



Title: Blood and a Full Moon

Author: Seductivembrace

Pairing, Characters: Spike/Xander

Rating: NC-17

Summary: Sequel to **HOSTILE TAKEOVER**. Angel and the gang attempt to deal with the situation in Sunnydale.

Disclaimer: Joss said I could, so I am.

Dr. Angleman surveyed the destruction in the lab room with disgust. Professor Walsh had become too fixated on the boy – a Mr. Xander Lavelle Harris, construction worker, lifelong resident of Sunnydale – to take the necessary precautions that were a must in their line of work. Without fully understanding what he *-it*, Angleman reminded himself – was capable of, its strengths, weaknesses, and ability to adapt to a given situation, Walsh had underestimated the thing and it had resulted in her death and the deaths of several good soldiers.

Thankfully, Agent Finn’s squad had been spared since they’d been off duty at the time of the two hostiles’ escape. He was going to need Finn once his other project was completed.

“Get this cleaned up,” he snapped to the soldier beside him.

“Yes, sir!” The lieutenant spoke into a portable communication unit and arranged to have the bodies disposed of and the room set to rights.

“Do we have a location on the missing hostiles?” Angleman asked after a moment.

"Not yet, sir. They're not in the immediate vicinity. We're expanding our search now. We may have to go mobile because the trackers only have a 50-mile radius."

"Do it. Assemble four teams. Cover each road out of Sunnydale. Start with the major cities."

"Yes, sir!"

"Lieutenant?"

"Yes, sir?"

"I want frequent updates. And I want those hostiles recovered alive. Is that clear?"

"Yes, sir!"

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Oz woke with a start when the sunlight hit his face. He sat up and looked around in confusion at the bushes surrounding him. A moan sounded to his left, and he turned in that direction to see Veruca, the singer from the Bronze, stretched out next to him.

He scrambled to his feet, trying to remember the previous night. He caught tiny snatches of images. Of him and another wolf taking to the streets. An encounter with a few humans before heading towards the forest, and the hunt. Feeding on a deer.

"I've got to go," Oz said, and he didn't wait around to see if Veruca heard him or not. He darted through the bushes and escaped into an alley behind a Laundromat. Thankfully the place was deserted; people had dropped off their laundry and skipped out to the coffee shop across the street to wait rather than linger in the stifling shop. After stealing a shirt and a pair of pants out of a dryer, he returned to his room to think.

He had a lot on his mind and some decisions to make.

Several hours passed, the phone rang and went unanswered. *Probably Willow*, he thought. More time passed and he still had no idea what he was going to do. He did know that he couldn't return to his cage. Somehow he'd managed to get loose and it wasn't safe for him, or the citizens of Sunnydale, if he got free again.

Which was why he wound up at Giles' house an hour before sunset.

"Oz?"

"Giles."

"What— that is, can I help you?"

"Do you still have your tranquilizer gun?"

"Of course."

"I need you to shoot me."

"I beg your pardon?"

"My cage isn't safe. I got out last night somehow. I don't have time to look for another place to stay. It's just for tonight. Last day of the cycle."

"Oh."

"I hate to impose, but—"

"No! Come in. Come in."

"Thanks."

Giles gestured to the couch. "Please. Have a seat. Tea?"

"Sure. Uh... thanks."

Giles came back into the room with a tray setting complete with tea and cookies, and Oz smothered a smile. He appreciated the watcher's thoughtfulness, this quiet repast before night fell and the werewolf took over.

"I'm leaving, Giles," he said suddenly. And he knew. Knew he couldn't stay in Sunnydale. Knew he had to leave and attempt to get control of the beast inside him.

"Are you sure? I mean, do you think that's for the best?"

"I got out last night, Giles. Who knows who may have been hurt." *Killed*, he didn't say. "I've got to find a way to get control of this thing inside me. When I change, I don't remember. I hate... not remembering."

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know, but I'll have a month to figure it out."

“Very well. I do wish you the best of luck.”

Oz appreciated that about Giles. How he listened, how he offered advice if asked, abstaining if not. Such could not be said of his well-meaning friends. And he decided then that he wouldn't say anything. Tomorrow, after he changed back, he'd leave. Just gather his few belongings and go.

Before anyone could change his mind.

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It took a week for Xander's ribs to heal sufficiently enough for him to get out of bed for any length of time. Since he'd yet to experience his first change, his body couldn't completely access the preternatural healing abilities inherent in the wolf.

During that time, Spike was a constant by his side, helping him see to his human needs. The last two few days he went so far as to hold Xander upright in the shower, though that only because he'd threatened to take one by himself. The daily sponge baths he'd been receiving just hadn't been cutting it.

That he cared not that both he and Spike were naked together spoke volumes as to how much he'd come to rely on the vampire since arriving on Angel's doorstep. His quiet presence both in and out of bed – the one they'd confiscated from the vampire that first night and who'd never failed to complain about it since – helped him deal with the nightmares that continued to plague him. Ones in which neither he nor Spike had escaped and were endlessly tortured in the name of science.

Stifling a sigh, Xander ran a shaking hand through his hair. Angel was leaning against the kitchen counter, surreptitiously watching him – or so Angel thought. Xander felt the vampire's gaze distinctly. The only reason he didn't take umbrage was because Angel seemed to have both his and Spike's welfare at heart, for the time being anyway. Surprising, but he wasn't going to question Angel's sudden change in behavior.

*Still...*

“What?” he finally snapped, looking up from his plate.

“This thing with you and Spike—”

“There *is* no thing with me and Spike,” Xander interrupted.

“He's evil, Xander. Just because he's agreed to bag it for now... It's just... You can't trust him. And, I don't want to see you get hurt.”

Xander stared at Angel, arms crossed over his chest. "Look. Angel." He wanted to yell, to tell Angel to mind his own business. And he would have. Except...

Angel really *was* trying to help. He'd gotten Cordelia and some half-breed demon named Doyle involved. His team, Angel had said. He'd even overridden both their objections at having Spike around.

"Hello? Pokers, anybody?" Cordelia had reminded them, and Angel had just brushed her concern aside, mumbling about "family differences and debts owed."

Xander sighed.

"I hear ya. And, I'll be careful. Alright? But Spike's been there. *Is* there. He could have killed me and disappeared after we escaped, but he didn't. He's here. He's helping. Researching even." And who knew that Spike knew his way around a computer almost as well as Willow?

This time it was Angel that sighed. "Alright, Xander. Just... be careful."

Angel really hoped that Xander would. He could see how Spike was fixating on the boy. More than he ever had on Drusilla.

"Am I interrupting something?" Spike asked. There was no mistaking the sudden tension in the room.

"No," Xander said. He was still staring at Angel. "Angel was just offering some fatherly advice." He chuckled when Angel winced.

"Peaches tends to do that a lot."

"Spike," Angel growled, objecting to the name.

"Sorry." Spike smirked. "*Angelus*."

Angel did a pretty good impression of rolling his eyes then pushed away from the counter and headed towards the elevator. "I'll be upstairs. Xander, eat your breakfast."

"Yes, dad."

Spike's laughter followed Angel up in the elevator.

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Wesley thought he was doing well as a self-professed rogue demon hunter. Though he'd not actually caught his first demon yet, his latest tip was very promising, and was what had led him to Los Angeles.

He parked his motorcycle and gingerly dismounted. His backside was numb from the long drive and it took him a minute to get used to being on his feet again before he crossed the lot and let himself into the bar.

The music was unbearably loud, but it masked the squeak of leather as he walked up to the bar where he ordered a shot of "something strong". He downed it in one and slammed the glass on the table, demanded another for good measure. Appearances were everything, after all. Who cared if his throat was on fire?

Little did he realize that he'd captured the notice of one of the patrons tucked away in the corner, someone who had taken one look at him and thought, "British wanker. Has to be one of the Council's do-gooders."

"I'm looking for..." Wesley began when the bartender glanced his way. He realized he was almost shouting and lowered his voice. "I'm looking for Doyle."

"Never heard of him," the bartender growled and turned away to help another customer.

Wesley wasn't deterred, however, and when the bartender came back, he had a fifty dollar bill in his hand. "Doyle?"

"Never. Heard. Of. Him," the bartender said again.

