

Summary: What Buffy wants isn't quite what Spike gets

Categories: [Television](#), [Angel/Buffy](#) Characters: Angel, Dawn Summers, Ensemble, Spike, Spike/Angel

Genres: Slash

Warnings: Angst, Attempted Suicide, Brain-Insane, Dark Themes, Extreme Dark Themes, m/m, m/m sex, Partner Betrayal, Rape

Challenges: None

Series: None

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Story Notes:

Guest appearances by the Greek Pantheon - not the Xena abominations either:) (except Ares - they didn't really abominate him too much.. alas he doesn't appear tho'!

Feedback: Please - this is a really dark fic form me and I'd love to know if it works or not. Get back to me at Shamenka@AOL.COM

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Chapter 1 by Shamenka and Vixen

Spike was enjoying Dawn's company. He was packing his few tattered possessions and preparing to leave delightful Sunnyhell for ever. The young teen was keeping him company, pleading with him to stay and save her from a world gone mad. Or rather, to save her from her sister gone mad.

"Look, if you really must leave, fine leave, but do me a favour first. Read this story to camera, just so I'll be able to remember you. It'd be like you weren't really gone forever. Please?" She whined and smiled and pouted, anything that would make her adored Spike cave.

Spike caved, as he almost always did, over the little things. He was still leaving however.

"Give's the story then!" He sighed, long sufferingly. Sounding far more like he was the youngster's older brother than Buffy ever sounded like her sister. He scanned the slim sheaf of pages and realised Dawn had written the tale explicitly for him to read. He scanned through the piece and smiled frequently, giggling occasionally.

Dawn sat in a stupefied delight, revelling in the fact that Spike enjoyed her silly story so much.

"So, will you read it so I can tape you reading to me?" She hoped, held her breath and prayed for a very small miracle.

"Oh, all right. Set up your bleeding video camera. Don't even know if I'll show up on the tape or disc or whatever it uses." He smiled at his young friend, then smiled deeper at the very idea of him having a human, or at the very least an almost human friend. It felt odd, but nice, to have someone who liked him for himself; not what he represented, not his so called status as childe of the high master the great poofter himself.

Dawn dashed about, setting up her tripod, then the camera, choosing angles and settings. Having fun. Which to Spike was the main idea in the whole silly notion.

A few hours before their innocent fun, a phone call had been placed to Los Angeles. Buffy had called Angel and asked him to have a word with Spike about his supposed love for her. She talked to the not sleeping, emotionally see-sawing formerly souled vampire. Even he didn't know if it was there or not.

Not that he told Buffy.

All he did was listen to selected parts of her complaint. The bit where Spike had chained her up, threatened her, had seemingly fed off a human. The high points of Buffy's complaint alternated with the previous nights run in with Cordelia. The double poison of her diatribe against him and seeing Wesley, seriously injured, in hospital, shot by a zombie cop of all things. And it had been Kate that informed him, not his former employees.

As he listened to the monotonous droning of the mortal girl he had once upon a time fancied himself in love with, an idea struck him. Maybe dealing with Spike was just what he needed to vent his pent up anger and frustrations. It wasn't as if he'd never done so before. He was an expert in the arts of pain and suffering. Especially when it came to his youngest childe, Spike.

"I'll come down and speak to him tonight, it's still far too bright out there for me to come down any sooner. Just don't tell anyone I'm coming. It might get back to Spike and he's likely to bolt before I can have my say." He forced himself to sound almost jovial, to make Buffy believe all he intended was to have a few choice words with his errant child.

"Fine, will we see you after you've spoken to Spike?" She sounded more hesitant than enthusiastic. Which just angered the demon within even more.

"That would depend on many things. I couldn't rightly say." He let his inner eye drift off to the picture his child's face would be on seeing him walk into his stupid little crypt. "Maybe is as best as I can manage."

"Okay, and thanks..." she paused then hung up, leaving Angel to plan his visit.

Finally, Dawn was ready, they had established that Spike did indeed show up on the camcorder. Now she had the camcorder set up to catch the blond English vampire as he sat on the ramshackle bed he had once upon a time shared with Harmony. He was perched comfortably and he had the pages of her story in front of him. She set the camcorder going and stepped back into the shadows so she didn't distract him, putting him off his stride.

He began to read her tale of love lorn demons being rescued by other world Princesses with their mysterious powers and all powerful magic. Spike was losing himself in the story, enjoying himself so thoroughly in such a human task when the crypt door crashed open and his erstwhile sire rushed in on him. Eyes filled with rage, hands filled with what looked like a large metal spider.

On his way to Spike's hideously pathetic crypt Angel surprised a couple of demons making some sort of a deal. He despatched them both, just for a warm up, and took the item they had been trading with him. And their money. It was an odd looking device, it had inward pointing spikes and looked as if it were made just to hurt his stupid child. An idea which fitted in so cleanly, so beautifully with his half formed plans to hurt Spike that it made him smile, genuinely smile in twisted delight.

Ahead he could hear Spike's voice, he seemed to be talking such utter nonsense about Princesses and powers and romantic twaddle. Just as he always was, a romantic fool. That reminded him, as if he needed reminding, that he was there to stop his child from loving his former lover. Opening the hinged thing he'd so resentfully acquired he stormed into the crypt, catching Spike totally unaware.

"There you are, you piece of cancerous shit. I should have dealt with you a long time ago; but better late than never, as the old adage goes, hmm?" His voice had that lilt, that slight touch of an Irish accent that Spike knew meant Angelus, meant trouble.

The blond vampire looked at his sire, not the shadows where he knew Dawn was hiding. Even if Buffy hated him, he couldn't let her be hurt by letting the mad demon that was his sire, Angelus, anywhere near her, if he could possibly stop it.

"What do you want, Angel? What have I done this time to rattle your cage?" He met his mad sire's glance and almost froze solid at the cold rage he saw there.

"Oh, touched that which is mine. Buffy asked me to 'deal' with you. Have a word with you, and the word I have chosen is payback. Seeing as how you don't really listen to mere words, that is." Angel reached for his childe and had his neck in his newly acquired torture device. As he clicked the thing shut the many spikes shot forwards impaling Spike's neck. Just as a burning fire filled his belly. Spike didn't know what his mad sire had wrapped around his neck, only that it hurt him inside and out. It drew blood as its metal legs pierced the tender flesh of Spike's neck. The little rivulets of blood only served to excite the emotionally shattered vampire even more. If that were possible.

Noticing nothing but his prey, he dragged Spike up and ripped his tee shirt from him, followed by his jeans and most of the skin off his chest. Ten long, bloody scores covered the pale flesh. The nails of Angel's hands digging in deeper than even he expected.

"What, not feeding right? Letting yourself slip like this is a punishable offence, you know? Then again your very existence is cause for punishment, and I'm here to deliver!" He finally got a response from his prey, the shock was obviously wearing off and was fast being replaced by anger. Spike began to fight back.

Spike gouged lumps from Angel's face, his hands, anywhere he could reach. He tried to get up and break free from his sire's heavy hold, anything to make this a fairer fight. As he stood, or at least tried to stand, Angel got a knee between Spike's legs and crashed his leg upwards, crushing his childe's cock and balls in the process. The pain flooded the younger vampire's body, stunning him for precious seconds, allowing Angel almost free reign against the blond vampire's defenceless body.

As payment for struggling Angel broke both of Spike's forearms.

The loud audible snaps made Dawn flinch, she was biting onto the hem of Spike's duster sleeve to keep from calling out. There was nothing she could do to Angel, no powers she could call on. She was not the magic Princess and this was not her happy ever after vampire fairy story.

After the wrists, Angel raised a leg and kicked down on first one knee then the other. Snap, snap and Spike was crippled, going nowhere. Angel threw the younger vampire over the bed he had been sitting on.

"Right, lesson number one. Buffy is mine! Lesson two, you don't touch anything that is mine!" With each lesson stated he double handed punched his fists into Spike's spine, letting his nails drag even more skin off the felled vampire as he did so. Flipping him over, he continued his lessons. "Lesson three, I am the master, you are the scum!" This time he went for Spike's face and ripped the skin from those delicate cheek bones. "Lesson four, Buffy hates you!" This time Spike rallied a little and raised his already broken arms up to try and protect himself. Angel simply wrenched his arms and laughed as the bone ends ripped out of the younger vampire's skin.

Spike screamed again, and again, and again.

"Lesson five, everyone hates you!" Angel rolled his victim over once more and pinned him there by his hair. He freed his deliciously hard cock from his own pants and rammed into his childe. "You're not even a descent fuck!" Over and over he pounded into Spike, ripping him apart inside and out. Enjoying beyond measure the sight of his childe's crimson blood flowing so freely.

Completion came fast and furious, given Angel's state of mind it could be little else.

"What, you didn't cum, you're saying it wasn't good for you scum?" he sneered as he wiped the bloody gore from his rapidly softening cock and wiped his hand over Spike's butt cheeks. "As if

you matter!" He rained blows down on the now barely conscious younger vampire, shattering ribs with loud popping noises, wrenching his back in an attempt to snap the younger man's spine. Satisfied his lessons had been delivered he dropped the broken body back on the bed.

"Be gone or dust by tomorrow night, or I'll repeat Buffy's message till you learn it. I'm not fussed which option you chose, scum, so long as you do one or the other!" With that he spun on his heel and marched back out of the crypt and stormed through the town, savouring his rage as he made his way to his mansion.

Behind him soft sobs could at last be heard. Soft cries from the young girl who had had to stand by and watch the brutal attack her sister had ordered for her best friend. She finally moved to him, forgetting that her camcorder was still running. She knelt on the bed beside him, reaching for him.

"Spike?" she whispered between sobs. "What can I do? How can I help?"

"Box, there." Spike could only point with his eyes, every square inch of him pulsed with a white hot searing agony and fear.

Dawn saw the only box that lay in the direction of Spike's eyes, she thought it maybe contained medications, something to help him. She brought the box closer to Spike and emptied the contents; a brightly coloured plastic pump action water pistol and a few stakes.

Finally, fighting the urge to pass out, Spike crawled over the bed a little, closer to Dawn.

"Take gun, holy water." He managed, fighting wave after wave of nausea. "Give me the stakes."

"Why?" Even as she questioned him she complied, thinking he wanted to defend himself.

Painfully slowly his hand closed over a stake and with even greater agony, he pushed it towards her.

"Take, get home, use gun, use stake. Go!" Spike didn't fight the pain induced tears that cascaded down his face, causing even more searing agony as the salt burned into the rips on his face.

"What about you?" She asked anyway, even though she was fairly certain of the answer she'd get.

"Am stuck here, can't heal in time, can't go through another incarnation of Angelus. Go home, Buffy will protect you. I'm through." And turning the second stake Dawn had given him towards his own chest he rolled over onto it, impaling himself through the heart.

A blinding white light filled the crypt, having never seen a vampire suicide before Dawn thought it all natural, just the product of a broken being dying.

She sat for a long time hugging the gun filled with holy water as she wept. When she could physically cry no more she packed up her things, and the now blood stained sheets of paper, put Spike's duster on and headed home.

Planing every second of telling the world what Buffy had had Angel do to Spike. Out of sheer spite. Just because he had loved her.

In the mansion, surrounded by the safe memories of Buffy and the joy of being in her company,

Angel finally slept. For the first time in a very long time, he slept soundly untouched by dreams.

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Chapter 2 by Shamenka and Vixen

In the Summers' living room the Slayer sat with the Scooby gang who had gathered to offer Buffy their support at her recent loss. They sat quietly, just being there for their friend. Quietly remembering Joyce, just being together. It was into that still tableau that a quietly crying Dawn entered. Concerned for her supposed to be sister's well being Buffy started to quiz her as to what was wrong with her.

"Dawn? Where have you been? What have you been doing? You didn't go near Spike again? After I told you to stay away from him! I told you he'd hurt you. What did he do? I'll kill him!" Buffy managed to say all the wrong things. She didn't even realise she had done so until her sister's face screwed up in rage and hate, ready for her reply.

"This is what I did! Let me share my evening with you, huh?" Dawn crossed to the television set and fiddled with a few wires, once the camcorder was wired in to the television she hit playback and showed them all what she had done,

Witnessing Spike's rape and suicide.

Angel's voice echoed in the otherwise soundless house with his hate filled statements that all his actions were from Buffy, at her request.

The slayer looked around frantically at her friends, begging, pleading to be believed.

"I didn't, I didn't say to do that. All I asked was that Angel speak to Spike, about his stupid obsession. That's all. I wanted Spike's obsession with me over and done with."

"Well, it sure looks like it's as over and done with as it can possibly be!" Anya snapped at the blonde slayer. "I'd say raped, beaten, dead is a pretty thorough talking to, wouldn't you? I hope you're pleased with your outcome." Having finished her short speech she headed for the door. "I think I'll be going now. And I suppose I'd better move before you send Angel over to speak to me too about all this!" She slammed the door after her. It was opened and closed soon after as Xander rushed to catch her up.

"Kinda makes me glad I'm over my crush on you. You're sure evil when riled." He opened the door and called out. "Anya, wait up, it's not safe out here alone!"

"And you think it's safe in there?" The occupants of the Summers residence heard her reply before the door slammed shut once more.

"Poor Spike, to die knowing the very person that you loved hated you so much they ordered that!" Tara stood, finally tearing her eyes from the now blank screen and turned to look at Willow, then Buffy.

"I didn't order... that!" Buffy pointed angrily at the screen. "I didn't."

"A..a..according to the big guy you did! Are you saying Angel's a liar? Even if you're telling the truth S... Spike isn't gonna know that, is he? Being dead and all.." Tara reached for her coat and struggled through her rage and tears to put it on. "Spike saved my life, saved my love with Willow, saved me from my family and their sick perversions, and I never really thanked him for it... now I never can!" Fury finally escaped her control and she rounded on the slayer. "Sweet dreams Buffy, I hope you feel what he felt, know what he knew!" There was yet another flash of light, this time not on the television screen, and Tara stormed out the house too.

Dawn bent to retrieve her camcorder and the tape after rewinding it. She hit play by accident and Spike's happy, amused voice filled the room.

"The Pan Dimensional Princess and the Vampire, by Dawn Summers. There once was a lonely vampire..." She slammed the stop button, gathered her things and ran out the room, heading for the stairs and the fragile sanctuary that was her bedroom.

"I'd better go see to Tara, and see if I can get her to take back her wish...good night." Willow looked torn, having to choose between her lover and her best friend. Finally she headed for the door and Tara.

For his part Giles recalled the images they had seen and the ever close to the surface memories of Jenny and her pain filled death.

"Angelus?" He asked, not actually able to meet Buffy's eyes.

"I think so."

"You going after him?" Giles looked towards the ceiling and the grieving teenager upstairs. "Or staying here with Dawn?"

"I guess Dawn needs me, even if she doesn't know she does." Buffy managed a strained smile for her watcher and mentor.

"You want me to stay?"

"No, I think we'd better deal with this between us. I'll be all right, Dawn will be too, eventually. Thanks anyway." She walked Giles to the door and quietly let him out. Turning to the stairs she tried to think of some way she could comfort her sister, but couldn't even imagine what it had been like. To be trapped there, in Spike's crypt while he was brutalised like that. A tear slowly trickled down her face. "Oh God, Spike, I never meant that." She climbed the stairs to face whatever was up there for her.

Spike found himself awake and lying on a clean, comfortable bed. All around him was a purer, whiter light than he'd ever seen. Beside him sat Oz, the werewolf he'd helped the slayer rescue a few weeks back.

"You dead too then?" He asked Oz.

"Nope, neither are you. You're here, with The Powers That Were. Sorta like The Powers That Be, just older." Oz stood up and nodded to someone the other side of Spike. He got up to let a dark haired, possibly middle aged woman with gentle eyes sit on the chair. She smiled at Spike, her eyes touched with a flicker of profound sadness.

Spike couldn't take his own eyes from her if he tried.

"Child, you have so many tasks yet to perform, for us, in return for which we have healed your injuries. All of them except one." The mature woman leaned forwards to reach for him, touching his face with a delicacy of touch he had never known since a child with his own long dead mother. "I am Hera, Queen around here by the way, and have been... elected... to tell you that you are wearing what our missing children call the collar of Hera. Oh, that's demons, much like yourself and young Oz here by the way. You are both part of our missing children, and that collar is a... fertility device." She reached out and took Spike's hands in hers, not letting him break her

hold. "It works despite the gender of the one wearing it. It was originally designed to allow new widows to have a child fathered by their husbands after they had fallen nobly in war. Do you see what it was meant for? It grants fertility. By the undead, before Hades' domain claimed them. And there is no easy way to tell you this little one, except honestly. You are pregnant, child, and we can't stop it without killing you, taking you to your final death."

As the truth of her words sunk in Spike screamed, cried, pleaded with them to kill him. Through all his struggles and grief Hera stayed by his side, holding on to him. Grounding him.

Oz too stayed in Spike's line of sight, silently being with him. Grieving with and for him. Waiting for the storm to pass and the rest of Hera's story to be told.

First light brought Angel awake, back from Angelus' madness. It also brought full technocoloured, stereophonic memories with it. Every single thing he had done the previous night. He had to wait the entire day, wondering if he's be in time to save Spike from other imaginary demons harming him in his weakened state. Wondering what Buffy would say if Spike told her what he had done. He recalled in exacting detail each and every injury he had inflicted. He remembered the joy inflicting them had delivered to him, to his demon. He made silent plans to take his childe home and care for him, treat his injuries, beg his forgiveness, give him the sire blood he would need to heal. Be the sire he should have been, not what he was.

As soon as the sun set enough to grant him his freedom he hurried over to Spike's crypt, his hands shook as he pushed open the door only to come face to face with a tear stained Buffy. His childe's name died unspoken on his lips, another name replaced it with dread.

"Buffy?" He whispered, somewhat shocked to see her there. "How... how is Spike? I only realised what I had done when I woke up. I had no control, Angelus was lose.." He stopped speaking at the sight of the rage building in her face.

"My sister was here, she had been filming Spike reading a story she'd written for him. They were happy, friends, having quality time as they say. Then you arrived and she had to hide and you know what you did! You do know all of what you did, don't you?" She shot him a filthy look as he nodded slowly. "Well, I don't know if you'll be happy to hear this or not, to know that Spike suicided last night, right after you left. Dawn helped him get the stake and he killed himself! And she was still filming it, the camcorder was still running. We all saw it! All of it." She walked towards him, quaking in her unbridled rage. "How dare you ever say I asked you to perform such an unspeakably evil act! That I wanted you to perform such wanton acts of cruelty! Not on Spike, your blessed master, not any demon, person, anyone. Ever! You have exactly the same choice you gave Spike, get out of Sunnydale and never come back, or I stake you myself! You getting this, Angel, Angelus, whoever you claim to be tonight? Leave!" She screamed in his face as she drew her stake. All Angel could do was retreat and head for LA and home. Alone.

Alone except for his memories. The one fact pounding through his numbed mind. He'd killed his childe. Raped him, tortured him, drove him to suicide. Killed him as effectively as if he had staked the younger vampire himself.

How could things have gone so totally wrong? So quickly?

The only answer he had was Wolfram and Hart. Them and their interminable drive to release Angelus, now it was something far worse that they faced. It was a guilt ridden Angel. A purer, more focused guilt than he had ever experienced before. It had a face, a name, a specific crime. It was Spike, his beautiful, wild natured childe and Angel would exact his full revenge against all of them. Each and every damned lawyer that thrice damned firm had would pay for this. They had made it so easy for Angelus to win his freedom. All he had now was his guilt and revenge to

comfort him. That and the destruction of Wolfram and Hart, to try to mend his broken heart with their blood. They had driven him to kill his child, and he would make them pay!

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Chapter 3 by Shamenka and Vixen

After the tears came sleep. Spike slept through the perfect day into the perfect evening before he woke again. Hera and Oz still sitting by his side. He couldn't even summon up the energy needed to be rude to them. Spike still felt exhausted, but more, worse than that, he felt deeply, deeply embarrassed. He had failed to stake himself for a second time, and far worse than anything else - he had cried before the mutt and a Goddess of all creatures. There was no doubt in his mind that the lady who called herself Hera and Queen was indeed the Goddess Hera. And before her William the Bloody had wept very real tears for his very real pain and profound shame. Why didn't they let him die?

"Why didn't you let me die?" Spike whispered his question to the ceiling rather than either of his companions. He couldn't face either of them, or the future. As for the past, he wanted to draw a veil over it all and never look behind it ever again. Failing that, he wished he had been allowed to die. If he could have wished a stake in his heart as he lay there, he would have. He continued to lie there, looking steadfastly ceilingward, wishing with all his might. Nothing happened. His heart continued to not beat, to be steadfastly stake free. He continued to exist, certainly he would never call it living ever again.

"You have a destiny, child, a very large role in the coming end game." Hera held onto Spike's left hand with both of hers, patting it softly, stroking his long fingers. Touching him with such delicacy that part of him hoped she would never let go.

"A destiny? As what? My insane sire's punch bag? Buffy's chew toy? Is that all my life and death amount to? A means to let my..." He barked out a short bitter laugh. "Fuck, but I almost called them my friends. That's rich, isn't it? Friends, them, me?" Finally he looked at her, meeting her eyes squarely, letting her see his pain in all its dark glory. "Why should I bother to fulfil such a destiny, huh? Did your Fates tell you that too? Did they?"

Hera was bathed in the agony of Spike's hidden soul, beyond responding for the moment, swamped by his feelings, the effect made all the worse by her continuing to hold him. She did not let go however. She held all the tighter. It was left to Oz to try and respond to Spike's pain driven questions. Words were not normally his strong suit, but his words were at least mostly always honest. So long as he didn't mention Tibet. That notion made him smile briefly, warmly, finding hope he spoke.

"Our destiny is not to be either of their kick toys. You and me are going to be partners, the werewolf and the vampire. Warriors for the Powers that Were and Will Be Again. You and I, us together, we're going into direct competition with Angel and his team of demon killers. They kill the demons to the favour of humans, always, well almost always anyway. You and I will be like bounty hunters, balancing the forces that drive the world. Bringing the guilty humans and demons alike to the... place..." He made a vague gesture with his hands obviously searching for an unfamiliar term.

"The Areiopagus Demoniacus, as some of the others call it. The demon court is its real title." Hera smiled at Oz and turned once more to face Spike. Taking up the narrative from the point Oz stopped. "You see, child, it had been agreed between us and those that came after that all matters between our excluded children and humans would be adjudged fairly. Until belief in our powers returned sufficiently we could do nothing but watch. Watch as they betrayed and ignore every promise they ever made to us. Now, however, we can and will act. All those lying..." She stopped talking, fumed quietly for a few moments, looked at Spike in an almost frustrated silence.

"Bastards, gits, scum, fuck witted mammal lovers?" Spike offered her a few emotive alternative terms of reference to choose from. He saw a fire burn in Hera's eyes at each pro-offered choice. He heard the stifled snort of laughter from Oz too, although he didn't turn to look at the young werewolf. He couldn't, Hera's rage was such a thing of beauty he could not look away. So pure and clearly defined, it was powerful, almost hypnotic to a creature born out of rage and violence.

"All of them!" Hera snarled. "They lied, they didn't keep a single promise to maintain the balance with the children they wouldn't let us take with us into exile. No, on the contrary they hunted them down, killing them. Unbalancing the world, removing the natural predator that hunted on the foolish, the weak, the unfit to survive mortals. Just as the strong mortals preyed on them. Two sides of a balance, but they tipped it in favour of the mortals, letting them breed and spread like a disease. Driving the demons into deep hiding. Not it's time we redressed that imbalance." Again Hera fell silent.

"And you want Oz, a relatively inexperienced werewolf, and me, a pregnant vampire of all things, to redress this balance? Look, I'm having enough trouble believing I'm not dead, like dusted dead. That's twice I've failed at it now! And... and now you say that I'm pregnant, me, a bloke, a male vampire, a man that died in 1873, knocked up, up the duff, ensprogged by... by..." He couldn't say it, it turned his gut so much he rolled over and threw up onto the smooth, polished, expensive looking marble floor.

With a wave of her hand the mess was gone. With another wave of her hand a goblet of still warm blood appeared in her hand.

"Here, drink this. And didn't it ever occur to you that you might have been saved from dusting yourself for some higher reason?" She handed the goblet over, once Oz had Spike sitting upright.

With shaking hands the vampire took the blood and gulped down a long draft of the warm, sweetly bitter fluid. At the taste of it, his eyes flew open and he slowly lowered the goblet, careful to not spill a drop. It was not pig, cow or any other domesticated animals blood. Nor was it human blood. It was rich, powerful, beyond any word he could envision. It had to be Gods blood. If Hera had been telling him the truth and the ancient Greek Gods were the true Gods of all demons natural to this dimension, then his Gods had given up their blood to feed him. Him! They valued him, he was worth something to someone after all. To the Gods.

"Oh, God.." Spike whispered.

"Most assuredly not, that lying old fart wouldn't give up a molecule to save anyone, let alone his blood for a child. Granted he only had the one, allegedly, but I always thought that story far too much like Herakles' life story to be true personally. Only Herakles enjoyed sex more." Hera grinned impishly as she responded to Spike's involuntary comment.

"Oh, Gods and Goddesses then." The vampire tried again, he had to be feeling better, his sarcastic tendencies were showing itself once more.

"Better." Hera cautioned, letting him know she was allowing the sarcasm pass this once. "Now, have you understood what we've been saying?"

"I think so. You want me, him and me, us like, to go out and kick ass for your cause. Save the innocents, bring the bad guys to justice, your justice. As in your actual demons court and fair trial justice. And generally work against... him!" The goblet held such interest at that moment, it was far better than thinking about him. The name he didn't want to think of, let alone say. He drank the last of the blood these Gods had given him. Savouring the very last trace of its flavour as he swallowed it down.

"That about covers it. Of course there are practical details to work out and what not. But you've

got the essential parts of things down pat." Hera retook a hold of Spike's hand, waving the now empty goblet away. "One of those details is the baby you are now carrying. We didn't actually count that into our plans. We suspect one of the other players got wind of our plans and tried to counter our emergence into the field of play. We have been directing your life and destiny from the side lines for a while now, getting you into position to allow you to make the transition from random killer to one of our champions. Hey, they've got two, we want two. It's only fair after all. The chip in your head was part of our over all plan. We had to get you thinking of the inhabitants of the world, human and demons alike, as something other than things to eat or fight. And you were doing so well too, until you fell for that Herakles clone with breasts and a vampire fixation." Hera snarled again. It managed to sound both lady like and definitely unlady like at one and the same time. Spike was impressed. Angered at their interference but still bloody annoyed with their high handed attitude to his future however. Then the truth of her words sunk in and he stared at her quite blankly for a heartbeat, if he had a heartbeat to measure time against. As he opened his mouth to speak his eyes flooded with emotion, not happiness and joy either.

"You had them put that bloody fuckin' piece of shit chip in m'bleedin' head? You lot were behind the fuckin' Initiative? And you're supposed t'be on our bleedin' side? Why?" The angered vampire was trembling with the rage that Hera's confession triggered.

"As I said, to teach you. To show you there are other things in the world besides destruction and mayhem and violence. You have learned to get yourself out of situations without using your fists. Granted you tended to use the slayers fists, but you learned that there are always options. You learned that killing isn't enough. It has causes and effects. And when the cause is you killing demons just to be killing someone then the effect is you get hit back by all the rest of the demons. I'd say you learned that lesson rather well. Wouldn't you?" Hera drew her shoulders back and sat a little straighter in her chair, it was obvious she hadn't expected Spike to react quite as negatively as he had.

"Fuckin' hell woman, what the fuck were you playing at? Teachin' me! Fuckin' Sesame Street for the undead? Teachin' me! Teachin' me? Christ on fuckin' skewer, you coulda' just givin' m'the fuckin' book. I can read you know! Have done since I went t'the fuckin' university, an' before!" Spike glowed in his rage. Hera and Oz finally sat back and shared a strained but happy smile; an angry vampire was normally a non suicidal vampire.

"Sometimes the lesson is lost in the translation." Hera held out her hand, fist curled downwards. "Here." She shook the hand getting Spike's attention and the automatic hand in response to her offering him something. Curiosity wasn't something created solely to orchestrate the demise of cats. It had long been the best means for Gods, or indeed Goddesses, to get the humans in the world to sit up and pay better attention.

Spike opened his hand and a small black chip fell into it.

He could say nothing. For once the bleach blond vampire was entirely speechless. All he could do was sit there and stare at the little lump of plastic and metal that had caused him so much damn grief and pain.

"Granted this does mean you can fight humans, you can defend yourself, even initiate a fight if you need to. But try and drink from one, without their express permission, and you're going to find out that that chip was really your very best friend, ever!" The Goddess' voice left him in no doubt that she was telling the truth. He slowly looked from the chip to her, unsure of what he wanted to ask. "It's simple, William Mansfield, you work for us, we see to your every need. Our blood will more than just quell your hunger. You need less, it does more. You get to..." she seemed to pause to consider the best choice of words to go with, "Kick butt, knock heads, wallop the opposition. And generally mess with him and her and their precious one sided game plans."

The very idea of a Goddess using such an obscure term as wallop had Spike clutching his belly

as he laughed. He roared with laughter until the tears threatened to return once more. And he totally failed to respond to her use of his real name. At least it meant she didn't have to explain to the vampire how come Oz didn't react at all to her mentioning it. He finally gasped for breath to speak and asked the werewolf the question uppermost in his mind, locking eyes with the younger man.

"I take it you're up for this then?"

"Yup!" Oz replied, sounding inordinately keen on the idea.

"Why?" Spike questioned him some more, laughter all gone, deadly serious.

"Because I am what I am all because someone messed with the balance a thousand years ago, or more. Because I don't want it to happen to others, if we can help it. You've learned to control the beast within, with out the stupid curse and the thou shall not be happy tag! Why can't other demon's. I've learned. They've taught me to master the beast, a thing Buffy and them said couldn't be done. They lied, they destroyed me and Willow, so I want to fight back." Oz fell silent, remembering the manner in which he discovered the woman he had loved and struggled for now loved another. She hadn't even had the courage or honesty to tell him. He had had to smell the truth from another.

"Tibet eh?" Spike teased.

"Tibet." Oz laughed, softly.

"About me being pregnant..." He didn't know quite what question he wanted to ask, but saw that Hera understood him better than he understood himself.

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Chapter 4 by Shamenka and Vixen

"It alters things somewhat. Instead of one of the Muses going with you as your liaison, I'll be going. Pregnancy is my.. oh, what's the current term... bag, it's my bag. So the team will be a werewolf, a vampire and a senior Goddess. Think you can cope with us? You will have to go through the full term of the pregnancy anyway. Might as well do it with me around." Hera rested a hand over Spike's still flat stomach.

"Yeah, you said, you can't terminate, but afterwards, who'll take it? I don't want it, I never wanted it. Never wanted to be a dad, let alone a fuckin' mum!" The omnipresent rage and fear returned to the blond's face once more.

"Wait and see, you don't know how you'll feel when the baby comes." Hera tried to get away with platitudes. She knew so much about what possible futures lay ahead for the child, depending on whether it was to be a boy or a girl. And even the Gods wouldn't know that until the eighth week of gestation.

"Don't I?" Spike snarled at her, fear, hate, loathing for Angel and Buffy and their precious powers that be filling him with rage once more.

"So, putting Angel's involvement aside for now, what did the baby do to you? What evil did it do?" Oz sat on the side of Spike's bed and looked at him, holding the vampire's gaze almost effortlessly.

"Well, nothin' so far." Spike reluctantly replied.

"Then let's take it one day at a time. You, me, Hera and the nameless one. Is the baby really responsible for Angel's guilt? Did he or she demand their creation? Is it even any of Angel's concern? Do you have to acknowledge it has anything to do with the bastard anyway? Can't it

belong to just you instead?" Oz was certainly not his usual quiet self. When he had something to say, he said it.

"Will it be mortal or a vampire?" Spike asked Hera directly.

"Why does it matter to you?" She countered.

"Because I've seen child vampires, they're never very sane, even by vampire standards. I need to know if I'm going to have to carry this thing for nine fuckin' months only to have t'stake it the minute it pops out. However it's gonna pop out!" The images in his head left him unsure whether to laugh or throw up again. He settled on shuddering slightly as a compromise.

"I don't know for certain, there are many possible futures for your child. None of them fixed. I won't know for several weeks what to expect from your child. By the time I have a fix on it's gender I'll know it's true nature, vampire or mortal too." Hera broke the news honestly, she couldn't lie to the traumatised vampire. He had had too many false promises of hope broken already. Too many promises of eternal joy turn quite literally to ashes in his hands.

"Oh fuck!" Spike let his head fall back and closed his eyes. Fighting fatigue, fear and all his other far too near the surface emotions. Unsure himself if he wanted a living mortal child or an excuse to kill a twisted, insane vampiric child.

Taking advantage of his position, Hera pushed him once more into a deep sleep.

"Let's leave him in the capable arms of Morpheus and go get something to eat for ourselves. Vampires are hardy creatures, nature demands that - given the hardships of their existence. Leave him with Morph." Hera indicated the door out from Spike's bed chamber and they both left the vampire to sleep.

Guarded over by Morpheus himself.

It had been twenty four hours since his world had turned upside down and inside out yet again. Angel had become Angelus who had in turn became this half and half nameless, childeless wonder. He had his soul and he had his demon's rage, and both wanted revenge. Both wanted to make the pain go away, the pain of knowing that he had destroyed his childe. For the remainder of his existence he vowed that he would never make another childe, Spike had been his last. And no one could take his place.

Not in his life and most definitely not in Hell. A Hell Angel was all too familiar with. It tore at both the demon and the soul to know that they had driven his childe to welcome those eternal torments as opposed to the torments he had promised him.

Dru no longer counted as his childe. Her share of the guilt prohibited it. She was as responsible as he for Spike's death. She had willingly sided with Wolfram and Hart, just like Darla had. He had offered to give his former sire his help, what she wanted was to take his soul. In the end, all she had taken was his childe. And with him went her last chance to avoid Hell once more.

So now it was time to extend her invitation back to that same Hell Spike had gone to, time to help her park and let her start her return journey. Payment for their sins was now due - and he was going to collect.

Angel looked up at the light that spilled out from Lindsey McDonald's apartment. Once, he had looked upon such light as a little morsel day in the eternal night, as a warm haven. But those fool enough to challenge him, and think that that domestic little light would shield them, were sorely

wrong. It was time the stupid lawyer learned his final lesson. Never live with a vampire, especially if you want protection from another vampire. Your home, the vampire's lair, his hunting ground. It was so obvious that Lindsey felt himself so safe from any and all vampires, his lights and life spewed forth from an open window. Unfettered, unbarred, unbelievable.

"Say bye-bye Lindsey old man." He whispered to the darkness inside and out, where his soul used to burn brightly. Now it was in permanent shadow. He looked up at that open invitation, if you could get to it and grinned in anticipation. Then he jumped. It was almost too high, but his rage leant him strength. And he made contact and entry with that too happy light.

"Angel!" The little lawyer panicked as the vampire descended from the window ledge, entering his mortal home. "How?" He looked around, trying to recall where Darla was, trying to get Angel with his back to the vampiress.

"You fuck a vampire, she hides out here, consequently she fucked your protection. Her lair, dear boy, your grave yard." The Irish lilt tinged his voice, with the souls grace and approval the demon showed forth in all it's malevolent glory.

"Angelus?" A hesitant smile dared to cross the lawyer's face, a hope sprung into sharp focus in that squalid little soul. He thought he had won. That the game was over and he the eternal victor.

Angelus lifted a gentle hand to smooth the dark haired mortal's cheek. As his other hand echoed the action and warm smile broke onto Lindsey's ugly features.

"Angelus!" He whispered the name like an acolyte's fevered prayer.

"Well, you know how it is?" Angelus smiled at the lawyer, savouring the moment. "You gotta be careful what ya' wish for, me lad, ya' jus' might get it!" Smile dissolving into rage he tightened his hold on the lawyer's head and twisted and pulled with his full vampiric strength and ripped the offending head clean of its cringing back. The decapitated body fell backwards with the heads last command to jerk away still locking its reaction. The thud drew the attention of the second player in the nights little drama. Dara ran into the room, skidding to a halt when she saw Angel's back to her.

"Lindsey? Angel?" Darla's startled voice gave the vampire the exact location for his former sire's position.

"Present for ya' Darla!" He spun, threw the head at her and as she instinctively caught it, the spring loaded stake hidden up his sleeve descended and he thrust it right into her heart one more time. For the last time. This time she would stay dead, he swore it!

Lindsey McDonald's head with its still startled expression fell onto the grey, cold unwelcoming pile of dry ash that had been the greatest love affair of his entire life. Angel didn't even spare him a moment's pity that the demon he loved so much could never love him. After all, she had never known how to love. Not like his Spike had. Spike had loved and they had made him take it all away.

One down, about a hundred more to go!

