail in perfect clarity.

Mine! the demon raged wanting it all and delighting in the perfect trust Xander placed in him.

Xander’s felt his limbs grow heavy. He wanted to say something to Spike; warn him but the world was starting to spin and the room grow darker.

Enough now, the soul warned noting the thudding of Xander’s heart starting to slow. We agreed. No more than is necessary.

*Changed my mind!* the demon growled even as Spike began to ease his fangs out of Xander’s neck and lick at the wound.

Xander tried to force his eyes to stay open. He tried to focus on Spike. He felt the vampire give a final lick and then brush a hand across his sweat matted forehead.

“Sleep, luv,” Spike whispered. “When ya wake up you’ll be as right as rain.”

Xander blinked and then fell away into a blissful deep sleep. Spike held him and watched him savoring the sound of each breath and steady beat of his heart until he knew that it hadn’t been moments but hours. Then he took a deep unneeded breath. He leaned close and whispered something against the white gold collar gleaming against Xander’s neck. There was a click as it opened and fell away on to the sleeping bags.

“I give ya my permission ta go as far away from me as you will and for as long as ya desire,” Spike
whispered as he ghosted a kiss behind Xander’s ear.

With his vision growing blurry he placed a final kiss on the tip of Xander’s nose before he gently let Xander go.

TBC
Xander groaned as he stretched his way to consciousness. He felt drained. He literally felt drained.

“I think somebody overdid it on the nummy treats,” he mumbled as he forced his eyes open. He blinked. He was used to waking up to see a perfectly chiseled chest, marred only by a silver and black pearl nipple ring, or a set of impossibly blue eyes. He saw neither. He pushed himself up on his hands and looked around.

“Spike?” he croaked past his dry throat. The vampire didn’t answer nor was he in view.

“Spike!” Xander called a little louder sitting up fully growing more alert his heart beginning to pound in his chest. “Sp...Master? He’s gone to get breakfast in bed, right? Xander thought as he began to dig out of the nest of sleeping bags. Master Romantic, right?

He stood up and heard a dull “ting” as something metallic fell to the floor. Xander hunched down and swept the ground with his eyes until they were caught by something shining faintly underneath the lantern light. Air caught in his throat so fast his chest burned and his eyes watered.

With a shaking hand he reached out and picked up the cold gold collar; his collar.

“SPIKE!” he yelled the shaking spreading through his body even as he forced himself to stand up. He surveyed the little alcove they shared again. Spike’s clothes were gone. Spike’s boots were gone. Spike’s coat was gone. All that was left was a small familiar book.

“Xander?” Willow called from just outside the entrance her voice edged in concern.

“Wills...” Xander cried turning toward her his collar clenched in his fist.

Willow rushed ignoring Xander’s state of undress. She gasped. Xander was pale, wide-eyed and trembling. She rushed forward and reached for friend but halted when he flinched.

“Where...where is he?” Xander forced the words out past the painful tightness in his chest.

“Gone,” Willow answered in confusion. “He left a little while ago. Lorne came to pick him up in one those special cars from Vegas. I thought you knew. He said to let you sleep. That it had been worked out. You were free to go.”

Free to go? Free..Xander tried to process Willow’s words. He looked down at the collar clutched in his hands. Masters only removed the collars unless they were going to kill or sell..but..

“I don’t..” Xander whispered looking back to Willow his vision blurry and his breathe still stuck painfully in his chest. “He claimed me. I...”

He left me? the stunned and confused man thought.

“Xander, are you...I mean,” Willow paled a terrible cruel thought curling in her mind she reached for him again. “Xander are you Ok?”
I don’t..was it all a lie? Just one more plan? Is it a test? Be a good Pe and don’t question! Xander’s mind whirled as his knees buckled underneath him and he fell into the nest of soft sleeping materials again. The collar was still clutched in his hand.

“XANDER!” Willow cried dropping down to her knees beside him.

“He told me..it was forever,” Xander whispered. “I can’t leave him but he’d left me.”

“Xander, please you’re scaring me. Are you...what do you need?”

I need Spike, Xander thought. I need to know what to do. I need...

He looked again at Willow her eyes bright with tears and fear.

“Free? What does that mean, Willow? What does that even mean? Bottles don't get to be free. Pets? Do Pets? I thought he loved me. Did he love me or was it just another...?

Like Lorne...like Larry...just needed my reactions, he wondered.

“Free?” he muttered trying to process what she was trying to say why his very understanding of the world was crumbling all around him.

Unable to resist any more and damn demon rules anyway Willow surged forward and wrapped her arms around her best friend. She pulled him close and held him.

He didn’t fight her. He didn’t flinch. He just raised his hand to stare at the open collar. He shivered. Hadn’t he been a good Pet?

“It means you can go home, Xander,” Willow said fiercely deciding that he never had to see Spike again no matter what claim the vampire had on him. “It means you can come home.”

Home? Xander thought his mind flashing to a penthouse suite in Vegas, a grey striped kitten, a floppy eared demon reading comics, and the comforting arms of a vampire who had held him safe through every nightmare.

Home? To be free to live with Dawnie and Willow again? Free? Free to go home? To be human?

he thought as a sob caught in his throat and suddenly his arms moved to wrap around Willow in return. Is that what it meant?

“Home,” he cried softly pulling Willow tighter to him. “Home with you and Dawnie?”

Hadn’t that once been his dream? Hadn’t that been what he’d wanted once before his voice had been stolen, before he had been made just a thing and before he had been won by Spike?

Before I’d been claimed by Spike, Xander thought. Before he said he lov...

“Home?” he whispered again.

“Yes, Xander,” Willow said tears freely flowing down her cheeks as the fear and suspicion inside of her started to let go.
“Home,” Xander sobbed as he began to openly weep buffeted by an overwhelming combination of emotions relief, hope, confusion and terrible loss.

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The resistance only stayed in the tunnels a few more days after Spike’s departure. They stayed long enough to be sure Angel was well enough to be left on his own and to coordinate were their new post-apocalypse base.

Those days were a blur for Xander. There were times he remembered helping pack up supplies, burning papers and teasing the girls. There were also long hours where he knelt silently amongst the sleeping bags in his little alcove staring at his collar as if he was waiting for something or someone.

He never spoke to Angel nor asked about him. Though he heard enough of gossip around the camp to know the re-souled vampire, while taking brooding to a whole new depth, had not talked anymore about being buried in the desert. Instead he became like a ghost helping unseen where he could while noting where the worst of the demon holdouts were according to intelligence.

One evening while returning to the tunnels Xander had passed the quiet vampire. For a moment they’d both frozen and locked gazes. Xander had swallowed fighting a sudden and nearly overwhelming urge to drop to his knees. Angel’s eyes had widened. Then the urge had passed and Xander growled as he turned and stormed away until the lights of the camp were far behind him. He had sat out in the desert watching the stars the rest of the night. In the morning when he’d returned he’d heard Angel had left for good.

Now it was the last morning. The last day before they were heading out to their new “home,” San Bernardino, California. Xander was packed and ready. He was up before dawn and once again sitting out under the desert sky this time watching as the night receded against the early rays of the rising sun.

He watched the shine from those rays reflecting slightly off the gold collar he held loosely in his hands. The soft crunch of shifting earth alerted him that he wasn’t alone. He turned to look behind him to see Tara walking towards him. Her long hair was draped around her shoulders and over a shaw she had wrapped tight against the desert morning chill.

“M..May I join you?” she asked with a soft smile. Xander nodded then looked back to the east to watch the sky grow brighter.

She settled beside him close enough so he could feel the warm human heat radiating from her. He smiled as they sat in companionable silence.

“Do you think it was ever real?” he asked as he watched the edge of the sun creep over the far horizon. “I mean do you think it was just another one of his plans? You think that’s why he did it? He didn’t need me anymore?”

“I..I think it matters what you think,” Tara’s said her gaze drinking in the morning light.

“So you d..don’t think it was real?”

“Of course it was one of his plans,” Xander snorted. “Just…the last move. One more I didn’t see coming.”

“Of course it was one of his plans,” Xander snorted. “Just…the last move. One more I didn’t see coming.”
“That he loved me? That….” Xander shrugged.

“There’s an old saying,” Tara began. “If you love something set it free.”

“See…see that!” Xander said interrupting the witch and turning to look at her, “see I don’t know if I want that. I mean on so many different levels it’s like the Donkey Kong of levels.”

Tara turned to him. She smiled while arching an eyebrow.