"I mean him no harm, I can assure you. He's a... an informant of mine. He wanted me to meet him here. Only, we've never actually met. In person, that is." Wesley shrugged helplessly.

"Sorry. Can't help you."

Wesley sighed and leaned against the bar. He didn't feel anyone at his back until they'd leaned over and swiped the fifty dollar bill from his hand.

"Hey!" he turned around to confront the person and just barely refrained from screaming.

He would have recognized the vampire standing before him anywhere. When he'd been a watcher-in-training, he'd spent an entire month devoted to studying the exploits of William the Bloody as well as the rest of the Scourge of Europe.

Staring at Spike, as he was calling himself nowadays, he could believe everything he'd ever read about the vampire.

"What-what to do you want?" Wesley stammered out. He watched as Spike calmly pocketed his money.

"Thought you were looking for a bloke named Doyle. It just so happens I know where he works."

"What makes you think I'd go anywhere with you?"

Spike grinned, Cheshire-cat-like.

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Angel Investigations was a madhouse and Angel wanted nothing more than to slink off to his apartment until everyone had gone away. Unfortunately, he couldn't.

"Spike, let Wesley go. Oz, nice to see you again. Xander, sit down before you fall down. Cordelia, just... I hear you, alright? Doyle—"

"Wait! You mean there really *is* a Doyle?" Wesley interrupted, shoving Spike off him.

"'course there is," Spike replied, not that anybody could hear him as they were all too busy talking at once... well, except for Xander, who was eyeing the red-headed newcomer - Oz - with some trepidation. Spike went to stand beside the boy.

"Problem, pet?" he asked, hands settling lightly on Xander's shoulders.

"Uh, no. It's just. That's Oz."

"Yeah, got that much."

"He's the guy that bit me. Or, I'm pretty sure he's the one that did it. That night is still pretty hazy."

"Did he now?"

There was an underlying menace in Spike's tone, and Xander was quick to dissuade him from whatever he might be planning.

"He's my friend. You're not allowed to eat him."

"Well, why not?"

Spike was definitely pouting now, and Xander smothered a smile. "Friend. Mine. Plus, it wasn't his fault."

"Yeah.... Well..."

"I mean it, Spike."

"Fine. No eating the mutt."

"Hey!" Xander objected.

"Wot?"

"I'm a mutt, too, now, you know. Well, you know what I mean. No name calling either." He crossed his arms over his chest and instantly regretted it. "Ow!"

His whine of pain, more wolf-like than human, accomplishing what Angel had been trying to achieve. Blessed silence.

"Xander?" Angel's sharp gaze zeroed in on Xander's face.

"Boy's had a little too much fun for one day, I'm thinking, Angelus. We're going below," Spike announced. He easily lifted a protesting Xander in his arms and headed for the elevator.

"I say! Was that?" Wesley asked. "With—?"

"Yes," Doyle replied.

"And he? They?"

"Uh huh," Cordelia confirmed.

"Oh."

"So, Wesley, what brings you here? Other than Spike, that is?" Angel asked, steering them all away from speculating on Xander and Spike.

"Actually, I came to Los Angeles following up on a lead. I'm a rogue demon hunter now."

"Oh really? And how's that working out for you?" Cordelia asked. She had to admit, Wesley looked *much* better in leather than a suit and tie.

"Not so well, I'm afraid."

Doyle bit his lip to keep from laughing.

Angel just sighed and shook his head. Knowing he was going to regret it, he invited everyone downstairs.

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Spike gave Angel a dirty look, but refrained from saying anything when Angel opened the lift and he, along with everyone else, stepped out.

"Everyone take a seat."

"So?" Cordelia said after everyone had sat down.

"Xander?" There was a quizzical look on Oz's face.

"It's a long story," Xander replied, sensing the question.

"I don't have anywhere to be," Cordelia said, settling back into her chair. Her quirked brow said "spill already".

Xander frowned. Angel's gang didn't know the exact reason he and Spike were there, only that the two of them had been hurt and were staying with Angel while they recovered, well, while *he* recovered. Spilling his secrets to them, reliving his time spent in the Initiative... Xander didn't think he was up to that just then.

"Go on, pet," Spike urged, and it was the quiet support he felt from the vampire that allowed Xander to tell his tale.

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"Angleman."

"Dr. Angleman? We've found the hostiles. They're in Los Angeles."

"Hold your position. I'm sending a retrieval team."

"Yes, sir!"

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After the big reveal, everyone had been silent, each processing what Xander had said... and what he hadn't. Spike had started getting antsy and Angel took that as his cue to get the others to leave.

He invited Oz to bunk down on the floor in his living room, not wanting him to have to spend another night sleeping in his van. Oz had agreed, and he left to retrieve his sleeping bag.

Doyle was putting up Wesley for the night, after they picked up Wesley's motorcycle from the bar.

They'd all agreed to meet back at Angel Investigations bright and early to begin researching the Initiative in earnest. Wesley had claimed to have a few contacts in the Council and he was going to make discreet inquiries. Doyle was hoping the Powers were going to be forthcoming, but as yet, nothing had happened.

Cordelia had given Xander a hug and a kiss on the cheek and told him to get some rest. He didn't mention the tears in her eyes, and neither did she.

"You ate, pet?" Spike asked after the others had left.

"Not really hungry."

"Shower and bed then?"

"Yeah. That'll be good."

Xander doubted that he'd be getting much sleep that night however.

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Spike blamed the fact that he'd taken to keeping human hours while caring for Xander as to the reason he'd not heard the commotion until it was almost too late. Seeing the swarm of men decked out in all black, their faces covered by masks, had him freezing for a moment before galvanizing into action.

He jumped from the bed snarling and heard an echoing growl come from Angel out in the living room. A dart embedded itself in his upper chest, and Spike yanked it out and tossed it aside. As a vampire at full strength, it was going to take a lot more than a single knock-out dart to slow him down. He leapt onto the man that had fired it and grinned maniacally at his scream of terror.

Smoke soon filled Angel's apartment making it difficult, if not impossible, to see, and the noxious smell filled Spike's nostrils until he remembered not to breathe. He grabbed

the nearest soldier and yanked his mask off; his suspicions were confirmed when the man choked once, twice, then passed out.

*Xander!*

Spike turned around and tried to see the bed, but the smoke was too thick. He raced forward and ran his hands over the surface, praying he'd encounter a lump that was Xander, but the bed was empty.

*"Angelus!"*

Something small slammed into his chest.

"Hold onto him," Angel said as he barricaded the bedroom door. "Come on. We don't have much time."

"They've got him. They've got Xander."

Spike planted his feet, intending on putting Oz down and going after the soldiers. Angel had other ideas.

"We can't, Spike. They're gonna blow the place. We've got to get to the sewers. Now!"

Spike concentrated and he heard the retreating footsteps. Heard, too, the timer that was steadily counting down.

"Here, let me have him," Angel said once he had the sewer access door open. "Go!"

There was a small splash as Spike landed in the water that covered the bottom few inches of the sewers.

"Ready?"

"Yeah. Drop him."

Spike caught Oz easily and a second later Angel was through the hole and taking Oz back from Spike.

"Run!"

Spike needed no further urging.

They'd barely taken a handful of steps when the explosion nearly knocked them off their feet.

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"Got a destination in mind, or are we just gonna run until we reach the ocean?" Spike wanted to know.

"Cordelia's."

"The cheerleader?"

"Yes. She's got a ghost. Dennis. He'll let us know if someone approaches. Should give us some time to regroup... get you some clothes. Get *me* some clothes."

"Bloody hell."

Spike just realized he was running around the sewers of Los Angeles wearing just a pair of boxers, and that only because Xander had refused to allow him to, in his words, "run around starkers while Oz was here". Angel wasn't faring much better, although he at least had some sleep pants on.

Thinking about Xander made Spike stop, forcing Angel to stop as well.

"Tell me we're gonna get him back, Angelus."

"We'll get him back, Spike."

"Promise me."

"I promise. We'll get him back, Spike. Now come on. We need to get to Cordy's. Then figure out how the soldiers knew where you were."

"Yeah. Okay."

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Cordelia immediately invited them in and quickly shut the door, throwing the bolt home. For good measure, she added the chain.

"Where's Xander?"

"Bastards took him."

"*What?* Angel!"

"I know, Cordelia. We'll get him back. But first we need to figure out how they found us."