In Sunnydale, in a busy corner of the graveyard Spike had called home, a practised hand put a new weapon into use. A quiet pump, pump hiss and Spike's water pistol discharged a measured dose of holy water right into a vampire's face. Followed by a stake to the heart and it crumbled to dust. Its pain wracked scream silenced for ever.

"Woah, this is almost fun." Xander's voice tried its very best to sound cheerful, and almost made it. "Makes slayage faster, safer, more accurate. The hissing, dissolving ones stand out clearly marked, ready to be staked." He looked over at the slayer as she staked his next victim. He wished he could find the right words to ease Buffy's guilt, even a little.

Buffy's arm shot out, following each jet of water to its disabled target. She knew just what Xander was doing, even appreciated his attempts at bridging the gap Spike's death had opened up between them all. But the wounds she carried were far too raw to want anyone treating them.

"And Spike devised this? The most important weapon to be added to the slayer's armoury in God knows how long and it came from a vampire?" He wasn't rude, he wasn't disrespectful, just amazed. "Wonder what else he would have thought up to help you, if we hadn't fucked things up so badly?"

"There's no we, Xander, just me. I fucked things up, I got him killed. I couldn't tell Angel from Angelus. I didn't want him dead, just to stop chaining me up and demanding I said I loved him, felt anything for him." Buffy staked the last vampire and turned to face the still tense Xander. Showing him just where the hurts lay, not that he really needed her telegraphing her pain. Finally, she realised that Xander, and all of them, felt as guilty as she did over Spike's death. It had been Xander that had offered to patrol with her. She hadn't wanted to ask, hadn't wanted to patrol alone, especially this close to Spike's crypt. "Thanks for coming on patrol with me, after last night and all."

"Didn't you feel anything at all for Spike? He loved you. It's bizarre but true. He went against his own vampire nature so much, just for you. And you never noticed, felt anything?" Xander blurted out the questions burning in his head as he relaxed his trigger finger and raised the muzzle of his brightly coloured weapon to the sky.

"Fear." Buffy looked at her friend and smiled a little shakily at him. "I felt fear for Spike, of Spike. I couldn't figure him out. He was so human, too human. Not what an evil vampire should be. He didn't follow the script and I feared him because of it. Just as he died because of it too. I didn't understand till way too late. He wasn't like Angel, he was always so comfortable with who and what he was. It was more than I've ever managed to be, being the Slayer has interfered with every relationship I ever had, or wanted, or didn't want."

"At least you felt something." He looked at the lights from the rest of the town, wondered how many vampires, demons and other beasts of the night were out there. Wondered if there was any other vampire like Spike, waiting for them. And he shuddered. "I guess we all felt fear. None of us understood him and we were all too afraid to try and understand him. Like you said, too human, knowing Spike was like looking into a perfect mirror in the night. All he reflected was human nature, and we're none of us angels." He turned back to her at her sharp intake of breath. "Sorry, bad analogy."

"S ok, really. And you're right. About everything." She smiled at her companion and finally found a real laugh, a gentle laugh, in her heart. "When did you become so wise then, oh profound one?"

"Erm, would you believe while living with Spike under my roof?"

"Actually, I would." Buffy looked at the now dark and empty again crypt that had been Spike's home. So often her first port of call when she needed help, and even if he did sometimes make her pay for his help, he always gave it. "You know, I think I'm going to miss him even more than I ever missed Angel. Angel gave up nothing for me, Spike gave up everything and I never noticed until it was far too late."

"Come on, let's call it quits for tonight and go home, you can fret over Dawn, I'll comfort Anya,

we'll all say sorry and cry some more and tell do you remember when stories and try to smile."

"Sounds like a plan." A shaky smile was his reward and they headed back to Buffy's home, silent, remembering and wondering what might have been.

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Chapter 5 by Shamenka and Vixen

Author's Notes:

Note: Guest appearances by members of the Greek Pantheon

Note2: The writing style may be a bit different in this chapter - I've tried to reflect the Victorian setting by the language used. Their English differed from modern English-English in it's more structured form and sesquipedalian leanings! I hope it works.

Dedication: to Vixen - a great sounding board, thanks a bundle luv!

Exhaustion finally propelled Angel upstairs to collapse onto his bed; the sleep he feared didn't creep up on him, it ambushed him. In Morpheus' dubious care, he was trapped in his own memories, trapped in a very personal dreamtime. His own past, himself and the childe he drove to his death the only players. Not the recent past either, but a much more distant past. The night of his very first meeting with the man who would become first his beloved William, then be abandoned to become his troublesome William the Bloody and finally, in the fullness if time, his estranged childe Spike.

The warmth emanating from young William was far more than a simple physical reaction to his simply being alive. It was a true reflection of his inner being. It was his smile, his laugh, even his polite greeting to a stranger just before they collided. An apology, kissing his lips like carolling angels. It was all the dark haired vampire could do not to steal him away, Angelus had fallen hard for that so naive mortal in those first moments. And with no immediate ideas of turning him, not then, not ever, not really. Angelus was prepared to take all the time in the world in this angel's seduction. Somehow he knew it would be so worth it.

"Forgive me, sir, I wasn't paying sufficient attention. I trust I didn't hurt you at all through my dereliction of care and attention?" The brown haired young man reached out a hand to prevent Angelus from any possibility of falling over. His concern so very evident at the other man's somewhat stunned appearance. What he did not know, nor could possibly understand, was that the dark man before him was entranced by the pair of clear blue eyes that looked up to his own face so shyly. And the young man attached to those bluer than sky eyes was no hardship to look upon either. So pure, so innocent, so very ripe for corruption. He smiled, slowly letting it enter his own eyes, mimicking mortal friendliness to perfection.

"Why, good sir, 'tis surely not all your fault now. You're a full grown man and if I'd been paying any attention at all I'd surely have seen a man such as yourself quite clearly. That I didn't is clear indication of my own lack of attention. I trust I didn't hurt you either, young sir?" Angelus had turned on the charm, he let a hand drift over the nearest forearm, beseeching reassurances, welcoming platitudes. Touching but not gripping.

"I am quite well, quite fine." The young man blushed, like a delicate rose in full bloom. Ripe for Angelus to pick it. And Angelus had never had a greater interest in horticulture than he did at that moment.

"Liam, Liam Saunders" Angelus stuck his hand out towards the now stunned young man and grinned at him. Giving him a name, granted his own true forename but one of many false names he used to travel freely around the mortal world. Showing him a cheeky grin offered in open friendship. Finally his young quarry responded in true civilised manner.

"William Mansfield, hello." He took the pro-offered hand and shook it firmly, but briefly, returning the grin in full measure with one of his own.

"Well, William m'lad, how about you and I go sit in yonder coffee house and get better acquainted? I'm kinda fresh to London, just arrived back from Paris and find myself in need of a friendly face and good company." He lowered the intensity of his smile to a warm, jovial one. Less intimidating, more just openly friendly.

William responded as Liam thought he would, he glanced over to the coffee house Liam mentioned and then back at the man before him, finally he glanced at his pocket watch and smiled.

"Well, I could spare a little time, mother is not expecting me back for a full half of an hour yet. Yes, I'd be happy to join you." He smiled a little hesitantly and indicated the other side of the road. "Shall we adjourn to the coffee house and a far warmer and quieter arena in which to converse?"

"Surely, my friend, surely." Liam placed a light, almost glancing touch to the small of the younger man's back and ushered him safely over the busy street, dodging the mess from horses and the debris from such a densely populated city. And so began the painfully slow seduction of his William. His, and only his, gentle William.

It had been so easy to insinuate himself into this sweet young man's life, so shy and yet, so desperate for friendship. The young mortal had a deep seated hunger for attention. So Angelus took it upon himself to feed that hunger until that beautiful young man was satiated, and no longer so needful that he looked everywhere for friendship. His William now looked only to him to fulfil that need. They became a familiar pair in certain social circles. Angelus introduced his William to so many pleasures, but slowly. He had had the time to take it at his mortal's pace. His lady's were in the north, touring a few estates with the entourage of young nobles and moneyed young men that they had enraptured. Well away from the temptation that was his William, where he wanted them. For the moment.

Even though at first he was annoyed that he had been left behind, alone in London until serendipity brought him into collision with young William Mansfield. Where upon his new adventure begun. Angelus had so long enjoyed the seduction of the innocent that he revelled in this new game. A game of conquest. William soon lost himself in the far more ebullient personality that was his new friend Liam's charming self. Just as had been Angelus' intention. Not only did he loose his need for friendship to his new friend, he lost everything to him.

However, it was a far greater shock when Angelus had found himself lost and captive to his William in turn. In all his years of hunting, of preying on the mortal world he had never once lost his heart to a mortal. Most certainly he had never been this drawn to a man so innocent. And drawn he was.

It had been a good six weeks, filled with theatre, opera, even music halls and a great deal of laughter. The nights spun past them both in a plethora of very private dinners for two, long conversations, brief touches of fingers against gentle flesh. William had gladly given his innocence to his new friend. Just as Liam willingly gave his body to his William in return. It was a love affair.

It had been during one such late supper for just the two of them that Liam had hosted in his rooms that their friendship blossomed into the next stage. William was a swift and perceptive student, he had quickly learned how to use his lips and tongue and hands to pleasure Liam. Tasting the wine they had shared as they kissed. William had never questioned Liam about his much lower body temperature after Liam explained what he truly was. On the contrary, all he did on that memorable night they first made love was smile at his friend and suggest they built up the fire, even though it was a warmly comfortable Autumn evening.

"Why should we do that?" Liam quizzed his so very desired friend.

"It'll make you more comfortable to touch, to hold, to do this to.." And hesitantly, that shy, wanton man had slid a hand inside Liam's shirt to stroke the side of his friend's body.

"Sweet William, do you know what you're saying? For surely, this is the one and only chance you get to change your mind before I make you part of my heart forever!" Liam had truly believed he meant every word of his declaration. By the light he saw in his William's eyes, he knew his friend did believe Liam meant his offer.

"My dear Liam, I have graduated from Oxford University you know. I fully know what I am saying, what I am asking of you. If you are willing to teach - I am willing to learn." And he had leaned over and kissed Liam one more time, trailing that hand within the Irishman's shirt up his back to hold him close.

"Then slowly, my William, we go slowly. Come, let's eat!" And both man and vampire had laughed at Liam's declaration. It being common knowledge between them that only one of them would truly dine that night. William, as always, ate the food and watched, enraptured, as Liam drank his goblet of fresh blood. It had been such a pleasant shock to discover that his William was neither repulsed nor revolted by his true nature.

Liam had made a nest of blankets and pillows before the fire, settling his sweet William beneath him, helping him to divest himself of his confining garments. Many soft entreaties were shared, many voraciously hungry kisses.

They had gloried in their mutual exploration of their naked bodies. Delighting in the touch and feel of each other. Liam stroked William to an almost painful hardness, he whispered softly to him all the time. Showing him, telling him what they would do together, guiding his hands, and in an uncharacteristic moment, let his William take him as his gift for allowing him his virginity. Liam straddled William's hips after they had stretched him together, getting his William used to such activities. Sliding slowly, impaling himself on William's deliciously hard cock, for the first time in almost one hundred years Angelus was letting another man fuck him. This time by choice. Not since the Master had staked his authority over the vampire had Angelus allowed himself to be on the receiving end of this act. Whereas before it had been duty and his place to do this, this time it was all about joy. His and his William's.

"Buck up, meet me half way, my William. That's it, slowly at first, let's find ourselves a sweet pace." Liam kept up a litany of endearments and encouragements as he let his lovely boy fuck him. Never showing a seconds discomfort on his face, lest he frighten his boy off this act before it was his turn to take, he purred deep in his throat, showing his delight. They moved faster and faster, Liam guided William's gentle fingers around his own hard cock and the stroked together.

"You are so beautiful, so wonderful, so generous, so... so..." William ran out of sufficiently emotive terms right about the time he ran out of brain power to think them with. He gave up all pretence to civilisation as he felt the tension building up, the pressure in his groin was such it was fit to explode. Speeding up their stroking Liam brought himself ever closer to William's ready state, but William's body ran out of patience. The young mortal man orgasmed, for the first time he spilled his sexual fluids in the body of another person. He filled his beloved Liam. "I'm sorry! I'm sorry too quick too soon..." It all became a jumble of sounds and words, but Liam knew what he was trying to say. The feelings so evident in William's eyes. Even now his lover's thoughts were for his enjoyment.

"Shhhh, sweet William, my turn will come. Now, if I'm not mistaken?" And he lifted himself free of William's softening cock, smiling, teasing, laughing. He rolled them to lie side by side, himself right behind William. "Are you ready, my William?"

"Yes!" William had hissed back, a slight tremor in his voice.

"Sweet love." Liam whispered, his fingers entering William, smoothing his way with oil, warmed by the fire William had wanted. He stretched and readied his lover, ensuring there would be as little pain as either humanly, or demonically, possible.

Slowly he entered his William, he knew that this time he wouldn't last too long himself. Which would no doubt be to his William's benefit. Not too much for his first time. He rocked William in time to his short thrusts into his strained but still willing body. The heat was beyond anything Angelus could remember. Even from his previous mortal conquest, though they were normally unwilling participants, William's willingness to love, to join with him was enough to drive him over the top so fast. He came in a drawn out silent scream, fighting the urge to sink his fangs into his William's neck and drink him dry. This was about sharing, not conquest, not about adding to his standing as a sire. This was about something almost forgotten in all his time as a vampire. This was about love. Angelus' own possessive, twisted love for the fragile young mortal now drifting off to sleep in his arms, trusting him.

Their time together was a time isolated from reality, a time out of time. Until that had telegram arrived. The one telling them that Angelus' ladies would be returning to London slightly ahead of schedule. The vampire's feelings on their immanent arrival had transmitted themselves to his beautiful William, and the young man had been smiling for him. Just as excited as he at the immanent return of his lover's family, because he knew how important his family was to Liam.

They had just finished making love, on a night so similar to their first. Before a fire, both warm to the touch, bitter and sweet with cum and sweat. Angelus had had the divine warmth of William's body, heart and soul, wrapped around him when he told the young man that his ladies were returning to London, soon. William had smiled at him, a warm, loving smile and leaned over him, stroking a single finger over his facial ridges. Unafraid now to touch either the man or the demon. In love with them equally, always tender. William never treated the demon any differently than he did the man, he loved both.

"And I know you'll be so happy to have them back by your side. Your mother and daughter, where you no doubt think they'll always belong. I can see you, so easily, as a really protective father. No one should ever be allowed to touch your children." William had smiled, a warm loving smile. He used the terms he was familiar with, but Angelus had understood his meaning well enough. He had had to agree that the young mortal was in no means in error in his assumptions. He was a somewhat controlling and jealous sire. He didn't like sharing. "It's a father's duty to protect his children, a son's duty to protect his parents after all. I should like to think that, in the fullness of time, once I wed, that I too would make such a good father as you do for your Drucilla. If you have time once they return I should like to meet your Drucilla. To find out if she is as fragile as my mind's eye casts her." William had continued to smile, to touch, to shine his love on Angelus.

That had been William's downfall. The images of his William entwined with a woman, any woman, fathering children in her body. The jealousy and rage that filled Liam, caused his demon self to react before thinking.

"You are mine! No one else's! Least of all some bovine half witted girl's baby machine." In his rage he drained his young lover. In his immediate grief he fed him his own blood. And in his certainty at having destroyed the sweetness that had been his William, he left the demon to arise and die, unaccompanied, untutored, damned to perish in his first and last morning's sun. But never unmourned.

In his last look at what had been his precious William the vision was clouded, blood everywhere and that spiked collar he had found, wrapped around his long, sensitive neck. The discontinuity of that item shocked him awake.

That hadn't happened in 1873, it hadn't. That collar is a new addition. He knew where he'd gotten

it, but now he felt he should know what it meant. The fear of his dream recurring dragged Angel from his bed and downstairs to the few reference books that remained from his sacking Wesley and the others. There was something about that collar, something that filled him with a greater dread than ever before.

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Chapter 6 by Shamenka and Vixen

Spike was sleeping again, dreaming, remembering his creation as a vampire and subsequent abandonment by Angelus, his creator. Only, he had known him as Liam at the time. He rather enjoyed the irony, that Angelus couldn't cope with the idea of him, poor little William, becoming a father. A real, flesh and blood, child born as a baby father. As opposed to simply siring some hapless soul into the ranks of vampires. And now here he was, almost a full 128 years later and Angelus had fulfilled that naive, childish dream for him. He was going to be that real father after all. Father, mother, all wrapped up in one package, and Angel would have nothing more to do with the child at all. It would be his child, the child Angelus had denied him all those years ago. His and his alone, his payment for all those mortal dreams he had had as a naive young man. And Angelus had ripped from him out of little more than spite. His unfulfilled dreams would be a reality, finally. At least one of them.

In his dreams he told Angel so many times, in so many ways about the karmic justice served upon him. In his dreams he practices saying things like, meet your son, meet your daughter and introducing a mortal, an adult, a child, even a baby, and telling the older vampire to fuck off and leave them alone. He heard himself explain how Angel would kill them, drain their blood as he had his own mortal family. Having to comfort a crying child, afraid that their other parent would come and eat them in the night. He dreamed of staking Angel, of letting his child see that he, or she, was safe.

He dreamed too of those years between his turning and his discovery by Drucilla. Those years he had struggled to learn about his new existence. How he had woken at first light and his hand had brushed against a sun beam and he had burned. His flesh had burned. It was then that he knew what his beloved Liam had done to him. He had turned him into a demon such as himself. And he had left him there to perish.

By night fall he was well aware that Liam was not going to return to him. He felt such a fool, he had trusted his beloved demon to not hurt him. And he had been betrayed. So, like injured children the world over, he had returned to his mother and her companion and told all. Even in his dream state he wondered why Liam had never questioned his acceptance of demons so readily. The dark haired vampire had never questioned his young mortal lover's ready belief at all, just rejoiced in his acceptance. Granted Liam had never met his mother or more especially her beloved companion, Mister Trasker.

Gronmann Trasker, or rather Gronmann the Trasker demon was the demonic equivalent to a watcher. They were archivists of demonic behaviour and their interactions with mortals. Which had led to his involvement with William's mother after her husband had died. Mister Trasker had taught the newly formed vampire what he needed to know for survival. He taught him to fit in and blend with both mortal and vampiric society. To make himself fully ready to join that same vampiric society when he was strong enough to survive. It was only after his mother died, of natural causes, that William abandoned his mortal life entirely and was reborn as Spike. Gronmann had identified Liam as Angelus, he had followed his family's progress around Europe, keeping his young charge informed as to where they were, what they were doing. Who they were killing. Comforting his adopted son when he couldn't fight off the tears any longer. A better father than Liam had proven to be.

In 1880 Gronmann had finally managed to get Spike in position to be 'found' by Drucilla, apart from her sire and grand sire. She was the easiest target, Angelus' weakest point. Spike seduced

Drucilla in much the same way Liam had seduced him. Simply by accepting her as she was, he believed all her various visions where Angelus and Darla laughed at their abstracted form. Spike, with the help of Gronmann, managed to interpret quite a few for her. He understood her, which Angelus didn't. Where as her daddy created her, her beloved Spike understood the pixies in her head, so she was happy. She was saddened at the so very sad tale of her poor Spike's creation. She thought it very naughty of his sire to create a childe and abandon him like that, so being her own generous self she invited him to meet her family. In effect she adopted him as her own creation. A delusion Spike never called her on.

That had been a great moment. The look on Angelus' face as he finally met his childe's new playmate, Spike. He had heard so much about Drucilia's new friend, that he had indeed anticipated meeting him. Until he saw who it really was.

Spike saw it all in Liam's face, no not Liam, Angelus' face. And his hatred hardened, his determination to be avenged grew even firmer of purpose.

"Cripes, fancy it bein' you that's my Dru's sire? Ol' bastard features 'imself!" And Spike had smiled, seeing realisation cross his estranged sire's face. "What? Ya' thought I'd up and dusted didn't ya'? I thought you'd've been a bit brighter than that. Or did you think I was so far less intelligent, less resourceful than I really am?" That last was spoken in his own true accent, in his own true voice. A gentle whisper of accusation.

"William.." Angelus spoke the name for the first time in seven years, only to be interrupted by the former bearer of that name.

"Spike!" Spike snapped.

"What?" Angelus had been surprised and looked up at the still slender, ever youthful vampire before him.

"My name is Spike. William Mansfield died in 1873, remember, you were there when he died. Come to think of it, wasn't it you that killed the poor stupid ugly shit?" Spike faced his sire off, eye to eye.

"A childe does not challenge their sire, boy, ever!" Angelus snarled back, trying to force the younger vampire into backing down.

"A sire doesn't abandon childer to the sun on the very night of their creation. I have no sire! Just a creator and since he didn't identify himself as such I owe no allegiance to anyone. Least of all the likes of you." Spike then did the unthinkable, he turned his back on his sire and dismissed him as irrelevant to his existence. Which was no more than the truth, but a truth Angelus wouldn't accept. Fate had brought his William back into his life, this time he was determined to be a true Sire.

So it was then Angelus that did the unthinkable, he acknowledged a childe seven years after his creation.

"I am your sire, you are my childe, my property, my boy. You do not turn your back on me!" He had spun Spike back to face him and took him in a painfully tight embrace. "You are mine, forever now, don't ever forget that!" Which Spike never forgot, unlike Angelus who seemed to have a very convenient memory.

Again his dreams returned to facing down Angel.

"I am your childe, this is your child, say good bye Angel, we're leaving!" So many ways to say the same thing. To fulfil so many boyhood dreams of being a father, just like his father had been to him. Of being a good sire too, if ever he felt that need. As good a father and sire as Gronmann

had been to him, and as tender.

He awoke resolved, but didn't get out of bed. He couldn't really see himself wandering around Olympus stark naked and asking all the various Gods and Goddesses if they could spare some clothes for him. So he stayed put, sure that Hera, or Oz, would come check up on him soon enough. There would be time enough then to get some clothes to wear and get back on his feet and on with his life.

In the offices of Angel Investigation, the breakaway firm, Wesley and Cordelia were talking, laughing about all the excitement Gunn wasn't really missing haven left early. Both looked as the door banged open and an agitated Angel walked in, straight up to the book shelf and tried to rummage for what he wanted. Cordelia tried to get between the angered vampire and the books, determined to have her say. Wesley tried to spring to her defence, instinct getting the better of good judgement, he heaved himself to his feet.

In his heightened state, Angel was aware of the fresh blood smell the moment Wesley ripped open his stitches. Yet another mortal young man, so reminiscent of his William, that he had let down, but at least this one he could something for.

"Delia, shut up and call an ambulance." He snarled at her, game-faced, getting her undivided attention for a few precious moments. "Wesley's burst some stitches."

"How do you know that, Mister Inscrutable?" The ire was back in Cordeilia's voice, and Angel had to admit he didn't like it. He deserved it and so much more than the young woman before him could ever guess. But he definitely didn't like it.

"I'm a vampire, you can look it up later, but first, call the bloody ambulance!" He didn't notice the use of one of Spike's favourite mild expletives creeping into his voice. Nor did he notice the more English cadence he gave his words. Not even Angelus' deliberately roughened brogue.

"Oh, God, oh God!" Delia dashed to the phone as Angel turned to Wesley and made him sit still.

"Why did you come here Angel? What did you need the books for?" The former watcher asked, trying to distract himself from the burning pain in his belly, and the blood seeping through his sweater.

"I found a thing, a collar, I used it on someone. And I messed up Wesley. I really messed up." Angel knelt before his former friend and almost prayed to him.

"Did you use it... this thing... did you use it on Darla? Drucilla?" Wesley watched the kneeling vampire's face for every emotion that flickered over it. The pain he found there left his own physical pain so greatly diminished in its wake.

"No, Darla's dead, so's Lindsay McDonald. I didn't put the collar, the thing I found, on either of them. No! I put it on Spike's neck before I..." He simply couldn't say it. "And now he's dead! He killed himself, and I made him do it, because Buffy phoned and I hurt him and he's dead. And I put the thing, the collar around him, and I know it's important what it was. I have to know." Angel finished his litany of horror in tears.

It was the first time Wesley had ever seen the vampire shed a tear over anything or anyone. It was the first time in so long that he had even seen a hint of the vampire's soul that he hated himself for what he was about to do. Use his former employer's pain in a brutal attempt to win back his friend's soul from all the vile darkness that surrounded it.

"What did this collar look like? I'm usually pretty good with objects, demon artefacts. I take it, it was a demon artifact, this collar?" Wesley looked directly into Angel's eyes and almost blanched at the pain he saw there. But concentrating on Angel was better than listening to Cordeilia fret about the time the ambulance was taking to arrive.

"It had these claws, spikes, when the collar closed around the wearers neck the spikes shot forward and pierced the flesh. There were four on the top and four on the bottom. When I closed it around Spike's neck I felt it warming up." Angel took a deep shuddering breath, to calm himself. To simply not throw up what little blood he had drunk earlier all over Wesley's lap.

"Pass me Gronmann's Catalogue. It's on the second shelf down?" He pointed to the bottle green leather bound book at the left the second shelf.

Angel stood up, shakily, and crossed to the shelves. Picking up the book Wesley requested, he idly opened it to the title page, then the dedication page and froze in place. Even Cordeilia knew something was deeply wrong as Angel began to shake. It was far more than a mere tremble. He was lost in a personal horror strong enough to almost shake his soul loose.

"What's wrong? Angel? What is it?" She reached his side and glanced at Wesley before turning back to the souled vampire. "Let me see, we can't help if you don't tell us what's wrong?" She eased the book out of Angel's hands and looked at the words written there. Looking from Angel to Wesley and back again she began to read the dedication aloud. Not understanding, but knowing it was somehow relevant to Angel's dire state. "Dedicated to William James Mansfield, my stepson, friend and greatest student. Victim of Angelus, fate and the Gods." She looked at Angel's whiter than ever face and then at Wesley's matching face. "Will someone tell me what's wrong? It's not like Angelus didn't bite people all the time, now is it? He was the really big bad, the evil incarnate one, wasn't he?"

"I'm sorry, Angel, I didn't think. Gronmann's the best reference on demonic artefacts. I simply didn't think... I'm sorry." Wesley turned to look at Cordeilia to explain. "William James Mansfield is far better known by the names he assumed once turned as a vampire. One of them was Spike. Angel's childe." Wesley again turned to Angel and this time he held his eyes, letting the vampire see both his sympathy and his accusation. "Only Angel, or Angelus as he was then, didn't stick around to instruct his childe in the finer points of survival. That was left to the writer of the book you're holding, his step father, sort of."

"I left him to die." Angel admitted, retrieving the book once more and giving it to Wesley.

The former watcher looked through the index for a collar matching Angel's description and took as deep a breath as he could before passing the book back. As the vampire read the words before him the doors opened and the ambulance crew finally entered. Wesley was prepped for travel and taken into the ambulance, Cordeilia had to usher the shocked vampire out the door.

"We'll follow in his car." She told the paramedics as they bundled Wesley into the relative safety of their vehicle. "Keys Angel, now!" She held out a hand and took the keys from Angel's numb fingers. She knew then that whatever was troubling Angel it was of paramount importance.

As they headed out the door the telephone started to wring, it's shrill tone filled the now quiet and empty room until the answering machine picked it up. The woman on the other end held the receiver from her ear and let the demon behind her listen in.

"See, no one's there, what shall I do now?" Her voice trembled as she spoke.

"Try later!" The demon replied, letting the woman live a little longer than intended.

In the car Cordeilia tried to get Angel to talk, to explain, to tell her just what was so wrong.

"Talk to me!" She demanded. Not really prepared to hear what Angel had to say, but knowing she was going to have to listen very carefully. She suspected that this would be a story he could tell only the once.

"The collar I put round Spike's neck is called Hera's Collar. I put it round his neck while I tortured him, and raped him, and then he staked himself. With the collar on he'd have been... stop the car!" He managed to hold on till the car screeched to a halt before he threw up. As he did so Cordeilia read the relevant passage and felt pretty damn sick to her stomach herself. When Spike suicided he took himself and a clump of cells that would have grown into Angel's baby with him.

Quietly, without complaint for once, she rode the agony of a vision while Angel came to terms with his actions, their consequences, and what might have beens. Time enough later to stop his own suicidal crusade. Even if it meant saving Wolfram and Hart in order to do it.

She vowed to herself that she would call Buffy in the morning and discover just what her involvement was, if any. She did recall her name being mentioned at some point. Then it would be past time to put her family back together again. If she could.

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Chapter 7 by Shamenka and Vixen

Author's Notes:

Guest appearances by members of the Greek Pantheon.

After they arrived back at Buffy's home, Xander and the Slayer each took a deep steadying breath, neither quite ready for what further trauma's might lie within. Niether even tried to find a fake, forced smile, stony faced they made their way in to the living room. A sea of equally strained faces turned to look back at them.

"Oh!" It was all Buffy's exhausted, emotionally drained mind could come up with. The pain she saw in those before her was the exact same as she felt sure her friends could see in her face.

Not only was Anya and a soundly sleeping Dawn there, Willow, Tara and Giles were there too. Each of them looked like they had had yet another sleep deprived night. Buffy looked around the room at her friends and gave thanks for them. Even when they were annoyed with her, or she with them, there they were, still together. Bearly a week since her mother had died and was buried, now they were together again, mourning again. Only this time they were almost as guilty as she for Spike's... No, they weren't. Only she was guilty. That much she would freely admit. Her friends weren't the one that had phoned Angel and sicced Angelus on Spike.

"H..how was patrol?" Giles asked, looking for some echo of normalcy to cling to. A routine he knew and one that threw up no shocks, just the expected demons and vampires that were inexorably drawn to the hellmouth. And hopefully no Angel, no Angelus, Giles knew there was little chance of Buffy ever forgiving the dark haired vampire for invoking her name in his gross acts of cruelty. Even less for his having performed said acts in front of her sister. And none what so ever for his having caused another being to suicide. The Watcher could only pray that none of his charges, his children would ever have to face a fate such as the one Angel had bequested to Spike.

"Vampires, lots of them." Xander offered, hardly pausing to even take a breath let alone notice Giles' concerns. "No you know who, however, that is definitely of the good!" Then again, maybe he had noticed. Either way Giles was relieved his children were safe.

Xander carefully put the pump action water pistol against the wall then shrugged off his jacket. As he turned back he noticed that Buffy hadn't moved. He flicked a quick glance to her troubled face and realised she was unsure of her welcome in her own home. She simply didn't know what to do next. His friend's world had crumbled leaving her without a foundation to support her. After her mother had died it had been Angel, sweet, generous, caring Angel that had held her, comforted

her, gave her solace. Who, then, would comfort her this time when it was Angel that caused her grief and guilt. Last time Angel had hurt her this bad she had had her mother's support, sort of, and Spike to conspire with. To save the world with.

It was then that the young man realised just what Willow had meant only a few days back, that Spike had not left a card with his flowers. He just wanted to offer his comfort for Buffy and Dawn's loss, for his own loss. The only person who didn't treat the bleach blond vampire as a freak had died. Now the vampire had died and no one was bringing anonymous flowers to Buffy's door. There was no comfort, and Buffy new it!

The dark haired youth reached for Buffy's coat, silently guiding her as to her next required action. Stupefied, the slayer followed his lead, incapable of making her own choices. Scared she'd make the wrong one once more and someone else would die.

"Coffee's hot, and the doughnuts are fresh. There's chocolate and jelly and sprinkles." Anya gushed to fill the silence she almost fully recognised as a member of her former demonic family. Oppressive, fearful, damning, vengeful. All states of being she was more used to seeing enacted on humanity than experiencing first hand.

"Thank you, Anya. It was really cold out there tonight." Buffy tried to smile and was pleasantly surprised that she did not in fact spontaneously combust. "What's everyone doing? What did we miss?" She smiled once more, slightly less strained, still looking as if she sat precariously balanced between numb and a soul destroying grief.

"We were copying the tape, Anya had a good idea, she wondered if anyone had warned Cordelia that Angel was.. that he wasn't Angel. We got no answer from her home number, nor Wesley's so we decided to send a letter and the tape by courier first thing in the morning." Giles answered, he clasped a hand on the former vengeance demon's shoulders in support of the confused girl as he felt her tremble slightly under Buffy's unnaturally sharp gaze.

"Good thinking there Anya!" Xander enthused at his lover's idea, a good, caring idea for once. He rushed to sit on the floor by her side and took over the physical comfort that Giles had been offering.

"Yes, it is. Good idea. Cordelia should be warned." Finally Buffy moved into the group and sat down, the better to hide the trembling in her legs. Lifting her soundly sleeping sister's head onto her lap, needing the physical closeness with her sister.

"Here, drink, eat, you look shattered." Willow offered over a cup of coffee and a doughnut. "Sustenance for the warriors!" she tried her best to smile, it too came out strained.

"I revoked my wish, it was unfair of me. I was just.." Tara faltered as she offered her explanation to Buffy.

"We all were, Tara, no biggy. It was just another big shock, after mom and all. Of all the people you would expect to go on for ever, a vampire should be right up there on the top of the list. I just never ever thought he'd ever want to kill himself. No matter what, Spike always seemed so... there! You know?" Buffy took a bite out of the doughnut and needed a sip of the coffee to get it passed her suddenly dry mouth.

"He did try it once before. Staking himself. Me an' Willow stopped him. It was right after he got the chip an' was living in the basement with me." Xander stopped talking, aware that his words were really not helping the Slayer cope with her feelings of guilt.

"He did?" Buffy squeaked in her surprise. Yet another thing she hadn't known about Spike. It had been hard enough to find out he was capable of loving a human, but that he could sink into the

very human state of depression too? Who was the demon and who the human? Spike had displayed far more human tendencies than Angel ever had even with his soul intact.

"Yeah, he didn't think he could go on, not being able to hunt, feed, fight. Nothing. He got better when he found out he could fight demons though." Willow stopped talking, lost in her memory of trying to watch television with the hyper energetic Spike trying to persuade her and Xander out on the hunt for evil doers. The smile that memory engendered was one of pure delight. "Xander? Remember, later, when Spike wanted to go out and save the world from evil? To make it safe for innocents, children, puppies and Christmas?" She looked directly at Xander, the only living soul that shared that memory with her.

"Yeah, talk about eager. The fervour of the convert. He wanted us to go out on the hunt, just the three of us, to save you from having to do it all, he said." Xander flicked a glance at the stunned slayer. "Of course it was all because he had just found out he could kill something, even if it were his fellow demons." Then a thought occurred to the young man, a thought that chilled his heart. "That wouldn't have made him very popular with the other demons would it? In the end... he didn't really have anywhere else to go did he, but Hell." Xander felt his stomach churn at the idea of having let someone down so much, Hell and all its tortures was preferable than staying on earth with him, them, any of them.

"It didn't, he wasn't and Hell was all he had left." Anya leaned into his arms as she spoke. "He received a lot of messy, painful beatings for helping Buffy. And demons really know how to hurt each other, creatively. He used to take me to the Bronze for a beer occasionally. You know, when life as a former evil demon got too bad, off we'd go have a drink and talk." A sudden, Earth shattering thought occurred to the former demon. "Who am I going to talk to now? Who else is going to understand?"

"I was a demon once, okay, it was for the one day and I had to pay Spike to help me sort it all out. You could have knocked me down with a feather when I discovered that Spike could understand me. I guess I was as bad as the rest of the world for taking him at the most obvious level. If not worse. After all, I had read all the available information about Spike, from first turning forward. Even a little of his mortal life was available, a rare thing with vampires. They normally destroy everyone they ever knew in their mortal lives. Spike didn't." Giles looked off into the middle distance, obviously reacting to things only he could see. And just as obviously not liking what he saw there. Self recrimination, like hind sight, had twenty-twenty vision, only sharper claws. "Hell, I've even read Gronmann's journal, a copy only I grant you, but an accurate copy none the less. It's believed that the original is with Spike. Or was rather."

"What do you mean, there wasn't a single journal by anyone even remotely like Gron anything. I know, I packed up his things myself." The slayer was surprised to realise that she had in fact eaten almost the entire doughnut and drank all her coffee. At least some small part of the gaping emptiness inside her was filled. "Who's this Gron person anyway?"

"A Trasker demon, and Spike's step father." At Giles' words the last mouthful of Buffy's doughnut was catapulted over the coffee table.

"Step father?" And a strangled gurgling sound was all Buffy could manage. She hurried to make sure she hadn't woken Dawn, certain that her sister slept on, she returned the revelations going on around her.

"Oh, yes, see, unlike normal vampires Spike wasn't buried, and he wasn't guarded by his sire and clan for his own protection either. Angelus turned him and left him to die in his first morning. Regarded as a heartless act even within vampire clans. Only Spike, or William Mansfield as he was known as then, was better aware than most mortals. Even for the Victorian era when such things as vampires were more readily accepted by the general public, William knew far better. He hid until dark and then went home to his mother." Giles absently reached for a doughnut and

another cup of coffee. Needing something to do with his hands rather than wringing them one over the other again and again.