“I mean one,” Xander said holding up a finger. “Whether or not he loved me I’m not an ‘it’ that you can just set free. Ok…maybe in the demon world of the After that was before the now which is the after of the after from the Before but I’m not an ‘it,’ Tara and I may have been Spike’s Pet but he never treated me like I was an ‘it’ so why start now? Unless this was just another time he just needed my…unless once again my reactions were just a cover.”

Tara arched her other eyebrow.

“Two, he can’t just set me ‘free’ he claimed me. I’m bound to him. I mean yeah, ok so apparently he’s made with the demonic permission slip letting me be apart from him but that doesn’t change that I willingly submitted myself to being bound to him.”

Tara tucked a strand of long honey colored hair behind her ear.

“It doesn’t change that I,” Xander sighed and looked back at the sun. “I dream about him every night, Tara. Sometimes I cling to the sleeping bags and breathe deep just trying to smell him…and can I just say how ‘eww’ that makes me feel on one level and all happy Xander on another?”

He looked back at her. She smiled.

“Told you, Donkey Kong levels,” her returned the smile then looked away again. “And I hate it, you know, that I want him. That I wake up…and he’s not there.”

He shook his head.

“I mean, I’m free, Tara! I’m free! I don’t have to wait for permission to speak. I don’t have to have ‘Blondie’s By Your Leave’ to hug Willow or Dawnie. I can wear clothes anytime I want and not just as a reward or to keep hidden something that’s his!”

She scratched an itch at the end of her nose.

“And feeding myself? Oh! Yep..no more making with the finger food porn part of my daily diet!”

He looked down at the collar in his hand.

“I once told him that when all over I was going to pawn this,” his voice growing quieter as he looked back at her, “that I could get a pretty good price for it. I can you know? I can pawn it!”

She nodded.

He looked back at it and gently rubbed his thumbs over it.

“When he first won me,” Xander snorted and looked at the sun continuing to rise higher defying the
darkness. “Won me, Tara. He won me in a poker game as of the pot. That night he took me up to his suite. He knew who I was. He remembered.”

He took a deep breath. Then let it out again.

“He took my old leather collar off. Threw it in the corner. I knew...I knew it meant he was going to drain me. He was finally going to get back at those pesky kids,” he said biting his lip.

“I was so far gone, Tara. I was so well...trained,” he spat the last word. “I couldn’t move. Wouldn’t move. Not even when I thought I was going to die. In fact, I was welcoming it. Happy for it and I was grateful, Tara. Grateful I was at least getting a look at the night sky again after all that time in the Vaults. One last look before I died.”

He swallowed the memories of that first night flooding back.

“From the very start he..he started to break me of that you know?” he continued. “He pushed...literally prodded.’”

A flush accompanied by a small smile spread across his cheeks.

“He..poked and prodded until I wasn’t just a still silent bottle any more,” Xander sighed. “Instead he started to make me his Pet and that being his Pet, eventually even being his pet with a little ‘p’ and then even eventually convinced me to accept his Claim.Tara, it was all so much better than being a b..bottle!”

He looked back at her. She reached out a hand to cover one of his.

“Do you know why I decided to accept his claim?”

She shook her head.

“I realized everything hadn't been taken from me, Tara. The only thing left for the demons to play perverted patty-cake with was my soul and I was so tired of the violate the Xanman game. I knew if I accepted Spike’s claim at least...at least I was the one deciding how the demon world was going to get it and which one got to play with it.”

Guess that's how all the best relationships start in a demon apocalypse,” he said twisting the collar in his hands. He sighed, “I know if you love something set it free, Tara. And I know if it comes back it's yours...”

“And if it doesn’t it never was,” she quietly finishes for him when he falls silent.

“But I am,” he whispers. “I am his on so many of those Donkey Kong levels.”

“Do you want to be?” she asks.

“I don’t know,” he answers honestly turning to look back into her eyes. “I didn’t think that was my choice any more..and if it is I don’t know if a ‘free’ me wants to.”

“Then maybe th..that’s why he did it,” she says squeezing his hand. “I think m..maybe he wanted to give you a choice and a chance to figure out what you, not the bottle, the Pet or even the Claimant, but you the f..free you wants.”
“But how do I do that now?” Xander asked before looking back to horizon. “I don't understand the rules anymore. I’m not even sure I know what I am anymore. What if I get it wrong?”

“Give yourself t..time, Xander. You can do that now,” Tara answered.

Then she moved in closer until she was pressed next to him. She laid her head gently on his shoulder and watched a new day finally arrive.

***

“Oi! I will wrap your entrails around yer neck and throw ya back to the hell dimension ya came from,” Spike warned his cunning and quick adversary.

Yellow green eyes narrowed. A slender leg slowly crept forward with claws slightly to the ready.

“Last warning,” Spike growled.

Quick as any hellspawn the vampire had ever seen the sleek grey tabby struck swiping the crystal tumbler half full of whiskey off the bar sending it crashing to the floor.

“LORNE!” Spike roared as the cat flipped it’s long striped tail in the vampire’s general direction before quickly and gracefully exiting from the scene of the crime.

“LORNE!” Spike roared again stomping towards the bar and the mess.

“Honestly, lemon drop,” the green demon said entering the suite, “do you think I just loiter all day outside your door waiting for your bellow.”

“Take that creature,” Spike said ignoring Lorne’s commentary and pointing to the cat strutting its way over to the pillow by Spike’s chair, “and stake it out for the coyotes!”

“No,” Lorne said calmly stepping around the vampire and the bar to grab some paper towels.

“No?” Spike growled.

“No,” Lorne said bending down to begin gingerly mop up the spilled whiskey while carefully avoiding the broken glass.

“And...do you care ta explain why ya said ‘no,’” Spike asked while pouring another drink, “before I have you staked out for the coyotes?”

“Because, lemon pie,” Lorne said standing up tossing the soggy towels into the trash bin and leaving the rest for the minions to cleanup, “last time you asked me to feed Ante to the Primals and I made it as far as the elevator before you called me to bring him back. The time before that, you asked me to find a wood chipper for him, and I made it as far as the ground floor. I doubt I’ll make it past the suite door this time.”

“Oi!” Spike shouted.

“Face it. Ante could start a second apocalypse and you would do nothing more than take his tuna away for a week,” Lorne said looking over at the cat who was sitting on the pillow and running its
tongue over the inside of its left paw.

“Would to,” Spike muttered around his drink. “Might take it away for two weeks.”

Lorne smiled softly. In the last six months there were few things in Vegas which seemed to cheer the master vampire, and whether he would ever admit it or not, the green demon knew the grey tabby who’d taken up residence with him was one of them.

Though Ante had not welcomed Spike back to the city with welcome paws, more like welcome claws, they’d come to an uneasy truce. During the three weeks while Spike had stayed in the desert with the resistance waiting for the ritual to resoul Angelus, Lorne had had the job of readying Vegas for Spike’s return.

It had gone mostly smooth. He’d found an unexpected and more than capable ally in the young teen, Connor who’d help lead the defense of the stable on Clem’s behalf. Angelus’ forces had never breached the stables defenses and as they’d retreated Connor had taken point to help clear the city of any stragglers. Lorne was sure he gave the order, just couldn’t remember in the confusion. At least that was the Pylean’s story and he was sticking to it.

Between Lorne’s social skills, Clem’s people’s skills and Connor’s fists the three had managed to bring the city into some semblance of order by the time Spike had signaled he was ready to return. Only the return hadn’t been what the green demon had expected.

It was an afternoon pickup with a slightly smoking Spike diving into the truck sans Xander.

“Drive,” was the only thing the vampire had said.

When they’d reached the city he’d gone straight to the arenas taunting any and all to a deathmatch. They could have Vegas if they won. He’d carried on like that for three nights before Lorne had shut the arenas down.

Then the vampire had locked himself away in the suite for days drinking and smoking until once again Lorne had interfered. This time he’d brought Clem, Connor and several thermoses of heated blood. Spike had come out swinging. It took a little effort but Connor eventually managed to put the drunken, weakened and angry Spike on the floor.

That’s when Ante had snuck into the suite. As usual he’d hissed and swatted at seeing Spike but then began walking and sniffing around the apartment. Spike had growled at the cat as it went room from room. Then Ante began to let out long plaintive meows.

“Shut it!” Spike had shouted.

The cat had ignored him and continued its sweep of the suite continuing its meows.

“Quiet!” Spike had roared.

The cat had just flicked its tail and flattened its ears but continued to cry. Then it had crawled up on to the pillow by Spike’s chair, Xander’s pillow. It had settled down into a kitty-loaf position wrapping its long tail around its body. Then Ante had just stared at Spike.