"Yeah. Okay. Here, set Oz down on the couch. What happened to him?"

"Sleeping gas, I think," Angel replied. "He should be fine in a few hours."

The lights flickered and Cordelia turned towards the kitchen. Saw a flashlight and a kitchen knife float towards her.

"Right!" She snapped her fingers. "Dennis you're a genius. Spike, sit down."

"I don't think so." Spike eyed the flashlight and knife warily.

"It's a tracer, dummy. Sit. Dennis will find it and Angel can cut it out."

"Spike..." Angel began.

"Fine. Just be careful with that thing," Spike said to Angel, indicating the knife he snatched out of thin air. Muttered, "Been cut up enough by those bloody soldiers to last me a lifetime."

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They found the tracer and Angel cut it out.

"See you haven't lost your touch," Spike muttered.

"Shut up, Spike."

Dennis brought them a hammer, ending whatever Spike might have said, and he snatched it out of the air with a mumbled thanks, then completely smashed the small piece of metal that had been hidden under his skin.

"We probably shouldn't stay here," Cordelia announced. "I mean. They might have gotten a fix on us before the tracer was destroyed."

"Cordy's right," Angel agreed. "We should go."

"Where?" Spike asked.

"My van," Oz said, groaning as he sat up on the couch. "Got some supplies in there. Cash. Enough to rent us a few motel rooms."

"We should get Doyle and Wesley." This from Angel.

"Well, what are we waiting for?"

Angel frown at Spike then turned to Cordelia, "Pack a bag. Quickly. Just grab enough stuff for a few days. We're out of here in five minutes."

A small duffle came floating down the hall. Cordelia grabbed it and smiled, thanking Dennis.

"I'm ready."

"Does he clean too?" Spike wanted to know.

"Of course."

"Guys! Leaving now. Spike, help Oz."

Angel took the lead and stepped out the front door, motioning for the others to follow.

"Be careful, Dennis," Cordelia said and followed Angel.

Spike and Oz brought up the rear.

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"You are so buying me a new pair of shoes, Angel," Cordelia muttered, levering herself out of the sewer and into the parking garage where Oz had left his van. She wiggled her foot and a piece of slime slid off her shoe. "Ugh! Disgusting."

"Shut it, Princess. Least you *have* shoes," Spike growled. He was still in a pair of boxers.

"Enough!" Angel roared. "Just get in the van. Oz?"

Oz produced the hide-a-key box and shook it. "Key." His other set was probably ash among the rubble that was once Angel's apartment.

He unlocked the door and everyone piled in. Angel sat up front with Oz so that he could give him directions to Doyle's place. Spike picked a back corner, grabbed a blanket, and huddled in it.

Surprisingly, Cordelia joined him.

"We're gonna find him, Spike."

She laid a reassuring hand on his arm.

Spike didn't say anything, but he didn't dislodge her hand either. He sat there unmoving, staring off into space and wondered about Xander. If he was being treated to more of the same at the hands of the soldiers. He was still sitting there, locked away in his memories, when the van stopped and Angel left to get Doyle and Wesley.

It wasn't until Oz knelt before him and said "Sunnydale" with knowing eyes that Spike seemed to come alive.

"You sure, mutt?" he asked, not daring to believe. Or hope.

Oz nodded.

"Right. It's back to the Hellmouth for us, then."

Oz grimaced. After the drama of his departure, the last thing he wanted to do was return to Sunnydale. But, Xander was his friend. He couldn't *not* go.

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The van rolled into Sunnydale in the early hours of the morning and drove straight to the mansion on Crawford Street. Everyone piled out, exhausted, and a little bit nervous, and made their way inside.

"God! What a pigsty!" Cordelia complained. Angel had given her a flashlight and she was shining it around the room.

Angel just shrugged. "I've been gone for a while."

"I guess so." Cordelia headed towards the bedrooms, brandishing her flashlight like a weapon. "Please tell me you at least have clean sheets."

"I should probably cover the van," Oz said. "Do you have a tarp, or maybe a blanket?"

"How about a concealing spell?" Wesley offered. "For the van... and perhaps the mansion as well."

"Good idea, Wes."

Wesley preened at Angel's praise, adding, "It's a rather simple spell. I'll write down the items we'll need and Doyle can pick everything up from the magic shop later this morning. I think it would be best if we keep a low profile, at least until we assess the situation."

There were nods all around and by some unspoken agreement they moved to the living room; Angel lit a few candles, providing just enough light for everyone to see and the flashlights were turned off.

Cordelia was still grumbling about how dirty the place seemed to be, an occasional “Oh my god!” or “Really, Angel!” drifting out from the back bedrooms.

“Can’t wait ‘til she finds the—”

“ANGEL!” Cordelia screeched.

“Chest,” Spike finished, laughing.

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Doyle was in the magic shop not long after it had opened, gathering the necessary items to perform the masking spell, when he felt the hairs on the back of his neck stand on end. A moment later, a blonde whirlwind came through the door dragging a red-headed female who was doing her best to break free. Buffy and Willow, obviously. He’d been briefed by both Angel and Oz on the likelihood of their showing up as the shop was their unofficial base of operations when researching the latest crisis to visit the Hellmouth.

“Giles!” Buffy bellowed, uncaring of the few patrons in the store.

Doyle’s eyes remained glued to the shelves in front of him while he blatantly eavesdropped on their conversation.

The watcher was obviously put out about the Slayer’s less than subtle yelling of his name when he replied, “Yes, Buffy, what is it?”

“Xander’s missing!”

“What? I mean,” his voice lowered to a whisper, and Doyle was forced to move closer to hear.

“Willow and me, we went by his job. The guy there, the foreman—”

“He was very rude,” Willow interjected.

“Yes, he was,” Buffy agreed. “I mean, you’d think he would have called someone when Xander didn’t show up. But no! He just *fired* him. Said he was a ‘no show’.”

"Xander would never do that. I mean, not really. Sometimes when he was up late helping us, he'd be late. But he'd never not call."

"Have you tried his home?" Giles asked.

Willow nodded. "We went there first before coming here."

"His parents were..." Buffy looked at Willow. "Unhelpful." Which was an understatement.

Mr. Harris had been drunk and his wife wasn't too far behind, and it had barely been ten in the morning. Neither had noticed Xander's absence. They'd been allowed to go down into the basement to see for themselves, and Buffy had been shocked at the condition of the place. It was obvious Xander hadn't been there for some time. The garbage stank of leftover food; clothes had been piled in a corner, obviously waiting for wash day. Nothing had seemed to be missing, so it wasn't as if Xander had packed up and moved away.

He'd just... disappeared.

"We have to find him, Giles," Buffy said.

The Slayer lowered her voice and spoke in a whisper, and Doyle had a hard time hearing what she said.

"...think it might have something to do with those military goons I came across?"

"At this point, I'm not ruling anything out. I'll see what I can find out while you girls go to class. Meet me back here when you're through for the day."

Both Willow and Buffy seemed ready to object, but at a look from Giles, reluctantly nodded and left the shop.

Doyle finished gathering what he needed and hurried to the counter to pay for his purchases. He needed to relay what he'd overheard to the others.

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It was the cold that woke Xander out of his drug-induced sleep. He opened his eyes and stifled a sob at seeing familiar white walls and a video console installed in a corner.

The face was different this time. Male. But no less scary.

"Hostile 23, welcome back. I'm Dr. Angleman."

Xander didn't care what the man's name was and he said as much, but more colorfully. Spike would have been proud.

His frown was the same as The Bitch's. The soldier's name he shouted for was as well. Xander almost welcomed the beating because it sent him back to blessed unconsciousness, where nothing could hurt him, or at least he couldn't feel it hurting him. Before he passed out from the pain, he catalogued the faces of every man in the room; if he ever got free, he was going to kill each and every one of them.

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The next time Xander woke, he was strapped down to a table with a gag in his mouth and two soldiers were standing sentry just a few feet away. A lab technician approached and checked his vitals then took several vials of blood from his arm. He moved off and spoke into a microphone.

"He's ready for you, Doctor."

"Very well. I'll be right there."

Xander's eyes grew wide and he began struggling in earnest when he saw the doctor approach the table with a tray of what looked suspiciously like knives.

"Give him another dose of the sedative," Angleman said. "I don't want him moving while I work."