"His mother? Then what? He ate her?" Xander thought he knew and understood just what drove all vampires. Yet he couldn't deny the shocked tone in his voice at the idea of Spike turning on his own mother.

"Good gracious no! He went home 'to' his mother. She looked after him, her erm... companion, Gronmann the Trasker demon, taught him to be a successful demon. Or so the journal said. Young William Mansfield wouldn't harm his mother, or any of his family. In fact he tried for seven years to fit in to human society. And he managed quite well, seemingly; he continued to work, as best he could given his vampiric state. But the unusual thing was that he did indeed manage to hold down his former job. Until his mother died that is." The Watcher took off his glasses to polish away the mist that seemed to have settled on them. It was that or sit there dabbing his eyes to mop up the tears he found himself ready to shed, not for Spike per se, but for William Mansfield.

"What job did he do? Was he really a bad poet?" Buffy found herself enthralled at this glimpse into the secret history of the vampire she thought she had known as Spike. Only, now she wasn't as sure that she ever knew him at all.

"He was a lawyer. He graduated from Oxford with degrees in Law and Mythology. The company he worked for moved; lock, stock and barrel, as the saying goes. Took up offices somewhere here in the USA, in this state I do believe, as a matter of fact. Changed their name I seem to recall reading, when a couple of the senior partners died rather messily. One William Mansfield may, or may not have been responsible for their demise. Even Gronmann didn't know and respected his step son's privacy too much to ask him out right." Giles put his glasses back on and coughed to clear the obstruction that was not unvoiced grief for the dead vampire, no it wasn't.

"Can vampires leave wills, and who would get his death benefits, if any?" Xander laughed, not harshly. "Excuse me, I'm William Mansfield, aka William the Bloody's executor, you are now due one hundred and twenty eight years worth of employee's death benefits. Now, wouldn't that go down well, not?"

"Yes, quite." Giles scowled at him, more out of habit than ire. "It was 'Connor, Wolfram, Becker and...' Oh God, damn it who was the last one? Give me a minute, I know I know this. Haven't read the damn book in almost ten years, what was that last name.."

"A lawyer, I didn't know he knew law! Did you know he knew law? Or Mythology, did you know he knew that, either of them? That he'd graduated from Oxford? I could have gone to Oxford, sat where he sat, studied where he studied. Did you know any of this?" Willow filled in the silence by questioning Buffy directly. And at length.

"He could have helped with that Mythology class and all those pesky assignments!" Buffy realised.

"Our Spike, the legal eagle, or bat rather?" Xander was impressed with the revelation of Spike's first career, before he went into the firm of Europe, Scourge of and co.

"Hart!" Giles called out and blushed slightly at the confused looks he received for his trouble. "The other partner, the law firm Spike had worked for, remember, I mentioned them a moment ago? 'Connor, Wolfram, Becker and Hart', William Mansfield work in their specialist property department. Buying, selling property for whomever the clients of the firm were." Giles rambled to another stand still.

"So why did he stop when his mom died? Did he finally kill her and have to hide out?" Xander asked, recalling the first part of Giles' tale of Spikedom.

"No, she died quite naturally in fact, of old age. When he lost his mother, he went out and found the vampire that sired him and made his life, or unlife rather, an unliving Hell on Earth." Then Giles recalled the next part of the tale and looked pointedly at his wrist watch. "Good lord, is that the time, got to get some sleep tonight. If you'll excuse me, I'll bid you.."

"It was Angelus, wasn't it, not Drucilla?" Buffy's brittle tone could have cut glass. "Angelus sired Spike, didn't he?"

"Y... yes, it was. But I still have to go. It's still late. Who needs a lift?" He looked around the hands waving at him. Old school habits died hard. "Right then.." Giles retrieved his jacket and donned it with out further comment, just a gentle smile touching his lips and eyes as he held Buffy's glance. "Do you need a hand upstairs with Dawn?" He finally asked, indicating the slayer's still sleeping sister.

"Nah, I'll cope. Get yourselves home, sleep people!" She eased out from under her sister and saw her friends to the door. "And thanks for coming over." She hugged them all, including Anya and Tara. "Pleasant dreams, all of you!"

"If I were still a Vengeance demon I could do something for Spike, but all I can do is hurt." Anya hugged Buffy rather briskly, still unused to the concept of physical comforting, but trying her best to do it.

"If anyone could come up with a good vengeance, it'd be you, Anya. You were nothing if not a true professional." Buffy smiled at her friend's girl friend and got a brief, honest answering grin. "Sweet dreams Anya, you too Xander."

"You too, pleasant dreams Buffster!" Xander kissed her cheek and headed for Giles' car with Anya in his arm.

"We renewed the protection and exclusion spells." Willow whispered as she hugged her friend.

"We let Dawn help, she seemed to need to be doing something and it's a safe enough spell. We thought it might channel her... erm, natural talents somewhere safer than last time." Tara added.

"Thanks, good idea. Dawn's a fighter, all us Summers girls are, we'll get through all this, all of us, together as always. Take care yourselves." She hugged Tara.

Both witches smiled at her and they too walked arm in arm to Giles' car.

"If you need me.." He left the rest unsaid, as it should be, but Giles did hold her glance as he made sure for himself that she was indeed all right.

"I know." Buffy reached up and kissed her Watcher's cheek. "Get some sleep!" She chided him as she ushered him out the door, waving as they all got in to the car and drove away.

"Okay, kido, bed, now. They might be fooled, but I'm not!" Buffy folded her arms and tried to scowl at the not really asleep lump that was her sister.

"Bloody hell, sussed again!" Dawn muttered one of her favourite Spikeisms.

"And stop cussing. What do you think Spike would say to hear you cussing like that?" Buffy tried the mild guilt route to get her sister to curb the bad language.

"Put more feeling into it?" Dawn hazarded a guess as she ran up the stairs out of Buffy's immediate reach.

"Probably." Buffy whispered, smiling. "Then again, he was fickle enough to just as probably have a handy dandy hour long lecture on proper language and discourse for young ladies." Imaging that lecture Buffy locked up the house and cleared away the coffee things. Finally, she went up to bed herself, ready for sleep.

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Chapter 8 by Shamenka and Vixen

On Olympus, Spike was facing Hera once more. One second he was lying naked in his bed contemplating asking the Gods and Goddesses for clothing, the next Hera had him standing up and fully dressed by its side. The sudden unannounced transference to an upright position pushed his stomach to the very edge of his control. The Greek Goddess saw the look on his face, sighed and waved a hand once more, abating the wave of nausea that threatened to sweep him away.

"Erm, I take it you want me to do something?" Spike managed to be polite. The idea that the diminutive female standing before him could reduce him to ash tray filler in an instant help him rediscover his inner politeness demon. Hera rather did remind him of his mother. A soft smile came unbidden to his face, gentling the harsh lines there.

"Yes, we need you to clean up some of Angelus' messes. A line of Skilosh demons have murdered a family of humans, you and young Oz will go meet out justice. Deliver the parent demon to us and kill the rest if you must. There are a few other little messes you must deal with too, if you can." She handed him a sheaf of papers. "Here you go, all the details you're going to need to get it all done. And once you're finished you'll know where to bring the parent demon. I'll meet you there." With another wave of her hand a brand new leather duster adorned the slender vampire's frame.

"What happened to my old duster?" Spike felt as if his entire existence as a vampire was being wiped out. Things were running out of his control. Granted working for the Powers That Were was a lot better than looking at 'Angelus was here' scratchings on Hell's walls. However, he would have rather they got their message across in some media that didn't involve Angelus torturing it out of his hide.

"It's with the slayer, if we remove it, she'll notice and react accordingly. If she asks the right, or wrong question even, at the wrong or right person, then our plans will be know far too soon. She isn't a fool, well, not entirely." Hera indicated the door from the room, out into a cool, darkened atrium. "Shall we go collect Oz?"

"About the daylight earlier, how come I'm not burned to the proverbial crisp? What gives with the day light up here?" Spike hesitated on the threshold of the room he had occupied. He had felt safe there, and he didn't know what to expect with the rest of Olympus.

"While on Olympus nothing will harm you. You are our champion after all and under our protection. As for the mortal world, you'll be able to function in direct daylight, for a little while anyway. About two hours a day in fact, as a vampire that is, any longer and you're like your mortal self again. We don't even know if you'd revert to vampire after more than two hours. But you'll be safe enough in all filtered daylight. In other words, so long as there is a window between you and the sun light you will be perfectly safe. It's our gift to you, like Oz's control over the wolf, you have daylight." Hera grinned somewhat sheepishly at him.

"Why the hell not more'n two hours? You're bloody Gods an' all!" Spike had had the image of living fully in the light of day pulled from under him once more and was taking out his frustration on Hera. Living dangerously. "Sorry, didn't mean t'shout." He mumbled on realising just who he'd shouted at.

"Yes, we are Gods, but you've got to remember we're somewhat out of practice at being Gods,

doing Godly things. Give us a chance, you'll not be sorry." Hera smiled at her new charge, it was so obvious that she was looking forward to her new adventure amongst the humans.

"Fine, you win. Let's get wolfboy and head to glorious downtown LA." Spike couldn't resist the enthusiastic mother look the Goddess gave him. It reminded him far too strongly of his own long dead mother. He only hoped he didn't start relying on Hera for a motherly ear like he had Joyce Summers. She would up and leave him behind, like Joyce had, like his own mother had. Going off to heaven where he couldn't follow. Not now, not thanks to Angelus anyway.

To distract himself, Spike scanned the papers again, familiarising himself with their content. Old habits died hard, some harder than others. He smiled ruefully as he realised that if handed legal looking papers he still memorised them.

"Who's this Kate Lockley? And why do I have to save her?" He asked Hera rather bluntly for the truth. As far as he could see there wasn't a demon directly involved in her death. On the contrary, there seemed to be far too many demons than she could account for.

"She's another victim of Angelus. His involvement in her life has led her to her current dire state. She was suspended from her job as a police detective and can't face the future without her past. Angelus is currently far too busy to answer his phone as she called for help. So it's up to those of us who actually do answer to the cry of 'oh God, why me?' to send the help she needs. And unless you haven't realised, you are the help we send." Hera laughed warmly at the look on the blond vampire's face.

"And these pyramid sellers of the vampire world? Why them?" Spike had formulated his basic plan for the first two challenges, leaving him free to think about the third one. "Other than eating and turning a lot of humans into vampires, what's so special about them?"

"Nothing yet, but your ex girl friend Harmony is due into town tomorrow or the day - erm.. night after and if she gets a grip on the idea she's going to take it and run with it. Then it'll go global and all Tartarus will break loose. She's rather alarmingly one of the lynch pins to the apocalypse we're trying to forestall."

"Aw fuck!" Spike swore loudly at the very idea that Armageddon was riding on Harmony's coat tails. "She's as thick as the proverbial plank, the dimmest bint that ever lived!" As the dread thoughts of the world depending on Harmony's actions filtered through Spike's mind he also realised they were now in some big room with lots of mirrors, and Oz was there too. "Hey!" He greeted the werewolf.

"Hey, back!" Oz smiled slowly in return. "We ready for the off then?" he enquired.

"Just about. Have you read these pages of doom and gloom?" The vampire waved the sheaves of paper at the werewolf.

"Yeah, just before coming over here. Can you believe Harmony in a pyramid sales scam?" Oz laughed at the image in his own mind of the dumb girl he had known at high school.

"It gets worse, she's one of the lynch pins to Armageddon, seemingly. We've got to stop her getting a hold of this pyramid selling idea." Spike snorted in derisive laughter and grinned wickedly at Oz. "I never thought I'd ever have to stop Harm from having an idea!"

Oz did something he very rarely did, he laughed out loud in public, at another's expense no less.

"If you're quite ready?" Hera's voice scolded both young men. To her a vampire of one hundred and twenty eight years was but a child, she reached over five thousand and stopped counting long ago. "Children!" She added for good measure, firmly putting them in their place. Or waving a

red rag to a bull.

"Ready, mother." Spike smiled so sweetly at her that she instinctively began to worry.

"Sorry mom!" Oz apologised, hugging her briefly and toeing the ground like a two year old. "He started it!" He added pointing at Spike.

"No I did not!" Spike pouted as he answered. "You did!"

"Did not!"

"Did too!"

"Did not, can't prove it!"

"Did too, can too, to. You locked Harm in the boys bathroom in your first term at high school and it traumatised her. So now she's determined to take over the world. So it is all your fault. Q.E.D." Spike stuck his tongue out and blew a loud raspberry. Just as the diminutive goddess was about to reconsider her plans for these two they both burst out laughing.

"I think I'm having an 'oh Gods, why me' moment." She muttered.

"One last thing before we go to the mortal world." She dragged both men's attention back to her. "When out and about in fighting situations you will wear this." She made one more gesture with her hands and Spike found himself wearing what appeared to be the finest mesh chain mail he'd ever seen.

"Why?" He asked, not looking away from the 'armour' he now sported.

"Because it will protect the baby. If it dies you die, remember?" She reached for him as he began to tremble again.

"Yeah, okay, I forgot. I'm pregnant and staying pregnant. What happens when it's time for it to be born? Do I die then?" Spike finally looked at her.

"No, by then your body will have changed enough to allow it to be born. All that happens then is that you become a parent." Hera pulled him closer and simply stood there. Letting him find his own equilibrium.

"Ready." He soon said.

Hera looked at him assessing his real state of mind and saw that he was indeed ready. If his ability to accept things as having happened that quickly, could he possibly be guided to forgiving Angelus? If they had him in their corner as well as Spike, then Armageddon would die in its birthing. And her other speciality would be satisfied. The Goddess of Marriage and Childbirth wanted a complete outcome to their current situation. Pushing such thoughts to one side she activated a mirror and transported them all to the mortal realm.

"This way, boys." She smiled as she stepped into the swirling image that filled the scrying glass.

Dutifully they both followed where she lead. As they stepped out of nothing they both realised they were in a large office. They both looked around at their new spacious surroundings before turning to face Hera once more.

"Where are we then?" Spike asked, Oz was content to simply nod his head.

"In our head quarters. Offices this floor, apartment up stairs, transference point down stairs." She handed them both a small bundle of business cards, they stated the address and company name. Night and Day Investigations. A phone number, their own names and the little word licenced under the company name made both men smile. That was far more than Angel Investigations had to their credit. The Gods and Goddesses of the Greek Pantheon sure thought of everything. Hera handed a set of car keys to each man but turned to Oz before speaking. "You're driving!" She told him.

"Why him?" Spike demanded petulantly.

"Because, you're pregnant and I do believe driving is currently considered way too stressful for someone in your early stages." With that explanation she ushered them all out of the door into a darkened LA street and towards a rather nice car. It looked rather familiar to Spike, like a white version of his damned sire's car in fact. "Get in, time is running out for everyone concerned. Complain later." She waved Oz off into the traffic and their first case.

Angel watched Gunn and Virginia watch each other with growing suspicion as they all sat, supposedly together, in the hospital waiting room. He let his attention drift over to Cordeilia as she too watched Gunn and Virginia. He could smell Cordeilia's confusion at Virginia's lack of nervous tension, he could clearly smell the dark haired woman's worry too. The short red haired woman just didn't smell right. Cordeilia smelled right, as did Gunn, but not Virginia. She didn't smell anywhere near as concerned as the other two did. Possibly she didn't understand how dangerous it was for Wesley to re-open his stitches? Maybe she did but didn't care? Unable to take the mood a moment longer Angel crossed to one of the empty seats that surrounded Virginia isolating her from everyone else.

"You do understand the severity of Wesley's accident tonight don't you?" He was in no mood for trying to be subtle. It wasn't something he had ever understood anyway, not even as a mortal. He had been a brutally direct man who in turn became simply a brutal vampire.

"Yes, I do, thank you very much." Virginia snapped at Angel, annoyed with his assumption that she knew less than she did. Or perhaps she was just annoyed that he saw through her so very easily. After living with her father so long she had thought she was a better actress than that, to show the truth so easily.

"So, you really don't care then. Isn't that it?" He pinned her under his hard gaze. He couldn't stand the idea of Wesley being used by anyone the way he felt used by Buffy. The way he had more than used his William. He had been unable to prevent his William suffering at his hands, maybe he could save Wesley some of that same hurt. Yet, a little spark in the darkest corner of his soul sympathised not with Wesley but with Virginia.

"Oh, I care." She shook her head at him, warning him off. A warning he chose to fully ignore.

"Just not enough. Look, Virginia, I don't know what game you're playing with Wesley, but for his sake, try and tell him the truth. Even if just once?" Angel vamped out and had to fight back the appearance of his game-face. "I can smell the emotions you're giving off, and believe me, I know the smell of fear in all its guises. You just aren't afraid for Wesley. You may be worried you'll have to find a new boyfriend tomorrow, but that isn't the same as being worried that Wesley will walk out of here tomorrow. Or be carried out in a box!" Angel swung his glance at Gunn and Cordeilia who sat huddled together in a corner. "Now, they smell right. They smell afraid for their friend." He looked once more at the red head and walked to the door of the waiting room and stared out at the world and its friend. All of whom seemed to be trundled by his face with varying amounts of freshly spilled human blood, just to tempt him.

Virginia pushed past him, roughly. A barely audible excuse me hissed at him. She made her way to the cubicle with Wesley inside and with a final glare back at the too perceptive vampire she entered. Not even bothering with a fake smile.

"What was that about? What did you say to upset Virginia?" Gunn stood by Angel's shoulder questioning the vampire. Letting his lack of trust show fully and unchallenged. Much as he secretly hated Virginia, for Wes' sake he would defend her from Angel if need be.

"I told her straight, that she didn't smell right. You smell of fear, the fear that a friend is hurt worse than you have been told. A clean fear. She smells of annoyance and inconvenience. Go, listen, make sure she's not hurting Wesley." Angel pushed the bulky man out of the door towards the cubicle that now held Wesley and Virginia. He could smell the desire that radiated off Gunn every time he was near Wesley, or even thought about him.

Gunn got there in time to hear Wesley announce to Virginia her intent to leave him. He also heard his friend's so called lover not deny her intent. He could feel his friend's pain, but a part of him felt excited about it. Casting a quick glance at Angel, wondering what the vampire could smell now, he entered the cubicle as the red head left. He didn't spare a glance for the fickle woman, he only had eyes for his hurting friend.

"When the doc says you can go, we're ready Wes." He sat beside the paler than normal Englishman and thanked the fates for this renewed chance to be there for him. He prayed to whomever would listen that he could be more than a friend to Wesley.

"We'll take Wesley to the hotel, once he's cleared to go home." Angel said as he faced the still fuming Cordeilia. "There's more than enough room and you and Gunn can keep a closer eye on him. I can always smell the blood if he over does things again." Cordeilia still glared at him.

"All of my things? You gave all of my things away? To a complete stranger? Just to get back at Lindsay?" She then processed just what Angel had said. "Why should we go back to the hotel?"

"Virginia just broke up with Wesley." Angel replied.

"Wesley!" She too moved to enter the cubicle with Wesley and now Gunn in it.

"Wait!" Angel reached out a hand to stop her leaving the waiting room.

"Why? Wesley needs me! Haven't you ruined enough lives for one week? Wesley needs the support of his friends, that's me and Gunn if you didn't know!" She tried to pull free from the vampire's grasp, but failed.

"I know, I also know what I've done, more deeply than you can ever imagine, Cordeilia. I know who it is I've hurt the most and believe me it wasn't you, your silly clothes, Wesley or Gunn! It was my child! The only mortal that ever loved me for the man and the demon, equally, and I killed him. And just to cap it all off, I drove him to his second death. So don't ever play the poor victim with me! Unless you want me to show you just what a real victim goes through?" He did not release her, in fact he pulled her closer, letting her catch a quick glance of his true demonic visage. Shocking her into listening.

"I can replace your stupid clothes so very easily. Just go into a dress shop and spend money on over priced bits of fabric off cuts." Through his anger and outrage Cordeilia could hear the pain in his voice. She finally realised that Angel was truly hurting, that the dead Spike had meant more to him, for longer, than she and the others currently did. As was right and proper between family. Family before friends. She also realised he didn't know all this in his own heart. Not yet at any rate. So she let him rant.

"Tell me, oh wise one, which shop do I go into to buy a new childe? Where do I get my William back? And the child I forced on him? Hmm? What, no answers? My, I am surprised! Wesley has Gunn, Gunn finally has Wesley, you have your promise of new clothes, what do I get? Where do I find solace? I'll tell you! I can't, not until they all pay. They forced Angelus to the fore, well, I think I'll take him visiting. Maybe that will deaden the pain. What do you reckon?" He released the young woman's arm, fully expecting her to run, not ready for her to firmly close the waiting room door and put the do not disturb sign on it.

"Angel?" She hazarded a light touch to his arm, trying to stem his grief and pain. "I forgot, forgive me? I shouldn't have ever compared my clothes to your Spike. But you can't carry on this campaign to rid the world of Wolfram and Hart, if you do you will lose yourself entirely. Then where will the innocents, the hopeless be? You have to give yourself time to grieve. And more importantly, we have to give you time to grieve. You've lost so much, any hope of a reconciliation with Spike, your William, and I should never have forgotten the baby you two would have had..." She leaned into him, to enfold him in her arms. Offering shelter from his immediate pain. Blindly he turned towards her warmth and held on. "Why did you turn him in the first place? What did he do, or say, to earn him that punishment? Or was it that he was alive and you wanted him a vampire? With you forever sort of thing."

"He said that, in the fullness of time, he hoped he'd be as good a father to his children as I was to my Drucilla." Angel looked at her, letting her see all his pain and regret. "I couldn't handle the jealousy, that my William could foresee a dim and distant day when he would choose to be with a mortal woman rather than me! That some bitch would get her hooks into him as a baby factory and a meal ticket! I was so jealous, I couldn't let that happen, so I drained him. Then, when I realised what I'd done, I shared my blood with him. Then something shut down, switched off. I stopped thinking, I just reacted, I fled him. I left him there to perish in his first and last dawn. I felt so sure he'd hate me for what I'd done I couldn't face him. I robbed him of all his dreams of a family. I killed him and didn't even give him the peace of heaven, but the eternal threat of the torment of hell. Just because he wanted children." He looked away, to the hands clasped between his knees as they sat side by side on the uncomfortable seats.

"Oh God, the irony stinks, doesn't it?" Cordeilia was honest with her opinion, but tender with the hand she laid on his leg. "Did you really love him? Even before you got your soul?"

"I think I did. But, as with all my loves, it was a jealous, greedy love. Not what he deserved."

"I really don't know what to say, you were right, I don't understand the pain. I can only imagine and hope I never do understand it." Cordeilia leaned over and brushed Angel's cheek with a brief, chaste kiss.

"I hope you never know it too. None of you." Angel leaned into the warmth of her touch and closed his eyes, remembering his beautiful William.

"When they're ready to release Wesley, we'll go back to the Hyperion with you. I guess Wes isn't the only one who needs his friends right now." Cordeilia pulled him back into her embrace.

"What do I do now Cordy? There is no redemption. I know that, because I killed it." He cried once more. This time the pain wrenched from him was not for himself and what he'd lost, but for a sweet, shy young man whom he had loved and destroyed in 1873. "I killed it in 1873 when I killed my William."

"You go on Angel, much the same as the rest of us..." Before she could finish her speech she was interrupted by the grieving vampire.

"Don't tell me, one day at a time, am I right?" He whispered his response between the sobs that threatened to tear him apart.

"Well, in your case, one night at a time. But otherwise, you got it in one!"

"Welcome to the first night in the rest of eternity!" He smiled, shakily at his friend, he hoped she would still be his friend at any rate. "If I ever forget, just whisper William and remind me. Okay?"

"Okay" She whispered back and fell silent, waiting to see what happened next.

Not that she could maintain the silence all that long.

"So, you reckon Gunn and Wesley have the hots or something for each other then? How do you arrive at that conclusion mister?" She didn't see it, hadn't seen it all the time it had been just her and Gunn and Wesley.

"Every time Gunn looks at Wesley he sends off this wave of pheromones. I guess my William would have referred to them as 'fuck me' pheromones. And, conversely, every time he looked at Virginia he gave off this corresponding wave of the old perennial favourite 'die bitch' scent." He grinned at Cordeilia's stunned expression. "Wesley gave off 'fuck me' pheromones to both of them."

"You putting Wesley into the double room on the third floor then? The one with the balcony over looking the atrium?" Ever practical, Cordeilia thought of the temporary sleeping arrangements. At least as far as they would aid Gunn's seduction and comfort of the abandoned Wesley.

"Of course." Angel agreed. "And you can have the room on the opposite side of the atrium, if you wish. It's got the best chance of over looking their room after all."

"Angel!" Cordeilia shrieked in outrage.

"You're acting lessons are paying off, that was almost totally convincing. Only, I know you too well."

"Damn!" She muttered, grinned and fell silent to wait with him for their friends to be ready to go home.

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Chapter 9 by Shamenka and Vixen

First light found Spike laying on his back watching the sun slowly rise through an uncovered window. Exhausted as he was, he couldn't not have watched this sunrise over the city outside his firmly closed window. He had successfully completed his first night as one of the fully fledged white hats with flying colours. His planing skills had been put to the challenge and had proven themselves sound. He had done his level best to adjust to his new situation. To accept that things had happened and he just had to go on. And he had acquitted himself well on all counts. He deserved to stay up and see this sunrise.

The Skilosh demons had been so very easy to take down. It seemed that his new employers had done their level best to think of everything. He and Oz had gone in there with a rope made of a material neither had ever seen, turned out to be Artemis' hunting ropes, ergo demon proof. So, armed with their ropes and a pump action shotgun each, it had been so simple to surprise the parent demon and isolate him from his brood. Then kill the brood. There was nothing that could be done for the poor souls who had been infected by the adult Skilosh demon's parasitic virus. So they had had to kill them all. But how to do so was the first stumbling block. How to distract the parent demon long enough to get at his parasitic children? And much as he hated to admit it, it was Angel's fucking attack that gave them the upper hand. When daddy Skilosh saw the collar around Spike's neck he was all for assisting a fellow parent as much as he could. Which gave them the opportunity to separate him from his children to the accompaniment of his outraged and desperate screams. Oddly enough Spike could almost empathise with the parent demon,

forcefully separating his family like that. But he had taken too many mortal lives in his quest to procreate. One here or there, now or again, but always having up to twenty of them with him? Even the demon in Spike's mind could see that that was well beyond overkill.

Granted, Spike had never created his own childer, he always seemed to have enough on his plate with all the young demons he somehow managed to find to adopt. They came from the hordes of minions and childer other vampires created and abandoned. Much as he had been himself. Witness Harmony for one, true he could have been nicer to her, but hind sight was always twenty-twenty wasn't it?

As he forcefully turned his mind back to the Skilosh demon he remembered the fight in that stupid woman's living room. She certainly didn't live up to her damn name. Mrs so caled Sharp had been about as sharp as a blunt butter knife, and far less useful. Her dead family all around her and she stood there too shocked to do more than offer to make them a cup of coffee. His memories were tinged with the sound of the parent Skilosh crying for his dead children. As he let them wash over him his left hand unconsciously drifted to stroke over his belly. Almost as if he were actively seeking the hiding place of the baby he knew was lurking in there, somewhere. Spike pulled his hand back, almost sick to his stomach at his foolish move. He wondered if waiting up to see his first sunrise in one hundred and twenty eight years was really all that bright an idea. Maybe he was too uptight, too wound up to think straight? Maybe it would have been better to have simply come home and gone straight to sleep? Wouldn't that have been better for little bratling in his belly? The blond vampire deliberately put his hands behind his head and told himself to not get attached to the brat in his belly. He was not keeping it, so there was little point in even thinking about it. He was a demon, a vampire, a warrior on the side of right, how could he raise a baby? Even if he wanted to! What kind of a father could he ever be to a mortal child, and there was no way he was letting a vampiric child survive. That would be too cruel for words.

He forced his mind back once again to the Skilosh demons and the mess in that stupid cow's house. Dead demon goo, dead human goo too. The inadvertent rhyme made him grin. It was looking at that mess that his second great idea of the night was born. Televisé the mess and make demon existence an up front, in the face reality. Skilosh demons at the very least. Then tell the television crews that Detective Kate Lockley was the woman to speak to about the criminal activities of demons in their city. Of course he had to have Hera stay behind briefly, make the calls and sell the story to the film crew and the police. While she did that he and Oz had taken their subdued prisoner to the holding pen in their basement. Not that the Skilosh would have know he were in their basement. Once he was securely locked up they had headed over to Detective Lockley's place. Spike had hoped that she'd have been a tad more compus mentus than Mrs Gibbering Imbecile had been when they'd left the first place.

Spike rather thought the stupid mortal woman was going to be in therapy for life. It served her right, she should have paid her bill promptly and in full. Even if the money was due to fuckin' Angel Investigations, if they had paid up, there would have been an after sales service agreement to help them out if daddy demon came looking for now demised baby demon. But no, like mortals the world over, they had to renege on their contract. He had to concede that demons were not much more trust worthy, but there were rules as to fair play. One had to pay a bill in order to then go get the money back, in pounds of flesh if need be! But at least the bill was bloody well paid in the first place.

He had Oz drive him over to the cop's place, mostly because the werewolf wouldn't let him drive till Hera said it was okay. Once there he had to have the werewolf kick in the woman's door and allow him in. He knew that at that moment there was no one alive in the place. Luckily she had only just passed into death. A quick belt of CPR and they were on their way to the nearest hospital with the resuscitated woman. It was a scene worthy of Passions, carrying her out of there, duster billowing in the breeze he created as he ran. Noble vampire to the rescue! And that image did make him laugh. It had been a good job for the stupid bint that he had known how to do CPR. And he only knew that from watching daytime soaps for as many decades as he had.

Who said you couldn't learn something useful from daytime drama?

He had this vague memory of Xander stating, quite loudly and emphatically, that vampire's could not do CPR. Seemingly, his sick sod of a stupid sire had told the spotty oik that vampires couldn't administer CPR. Which Spike knew was total bollocks, he was probably better at it than most humans. After all, the air that exited his lungs was as fresh as it went in. When he had breathed for the stupid bint Lockley he wasn't forcing spent air into her lungs, was he? No doubt what his sire had really meant was that if he couldn't do something himself, then it couldn't be done! It had been his credo for so long, way back when, Spike didn't imagine the numpty would see fit to change it.

Almost idly, Spike wondered at his use of so mild an insult towards Xander as well as Angel - Angelus, whatever the deluded vampire chose to call himself. As far as Spike was concerned Liam was a perfectly good name. Granted the bleached blond vampire did somehow get the feeling that these days it was the sort of name that would grace an asthmatic, bespectacled snivelling little kid. Not a big roughty toughy dickhead like his ignoble sire. He put his mild expletives down to the chance to see his first sunrise in one hundred and twenty eight years, without the inherent spontaneous combustion problem. It was obviously mellowing him, a little. That idea made him giggle, almost carefree and childlike. And had nothing to do with himself no longer going by the name William, no, non what so ever.

He glanced at the bright rosy glow flooding his room and smiled at the absolute lack of discomfort he felt. He was seeing a new day, first hand. Not wanting to tempt fate too much he struggled out of his comfortable bed, crossed to the window and smiled out at his first new day. Then he closed the curtains, tight shut, and headed back to his bed, with every intention of sleeping.

Sleep, however, didn't want to be welcomed just yet. His mind was still replaying the previous nights activities at him. The memory of getting the drunk and drugged woman into the hospital with a pocketful of pill bottles, the contents of which she had apparently swallowed, not even his last task of the night. No, that little marvel was reserved for his first contact with the pyramid sales morons. They had to have been the funniest and best part of the entire night. Hera had rejoined them by then which had given Spike his biggest and best idea of the night.

They had all walked in, even with the wards against mortals entering, the looks on the guard Vampire's faces as he walked in with two apparently all too human human's in tow had been a picture. When he introduced himself, the look of awe had fed his much starved ego. Seemed that the name William the Bloody still carried some weight with the local vamps.

Staking that Daniel, Desmond, Derek, whatever his damn name was, the pillock anyway, staking him had been fun. Especially as he had allowed the pillock to try and stake him first. He trusted in Hera's fancy chain vest. He did suspect that it had been made by Hephaestus, one time Greek God of the Forge. If it was, he'd make sure to give thanks next time he was in the temple. If it hadn't been, right then, mere days after he had tried to stake himself, he could hardly cry foul if that pillock had in fact managed to stake him. Not that piles of ash howled much of anything anyway. It was the priciple of the thing.

It was too much, he laughed loud and long at that memory. And once he had fianlly calmed down, his brain steadfastly carried on reviewing his nights activities.

Hera had arrived at the prearranged rendezvous point and they had all gone in, as he had previously recalled. But, after the you stake me - then I stake you session when the idiot died his final death, everything had changed. He would forever remember with fondness the look on Hera's face as he claimed he survived only by Hera's grace. He hadn't lied after all, Hera had had the grace to give him the stake proof vest, hadn't she?

The power he had felt, standing up there, on that stage, preaching to his fellow vampires, was

incredible. Selling them a non existing, at that point anyway, religion. If that was how tele-evangelists felt, even before the money rolled in, it was little wonder they loved the feeling. He talked bullshit at length at them. All about how Hera could make them valued members of society again. How she and the Olympians were the only Gods that cared for them. How they were all 'The Lost children of Echidna' and for those who hadn't had a good old fashioned education she was known as the mother of all demons. That made her their mother. The mother of all demons native to their world. Of how their Gods were now strong enough to fight to get them back. Of how the one true God brigade had kept them a sub, sub class for far too long. He also reminded them all that eating, and the subsequent killing of humans, was entirely optional. There were always alternatives. Animal blood, donated blood, just don't kill the humans one fed from. Let them recover and feed again and again. After all, if they took too many humans the mortal population would wait till high noon and wipe them off the face of the planet. They might have so many advantages over humans, but they had too many vulnerabilities to them too. They were all like children sitting on a saw, a teeter-totter, humans on one end, vampires on the other. Each dependent on the other to play the game. Only, humans had the option of getting off the toy and walking away from the game all together. That idea had surprised him too, he'd never thought of it like that, not for a very long time. Not since his mother had died and he had left Gronmann's care.

And they had bought it. All if it. The vampires in that old cinema had swallowed his waffled rubbish, hook, line and sinker. They had looked at Hera and worshipped her. They had asked her blessing, in their dark, miserable hearts they had given forth belief and asked only a vague blessing in return.

Hera had had fully fledged worshipers for the first time in so very long. The Goddess had almost cried.

The vampires had someone in whom to believe. Some of them did cry.

That was the point at which he had left Hera and Oz to deal with things themselves. He'd caught a cab and headed back for their base, exhausted. He wasn't that surprised at how tired he had felt, after all he had suicided himself only a couple of days before.

Maybe that Lockley bint wasn't as daft as he had first thought she was. After all his less than sane sire had forced him to the self same point, although by a different route, as he had reduced her to. His solution hadn't been any different to hers, had it? He had to admit, in his own heart at the very least, that it had not.

He had stayed awake, waiting for his... his what? Friends? Colleges? Team mates? Whatever they were, he had waited up to make sure they were safe. Whatever it was that they would eventually become, it had felt wonderful to have people to worry about again. Seeing their happy, tired faces had been enough. He greeted them rather grumpily, and after watching Hera transfer their captive demon back to the Demon Court - he had headed for his recently found bedroom and his wait for sunrise. Spike moaned about having to wait up, about having to see the demon off their premises, about their tardy hour when he had to get his sleep. He didn't want them to know that he needed to be needed by someone. That that was probably why he had fancied himself in love with the Slayer. She needed a vampire to fight at her side, and he needed to be the vampire fighting at her side. To prove his own worth to himself if no one else. And as payment she had sicced his sire on him to do all that...

As he thought those thoughts the sun had duly risen and he had seen it, and survived.

Rolling over, he snuggled into his comfortable bed, pulled up the warm, new blankets and finally fell asleep.

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Chapter 10 by Shamenka and Vixen

In the board room of Wolfram and Hart a group of exhausted, harried lawyers sat around the table, nursing yet another cup of coffee, dealing with yet another crisis. Lilah Morgan had the floor and was desperately looking for some way to release it to another speaker. Her employers had a tendency to more than shoot the messenger.

"...Further to the aforementioned delays; the leader of the team of Shamen working on Lindsey's current problem, informed me the re-gestation will be hindered by the copious contamination of the relevant body parts with vampire dust. Taking it all into account, it will take approximately forty weeks to duplicate Lindsey's body." She finally looked at her superior, her intermediary between her and the senior partners, and fervently hoped that said senior partners didn't require a personal briefing of their current status. Lawyers tended, with an alarming frequency, to simply not come back from such meetings.

"So, where is Lindsey's spark, his soul if you would, while all this maturation and decontamination is going on?" Her boss fixed her, finally, with his unrelenting stare. Demanding an answer, not even more hyperbole.