Lorne had known then what was coming next. Somehow, and as quickly as he could, he’d gotten Clem and Connor out of the suite. As the door had closed behind them Spike let out the first of many
broken sobs. That night Spike had told Lorne how he’d let Xander go.

“..the Luxor?” Spike’s voice interrupted Lorne’s thoughts.

“Hmm?” Lorne asked focusing back on the present.

“How’d things go at the Luxor? Wankers gettin’ the idea it’s a human safety zone?”

“Clem has things well in hand.”

“And when you say, Clem you mean Connor,” Spike said taking his drink back to his chair.

Connor might wear Clem’s collar but anyone with any sense, including sense of survival, knew Connor was no one’s slave but he was loyal to and very fond of the saggy skinned demon.

“He is an exceptional young man,” Lorne said fixing his own drink. “Still can’t believe his father is Ang..”

“Oi!” Spike warned. “Said we were only talkin’ about that the once. Gives me a headache.”

“Lemon drop..”

“Its enough we know who he is and where he came from.”

“Really? He’s.. well you know who he is and he survived growing up in an outer hell dimension with just one lone human raising him and now he helps keep things running smooth in your city and you don’t want to talk about it?,” Lorne asked taking a seat at the bar.

“Wot I said innit it?” Spike growled.

“But..”

“Ah!” Spike snorted raising a finger. “Some day that’s something for him, Linds and the Poofter to work out but not now. Not when we finally convinced him not to go after Peaches.”

“Only as long as he thinks he still has some moves to learn from you.”

“And that’s why I ain’t in a hurry ta teach him everything I know,” Spike said looking at Lorne. “Speaking of my grand-sourpuss?”

“There were some rumors of a sighting out in Kansas. Story was he had a pair of hunters, brothers, on his tail. Good pair I hear. Word is they kept a lot of people alive during the fall. Interesting taste in cars,” said before sipping at his drink.

Spike arched an eyebrow.


No DeSoto, Spike sniffed.

“Report on the new arrivals?” Spike asked changing the subject before swigging whiskey from his
“Four of the five applicants were legitimate bonds,” Lorne said. “The human or humans in question really did want to stay with their respective demons, vampire, etc. The demons have been referred over to HR for job and housing opportunities.”

“The fifth applicant?”

“Demon sent to the arenas and human set free and given a bus ticket to San Bernardino with the standard ‘So You’ve Been a Demon Slave’ recovery pamphlets.”

Spike arched an eyebrow. “That’s a little glib.”

“Well, sometimes I really don’t know what else to call it,” Lorne sighed tiredly before downing his drink.

“Damnit, Green Bean I thought I told ya to lay off the applicant reading for awhile,” Spike growled softly. “Let Numfar…”

“Spike, you know Numfar is already backlogged with petitions for certifications on pre-existing relationships let alone trying to keep up with the influx of immigrants to the city. The faster those petitions get processed the less grumbling…”

“I like the grumbling…”

“You like the fights caused by the grumbling,” Lorne corrected.

“And wot of it?”

“They won’t bring him back.”

Spike hissed.

“Spike…lemon drop,” Lorne started putting his empty glass back on the bar.

“I don’t want to hear it,” the vampire said.

“He’s still in San Bernardino,” Lorne continued softly.

“I told you I don’t want to hear it,” Spike said turning to face Lorne his eyes rimmed with gold.

“If that were true, lemon drop, you wouldn’t have me keep tabs on him.”

Spike looked away.

“Still living with the witches and Nibblet?” he finally asked as he held out his empty glass for a refill.

“Yes,” Lorne said standing up and grabbing the bottle of whiskey from the bar.

“No…no one,” Spike tried to ask a question he didn’t really want answered.

“Nothing new,” Lorne said filling the vampire’s glass half full. “Just those few dates a couple of
months ago with that ex-vengeance demon, Anya. Word is their friends but nothing more.”

Spike drained the drink while the demon raged at the thought of another demon, even a former one, romancing Xander.

“He..he isn’t..? He’s ya know..?”

“Spike,” Lorne said placing a hand on the vampire’s shoulder. “I can’t read him from reports. I don’t know if he’s happy or not. All I can tell you is that he’s living with the people he loved most in the world before it went to hell. He has a job which suits him. Construction work lets him be outside in the sun all day building things and helping people. He’s doing what you gave him the chance to do. He’s living a normal human life.”

Pain lanced through both Spike’s soul and demon. In all his scheming and planning he’d never thought to find Xander. He never thought the human pawn in his grand game would be the gangly boy from Sunnydale all grown up into a man both his soul and demon craved. He never thought he’d fall in love with his Claimant. He never really thought it all the way through what it would cost him if he beat Angelus not until the moment he’d realized Angel’s soul was back and he had truly won.

That’s when he knew. That’s when he’d understood that he’d had to let Xander go.

“If you had done anything else...,” Lorne said softly.

“There would have stayed my Pet.” Spike finished staring off into the bottom of his glass.

TBC
“Spike,” Xander groaned the vampire’s name in a hushed whispered full of frustration. He opened his eyes and stared up at the ceiling. He ached. It had been another dream; one of many many dreams since the desert.

Xander rolled over on to his stomach ignoring the slide of his half hard cock against the firm mattress. He snaked a hand under his pillow and searched until his fingers felt warm metal. With a sigh he wrapped them around his collar and tugged it out from under his head. He rolled over again.

He sat up and with his free hand reached for the knob on the small lamp beside his bed. He gave it a twist spilling turning his bed into an oasis of light in his dark bedroom. He studied the collar. He let the familiar weight and lustre offer ease to his mental frustration. It was never enough but it helped.

Sometimes it was enough to help him get back to sleep. Sometimes it was enough to let him make it through another day of the happy routine he had fallen into living with the girls. It was enough for him to greet them with a joke in the morning. It was enough for him to have a clear head at work so he could soak in the sun and exertion while rebuilding the world. It was enough to let him come home and be human again. Another day living free.

*I have heard men talk about the blessings of freedom,* he thought remembering a quote from *Ivanhoe,* but *I wish any wise man would teach me what use to make of it now that I have it.*

He sighed and looked at the small book on his nightstand. It was the only thing Spike had left behind.

*Besides me,* he thought as he reached for it.

On the nights the collar wasn’t enough he would read the book. Spike had never finished reading it to him but Xander had since finished it. In fact he had read it again and again each time imaging the words said in Spike’s smokey voice.

He also read the book the nights he had nightmares. The nights he woke up in silent screams remembering to be a good bottle. The nights his sheets were soaked with sweat and he wasn’t sure how he was going to be able to shower come sunrise.

Xander flipped open the book. He turned a page but the words would not come into focus. He smiled sadly. It was going to be another long night.

*Spike,* he thought closing the book. *I don’t want to do this anymore.*

Then his heart skipped a beat and his eyes widened. He sat up straighter in bed.

*What did you just think, Xanman?* he thought.

*I don’t want to do this anymore,* he silently answered himself igniting fireworks of insight lighting off through his heart and brain.

“I don’t want to do this anymore,” he said aloud his heart racing as this simple thought broke open something powerful inside him. “I. Don’t. Want this...I want...I want..I want. Spike!”
The book and collar fell from his hands as an emotion so sweet and strong it shook him harder than the Tremblor demons had. It was more than just want.

He shook his head and sucked in a deep breath. Then he let out a little laugh. He shook his head again.

“I don’t want this anymore,” he said to his empty room, “and I am a free, and possibly a little insane given the talking to myself, and I get to choose even if choosing means I give up choosing again because...I want to go back to Vegas! I want to go back to Spike!”

He threw back the covers and jumped out of bed. He clapped his hands together and started for his closet.

“Willow is probably going to kill me,” he muttered opening the closet door and beginning to rummage around the bottom until he found a duffel bag, “but it won’t be the first time my life’s been gambled with.”

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“Elucido,” Willow’s voice drifted through kitchen followed by a bright light.

Xander winced. He shifted the duffle bag slung across the back of his bag and turned around.

“I think that uses the last of your spell allowance for the week?” he said with a smile.

“Sit,” Willow points towards the kitchen table ignoring while marshalling her stern face.

“Wills?” Xander softly pleaded before resigning himself to take a seat.

“Not even a goodbye?” Willow accused as she stepped towards her best friend. “Just..what an empty room?”

“There were letters,” Xander said staring at the floor as he dropped his duffel bag.


“Ah!” Xander said looking back up to the infuriated redhead. “You used up your spell allowance. You turn me into a frog someone is going to be in trouble with Tara.”