Even with the sedative, Xander still screamed when the scalpel took a layer of flesh from his inner arm. Five more shots and he barely twitched in reaction as the knife cut into him over and over. His voice had gone hoarse from yelling, cursing the doctor, then just begging for him to stop. The drug he'd been given had limited his movements; it had done nothing for the pain. He felt each and every cut to his body.

Then, when he thought he could suffer no more, the doctor performed a complete physical exam. He'd never felt so degraded in his life and he had to wonder at these men, these humans, that would treat another human being so callously.

Exhausted, the fight completely gone out of him for the moment, Xander could do nothing but lay there as the doctor ran impersonal hands over every part of his body, inside and out, cataloguing his findings in a voice recorder for later review.

His body oozing blood from the numerous cuts all over him and the numerous injections he'd received from the overzealous lab technician had left Xander weak and on the verge of passing out. Before he slipped back into blessed unconsciousness, he pinned the doctor with a look, eyes blazing with fury.

"You better pray I don't get free." His eyes closed then and everything went black.

Angleman stood and removed his gloves. Gathering his specimens he turned and headed towards the door.

"Get him cleaned up and shaved, then put him back in his cell."

"Yes, sir!"

The first soldier looked at the second and smiled.

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"I think we should let them know we're here," Wesley said in response to Doyle's recent discovery.

"No!" Spike was adamant. "A bloody week and they're just *now* noticing the boy is missing?"

"You wouldn't let me call her," Angel reminded him.

"One has nothing to do with the other. They're his *mates*. They should have known! Suspected, at least."

"I agree with Spike," Cordelia said.

Spike was surprised to have support from her corner and he nodded at her to show his thanks. He'd not expected anyone to agree with him. About anything.

"It can't hurt to let them know we're here," Wesley reasoned.

"Then they'll want to know why. And when they find out about Xander..." Cordelia shook her head. "They'll want to take over, and that's not gonna happen."

"So we don't mention him. I'll just say I had a vision," Doyle said.

"Which will explain *us* being here. But what about Spike? And Wesley? And Oz?" Cordelia arched a brow and waited for Doyle to answer.

"We'll leave them here."

"Slayer's gonna know I'm here. No way Angel comes to town and she doesn't swing round for a visit."

"Spike's right," Angel said. He held up his hand before either Doyle or Wesley could speak. "Doyle, you and I will go to Giles. We'll mention your vision about soldiers being in Sunnydale and that they are doing something to the demon population. We won't mention anything about Xander, *or* that anyone else is with us."

"And then what?" Wesley wanted to know.

"We pump him for information," Angel replied, adding, "I doubt he'll want to tell Buffy I'm in town, so that will play to our advantage. If not... Wesley, how good is this concealing spell?"

"It would take a very powerful witch to sense the magic surrounding the mansion."

"Good. Doyle, let's go."

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"We're closed," Giles called out when the bell over the door rang. He'd told Buffy to change the sign after she and Willow had departed.

Giles came around the corner, and only years as a veteran watcher kept him from flinching when he spied Angel and another man standing in his store. The other man looked somewhat familiar and he couldn't help but ask, "Have we met?"

"Not formally," Doyle replied. "I was in here earlier, buying a few things."

"Ah, yes. Of course." Giles turned to Angel. "Angel."

"Rupert."

"What brings you back to Sunnydale?"

"Doyle... he's my link to the Powers That Be. He had a vision about soldiers being here in Sunnydale. We came to help."

"Really? I, that is... we've noticed some peculiarities, but nothing— Soldiers, you say?"

"Yes," Doyle replied. "And they're doing something to the demons here. Experimenting *li-ow!*"

"Have you noticed anything strange? Fewer demons around, perhaps?" Angel interrupted.

"Buffy has mentioned that patrolling has been, in her words, 'rather boring,' of late. I didn't think anything of it other than a temporary lull in demonic activity."

"Well, we just wanted to let you know," Angel said. "So you could let Buffy know."

"And you drove all the way to Sunnydale to mention this? You couldn't just call?"

"Visions don't work that way," Doyle lied. "Have to come to the scene of the crime, so to speak. If not, I'll just keep getting the same one, over and over."

Giles pursed his lips but didn't refute what Doyle was saying.

Angel grabbed Doyle by that jacket and ushered him to the door. "You'll let Buffy know?"

"Yes, of course."

"Good. That's good. We'll just be leaving then. Back to Los Angeles."

"Angel, do you really think that's wise? I mean, if the situation was so dire as to warrant a vision by these Powers, don't you think you should stick around? Maybe help Buffy until this latest crisis is averted?"

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

"What do you mean you're meeting the Slayer at the Bronze?" Spike demanded.

"That's what I said," Angel replied, not for the first time. "Apparently, Willow is... moping and Buffy is taking her there."

"I don't see why —"

"She refused to meet at the magic shop. Willow needed her help and she is taking the night off from slaying." Angel glanced at Oz, wondered if Oz understood what he was saying. Willow was feeling down and Buffy was trying to cheer her up.

"How do you take a night off from slaying?" Wesley wanted to know. All he got was a frown from Angel.

"Look, Spike. This may actually work to our advantage, having Buffy with us. We could use another fighter. We have no idea the scope of this thing with the soldiers. It makes sense —"

"She'll spend more time trying to stake me than finding Xander."

"I'll talk to her."

"Fat lot of good that'll do. Evil here."

"You're behaving," Angel replied. "You *are* behaving, right?"

"Gave you my word, didn't I?"

"Yes, you did. Look, I'll talk to her, Spike. Now, I've got to go."

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Spike waited until Angel had disappeared and gave him several extra minutes head start before he stood and headed for the door.

"Where do you think you're going?" Cordelia demanded.

"Where does it look like I'm going? Out."

"I don't think so. *Hello?* Soldiers. Remember?"

"I'll be careful."

Cordelia snorted. "I doubt that. I'm going with you."

"No, you're not."

"Well, you're not going out by yourself. What if you get caught? You're the only one that knows how to get inside this base."

"She's right," Oz said.

"Who asked you?" Spike growled.

"I'll go with him, Cordelia," Oz said, ignoring Spike's outburst.

"Do you think that's wise? What if Willow sees you?"

"We'll stick to the shadows. I doubt our intention is to be noticed, am I right?" Oz gave Spike a pointed look.

"Fine. I'll take the mutt. Don't wait up." He glared at Cordelia, then at Wesley and Doyle, and slammed out the front door.

Oz hurried after him.

“So, what are we doing, exactly?” Oz asked when they were almost to the Bronze.

“Making sure Peaches sticks to the game plan.”

“You think he won’t?”

“Slayer and him have a history,” was all Spike said.

Oz couldn’t ask him anything else, because they’d reached the club and the music was too loud to hold any kind of conversation.

“Come on,” Spike muttered, nodding towards the stairs. “Slayer’s at that table in the corner and I don’t want her to see us.”

“How did you...?”

“Gotta sixth sense where slayers are concerned. You get a better handle on your werewolf, you’ll be able to tell as well. Now, let’s go.”

They jogged up the stairs and found a spot in a darkened corner overlooking the first floor. They could easily see Buffy’s table and watched as she and Willow sipped their drinks and bobbed their heads in time to the music, though Willow was a lot less enthusiastic.

During the next hour, the two girls would occasionally leave their table and step out onto the dance floor, but for the most part, they were content just to sit and talk. About what, Spike wasn’t able to determine. He wondered where Angel was, and why he’d not shown his face yet.

*Probably doing his skulking stalker thing.*

He forgot about Angel a moment later when a Neanderthal-type guy approached the Slayer’s table; something about the way he walked set him on edge. She seemed to know the guy because she stood and gave him a halfhearted hug then gestured for him to join their table. He nodded and he turned to the waitress passing by to order a drink and Spike saw red.

He had every intention of hopping the railing and dropping down in front of their table, taking the soldier by the throat and dragging him out of the Bronze, but Oz must have sensed something because he’d latched onto his waist and wouldn’t let go.

“Are you crazy?” Oz hissed.

“Let me go. I’m gonna kill him.”

“In front of Buffy?”

“I’ll kill her too if she gets in my way.”

“And then what? *Think*, Spike!”