Lilah didn't like being forced to be definite, she far preferred to be well hidden in the shadows of ambiguity and obscurity. It was little wonder she had never managed to make any mark in the property division, there all that mattered was tight, concise definition with water tight clauses.

"I believe he's in the waiting room, sir. Being alive, I can not personally check on that, perhaps Holland could? He does have a degree of freedom of movement in and around the home office these days." Lilah didn't fidget, despite how desperately she wanted to. To show any kind of weakness before any of the senior vice presidents was simply not a good idea. Damn Lindsey and his stupid lust for that skanky vampire! It was all his fault and they were now going to all this trouble and for what? She couldn't see any point to it at all. "Of course, leaving him dead is always the cheapest and easiest option. It minimises our risks and our clients risks."

"True, but sadly it wouldn't afford us the opportunity to make him squirm while he tries to explain it all away. Now would it? And then, there's always the fact that only he knows what happened in his apartment. Also his soul, his spark is down there, as you so correctly said, where we can't go ask him. We need to know what happened, what further risk there is in all this, risk to us, the company and our clients. Do we have any idea who did it? Did the detectors and surveillance devices pick anything up at all? Can we get these answers anywhere else other than from Lindsey?"

She saw that her superior was also looking for a scape goat, one that wasn't currently alive, one that could be guilt ridden, or shame-faced into signing the same eternal contract that Holland had. The sort of contract she herself was currently trying so desperately hard to avoid putting a signature to. In the end it all came down to one very simple fact; she'd rather Lindsey signed his eternity away, than she her own.

"No we can't, I'm afraid. We did run the surveillance tapes and records through every decryption process we have, and what did we find? Nothing, if he were indeed cohabiting with the vampire Darla, as previously suspected, then he must have disabled the vampire detection devices to prevent our picking her lack of life signs up. It could have been anyone, or indeed, any thing. Although, I do rather suspect it was indeed our dear friend Angel that was most probably responsible. Lindsey was pushing him too hard, too far, well beyond breaking point. As I have mentioned before, frequently, if you push Angel too far you do not get the Angelus of history, but some insane stunt double. I suspect Lindsey pushed Angel way beyond his breaking point. As a result it is he himself that has been broken, as well as Angel. And I for one do not want to come face to face with the less than sane demon that's currently walking around looking like Angel!" Lilah faced the junior member of the board that had quizzed her. She chose to look at him directly, anywhere but at the real power in the room.

"Fine, dismissed Lilah. Go get some rest, you deserve it. And thank you for your reports and input. You will, as always, be kept informed of all decisions relevant to your department." Her boss smiled at her as he bade her leave the room, the building in fact. As he dismissed her and sent her home like a naughty school child.

Terrified it meant something more than it was, Lilah Morgan stumbled out the door, out the building eventually, more aware than ever before of that little bit of space directly behind her shoulders. She suddenly missed Lindsey with all her heart, he had at the very least made an alternative target to herself. Lilah was feeling very lonely indeed.

In the waiting room a lone soul paced the area he could feel. He certainly couldn't see anything. He had a dread idea that he knew exactly where he was, how long he could expect to remain there was anyone's guess however. If he were lucky it would be later, rather than sooner that he would be let out of his light tight waiting room. Whatever delights resided in the rest of Hell he could long wish to put off greeting them. Damn Angel anyway! Killing him like that! He was no doubt hidden away someplace with Darla, fucking. His love had never been enough for the mad woman, the vampire, the whore!

He stepped a little too far and encountered yet another wall. Taking advantage of it's solid feel he slapped his hand against the surface, hoping to vent some of his inner aggressions against it. Instead he felt marks in the surface. Always curious, he explored his new discovery, instantly putting aside his anger to look at someone else's pain. It had to be more fun than his own, after all whomever had done it had felt the cause worthy of recording. Someone, or even some thing, had cut letters into the surface of the wall, that much was easy to decipher. He traced the sentences back to what felt like the beginning. He tried to read the words with his fingers. But it was almost impossible. Years of guitar playing had left him with thickened calluses on his finger tips. It was then that he realised his soul had both hands. That idea brought a smile to his face and relaxed his mind just enough.

Lindsey McDonald did something in death that he never did even once in life. He prayed for illumination, of the Fates of Gods or whatever would listen to him to lighten his darkness. Just enough so he could read would do. He wasn't greedy, a spark of light to read by was all he wanted. Not even salvation, just light.

"You never learn, do you Lindsey? What did Angelus say to you? Be careful what you wish for? Hmm? Sound familiar?" The so very familiar tones of Darla's voice echoed into the dark right behind him.

"Darla? What are you doing here? I'd have thought you'd be fucking Angelus someplace." The derision in his tone spoke volumes of what had happened to his one time love for the female vampire.

"Shows you what you and your pathetic band of lawyers know, doesn't it? Angelus killed me right after he killed you. Again! It's getting to be too much of a damn habit with him. And he killed me for much the same reason I suspect he killed you. Sadly, that reason has absolutely nothing to do with you and I fucking, and escapes me for the moment. Something seems to have happened to my Angelus, something I don't even want to think about. He's not anyone I recognise any more." Darla stepped away slightly and the sounds of cloth rustling filled the darkness. "Here, this is for you. I woke up this place, not here, and the man in charge gave me this and sent me here to deliver it. He said you'd need it and have to hide it from them. He didn't say who or what them was or were. But here's your thing. If you get this, I get a lighter sentence this time." She felt for Lindsey's hand and put a small round thing in it. As she did so it glowed slightly. Casting a warm light over his hand. "Said he was Hades or something, but anyway, you got it, I'm out of here. Bye Lindsey, it was a blast." As she finished speaking she faded from view until all Lindsey was left

with was the tiny light with which to read the words so painstakingly carved into the walls of his current location.

Lindsey put all of his resent happenings aside and went back to the start of the words he had discovered and began to read. As if a magic force held him there he couldn't stop reading no matter how hard he tried.

- I Angel, having been known by many other names want to tell whomever what brought me here. It was jealousy. Pure and simple, jealousy led to my downfall. I never could display proper emotions, I don't think I ever truly understood my feelings. Especially where lovers were concerned, and this tale concerns at the very least two of them. My precious William and the woman whom I foolishly thought of as my soul's mate. Just because I had a soul when I met her. Ironic, isn't it? I fell in love and released Angelus, yet, when I last fell in love it was Angelus' doing and his act of betrayal that destroyed it. None of us has had any luck in love. Liam didn't even know the meaning of the word love, Angelus saw it as a weakness in himself and a weapon in others, and I bollixed it up the first chance I got... -

It looked to Lindsey that he had a lot of reading to do, the light to do it by and all the time in creation in which to do it. At least he was familiar with the cast of characters in this story, it was a start at least.

In his bedroom Angel was weeping yet again. This time he was getting annoyed with himself. He had shed more tears since leaving Sunnydale than he ever had before. All of them for his William, his Spike, and his actions of a scant three days before. Now, for a change, it was his actions of more than a hundred and twenty odd yeas before. It was for the words so very neatly and carefully written in the book in his hands, his William's journal for the year 1873.

As he read, or tried to read the words before him there came a knock on his bedroom door. He recognised instantly that half timid rapping.

"Come in Cordeilia, what can I do for you?"

"I thought I'd let you know that Wesley and Gunn are now both secured in the third floor room, as planed." She entered the room fully and looked at Angel and his distraught face. "What's wrong this time? More bad news?" She crossed the room to perch beside him on the edge of his bed. Reaching out to her friend, she laid a gentle hand on his nearest hand and squeezed softly.

"No, just my William's journal. Listen, this is what he wrote of the morning after the night he went home after I turned him. Listen to his words." He moved his hand from her soft, comforting grasp and lifted the book into a comfortable reading position. He took a deep, entirely unneeded steadying breath before he spoke again. This time relating Spike, his William's words to his audience.

'It was late evening by the time I staggered home to my mother's house. I had great need of her beloved Gronmann's council. His words are, as ever, sage, embodied with the wisdom of his people. He took me aside and I told him my tale first. Together we sat at table in the kitchen. He, cutting deeply into his flesh to bleed for me. And I, watching with all the attention of a half starved beggar at a great banquet. Trasker blood is almost tasteless, but it had such a power to it. Such strength, such vigour. Soon, I was feeling better. Not exactly human again. Nothing will ever fill that shadowed place in my soul ever again. Except possibly the first sunrise I chose to greet, rather than continue this horrendous existence. But I digress, forgive me sweet muses, I anticipate events which is just not done in the arts of a chronicler. After I had drank of his blood, Gronmann took me at once to see mother. Mother looked just as she always did. Full of life, love, warmth. Will I ever feel warm again? As I looked at her a shiver straight from the depths of Hell

shot up my spine and once more I found myself breaking into tears. The important word in this tale is breaking. I felt as if all of me was going the way of Jericho's walls. Crumbling to dust. Just as surely as I would if staked. I confessed to her, there and then the plain, unvarnished facts of my new existence and sat heavily by her on the couch she had lain upon for her rest. "I am a demon, a creature to be cast in stone and mounted on a cathedral roof. I am such a hideous being that no one should look upon my visage" I confess I wept and lost all control of my face, my inner horror came to the fore and in its demonic features I sat by my mother's side and wept like no demon has before me. Mother, blessed angel, she raised her hand to my hideous demonic mask and touched my tears. She smiled sadly, knowing the loss of all my dreams that I struggled under and she spoke so strongly to me that I knew all could not be lost. Not yet, for where there is Mother there is life and hope. Always blessed hope. She touched my tears and chastised me. "Nonsense, my sweet William, Gargoyles don't cry! Therefore you can never be such a creature." She touched my tears, my face. I praise the Gods that have forsaken me thus for such a Mother and mine.... I am not a Gargoyle.. for I weep and Gargoyles don't cry...'

"She sounds wise and caring and so right. You aren't that ugly beast either. You should remember her words and get some rest." Cordeilia took the ageing volume from her friend's hands and placed it on his night-stand. "Wes and Gunn are all tucked in safe for the night, and I just stopped by to say good night myself." She reached over and kissed his cheek. "Remember, you aren't the ugly one, what's left of Angelus is."

"Perhaps, but what I was, even as a man, was uglier than any stone demon that graced any church." Angel looked at Cordeilia, eye to eye, willing her to see the truth in his soul.

"Then renovate yourself Angel. Only, not tonight, ok? Go to sleep." She walked back to the door before turning to face her friend once more. "See you around lunch time, ok? No one's planning on being awake much before lunch time. So sleep!" She admonished him and made to leave his room, a lingering echo of the story she had just heard puzzled her however. "Angel?" She quizzed her friend as she turned back to face him. "Why does everyone call him 'Sweet William' you did earlier, now his mom did too? Why sweet?"

Angel's honestly puzzled look at her question brought a genuine smile to her face. Waiting for an answer, any answer, she tilted her head to one side and smiled once more.

Was he fond of sugar or something?" Cordeilia walked back to Angel's bedside and sat beside him once more.

"No, it's just that there's a flower called a sweet william, it's small, delicate, all reds and pinks and whites and purples. All shades of my William's blushes. He was all at once delicate and strong, gentle and robust. Sweet William just fitted him, until I robbed him of that sweetness..." Cordeilia interrupted him before he could reach the deep waters of yet another brood.

"But you didn't. You read his journal, didn't you listen to what you said, what he said? Don't you realise anything from that little bit you read to me?" She was genuinely amazed at Angel's obtuseness, that much was clear to the vampire. However he couldn't see what she was talking about.

"Realise what? That I turned him into the demon he hated being? That I killed him out of my own petty jealousies?" Angel snapped at her, how dare she try and acquit him from the guilt that was his due.

"What broke him finally wasn't you turning him, Angel, it was the death of his mother. I never heard anyone say he turned her into a demon too, so she had to die at some point. That would have been the pain he couldn't have stood if he was as sensitive and loving a son as he sounded. That sweetness survived you, it didn't survive her leaving him behind. She goes off to heaven and he can never follow.." She stopped talking, what had started out as a comforting

speech had just ended up reminding Angel of the soul he had damned from heaven to hell.

She expected Angel to go off in instant deep brood mode, what she didn't expect was the laughter that bubbled up from somewhere deep within the vampire. It wasn't a harsh sounding laugh, but a robust, highly amused one.

"That's my Cordeilia, my Job's comforter. Where would I be without you?" The laughter stopped as suddenly as it started, ending on a deep soul shifting yawn. He pulled her down to lie beside him, content to feel her comforting warmth. Angel closed his eyes, listening to the heart beat that slowed and gentled as Cordeilia hugged him back. Exhausted beyond endurance, he finally fell into a deep sleep.

"Job's comforter? Sounds both rude and a question for Wes when Gunn lets me ask him." Cordeilia muttered to the ceiling as she joined Angel in sleep.

In Sunnydale, the Slayer shot awake and climbed from her bed. As she had the night before, the nightmares the worst she had ever lived through. She groped in the dark room for the battered leather duster she had taken from Dawn and shrugged it on over her night-gown. She didn't put the light on, she didn't believe she deserved that small comfort. No, it was Spike's duster she craved. It was the only sanctuary she had from the nightly round of nightmares. It was the only thing she had that brought the smell of Spike to comfort her. To wear what he had worn, to know the last body to be wrapped in that coat had been Spike's was so oddly comforting. Like he was keeping the nightmares away.

Her loss was incalculable, simply because she didn't know fully what it was that she had lost. Only that she had lost it before she had had the inclination to really know it. Now she never would. Spike had loved her, a protective love, a deep love and she had paid him back by letting Angelus loose on him.

As she fell asleep she vowed to herself that she would never fall in love again. Nor would she let anyone else fall in love with her. Being alone was all there ever was for a Slayer. Her gift in life seemed to revolve around death, she vowed never again. No one else would die for her love.

Dreaming of what might have been, she slept the rest of the night through. Wrapped in her Spike's duster.

In the third floor room they had been allocated, Gunn held Wesley close as the Englishman slept soundly. The pain and rejection from Virginia leaving him like that having taken its toll. Gunn was a patient man, he would wait, he wouldn't rush. He had Wesley in his arms, under his protection, where he knew the Englishman belonged. All the rest was gravy and could wait.

"I'm here for ya' man. Always!" He whispered as he joined his beloved Wesley in a deep refreshing sleep. Still holding his prize in his arms.

End Notes:

Be warned - the next chapter will jump forwards a few weeks other wise we'll be here for eternity waiting for something to happen LOL!

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Chapter 11 by Shamenka and Vixen

It had been three whole months since he and Oz had started their new lives. Fourteen weeks, or close enough too to not matter, of ups and downs. Of good news and the omnipresent bad news.

The current spell of bad news was that that skanky Goddess reject Glory was on the move again. This time her activities were enough to warrant Hera insisting they intervene. Spike didn't want to. He didn't want anything to do with aiding the Slayer. Not after she paid him back for loving her, and in the coin of her own choosing. And for what? For having loved her? Well, no more of that nonsense. He swore to himself, and the baby nestled within him, that he would never fall in love ever again. It just hurt far too much when it all went wrong, as it inevitably would.

Spike had to conclude that he was simply not destined for true love. Not the sexual kind anyway.

The hand not currently holding his favourite pump action shotgun rubbed over the starting to bloom bulge in his belly. As if knowing he was thinking about her, his Alicia seemed to move. Even though he knew that that was all in his imagination. She was too small for him to feel. Supposedly. He could feel her so very human warmth however. And he was positive he had felt her warmth shift. Heard her heart rate fluttering always in the back of his mind. It sounded like a very faint whisper of daddydaddydaddydaddy, and it was her heart singing for him.

Spike had vowed to her not to let her down. A private vow between father and child.

That was the only kind of love he would believe in from now on. Father and child. Not Sire and Childe, not vampire and Slayer, not even vampire and vampire. If he was feeling horny, well, that was what they had invented whores for after all. There was always sex available, and it wasn't as if he could catch anything anyway. And if he had his way, his Alicia would be the first ever child born of a male vampire to make it as the world's first official female Pope. He wouldn't count that bint in the fourteenth century, or when ever it had been. His Alicia would live a life of religious devotion and purity. Even if he had to convert to Catholicism to make it happen! Not that he seriously saw Hera letting that happen, but it was a nice pipe dream anyway.

He had never actually told Hera that he had decided to keep his child. The Goddess had somehow simply known when he reached that decision, that he would not be giving up his daughter. Especially to a family of strangers to do with as they would. Not that he thought that all foster and adoptive homes were filled with evil waiting to pounce on lost waifs and strays. He fully and readily admitted that he knew the difference between a Dickens novel and reality after all. It was just that he knew the evil undercurrents that lurked in his own world, and trusted in his own powers to navigate his Alicia around the dangerous eddies. An evil he didn't know, couldn't see, was too much for him. And love was just one such evil now. It had taken one hundred and twenty eight years, but he had finally lost all faith in love.

As always Alicia soothed him, he smiled and looked up into the grinning face of a half wolfed Oz.

"Don't say a word, dog breath!" He spoiled the snarl by smiling at his friend and partner.

Oz just grinned wider and rechecked his own shotgun.

"Be ready, you two, and cut the chatter. One wrong shot and the wrong person goes down for keeps." Hera was driving. She still didn't like Spike to drive, nor did Oz. Their joint over protectiveness drove the vampire nuts. Not that she let that influence her, she was a Goddess after all, and that automatically made her right. It said so in her Goddess handbook.

Knowing his friends fussed about him in order to protect him brought an almost living flutter to Spike's own heart. He didn't love them for it, he merely liked them, and would admit to nothing more. Looking up, towards the ludicrous scene before them, brought a sharp focus to his mind. A good score or more of actual mounted warriors, wearing chain mail no less, were attacking a somewhat dilapidated motor home. If it were a scene in a tv show or a movie he would have laughed at the implausibility of such a scene. Yet, here it was being enacted before him. Time to ride like a knight in shining convertible to the rescue of his fair Dawn.

He could hardly wait to see the look on her face as he rescued her, again.

She was the only reason he was willing to do this.

His friend needed help, his help, help only he and Oz could give.

Spike shared a look with his semi-lupine friend and saw the reflection of his own worries and fear in those so familiar features. Off they were both going, to rescue someone they had each loved. Someone who had hurt them in so totally unloving ways.

Were Buffy and Willow worth the effort?

He knew Dawn was. His sweet Dawn.

"For Dawn." He whispered to Oz.

"For Dawn!" The half wolf smiled back as best he could. The drawing back of his mouth over long wolfish fangs looked more fearsome than reassuring. But Spike knew exactly what to look for, and saw it.

He vamped into his game-face and muttered 'now' to Hera. Their mentor pushed the button that folded the roof back, exposing him to the sunlight, starting the clock ticking again. There was one hour, fifty-five minutes left on the clock.

With both young warriors sitting securely on the back edge of the back seat, blasting away for dear life - Hera finally saw just what it was her son had gotten out of his job as God of War. A pure, sensual rush of power and invincibility. Granted for the Gods it was true, but she rather suspected her young charges felt that self same rush too.

In the motor home, a frightened group of young people and their surrogate father tried to keep their enemy outside the door where they belonged. They had heard the car engine coming closer, getting higher in pitch, Dopplering towards them. They had hoped that the advent of another road user would frighten off their attackers somewhat. When it became obvious that they were not going to be swayed in their goal they all feared for the safety of the occupants in the other vehicle.

"Bloody Hell!" Giles swore from his position at the driver's seat. "I'm hallucinating, I have to be!" He stared out the windscreen at the figures sitting up on the back of the car heading towards them. Each had a shotgun. One was a werewolf and the other a game-faced vampire he readily recognised. But, it couldn't be, surely?

"What is it, Giles?" Buffy struggled forwards to look over his shoulder at the car still coming towards them. "It can't be! It is!" She squealed in undeniable delight. She leaned further forwards, as if that would give her eyes a clearer image of what, of who, lay before her.

"Can't be what? The seventh cavalry?" A queasy Xander muttered between struggles with travel sickness. He contemplated getting up to look, but decided that the others didn't need his stomach contents decorating them, so he tried his damndest to sit still.

Then the first shotgun blasts sounded out, unnaturally loud in the desert. The thunderous explosions of the shotgun shells going off, the whinnying of the terrified horses, the roar of overstrained motor home engine didn't drown out the howls of animalistic glee from outside.

"It's way better than the cavalry, it's Oz... and Spike. I swear, it's Spike. He's outside, in the sun,

not bursting into flames, being all vampiry. Shooting the bad guys and saving our asses, again!" The laughter in Buffy's voice was shrouded with a very real catch and sob. She pulled Spike's old, battered duster even closer and wiped yet another tear from her face. "Spike is really outside, he is really coming to our rescue. Like he's done before, only in daylight and with Oz. And shotguns and a woman." She raced to the back of the motor home to watch out the back windows as the car shot past them, did a hand-break turn the envy of any stunt driver and flew back towards them.

Everyone who was able crowded round to see for themselves just who it was that Buffy thought was Spike. As each of them realised that it was indeed Spike smiles broke out. In short order the enemy was vanquished. Those that survived fled, having discovered that discretion was, in truth, the better part of valour. Once sufficiently free of attackers, Giles pulled in to a long abandoned diner and stopped the vehicle. The smile that the sight of their erstwhile rescuers had brought to his face was still there. He had never, in all his life, been so glad to see a vampire and a werewolf.

Buffy in the lead, the occupants of the motor home erupted on to the cracked tarmac and rushed to the occupants of the white convertible that had pulled in after them.

"Why are we stopping?" Spike's distinctive voice asked, somewhere between vexed and frightened.

"Because I say so." The woman driving replied. She and Oz got out of the car and stood waiting the arrival of those they had saved, and for Spike to decide he had to face his fears.

Reluctantly, Spike got out the car and checked his watch. There was still one hour and forty minutes before he could truthfully seek sanctuary in the dark.

"Fuck!" He muttered.

"Language, William. Please do introduce me to your friends." Hera stood slightly in front of the day walking vampire, physically between him and Buffy.

"You already know Oz, the only other friend I see around here, apart from yourself of course, is Dawn there. Dark haired little chit behind little miss torturers'R'us there." He pointed to Dawn and her sister briefly. "Can we go home now?" He pleaded with his eyes for her to let him hide. He wanted to hide. He needed to hide.

"No, we can't. We're here to do a job, so get on with it. If you have to face the people that hurt you, so be it Spike. Suck it up and deal. As you yourself are so fond of saying." Hera did take one more step closer to the Slayer and was totally ignored by the young fighter.

Buffy ran full tilt towards the vampire she had seen suicide on that tape. The very vampire that filled all her dreams. That had died loving her. That had died thinking she had demanded Angel treat him as he had...

Reality sunk into her conscious mind as she closed her arms around his neck and was pushed forcibly away from him.

"Get off me!" Spike snarled, fully game-faced once more. "Don't touch me!" Only Oz's reflexes saved her from the suddenly ready shotgun.

"Spike!" He admonished his friend, taking the loaded firearm from his friend's trembling grasp. "Back off, Buffy." He looked from his friend, to his former lover's friend. Stating which camp he was in firmly and clearly. He would get between the Slayer and the vampire if need be, and stay there, but only for Spike's sake.

"Spike?" Buffy's voice held a timorous quality that no one had ever heard from her before. "Please, Spike, I didn't ask Angel to do... that! I didn't. I wouldn't. Ever!" If it were possible to say the totally wrong thing, to the wrong man, and at entirely the wrong time, Buffy managed it.

"I remember everything, every little thing as if it happened only yesterday! Funny, Angel never once said it was all his own idea. Buffy wants me to do this, Buffy doesn't want you touching her, I don't want you touching her.. I remember every single blow as he smashed my bones, as he ripped my skin, as he slammed my neck in Hera's collar, and I remember every second of him raping me... and fuck if he didn't once say it was all his own idea. Any of it! Fuck off, Slayer. Just fuck right off and leave me alone. You got what you want, now give me what I want!" He didn't even bother to continue looking at her once his tirade stopped. He just marched off towards the door of the abandoned diner and forced his way in.

"Oz? How, why?" Buffy's voice was almost lost in the whispering flutter of Alicia's heart speeding up in response to Spike's heightened, adrenaline rush confused state. He stood in the darkness within and listened to his daughter and the conversation, such as it was, outside.

"If he wants you to know, he'll tell you himself." And he heard the tell tale sound of Oz walking towards his dark hidey hole.

"Not the cool, calm, day walker vampire out there, was I?" He tried for humour and almost got hysteria.

"Not really, but I guess you had cause." Oz walked up to him and touched his shoulder in a calming gesture. "You know we've got to help them. Remember, this is for Dawn, not anyone else, okay?"

"Dawn! Shit!" Spike turned troubled eyes back towards the group still outside the diner. "She was there, you know? Saw everything. I had to scream louder and louder to cover her crying. Poor love." Spike headed for the door again, his behaviour being driven by his random mood swings. He was now into 'need to protect' mode, and Oz hoped that Xander would keep his idiotic trap shut, just this once. Or he'd shut it for him.

Buffy smiled as she saw a concerned Spike heading back towards the group. She stepped towards him again and tried to reach out to him as he passed her by, ignoring her. She was left feeling lost and bewildered as the vampire enfolded her sister in his arms.

"Dawn? Pum'kin?" Spike looked at the young teen that he had tried so hard to protect. "You ok?"

Dawn looked at Spike, large as unlife, standing in the broad daylight, worrying about whether or not she was troubled. Still hurting at Buffy's actions, the ones she had never called for. He was looking at her, love or at the very least tenderness shining forth, just for her. Wasn't this what she'd always wanted, dreamed of? That Spike would look at her with love and at Buffy with hatred and disdain. Why then did it feel wrong? Why did she feel compelled to act for Buffy's defence? To give up Spike's attention just to soothe her sister's raw nerves?

Because she was her sister. Buffy didn't even suspect that she knew about the nightmares, or that they all commented on her continued wearing of Spike's duster for protection and comfort.

"I'm fine Spike!" She smiled as she walked into the welcoming embrace of the vampire she had had a crush on for so very long. "I'm so glad you're ok. You are okay aren't you? You are real?" Her voice quaked a little on real, she obviously wasn't as together as she had thought she was.

"I'm real, but as for okay... that'll take quite some time yet." He gave her a sad smile. He looked almost maudlin, as if he had the weight of the world on his shoulders.

"A baby!" Tara squealed, she was finally calmed enough from the flight and fight to focus her scattered wits enough to really look at their rescuers. She stood there, pointing at Spike, beaming all over the place. "Spike's having a baby!" She looked at Willow, hoping the red head could see what she could see. The baby growing in Spike's belly. "He's got Angel's baby in his belly!" She looked at Buffy, hoping she would believe her too. "She's in his belly, can't you see her?"

"The question is, why can you see her?" Hera moved to stand beside the rather disturbed young woman who was upsetting her William so much.

"Spike?" Surprisingly it was Anya that spoke first. She crossed to Spike's side as he held on to Dawn, even though his arms were now numb and powerless as shock rocked him. He hadn't wanted them to know, he didn't want their false sympathy, and most importantly, he didn't want Xander Harris' inevitable sarcastic comments. "Is what she said true?" He spun towards the former demon at her sudden question.

Spike nodded, ashamed for his daughter, that these mortals would know the ignominy of her conception.

"Do you want vengeance? I think I can swing things with the other Vengeance Demons to get them to do something nasty to Angel? Make his cock fall off, or have his balls strangle him in his sleep. Oh, wait, that wouldn't work with him being a vampire..."

"Oh, Gods, Hera's collar, you even said as much. And I didn't think, you're still wearing it. So, you're still.. erm... you know?" Giles blushed as he finally got over his combination of shocks and approached the young vampire. "The bastard, I'll kill him." And the truth was clearly heard in his quiet voice.

Without thinking he took Spike in his own arms, he gently released the blond vampire's frozen arms from around Dawn's body and pulled him into the protection of his body's warmth.

"I suggest we get under cover, in case our missing friends turn up?" Xander's soldier mind clicked into action. A quick look at Oz's face had told him, quite clearly, that one smile, one laugh would sign his death warrant, at the werewolf's hands. Not that he wanted to laugh, well, not all that much!

"Don't! Say nothing. Do nothing. Think nothing." Oz snarled into his ear as he walked past him towards the diner.

"Two outta three wise monkeys ain't bad." Xander muttered as he brought up the rear with Buffy.

"Giles won't kill Angel." She happily informed her friend. She never once took her eyes from Spike's retreating form. It was as if she was trying to see the baby, like Tara had, through will power alone.

Xander looked at her, and didn't like what he saw, or rather, what he didn't see. Buffy was slipping away from them. It had started weeks back, after Joyce's sudden death and continued after Spike's rape and suicide... That memory took away any desire he had to laugh at the blond vampire's predicament, and served to remind him that but for the grace of God went he himself. He'd pissed off Angel far more than Spike had during the time he'd known them both. If it had been him, rather than Spike, he knew he wouldn't be coping anywhere near as well as he was. As Buffy oh so clearly just wasn't.

"Why won't Giles kill Angel, Bufster?" He asked his question in a quiet, soothing voice. Hoping against hope she would make a rational argument for Giles' rational mind cutting in before he could try and kill Angel.

"Because I will. He doesn't get to hurt my boy friends like that. I told him once before, he wasn't to come to my patch and beat up on my boy friends."

"Spike isn't your boy friend, remember? That was why you wanted someone to talk to him about him loving you?" He kept his voice as calm as he could, almost cheerful, hoping his words would trigger reality in his friend's world view.

"He loves me, I love him. We're going to be together! Mark my words Xander, he's mine." She pointed towards the vampire still being held by her watcher. "Giles will look after him for me, until he lets me look after him."

"And the baby?" Xander dreaded to think what her solution would be to that problem.

"If he wants it, I'll want it too. If he doesn't, then I won't either." She smiled at him and then at Spike. "He's my man, it's his baby, his body... and what a body!" She pulled Spike's old battered duster even closer around her body and grinned at her Spike nestled in her watcher's arms. "I'm going to talk to him." She moved only one step forwards before she was stopped by Willow. "Hey, Willow. Spike's alive... undead, what ever.. and he's carrying a baby too. Do you think he'll want to keep it? Did you know I love him?"

"I don't think telling him that right now would be such a great idea, Buffy. He's rather fragile. Give him time, and space. Yeah, lots and lots of space!" She looked to Xander for back up. The habit of a lifetime cut in flawlessly and Xander played his part to perfection as he automatically picked up on his cue.

"Yeah, he's been really badly hurt after all, he needs plenty of space to recover from it." Xander kept his face straight, through years of practice in the gentle art of lying through one's teeth to one's parents. He knew right away that he had convinced the less than thinking straight Slayer of the validity of his reasoning. All Xander could then do was hope she would act on his suggestion.

"Space?" Buffy questioned her best friends, ever. They nodded in unison. "I can do space. Can I still do friendly while doing the space though, can't I?"

"Gentle friendly. He needs very gentle friendly. And space. Big gentle friendly space." Willow prayed that she were right. What she didn't expect was a direct and immediate response to her prayer.

"Quite right my dear. Gentle friendship. Now, what exactly is wrong with your young friend?" Hera was by their side, not one of them had seen or heard her approach. She wasn't looking at Buffy, but at Tara as the damaged young woman tried to touch Spike's belly. The vampire and the Watcher seemed locked in some bizarre dance as they tried to evade the determined young woman's hands.

"Who are you? What's your involvement with my Spike?" Buffy quizzed the older woman, she didn't think she was a rival, but didn't know off hand just what she was.

Her proprietorial statement about him being 'her Spike' did not go unnoticed. Hera chose not to question her at that moment, preferring redirection to direct intervention where ever possible.

"I'm Hera." The Goddess so enjoyed the stunned looks on the mortal children's faces, it was a moment she would long look back on fondly, and smile quite evilly at. "The boys didn't introduce me, did they? Boys! Manners of toads, all of them." She smiled graciously at the group of young mortals. "And, yes it's my collar Spike's currently wearing." She saw recognition of the name finally blossom into a response, of sorts, on Willow's face. "Yes, my dear, that Hera. Now, about your young overly perceptive friend over there, what happened to her?" She redirected once

more, by pointing at Tara directly this time. It seemed, to her at any rate, that these youngsters seemed to totally miss subtlety.

"Glory attacked her, hurt her, scrambled her mind." Willow trusted this woman, this Goddess, trusted that she spoke the truth in who she was. Trusted her too that she would help Tara, if she could.

"What's your involvement with my Spike?" Buffy asked again. Her fragile mind teetering even more on the edge of the Titan's Abyss. Hera finally realised that the young woman had snapped, that her world had indeed crashed around her once too often. Her mothering instinct took over, this child needed immediate help, the other one was at least functional, after a fashion.

That, and if Spike were anyone's he would be hers, as Echidna, Mother of all Monsters was her grandmother's sister/daughter or some such. Either way her Spike had not and never would belong in any way, size or form to such an insipid creature as Buffy, the vampire slayer. Tartarus, but surely her job should preclude her forming intimate relations with vampires in the first place! Hera considered her options, brute force or ignorance. If she left Buffy in ignorance she could see Spike ripping her head clean off her shoulders, and suffering the resultant guilt somewhat loudly and publicly for a very long time to come. That left the brute force option. She was going to enjoy that one, immensely.

"Child, he is not your Spike. Not now, not ever. You have no claim on his love what so ever. He knows you have never loved him. That is the truth. That is what he, and everyone else knows. You should know it too!" Hera touched the young woman's brow with a gentle hand. As she did so the fog cleared and reality bloomed once more, in sharp harsh focus. The pain of the truth was sharp, but it was indeed the truth, reality. However unpleasant that was.

And the companion to truth was guilt, just as the companion to guilt was pain. The Slayer knew full well the pain and horror she had released on Spike, however unwittingly she had done so. The fact remained that it was she who had called Angel, who had been Angelus, who had in turn hurt Spike.

"I hurt him, didn't I? It really is all my fault, that Angelus did all that, isn't it?" Buffy looked at the back of the blond vampire who was once more talking with Dawn, having finally evaded Tara. He was still close to Giles however, she could see her watcher's own need to protect him like he never had before. What had once been scorn and derision was now concern and fatherly warmth. And judging by Spike's lack of haste in leaving his side, he too needed what Giles was so eager to offer.

"Yours and Angel's. Oh you have your share of the blame, that much is so very true, my dear. But he, Angel, has an even greater share of the blame. There's plenty enough of it to go around. Never fear on that score." Hera smiled rather sadly at the young Slayer. "Even if you do fancy yourself currently in love with him, he no longer loves you. He can't allow you, or anyone else for that matter, that power over him ever again. And yes, a great deal of that is that he blames you for Angelus' attack, and no doubt always will. He loved you and you repaid it with absolute pure hate. And again yes, I know exactly what he did to you, including how much he has never actually harmed you, not since falling in love with you at least. So, he's got skewed values and notions about love. He tried his very best, you know. To love you properly. Only, the rules of the game he learned are for a different game entirely. A game of love Angelus taught him, oddly enough. He learned them the night he died and has stuck rigidly to them ever since. He is a vampire after all. They're created stubborn. Although I dare say you would have to give the lad points for trying. Until you and Angelus, he always believed in the power and value of love." So saying, Hera moved back to Spike's side and left the Slayer to wallow in her own guilt, confident she wouldn't drown in it this time. She now had to think of what was best for the blonde haired witch. No matter what way she looked at it, life around these mortals and half demons was never dull. Especially where Glory was concerned.

She fully intended to make Glory pay for messing around in her world, with her mortals, her demon children.

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Chapter 12 by Shamenka and Vixen

They had sheltered in the dark of the boarded up diner for a couple of hours while Hera tried to do something to help Tara. While she did that, Willow filled Spike in on all that had happened in the last few weeks. Of their flight to save Dawn once Glory knew who it was that she wanted. She tentatively asked Spike what had happened to him, how he had survived.

Even though he knew Buffy was listening, Spike spoke to the red headed witch and told her of waking up on Olympus, of Hera telling him about his so called destiny. Of the gift of walking in the day light, of his ability to hit humans again. He told her about the wait to discover if he were to carry a demon or a human to term. And he even told her about his delight when he realised he could hear her heartbeat, before even Hera could confirm that she was human and a girl. He at least knew she was human. And that he wouldn't have to carry the child to term just to have to kill it if born a demon.

A profound silence followed that statement, even the normally chatty Willow fell silent, unable to find something even remotely chipper to say in response to that.

"So what are you going to call her?" Buffy finally risked a question, a neutral question, or so she hoped. She so desperately wanted his forgiveness and knew with such crushing surety that she would never get it.

Spike looked at her, he took in the tired, haggard look, the loss of so much over so little time had certainly taken its toll on her. He also saw the ghosts of guilt and responsibility that now haunted her. That feeling was one he knew in his heart would never leave her. It was the hardest and most changing lesson the world had to offer. And usually came with such a painful price tag it was hard to impart that kind of knowledge to another. He didn't forgive her, would never forgive her, certainly couldn't ever forget what she had done to him.