“I’m not going to be the one in trouble mister. I won’t be the one casting the spell if you leave without a word,” Willow said flouncing over to take a seat of her own.

“Wills,” Xander sighed.

“No,” she said firmly. “You. Mouth. Make with the speakage or I wake up Dawn and there will be hurt puppy dog eyes.”

“That’s not playing fair,” Xander cried.

“Neither is you sneaking off in the middle of the night.”
“Technically early morning.”


“Right,” Xander sighed clasping his hands together and leaning over the table. “I’m leaving.”

“Figured that out,” Willow said crossing her arms over chest. “Where are you going?”

“I think you know,” he said looking into her eyes.

“No! Xan...”

Xander closed his eyes. This is why he’d chosen the cowards way. He knew there’d be too many arguments; too many objections.

Willow stopped speaking and bit her lip. This was starting off wrong.

“I’m sorry,” she sighed uncrossing her arms. “Not helping?”

He opened his eyes and shook his head.

“Can I ask...I mean I thought you were happy here, with us,” Willow said her voice softening.

“I am, Wills,” Xander said. “I am. I’m as happy as I could be...” he struggled for the words to explain.

“Is it because of what happened with Anya?” she asked suddenly. “I mean, Xander there are...other women. Ones who weren’t demons first.”

“No! Ghods, no!” Xander said waving his hands signalling a foul on the field. “Anya was...look I know you don’t want to believe it but Anya was good. She really was...is. Maybe if things had been different she would have been great but...”

“But she’s not, Spike,” Willow finished for him.

“No, she’s not,” he confirmed.

“So that’s it,” she said a touch of bitterness creeping into her voice. “You want to go back. Back to him. Back to Vegas and living with demons and monsters instead of here with Tara, Dawn and me. Here where we need you.”

Xander flinched.

“Not fair, Wills,” he said.

“What’s not fair? We do!”

“For what? To unclog the bathroom sink or hang pictures on the wall? Oh, I know to get the secret stash of Oreos down from the top shelf,” Xander snapped.

“How about to help out with reclaiming the world! Rebuilding! Your job. Remember? The one I
“You thought you loved.”

“Low blow, Wills,” Xander said his eyes flashing angrily.

She knew how much the job meant to him. He told her the first month after he had it. They had sat in
the same kitchen and he’d told her how everyday out in the sun working on the job helped reclaim a
fraction of the time locked away in the Vault. He told her how each day helped to chase nightmares
of the Tank away.

“You think you’ll be able to do that in Vegas? Spend hours outdoors with no walls?”

“Maybe,” he said.

“You are willing to risk it?” Wills asked.

“C’mon you’ve read the reports! Vegas is changing! They have human safety zones now! Human
and demon relationships are being certified…”

“By demons!” she interrupted.

“By empathic demons,” Xander argued.

“And what about the demon zones,” Willow argued. “You know like the one where the master of
Vegas lives? The ones humans enter at their own risk? The ones where most of the humans who do
risk it are on their knees wearing collars and doing what they’re told? You want to go back to that?
Do you want to go back to being …”

“Don’t say it, Will!” Xander said jumping to his feet and sending the chair crashing to the floor
behind him.

“Wh..what’s going on?” Tara yawned from behind them as she entered the fight zone.

“Xander’s leaving,” Willow answered. “Going back to Vegas.”

“Pay up,” Dawn said calmly holding out a palm to Tara as she shuffled sleepily around the blonde
witch and headed for the refrigerator.

“Nope, you still owe f..for the movies last week,” Tara said flipping the light switch on and sending
a pointed look to Willow. “Besides I think Faith’s bet was closer?”

“Wha..?”

“I can explain.”

Xander and Willow spoke at the same time.

“Hmm,” Dawn said taking a carton of orange juice out and setting on the counter. “You might be
right. Should I call her? What time is it in Cleveland right now?”

“A more reasonable hour than now,” Tara said wrapping her arms around Willow after slipping
behind the redheaded witch. “I thought we agreed no frivolous uses of magic?”
“You have a pool on me leaving?” Xander sputtered. “How long has that been going?”

“About a month,” Dawn yawned again and grabbed a glass from the second cabinet to the right of the sink. She shrugged. “It was Anya’s idea.”

“It wasn’t frivolous,” Willow muttered. “He was leaving.”

“Anya had a bet?”

“No, she just had the idea,” Dawn said pouring some juice into her glass.

“Light switch. No need for magic and less danger of Darth Willow,” Tara whispered lovingly against Willow’s ear.

“I’m in trouble aren’t I?” Willow whispered back.

“Big,” Tara said hugging Willow tight.

“So, should we call Faith?” Dawn asked Tara.

“Wha...wait...you aren’t stopping me?” Xander asked Dawn in confusion.

She shook her head as she took a sip of orange juice. Xander looked to Tara. She just smiled at him. Willow frowned.

“I didn’t know about the bet,” was all she said.

“OK, is this like a bad, but not like all spooky skin you alive kind of bad Willow, and good Dawnie and Tara routine?” Xander asked as he picked up his chair and plopped back into it.

“It’s m...more like we have faith you can...can figure out what you want for yourself and want you to be happy,” Tara said.

“Actually I think it’s more like you aren’t going to find anyone hotter than Spike,” Dawn said jumping up to sit on the kitchen counter.

“DAWN!” Xander and Willow cried in unison.

“What?” she grinned. “C’mon! You can’t tell me he isn’t!”

“I..there..will be no mention of Spike hotness or anything Spike in the realm of heat and...DAWN!!” Xander babbled.

“And hotness isn’t the point!” Willow said.

“No, the point is you don’t want to let Xander go,” Tara said. “Dawn, don’t sit on the counter.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Willow asked turning in Tara’s arms.

“It m..means,” Tara said, “you love, Xander and you are afraid to let him go to let him make his own mind up. You’re afraid you’ll lose him again.”
“I’m afraid to let him go back to Vegas!”

“Why?”

“Am I the only one who cares it’s a demon run city?” Willow cried.

“It’s a Spike run city,” Dawn said still sitting on the counter.

“And that’s supposed to make me feel better?”

“Yes,” Xander said looking at Willow.

“If..Xander..were going to LA t..to be with someone would you stop him?” Tara asked.

“If he was a vampire! One who’d made him a slave, claimed him used him and not to mention left him!”

“What if it was to someone who p..protected him as best he could even while putting himself at risk. What if it were someone who cared for him and loved him in a place that per..perverted c..caring and love? What if it was someone who c..could have forced him to stay with him but instead let him go to make his own ch..choices?” Tara countered.

“That’s not....” Willow started to argue.


“But,” she said turning to look at him her eyes shimmering with unshed tears. “I can’t lose you again.”

“You aren’t going to.”

“But you go..and I may never...he could…”

“I could go to work tomorrow and you could never see me again,” Xander said. “I mean isn’t that something from ‘Lessons Learned in An Apocalypse 101?’ Nothing’s guaranteed?”

“But you’re happy here.”

“And maybe I could be happier there,” Xander said softly.

“What if..what if he doesn’t want you? What if..” Willow persisted.

Xander flinched and Dawn gave a little gasped.

“Well I won’t know if don’t go,” Xander answered pushing back against the doubts Willow’s mark had found.

“And if he won’t let you go?”

“I don’t think Spike would keep Xander if he didn’t want him,” Dawn said rolling her eyes and jumping off the counter.
“Is this what this is about Xander?” Willow continued. “You wanting him?”

Xander sighed closing his eyes. There was so much he wasn’t ready to talk about yet. He needed to talk to Spike; to see the vampire first. If he’d learned anything from their time apart he’d learned no more trying to navigate emotional landscapes by proxy.

“Wills,” he said opening his eyes and choosing his words carefully. “I’m going to Vegas because I need to and I want to. I’m going because I’m ready to go back and I think that’s where I belong. Please, I don’t want to leave with us fighting. I need to know you are going to be OK with this because I need my best friend to believe in me.”

“You are asking me to believe in Spike!” Willow cried.

“No, Wills,” Xander said moving towards his friend and brushing her cheek with his thumb. “I’m asking you to believe in me. Believe that I’m Ok. Believe that I’ve been through hell and back and I know what I want. I’m asking you to trust that I can be trusted with deciding for myself what I want.”

Willow stared into Xander’s eyes until her own began to flood with tears. Then she pulled away from Tara’s arms to throw herself into Xander’s. She wrapped her arms around him tight and clung to him.

“If he hurts you..if he doesn’t treat you right ...I..,” she started to sob.