“Listen to Oz,” Angel said, suddenly at Spike’s back. “Come on. We’re leaving.”

“Angel...” Spike still struggled to get free. Revenge was on the tip of his tongue and he could taste it.

“I know, Will.” Angel whispered in Spike’s ear. “But now is not the time.”

It was only the promise in Angel’s voice that made Spike stop struggling and walk out of the Bronze without another word.

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“Spike, I need to know everything you can remember about that base. Get some paper, draw me a floor plan.”

Rather than object to Angel’s domineering tone, Spike got up and hunted down paper and pen and got to work. He wrote down everything he could remember – his cell, Xander’s, the lab, the demon dump, everything. He also tried to reconstruct the base from the exit he and Xander had taken all the way back to the lab. Everything was pretty hazy as he was either unconscious from a beating, or drugged when he was pulled from his cell.

While he was writing, Wesley was busy working on a spell to disguise them so that they could infiltrate the base.

Angel’s plan was to go that night. They didn’t want to chance anything bad happening to Xander, and the longer he was kept there, the more likely it was. Plus, if they didn’t go in soon, he wouldn’t put it past Spike to do something on his own. He’d been overly protective of Xander while they’d stayed at Angel’s house.

A bond had formed between the two while they’d been held captive and it didn’t take Angel being a genius to figure out that something was going on between them... no matter how much Xander had objected when asked.

He just hoped that Xander knew what he was getting into associating with Spike.

"Well?" Angel asked. He was hovering over Spike's shoulder, watching as he put the finishing touches to his makeshift map.

"Best as I can remember it," Spike said. "Was kept drugged up a good bit of the time." *Or I was beaten unconscious.*

"We'll risk it. I'm sure we're going to be flying by the seat of our pants anyway. This, at least, gives us something to work with. What about guards?"

"Pretty much everywhere. Before... Xander and I stole some uniforms. Helped us get around unnoticed for the most part. May wanna do that again."

Angel nodded. "Alright." He turned to Wesley. "Wes?"

"I'm ready."

"Then let's go."

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"So how are we going to get in?" Cordelia asked.

"Like this," Angel said. He took an ax to the ground where Spike had indicated, and didn't stop until the stairs leading down to the base were revealed. "Alright, everybody stick together."

Spike went down the stairs first, followed by Cordelia, Oz, Wesley, and Doyle. Angel brought up the rear. They'd timed their arrival, hoping that the early hours of the morning would have a decreased number of soldiers patrolling the facility. So far, they'd gone down two floors and had encountered no one. Either the spell was working, or their hunch had paid off.

"Shh!" Spike said suddenly, holding up his hand for quiet. A moment later he took off running down the hallway, going right when the hall came to a dead end.

"Go!" Angel urged. He'd heard the sounds coming from nearby, figuring it had to be the holding cells.

When they burst through the door, Spike was fighting off four soldiers. Three more were arming themselves with what appeared to be tranquilizer guns. Another soldier was reaching for the microphone on a control panel in the far corner of the room. Various demons were pounding on the windows that made up the front of their cages, sensing their possible freedom.

Angel went after the soldier trying to sound the alarm and everyone else fanned out to take on the remaining soldiers. He easily disarmed the man, then threw him towards the other soldiers that had just turned away from the weapons rack. They all went down in a heap, giving the others time to surround them.

"Drop it!" Cordelia demanded of one of the soldiers still holding his weapon. She was brandishing a stun gun and was eager to use it. The soldier held up his hand, palm up, and the gun slid free. "Wise decision."

Spike finished off the last of the soldiers he'd been fighting then began frantically searching the cages for Xander. He nearly passed by him, not recognizing the completely shaved body huddled naked in the corner.

"Angelus!" Spike shouted, pounding on the door to Xander's cage. "Get these doors open!"

"Wes!"

Wes rushed to Angel's side and tried to figure out what button opened the doors. "Got it!" He pushed the button marked five and the door Spike had been pounding on slid open.

Spike rushed forward and knelt at Xander's side. "Oh, pet!" He carefully lifted the boy in his arms, mindful of the small cuts to his body that had yet to fully heal.

"Let's get out of here," Spike said as he stepped out of Xander's cage.

They would have, but a commotion at the far end of the room drew their attention. The door flying inward had everyone scattering.

"What the bloody hell is *that*?"

"Cordelia, look out," Doyle shouted. He shoved her out of the way and received a backhand to the face for his trouble.

Angel leapt the console and shouted for Wesley to open all the cages, and threw himself at the demon that seemed determined to take his team apart. While he had it distracted, he noticed that Oz was helping Cordelia to her feet and leading her towards the exit at the opposite end of the room. Spike, cradling an unconscious Xander, was right behind him.

Wesley got the doors opened and shouted in triumph.

"Wes, get Doyle and follow Spike!" Angel yelled.

Angel was thrown back and crashed into the demons just now emerging from their cages. He made sure his team got out, then shoved demons between him and the freaky looking demon Frankenstein still advancing towards him.

An alarm sounded and Angel knew that in a matter of minutes the place was going to be flooded with soldiers. He turned and ran, quickly catching up with the others.

“Hurry!” he said. “We don’t have a lot of time.”

They all ran as best they could back the way they’d come. Eager to be away. For the night to be over.

They all were a little worse for wear, some more than others.

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Spike strode into the mansion, Xander still held in his arms, and went towards the bedrooms, claiming the one furthest away for himself and Xander. He walked in and kicked the door shut, then set Xander down on the bed.

He wanted to get Xander cleaned up, but didn’t want to reopen the cuts on his body. Instead, he stripped out of his clothes and climbed into bed, gathered Xander in his arms and slept.

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“Don’t!” Angel said when Cordelia tried to check on Xander.

“But he’s hurt.”

“Spike will look after him.”

“But—”

Angel looked firm and Cordelia finally relented. “You should probably get some rest. I want to be out of Sunnydale as soon as Xander’s better.”

“Angel! The tracer!” Cordelia suddenly remembered.

Angel was up and moving before she could say anymore. He yanked open the door and stared down a snarling Spike. Cordelia came up behind him holding a kitchen knife.

“We’ve got to get rid of the tracer, Spike.”

Spike's eyes widened and he carefully turned Xander onto his stomach and began probing the area where his had been placed. It had to be there because it was the only area on Xander's body that had been left alone.

"You got a knife?" Spike asked.

"Here," Cordelia said. She moved into the room and handed the knife to Spike.

He held it poised over the area he figured the piece of metal to be and hesitated.

"Want me to do it?" Angel asked.

Spike nodded, grateful, and handed the knife to Angel. He held Xander while Angel lifted a section of skin and made a small incision, and then another, then folded the skin back to reveal the small piece of metal with a flashing red light. He used the flat edge of the knife to pull it free and backed away as Spike moved in and began licking the skin back into place.

"Come on, Cordy. We've got to get rid of this before the soldiers track it here. I'm not sure how well the concealing spell will hold up against such harsh scrutiny."

He walked back out into the living room.

"Oz, you think you can drive this around and then chuck it somewhere." Angel held up the tracer.

"Sure."

"Wesley, go with him."

Angel opened the door to walk the two outside and encountered Buffy, hands on her hips and ready to do battle.

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"Angel? What's going on?"

Buffy had been standing outside the mansion, but the place had looked deserted. Which had been strange because Giles had told her that Angel had been in town when she'd stopped by his home after walking Willow back to their dorm room. Apparently he and someone else were going to help with the soldier problem in Sunnydale.

Then the door had opened and an invisible wall surrounding the mansion seemed to shimmer.

"Buffy. Hi."

Oz and Wesley stepped out behind Angel and looked anxiously at Buffy.

"Oz? What—?"

Oz didn't look at Buffy, and at a word from Angel, he and Wesley walked around to the side of the mansion, got in his van, and left. Buffy stared at the retreating van in shock then turned and glared at Angel.

"Angel."

She just said his name, but that one word conveyed a lot of meaning. Like, what in the world is going on and you better tell me right now, *or else*.

"We got a vision that soldiers were here in Sunnydale and doing something with the local demon populace. We came to investigate."

"I know. Giles told me."

"Do you know that your *boyfriend* is one of them?"

"What? *Riley*? No way. He's... just a normal guy."

"No he's not, and he's either playing you or you know and are covering for him."