"If it's even any of your business, I will name her Alicia Beatrice Mansfield." He swung back to face Willow and smiled almost shyly at her. "After my mother."

"It's a nice name." Willow smiled rather sadly at the vampire. Knowing his history as she now did, she knew he wanted his mother to approve his choice of names, to approve his decision to keep the baby. "I imagine she would blush at being the baby's name sake, and also be as proud as punch that you chose her name for your daughter."

"I'd like to believe so." Spike smiled sadly and pushed away from the table around which they had been sitting. "Excuse me." He nodded to the red head and stood up, slowly he walked away, exploring their current hide out.

A staccato of hurrying steps sounded right behind him, heralding yet another intrusion in his life. He wished that the Slayer would just leave him alone. Just go away and bother some other poor fool mad enough to fancy himself in love with her. Turning to snap at her he was pulled up short by the surprise at seeing Dawn behind him, not her sister.

"Dawn? What can I do for you?" He didn't smile, he was beyond being pleasant for the moment. Willow had received the last iota of politeness in his soul for the foreseeable future.

"Don't hate her, she can't take it any more. She's not as strong as she used to be. See, the friend she thought she had, turned evil. And the enemy she thought she knew, well he turned out to be more of her friend than the other one." Dawn watched for a reaction to her words and sighed when the only response Spike gave her was one of deliberately adopted confusion.

"I think you've got me confused with someone who cares." He spoke softly, slowly, as if to an idiot. Once done he turned his back on her again. "Please leave me alone."

Dismissed, politely but still dismissed, Dawn walked slowly back to her sister and friends. It was such a gentle way for Spike to dismiss anyone, not least her. Glancing back at the vampire she had to think that he wasn't as cut off from them as he thought he was, or that he wanted to be. Maybe there was hope after all. Just maybe.

"Let's just head back to LA, you can lose an army in that bleedin' city, let alone a small group of mortals!" Spike called out from his dark enshrouded hidey hole. "Hera can ride in the damned mobile home with Tara, let's not make ourselves sitting targets any longer than we need to."

"You ride with me then," Hera wanted Spike where she could keep an eye on him, also where she could watch how he related, or failed to, with the Slayer.

After a brief battle of wills that Spike knew he'd lost even before he started he gave in, as lacking in grace as the mortals would normally expect of him.

"Okay, Xander can ride with Oz in the car. That way he won't throw up in the RV and he won't say the wrong thing to anyone about anything!" Anya certainly understood her boy friend.

"Whatever! Just move!" And Spike swept out and headed for the hideous vehicle the Slayer had chosen to escape in.

"Where are we going, exactly?" Buffy asked, not losing sight of Spike until he boarded the RV.

"Our place. And before anyone comments, Spike will just have to live with it. Tomorrow we'll reassess our options and find you somewhere better to hide out." Hera led Tara to the vehicle and knew that the others were straggling out behind her. Her first priority was going to be getting Tara to Olympus and to Apollo and Asclepius. The damage was certainly proving to be beyond her limited abilities to help.

Once in LA, Buffy had sat back and watched as Hera took Tara to be healed. She stood to the side as Dawn explored Spike's new home. It was far better than his mouldering crypt any day. She spent a good few hours just enjoying the place, enjoying Dawn's obvious enjoyment too. Buffy enjoyed knowing where Spike was in relation to her location. She kept her physical distance, just let her senses settle on him though. The Slayer had given him the space she had promised Hera and Willow and Xander that she would. She had watched him from a distance, not even listening in while he made a phone call while Oz raided the freezer for food. She even smiled as Oz and Xander made a mountain of pizza from the freezer for their evening meal. They had dished out blankets and pillows and settled everyone in for the night. She had even accepted her pillow and blanket with a warm smile.

What no one could take from her was the joy she had watching Spike watch the sun come up. Once assured of a new day the blond vampire had risen from his bed, closed the curtains and finally acknowledged her presence at his open door.

"What do you want?"

"A time machine, even though that really wouldn't be fair." She smiled sadly at Spike.

"Why?" She knew he meant why all of it, and smiled again at his brief, unshouted, question.

"I would go back in time and stop myself from making that stupid phone call. But in doing that, I'd

rob you of the day light. You look so good in the day light. All golden and shining, like you're really part of it, not just enjoying it. That wouldn't be fair. But you wouldn't have been hurt, have been..." Her face flushed as rage filled her, yet again. "I'm going to make him pay for what he did. To you, to Dawn, to all of us, but you most of all. I'll have his cold water tank blessed. I'll have all his light bulbs replaced with those daylight wave length ones. I'll coagulate all his blood bags. I'll put crazy glue in all his locks. I'll tranquillise him and remove all his furniture, every stitch of clothing. I'll out him as a demon on the Montel show. I'll paint all his windows black so he won't know it's daylight till he walks out into it. I'll think of something, I will make him pay!" Buffy had to halt her tirade to take a breath before she passed out. Then she grinned, a truly demonic leer if ever Spike saw one. "Or I could just let him see you, and baby Alicia when she's born and tell him, 'hey, this is your daughter, an' this is the last you'll see of her' and just walk away from him." She looked at Spike and caught a rather startled look on his face. "What's wrong?"

"That's one of my dreams, the walking out an' taking the baby one. As for the other ideas you've had, what coin do you want me to pay in? Should I worry about light bulbs and water tanks?" Spike got off his bed and headed for the curtains, closing out the early dawn.

"No, never. I promise." She watched him pull back his blankets and pull his tee shirt over his head.

"Fine." He muttered from within the black cotton. "Good night, Buffy." He added quite pointedly as she watched him undress.

"What?" She asked distracted by the sight of his belly, knowing a baby was in there, she couldn't look away.

"I'm going to bed, and you are no longer welcome in it. Good night!" He was sharper than he intended, but determined to get some privacy. It was his due, at the very least.

"S...s...sorry..." Buffy stammered and dashed back to the sitting room and her pillow and blanket. Sleep was a long time coming to her.

In his room Spike rolled over and fell fast asleep.

It was still fairly early, for the City that never sleeps at any rate, the dinner crowd were heading out for clubs and dancing. The early club crowd were off looking for late dinner. In an almost empty hotel a phone rang. A hand snatched it from it's cradle just as the answering machine had cut in. The voice belonging to that hand cursed softly as the caller had to listen to Angel's message over her own cheery greeting.

"...Sorry for that, didn't get here in time. How can Angel Investigations help you?" Cordeilia enquired almost convincingly sweetly.

"Get away from him Cordeilia, before he attacks you too.." And the phone went dead as the caller replaced the receiver on their end.

As she screamed the caller's name into the dead phone line the other inhabitants of the hotel ran to the front desk. She played them the ten word message and stood back.

"He's out there, it's him!" Angel headed for the door and the outside world and the search for his missing, damaged, presumed dead childe. Wesley, Gunn and Cordeilia hot on his heels. Trying to calm him down, to make him think. But Angel didn't want to think, he only wanted to feel And all he wanted to feel was Spike's body against his. Not dust, not gone, not hating him as he knew he so richly deserved.

Into the empty hotel a green skinned alien demon stepped, looking for someone else to deal with his troubles. He called out, looked about. Pushed the button by the blinking light on the answer phone, satisfying his innate nosiness if nothing else.

"Well, Angel, if you're out looking for this hotty, I suppose I'd better deal with my visitors from home myself..." He wanted to meet the owner of that voice. He left a note, but didn't expect Angel to get back to him too quick. He could feel the last traces of the vampire's dash out of there, and the fear and worry in his friends as they dived out after him.

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Chapter 13 by Shamenka and Vixen

Spike sat beside the other Slayer, the one that hadn't commanded Angelus to... twenty two weeks and a small handful of days, and he still couldn't think of all Angelus had done to him. He couldn't forget all Angelus had done either. No matter how hard he tried. He could at least differentiate between Angel and Angelus now. His tormentor had definitely been yet another reincarnation of the soulless version of his damnable insane sire. That didn't mean he wanted to spend any time in the ensouled version of the loony's company. Far from it! The greater the distance between them the better, even within the bounds of the LA city limits. He might have spent the last four months cleaning up Angel's messes, happily keeping one step behind the precariously balanced, sanity challenged sicko. That didn't mean he was desperate to meet up with him personally ever again.

He really didn't like to think of either version. Yet, there he was, not only thinking about him, but actually on his way to see him. No matter how he had whined and bitched and moaned, Hera had not listened to him. On the contrary, she had simply acquired the relevant text books on law and advised him to revise. He had not even spent a moment in contemplation of anything legal since his mother had died.

It was safer that way. Safer for the world if it never becomes a battlefield in the worst corporate take over in all history. His former employers had gone into involuntary early retirement before their supposed partners could go for a seriously hostile take over. So now he had practised law, in a mortal hearing no less, and had won. His 'client' sat beside him in the car, quiet, which was a blessing. And he sat there beside her counting down the hours, or days, or if lucky the weeks until Messrs Connors and Becker returned to the real world. And demanded their company back.

He had had to go and say the trigger phrase, out loud, in a mortal court and before a whole lot of witnesses too! All that and he had only just realised he'd been manipulated into saying it. Damn, but she was good.

He had to hand it to Hera, it was a great way to tie up Wolfram and Hart. Especially as he now knew all that they had done to facilitate Angelus' return to the world, and consequently his current situation. Paybacks had been Angelus' word of choice, and was now his too. He was even tempted to contact Wolfram and Hart's personnel division and ask for his old job back. Just so he could be there when his old bosses returned, pissed off and grumpily newly awakened. Now that was his idea of paybacks.

Spike quite honestly didn't give a rats fuck for Wolfram and Hart's chances of survival when Connors and Becker got through with them. What better way was there to snarl up a couple of extra dimensional demons, non other than with another couple of extra dimensional demons. Only, this time with pissed off ones!

It kept coming back to that. Just how pissed off Connors and Becker were going to be. A sight he had seen a scant three or four times in his previous career as a lawyer, and not at him then either. For that he gave thanks. He never wanted to face either of them that angered at him. Not that he had ever had to worry about that. He had long been a favoured worker in their division. Good at his job, good with the clients, quite patient, knowledgeable in all aspect of his chosen field of law.

What would now be called a corporate slut, or so he believed.

All of which contemplation still left him in a business suit, doing the lawyer thing and getting Faith released on probation, in his custody, to a job of his choosing in a firm of his selection. In other words, he was about to give Angel a Slayer to play with, whether he wanted one or not. Granted, researching W&H's involvement in Angel/Angelus' return had revealed their current scam to him. They were not very subtle, and not very bright either. He'd done better work over one hundred and twenty years before, and they still didn't learn from the past.

It was his ace up his sleeve. He now owned Angel's building, and had acquired the security within the dark haired vampire's mortgage too. If Angel got too much for him, he'd evict him! He promised Alicia he would. She didn't need Angel, he didn't need Angel. Even Buffy approved of his counter measures, even if Hera did argue with him over his plan.

In his belly Alicia moved and little feet poked against the distended flesh around her. Spike smiled at the feeling of her turning somersaults. Almost as if she were trying to remind him to have happier thoughts.

"You really pregnant?" Faith finally spoke, for the first time since they left the prison gates so far behind.

"Yes." Spike muttered, distracted by Alicia's movements once more. Gently touching a finger against her foot, watching the bump react to his touch.

"Like how B said?" She quizzed the now dark reddish brown haired vampire. Intrigued, despite herself. Since her former nemesis had visited her in the prison, telling her all that had happened outside, she had wanted to see the pregnant vampire for herself. To see the physical evidence of Angel's wrong doings with her own eyes. Now she was wanting to touch that moving bump too. Only she figured it might be more than her life was worth to ask to touch it. So for now she chose to remain silent on that notion.

"Yes, just as she said." The tension in Spike's voice validated her silence. She might be erratic in her actions, but no one had ever called her stupid. Not and survived intact anyway.

"And Xander's really dead?"

"As good as, when Glory's first host died she transferred to him. Always did have the knack of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. That includes a traffic accident involving Glory's host and a large truck." Spike looked up at the girl beside him. "In order to get rid of Glory, Buffy'll have to kill the current vessel too. And no other mortal males can be around, or it all starts all over again!"

"Poor B. Gotta admit she has shit luck with men." Faith shrugged as if to acknowledge the stark truth in her statement but to admit also that that truth didn't really affect her.

"Gee, thanks a lot! It's so reassuring to know that I constitute nothing more than shit luck in your way of things. Your fellow feeling warms my unbeating heart, truly, it does!" And with that Spike turned away from Faith, to watch the lights of the city at night pass him by. Like so much else out there, it all just fled away before he could even see it, let alone name it. Even his normal game of seeing how long he could stare at the back of Oz's head until told, loudly, to stop held no interest. He wasn't allowed to drive, but he was allowed to face down Angel? Somehow he felt someone had their priorities wrong.

"Oops, sorry Spike. I forgot you used to favour the B team."

"Yeah, well, it's not just her luck that's shit. Mine has been shittier for a whole lot longer than hers.

After all, I fell in love with her didn't I?"

Life in the Hyperion progressed at such a slow pace, Wesley thought they might be standing still. They might even be going backwards if they were any less lucky than they were now.

During the last four months nothing had gone right. Even that strange phone call two months before had only given Angel false hopes that had inevitably been dashed. Yes, nothing was going right, except him and Gunn.

He and Charles had finally realised what was right under their noses. When it came to relationships, they were good together. They now had what Angel, in 240 years, had never managed to achieve, an equal loving partnership.

Wesley thought of him now with pity. The dark vampire had gone out of his way to be available to fight with them whatever demons needed vanquishing, but they had both noticed Angel didn't take as many precautions as he used to. It almost seemed that their friend wanted to die, but wouldn't allow himself the escape of doing it himself. If his suffering was to end, then it was up to The Powers That Be to end it. Something they were conspicuously not going to do, as far as that miserable vampire was concerned. Indeed it did seem that said powers wanted his friend's suffering to go on indefinitely. Lucky for them of course, but rather sad for Angel.

It had been the video sent from Sunnydale that had started Angel on the path of self destruction. In the days immediately after Angel's confession of guilt he had seemed to pick himself up a little. Then that video arrived, and the blackest depression closed in on the ensouled vampire. One that none of them seemed able to lift. The strange phone call had made things even worse. He had tried for so long to convince Angel it was Xander or some one just deliberately trying to hurt him, but Angel was too far gone to listen.

In order to keep Angel's sanity with them, they decided he couldn't ever be left entirely alone. Someone must be with him more or less twenty four hours a day. He and Gunn had moved their things into the hotel, their constant presence to remind the vampire that they needed him. But they could never get used to hearing the screams and shouting, the rage and fury. They had to endure listening to Angel beat and rape Spike over and over again as the miserable vampire forced himself to watch that tape. It was his nightly penance, least he ever forget just exactly what he had done.

If only they had simply phoned rather than send that tape! Oh, he knew they had their reasons, as they had said in the oh so short unsigned note. It was to warn Cordeilia. At least he hoped that was their real intention. Didn't they realise that Angel would get to see that video record of his attack on Spike? But surely they hadn't intended to drive Angel insane? Had they made that phone call? Surely not. Surely Buffy had enough feelings left to realise Angel would have lost Angelus forever? Did they think that Angelus' actions that night wouldn't haunt Angel every minute of every day since then? That he needed constant reminding?

In all the weeks past, Angelus had been remarkably noticeable in his absence. The demon core in his heart was now fully consumed by the soul, never to see Angelus rise again. It had been Angelus' own love for his William that had finally bound demon and soul into one being. One whole being that loved a now utterly dead vampire of their own creation. And their own destruction.

Even Kate Lockley coming into the agency hadn't rocked Angel out of his depression. His only concession had been to not watch the tape while she was on the premises. She had her own problems after all, and at least Angel didn't want to make them worse by driving her away.

When she'd been sacked from her job, she had attempted suicide. Some strange man had saved her. She gave a rather scant description of the whole event. The unknown man had resuscitated her, but all she could remember were his eyes. They were so blue, so filled with his own pain. Kate claimed that if ever she saw those eyes again, she'd instantly recognise him!

Wesley had the notion that this was just an excuse for the lonely woman to stare at every young man she met. Either way, he was eternally grateful she was around. So, should he thank heavens for small mercies, or opt for asking Kate to move in permanently? Perhaps if she did, Angel would stop watching the damn tape altogether? Maybe he'd even give himself time to heal?

Wesley stretched as he stood up, he reached over to turn the computer off and as he backed away from the desk he ran into a pair of very welcome arms.

"You broodin' again, Wes?" The warm voice of his lover whispered delicately in his ear.

"Brood? Me? I fear you're mistaking me for Angel, Charles. I ponder, I question and I consider, but I most assuredly do not brood!" He laughed gently as he turned in his lover's welcome embrace, a smile dancing over his lips, ready for Gunn's teasing humour to chase the blues away.

"Damn, I'd just hit on a new anti brood strategy and wanted to try it out! See, I was goin' to do this.." He kissed Wesley. "Then I was goin' to do this..." He ran a hand up under Wesley's shirt, tweaking a nipple, gently. "And then a bit of this.." He rubbed his erection against the welcome bulge he found hiding in Wesley's pants, and smiled slyly. "But, since you're not broodin' I'd better go try it on Angel instead.." Gunn kissed him hard, demanding, and stepped away from him as if ready to go find Angel. The look of annoyance that briefly flitted over his lovers face was a treat. Wesley was so very emotive he would never tire of watching his thoughts and feelings dance through his eyes.

"Oh, I didn't say I couldn't brood. If you want to practice, I can brood."

He kissed him again.

"Brood, I can go, brood, brood... brood."

Kisses ensued once more. Then strokes. Then tweaks. Then groans as hard cocks ground together.

Gunn broke their kiss, just briefly. Long enough for what he considered a sentence of olympic proportions, considering their circumstances.

"Bugger broodin', bed, now!" Gunn pulled Wesley to him once more, not noticing that he had let slip the mildest of English expletives he'd picked up from Wesley.

"Bugger brooding? Is that what you call this therapy? You want to bugger me or be buggered?" Wesley teased, delighting in scandalising his Charles so thoroughly.

"Wesley!" Gunn admonished his lover.

"Well?" Wesley teasingly challenged.

"Both." Gunn finally admitted, laughing at the delighted expression in his Wesley's eyes.

"Like a wise man once said, bed, now." Wesley whispered.

"At last, true recognition." Gunn took Wesley by the hand and led him to the elevator, towards the sanctuary of their bedroom.

As they crossed the foyer Wesley realised that the video wasn't playing.

"It's remarkably quiet, is Angel actually in?"

"Yup, so's Kate, so we go, now, and we enjoy the peace and quiet while it lasts." Gunn paused for a kiss in front of the elevator.

It was, like many things in his life, the wrong thing to do. As his hands swarmed over his lover's pale flesh, the front door opened and a delicate cough sounded right behind him, almost scaring him into an early grave. Especially when the man in his arms opened one eye and acknowledged their visitor's presence.

"Oz! What brings you here?"

The lazy question gave way to instant alertness when this Oz person replied.

"Armageddon, apocalypse, end of the world as we know it. The usual stuff for a Monday." There was a single heart beat's quiet before he dropped the other shoe. "And of course Buffy's outside waiting to come in. Is Angel around?"

"Buffy!? What the hell is she doing here? Come to rip what's left of Angel's heart from him? Hasn't she done enough?" Wesley was into his defensive stride. He had spent long enough rebuilding what was left of Angel's shattered life to have Oz, Buffy or anyone else for that matter, come waltzing in and disrupting it. "She was the one who never can tell Angel from Angelus. She's the one that can't deal with her own problems without dragging Angel in. She's the one who..." a sound from behind him stopped him mid tirade.

"She's also the one who ain't involved with this guy, Wes. I don't recall any mention of an Oz outside of that tv show. You know, the one with the guys in prison an'.." It was Gunn's turn to be stopped in mid sentence.

"Of course, yes, well, Oz, you do know what's been going on between Angel and Buffy? About Spike?"

There was something about the smile that crossed Oz's normally stoic face that sent a chill up Wesley's spine. It made him even more reluctant to call Angel down.

A door slammed shut somewhere above them. Footsteps, male footsteps hurried along a corridor. A door slammed again. This time feminine footsteps echoed the hallway, followed by a disembodied voice.

"Look, Angel, all I said was get a life. All you ever do is sit up there and mould. It's gone way, way beyond brooding. If you're not fighting the biggest fuck of a demon in the sewers, you're lurking behind locked doors watching videos or something. So okay, something shitty happened, life sucks, shit happens. Get over it!"

That was the voice belonging to the feminine footsteps.

"Just back off Kate. Leave me alone!"

That was definitely Angel.

"You don't understand what the fuck you're talking about!"

And he was really, really livid.

"It has absolutely nothing to do with you. Leave me and my fucking unlife alone. You're more than welcome to work here, but keep the hell out of my private life. The optimum word there is private, ok? Butt out, now!" His footsteps reached the top of the stairs and paused only briefly.

Oz had one hand in his pants pocket, pressing the pager button he held for dear life. He wished he had the chance to hide a camera in the hotel foyer. He just knew the look on Angel's face was going to be an absolute gem.

The vampire glared down at the upturned face of a slightly amused werewolf. He had no idea why Oz was there, but was glad for the distraction. He guessed Kate would have the grace not to continue the argument in public.

"Oz? What are you doing here?"

Gunn and Wesley answered first .

"Armageddon, apocalypse, end of the world as we know it." Gunn supplied.

"The usual stuff for a Monday." Wesley added. "Or so it would seem."

"Trouble?" Angel asked, hurrying down the stairs, ready to face any monstrosity rather than endure another second alone with Kate. He watched where he was heading not wanting to fall down the stairs and make an even bigger fool of himself than he already felt. He didn't notice the formerly blond vampire walk in.

"You could say that, Peaches. But then, trouble always was your first, last and middle names, wasn't it?"

It was the first time any of them had seen a vampire faint.

Oz had been right, the look on Angel's face, that split second before he passed out, had indeed been an absolute gem.

"Spike?" Wesley voice squeaked.

"Oh, do state the obvious." Spike looked to his sides and his escort of Slayers. "Those sofa's look comfy, shall we ladies?" He offered each of them an arm, more to hide his own hyper nervousness than good manners. Neither girl missed that fact, but neither girl was rude enough to decline his offer.

"Sure Spike." Buffy smiled up at her escort.

"Sounds good t'me too." Faith added.

"Did you notice the unconscious vampire on the floor?" Buffy leaned over and quizzed Faith once they were seated.

"I did, a bit unprofessional I thought." Faith replied.

"I thought Cordeilia was the one that wanted to play at being a cheesy actor type." Buffy added.

"Deilia? Acting? Wouldn't she need talent?" Faith asked.

"Apparently not!" Buffy sat back, sharing a cold hard smile with her co-slayer as she did so.

"What is going on?" Wesley crossed over to the seated trio and glared at the formerly bleached blond vampire and realised. Spike was definitely there, definitely unalive as a vampire ever was, and still pregnant. "The collar," he whispered, not sure what it was he wanted to ask.

"Can't come off without killing me and the child. Boy, aren't I the lucky one?" Spike's voice dripped with pure sarcasm.

Standing there, looking at him, knowing what Spike had suffered at Angelus' hand, Wesley couldn't really blame him.

"Up you get." Gunn's soft voice coaxed their friend onto his feet. The hand helping him up never left his friend's arm. Not even for a nano second. "You ok?"

Angel looked so confused, so lost, so desperate for his dream to be real, that Gunn's heart twisted into bigger knots than ever for his friend's pain.

"It is Spike, he's here, he's really here." Angel twisted free and lept towards the sofa and his child.

"Spike!" He reached out, aching to touch him, to make sure he wasn't dreaming. As he went to pull the younger vampire into his embrace he noticed the prominent bump in Spike's belly. A split second before the fist shot out and punched him hard.

"Don't you dare touch me. Not a finger, not even a hair!" Spike snarled at his sire.

"Oh God Spike I'm sorry. So very sorry. It was Angelus, he was loose, he..." The stammering vampire was interrupted by his furious child.

"Funny how it's never you when you do something purely evil. Isn't it?" The smaller vampire stood there, trembling with rage. All his fears fell aside in the wave of utter fury that washed over him. "See this?" He pointed to the bump in his belly. "This is a baby. Your fuckin' baby. An' I can't get rid of it, 'cos if I do, I die too. Don't give me sorry. You beat me, raped me, n' gave me this, isn't that enough? Sire?"

"Raped?" A quietly shocked female voice asked. It was obvious to Kate that both Angel and the blue eyed man he was staring at hadn't heard her. Blue eyed? She looked harder at the newcomer and his incredibly hurt and angry blue eyes. She knew those eyes. She raised a hand and silently pointed at the red haired man as she turned to look at Angel.

Angel was shaking so badly his voice was barely a whisper. "I know. I knew what I'd done from the day after I got back here. But I thought you were dead." Tears ran freely down his face as he struggled to find the words to explain. "They sent me a video, it had everything recorded there. I saw exactly what I did to you, every single horrific moment. I watched as you ended it, and believe me, I knew it was all my fault. Angelus loved you so jealously. Twice that jealousy has aimed itself at the one he loved most. This time even he was broken by what he'd done, but it was all too late. At least that's what I believed. I don't understand how this miracle's brought you back to me. But it *was* you that phoned. You are really here, and with our child." Angel reached out to try and touch the living bump Spike carried.

"Child?" Kate asked, a little louder. Still not getting any attention from the involved and deeply divided occupants of the room. She was now really confused, since when could men have children together?

Spike backed away and growled. "I have not come back to you. Don't touch me - or her. Do you understand? She's my child now. Get this clear. She is my child. Mine! She will never be yours. Ever!"

Spike glared furiously into Angel's eyes. His sire stared back stunned for a second, then dropped his gaze and just stood there hunched and defeated.

The smaller vampire's words were sinking in. A daughter, his beloved Spike was carrying their daughter. For a moment his undead heart soared, then crashed heavily. His crime would be punished. He would never be allowed to know her. "At least you're alive, thank God." he whispered.

"On the contrary, foolish vampire, that misbegotten sod of a God you pray to had nothing to do with Spike's survival. We did." Hera swept into the hotel in full regal glory. Every inch the Queen of the Gods. "I am Hera. I guide Spike's journey. Not you. Not your God. Now sit down and be quiet!" She pointed to another chair and Angel was compelled to sit. He was very quiet.

How could he mind. He had a good view of his childe, and right now he would settle for just sitting there gazing at him forever; pregnant, furious, and still just ...amazing.

Kate looked at the older woman that had just joined them. Hera? What kind of name was that? The only time she'd ever heard a name like it had been in that tv show with the big buff guy in ugly leather pants. That Hera?

"Hera? Goddess of whatever Hera?"

This time the strong willed woman with her blue eyed rescuer took notice and nodded in response.

"Now, we have a battle to get ready for. Clear all mortal men out of here, and we shall begin." Hera swept fully into the foyer, ignoring the outraged shouts from Wesley and Gunn until she stood face to face with them.

Battle? Mortal men out of there? That was enough, Kate stood there channelling her inner cop. If trouble was brewing then she wanted all the details now!

"Will some one please explain to me just what is going on here?" She yelled this time. And was still ignored. Her rescuer and her seriously broody friend were staring at each other. One with a look of fear, the other with a hunger and longing. All the while Angel looked at blue eyes it seemed that Wesley and Gunn couldn't look away from the new woman amongst them.

Niether man would take this woman dismissing them like that, no matter who she was. If there was going to be a battle, they would face it as they always did, side by side with their vampire friend. The Goddess of Marriage sighed, they couldn't be expected to understand the risk they caused. She looked into the souls of the young men before her and saw their love bonding them together. She smiled. Her sons and daughters would have run from that smile, but to the mortal men it looked so benign.

Gunn was suddenly very aware of the heat radiating from Wesley's body. The smell of his lover's warm skin reminded him of safety, of comfort of their previous nights passion. He couldn't help it he was getting hard just remembering being with Wes.

"I beg your pardon, Madame, whomever you say you are, but I will not leave my friend and employer to the less than tender mercies of these two Slayers!" The way Wesley pronounced the word 'slayers' would have his audience believe he had just given voice to the foulest curse word

the world possessed.

The Goddess swung to look at him. She said nothing, just stood there looking at him. Then she raised a single eyebrow and smirked at him. Wesley tried to step away from her but collided with Gunn's body instead.

"You okay, Wes?" Gunn held on as he felt their bodies touch. He would swear his body was vibrating at all the points it connected with Wesley's.

As soon as they connected Wesley was aware of Gunn's desire for him. For him! Of all humanity that wonderful man loved him. He wished he could sing it from the stars, that wonderful Gunn loved him, emotionally, spiritually and blessedly physically. He really needed some of Gunn's anti brooding therapy. In him, pounding his body in to the mattress, and right now!

He couldn't pull free of those wonderful arms if he even tried

Angel looked away, briefly, as he smelled Gunn and Wesley's growing arousal. The foyer reeked of 'fuck me pheromones' and that sweet scent was having an effect on him. As he felt his own body hardening he quickly glanced back at his Spike. He had died his hair, he looked so much like his beloved William it was as if Hera had plucked him from the past, just ready for him to love again. Yet, he knew this was not his mortal William but the demon infested Spike he had created out of a jealous rage. All because he couldn't stand the idea of his William fathering babies. How perverse that he had now fathered a baby in his William's body.

If only he hadn't let Wolfram and Hart get to him, Angelus wouldn't have been able to win his last freedom. He wouldn't have tortured his Spike. But then also, Spike wouldn't be carrying their baby. A little girl! Angel couldn't stop looking at his William, and the bulge that was their daughter. He vowed to himself he would protect both of them. No matter what Spike had said, somehow he would allay his fears. If there was even the smallest chance, he would fight to win him back. Both of them.

Angel closed his knees on his palm together hands, trying to crush the growing erection he was sprouting by will power alone.

"Look, can we get on?" Buffy could smell something, she wasn't too sure what, but it flowed from Wesley and the black guy holding onto him for dear life. "War, wicked evil Goddess, good nice Goddess, save the world for the forces of good and order and little babies?"

"Red's not here with the others yet." Spike looked at Buffy as he spoke. He turned away almost immediately, as if he couldn't stand to look at the blonde woman's face.

Buffy's face reflected her hurt at his turning away from her. He wasn't angry, he didn't shout, it was clearly his indifference that affected her so strongly. He wasn't sure how long Buffy had known Spike was once more unalive as ever he was. And to be truthful Angel didn't want to think on how long she had kept this a secret from him. That way lay anger and he never wanted to visit that rage anywhere near Spike ever again. But she should have told him. Trusted him enough to know Angelus was gone, that Angel ...

How was she to know? She was the Slayer, not Omniscient! But wasn't Hera a Goddess of some sort? Shouldn't she have known? And done what? Told his terrified child that it was okay, Angel wouldn't rape him anymore? At least he didn't trust Buffy any more than he would seem to trust him. He had turned away from her, physically.

It was a spark of hope for Angel, he felt sure it meant Spike no longer fancied himself in love with Buffy. Probably didn't even like her either. Yet, there he was, with her sitting by his side, right were the dark vampire longed to be.

"And there're randy mortal guys wanting to make out in the room. D'you think they'll let us watch?" Faith added her own spin on the events unfolding before her very eyes. She had never thought of Wesley as a sensual being, but the smell in the air proved her so very wrong. She leared at her former watcher and his boyfriend.

"Eww, Wesley's Wesley, he doesn't do sex. He's Wesley!" Buffy squealed, rather disgusted at the very notion of her former watcher and sex.

"Doesn't do sex! Fuck! Girl, what planet are you on? Planet Blonde perchance? Damn right Wes does sex, and with me. So hands off!" Gunn pulled his lover against him, firmly, rubbing his hard cock against Wesley's butt.

"Then, go, be with your Wesley. Be safe!" And Hera pushed the last bit of power at them. In the blink of an eye they knew why Hera wanted them gone. That they were in deepest danger if they stayed. And more so that their friends were also in deadly danger if they didn't leave immediately.

Wesley nodded, agreeing with the woman he now accepted was a Goddess. He turned to Angel and reached for his friend. Getting his attention with a light touch to his shoulder he knelt beside him, whispering.

"Slowly, Angel, gently. Bugger making your father proud, make your mother proud instead." He smiled at his friend and smiled over at Spike too. "Good luck, in everything." Rising, he crossed to Gunn's side. "Where can we go to be safe?" He asked Hera.

"Let them go to our place. Show them, Hera, please?" Spike offered the safety he knew the mortal's would find in his home, with Giles there too.

Hera transferred that knowledge to them too. And bade them farewell.

"I know where that is.." Gunn's deep voice faded swiftly as the night swallowed both men heading off to the truck Gunn drove.

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Chapter 14 by Shamenka and Vixen

For a brief second, silence settled in the hotel foyer. Then the door opened yet again as someone new rushed in. All eyes tracked to Cordelia - except Angel's, he still couldn't tear his eyes away from Spike.

"Angel, I had a vision. It was Spike he..." She stopped short and gaped at the vampire sitting in front of her, large as unlife. Buffy was on one side, Faith to the other, with Angel across the foyer, sitting staring at him like he was a starving man's last meal. "Oh, he's here. Damn, cross town traffic was pretty heavy. Sorry!"

"You could have phoned." Buffy pointed out.

She glared at the Slayers. "Some things shouldn't be discussed over the phone. Like some things shouldn't be sent as anonymous video tapes either." Then she turned to coo at the vampire. "Spike! You're undead! This is so cool! And hey, less blond than I remember. Looks good on you."

"Can we get on? Before my headache explodes fully?" Spike had had enough, that much was very obvious.

"What can I do? I'll do whatever you ask of me, fight whoever you want fighting. Anything, anything at all." Angel started. "Please, you must let me help you."

"Oh yeah? Why?" Spike asked, sneering at his sire.

"Then I'll have time. Time to show you." Angel pointed out, never rising from his appointed seat.

"Show me what?" Spike spat back at him quickly, glad of the distance between them.

"Time to show you how sorry I am that I ever hurt you - try and make something right from all I've done wrong. Damn it, Spike please, I love you. Just give me chance to earn your forgiveness."

"And you believe this shit?" Spike threw his head back and laughed, the touch of hysteria in that sound indication enough that he didn't trust Angel, didn't forgive him, didn't love him. Was in truth very, very frightened of him.

That was going to be Angel's first task, to allay those fears.

"Look, will someone please tell me what the fuck is going on here? There's been mention of rape, of death, of pregnant men, or vampires or whatever. We've had Goddesses and bimboids bursting in, Wes and Gunn dashing out. Like I said earlier... What the fuck is going on!" Kate stood in the centre of the foyer, every eye on her, not a sound could be heard, not a whisper. Slowly, Angel stood up and faced her.

"Remember when you told me to get a life?" He waited as she nodded, slowly. "You wondered what had happened to make me as 'broody as all hell on a wet Tuesday' as you nicely keep calling me?" Again she nodded. "About four and a half months ago, at the end of a long period of torment from Wolfram and Hart." He met her eyes, letting her see clearly the pain in his. "I told you about them resurrecting my sire. Anyway, I got a call from Buffy. That's Buffy!" He pointed out the blonde girl standing by Spike's side.

For her part Buffy waved at the strange woman Angel had pointed her out to. Spike looked at Buffy and wondered how the young woman managed to get so much sarcasm into a single small hand gesture that didn't involve only two fingers. Shrugging it aside he turned to see what Angel would do, or say, next.

"She wanted me to have a talk with Spike. That's Spike, my childe." Spike declined to acknowledge Angel's words in any way other than staring at him. Angel didn't mind Spike's silence, he was at least there, alive. He continued his story, not looking at his friend, but at Spike as he spoke. "I created him in 1873, I betrayed him then and over and over again, and finally I betrayed him four and a half months ago. Angelus was in control and he is me without the slightest inkling of what guilt is. At least he was. The demon and the soul merged because the demon tortured, raped, impregnated and drove Spike to his final death. As Angelus I found these demons with that collar round Spike's neck. I took it from the demons, put it on him and did what I already said. I did it just because the thing has spikes. Spikes for Spike, I never said Angelus was original. He was and is still here, always will be jealous of anyone getting near our Spike. Like I am, only I know it's wrong. And I'm sorry."

Spike looked at his sire, looking for Liam, for Angelus even looking for Angel, if he really was a discernibly different being. All he saw was all he ever saw. The demon that had created him out of spite. To be jealous there first had to be feelings there, something to be jealous of.

"You trying to convince your bint or yourself?" He snarled his question at his sire. "'Cos you sure as shit stinks ain't convincing me!" He turned to the woman he had saved all those months back. "Listen lady, I didn't revive you to have you listen to shit like this. The truth is he felt like it. Felt like creatin' me, felt like torturing me, felt like raping me. If he'd known what the fuckin' collar was he'd never have touched it. He's taken parenthood from me once, he'd never willingly offer it back to me. He's a rapist, a torturer, a sick fuckin' bastard all the ways you look at it. That's all, pure and simple." He turned to Hera and begged her for escape, silently, with his inner prayers.