“Hey,” Xander soothed as he returned her hug. “Spike’s lost more than a few brain cells to peroxide poisoning but he’s not dumb enough to piss off the most powerful witch on the continent. I’ll be OK.”

She nodded into his shoulder as she continued to sob. He held her. Together they soaked up the moment as they both needed to hold on and to let go. Eventually, Willow sniffed loudly and lifted up her tear streaked face to look at Xander again.

“How were you going to get there?” she asked softly.

“First bus out this morning,” he answered.

“C..can we take you to the bus station?” she asked.

“I’d like to see the fool who’d try and stop you,” he said smiling before he was suddenly enveloped into a hug from all three women in the room.

TBC
Chapter 95

The closer the bus had gotten to the Vegas the more nervous Xander had gotten. He’d thought the hard part was leaving the girls. Yet, the closer the bus had rolled toward Spike’s city the more Xander began to second guess himself.

Willow was right. He had been happy. Just, not happy enough. His thoughts had been chaotic playing out all the possible outcomes to his return until he’d been tempted to get off the bus, call the girls and go back to San Bernardino.

He had distracted himself by looking around the bus. It wasn’t crowded. Vegas was still not the most popular destination in the post-post-apocalyptic world. Still there had been enough passengers to get a read on the mix of motives of his fellow travelers.

_Looking for sanctuary_, he’d thought as he spotted the demons disguised as humans.

He had spotted the humans who were looking for the dangerous and thrill of seeing a demon run city. Some people had gotten addicted to danger during the Fall. Vegas could satisfy that addiction.

Then there had been those humans who’d tucked self-consciously on their shirt collars. The ones who had sat as close as they could to the demons in disguise. The ones who were quiet unless spoken too and who rarely made eye contact.

Xander had tried not to stare or think of those too much. He had known why they were going to Vegas. He’d met many like them in the Survivor’s group meetings he’d gone to with Tara. The meetings Willow didn’t know about. The meetings where former demon slaves had talked about their life during the Fall.

There had been those who couldn’t figure out how to live anymore without a master; without the demon rules. The meetings had helped some while others had simply drifted away to seek out someone to collar them again be they human or demon.

In the first few weeks after leaving the desert Xander had wondered if he was one of those humans who’d slip away looking for a new Master. There hadn’t been a day where hadn’t he’d felt the need to go to his knees, to snap his fingers for permission to speak or to even reach for the collar he kept tucked in his pocket or under his pillow.

The meetings, Tara and the new life in San Bernardino had helped. He’d gotten better but his dreams were still full of the memories of being Spike’s good Pet. He’d wake up hard, aching and calling out for his Master. Those had been the confusing days.

The good days had been the mornings he’d woken up hard, aching and calling out for Spike. Those had been the days where his nights had been dreams filled with him being Spike’s pet.

The bad days had been after those nights where he’d thought he could feel the claim burn through him. He’d ache for Spike so hard he thought the vampire had revoked his permission for Xander to be away from him. Those were the nights where Xander would stroke his hardness to completion with one hand while silencing his cries with the other.

The worst days were the nights he had nightmares about being in the Vault. The nights he’d dreamt
about being a bottle. Those were the days he’d lie in a cold sweat and long for impossibly strong arms pulling him close to an impossibly perfect chest which practically purred.

All the days had grown into weeks and the weeks had grown into months. The want and the ache had never abated but Xander.

During that time he rebuilt his life. He gotten a job. Reconnected with Willow. Learned how to be human again. He’d even tried seeing someone else.

The bus lurched forward and the brakes hissed as the bus rolled to a stop interrupting Xander’s thoughts. There was a bustle of movement as human and demon alike stood up to gather belongings. Xander sighed and picked up his duffel bag from the empty seat next to him.

He looked out the window as he waited to get into the line of people in the aisle waiting to exit the bus.

*Ready or not, here I come,* he thought.

***

“Next!” the green skinned demon who reminded him a little of Lorne called. Xander stepped forward through the gate. He was at the his third checkpoint of a day. The first they had verified he had no forbidden weapons as well as any magical items or status. The second had verified his species.

It was now after sundown and he at the final checkpoint before the “Demon Zone.” It was the one where humans entered at their own peril. The only protection they had beyond was one a demon or monster gave them.

They might enter voluntarily but that didn’t guarantee they could leave. Xander’s hand curled tightly around the collar shoved deep in his pocket.

“Purpose?” the demon asked looking at a form on a clipboard in front of him.

“Uh? Purpose?” Xander asked suddenly unsure what to say. “Uhm..well I’m here to se...”

“Immigration? Hunting? Tourist?” the bored demon interrupted not looking up.

*Hunting?* Xander thought.

“None of the above,” Xander answered.

“Right,” the demon said finally looking up at him. “Let me guess. You’re not sure.”

“I am but it’s kinda of comp....”

“Sing me something,” the demon ordered.

“What?” Xander asked.
“Sing me something...or recite me a poem. Ain’t that hard...just for Luna’s sake don’t recite a limerick. I’ve heard them all.”

“Righ...,” Xander thought struggling to think of something. ‘Uhm Ok, how about, ‘Space. The final frontier. These are the voyages of the Starship Enterpris....’”

“Stop!” the demon suddenly cried it’s eyes fixed on Xander as it grew pale.

Xander’s mouth snapped shut. The human and the demon stared at each other for a brief moment then suddenly the demon stepped behind Xander and pulled the gate shut. He turned back to face Xander then licked his lips.

“I think I need to refer you to someone else, won’t you please follow me?” he asked very politely.

“And where are we going?” Xander asked cautiously not willing to wander off into the Demon zone with just any demon.

“To see my boss,” the demon said doing it’s best to offer a non-threatening smile.

“And that would be, who?”

“Lorne, sir,” the demon answered growing more nervous.

“Lorne,” Xander cried suddenly smiling then frowning. He’d learned harsh lessons about the demon world of Vegas. “Look, I know Lorne. Could you just call him and tel....”

The demon grew paler and nodded his head furiously.

“If you prefer, I could see if he could come here, personally. It would be no trouble! No trouble at all!,” the demon said stepping into his little booth to reach for the phone before Xander could finish.

“Ok,” Xander said as he leaned against the side of the booth.

Vegas really has changed, or I have, or both, he thought as he waited to see his old friend.

***

Lorne was in a foul mood. He’d brought several recruits from Pylea to help with the much needed readings around Vegas. However, days like today he’d wondered why he had bothered. Already he’d had two false negatives on immigration readings nearly causing one triad and a pair to be separated. The human partner in the triad had been pregnant and the fetus had thrown off the reading leading Reguir to declare the group not a voluntary bonding. The pregnant woman had been on the bus before the demons’ urgent, and bloody, appeals had reached Lorne.

Then Veryla had tried to do a reading from a knock-knock joke! The demon from that pair had already gone one round in the arena by the time representative from Wolfram and Hart, carrying a copy of the couple's binding contract, had stormed into Lorne’s office bringing back way too many unpleasant memories.

Now, Koahn was insisting he come to the Koval Lane checkpoint because he had a master...
vampire’s Claimaint seeking entrance into the Demon zone.

“Koahn wouldn’t know a Claimaint from a good Cosmopolitan,” Lorne muttered as he got out of the limo in front of the booth near the gate. He froze when he saw a familiar form leaning against the booth’s frame with his back to Lorne. The Plyean’s throat went dry and his hands began to shake. He blinked.

Xander? he dared to hope.

“Lorne!” Koahn croaked dashing out of the booth.

The figure turned at Lorne’s name and the demon couldn’t stop himself from rushing forward.

“Xa...Claimant Xander!” he cried. “It’s you! It’s really you!”

“Yeah, in the flesh, though not the naked flesh,” Xander said blushing a little.

“This...is...” Koahn’s voice disappeared into a high pitched squeak.

“Oh get a hold of yourself,” Lorne said to his fellow Pylean. “Stop your squeaking, close up shop, get a properly prepared cocktail and say nothing of this to anyone or you’ll be answering to my boss.”

Koahn’s eyes grew wide then rolled back in his head before he crumpled to the ground.

“Uhm,” Xander said looking to unconscious demon.

“Don’t worry about him,” Lorne said motioning for Xander to follow him. “Vegas just isn’t for everyone.”

“But..” Xander said following Lorne towards the limo.