"I'm not covering for him. Sheesh, Angel! Riley goes to UC Sunnydale. He's a TA for Professor Walsh. He wouldn't hurt a fly."

"A fly, no. But he'd damn sure hurt a demon."

"What are you talking about, Angel?" Buffy demanded; she crossed her arms over her chest defensively.

"These soldiers are experimenting on demons."

"I don't believe you."

"I don't care if you do. We're—"

Spike bellowed Angel's name and Angel dismissed Buffy out of hand and raced back inside.

"What is it? What—?"

"He won't stop thrashing, and he won't wake up," Spike yelled. He was struggling to hold Xander still on the bed with little success.

The boy's blood-curling screams made both of the vampires wince.

"Ouch!" Spike muttered. His voice became soothing as he crooned to Xander, running his hand over his shaved head, down his back, "Xander, pet, wake up, love. It's just a dream."

"Spike!" Buffy hissed. She'd come up behind Angel and was peering over his shoulder. "What is Spike doing here? And, that's... *Xander!*"

She tried to enter the room and rescue Xander, but was barred by Angel and a snarling Spike.

"Get out of here, Slayer. It's your bloody fault he's like this."

Buffy broke free of Angel's grasp and drew a stake. Angel, responding to the threat, vamped and took a defensive pose.

"Get out of my way, Angel."

"No. You don't get to come in here and make demands. We rescued him. Those soldiers you're so friendly with did this to him, just because he had the misfortune of getting bit by a werewolf."

"Bit by a werewolf? What are you talking about?"

Buffy shook her head, denying what Angel was saying. Out of the corner of her eye, she could see Spike murmuring to Xander, peppering his face with kisses. She tried to get into the room again, not trusting Spike for an instant, and came face to face with Angel.

"It's time for you to leave, Buffy."

"I'm not leaving without Xander."

"Yes, you are." Angel saw her body tense, and said, "Don't make me fight you. You'll lose."

Buffy relaxed her aggressive stance, if not the expression on her face. "This isn't over."

"No," Angel agreed. "It isn't. The soldiers created something, a demon out of various body parts of other demons, and probably humans too. At least it looked that way. I suggest you get with Giles and figure out how to kill it."

Rather than say anything, Buffy turned on her heel and left.

Angel shifted his attention back to Spike and Xander, nodded at the gratitude in Spike's eyes. "Maybe we should get him a sedative. I can have Wesley mix something up when he gets back."

"Yeah. Alright." He settled down by Xander, who was calm for the moment. "Slayer'll be back."

"I know. As soon as Oz and Wesley return we're leaving. We'll go back to Los Angeles and figure out how to take out that thing those soldiers have created. Until then, the further we are from Sunnydale, the better."

Spike nodded wearily and reluctantly climbed out of bed to get dressed, covering Xander's naked form gently with the sheet.

Angel noted Spike's mechanical actions, realized he was running on auto pilot and wouldn't be thinking of the practicalities. "I'll check the trunk in my bedroom. I should have something that will fit Xander for the time being."

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Buffy, Willow, and Giles showed up at the mansion just as the sun came up and were armed with all manner of weapons. They had every intention of getting Xander back, by force, if necessary.

Willow had been shocked, then hurt that Oz had come back to Sunnydale and not told her. She and Giles, both, had been stunned that Xander was now a werewolf – if Angel was to be believed.

The place looked deserted but Giles mentioned that it was probably the result of some spell Angel had performed. He quickly mixed together a handful of herbs to countermand the spell and read the lines he'd jotted down on a piece of paper.

The invisible wall shimmered again and disappeared. Unfortunately, the place looked just as deserted without the spell.

Buffy banged on the door, kicking it in when no one answered.

The place was deserted.

"They're gone."

Giles laid a reassuring hand on her shoulder. "We'll find him, Buffy."

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"We can't stay here indefinitely," Cordelia told Angel as she collapsed onto her couch. A glass of water floated in the air, and she grabbed it when it hovered in front of her, thanking Dennis. Cordelia, Angel, Spike, and Xander were bunking at her place for the time being while Wesley and Oz were staying at Doyle's.

"I know," Angel replied. "I'm working on it now. We're gonna need a new base of operations anyway. I'll go out once it gets dark."

"What about Xander? And Spike?"

"Spike will look after Xander. Do you have anything that Xander can eat? Soup or something? I don't know what those soldiers did to him, so I'm not sure what kind of appetite he's going to have."

"Soup should work. I'll get changed and go to the store."

"Just... be careful. I doubt the soldiers were able to pinpoint your apartment, but..."

"I will. Straight to the grocery store... oh, and maybe a clothing store. You guys didn't really buy a lot after the whole exploding building thing. Not that we've really had a lot of time. Been a whirlwind few days, hasn't it?"

"Yeah. It has."

"Well, off to shower. You think Spike will bite my head off if I get some clean clothes out of my room."

"No. But, I'll go with you... just in case."

"Thanks." Her face fell suddenly. "He's going to be alright, isn't he? Xander, he's —"

Angel laid a hand on her shoulder. "Physically, he'll be fine in a few days. After Xander changes for the first time, he'll start to heal a lot faster. Mentally, I just don't know. Spike told me what happened to them, more than what Xander told you guys. It wasn't pretty."

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The bedroom door closed behind Angel and Cordelia and Spike heaved a sigh of relief and settled closer to Xander. He was exhausted, physically and mentally. It had taken awhile for Wesley to come up with a sleeping draught for Xander, and the boy had done nothing but thrash around on the bed, caught up in his nightmare - or memories -

until Spike had poured the majority of it down his throat. Xander had finally managed to drift off to sleep and they'd all loaded into Oz's van and left Sunnydale behind.

During the drive, Xander had twitched in his sleep, but not the wild thrashing that had gone on at the mansion. Spike had just continued to soothe him while silently demanding that Oz hurry.

"Ow..." Xander groaned.

Spike gently turned Xander over so that he could face him.

"Hey, pet."

"Spike?"

"Yep. It's me. I'm here."

"Where – where are we?"

"Cordelia's. Chit even gave up her bed for us."

"Are you sure it was Cordelia?" Xander tried to joke. Laughing hurt and he groaned again. "Ow."

"Try not to move, love. You've got cuts all over your body that haven't healed yet."

"He cut me," Xander murmured.

"I know."

"He – he..."

"Shush, pet. I know." Spike drew Xander in his arms, felt tears fall onto his bare chest.

"They shaved me. They were laughing, said the doctor was going to put something in my brain."

"Shhh. Never happen. We got you out. Got rid of the tracer too. They won't be able to find us again."

"I was so scared. I can't stop thinking about it."

Spike kissed him. He'd just wanted to stop Xander's trip down memory lane. Wanted to stop the boy's crying. And, miracle of all miracles, Xander kissed him back. Wrapped his arms around Spike and held on for all he was worth.

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"I found a place," Angel said.

"Yes!" Cordelia cheered. For nearly a week she'd been subject to Xander and Spike making goo goo eyes at each other, holding hands, *kissing*. It was driving her crazy. Since when was Xander gay? He'd dated *her* after all, hadn't he? He liked girls, not psychotic, evil vampires.

"You ruined me for other women," he'd teased. Then blushed when Spike said something a lot more graphic, wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

Angel's brows drew together as he spied Spike's touch veering into x-rated territory. His look clearly said stop it... which Spike ignored, of course. Finally, Xander, exhibiting a bit of common sense - or embarrassment - shoved Spike's hands away and moved over a few inches on the couch out of reach.

"It's an old hotel call The Hyperion. The ground floor can double as offices for Angel Investigations. There's rooms, sixty-eight of them," he said, stressing the number. Plenty for Spike and Xander and himself to never have to worry about crossing paths, or chance overhearing what he was assuming their relationship was headed towards.

"When are you moving?" Cordelia asked.

"Oi! Trying to get rid of us already?"

"Yes."

"We gave you your bed back."

"Well, I want my apartment back." The lights flickered and Cordelia smiled. Dennis obviously agreed with her.

"Sorry, Cordy. Until this thing with the soldiers is finished, I want you with us."

"But you said the soldiers probably didn't know about this place."

"Still, I don't trust you being here by yourself. No offense, Dennis."

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"Ugh! This place is a dump!"