"I'm sorry Spike, you go nowhere, we need you, we need to fight Glory where we have the upper hand." She spoke aloud to him, as she always did, the silent, unspoken words of duty, of destiny, of all the noble and bright reasons went unsaid, unshown, but never unthought.

"Isn't there a fluence, a magic something your Goddess friend here can put on Angel to prove that he'll not hurt Spike like ever again?" Cordielia asked the group, smiling in a hopeful way.

"Hera?" Buffy spoke the name hopefully. Not sure herself if she hoped the Goddess could or couldn't do as she would be actress asked.

"That could possibly be arranged." Hera smiled at the Slayer, then looked first at Angel and lastly as Spike. "There is something Apollo or his boy can do to modify his behaviour along those lines. It's not in my field, so it would have to wait until after this damned battle however." She saw that Spike knew what she thought her stepson could do. A chip very much like the one he had had in his head for so long. "It's a drastic step, but if I were the one requesting it, they'd have little cause to refuse."

"Would it be a blanket ban on hitting vampires or just me?" Even though he hated his sire and all that he had done to him, he didn't want him to die at the hand of the first pissed off vamp to come along. And that notion threw him for a loop. That he still cared even a little bit? Or was it that he just wanted the privilege of staking the sick fuck himself? He tried so very hard to make it that choice.

"Oh, very specific. And Apollo would know every time he has those kinds of thoughts, if he ever did." This time she fixed her gaze on Angel and left it there. "Well, vampire? Are you willing to protect your childe from yourself?" In truth she half expected him to prevaricate, to refuse even. To demand time to think it over at the very least. Not his instant agreement.

"Yes, very willing. Do it, whatever it is, if it means my Spike will feel safe around me again."

"What do you mean again? Like I was ever safe around you?" Spike looked Angel square in the eye as he damned him.

"You were, a long time ago. When Liam Saunders courted William Mansfield and won his heart. Then I had to go and spoil it all." Angel turned from his estranged childe to the Goddess. "Do it, now!"

"Isn't this all a bit sudden?" Buffy tried to put the brakes on the situation. She didn't want Spike to feel safe with Angel. She wanted him to feel safe with her! Yes, she knew he didn't love her anymore, but she was fast learning to love him. And she needed time to remind him of what he had once upon a time felt for her. He was hers and she steadfastly refused to share him with anyone, especially Angel!

"If it's what it takes, Buffy, Spike has to feel safe." Angel smiled at her, he could smell her attraction to his childe, he wasn't having her as Spike's only shelter from all the badness out there, himself included. "What are you going to do?" He asked Hera directly.

"You really don't listen do you, Angelus? What did I just get through saying? I am not Goddess of Healing, I'm empowered in Childbirth and Faithful Marriages. Bloody Christians, you never did learn anything of value. Only endless reams of Pagan Gods are bad! Why are they bad oh wondrous priest? Because we say they are bad! Let me spell it out in simple little words for you: I am not Goddess of Healing, I can not put the behaviour modification chip in your head. My stepson and his son are the ones for that and, oh my, they are so very not here!" Hera glared at Angel, not dropping her eyes from his face until he blushed and looked away first.

"Do you talk to Zeus like that?" Spike asked her, smiling at her. "'Cause if you did I don't see how he ever had the balls to betray you!"

"Ah!" Hera sighed deeply, eyes dancing with rekindled mirth. "That's where I went wrong! I should have shouted at him then, hmm?"

"Or just nailed his balls to a tree." Faith offered her own theory on husband training.

Hera looked at the young, dark haired slayer and laughed. The sound of pure delight filled the foyer as she put a warm arm around Faith's shoulders.

"I think I just might try that when I next get home. With our greater involvement in human affairs it won't be too long before the old goat comes here and sees all the near naked pretty young things on offer. But if I nails his balls to a tree..." She giggled again and hugged the slayer once more. "Sorry, but I can just envision his face.."

Apparently so too could Faith, she turned into Hera's embrace and laughed right along with her.

"Now that that's sort of settled, can we get back to this bloody battle... shouldn't the others be here by now and shouldn't we be getting ready?" There was hope for his safety on the horizon. For the first time since they realised this battle was coming, he was eager for it to happen. Finally, with so many people around them he was beginning to feel somewhat safer in his sire's presence. For the first time since he had arrived at the Hyperion Spike turned his back on his sire.

Angel had never been so happy to see the back of Spike's head since the last time he and his William had made love. All the violent sex he had had with his childe in the intervening years would never count in that tally.

Spike paced the foyer. Swinging like a pendulum, a different emotion at the apogee and perigee of his journeys arc. He was waiting for Red and the others to arrive. Their motley band of warriors for good against the truly demonic Godhood of Glory. He didn't give much for their chances. Then he thought of the passion and belief his side had going for them and didn't give much for Glory's chances. No one threatened his Dawn and lived to tell the tale. Not if he could do something about it.

From the office area Angel watched his childe pacing. He wished he could take him in his arms and protect him, and their baby, from all the fears he saw echoed in Spike's body language. Even if the biggest fear in Spike's life was he himself.

Still seated on the sofas both slayers sat with Hera, the Goddess sitting directly between them. Forcing them to face the battle ahead, not their petty squabbles of the past. In between refereeing the girls occasional snipes at each other, the Goddess of Marriage alternatively watched Angel and Spike. She saw the love and pain in Angel's so called imposed soul, and wondered if she should ever tell either vampire that it wasn't a soul Angelus had been missing, but his conscience. That young man had been born with no sense of guilt what so ever. A true sociopath, only his dislike of the pain of punishment had held him in check as a mortal. A fact that the demon in his soul simply took advantage of. Conversely, young William Mansfield had had enough guilt for several men in his soul. No doubt why he had never lost touch with his true soul, no matter how hard he tried to deny it.

Even vampires didn't know they all had a soul, the core of their individuality, just as they had been as mortals. But their parasitic demon kept that fact hidden, telling the human mind it had no soul left, that all that remained was eternal despair. Months of observing young Spike and the other vampires in the temple had shown her that the demon that touches them controlled so

much of what they perceived as their remaining humanity. But if they could reach beyond the demon the humanity could reassert itself, a little at any rate. Some more than others. Like in all things, everyone was different.

Looking at Spike, at his true soul, she saw that in all the time he had been with Drucilla, he had never betrayed their relationship. Not once. Even though he hadn't really loved her in the beginning, he had come to love her for her own being in the fullness of time. Although only after their sire had abandoned them. Despite everything he had remained steadfastly loyal to her, ignoring her countless affairs with other male creatures, not only vampires. Until she went one step too far and his love turned to loathing, by way of heart break, again.

"He never once betrayed Drucilla with another lover. Not once!" She muttered, only half aware that she had spoken aloud, even if in a whisper. The slayers had heard her. As did Angel, that much was evident from the way his head whipped over to look at her and then back to watching his beloved Spike.

"He's loyal to his lovers, and friends, and those he considers family." Buffy pointed out. All but canonising the younger vampire.

"Man, one hundred years and he's only had the one fuck bunny?" Faith asked, somewhat less subtlety than Buffy had put it. "And then Angel there happens?" As she looked at the formerly blond vampire she felt something stir. Not love, not desire, not even sympathy. But understanding, fellow feeling. She knew exactly where he was coming from. "Poor bastard."

"He had Harmony, and he loved me for a while. But I didn't understand. Didn't see what made him so special, so unique." Buffy leaned in against Hera. "Wish he still felt like that about me now. We could raise Alicia together, as parents." She sighed again. "But I suppose being Auntie Buffy is going to be better than nothing."

"It's going to have to be, child. You killed any love he had for you with a phone call. Yes, I know. Before you drag it all up all over again. You didn't know Angelus was loose. That's not the point. Not all of it anyway. The fact that you phoned anyone, especially Angel, to deal with Spike's love for you, like getting someone to kill an unwanted pet, that is what he'll never forgive." Hera hissed her comments back to Buffy and pushed her awareness out towards her missing children. "They're on their way. Another minute maximum and the Key will be here." She faced the door and Spike as he paused mid arc. She briefly wondered if he had been listening to their quiet conversation. Casting a quick glance at Angel showed her that he had continued to listen. So now he had the name of his daughter and a single ray of hope, that Spike would never again think himself in love with Buffy.

The doors swung open and Willow entered with Tara shadowing her the other side of Dawn. A couple of women that Faith only latterly realised were vampires came in after them. At least one of them was, the scent on the other one was confused.

"Hi! We're here!" Willow sing songed her greeting, hugging Spike as she saw his open relief at their safe arrival. "And this is for you. Go change from lawyer man into fighter man." She handed him a bag and pushed him towards the back of the foyer. "And don't forget the chain mail!"

"Yes mother!" Spike took the bag, the instructions and Willow's worrying all in good stead.

"Need any help changing?" The female vampire asked, rather suggestively. Which earned her synchronised glares from Angel and Buffy.

"No, that's okay, but thanks for the offer anyway Harm." Spike disappeared into the gents toilet to change for the up coming fight. As he did so he did not see the darkening glower on Angel's face as realisation dawned on him. This blonde vampiress was Harmony. The female Spike had

taken as lover after Drucilla broke his heart. This one was his rival, not Buffy. Spike still liked this Harmony.

Angel hated her already.

Sitting in Angel's bedroom, tears streaming down her face, Kate now knew what heavy secret the brooding vampire had been hiding all those months since her arrival. There, on the bright, shiny and new television Angel had bought himself she had watched the rape, the suicide.

Cordeilia wasn't in any better shape. She had seen and heard the tape so very often, yet it never failed to affect her. Even though she knew that the victim was down stairs, as unalive as ever he was, it still hurt. Knowing her best friend was even capable of such an act, hurt.

"Thanks for showing me the tape. It couldn't have been easy." Kate gave her companion a watery smile. "At least we can be grateful that Angel does feel remorse for his actions. If he didn't... Damn, but then I'd be first to stake him myself!" Anger was brewing. She had done all the required sensitivity courses, she knew how to empathise with a victim. She knew how to distance herself from that same victim. What those courses had never taught her was how to cope when the victim had died, and you'd seen that victim die, and then come back to life in time to save yours.

"No, you'd be way down the line Kate, I'd be first, Wesley and Gunn right along with me. Buffy only escapes staking because she's a human. Or so I'm told." The would be actress was telling the absolute truth. Her hatred for the blonde so called Slayer down stairs was a very palpable thing.

"You hate her, don't you?"

"Yup, even when I was one of them, the so called Scoobies, I still hated her. She was so arrogant. Okay, I can be a stuck up bitch with the best of them, but my arrogance never caused that!" She pointed directly to the now thankfully blank screen. "I have never set myself up as judge, jury and executioner over anything more profound than who was in and who was out in the High School popularity stakes. If somebody says they love me I either say 'yeah' or cut them down to size myself. That's why we've got tongues in our heads! To use them for something other than oral sex and ice-cream!" She looked ready to punch someone, a diminutive blonde someone.

"I think we'd better get down there. The others might have turned up by now." Kate stood up and headed for the door, Cordeilia hot on her heels.

"But don't you think Spike looks kinda sexy all pregnant and hurting though?" She asked the former cop, obviously saying the first thing to cross her mind.

"Well, actually, yeah, I do. But, can you see Angel letting anyone close enough to hold him and pet him and make it all better? I can't!" Kate headed for the stairs and the foyer below.

"Me niether." Cordeilia agreed.

They arrived just as Spike exited the gents toilets, suitably attired for the fight to come. Still in black pants and black tee shirt, just wider sized, the younger vampire looked even better than he had in his business suit. The fine chain mail he wore over the tee shirt and bump was so fine it almost looked like fabric.

"Wow, warrior Spike to the rescue!" Cordeilia smiled at the suddenly blushing vampire. She

linked an arm through his and lead him forwards. "Have you eaten lately? Are you hungry? We got blood bags in the kitchen. Pig, cow even a couple of human I think." She looked from the vampire towards the kitchen door, her eyes swinging past Angel in the process. She let go Spike almost immediately.

"I can't drink human blood. It's one of the restrictions on me being able to go out in the daylight." Spike watched that piece of news strike Angel from the corner of his eye, mostly he looked at the former cheer leader and caught the increased tension in his sire's body. "I could go a cup of pig blood, if you have any little marshmallows to float on top though." He smiled as she moved slightly back from him, Angel's sub human vocalised growl impinging on her subconscious.

"Can do." Cordeilia stepped even further away from Spike, covertly watching Angel calm down as she did so. She had to conclude that her friend was one seriously in love vampire. And possibly on a hiding to nothing in getting his Spike back. "You can walk by day? Like out in the daylight day?" She suddenly realised what Spike had said to her. Proving to one and all that Cordeilia Chase had grown up, she did listen to what other's had to say.

"Only for a little while. I try not to do it on a whim, much!" Spike grinned at her. "Does help with the case work though. You think you're safe from vampires, just 'cos the sun is shining? Think again fuck wit!" Spike enacted the role he was describing. "Vamping out in the daylight sure puts the willys up a lot of folks." He added, somewhat tamely.

"I bet!" Cordeilia's awe-struck voice headed further towards the kitchen. "Pigs blood, I'll just get that." She turned away from Spike and looked at Angel and his own awe-struck expression. "Angel, do you want to eat?" He shook his head, not even looking at her, which annoyed her no end. "I remind you that we have a real big battle ahead and you haven't eaten at all today, and I can't even guarantee yesterday had you eat either!"

"Fine, same as Spike, only without the marshmallows. I'd rather save them for chocolate." Angel spared a glance and very brief smile for his friend before he turned back to Spike. "What's it like?" He asked his question directly of Spike.

"Huh?" Was Spike's less than coherent answer.

"Walking in sunlight? What's it like?" Angel's face fell as he realised daylight gave his childe a sanctuary he simply couldn't go in to. Someplace he could run away from him. Anywhere, outside, in the warmth of the sun.

"Bright and hot mostly. Give's me a bit of a headache even with shades on." Spike answered his sire automatically.

"Does too. Gives him the headache, like he said." Oz finally spoke up, the rest of the group might have been forgiven for thinking he had vanished somewhere. Even after living with Spike and Hera for several months, he still managed to cloak himself in silence most of the time. "Real tension stomper."

"A good massage would probably sort that out." Angel talked directly to Oz then flicked a glance at Spike. His childe 's face was screwed up on abject horror.

"Massage? That requires touching, requires going near the collar. One false move and me and Alicia are just so much dust." And he turned away from the others, looking towards the kitchen door and the young woman beyond. Focusing on anything other than the mixed bag of feelings the very idea of intimate touching brought boiling to the fore.

"I didn't think... sorry." Angel tried to offer his heart felt apology for his faux pas, but as always Spike chose to take even that the wrong way.

"What else is new where I'm concerned? You never think, not about me at least." He spun to round to glare at Angel, missing the kitchen door opening once more to let an angered Cordeilia out.

"Here's your blood Spike, and yours Angel. And just you listen here, mister I've been seriously hurt. Which you have, I know. But Angel is sorry, so fucking sorry he's spent every night since we got that damned tape trying to find a beast that will put him out of his pain. What pain? I don't hear you ask. Well, since you so desperately want to know, the pain of realising just what he had done to the one being in all the damn planet that he loved above everything. Us included!" She dragged in a deep, hasty breath and did not give up the floor, she was speaking and if the others had any sense they'd simply shut up and listen. "And if I ever thought he would hurt you ever again like he did that night, I'd stake him myself. That is not Angelus!" She pointed to the deeply ashamed and embarrassed vampire by the door. "That is what you get when Angelus and Angel combine. A deeply ashamed and passionate manic depressive vampire with an obsessional love complex directed at his supposedly dead child whom he loves... Passionately! And they're murder to live with!"

"Oh..." Spike finally managed when it became obvious that Cordeilia had ran out of rant. "Oh.." he managed again when he looked at his sire and saw that the former cheer leader had spoken the truth. "Oh shit!" He finally vocalised as Glory smashed through the glass doors straight towards Angel.

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Chapter 15 by Shamenka and Vixen

Lindsey had reached the seduction scene. At least one of the many sweet seduction scenes. It was so clear to the lawyer that Angel had been as obsessed with his William as Angelus had been. Angel's ramblings had finally settled down into a much less chaotic order. Mostly it was a fairly coherent auto biography, and he now thought that he may possibly know Angel better than the demon did himself. He knew that Wolfram and Hart had so badly miscalculated their approach when they had thought Darla was the key to controlling Angelus. If they had had Angel's so called 'Sweet William' in their grasp they would have had the vampire's undivided attention, let alone the demon almost immediately in the palm of their hand. Or, on the other hand, it was just as likely that they would, by now, all be crowding in to that one small waiting room. And judging by the passion Angel's William generated in the big ensouled vampire, he'd go for the second option. In fact he'd bet his life on it, if he still had one. A thought that made him laugh.

Part of Lindsey really wanted to meet Angel's William and see if he was as beautiful as Angel described him. Oh, he knew Angel's history, he knew just who Angel's 'Sweet William' was, where he was and all. But like the rest of creation he had mistakenly assumed that Angel hated Spike. Hated the vampire he had created for a previously unknown reason. None of them had suspected that the real reason for their twisted emotional response to each other was nothing more than a simple jealous rage, a really twisted love. He'd seen the drawing of Spike, read the reports on Spike, scant as they were. Alas he was now beyond ever meeting Spike. Just as his former colleagues were beyond the benefits of his current wisdom.

He could wish all he wanted for the LA office to have his new insights to William the Bloody and his relationship to his sire. A sire he now had positive confirmation wasn't Drucilla. Information he had no way of sharing, even if he really wanted to.

Yet, why would he wish his rivals had this information anyway? His reasoning brought him round to the potential overcrowding of his little room and alleviating his soul crushing loneliness. All he had were his memories, and Angel's memories and a small, but growing, second hand crush he was developing on William the Bloody ... William the Bloody not there either! He laughed, again, this time at his own silly pun. But the truth remained, he so longed for someone to talk too. But, knowing how his employers worked he had to try his utmost to curb that longing, because that

was what they were using to break him. He knew it. Just as he knew they were no doubt preparing him a new, or at the very least, a repaired body, all the better to get him to sign away his eternity. Just as he had seen so many staff members do before him. After all one of his former primary tasks had been to find out just what were the hot buttons to push on his own staff members. Just like someone had done for him.

Lindsey put his light down by his side and let that last thought circle in his mind for a moment. It was a new departure from his self imposed routine. The former lawyer wondered why his habit had seemingly changed so suddenly? Maybe he had read too long this time? He had been reading for quite a while; not that he had any way to gauge the hours or days or weeks in there. Other than by the days and weeks worth of description Angel had left him. It was not a reliable calendar. But he had found in it a rhythm that suited him. Read a while, think a while, rest a while, dream of Angel's William a little, and then start the cycle over again. Perhaps this was his soul telling him to break his own cycle.

He laughed, a short, bitter bark of sound with no audience to share the joke. As if being dead wasn't a big enough change to his routine. As if loneliness wasn't soul destroying. Wasn't as crippling as a physical injury.

No one had disturbed him, no one had even been there to speak to him. Other than Darla's one oh so brief visit that was. So no one had ever seen his little light. As far as the home office was concerned he was sitting in the dark, contemplating his navel by touch alone. And he rather liked it that way. Granted he would really like someone to talk too, but no one connected to Wolfram and Hart. He would much rather spend all his eternity with less hellacious creatures. Atila the Hun, Hitler or even Jack the Ripper... at least they were human monsters. Weren't they? Or had they been earlier employees of older incarnations of Wolfram and Hart. After all hadn't they been an entirely different company before their somewhat hasty move to the then tiny town that was Los Angeles in 1881.

If he recalled his history rightly, it snowed for the first time ever recorded in LA shortly after Wolfram and Hart had opened for business. Pity no one in Los Angeles could read the omens. Or, if they did, perhaps they mentioned it to entirely the wrong person, and no doubt paid dearly, and painfully for it. Maybe he'd meet them down here, if he was ever let out of his own personal waiting room. One he shared with all the ghosts of Angel's past.

At that latest sign of his growing confusion and doubt he lifted his light and prepared to read a little more. Anything to turn away from the demons he knew so well. They filled all his imaginings. He'd even cast Mother Theresa as a demon, once. A sudden moment of clarity showed him what Wolfram and Hart were up to. They were going to drive him to the brink of insanity for want of another voice and then trust in his desperation to make him listen to any and all bullshit they choose to feed him. And no doubt make him sign away all his eternities.

"Oh no, I will not play this game! Do you hear me, damn it? Are you listening to me? Watching me?" He spoke aloud for the first time since Darla left him his little Hadean light. And that gave him an irrational hope, that there was something or someone, somewhere, willing to listen to him. "Lord Hades, I beg you, all I want is someone to talk with. Please!" His voice slipped and trembled a little on that last word. And in that moment he knew his former employers were winning. His sanity was slipping even faster than before. Folding himself into as tight a ball as he could he started to cry. Desperate for any break in his enshrouding silence he didn't fight for control. "Just one... that's all, just one."

If he hadn't been dead he would have died when a hand gently touched his shoulder, right before a voice whispered just as gently in his ear.

"Hello, child, I wonder, would you happen to know just what it was that drew us to you?" The voice was masculine, cultured, gentle, soothing, so very English in its every cadence. And so

right on cue that Lindsey began to believe in something, in someone again. In the ancient Greek God of the Dead. Hades had seemingly answered his prayer, unlike some other deities he could think about. Yet, shock held him momentarily silent. Not quite daring to believe he wasn't finally, and irrevocably insane!

"What ails you child?" A second as cultured, as masculine voice asked. "I heard you call out our dear Hades' name. Why would you pray to our kinsman in this of all places?" That voice was gentle too. As if his feelings mattered to them. Oh, but his loneliness was shaping his eternity into odd patterns. Why English voices? Polite English voices filled with care and sympathy.

"Your kinsman?" Lindsey unfolded himself, looking to see what shape his dementia had taken. In doing so he revealed the little light in all its shining glory, remembering too late that he shouldn't be showing that light to the residents of Hell.

"One of Hades' lights!" The first voice whispered, awe-struck.

"Little wonder we were drawn here on feeling our bodies awaken." The second speaker's voice trembled as it spoke. A gentle hand reached out, not for the light but to softly touch Lindsey's shoulder. An act of comfort, a singularity in and of itself in the bowls of Hell.

"Who are you? Why are you here?" Lindsey reached out and touched both speakers. Touching their demonic faces making sure his delusion was complete. "Are you here?" Lindsey wanted to believe the truth his eyes showed him, but all his years of experience told him that this was, most probably, just another of Wolfram and Hart's torments.

"We have many names, but only one you might remember. Our very last names in the mortal world." The first speaker smiled and gently cupped Lindsey's face in his huge, animalistic claw. "Do you not feel a connection... Lindsey?"

"You know me?" Lindsey couldn't help it, he smiled. Welcoming this imagined familiarity.

"Yes, of course I know you. Like I know all our personnel." He smiled again, this time the smile moved into a short, cheerful laugh. "I am Mister Connors, by colleague here is Mister Becker." The demon reacted to Lindsey's reaction to their names. "Ah, I see you recognise our names."

"You were the senior partners before the relocation of 1881. I've read the history of the firm. A young vampiric lawyer, what was his name? He's supposed to have killed you in a fit of hunger or something." Lindsey sat a little straighter in the presence of his most senior employers.

"Such mortal nonsense. Our dear William didn't kill us, he hid us. It was Wolfram and Hart that sought our demise; our dear William that facilitated our escape. It was in deed our dear friends Messers Wolfram and Hart that tried, so ineffectually, to kill us." Mister Connors laugh, softly. His eyes glittered with some hidden emotion, the most mortal one Lindsey could come up with was glee. Their attempted murder seemed to be a source of delight to these demons, and Lindsey could not see why? Yet, their delight was infectious, he found himself smiling back at the so amenable demons beside him.

"If they were your friends, why would they try to kill you?" Lindsey drew in a sharp breath as soon as he finished speaking. "Sorry, dumb question."

"On the contrary, my dear boy, you have simply been alone too long. Come stand, let us see your room here." Mister Becker held out a hand to ease Lindsey onto his feet between the two demons. Somehow, standing between them like that, lent a sense of security to the former lawyer, one that he had been missing since he had awoken there.

Once upright the dead lawyer looked at them, neither being was much bigger than say Angel. His

current yardstick to everything. After all, Angel had been his only companion for so long now, it was only fitting he be his measuring rod too. At the very least Angel's brooding ramblings had been.

"To answer your question, dumb or otherwise, Messers Wolfram and Hart are from another dimension entirely. Do you understand such concepts child?" It was Mister Connors that spoke. Lindsey thought of all the episodes of Hercules or Xena or Star Trek he'd ever seen with just such a plot. Then he thought about his employers and laughed. If those television writers had even half the knowledge he had of such places they'd never write again. No one would ever believe them. "Ah, I see that you do. Good! We, on the other hand, are native to this dimension. We belong here. We are of the few surviving first generation demons on this planet. And that made us a direct threat to our dear friends."

"Surviving? But you're dead! Dead and in Hell right here with me." Lindsey was sure of so little since his own death, other than those few scraps Angel's writings had confirmed. But he was damn certain they were all dead. All of them dead and damned.

"No, quite the contrary. Our dear William was slipping, his sanity hadn't been the same since his mother died. We tried our very best to help him, but he needed to do his own things. We knew he would come back, that our William would abandon his demonic persona and choose to be with us again. So when we abandoned our corporeal bodies to hide out here we gave him the trigger phrase." Mister Becker smiled as he paused in his narrative.

"What trigger phrase? I'm confused!" Lindsey buried his head in his hands hoping his next delusion was going to make at least a little more sense than his current one did. Maybe, if he kept his eyes covered for long enough they'd make a tv movie of it all and feed him the tale in bite sized chunks. With plenty breaks for ads and coffee? What he didn't expect was the very next words spoken in his little corner of Hell.

"If it please the court, my client begs leave to ask for clemency... or words to that effect, and in that predestined place." Mister Connors started to laugh softly at the shocked look on Lindsey's suddenly upturned face. "What? Our William was a lawyer, is a lawyer, and no doubt always will be a lawyer. Granted it is highly unusual for a vampire to enter a plea in a mortal court, that was why the words and place of their utterance was so critical. Our William needs us for something. That much is obvious, to us at least. Perhaps the time has come to finally deal with our dear friends Messrs Wolfram and Hart. Permanently!"

"I do so hope that it is thus, brother. I must admit I grow so very weary of this hiding place. They have such a lack of imagination that it depresses me. Our dear cousin Hades was never this... predictable." Mister Becker looked from Mister Connor to Lindsey and back. "If our dear friend here has the key of light, why don't we go home? William wouldn't have summonsed us if there was no way home." The desperation could be seen in the demon's face. His need to go home was as great as Lindsey's, only Lindsey wanted to finish reading his story first. He couldn't help casting a glance at the as yet unread portions of Angel's tale.

Couldn't his vision wait till he had finished reading Angel's auto-biography first?

"What is this?" Mister Connors asked, looking at the scratched words on the wall. Lindsey would never doubt this being as a demon ever again as the vision before him mutated and grew, distorted and twisted beyond recognition. "Angelus!" It snarled!

"Angelus has come to hell and we missed him? Where is he?" Becker began to mutate too. It was clear to Lindsey that neither being liked Angelus for whatever reason they had yet to tell him. He warmed even more to these ancient beings.

"He's alive. He came here while alive, or as alive as the undead get at any rate. He was sent

back, no doubt too close to living for the demons in this place. It was Angelus that killed me!" Lindsey turned from demon to demon, almost pleading for their belief.

"How could that be?" Connors asked. "How could such a vile demon be given such charity? And sent here as yet undead, that's a cruelty worthy of Angelus himself! I would have said there was no being as so cruel as he that would do such a thing."

"See, I kinda scanned along a bit a while back. He was sent here, physically, by his then lover, and with his soul back in place..." Lindsey ran his little light along the carved words. Looking for the relevant passage. "See, here it is!"

"Hmm." Was all that Mister Connors would say on the subject.

"Bring your light to the start, child. I want to take Angelus' words with us. We can read them later and decide which words we believe. Those of the so called ensouled demon known as Angel, or those of our dear William." It was Mister Becker that made that so polite request. Yet, Lindsey recognised a request that was a demand when he heard one. Oddly enough, usually from a demon!

"Your William is his William isn't it? Your William is Spike, William the Bloody?" Lindsey finally gathered his wits and began making the synthesists connections he had been hired by Wolfram and Hart to make for them. His greatest talent, making something out of apparent nothingness.

"In deed he is. You are a clever man, Mister MacDonald." He noted the younger soul's reaction to the mention of his surname. "I told you, we know all those who work for our dear friends. And that includes you. Our dear William did become the vampire known as Spike. Why do you ask? You disapprove of vampires?"

"No, not really, it's just that I think maybe something's happened to William, to Spike. Something powerful and strong enough to succeed where we were failing. We, they, Wolfram and Hart rather, were trying to drive Angel insane, trying to make Angelus come to the fore. To break him and leave him only able to function under our control. Only I think something happened that we didn't, couldn't allow for. Then he came and killed me. His sire, Darla, was hiding in my place, and I thought he wanted her for himself, but she too died, right after me. She brought me this little light and admitted she didn't know anymore than I as to why Angelus did as he did." Lindsey paced the wall, trailing the light for his visiting demons to scan the words.

As they read them the words faded and vanished from the wall. Lindsey kept walking and talking, trying not to think about the vanishing tale of woe.

"See, Angel got his soul forced back on him for the first time back in 1898. He was filled with such guilt for his actions as a vampire. His greatest regret is in this section. Well, greatest that I've read so far. He fell in love. Angelus, not Angel. He fell in love with an innocent young man and got all possessive and jealous, and finally he killed him. The man he had fallen in love with was a mortal and in a jealous rage he killed him, and turned him, and abandoned him. There's a lot of references to his hearing that Spike did this and Spike did that. All with this sense of pride, or possibly love. And loosing Spike is the only thing that I now think would destroy both Angel and Angelus. We picked the wrong damn target!" And in his utter despair at having died for the wrong cause, he laughed. He laughed rather than cry before these, his most senior of senior partners. "I died for entirely the wrong fucking cause!" And he laughed some more.

Unlike those demons left behind, these two elder beings just held the younger soul as it laughed itself out.

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Chapter 16 by Shamenka and Vixen

"Don't you think that funny? Wolfram and Hart picked the wrong target!" He looked at his demonic

visitors, willing them to understand.

"Well, of course they did, dear boy. They are not and never will be part of this world. The just arrived here, one day, found a little followed tribal deity and built him up to their figure head. Oh they knew that any God will collapse in on themselves with too many followers all making demands on you at once. All those contradictory prayers, too many voices screaming all at once. It's why so many of the successful belief systems are Pantheons. The more Gods to share the duties the more they survive and grow stronger. But, either they do not understand what drives the beings born herein, or more frighteningly, they simply don't care. But I think it is that they do not understand our world. Not entirely. They are fools playing with dangerous toys, and like all fools they really should expect to be blown up occasionally." Mister Becker smiled at him. It was an oddly comforting gesture. Lindsey smiled back, shyly. "Now, let's finish Angelus' tale of woe and get out of here. You have the key of light you know? There's a lot of lost souls that will be so grateful to see it, and you. Come, there's not much time to waste, I don't doubt. Somehow with these things there never is!"

"That's twice you've mentioned this key of light. What is it?"

"Why, your little light here. It's the key to unlocking the gates between this underworld and our own underworld, the real underworld. You have in your hands the key to the gates of Tartarus." Mister Connors smiled, gently, reassuring the young lawyer. "When those various hangers on that your people think of as 'The Powers that Be' came on the scene, the Olympians, our people, had been subjugated for so very long under the rule of our own children. The Romans replaced many of our Gods with their own, when they were driven out of Greece as their empire collapsed our Gods were too weak to really lead our people. Hence when the Wolf, the Ram and the Hart came to this world they found it so easy to shut off Olympus. Closing in the rightful Gods. Ironically, even the Roman Gods lost out, they too were closed in, imprisoned in their own paradise. So many millions of their believers, the Olympians lost children, were left outside Tartarus when they were forced to shut the gates. I don't think it was ever envisioned that all gates to Olympus and Hades' domain would close as one. The gates to Tartarus can only be opened from the outside. Getting that light to you must have been difficult, it could have destroyed the soul bearing it as a gift." Mister Connors stopped talking, obviously thinking about the logistics involved in getting the key out of Tartarus at all.

"It was Darla, remember, I told you. She had been Angelus' sire. She had been returned from here by Wolfram and Hart's magicians and turned back in to a vampire against her will by Angelus' insane child, Drucilla." Lindsey wasn't looking at the demon doing the talking. He was trying to take in as many of the vanishing words as he possibly could. "Why did William accept Angelus' being a vampire so easily? Even Angel never figured that out."

"His step father is Gronmann. A rather sweet young Trasker demon. He was so deeply in love with William's mother, and her children. And, in deed, she and they with him. He helped raise them all after their father died. Out in India I seem to recall. Demons were nothing new to our dear William. He eventually came and worked for us, after all." Mister Becker stopped assimilating for a moment to look directly at their new, young lawyer friend. "I take it that it never occurred to Angelus to simply ask William why he feared him not? Oh, my dear Mister Connors, you don't suppose it was you and I, and our dear friend Gronmann that led to young William's demise do you? Should we have instilled a greater fear of demons in his heart." His fear at having been a possible cause of William the Bloody's demise was entirely genuine. A fact that rather reassured Lindsey that things would be fine, in the long run.

"No, and we can not allow ourselves to think like that! If William had not become the demon he was we might yet be playing dead, awaiting the return summons." Mister Connors' face hardened somewhat, a look of determination that Lindsey didn't want to challenge, but felt he must.

"I still think something happened to William. I think he's dead. Well, deader than a vampire

certainly. I think that that is possibly the only thing that would push Angel into Angelus' waiting madness."

"I disagree young Lindsey. Quite simply put, if our dear William were truly dead then he could not have uttered the awakening summons in a mortal court no less. So, surely, he still lives. But I shall have words with your Angel, or indeed Angelus, whichever incarnation has control of that body, just as soon as we all get to where ever they are." Mister Connors nodded at Mister Becker, the latter restarted assimilating the words carved into the wall.

"We all? The three of us? Where are your bodies anyway?" Lindsey was becoming very intrigued by his demonic visitors and their strange history lessons.

"Why, with our dear Gronmann, of course. I expect he too will be desirous of getting back to his William. He has been alone too long has our William. They were such a close family. Until Angelus and his jealous rage, if you and his words are to be believed." Mister Connors' good humour had seemingly returned.

Lindsey still had questions however. "Young Gronmann? How young is young in a whatever you said he was demon?"

"Well, when he first loved William's mother that was somewhere about one hundred and forty years ago. Roughly, I'm not too sure of the passage of time in the real world. And he was only two hundred and sixty something then. Traskers live for maybe eight hundred years, give or take fifty. He stayed with us, waiting for William's summons and, low, we are summonsed." Mister Connors' smile was genuine this time. He was clearly looking forward to meeting up with his demon friend, and of course his dear William.

He couldn't help it. Lindsey felt that same enthusiasm fill him with new hope. If this were his delusion it was by far the best he had ever devised. So full and complete. If it were true, then his life, or in deed his death, was about to become a whole lot more interesting.

"Finished!" Mister Becker's ever cheerful voice sang out. "And if everyone is now ready, shall we get started?" He looked to his fellow demon for confirmation, and to his surprise he looked at Lindsey too and did nothing until he nodded his assent too.

"Together then, brother." Mister Connors stood behind Lindsey and reached out around him clasping Mister Becker's arms as he did so. Mister Becker did much the same to Mister Connors. "Now, Lindsey, we need you to wish to see the lock that fits your key with all your heart. Now!"

And Lindsey wished, with all the power in his heart, his soul, his darkest despair and his brightest hope.

He closed his eyes too, for good measure.

Seconds later he was standing on the shore of the strangest sea he had ever seen. It seemed almost alive. Until he realised that what he thought was viscous water was individual souls. Millions of them, twisting and turning over and over again. All straining towards one small former mortal's soul.

They reached out to Lindsey. And the key!

"Shouldn't we have face untold horrors and trials to get here?" He asked his senior partners.

"My dear child, I do believe that you have read far too many Gothic Romantic novels." Mister Becker accompanied his response with his almost omnipresent laughter.

"Oh, now what?" Lindsey asked, he looked at the sea of souls and let his eyes track upwards until the citadel filled his mind. What was left functional of his mind. For there, floating above the sea of souls was the strangest city he had ever seen. It had everything; Gothic spires, flying buttresses, impossibly white walls and roofs. It had a pulsing light in its core. No doubt the door out of this literal Hell for those lost souls endlessly swimming beneath the citadel. Out of line of sight with the torment that was their personal salvation and redemption.