“Trust me, Cupcake, He’ll get a promotion out of this,” Lorne said with a smile as they slid into the privacy of the back of the limo. Xander automatically kneeling in front of Lorne’s seat. He smiled at the human as he watched him tuck his duffel bag on the floor next to him. So many questions were stampeding through his head but there was only one which was important. He knocked on the privacy window signaling to the drive to return to the Slayer’s End.

“So..” they both said at the time. Then laughed.

“You first,” Lorne said.

“Spike?” Xander asked softly.

“Better,” Lorne answered.

“Better?” Xander asked anxiously.

“He was..” Lorne paused. He was uncertain how much he should tell Xander. Afterall he really didn’t know for sure why he had returned to Vegas. “Cupcake, what are you doing here?”

“I..wanted Sp...I wanted to talk to Spike.”
“Talk?” Lorne asked looking at the duffel bag.

“Some talks taking longer than others,” Xander shrugged.

*Your talks could level Vegas if you’re both not careful,* Lorne thought.

“So..is he at the Slayer’s End?” Xander asked.

“At the Mandalay actually. Cage match tonight.”

“He’s fighting in the arenas?” Xander ask his face twisting in concern.

“About once a week,” Lorne sighed. “It’s a good cash draw. Don’t worry, it’s not a deathmatch.”

Spike hadn’t participated in another deathmatch since the night Lorne put a stop to them after the broken hearted vampire had come back from the desert. That’s the night Lorne had gotten through the vampire’s rage and grief to understand if he lost not only would he lose his life and his city but he would also be killing Xander. Just because Xander hadn’t been with him hadn’t meant the Claim was any less binding.

*Cupcake doesn’t need to know any of that though,* Lorne thought.

“So..?” Xander said breaking the silence.

“So we get back to the casino and take you up to the suite where you can get cleaned up. You can say ‘hi’ to Ante while getting a good meal and wait for Spike to get back.”

“Wait. Ante’s living in the suite?”

“And making Master Spike’s life a happy hell everyday,” Lorne said leaning forward.

“And he survived?”

“Oh Ante’s much tougher than he looks,” Lorne replied.

“I meant Spike,” Xander corrected.

Lorne gave a full throated laugh.

“Oh, Cupcake, I’ve missed you,” he said.

“I hope you aren’t the only one,” Xander murmured.

***

*Spike’s shoulders ached, his fists were sore and he needed a drink, a shower and a long drag off a cigarette without the nagging of a certain busy body demon. Sunrise was in a few hours and it looked like he wasn’t going to get any of his needs met.*

Lorne had been waiting to pounce on him as soon as he’d set foot inside the Slayer’s End. The bloody nuisance had been practically vibrating with nervous energy and gone off about a series of misreadings, appeals and paperwork from the shysters out of L.A.. He’d hustled Spike to the private
elevator and insisted Spike go straight up to his suite.

“Lemon drop, now no snarls, grumbles and depictions of lurid hours of torture. Up straight away to your suite for a quick shower. Need you fresh and dandy. Need your signature on paperwork and your dulcet tones on the phone,” Lorne had set as he’d practically shoved Spike into the elevator and pressed the button to floor to his suite.

“Oi! Know where ya can sti..” Spike had started to snarl but the elevators doors had closed cutting him off from view of Lorne’s too perky face.

*S’not too late to make a new pair of shoes out of him,* Spike thought as he stepped out of the elevator. He strode over to the door and opened it. *Even that probably wouldn’t shu…*

Spike froze. If his heart could beat it would have stopped as his brain tried to reconcile what his eyes were seeing. There was a man standing in front of the suite’s wall of windows staring out at the Vegas skyline.

TBC
Chapter 96

Xander, he dared to pray as he watched the figure turn from the window to look at him. Spike swallowed reflexively. It was Xander. He was tanner and broader in the shoulder. He was dressed in worn but form fitting jeans covered slightly by a soft cotton button up shirt he wore untucked.

All man now, Spike thought as he continued to stare at his pet, his love, drinking in the details of how the last seven months had changed Xander. Construction work really had suited him.

Xander stared back at Spike. His heart pounded chaotically in his chest: it matched the chaos of his thoughts.

Was this a mistake? Why doesn’t he say anything? Ghods! He is more stunningly perfect than I remembered, he thought as catalogued the blue of Spike’s eyes and the way his black t-shirt clung like a second skin over the chest Xander had spent so many nights hungering to touch just one more time. Xander mapped with his eyes the way Spike’s jeans accentuated the vampire’s lean muscled legs remembering how they had moved against him.

“Nice view?” Xander asked breaking the silence as he forced his feet to move toward the bar. “Much nicer than when you left?”

Spike just nodded as he finished entering the room and shut the door behind him. He watched Xander as he made his way behind the bar and bent down to rummage in the mini-fridge behind it.

Lorne knew he was here! Spike thought as his mind began to work again. I’m gonna kill him! I’m gonna...Xan...Xander!

“You thirsty?” Xander asked holding out of one two beers in his hand.

“P...Xander what are you doing here?” Spike finally managed to find words as he stepped forward and took the offered beer. He watched as Xander he popped his beer bottle top off the on edge of the bar.

Pet’s learned some new tricks, Spike thought as he flicked the top off his own bottle with his thumb.

I wanted you...needed to see you, Xander thought.

“I wanted you.. to talk to you,” Xander said before taking a generous swig of the beer.

Spike took a drink of his own beer the liquid almost catching his throat when Xander’s said “want.”

He made another inventory of Xander now he was closer. The top few buttons on Xander’s shirt were undone making it easy for Spike to catch his warm scent. He smelt good; clean like he’d recently showered. His hair was a little shorter and he couldn’t help but notice the earring he’d had him wear was gone. The absence made Spike anxious.

Xander noted the inspection. He saw the vampire’s drift towards the earlobe missing the earring stashed safely in the duffel bag lying in the other room.

“Earrings not always the safest thing at a construction site,” Xander explained.
He took a closer inspection of his own. Spike’s knuckles were bruised and torn in places.

“You need those…” he started ask pointing bottom of his beer toward Spike’s hands.

It was too much, the long looks, the surprise and pain of wondering. Suddenly the vampire felt too exposed and too vulnerable.

“Oi! You said ya needed ta talk,” Spike suddenly barked too anxious and defensive to make nice. “So..talk.”

“Wow! Same old, Spike,” Xander replied. “I take it you didn’t go to charm school in the last seven months?”

“Sod off,” the vampire said as he turned stormed over to his chair and flopped down into it.

“Ok, No Toastmaster’s either,” Xander observed stepping around the bar growing more nervous now he was actually here with the vampire of his dreams.

“Stake me or spit it out, Xander, “ Spike growled, “ but please spare me the Harris babble!”

“So what was your plan, Spike?” Xander asked stepping toward the chair desperate to find a way to jumpstart his mouth. Desperate to find away to saying all the things he needed to say.

“I mean if you hadn’t won me? If you had never found me and don’t..just don’t try and pretend you knew I’d end up in that game.”

Xander fixed his gaze squarely on the vampire.

“Ya lot were always soft. Hadn’t thought it all the way through,” Spike finally answered his gaze shifting to look at the drink in his hands. “Figured I’d find some member of the resistance or some human ya’d all find valuable to bargain with..to use to make the meeting with.”

“Would you have made them your Pet?” Xander asked.

“Was a good cover,” Spike answered forcing himself to look at Xander. “A necessary one.”

“Would you have..Claimed them?” Xander asked the question causing something to twist painfully inside

“Maybe,” Spike answered honestly knowing his pet deserved the truth.

Xander hissed as air burned cold in his lungs and the pain became something new. He stared at Spike in shock before he set his beer down on the bar and turned his back on the vampire.

“Pet!” Spike cried standing up in alarm. Xander took a breath and shook his head.

“Sorry,” Xander said then turning back around and offering the vampire a tight smile.

“Xander..I don’t know. I hadn’t thought it through. I don’t know what would have happened. You came along and bollocked everything up,” Spike tried to explain. “I never lied to ya abou…”
This is all going wrong, Xander thought. Time to yank the band-aid off before it gets any worse.

“You know the first month after you left me,” Xander interrupted Spike. “The first month living with the girls I was a mix of depression and anger? I kept putting my fist through the walls just trying to either feel something or get rid of the anger.”

Spike snapped his mouth shut. Here it was, his pet was finally saying what he’d come to say. He owed it to Xander to listen to him.

“Funny, that’s how I got into construction. Had to fix up the damage I caused,” Xander continued. “Because that’s what you do, Spike when you wreck something you fix it.”

Spike sank slowly back to his chair. He set his beer next to his chair and hung his head. He’d wrecked Xander and he’d failed to fix him and now the only thing he could do was listen to what Xander had to say.