"Have to agree with you there, Princess." Spike crinkled his nose in disgust. The hotel looked like it hadn't seen the right side of a broom in darn near fifty years.

"It was deserted."

"So it was cheap," Cordelia said.

"Yes."

"I'm game," Xander said, and walked gingerly about the lobby looking around. "Oh! Hey! Kitchen!"

"It's not stocked yet," Angel told him. "Figured we'd clean—"

"Clean?" Cordelia demanded, interrupting Angel. "I've got to *clean*?"

The front door to the lobby opened and Oz, Wesley, and Doyle walked in, preventing Angel from answering.

"Hey, guys," Oz said.

"Oz! Hey!" Xander called out.

"Xander." The two moved to a couch and sat down. Dust billowed up from the cushion causing both of them to cough and laughingly fan it away. Oz sobered almost immediately though. "I'm sorry."

Xander smiled. "Not your fault, man. I mean, it's not like you knew. And hey... I'm still alive."

"Yeah."

"So... you sticking around?"

"I left. Sunnydale, I mean." *Willow*, he didn't say. "For good. I just... I gotta get a handle on this thing." This thing being the wolf.

"Oh."

"I came here, not sure why." Oz shrugged. "It was instinct, I think."

"Spike said you're the one that knew I was back in Sunnydale. *Really* knew, I mean."

"I just sorta sensed you, ya know?"

"Does this mean we're like brothers now? Family?"

"If you want."

"It'll be kinda nice. Having someone to talk to about this."

"Yeah. About that. I *am* leaving. Now actually. I just wanted to say goodbye, and that I'm sorry. Again."

"You're really going? For good?"

"I told you. I just can't be around other people. Knowing that I can hurt them."

"Where will you go?"

"Don't really know. I still have a few weeks before the next full moon. Hopefully I'll find some place that can teach me control. I hear Tibet is nice this time of year."

"You'll come back, though?"

"Maybe. Anyway... I gotta run. Want to get on the road while it's still light out."

"Be careful."

Oz smiled and stood.

"See you around, Xander."

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Cordelia, Doyle, and Wesley were drinking coffee – in Wesley's case, tea – and eating pastries when the lobby doors were kicked in. Cordelia screamed for Angel before realizing it was Buffy. Behind her stood Giles, armed with a crossbow, and Willow.

"Buffy! What the hell?"

"*Cordelia?*" Buffy looked confused. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm staying here temporarily. What are *you* doing here? And breaking down doors for? The door was unlocked, you know."

"We came for Xander," Willow said.

"What makes you think he wants to go anywhere with you?" Spike asked, standing at the balcony.

"Spike!" Buffy took an aggressive step forward.

"Slayer."

Spike swaggered down the steps and crossed to where Cordelia and the others stood. "Got any jellies left, Princess?" He snagged one out of the box and looked pointedly at the Watcher. "Suggest you lower that crossbow, mate, or Percy here is gonna put a bullet right between your eyes."

Giles looked aghast. "Wesley, have you taken leave of your senses? Aligning yourself with that... that..."

"Vampire," Spike offered. "And, Percy is with us. Well, with Angel, anyway. Ah, there's the grand poo bah now. Hey, pet," he called out, seeing Xander standing behind him.

Angel ignored Spike and stared at Buffy. "What are you doing here?"

"You're not the only one that can do spells, Angel. We did a locator spell and tracked you here. We came for Xander, and we're not leaving until we get him."

"Xander doesn't want to go," Xander said, and started down the steps. He was still sore, the cuts on his body had scabbed over, the bruises were now a mixture of yellow and purple, and if he moved too fast, hurt.

Giles lowered his weapon. Xander wasn't being held against his will as Buffy had alluded to.

"But why, Xander?" Willow asked.

"Because it's not safe for him there, you bint. Slayer was told as much, but she's too daft to listen."

"Spike," Angel sighed.

"Spike!" Buffy growled.

"Rupert, would you care for a cup of tea? Pastry?" Wesley asked into the tense silence.

"God, yes!" Giles set his crossbow down on a nearby table and walked over to what had once been the check-in counter.

"Giles!" Buffy whined. Stomped her foot and put away her stake. "You're supposed to be on our side."

"Xander?" Willow raised her hand, as if to touch him when he went by.

Xander jerked away from her, out of her reach and joined Spike. He was still skittish around everyone but the vampire.

"Breakfast, pet? Milk? Donut?"

"Yeah. Okay."

"Go sit down. I'll bring it over."

Xander nodded and sat down on the couch away from everyone else. Plastered himself to Spike's side when he sat down next to him.

Giles was too busy enjoying his tea to notice Xander's behavior, but Buffy did. So did Willow.

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"Did you find out any more on the demon Frankenstein?" Doyle asked Giles.

Willow and Buffy were hounding Xander about Spike. Xander was becoming more withdrawn and Spike was getting steadily angrier. A fight was brewing and it wasn't going to be pretty. Angel, unfortunately, was having little effect on getting Buffy or Spike to back off.

"Yes," Giles answered. "It was why we were delayed in arriving. Apparently this thing has broken free of the base and gone off on its own. It's killing demons, dissecting them, really. Like it's trying to learn their anatomy. Before we left, it had killed a human boy."

"I tried tracking it, but no luck," Buffy said. She grimaced, recalling the boy she'd encountered in the woods.

"I really think we should pool our resources," Giles said. "You all have an intimate knowledge of the base. If we work together, we can take down this creature and get rid of the military once and for all."

"No bloody way. I'm not dragging Xander back to the Hellmouth to chance him getting recaptured. We're done."

"Spike," Angel began.

"No, Angelus!"

"Spike." This time it was Xander. He leaned over and whispered in Spike's ear.

"Fine. But you're with me. Whatever plan you lot come up with, Xander goes with me."

"No!" Buffy said.

"Fine," Angel agreed.

"Angel!"

"Xander's with Spike, Buffy. Deal with it, or I'll leave them both here." His tone brooked no argument.

Xander's eyes widened at Angel's defense, and he could sense Spike's smirk. He was oddly... touched.

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"Jesus, Spike!" Xander said and rushed forward, wrapped the vampire's arm around his neck and helped him to a nearby chair. "What the hell happened?"

"Adam happened," Spike muttered.

"Who's Adam?"

"It's what that bloody freak show is calling himself. Damn near tore us apart before we managed to escape."

Buffy and Angel didn't look too much better. All three of them were sporting injuries from their encounter with Adam. Their clothes were ripped and marked with blood.

"He's creating an army," Buffy told Giles, taking a seat beside Willow. "One of Riley's friends, Forrest, I think. He'd... it was awful, Giles. He was like Adam."

Willow shuddered and gripped Buffy's hand.

"Good riddance," Xander muttered under his breath.

"We can't defeat him," Angel said. "He's too strong."

"It's a shame you guys can't combine your powers," Xander replied ruefully.

"Ow! Bloody hell, pet," Spike complained when Xander pressed too hard on the wound in his side. "Leave off, yeah? Nothing a little blood won't cure."

"Spike, you have a gaping wound in your side. I'm not going to 'leave off'. You need stitches." Xander held up his blood-saturated towel as proof. "Don't make me sic Angel on you. And speaking of Angel, where was he when you were being run through?"

"Prolly holding up the floor after Adam clocked him one."

"Because I was saving your ass at the time. You'd have more than just a hole in your side if it wasn't for me."

"Pfft."

"Xander's right though. Stitches will help hold the skin together while you heal." Angel turned to Wesley. "Wes, can you get the first aid kit out of the bathroom?"

"You know, I think Xander is on to something," Giles said suddenly.

"What? Huh? What did I say?"

"About combining their powers."

"You know, Rupert, that just might work," Wesley agreed as he walked back into the living room carrying the first aid kit. "The strength of a slayer combined with two master vampires? Buffy would be unstoppable."

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"Why are you being so stubborn about this?" Xander asked. They were lying in bed together; Xander was on his side facing Spike.

The Slayer and her gang had gone home and would be back in the morning to plan. For what, Spike didn't know. He refused to have anything to do with the spell. No way was he getting within ten feet of the Slayer.