"You ask them, politely mark you, to form the bridge of souls. And we cross to the citadel. All of us. And we go home. All of us. Finally!" Mister Connors couldn't keep the excitement out of his voice if he tried. Not that he did try. They were so close to home, to rejoining their old friend Gronmann and their dear William.

"Could you please make a bridge so I can go open the door to Tartarus? For all of us!" For good measure Lindsey held up the little light, the key of light to let his audience see he was telling the truth.

He could never have begun to imagine the sheer wall of sound that the sudden voiced excitement of a million or more souls as they all danced, and cheered, and sang in their rush to carry him to the citadel and the door home. He couldn't understand a word they were singing, or crying, or shouting. However they were rejoicing he heard it in the emotion, if not the words.

A bridge was formed. It shone with hope and glory and salvation. Never in all his years as a lawyer for Wolfram and Hart had he ever had such a moment as this. No victory he had ever won in any court or boardroom battle had ever had the emotional impact of this very moment. They were finally going home, and they were taking him with them. They were saved and he was the one that had saved them.

He was the hero, the good guy, the one carried home in triumph royal. This was his victory, and he revelled in its wonderment.

As the bridge formed the senior partners stood poised ready to ascend to the citadel above. They watched nervously as Lindsey watched the bridge form. They could understand what drove the young soul to its raptures. Being demonic did tend to have a detrimental affect on their public image. No one ever expected the gentle nature they showed to the world. Even Wolfram and Hart had underestimated them. So many of their enemies had simply believed that they had died. Not one of them had ever come looking for them, especially in their own stronghold, amongst their best kept secrets. Just as no one had ever looked beyond the surface bravado to the soul that resided within the young lawyer before them. He reminded them both of a somewhat more confident William. Both were so sure that young Lindsey would be such a better match for their dear William that that awful Angelus. Not that either had any intentions of playing matchmaker. Not right away at least. Not until they knew where Williams tastes lay these days. There was so much catching up to do. So much history to learn.

Eager to see what changes the world had wrought on their dear William, they both returned their vigilant gaze once more towards the bridge home as the final few souls needed slid seamlessly into place. As the bridge finished taking shape the feelings of happiness and of rejoicing intensified. Those souls not actively forming the bridge danced around and around those three souls waiting to cross to the door between the worlds of eternal subjugation and just adjudication.

Freed from imprisonment without trial to their so long sought after free trial at the hands of Hades, their God, flying on the wings of hope. The ancient Greek souls waited, almost patiently, as the key holder tried to gather his scattered wits.

"Come, child, up with you and open that damned door!" Mister Becker's ever present smile grew wider as he looked forwards to seeing his family once more. "I've waited since the year 350AD,

in your counting, for this moment and, sadly, have to admit I don't want to wait any longer." He made shooing motions with his hands and urged the fascinated Lindsey forwards.

"What happened in 350AD?" Lindsey asked as he moved to place a foot on the first portion of the bridge of souls.

"Monotheism, took over from our family, the Pantheon of Ancient Greece. And all the gates shut against us. The Earth living children of Echidna, and our followers souls." Mister Connors placed a light hand on Lindsey's back and guided him forwards. It was as if the physical contact between them filled Lindsey with all the excitement of the exiles, he hurried forward, knowing somehow just where he was going. Almost as if the key was drawing him forwards. After all, he was only the key bearer. Mister Connors didn't miss the passage of the young souls thoughts as he fled in his excited rush from all of Hell behind them.

That thought galvanised the ancient soul. He too began a head long flight into the depths of the citadel. Heading to the doorway he knew was at that very moment being unlocked.

"Hurry, everyone, before they can rouse themselves to stop us! Move... move... move!" The former lawyer began waving all those long forgotten souls forwards. His voice had filled the citadel just seconds before the booming alarm of the great door opening sounded.

Outside the early stages of the alarm were effectively drowned out in the cacophony of off cadence singing and shouting and merry making. The oldest of the Gods forgotten children were making sure they would get away. That this time nothing would stop them reaching their long lost friends and families. That they would go home, finally.

Inside the citadel Lindsey MacDonald, former rising star of Wolfram and Hart was standing there, holding a giant door open. On the other side of that great monolith stood a sea of expectant faces.

And a three headed dog. Each head ready to do damage to anyone that even thought about hindering that long awaited flight. Encouragement was being called out all around them, more and more of the trapped souls flew through the door. With each passing soul the alarm sounded louder and louder as there were fewer and fewer voices to camouflage it.

A baying sounded in the distance. The very shrill note they uttered was enough to terrify Lindsey. He had heard as many folklore tales about the hounds of Hell as any other living soul. He had never envisioned himself as being their idea of a midnight snack.

"Hurry! Hurry!" He urged his charges onwards, waving them on in an ever faster cascade through the doors. It would be a finely tuned race, the escape of the last soul versus the arrival of the owners of those screeching voices.

As the last of the lost souls fled through the door Mister Connors finally ushered Mister Becker, Lindsey and himself through the door. It automatically closed behind them leaving the only angry animal sounds those of the great three headed dog snarling at the now firmly closed door.

"Did everyone make it?" Lindsey asked his travelling companions.

"Everyone did, child, thank you. Thank you for getting us all home. Come, let us see what we can now do for you!" Mister Connors smiled, a soft comforting expression and changed before the younger soul's eyes. He grew, up, out, bigger than any being Lindsey had ever seen.

He turned in time to see Mister Becker metamorphosise in the exact same manner. Gleeful laughter echoed around both beings as they took on their own true shapes. This much Lindsey realised for himself. They were finally free of Hell and had no reason left to deny themselves their true forms.

"Children?" A soft, almost hissing voice called out from the depths of Tartarus around them. Immediately followed by a creature half woman, half snake. Then a huge lumbering giant of a man exited the darkness right behind the she snake creature.

"Sons?" the giant uttered, awe-struck at the sight before him.

"Mother - Father!" Both of the senior partners uttered, quietly, in unison. Right before parents and missing children met in a tangle of arms and laughter.

Lindsey fully understood that they would not be moving on from there for any appreciable time to come. One thousand, six hundred and fifty something years was a long time to be separated from ones parents.

And it was the first time he had ever thought of demons as creatures having parents. Loving, caring parents, families every bit as like mortal, human families as made no difference what so ever. It was a humbling thought. That he could have ever been quite that arrogant.

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Chapter 17 by Shamenka and Vixen

In the Hyperion the battle began, with that first heavily telegraphed move by Glory. As soon as Spike had looked at him, Angel had, if at all possible, intensified the level at which he watched Spike's face like a hawk. That so beautiful, so well known face that wore such a shocked expression at Cordeilia's description of Angel's own feelings. He saw the immediate change in expression a split second before he heard the first crack as the glass doors directly behind him began to shatter. Giving silent thanks for his childe's no doubt unconscious forewarning, and his own inherent preternatural speed, Angel all but flew to safety before the glass began to fly, let alone finished settling. In his travels he physically picked Spike up and ran with him. Thankfully, Spike didn't put up much of a fight at his sire's protective action.

"I want the key! And I want it now!" A high pitched female voice demanded from somewhere behind him, in the general direction of what remained of the hotel's main door.

"And that is Glory, I presume?" He asked Spike as he put his childe back on his own feet before he turned to face this new threat to his William's life. That glass could have hurt the baby, and have hurt his Spike too. Killing his family in one easy stroke. That he couldn't forgive. No one was ever going to hurt either Spike or their child ever again. Not him, not Buffy, and especially not this jumped up stupid little fart of a Goddess. No one!

Spike was no fool. He knew that Angel's action had possibly saved both the baby and him. So he bit his tongue on the almost instinctive sarcastic retort and answered honestly, with the truth as he knew it.

"Not only that, but she has to possess a human male as a host, so what you see is not only Glory but it's also Xander Harris." He cast a shy look at Angel's face as his sire processed that bit of information. After hours of angst and worry, Angel's face suddenly dissolved in unbridled laughter.

"Oh, sweet Mary mother of God. Xander Harris in a bright red tart's dress?" Angel couldn't hold it in any longer. He let fly with a loud bellow of laughter. "And what key do you want? A nice room key so you can fuck your little gremlins? Or your..." He sniffed the air and turned to look at Spike, indicating the group of things following Glory into the foyer.

"Mortals, I think, but they do smell off, somehow." Spike looked past Angel to the only other vampire in the foyer. "Harm?" He got her attention and indicated he wanted her there with him and his sire. Spike's scent came with her.

It worried Angel, that the sire scent came from this blonde threat. He knew Spike had never created childer, but Harmony reeked of Spike's dominant scent. As if he was her sire. He watched her advance with more than a touch of fear and annoyance. She was so comfortable in Spike's presence, it unnerved him to think that Spike might choose her company over his. Once she got there, a second later, Spike pointed to the almost mortals with Glory.

"They smell 'off' to us, not quite mortal, not quite anything else. You got any input into this?" He easily met Harmony's eyes as he talked to her. Something he hadn't done much to Angel since he had entered the hotel a scant hour or two before.

The blonde vampiress shook her head. She was much less experienced in such matters as even one of the Slayer's friends, that much she could at least acknowledge to herself. She did wonder, for the briefest flickering moment, why Spike would choose to ask for her advice rather than Buffy and her friends. Then she understood, she realised such a basic truth it both chilled her and warmed her. It was all due to betrayal. Unlike any one of them she hadn't turned against Spike. Not to that extreme at any rate.

Buffy had heard every word that Spike had said. No matter what had gone down since he had returned to her, she always knew exactly where he was in any room they shared. She couldn't let him get hurt ever again. And just because Angel was here was no reason to stop. If anything it was more than reason enough, in her eyes, to protect Spike all the more. He had to realise that every second he was with Angel was one more second closer to Angelus' evil jealousy. To another assault, another attack. To being raped one more time. Unable to stand by and let Angel have unchallenged access to Spike she butted into the vampire's conversation. Anyway, she justified things to herself, she had the information they seemed to need.

"She wiggled her fingers in their brains. They're mortal enough, just no longer really all that sentient." She dragged Dawn over to Spike as she made to join him and the other two vampires.

"She what?" Spike demanded a repeat of Buffy's statement. He rather hoped the mental image he had was a false one.

"When she's looking for information she sticks her hand inside folks heads and wiggles her fingers. It's what she did to Tara, what Hera managed to cure, but I think she feeds off of those particular ones." Buffy looked at the shuffling mounds that had once been living, breathing, feeling, thinking people. Now they merely breathed and existed.

Spike was a little disappointed to realise that his imaginings were every bit as bad as the reality they all faced. It also worried him, what could she do to Alicia if she touched her? And that fear made him immediately defensive.

"Eww!" Harmony made an outraged face at the other realm Goddess. "That is so not good! Eat them, fine, if you really must, they can always fight and run away. But messing with their life force like that? That's just plain evil!" She was game faced, ready for the up coming fight. Totally ignorant of two vampires and a slayer smiling behind her back. "Ok, I know what to do here." She turned back all cheerfully intent on putting forward her plan. "Spike stays back here and guards Dawny. Angel and I will take out the walking smorgasbord and Buffy and Hera can go for Glory.. leaving the gremlin things for everyone else." She smiled at the attentive faces, enjoying the look of unity in her group. "Okay?" She challenged.

"Damn right, Harm! Spike stays out of things with Dawn. I can get with that program. Angel?" Buffy looked directly at her former lover, the man she used to call friend for his no doubt caustic response.

For his part Angel admitted to himself that he didn't like this Harmony. She was too close to Spike, but she was also, sadly, quite right.

"I agree, Spike stays out of the fight, he stays back here with Dawn."

Spike had his own opinion on the subject and didn't like his actions being decided by a committee, of whom he only currently liked one member.

"Just a bleedin' minute here, no one decides what I'm goin' to do but me. And Hera. But in this fight it's every hand on deck and we all fight. I am not entirely incapable of fighting, you know?" He glared at his companions and realised he hadn't changed one opinion.

"Please Spike. If not for me, or yourself, then for Alicia?" Dawn asked her friend to stay safe.

"That's all it is, formerly Blondie Bear! I don't want anything bad happening to the baby. Or you for that matter." Harmony kissed Spike on the cheek, only to be dragged away by Buffy. Angel had been too stunned to forcefully remove the vampiress from touching distance of Spike. But he supported Buffy's action. This time.

"This is neither the time nor the place to be making any kind of play for Spike. Leave him alone!" He underscored his command with a subsonic growl. Only Dawn didn't hear it, although with the instant response it got she could figure out what he must have done for herself.

"Who do you think you're growling at?" Harmony almost challenged him.

"Glory? The fight? And Spike is staying here to protect me." Dawn pushed Harmony, and Buffy, slightly towards the now furious Goddess who was facing off against Hera, and their friends.

"Glory!" Buffy readjusted her immediate priorities and turned to face Glory.

"Mangled people!" Harmony re-acquired her target lock, the look on her face an entirely predatory one. "Come on growly, before they get over here and get Spike." She urged Angel forwards and headed for the mind wiped force at Glory's side, with or without him she was going to engage the enemy.

Angel paused to look at his child. To make one last entreaty to him, not holding out much hope of a reasonable response.

"Please Spike. Keep yourself, the baby and Dawn safe. I couldn't take losing you again." Without waiting for a response he turned and joined Harmony in the battle with the mindless minions. He silently and secretly hoped that the violence of a fight might bleed off some of his darker passions. Like his deep seated urge to grab Spike and run!

"Never mind once was blondie.." Dawn teased her best friend, ever. "What they all failed to take any note of is that Glory is gonna be heading here. For me! I'm her damn Key after all. So, you'll not be all that out of the fight. Just held in reserve, sort of." She grinned at her friends look of utter surprise. It seemed to her that Spike hadn't thought of that either.

Spike finally laughed at his young friend's cunning.

Glory was facing up to Hera, the elder, native to their world, Goddess was drawing on the freely given and direct belief of her immediate followers. Their power was being fed through her Priestess and into the heart of the battle. Glory was fighting on her reserves of power. All she had gathered from the fragile life forces of her once human cannon fodder.

Some of the little wizened faced gremlin look-a-likes rushed towards the two vampires fighting side by side. One of them held an ornate cross in his hands and waved it rather annoyingly in Harmony's face. Angel caught the motion and turned to see the blonde vampiress facing down

against the cross bearer. What he didn't expect was for Harmony to grab the cross and with a single blow, smash the ugly little being's skull in with it.

And no sizzling.

"Get real, gremlins!" Harmony's voice dripped sarcasm as she clubbed one of the ex-humans with the cross. "What you got is a fancy piece of metal. That is all! What I got is true belief! Sheesh!" With that she pinned one of the gremlin like minions to the nearest wall with the cross. "See, I believe in my Goddess, she believes in my belief and protects me. What does yours do? Wears totally skanky dresses and couldn't walk in heels if her sad pathetic little life depended on it! And all you do is die!" With that she punched another ex-human and snapped his neck with the power of her strike.

Angel laughed. It was a near hysterical sound from the very pit of his soul. But Harmony had taken no damage from that cross. She professed her belief and still bitched about the bitch Goddess' truly awful dress sense. Yet, she had taken no damage from that cross what so ever.

In their corner of the fight Cordeilia's voice could be heard screaming abuse at the wave of gremlins that ran at them as she faced the fight side by side with Kate and Anya. Cordeilia's rage turned in to shock and fear as Kate fell to the foyer floor with a short sword passing from the front through to her back. She lay there, bleeding over the floor, twitching, making a few whimpered grunts. Looking like some sick idea of a human kebab. Cordeilia felled the assailant that had struck Kate. Screaming at it all the while. Not really thinking about what she said, so long as it was heard and understood.

"I am so going to do that to that skanky bitch goddess Glory! Xander or no Xander!" Cordeilia stepped over the gremlins that fell under her favourite small hand axe.

Anya looked at the dark haired woman swiping at her enemies, cutting a swath towards their greater enemy. She looked at that deranged enemy and saw not the blonde Goddess wanting their doom. But the dark haired mortal man that had offered her nothing but his unconditional love. She knew that what Cordeilia said was true. They were all trying their utmost to do that very thing to her Xander. To kill him. Anya knew it had to happen. But in her heart she knew that she couldn't stay there and watch it happen. Not to her Xander, to the man she loved with all her heart.

Pushing her way forwards, almost blindly, Anya fled through the remains of the broken door and into the night. They could fight Glory and kill her Xander, but she'd be damned if she'd stand by and applaud while they did so. That was asking just too much.

Behind her, Cordeilia engaged her next foe, unaware of Anya's flight. Only focusing on the fight to survive.

A sudden change of tack had several of the former human minions heading over towards Spike and Dawn. Trying to drive a wedge between the fighters and the defender and Glory's Key.

"Bag!" Spike's voice called out behind Angel, he risked a brief second to glance over his shoulder, in time to see Dawn reach for one of the long bags Oz had brought in with them. Turning back as he recognised the click-clack of a shotgun being readied for action. Followed by a shower of ceiling plaster as Spike fired his first shot into the ceiling, halting their progress for a much needed second.

Before the last echoes of the shotgun blast had fully died away, Faith had finally engaged the enemy and her first fight as a true Slayer for so very long was on! She had so much pent-up rage and fury to vent. All the guilt of having failed in her sacred duty was now fully focused on that fight. All her guilt over the torture she forced Wesley to suffer was purged in that fight. She would

not let her sacred charges down again. It no longer fully mattered to her if her enemy was human or demon, all that mattered was that she was defending those in the right. Innocence was innocence, there was no greater cause to fight for, than to protect the innocent. No matter what the species.

"Here!" Dawn handed Spike a short sword and he began to cut a path through the ranks of the almost dead. Backing up his legal charge. He hadn't achieved freedom for Faith just to see her fall in the first battle that came along.

A roar off to the far right brought a lupine form fully into the fray by Spike's other side. The enemy retreated, slightly. Allowing Angel to get back towards Spike and acquire the shotgun from Dawn's hands.

"Can I use that?" He smiled at her and she handed him Spike's first weapon. Turning back to the battle he pushed ahead of his comrades and fired several shots into the mini army of zombied humans. He didn't want to kill them, but neither could he take the risk of their hurting Spike and their baby. Or, in deed, hurting Dawn either. Yet as he cleared many of them from the fight, more seemed to pour in the hole that had been his door.

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Chapter 18 by Shamenka and Vixen

With the ranks thinned out, even if only a little, the battle was far more even handed now. Each of the vampires could easily take on several of the former humans, or the gremlin creatures. Glory was still playing Godly ping pong between Hera and Buffy. Faith was still making major headway with the mixed army of gremlins and former humans. But the main battle was inching ever closer to Spike and Dawn. Oz faced his own assault from the forces against them. He let slip the ultimate Dog of War as he begged his God's indulgence for his friends safety and his God's mother's safety.

He felt that familiar warm buzz that was his God's blessing. The careful control over the berzerker mode in the wolf's mind. Letting go just a little more he tore into the enemy.

Willow and Tara had established a magical field between them, one fighting either side of Glory, Hera and Buffy, they tapped Glory's energy levels weakening her with the constant flow of her power leaving her grasp. Her image had begun to flicker slightly. Only once or twice had she suddenly looked several inches taller, dark haired and male.

In a burst of desperate action Glory grabbed a hold of Buffy and threw her over her head and into a group of her little worshipers; where upon they seemed to swallow the blonde slayer whole. Glory staggered on towards the only absolutely pure life force on the entire battle field. She used one of her own gremlin creatures to bat Oz out of the way. She discarded the broken necked creature once it had served it's purpose. Faith lunged for the Goddess but was just as easily swiped aside. Desperation had loaned the Goddess strength and focus. Both of which had pinpointed Spike's distended belly as her immediate target.

Faith was the first to recover her feet. But it had been so long since she had been in proper combat that it took precious seconds for her to orientate herself as to what was currently happening.

"No!" Dawn screamed. Instinctively she knew what Glory's target was this time. And it wasn't just her. "Spike, move back!" She screamed. Getting Angel's instant attention. He turned, just as Harmony did. Between them they each used a zombied fighter as a battering ram. They both headed back towards Spike and Glory's inexorable advance against him.

"Oh, a vampire with on board snacks. Now that's just so damn thoughtful!" She reached out and pulled the dazed but still fighting Oz out of her path. She physically picked up the writhing, snarling near wolf beast and tossed it towards the slowly climbing to her feet Buffy. "Here,

snacky, snacky!" She smiled at Spike, not his face, just his distended belly. "You look so delicious. Just a ripe little plumb for me to eat." She reached out towards Spike.

Spike swiped at the questing hand with the short sword in his own hand. He cut her. He drew blood and her rage with it. He didn't like the way she had picked up Oz and threw him away like a rag doll. Nor the way she had casually thrown the Slayers aside either. It didn't bode too well for him and Dawn.

A handgun went off, startling everyone, as Dawn emptied the entire clip of an automatic pistol she'd drawn from Spike's bag of weapons into Glory's advancing form.

Glory stopped for a vital few seconds as she shrugged the squashed bullets out of her borrowed form. That had really hurt. She had felt almost every one of those pesky little bug bites.

"Oh, naughty Key. Just you wait till I bleed you dry. I won't use a clean blade. Not after you just did that!" Glory flicked her gaze towards the Key then back to her newly designated primary target. "Look, little vampire, why don't you just stop all this struggling and let me do what you know I'm going to do anyway."

Hera and the witches were forcing power through the draining spell. Emptying the Goddess as fast as they could possibly manage. As the flickering between Glory and Xander increased Buffy finally untangled herself from the gremlin creatures she was thrown into, with Oz's help. They turned to head towards Spike and Glory.

Spike swiped his sword at her a few more times. Cutting her on each pass, until she grabbed the blade from his hand and threw that behind her too. Right into Hera's hands, narrowly missing Faith's head in the process.

"Son of my Blood, use this body as your Instrument of War!" Hera reached out with her mind to her son, the God of War, and extended his power through her own and into the sword. Just as the power fully filled the mortal blade with its divine energy Glory reached Spike.

A pain filled scream tore from the blond vampire's throat as he felt Glory's hand sink into his belly and touch, so briefly, the baby within. She had no time to really focus on her objective as Faith lashed out at the Goddess' face. Punching, scratching, hurting, distracting her for a few vital seconds.

"No!" Angel's agonised scream joined Spike's inarticulate scream of fear and pain. He grabbed Glory and pulled her hand physically out of his childe's belly and away from the fists pummeling her and turned her to face him.

Everyone, bar Spike, looked on as Angel let slip the bounds on Angelus. He beat at Glory's face. He ripped at her eyes. He bit at every part of her that his fangs could reach. And no one begged him to stop. Then he glanced beyond the blonde Goddess to his childe's blonde vampire friend, the one that smelled so strongly of Spike, and threw Glory to Harmony's mercies. He finally realised that of course Spike liked her, of course she smelled of him. She had been adopted into the Order of Aurelius, she was his grand childe by Spike's own choice. Not by blood, not that that mattered at the moment. All that mattered was family, and she deserved her reward for defending her family, while he turned to comfort what remained his.

Angelus willingly returned to his own corner of Angel's soul and the dark vampire rushed to his fallen, grieving childe. He picked Spike up and rocked him. Nestling his hurt childe against his knees. Just as he had intended the morning after his attack on Spike. He gathered his childe to him for protection. Inarticulate growls and whines rolled off Angel's tongue as he tried to comfort his childe.

Harmony managed to get in a good few hard blows against Glory until Oz and Buffy relieved her of her burden. She let her eyes take in their enemies and saw that the dark haired Slayer was dealing with the situation most proficiently. She sighed, raggedly, then, released from her immediate need for vengeance, she too reached for Spike, to offer comfort. Instinctively she lowered her eyes, and made little yips of submission as she reached for both Angel and his injured child. She knew her place in the pecking order. Spike had adopted her as a child. But this was her adopted sire's physical sire. His was the greater claim. He commanded their family, and she just followed his lead.

Spike cried. He unashamedly cried into Angel's chest. Unable to stop the tears even if he wanted to.

Angel continued to cradle him, comforting him as one would any frightened child. Unable to stem his own tears, unwilling to even try.

Harmony faced Angel, a hand on Spike's arm, ready to fight off any not of their vampire family that would dare touch Spike. Under her breath she uttered prayers for the unborn child in Spike's belly. She pleaded with Apollo, with Asclepius the Gods of Healing. She prayed to Hera, to Demeter and all the Goddesses of Fertility for that tiny baby's life. Over and over she uttered her prayer. Her words only audience was Angel, and the Gods. All of whom listened and grieved with her.

Buffy and Oz were turn about ripping into Glory. Neither could ever forgive what she had just done. Spike's cries fuelled their rage until Glory finally managed to break free. Her image was quivering, shifting, moving back and forth between herself and Xander's true form. As she did so, shifting into Glory's form she reached for Dawn, and caught her. Instantly halting Buffy and Oz's assaults.

Not to be taken so easily Dawn smashed the now empty gun, butt end first, into Glory's face, making the Goddess stagger and shift once more. This time Xander regained a firmer hold over his own body and looked at the devastation Glory had created using his body as her home from home.

Xander kept a hold of Dawn and he spun them both around, he saw his perfect solution. Somehow he remembered who the woman with the sword really was. He had managed to keep it from Glory by deliberately keeping his mind blank. There were, however, enough remnants of Glory's memories and knowledge left for him to even see the preternatural power running through that sword. That gave the ghost soldier in his soul an idea, an idea that would not only win them the battle, but end the entire war.

"I'm sorry pumpkin, but as long as we both exist she'll always find a way back. This isn't her holy place you know?" He smiled, sadly, into Dawn's eyes.

She knew, somehow, what he intended to do. And she nodded, just once.

"Do it now then. Before I change my mind." Dawn whispered to Xander and reached up to embrace him as close as she could get him to her own body. Hiding her face so that Spike and Buffy wouldn't be able to remember her tears. That was one memory she didn't want to leave them with.

Xander ran at Hera's sword, impaling them both. Discharging the power of Glory, and the power of the Key, and even the power of his own life force through that sacrifice directly into Hera.

In a bright flash all three vanished.

Leaving behind them the quieting tears of a heart broken vampire. And the words no one present

would have wished him to ever have to say.

"She touched the baby, Angel. She touched her. She hurt her. And I don't know how much! She touched the baby. I felt her hand, inside, touching Alicia."

Angel touched Spike's belly. At last getting to feel that child within. He expected to feel the cooling of her corpse, but instead he felt the strong rhythm of her heart, still beating. Still so very much alive.

"She's still alive, Spike. Listen, feel her heart beat. She's still alive." Angel's renewed tears were tears of hope. "Where there's life, there's hope." He took Spike's hand in his and placed them both back on his child's belly. Feeling that firm heart beat with his beloved Child. Their child still lived.

"Xander's gone." Willow's grieving voice eventually broke in on Angel's awareness. "He killed himself and Dawny." There was another brief pause. "Oh Gods, Buffy!"

Angel continued to hold his child close as they both felt the child within his belly live. Her heart beat a strong reminder of life. As he held Spike he looked around them. The former human fighters were mostly dead. The few gremlin creatures that had survived the battle were dropping to the floor, turning to dust. Nothing without their Goddess as focus.

"Right, where would Hera have gone? Can we get there? Where can we dispose of the bodies safely?" It was Faith that took command. She turned to the few faces she was most familiar with. "Cordeilia, could you contact Giles, let him and Wesley and your other friend know what's happened. They might have some ideas." She tried a tired smile at Cordeilia and felt a flood of relief when the dark haired girl smiled just as tiredly back. "Where're your friends?" She looked around, counting their number.

"Kate? Anya?" Cordeilia asked. She turned over bodies, some covered in gremlin dust, some just dead gremlins until a choked sob was drawn from her. There, at her feet, was Kate's bloodied and broken body.

"Is she.." Willow almost asked as she stepped up to Cordeilia's side. She crouched down and felt a faint heart beat. "She's alive, but seriously injured. She needs help, now!"

"I'll see to her." Oz easily picked her up in his half wolf form and headed for the door. "I'll take to the nearest hospital and get right back. Okay? And Anya ran, early on. I guess she couldn't face what she knew we'd have to do to Xander. What he did to himself. I guess we're going to have to tell her just how brave a man he was, right up to the end." He didn't wait for an answer, he just headed out with his hurt comrade heading for the help she needed.

"Phone Giles!" Cordeilia reminded herself, firmly. She headed for the reception area and the telephone. Dialling, she noticed that her hand was shaking. She glared at the offending hand and let a sob slip. "I don't know the number.." She confessed to the roof. Her shock and grief both threatening to take over her mind.

Tara repeated the number for Oz and Spike's place. She'd used it so much in the last few weeks, keeping in touch with Hera, and what had become home base to them all.

"Thanks." Cordeilia tried a smile and, just as Faith had found out, she found it returned.

"Willow, help Buffy onto a sofa. Erm, I'm sorry, I don't know your name?" Faith smiled, very shyly at Tara.

"Tara." Tara informed her, trying to smile bravely.

"Tara." Faith acknowledged the blonde girl with a smile. "Could you make coffee and tea for everyone? I think it's supposed to help with shock." Tara nodded and headed for the kitchen. "Erm, I don't know your name either." This time she was slightly more confident that smiling helped. She smiled at the blonde vampiress. "But, could you go with Tara and see to whatever blood requirements you and the others have?"

Harmony looked up at the dark haired Slayer, grateful for any guidance and direction at that moment. She smiled, shakily, and she too headed for the kitchen. She had direction, something to do for her sire and grand sire.

"Angel, do you need help assisting Spike to the other couch?" Faith asked her personal inspiration and mentor.

"Thanks, Faith. If you could." Angel let Faith help him, yet he never fully relinquished his grasp on his Child. "So, how did you get out in time for all this chaos?" He tried to establish a normal conversation with the dark haired girl. Anything to let his own equilibrium reassert itself.

"Spike got me parole. He stood up in court for me and got me released to the recognisance, is that the right word, of an employer of his choice. So long as my parole officer agrees." Faith smiled at Angel and at the vampire still firmly held in his arms.

"The others are on their way over. They'll be here in maybe thirty minutes, depending on the traffic." Such banal conversation finally hit Cordeilia and she started to cry, quietly. "Is it all over?" She sobbed.

"Yeah, all over. But not all done with." Faith lead the sobbing girl to sit by Buffy's side. With such normal kitchen sounds filling the air she finally had time to take stock. "We need an obstetrician." Was the only thing she could immediately think of to say.

Tara and Harmony brought tea, coffee and blood out of the kitchen. Passing mugs around they all finally found someplace to sit, or perch and wait. Faith sided with Angel and Spike, as did Harmony. The blonde vampiress was content to sit by her adoptive family's side, just in case they needed her.

They all waited for Giles, Wesley and Gunn to arrive. And for Oz to return. And the hope that one of them would have an idea of where to go from there.

On her couch Buffy just sat, nestled between Willow and Cordeilia, motionless, tearless. Alone.

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Chapter 19 by Shamenka and Vixen

What had started out as a routine check on his incapacitated charges ended in an unforeseen outburst of excitement. One of his so long still guests had moved. He had seen it with his own eyes and rejoiced. That one small movement was no idle wished for dream, it had actually happened. Mister Connors had moved his left hand! For one hundred and twenty years or so it had lain palm down, now it was twisted into a somewhat uncomfortable palm upwards position. It had moved entirely of it's own volition. This was one of the signs he had so long waited for, that Messers Connors and Becker were waking up. Not that he thought they were anywhere jumping from the beds they had lain on for so very long and dancing a jig round the room. Far from it in fact. Yet it was an important first step, and marked a change in his normal care routine. He would have to exercise their bodies more often to facilitate their comfort whilst waking up. And it could all only mean one thing; that his dear William was himself once more. No doubt still a vampire, but his own sweet self, or as close as would make no matter to him. His William had finally recalled their charges. That his inner soul was once more in control, dominating the parasitic demon symbiot that was forever grafted onto his being; sustaining him, yet tainting him all the while.

It cheered him, knowing that his demon charges were finally waking from their long hibernation. It was not only that his dear William was the only one able to work this miracle. It was that no matter where his charges went, he would go too. Most probably straight to his dear William's side: where ever that was. They were the only connection to his William left to him, and that made them as family to him. And family was all that mattered to any Trasker demon.

He quickly brought a writing desk into the chamber in which Messers Connors and Becker lay. He would watch them as he completed his journal entry. All his little thoughts he had for so very long wanted to share with his William might finally have their destiny fulfilled. Writing soothed his whirling thoughts. Let him focus on the very real requirements for modern transport. His charges were tall enough to be unusual humans, but he himself was slightly taller still, and a rather distinctive pale lilac into the bargain. It has been so long since he had worn a physical glamour to disguise himself for any length of time that he thought he had surely better start practising once more.

Somehow he knew he faced a journey of far greater importance than his weekly trip to Sainsbury's for his groceries. He was going home. And home was where ever his William was.

She was beautiful. Asleep, curled up safely in her father's belly. And beautiful. So beautiful he didn't think he'd ever manage to express just how beautiful she truly was.

And if Glory weren't already dead, he kill her himself, slowly, painfully for what she had done to that totally innocent girl... And to Dawn too! He had to be honest with himself and admit that he cared little as to what had happened to Xander Harris. It was hard to care for someone who hated you quite so much. That was something he would only do under very special circumstances, like now; still loving his childe that had so many reasons to hate him. Least of all the beautiful girl sleeping inside of him.

"She is so beautiful!" He whispered, he didn't want to raise his voice and make Spike fully aware that he was still there. Sitting beside him, looking up at the projection the senior God of Healing was casting of the baby nestled inside Spike's body.

"That she is." The God smiled as he replied. "And only that one hip took any damage from Gorificus' touch. But I believe a lot of that damage will repair itself before she's born. And of course Glory can't touch her ever again." The God, Apollo, snarled at the name of their late opponent. "If she weren't already dead I'd introduce her to my little brother..." He muttered on to himself almost below even a vampire's ability to hear.

"I thought you had a sister. Artemis?" Angel was lost. It had been literally centuries since he'd had any reason to study the Greek Gods. Not since he had left school had he read anything much about them in fact.

"Yeah, and all of my father's other children. I was thinking of Ares. He'd have shown her what Gods think of those other Gods that choose to hurt children. Especially children under our protection!"

"Ares... he's the God of... of War isn't he?" Angel's face was contorting with the effort at such deep thought. All he wanted to do was sit and stare at the image of his daughter. The one he forced on his childe's body when he raped him.

As always that remembered guilt was like a shock of ice water over him. He couldn't get away from the fact that he had caused his childe such hurt, such humiliation over and over again. It was possibly the worst day in history for his sweet William, the day they met, even if it was the

greatest day in all of creation for either Angelus or Angel.

His hands instinctively curled around Spike's hand as the younger vampire lay on Apollo's examination couch. He cast his eyes down, away from the sight of their tiny sleeping daughter. A child the like of which no vampire had had in many centuries, and she wasn't even the product of a loving act.

"He is indeed. And a very inventive God of War he is too. He's fanatical about children. The first ever murder trial the world ever saw was Ares' trial over his then youngest kid. He'd killed one of our Uncle Poseidon's sons for raping his daughter. He was acquitted too. Ares hates rape in all its excuses." Apollo seemed to think for a moment about his patient and how he gained him as such. He turned to face Angel once more before issuing his warning, such as it were. "I guess it's just as well, for you that is, that he's not here at the moment. He's not over keen on what you did to young William here."

"I'm neither proud nor keen on my actions either. I have caused Spike nothing but pain since I first met him. And it doesn't even matter if I'm Angelus or Angel. My actions always seem to end up hurting him." The despondent older vampire didn't relinquish his hold over Spike's hand. All he did was hold it ever tighter, like the almost living embodiment of a life line. A life line neither could afford to let go in danger of losing their lives for ever.

"Excuse the hell outta me the pair of you, I'm still here, still have an opinion and all. Being pregnant doesn't make me either deaf or stupid, you know?" Spike dislodged the disc sitting over the growing bulge in his belly making the image of the child within him flicker and break up. "I know what happened, I was there after all. You broke in and beat me up, raped me, shoved this collar on me and promised to do it all again the following night. I don't think that's at all coverable by such a namby pamby word like hurt. I really don't. And all because your beloved Buffy asked you to." The amount of pure hatred Spike got into the name Buffy impressed even the single God in his very small private audience.

"No, don't blame Buffy. All she asked me to do was to speak to you. To get you to back off. Well, actually she wanted me to get you to leave her alone and to stop declaring your love for her. Only she didn't know she was talking more to Angelus than Angel. It wasn't her fault, she didn't know that I'd been driven half insane by Wolfram and Hart. I blame them, and myself. She didn't know I'd go off the deep end declaring that you were never to touch what's mine. Shit, I even lied to you and myself. What I really meant was no one was to touch you. That's why I didn't want you declaring your love for Buffy. You had been entirely faithful to Dru for over a century! I didn't want you being as faithful to Buffy as you had been to her." Angel took a deep steadying breath before continuing his narrative. "There's this firm of lawyers, they're called Wolfram and Hart. They set this young hot shot lawyer on to me. He had them raise Darla from Hell and between them they dragged Angelus out from behind the soul, kicking and screaming all the way. But, he had to share the spot light with the soul. I never lost my soul, only my mind, any semblance of self control. His insanity flooded both our minds. His lack of control took over until the morning after I attacked you. And we both remembered what we had done. The demon and the soul were finally in accord. But, by then, as I thought, it was too late. When I finally got back to your crypt I was going to take you home with me, nurse you back to health. Feed you all the Sire blood you could drink. Beg you for your forgiveness. I had such plans to make it all up to you. Only I got there and Buffy told me you were dead." Angel could go no further, he buried his head in his hands, and ironically Spike's hand that he had never relinquished hold of. Wetting them both with his tears.