*If that’s what he needs,* Spike thought his broken heart breaking into even smaller pieces.

“It took awhile to get through the anger, Spike and then there was the confusion. I just couldn’t understand. I had done everything you wanted from me. I’d played every role you’d asked. I’d been your good, Pet. I was *your* pet. I willingly submitted to your Claim and I willingly bound myself to your demon.”

The words flowed easy out of Xander now. They poured out of him and he didn’t know if he could stop them even if he had wanted.

“I’d gone from being a bottle to your Claimaint. Gone from hating my own body to not only wanting and needing what you could make me feel, but enjoying it, Spike! Ghods! Do you know how I ached for you?” And can I say how wigged out that made me? You let me go and I was a free Xanman and all I could think about how good you felt! How you tasted!”

Spike couldn’t help but look up at Xander. He couldn’t help but stare in his own longing at the man he loved but he remained silent.

“I even tried dating! Found this girl, Anya. Yeah, ok, former demon but I thought that would be a bonus. She would get it. Get me and yeah it was good, Spike.”

The vampire bit back a growl. He curled his fingers into the armrests of his chair until the leather gave way.

“She was warm and she was funny. She was soft and all woman in all the right places, but..” Xander paused to take a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“She wasn’t you and no matter how nice it was to wrap myself up around her for a good heavy make out session in the end it’s not her lips I wanted to kiss and it’s not her arms I wanted around me.”

Spike’s fingers froze in their need to peel back the leather on his chair. However, he dared not look at Xander.

“I thought maybe I just needed time, Spike. So I focused on being with the girls. I was happy, Spike. Happy being with Willow again and watching her fall in love with Tara. I was happy seeing Dawn becoming this strong and beautiful young woman. I was happy building things and watching the
world come back to life and I told myself that that it was enough. That if the girls were happy then it’s all that I needed.”

Xander sighed and then he walked slowly toward Spike and then slowly sank to floor in front of the vampire’s chair.

“So let’s see, Spike I went through depression, anger and I guess Anya was denial until finally I had bargained away and accepted going through the motions,” Xander said.

Spike looked at Xander in confusion.

“In the desert, after you left, I kept thinking everything in terms of why you did it and what did I want and what were the choices I was supposed to make? What were the rules and what if I chose wrong?”

Xander shook his head.

“I went to meetings with Tara and tried to work through my need...my urges to fall to my knees to someone to have a Master...to find a new Master...”

Spike couldn’t stop a snarl from escaping. Xander smiled and covered one of Spike’s hand with his own.

“Doesn’t feel good does it? Kinda like hearing how you might have Claimed someone else,” Xander said with an arched eyebrow and a wry smile.

“Pe...Xan?” Spike whispered. “What are ya trying ta say? Maybe I need ya ease back on the cage fights a bit or maybe I’m just a bit out of practice with Xander speak but I’m really not followin’ you here.”

“Nah you were just always slow,” Xander teased resisting an urge to run his hand through Spike’s hair.

“Oi!” Spike snorted.

“What I’m saying is I needed time,” Xander said as he slowly began to unbutton his shirt.

Spike swallowed. His eyes fixed on Xander’s fingers and his mind whirling.

“Pet?”

“Time to be with the Willow, to be human, to think, to heal,” Xander whispered huskily as he pulled his shirt open revealing his well-defined chest and a ruby tipped nipple ring resting snugly where it belonged, “Time to figure out what I want and time enough to realize I was free to go get it. But you knew that didn’t you Spike?”

“Xander,” Spike said in shock grasping at the human’s shirt and pulling it open and down off his shoulders. He stared at the glinting little ruby and wondered what it meant.

“You’re turn,” Xander softly ordered.

“Wot?” Spike said focusing his attention back to Xander’s face.
“Take off your shirt, Spike,” Xander said with a slow smile. “I want to see something.”

Spike forced his fingers to let go of Xander’s shirt. He reached for the hem of his own and yanked it over his head before throwing it into a far corner. He was rewarded to see Xander, his shirt fallen to the floor, kneeling in front of him staring at the vampire’s chest.

A happy smile curled across Xander’s face as he saw the black pearl pinned to Spike’s chest via a nipple ring of his own. A ring Xander knew would be there if everything Spike had said and did were real. A ring Xander had placed there marking Spike as his as much as Spike had marked him. He looked up at Spike’s face.

“You told me you loved me when you asked to Claim me,” Xander said huskily as he inched forward to kneel between Spike’s knees. “You showed me how much that last time we were together and you proved it when you let me go.”

“Xan..” Spike cried out in an aching whisper unsure and afraid of what to do next. He felt they were on the precipice of their relationship from which there was no going back and one wrong word or move could send it all hurling into some hellish abyss.

“I was so broken I wasn’t even sure I could love,” Xander said, “but seven months is a long time to heal. Once I figured out what I wanted, you know what happened, Spike? I figured out what I felt. Seven months is a long time figure out that I just didn’t want you..didn’t just ache or just need you but that.”

“Xander..” Spike mouthed afraid and hopeful all at the same time.

“I love you,” Xander said his eyes boring into Spike’s soul and his voice firm with every conviction of his own.

Spike’s soul and demon fell straight over the edge and surged forward Xander lifting him up into his arms. Cool bare chest met warm bare chest. Hungry mouth met hungry mouth. Xander’s arms wrapped tight around Spike’s shoulders as the vampire’s hands snaked under the man’s firm ass. Using vampire strength he lifted him up.

Xander wrapped his legs tight around Spike’s waist. The vampire spun them around. As one hungry tangle of limbs seeking to merge completely together Spike propelled them across the room until Xander’s back was pressed flat against the glass of the window separating them from desert night.

“Don’t,” Spike said breaking their devouring kiss to look into Xander’s eyes. “Don’t say it if you don’t mean it.”

“I love you,” Xander said again squeezing the vampire tighter. “you dork.”

Spike growled then groaned. He was impossibly hard and straining confined in his jeans and he could feel the heat of Xander’s weighty bulge pressing into his abdomen.

“Xan..does this mean..?”

“Put me down for a sec,” Xander said unwrapping his legs from around Spike.

Reluctantly the vampire let his warm love slide down his body. Xander stayed pressed against the
vampire as he fished in his pocket. Then with a shy smile he pulled his hand free and in it gleamed his white gold collar.

“Couldn’t get a fair price for it,” he joked.

Spike reached out and touched the collar but didn’t take it from Xander’s grasp.

“P..Xander are you sure? Do you know what you are…”

“Demon city run by demon rules,” Xander said without hesitation. “I didn’t need to find another master because I already have one.”

Then Xander took a deep breath. He stared Spike in the eye and let it out very slowly and carefully.

“And I know if I wear this again,” he said softly, “I live by the that choice. I live by those rules and..I know that sometimes I’ll need to be the Pet and I willingly agree to do that, Spike. But I trust I’m still your, ‘pet’ and your love. I trust you’ll take care of me and love me and part of that means you know I need sunshine. I need to build and fix things. I trust you know I’ll need to see Dawn and Willow and maybe even Fai.”

Spike put a finger to Xander’s mouth and softly silenced him.

“Vegas has plenty of things wot need fixing,” Spike said firmly. “And I like ya all tanned and warmed up by the sun. As for the bints, don’t think I could keep ’em from ya if I wanted ta. Nibblet alone could probably turn this city against me. As fer the slayer...well I’m sure at some point the she’ll come callin’ fer my help with Cleveland from time to time and no way I’m leaving my pet behind.”

Xander grinned around Spike’s finger before sucking the tip into his mouth and laving it tenderly with this tongue before very slowly and deliberately biting down on it.

“Xan!” Spike moaned. Xander released his prisoner. He rubbed up against Spike letting the vampire feel his heat and how much he wanted him.

“Spike, please,” he asked.

“I don’t think I could let you go a second time,” he answered hoarsely his soul demanding he give Xander one last chance to change his mind even as his demon screamed to collar, shag and reclaim his pet already.

“You would if I needed you to,” Xander whispered sliding his free hand around the edge of Spike’s jeans.

“Pet!” Spike groaned as he nodded.

“But you won’t need to,” Xander said before leaning forward to lick a hungry stripe from Spike’s pierced nipple to the edge of his mouth.

Spike roared. Once again he picked up Xander into his arms. Once again Xander wrapped arms around his vampire and then devoured his mouth.

This time Spike stormed them straight into the bedroom. He carried them to the bed where he lay
Xander down. Only them did Xander unwrap himself from around Spike only because the vampire began to peel Xander’s remaining clothes off.