He was really only alive thanks to Angel. The Slayer had watched him struggling with Adam and done nothing to intervene. Claimed she was busy with Forrest, but Spike knew better. She'd wanted him dead and had thought letting the Frankenstein demon do the job would be her way of going about it. Spike didn't say anything to Xander though. The boy had just about reached a decision as far as his friends were concerned; he wasn't going to be the one to provide the ammunition to make him leave. He wanted

Xander to leave because he wanted to be with him. Not because he couldn't stand being around his friends anymore.

"For one thing, I don't like the idea of the Slayer rattling around in my head. Second, I don't trust the Slayer or her watcher," Spike said finally. He wasn't going to lie about what he was feeling, however.

"Who said she was going to be in your head? And Wesley will be doing the spell."

"Not going to be a spell. Least not with me."

"But—"

"Not going to change my mind, pet. Slayer can manage just fine with Peaches. Tap into Angelus' power and Adam doesn't stand a chance. Besides, she's gonna need someone around to deal with the riffraff," Spike said, referring to Forrest and the other demons Adam had acquired for an army.

"Yeah. I guess."

"I'll be able to keep an eye on Angelus," Spike added. "Make sure nothing happens to him. He's pissed a few people off, taking our side. Be a simple matter to take him out while he's so defenseless."

Xander nodded. Buffy and Willow never missed an opportunity to catch him alone and question him about Spike and complain about Angel's behavior. Each time they did, though, they just pushed him further and further away. Made his decision to leave Sunnydale easier.

Angel hadn't said anything, but Xander could tell that they'd also confronted him as well. It had made for a tense few days in Sunnydale.

He was just glad Angel had made Cordelia and Doyle stay behind in Los Angeles to work on getting Angel Investigations up and running again. Cordelia would have lit into both Buffy and Willow and it wouldn't have been pretty.

What really hurt him was that neither Buffy nor Willow had yet to mention the fact that he'd been captured, tortured. The only reason he was alive was because he and Spike had worked together to escape. Then, Spike, along with Angel and his gang had rescued him when he'd been recaptured. His friends hadn't even realized he'd been missing; they'd been too busy with school to wonder about their "Xander-shaped friend".

In a few weeks he was going to turn into a werewolf for the first time. He was pretty damn scared about that. But they'd not asked him how he felt. Willow had only asked him where Oz was, and he'd answered her truthfully that he didn't know.

"Get some sleep, love. Tomorrow's gonna be a long day."

Xander sighed and nodded and snuggled down next to Spike.

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Tomorrow ended up being a long day, and Xander was never so happy to be back at the mansion and in bed, with Spike wrapped around him like some four-legged octopus.

They'd all set out at sunset. Spike had put his foot down about the spell and it had ended up being just Buffy and Angel. Wesley had performed the spell without a hitch and Xander had stood over the vampire as Buffy and the others had raced into the cave that was Adam's base of operations.

Buffy had kicked Adam's ass all over the place and Spike, Wesley, and Giles had taken care of Forrest and the few demons Adam had recruited and not yet killed. Riley had been there; Spike had killed him. Spike had told Xander about it on their way back and Xander had just smiled. He'd been beaten pretty badly at the hands of that particular soldier and hoped that the asshole wouldn't figure so prominently in his nightmares any longer.

He'd also had a run-in with Buffy, aka the Scary Slayer. The First Slayer's essence, Giles had said as they'd collapsed onto chairs and couches in Angel's living room. Apparently she'd not liked sharing space with a vampire, even one that happened to have a soul. Said it was filthy. Tainted. Buffy had stood over them, and her voice had been hoarse, raspy, when she claimed she had to do away with the evil infesting her.

"Over my dead body," Xander had shouted. Buffy had taken a step forward and Xander had really thought he was going to have to kill his friend. Then she'd stumbled on her feet and righted herself, blinked, and she'd been Buffy again. The murderous haze gone. He'd not taken any chances and told her to get away from him.

Xander had helped a weakened Angel to his feet, then Spike had been there and was holding the vampire up on his other side. "Let's go home, yeah?"

There'd been nods all around and they'd retreated back to Angel's mansion.

"So..."

"What's on your mind, pet?"

"Adam's dead. The military is about to be a thing of the past."

Giles had called a contact at the Council and discreet calls had been made to certain heads in Washington. The troops were being recalled, provided the threat to the citizens of Sunnydale was dealt with. Everything had been hush hush, of course. They'd denied culpability, claiming the people in charge had acted on their own.

Xander hadn't believed it for a second, especially after Spike had told him the Germans had tried something similar during World War II.

"So..." Xander said again.

"So?" Spike asked.

"I guess you'll be leaving now. Buffy said she wouldn't stop you if you wanted to leave."

"Not like she could."

Xander nodded.

"Anyway, Peaches said I could stay with him for a bit. Said we worked pretty well together."

"Angel said that?"

"Said you could come too, if you want. Plenty of rooms, what with him living in a hotel now and all."

"Gonna need that. My dad's probably already rented out the basement. And, I don't have a job anymore, seeing as I was fired."

"Hear he's got a cage in the basement too."

"Pretty handy... *and* creepy."

"Peaches is full of all kinds of surprises."

Spike smiled and Xander smiled back.

"Count me in," Xander said.

"Yeah?"

“Yeah.”

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## Epilogue

Xander left with mixed feelings.

Willow and Buffy weren't speaking to him; they'd both been less than pleased when he'd met with them at Giles' and said he was moving to Los Angeles with Spike and Angel. Accusations had been made and Xander just didn't have it in him to argue. He was too tired, physically and mentally.

He'd quietly said goodbye to Giles in the sudden silence and left. Limped, because he still wasn't fully healed, though he'd held his head high as he'd walked away.

Spike had met him at the door when he returned and at the look on his face, the pain he'd been unable to hide, had been ready to kill his friends.

“Forget it, Spike,” Xander sighed as he stepped inside. “Let's just go.”

He felt Spike's arms slide around his back and pull him into a hug, mindful of his injuries, and Xander rested his head on Spike's shoulder.

“Alright, pet.”

Spike looked at Angelus.

“Wesley, let's go,” Angel said.

The drive back to Los Angeles was made in silence.

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Back at the hotel, Spike led Xander up to their room. Wesley watched them until they disappeared from sight. He wasn't quite sure what to do now that the situation in Sunnydale had been dealt with. Doyle wasn't around so he couldn't ask him about the demon that had brought him to Los Angeles in the first place. He was just about to leave when he was stopped by Angel.

“Feel like sticking around, Wes? We could use an ex-watcher turned rogue demon hunter,” Angel said.

“Really? I mean, um... Yes. Yes, I would.”

"There are plenty of rooms if you need a place to stay."

"That would be great. Thank you. I have some things saved in storage, books and such that could be useful. I can arrange for them to be sent over in the morning."

Angel pointed to the area behind the counter. "Offices are through there. There's an empty desk and some shelves you can use."

Wesley nodded and thanked Angel again. "I'll just, uh, go pick out a room."

"I'd avoid the third floor."

"Oh?"

"Spike and Xander are on that floor."

"Right. Of course."

Wesley left and Angel took a seat behind his desk. He leaned back and propped his feet up, smiling, oddly content. For the first time in a long while, Angelus wasn't banging against his cage, struggling to break free and wreak havoc among the populace.

He could only contribute the sudden change to having Spike back in his life. As much as he was a pain in Angel's ass, Spike gave his demon something that Cordelia and Doyle - and now Wesley and Xander - couldn't.

Angel shook his head and chuckled, got to his feet and headed towards the bedroom he'd claimed as his own.

For once, he was looking forward to tomorrow. He had a sense of purpose that had been lacking since arriving in Los Angeles, and a team that seemed eager to help him. So what if he had a psychotic, evil vampire and a boy that he really couldn't stand a few months ago and was soon going to change into a werewolf for the first time as part of that team.

They'd keep him on his toes and out of his perpetual brood.

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Dr. Angelman was surprised that he was getting someone other than a JAG lawyer to represent him, especially since there was no way he could afford it. Still, he stood and let himself be shackled at his wrists and ankles, then led to a separate area where the accused and their lawyers could meet in semi-privacy.

Once in the conference room, his chain links were secured to the floor and the marine left the room to stand sentry just outside. A moment later the door opened, revealing a clean-cut young man whose suit probably cost more than Angleman made in a year.

“Hello, Dr. Angleman,” the man said and whipped out a business card from an inside pocket. “I’m Lindsey MacDonald.”