When Xander was naked he lay back on the bed to watch Spike undress. The human’s cock was hard and leaking precum. He reached for it and Spike growled.

“Mine, pet,” the vampire said.

Fire licked through Xander as he groaned and nodded.

“Hands above yer head,” Spike ordered, “and spread yer legs.”

“Yes, sir,” Xander said huskily with a jaunty smile as he followed orders.

“Oi! Cheeky git!” Spike said crawling up, now naked, between Xander’s legs. “Might have ta punish ya fer that.”

“Promise?” Xander asked arching an eyebrow.

“Yer killin’ me, luv,” Spike groaned leaning over his pet stretched out underneath him like a feast.

“Good thing I can give you what you need to live...er unlive,” Xander teased before turning his head to the side offering his neck up to the vampire he loved.

“Xander!” Spike panted his face in ridges and fangs as he hovered over the man’s bare neck. He could smell his pet’s need. He could smell his cinnamon cedar scent. He could feel his heat and hear his heartbeat. He could almost see all his warm blood pumping just below the skin.

Never..never letting you go again, Spike vowed.

I’ll crawl on my knees behind ya if I have to but I will never be parted from ya again.

Somehow Spike managed to pull himself back. He managed to push his demon back to let his face resume its human visage. He needed to calm down because they were going to do this right. He took an unneeded breath.

That’s when he noticed the duffel bag on the floor and all the little pieces of his broken heart finished reassembling. Xander had never come to just talk.

He shuffled back and rolled to the other side of the bed.

Xander snapped his fingers.

“Permission ta speak, luv,” Spike said fishing to the drawer for a tube of lube he hope was there. He hadn’t needed any for seven months.

“Whatchya doin’, Master Mayhem?” Xander asked.

“Gettin’ the slick so I can shag and collar ya properly,” Spike replied his voice deep and smokey.

Xander moaned.

“Roll over for me, pet,” Spike ordered as he found what he was looking for. “And no humpin’ the
“Why would I do that when I’d rather hump you?” Xander teased.

“Oi!” Spike cried as he gave Xander’s ass a playful swat as it came into view. Xander gave a pleasant sounding grunt before wriggling his butt towards Spike.

“Just the one?” he asked.

“Hands and knees, luv!” Spike barked his cock harder than he could remember it ever being.

Xander smiled into his forearms as he assumed the position. He spread his legs wide and loved the idea of the image he must of presented. No more was he just dreaming about Spike’s voice or his hungry cool touches.

As he felt the vampire’s fingers slowly tracing a line between the globes of his ass cheeks Xander’s heart took on a new beat. It was a happy beat. It was one that grew in a pounding rhythm as he felt his beloved master’s slick fingers slide and begin to slowly stretch him.

Xander groaned and with each twist which opened him wider and readied him he felt happier and freer than he’d dreamed possible. He’d thought he’d wanted, Spike these past few months. He’d thought he’d needed him. He was wrong. This, was want! This, was need.

“Please,” he let slip.

“Up and face me,” Spike ordered.

Xander did as he was told and was rewarded with watching Spike coating lube on his own engorged and leaking cock.

“Give me yer colla, luv,” Spike said softly.

Since that afternoon in the desert when Xander had woken without Spike, the one thing which had grounded him through all of his confusion, anger and depression was his collar. He’d carried it with him and when he hadn’t, it had lain safely under his pillow so he could clutch it when he woken from nightmares or heady dreams.

Now with one sweet simple command he handed it over to Spike.

“I want you to mount me know, pet,” Spike said watching with loving adoration Xander’s face. “Knees on either side of me and down ya go at yer own pace.”

Xander nodded and moved quickly.He clutched Spike’s shoulders for balance, pressed in close, and draped himself over Spike’s lap. He could feel his vampire position himself underneath Xander, lining himself up with one hand while spreading his cheeks apart with the other.

“At yer own..” Spike started to say expecting Xander to ease down on him but Xander didn’t want that.

Spike’s eyes flew open eye wide and he threw back his head in a long groan as Xander thrust himself down in one fluid motion. Xander gasped as he welcomed the burn and the strain. He reveled in the hard ache and cool reality of being impaled on Spike. This is what he wanted. This is
what he needed. This was no dream.

“Xan..pet,” Spike panted forcing back to look at Xander.

“I wanted that,” Xander said gasped. “I missed you. Missed this”

“Fuck!” Spike said leaning his forward to rest his forehead against Xander. He wrapped his arms around him. Xander ran his thumbs down Spike’s neck as he breathed through his body’s adjusting to the sudden fullness.

“Ya could have hurt yourself,” Spike said.

“I’m your Claimaint,” Xander said in a husky voice. “I can take it.”

Spike groaned and fought the need to thrust up into his pet.

“Should punish for that,” Spike grumbled.

“Yeah?” Xander said hopefully.

“Oh! Ya won’t be so eager for punishments when I make ya scoop the litter box,” Spike said then froze a moment. He looked around. “Where is that hellspawn? Where’s Ante haven’t seen him..”

“Really, Spike?” Xander asked pulling his forehead back a little to laugh at his master vampire. “You now?”

“Master Spike,” the vampire corrected kissing the tip of Xander’s nose, “and yeah. Wouldn’t put it past that beast ta decide ta use my dangly bits as a new toy right in the middle of a good toss!”

Xander laughed and pulled his vampire in for a deep kiss. He slipped his tongue in past Spike’s surprised lips and then claimed him for his own.

“He’s with, Lorne,” Xander whispered when he eventually broke the kiss to breathe. “Only one playing with your bits tonight is me.”

“Xaaaander,” Spike groaned and this time did thrust up. Xander gasped and returned the motion. Spike growled. This was it. This was the moment.

He gently grabbed Xander’s chin in one hand.

“I love you,” he said staring into his love’s eyes holding up the gold collar. Xander’s breath caught and he nodded slowly.

Never breaking eye contact, Spike wrapped the collar around Xander’s neck. When it clicked into place he leaned forward. He kissed Xander’s nose. Next he whispered something against Xander’s neck.

Xander clinched around Spike as he felt the magic ripple through the collar locking it into place. Spike bucked underneath him. Xander moaned and held fast. Spike grabbed his pet’s waist and then began to pound up into him.

Spike had wanted it to be tender and gentle. Spike had wanted to be slow and last forever but their
bodies wanted something different as something much more primal took over. They were both consumed with heat and hunger. They erupted in heady snarls and groans. Xander’s nails ripped down Spike’s back as he tried to grind himself harder and harder on to his vampire his cock caught and rubbing between them. Spike’s fingers left bruises in Xander’s skin as he pulled his body to him impaling as deep as he could go.

Human teeth sank into the meat of Spike’s shoulder as Xander screamed his frustration as his body wound tighter and tighter toward its release. Fangs ripped into Xander’s neck so a hungry mouth could draw Xander’s very life force into the vampire.

“SPIIIKE!” Xander screamed with pain and pleasure as his vision went white and his hot spill erupted coating them.

“Xan...XANDER!” Spike cried tearing his mouth away from his heady feast as his body pumped it’s release deep inside his love.

“Sp...sp....Ghods! I LOVE YOU!” Xander panted as his body was rocked with his and Spike’s climax.

Spike grabbed Xander’s face between his hands. He looked at his pet.

“I love you, Xander. I love you, pet,” he said before smashing his mouth on to Xander’s.

Xander could taste his blood on and around Spike’s fangs. He didn’t care. He only deepened the kiss and held on to Spike until the storms of sensation started to subside. He kissed Spike until he felt his body start to grow lax.

Then he felt Spike ease them down to ease out of him. Xander lay back on the bed panting, while Spike curled up around him and gently licked his neck until the blood ceased to flow. Then he pulled the bed clothes over them cocooning them in warmth.

Xander turned in his arms to face his beloved vampire. Spike smiled and kissed the tip of his nose.

“I love you,” Xander whispered.

“I don’t think I’ll ever tire of hearing ya say that, luv,” Spike answered.

“I love you,” Xander said again.

Spike ran a finger along the edge of Xander’s collar.

“I would love ya without…”

“I know,” Xander said catching Spike’s finger in his hand.

Spike looked into Xander’s eyes.

“I love you, Xander. I love you,” Spike said with all the love both demon and soul could give.

Xander smiled burrowing himself against the chest he’d missed. He closed his eyes and thanked the fates and the turn of the cards winning him from his worst nightmare to his wildest dream; winning him over to Spike the Master of Las Vegas and the master of his heart.
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