"He's telling the absolute truth!" Apollo sounded totally amazed. He had clearly had as much scepticism at Angel's motives as Spike had had himself.

"It's all in his memories. I'm surprised the soul held on so strong. I'd hate think what would have happened to you had he not held on so damn tightly to that little spark of humanity. The horrors those alien bastards put him through... it beggars belief."

"It really was Wolfram and Hart's fault then? Not just him wanting to do all that? All this?" Spike sat up a little more and used his free hand to gesture to his distended belly.

"Trust me, I'm a God, more than that I'm one of your Gods." Apollo smiled at Spike, a warm reassuring gesture.

"It's a good thing their time is almost up then, isn't it? Only they don't know revenge is on its way!" Spike laughed. He let rip with a burst of genuinely warm laughter.

"How, who? Did you send a hit man after them? They're demons, that wouldn't work with them!" Angel looked up and never let his eyes drop from the sight of a highly entertained Spike's joyous smile.

"I know exactly who they are, you moron. I used to work for them!" He stared at his now totally confused Sire. "Can you recall what I did for a living way back when you first met me? Like when I was actually still living."

"You worked in an office, that much I remember. I'm sorry I was too busy enjoying all these fantasies involving you, me and a decade or two's privacy to pay strict attention to the ins and outs of your mortal life. It was something you did during the day while I couldn't be with you. And something that occasionally took you away from me of an evening too for that matter.."

Angel couldn't help it, he frowned in annoyance at that long ago job.

"I was a lawyer, I work for a big firm in London. Messers Connors, Wolfram, Becker and Hart. Only I worked with the two nicest demons you ever met. Mister Connors and Mister Becker. They were the then senior partners and suffered the most gruesome take over. Which I was blamed for by the way, seeing as I was by then a vampire and had been for seven years." Spike glared at Angel who had the grace to blush.

"And you'd worked for these demons how long exactly?" Apollo knew the answer, he simply wanted Angel to realise why his Spike had never had any fear of him.

"Since leaving University with my Law Degree. About twelve years by the time I finally lost control of the demon inside." Spike shrugged and blushed remembering his actions back then. "My mum had just died and Messers Connors and Becker had just told me what they were going to do. Go into hiding. They gave me a trigger phrase and sent me on my way. Familyless! That was when I teamed up with Drucilla. I had to leave my bosses with my step father, but since he's a Trasker demon I knew he'd live long enough to take care of them. And I said the trigger phrase in court when I appealed for clemency for Faith. So they're bound to be waking up.." He stopped talking when he realised that the God with them was now laughing almost hysterically. "Care to share, do we?" He didn't care if he were talking to a God or not, his voice dripped pure sarcasm.

"Yeah, well they got out of Hell all right; their souls that is. Along with this really nice guy called Lindsey McDonald. His soul anyway. But I'll leave your afternoon visitor to fill you in on his sorry tale later, like afternoon later. Suffice to say they are waking up even as we speak. Their souls are now safely in Tartarus." Apollo saw the fury in Angel's face at the mention of the third soul. He couldn't deny him his right to be angry, he knew from the dark haired vampire's own thoughts and memories just what part Lindsey McDonald had to play in his attack on Spike. "And I agree Angel, you will get the chance to face Lindsey McDonald again. Only this time try talking to him, don't just rip off his head and send him back again. He might have had a change of heart or other such epiphany whilst in their Hell. Rather like another demon might have at one time or another?" Apollo managed to calm down and simply enjoy the feral look on the older vampire's face.

"And?" Spike asked, demanding an explanation from one or other of them. He didn't mind which.

"Lindsey McDonald was the young lawyer I was talking about earlier. He was the one that raised Darla! He was the one that drove Angelus and me both merrily on our way to joint insanity! He was the one that had me in such a state that I did what I did to you! He was the one whose head I ripped clean off his shoulders, right before I killed Darla, yet again!" Angel looked at Spike as he spoke. And Spike finally realised that he had never had the full power of either Angel or Angelus' wrath directed at him.

"You don't like this guy, do you?" He tried a gentle tease at Angel's expense. He couldn't help but laugh at Angel's startled expression. Yet, when his laughter triggered Angel's laughter he couldn't help being encouraged as to their chances of some sort of stable future, if not together then at least a lot closer than they had had in the past.

"What gave away that clue?" Angel finally managed to ask.

"I could hear the exclamation marks. I swear I could." Spike smiled at his Sire, the look that that one small action triggered almost had the younger vampire running for safety.

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Chapter 20 by Shamenka and Vixen

The God of Healing noticed the looks passing back and forth between the vampires and decided that Spike was well enough to be allowed out for a walk in the Olympian sunshine. And he could take Angel with him, it might help the dark haired vampire to calm down, expend some of that nervous energy.

"Ok, children, take yourselves out of here and go for a walk. Go explore the place, the public places and gardens that is. I don't want to see either of you again until your visitor is ready to talk to you. Give it a couple of hours. Shoo, go, now!" Apollo ushered them out of the door and into the sun light.

Angel's immediate panic amused the God for a second, until he realised the fear was for Spike, and genuine.

"Didn't anyone explain things to you?" He asked Angel as he quelled his fears with a touch. "This is Olympus, home of the Gods and our assorted relatives. Vampires are descended from one of us, you are part of us, our family. You are free to walk in the Olympian sunshine. It will not harm you. Go, walk, enjoy." He leaned close to Angel's ear and whispered lower than Spike could readily hear. "See how pretty your Spike looks in the sun shine." And he pushed the vampire out into the full light from the Godly sun that warmed the Olympian day.

"Let's go." Spike turned in the direction he recalled Hera's garden to be in. He'd been there rather frequently since he had first woken on Olympus. The quiet in Hera's garden never failed to soothe the tension in the soul he wasn't supposed to have. "Hera's garden is close by, and quite possibly the most beautiful place on all of Olympus." He led the way for a second, no more, then Angel was by his side once more, hand clasping his as if this time his Sire would never let go.

Thinking about Hera triggered a cascade of memories for Spike. He still hadn't heard how she was doing. Oz had all but physically fought Angel to take Spike home, once there the three of them had transferred here and Angel had sat with him ever since. Oz had gone off to make enquiries as to the conditions, if any, of the three who vanished from the field of combat when Hera disappeared. So far Oz hadn't returned. Yet the memories of his first few meeting with Hera was niggling at the back of his mind. It was relevant to what he and Angel had been talking about. About their dear former friends in Wolfram and Hart. If only he could remember what she had said, he knew it would make quite a considerable impact on things.

"Talk to me. Tell me why you did what you did? And I don't mean just this!"

Spike made a gesture with his left hand and indicated the slight bump his belly was definitely showing. "I mean all of it! Start with why you killed me in the first place. You know, I never knew what it was that made you do it. I had my own ideas, just never the truth." The look he gave his ensouled Sire spoke volumes to the dark haired vampire.

"I've thought a lot about that night. Hell, that entire time we were together, an honest to God couple. I know exactly what you said that triggered that insane jealousy. You said that in the fullness of time, if you became a father, you hoped that you'd be as good a father to your children as I was to my childer. I couldn't stand the idea of you lying with anyone, let alone some bovine arsed mortal female that wanted you just for your baby making capabilities and your regular income. I thought, for a deadly second, that you wanted to leave me for some woman you'd already picked out. I saw red, I saw green, I saw every damn angry colour in the spectrum. And not liking that rage I struck out at what I saw was the cause if it all. You. I drained you. It only took moments. Then I realised exactly what you had said. In the fullness of time. Not today, tomorrow or next week - in some amorphous future that may or may not have happened. So I fed you my blood, and then I ran away. I couldn't look you in the face and admit how foolishly jealous I was. I left you to dust yourself in the first light of day." Angel faced Spike as he spoke. He let his estranged child see the exact truth in his words in every look and gesture. "I was a fucking nightmare to live with for years afterwards. My sudden rages added to Dru's already addled mind. She thought it was all something she must have done or was about to do. Unable to decide she crumbled even further into her own world. For her part Darla didn't know what had upset me so much, nor did she even care. So long as she got her fine dresses and pretty jewels, she didn't care if I were happy, sad or suicidal."

"But when I came to you, with Dru, you were so pissed off at the very sight of me! I could see that you were annoyed that I'd not turned to dust. It was in every line of your body. You hated the very sight of me. I saw it all for myself, you can't deny it! I dare you to deny it!" Spike's voice cracked slightly at the remembered images of just how angered Angelus had been at the very sight of him in Drucilla's company.

"You have no idea do you?" Angel almost snarled at Spike's obtuseness. "I wasn't angered at you surviving. I was in a jealous rage because you were with Drucilla! She had already wormed a blood oath out of me that I'd not try and take her new friend away from her. Either by making him love me or by killing him. That I'd let her friend decide freely just whom it was that he wanted. See, I had always taken what lovers of hers I fancied for myself. But on that occasion she cornered me and I freely made that blood oath before Darla and the fucking Master so I couldn't go back on it. I'd never have uttered a single solitary word of it if I had known who her new lover was." Angel hugged his arms in close to his belly, as if the memories he was reliving were trying to make him throw up.

"And if you had known? You'd have not made the oath, would you?" Spike's voice held an echo of a long nurtured pain. The belief that Angelus only let him live on sufferance, that his Sire would have killed him rather than acknowledge him way back in 1880. Angel could hear that very old pain in every breath and utterance.

"Damn right I wouldn't have. I'd have beaten your whereabouts out of Dru and gone after you and claimed you for myself! When I saw that the lover I had sworn to leave alone was you I could have killed her!" Angel realised that they had reach a beautiful formal garden, he hadn't noticed their journey at all, he had been that focused on Spike. "Oh, is this Hera's garden then?" He looked about and saw a delicately carved wooden bench and escorted Spike over to it. "Please, rest, sit, we still have a lot to talk about." He assisted the pregnant vampire onto the bench and kneeled before him. "You have to believe me, I have loved you from that first evening I met you. And I thought I had killed you. Did you know that Angelus only ever fell in love once and only ever experienced guilt once?" Angel looked up into Spike's face as the Olympian sun made golden highlights in the younger vampire's natural hair colour. "I should never have stolen you

from the sun. I don't think it has ever forgiven me that crime."

"You were saying?" Spike blushed as he prompted his Sire to continue his narrative.

"Huh?" Angel managed, less articulate than Cordeilia with a vision induced headache.

"Angel loved once, felt guilt once? You were talking about it.." Spike shrugged, deeply embarrassed and hurt that maybe he had misinterpreted Angel's words. Maybe he was talking about Buffy?

"I fell in love, real love not just lust with you. And when I killed you it was the guilt that made me turn you. It doesn't really matter if it's Angelus or Angel, both incarnations love you equally. Only I'd like to think that as Angel I'm less likely to act on jealous impulses where you are concerned." Angel stood up and took his place on the bench by Spike's side. Reclasping the younger vampire's hand in his as he did so. "Even when I was attacking you, making our daughter in such a painful and deplorable fashion I was lying through my fangs!"

It was such an out of character thing for either Angel or Angelus to say that Spike couldn't help himself, he laughed at Angel's choice of words. "You lied about what, to whom?" Spike's voice was taking on more and more cadence of William James Mansfield, losing the adopted nuances that were all Spike.

"I lied about not wanting you to touch Buffy because she was mine. I didn't want you to touch Buffy because you were mine! I didn't really give a rat's arse about her being touched, just about you doing the touching." Angel grinned somewhat sheepishly at his admission.

"But, last time before that, when Angelus was let loose you took Dru away from me! You never once looked at me with anything but derision in your eyes!" Spike tried to storm to his feet and stalk off in high dudgeon. He didn't even make it upright. He was held firmly by Angel and came crashing back down to sit beside him.

"Remember the blood oath? By that time both Darla and the master were dust. The oath was null and void since the witnesses were no longer with us. But I chose not to take you from Dru but to take Dru from you!" Angel held Spike's gaze all the time he spoke. "You were supposed to wheel yourself into my bedroom and not move until I left Dru alone! Only, you didn't follow the script I'd mapped out in my head. Oh no, not my beautiful Spike, he went and teamed up with the slayer and won! What was supposed to happen was you would finally demand that I put aside Dru and my obsession with the slayer and we would make wild passionate love for the very first time in one hundred and twenty seven years. I had allowed for the contingency that you'd kill the slayer, making your tally three slayers, and then you'd fight me for Dru. Only we'd end up making love rather than wrestling. That one didn't work out either."

Spike watched Angel's face as the older vampire catalogued his lack of foresight when it came to predicting the most probable reactions of his child. He had to conclude that Angel and Angelus really didn't know him all that well!

"And sending the entire world to Hell? Was I supposed to come and stab you and thus proving how noble and honest and worthy of a soul I was?" Spike was trying to fit in what Angel was telling him with what he remembered so clearly of the return of Angelus.

"No! I was thoroughly pissed off and had decided to do something utterly stupid! I can't explain that one, because I don't have any idea as to why I did it. I found out about the artifact, which had no business being found where it was by the way. Anyway, it was like finding that damned collar, I don't know why I did what I did, I was only left to regret doing it. I went to Hell, or Wolfram and Hart's headquarters as I now know it to be. And if Wesley and the others hadn't been there for me this time I'd be back there now. I was going to destroy all of them for torturing me like that.

For putting me in a position where you suffered like that! And to cap it all off, I found out a day or so after the event just what that collar was! As it is all I managed to do was kill Lindsey MacDonald and Darla again, that's becoming too much of a habit you know? Anyway, I killed them, went to Wesley to find out about the collar, I'd had this dream and the collar was so important in the dream. Wesley had a copy of Gronmann's catalogue and I flipped out when I read the dedication in it. So Cordy took it from me and Wesley found a reference to the collar. When I knew I'd caused you to suicide carrying a clump of cells that would have been our baby I threw up!" Angel blushed, a deep even red. "I mean, I was in such a state I had to let Cordeila drive my car and I made her stop so I could throw up! I've never thrown up, not once before that night. Granted I've come close, but that was the first time I actually did it."

Spike patted the hands that still held his right hand so tight. He could sympathise with Angel's upset over throwing up. It wasn't something he enjoyed doing in the early stages of his pregnancy. During his 'I still hate Angel and don't know why he did as he did to me' stage. Finally Angel had confirmed all Hera had found out for him, had it been only a few days before? Then he remembered something else of importance. He owned Angel's building and the mortgage he had taken out over the lease! And he remembered just what Hera had said about Alicia's existence. Granted it had been the first morning, or close to it, after he had tried to stake himself, he could be forgiven for not recalling clearly. It seemed that maybe it was his turn to confess all, or at least a healthy chunk of all!

"I knew all that. About Wolfram and Hart. I knew about your jealous rage and how they had induced it. Hera found out about it a few days back. But I had to hear it from you too, I had to hear you say it. There was no point in me knowing it if you never faced the truth. I also know some other stuff that you should know too. Stuff like I own your mortgage and your damned hotel. And things like, Hera thinks you were made to pick up that collar. After all, it was kinda too handy to be genuinely coincidental that you got it and used it before you found out what it did! Hell's teeth, it could have made me super strong or anything and you used it without a moments hesitation. And here I quote Hera who was trying to explain why they saved me and what had happened by the way!" Spike took a deep breath before he spoke again. "She was talking about how they had tried to cover all the variables but couldn't... hadn't foreseen one major change in their scheme of things, she said; 'One of those details is the baby you are now carrying. We didn't actually count that into our plans. We suspect one of the other players got wind of our plans and tried to counter our emergence into the field of play'..."

"What?" Angel's voice went very cold, very flat. "Wolfram and Hart didn't just try and drive me insane they arranged for me to... to find that collar while I was in the frame of mind where I'd be easily convinced to use it? They made me do all this to you? Oh, I promise you, I am going to make them pay and pay and keep right on paying, in blood if need be, until you are satisfied that they have suffered enough. Only then will they die!"

"Who are you avenging? Me or yourself?" Spike tried to read Angel's face, but he had closed in on himself in his rage. He was determined to not show that anger anywhere near Spike, a fact that Spike could not help but smile at.

"Neither, I am avenging Alicia. She shouldn't have been conceived like this! She should have been the product of love, not manipulated hate. I should never have hurt you, I should never have killed you that night back in 1873. I should never have done any of the evil things I've done to you..." Angel's very real guilt was halted in its tracks by Spike's next words.

"You might have been manipulated into creating me too. Did you ever think of that? That you had no real say in creating me?" Then Spike's new idea really sunk in. "Fuck!" He screamed abuse at the fine Olympian sky. "Who did I tell you I worked for? Wolfram and Hart's partners. Who did they want to overthrow? Those same partners. They never batted an eye lid after they discovered I had been turned!" Spike was raging. His free hand twitched and pointed out each point.

"They may have taken advantage of our meeting. But I rather think I fell in love with you all by myself." Angel smiled, gently. "But as for the rest of it - you became a vampire and were round long enough to wake them from the hibernation or what ever they're doing."

"What are we going to do about it?" Spike asked, calming down as Angel drew lazy circles on the back of his hand, soothing him.

"We are going to go out for dinner, see shows, take in movies. I hope. I have every intention of courting you the right way now. Just like I should have done back in the begining. I am going to beg for your forgiveness and pray that our daughter will want me in her life when she hears how I raped you. I am going to ignore all of them, as best I can, and concentrate on making your life as full of love as you'll let me."

The dark haired vampire sat in the sun, waiting for Spike to comment on his dream for their future. He knew a myriad of thoughts were chacing around in his childe's head, and heart.

"She was created to the devine plan of the Gods, or somebody, demon if you wish. We were just vessels for their machinations." It wasn't Spike that spoke to him, it was his sweet William. "She is, however, our daughter. And I like your plan, and our role in it." He smiled a genuinely warm smile, the likes of which Angel had not been on the receiving end of for one hundred and twenty seven years.

"You will let me court you? As you should be courted?" He asked, just to make absolutely sure he understood everything that Spike, 'William' might be saying.

"Yes." William said quietly, looking up at him from beneath the shelter of hs impossibly long lashes.

Angel sealed their agreement with a gentle kiss to William's fingers, still held captive in his much bigger hands.

"My William." He whispered in bendiction to his returned love.

"Erm, Spike. After all this time, I've kinda gotten used to Spike. But, maybe William, in quiet times, private times... Liam." The hope of private times with Spike almost had Angel disgrace himself in Hera's garden. The release of tension was a near orgasmic moment.

"Spike it is." Angel was content to sit by his childe's side and look to the future, now that he had one. "We'd better get back to your visitor, it sounded so mysterious when Apollo was talking about it." He hated to break the mood, but he hated even more being the cause of trouble for his Spike if he could possibly help it.

"I suppose!" Spike sighed deeply at the concept of facing whomever was scheduled to see him. He was far too content simply sitting there in Hera's garden, enjoying the Olympian sunshine. "Help me up then, and we'll head back." He batted his eyelashes outrageously at Angel making the darker vampire laugh at his antics.

"My pleasure." And Angel drew him to his feet, and into the embrace and shelter of his arms. He held him there for a few moments, letting Spike know through that gentle contact that he loved him and thanked all fates everywhere that he was giving him this second chance. Despite his strong desire otherwise, Angel knew it was far too soon in their renewed relationship to risk even a fleeting kiss. The moment might be soon, might be near at hand but wasn't yet now. He contented himself with a heart felt sigh instead.

Together they started to walk back to Apollo's chambers and the mystery guest that seemingly awaited their return. Walking side by side once more both grinning widely in the sunshine, it was

a major victory against their enemies. Wolfram and Hart and their demonic minions might try their damndest to break them, but they would not let them. They were once more together, and would remain together.

"So, who do you think we're going to meet?" Angel wove his fingers once more through Spike's and gently squeezed his child's hand. Grinning wildly when he felt Spike's fingers squeeze back.

"With the Greek Gods, it could be any bloody one of them, a hero type or whatever. We'll only find out when we get there." Spike looked up at his sire and smiled. "Anyway there're far more important questions I want answers to!" He didn't snap, he did scowl slightly however, for effect.

"What questions, what's wrong?" Angel's immediate concern was genuine, it was clearly writ large in his troubled gaze and Spike felt a tiny little twinge of guilt for putting it there.

"Where are you taking me for our first date?" He smiled, almost shyly at his flabbergasted sire.

"Where ever you want to go!" And he bestowed the first kiss he felt able to give him onto Spike's fingers entwined with his. That moment was now. Spike welcomed his gentle touch.

"Funny, I thought you'd say that!" Spike laughed and walked on, towards their mysterious meeting and whatever lay ahead. Angel had to follow, he was determined to never let go of Spike's hand again. No matter how inconvenient it became. Angel laughed at his silly thoughts, attracting Spike's attention once more. "What's so funny?"

"Oh, just random thoughts." Angel smiled at his child. "I love you. I've always loved you." He saw the confusion that danced in Spike's face and regretted the abruptness of his declaration. "It's ok, I only want you to get used to hearing that from me, because it's true. I do love you. And I truly always have. Only I was never able to express it properly before."

"And now you can?" Spike asked bluntly.

"Yeah!" Angel sighed, deeply as if from the roots of his soul. "The very thought of losing you was the catalyst I needed to grow up. I was a tactless, self obsessed drunken lout when I was alive, and remained that way for the best part of two hundred and fifty years. It was the sight of the one being to ever truly touch my heart and what little soul I ever could lay claim to dying because of something that I did, it changed me. I prayed so damned often to the Powers that be for the chance to start over.." He sniffed up, rather inelegantly. " And now I have it, courtesy of the powers that were rather than those damned task masters I followed so slavishly."

"So don't waste this one, because this one is the last one. Ok?" Spike was gentle, but firm and Angel knew he spoke the absolute truth.

"I won't, I promise you that much. I won't let you down, either of you, ever again." Angel touched the slight swelling that was their child and held his loves eyes with his. A single tear tracked down his cheek unheeded.

"Well..." Spike muttered a little uncomfortably at the declarations of love Angel freely gave him. Strong emotions had only ever led to pain and humiliation, normally at the hands of Angelus. It was going to take a lot of work to learn to trust Angel instead. "Let's get back then before the send the dog out looking for us!"

"Why would that be such a bad thing?"

"It's got three heads and all of them have truly awful bad breath is why!"

Spike laughed and walked on, enjoying the sound of Angel's honest laughter as he dragged along behind him.

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Chapter 21 by Shamenka and Vixen

They had waited for a hour or maybe days or only minutes. Time was almost a randomly applied concept on Olympus. After the first little time period, possibly only a few minutes, they had sat back on the couch Apollo had used while examining Spike and Alicia. It didn't take them long to be lying back on the couch with Angel's back to the wall and his chest pillowing Spike as comfortably as he could, both arms around his child's middle feeling their daughter's every slight movement. Or imagining he could. It made very little difference to the dark haired vampire. It was miracle enough that he was going to be a father, miracle enough that his beloved Spike forgave him all his transgressions. What did it matter if he could really feel her move or simply imagined he could. She was there, alive, the damage to her hip was on the mend and she was theirs!

Not much was said during their wait. Lots of smiles and soft looks as Spike twisted round to make sure Angel was still ok with him being there like that. Their silence was golden.

And it lay in tatters when the door opened and their mystery guest entered to find them snuggled up close together like that. It didn't matter then that Spike had forgiven Angel, or at least was trying his utmost to forgive him. It didn't matter simply because their guest never asked about it, about them, about why they were nestled together like that.

He simply attacked.

As the door opened they had both looked up into the shocked face of one newly returned from the dead Xander Harris. Immediately the shock faded the anger erupted. The dark haired youth had dragged a startled Angel out from behind Spike, threw him against the nearest wall and rammed the stake he had carefully concealed directly into the older vampire's heart. All before one of them even managed to utter a greeting to the youth. A welcome that died in its birth from Spike's lips. Angel hadn't even managed to formulate a word of welcome.

Looking at the obscene object sticking out from his chest Angel sank to the floor, a very Angelus like vulgarity on his lips. Almost in time with the slow wagging of the stake as his body bumped down the rough stuccoed wall of Apollo's chamber of healing. An unlikely place to meet his death. That thought led onto another much less profound thought, one he gave voice to.

"Fuck, that hurts." He whispered.

"No!" Spike screamed, throwing Xander as far over the room as he could manage, he dropped to his knees and reached out for his not dusting yet sire. "Please, not now! Please, Gods, not now! We need you, I need you, Gods please!" He whispered his undirected prayer over and over again as he reached out to support Angel from falling over.

The dark haired vampire pulled ineffectually at the piece of wood jutting out of his chest, giggling softly in his shock. Smiling at the forgiveness he could hear in Spike's voice, and see in his beautiful eyes as they begged him not to die.

"It's stuck, Spike. I can't shift it!" his hands felt as if they were made from wet cardboard, they had less grip and strength than their Alicia currently would have. "Oh, Gods, I don't want to die again. Not now, not when you.. oh, fuck it, it hurts." He kept on tugging at it, making no headway what so ever.

"You can't die, we need you. We need you!" Spike was openly crying, unable to focus himself enough to try and help Angel get that hideous piece of wood out of his chest, out of his heart.

"What is going on in here?" The deep rumble that was far too powerful to be a mortal voice boomed out into the room. It was followed soon after by more and more voices all demanding to know what was going on.

"Shit! Don't remove that stake!" Apollo finally made his way through the crowd to get a first hand look at exactly what was going on. He glanced around and saw his half brother close at hand. "Ares, help lift him onto the couch. The rest of you go do something useful!" The senior God of Healing tried to pull the stake out too and it didn't budge. "Shit, it's stuck!"

"I know..." Angel giggled almost hysterically at the God trying to help him.

"Let me try?" Apollo's half brother tugged at the remarkably stubborn piece of wood, it didn't move for him either.

"I want you to know...." Angel muttered a little more quietly. "That it hurts like fuck in my back every time one of you tugs at it!"

Ares pushed an arm behind the vampire and ran his fingers down the dark haired man's spine. On finding the point of the stake jammed firmly between two vertebrae he grinned up at his older half brother.

"Stuck in his spine." He said simply and waited for his brother's nimble fingers to join his behind the vampire's back.

"Got it!" Apollo sent a happy grin his brother's way and looked at the front end of the stake. "Okay, it works this way, I'm going to have to push this thing out from behind as Ares here pulls from the front. Feel free to scream in unremitting torment and agony." He looked at his brother and a silent signal passed between them.

Angel could feel his spine moving and his heart ripping even further as the stake was dragged out of his body. The God of Healing had been right, it was unremitting torment and agony. And rather than scream and frighten his sweet Spike any further he smiled tiredly at him and fainted. He missed Spike's frantic calling of his name, the terror in his voice as he thought Angel was about to turn to dust. He missed too the Gods beside him closing the gapping hole in his heart and chest, resetting the bones in his spine and ribs into their correct alignment. Missed the horror of seeing tears running once more down Spike's face.

"Shush, child, he's simply fainted, but he's fine. None of our children can be killed up here. If your over zealous friend over there had waited a little longer, however, and staked him on the Earth then your Angel would be dust by now." Ever the warrior Ares managed to admonish one man while trying to comfort the other. "Give my brother a second or two and he'll no doubt have your precious up and about once more." He was remarkably cheerful in the face of Angel's potentially fatal injury.

All he did was remind Spike of Xander's presence and what he had just done to Angel. It was all the younger vampire could do to not strike out at the War God's cavalier attitude towards Angel's injuries. He watched closely as Apollo touched Angel's face and light flew from the God to the Vampire. He caught the heavy nudge the God of Healing gave his half brother before Ares eventually joined the older God and put his hand to Angel's face too.

As both Gods redressed the imbalance in Angel's life energies they couldn't help but share in his uppermost memories. All his and Spike's discussions about 'them' about 'Wolfram and Hart' and their direct and indirect interference in their lives. They felt Angel's grief as he thought he was going to die now after all, even after he and Spike had made their peace. He was grief stricken that he would miss the birth of their Alicia, that he wouldn't get to court his beloved Spike as he should be. As Spike had agreed to let himself be courted.

Angel's love for Spike washed over both Gods, leaving them both grinning like loons at each other. They wakened Spike's sleeping Angel with a soundly manful nudge and matching lascivious grins.

"Spike, he's awake again!" Apollo yelled over his shoulder to the younger vampire trying to get to Angel. "Chill, kido, give him a couple of minutes to recover." The God of Healing pushed his half brother out of Spike's way and didn't let go of him once they were both standing up.

Angel's love and passion flowed between them, amplified by their own Godly natures until the echoes of that passion were all either God could feel.

"See ya!" Ares muttered as he grabbed his half brother. "Don't break the mortal, ok?" He waved rather vaguely in Xander's direction and took Apollo out of there with him. Neither God paid anymore attention to the goings on in Apollo's chamber of healing. They were having far too much fun exorcising Angel's imposed emotions.

In Apollo's chamber Spike turned to look at the rather angry young mortal as he squatted on the floor. Bending, with a degree of difficulty he snatched up the discarded stake and approached Xander with a slow deadly grace.

"What the fuck did you think you were doing? Why shouldn't I do as much to you?" Spike's voice was soft and calm, denying the rage that shone in his eyes. The very quivering of his body as he tried to contain his rage was a dead give away however.

"Something Dawn wanted to do ever since she had to hide in the shadows and watch what that fucker did to you!" Xander stood up, straightening his legs as he pushed his back against the wall he had been squatting beside. As he stood up his rage boiled over. "All her memories are mine now. All her feelings, all her dreams and all her nightmares. And that sick fucker you were cosying up to all sweetness and light featured in a hell of a lot of her horrors!"

"Well, I don't see Dawn barging in here trying to stake Angel! Only you!"

Spike leaned in towards the young mortal and snarled at him, pricking his chest with the still bloody stake the Gods had removed from Angel's heart.

"That's because the only place she exists is in me!" Xander screamed right back at the pregnant vampire. "She didn't have any existence outside of being the key! So when we all went foomp on Hera's sword she was lost forever. She... she... they told me that she had to die because she didn't have a soul. That they finally knew for sure! Only beings with souls can be cured up here!" Xander watched the filthy stake begin to tremble as his words sunk into Spike's mind. "Spike?" He glanced into the younger vampire's face and saw a completely blank look, rather like any human in the throws of shock would look. "Oh fuck, Spike? You ok?"

Angel stepped immediately to his Spike's side and looked into his beloved's face. He lifted a gentle hand to touch the silently shed tears that began to flow down Spike's so very pale cheeks. Slowly, he removed the stake from those delicate, trembling hands, drawing it out of Xander's chest, and threw it over his shoulder. As it clacked hollowly behind them the sound seemed to trigger a small movement in Spike. The younger vampire turned to Angel and buried his face in his sire's recently repaired chest and bawled himself hoarse snuggled against the first being he had ever truly loved.

"Shhhh...." Angel held him tightly, snuggled into him as he offered inarticulate sounds of comfort. A rumbling purr echoed from deep within his chest.

"What's wrong?" Xander placed one hand flat against Spike's back and met Angel's eyes with

neither apology nor remorse. He still thought and felt that Spike could do so much better for himself than Angel. And he knew too that when and if he ever voiced that opinion he spoke for Dawn too.

"Only creatures with souls can be cured here!" Angel snapped back at the defiant young man. "Don't you ever listen to anyone else's troubles? Didn't you piece it all together yet? Gods, no wonder everyone always treats you like the Zeppo! You really are that stupid and useless!" Angel finally decided that enough was enough and that the kid gloves were well and truly off when it came to dealing with Xander Harris. "He was healed here, after Angelus' assault, my assault, after he staked himself, he was transported to Olympus and healed here you moron! Not on Earth." Still no light of comprehension lit Xander's countenance, Angel heaved a sigh as if it came all the way from the lowest level of Tartarus itself. "If Spike was healed here then according to your own statement he must have a soul. He has just found out that he truly does have a soul, after believing for almost one hundred and thirty years that he was a soulless demon destined to languish forever amongst the torments of Hell, and you just blurt out that he is as capable of being saved as you or I! Why the fuck do you think he's upset? They're late with his dinner perhaps?"

"And this is a bad thing, why?" Xander was still confused. Surely Spike should be celebrating, or something? Not snuggled close to Angel crying his heart out!

"Ever since I turned him he has seen himself as little more than a... a Gargoyle, a demon cast in stone to frighten little children into saying their prayers. Now he finally has proof that he is not Gargoyle, that he is as worthy of redemption as any of us. His mother was so right, Gargoyles don't cry... OW!" Angel rubbed a slightly red cheek as Spike's hand shot out and slapped him.

"Now what?" Xander demanded, now highly confused. He could attest that Angel had done nothing this time, made no threatening gesture towards Spike what so ever.

"You bastard!" Spike squealed up at his beloved sire. "You've read my diary!"

"I did!" Angel confessed. "But only after I thought you were dead. And only that one over the time I turned you. It brought my sweet William back to life for me. Sorry. I will return them as soon as we get back to normal Earth."

"Damn right you will!" Spike snarled at Angel, then noticed the bright red hand mark on his recently staked sire's face. "I guess I over reacted.." He stretched up onto tip toe and gently kissed Angel's so recently abused cheek. "Forgive me?" He begged.

"Nothing to forgive." And Angel lightly touched his lips to Spike's cheek.

Returning the gentle kiss his beloved had gifted him.

"Barff!" Xander yelled making retching sound effects behind the pair of kissing vampires.

"Shut up Harris!" Angel glared at his erstwhile attacker. "You might have all of Dawn's memories, but you have none of her heart, none of her caring attitudes. It's truly a damn shame they couldn't have given her your soul and left you for dead. But never fear, you and I will deal with you staking me - later. Hear me, Harris, this is your first and last warning from me; if you so much as lay a finger on Spike, upset him in anyway ever again, you and I will dance again."

Xander looked at the dark haired vampire and saw clearly that it was neither Angel nor Angelus that spoke to him. This was some half way amalgam of both creatures, and they both loved Spike beyond reason.

"Right!" Xander muttered and turned his back on the courting vampires.

"So long as we both understand things!" Angel led his child back to the couch and sat them both down, side by side and placed an arm around Spike's shoulders as he did so. "Now, how do we get off of here? We've got a date to organise." He laughed at the very slight flush on Spike's cheeks at his words and prepared to wait until Spike wanted to speak about his soul before he would raise the subject again.

"We can only get back when one of the Gods takes us. If they're not tripping over themselves to see the back of us it means they've got a big job for us to take over for them!" Spike spoke from hard earned experience.

"What sort of task?" Angel asked. He was aware of the mortal young man listening to their conversation but said nothing about it, or to him.

"A difficult one, knowing them." Spike smiled and moved slightly closer into Angel's side as they tried to sit closer together.

"Oh how well you know us, William!" A female voice filled with laughter drifted from the direction of the doorway making the occupants of the room turn to see who was entering. It was Hera.

"Hera?" Spike hurried over to her and hugged her close. No longer caring if anyone else knew he felt something for this Goddess. Felt a form of love for her that he had previously reserved solely for his own mother. More than he had ever felt towards Joyce Summers.

She eagerly returned the young vampire's hug, feeling for his surface thoughts and feelings. She let him take his time with their wonderful hug, he seemed to need it. It also afforded her time to assimilate all that had happened to Spike since they had last met. To share his fear and grief when Xander staked Angel before his very eyes. She had to agree whole heartedly with Angel on Xander's current worth. Alas, even Gods were constrained to act within the boundaries of their own laws.

"Now, standing here isn't getting anything done. We have to get back to the others and start putting everything back to rights. We have those awful demons trying to disguise themselves as lawyers to... to take down, I believe you might say? Another one of them to rescue and I'd better get you home before Oz decides to storm the gates and demand you back!" She turned to Angel and smiled at him, indicating him to come join her and Spike. "And as for you, young man, and don't argue I am Millennia older than you can imagine, you have a family to take care of." She pulled him to stand beside Spike.

"Willingly!" Angel grinned at her and took Spike back into his arms.

"Barf, again!" Xander's sarcastic tone totally spoiled the mood building between the reunited vampires. Much to Hera's annoyance.

"If you make that disgusting noise, or any disparaging remark, sound or face, ever again and I will personally introduce you to my older brother Hades. Do you get my drift?" Hera glared at the young mortal until she was sure he did understand her.

Xander looked back at her and ran the name Hades through his teen tv filter until he had an image that fit the title. That title being God of the Underworld - the guy in charge of all the dead folks. Emphasis on dead.

"I get you. Hades, dead, me." He turned away from the vampires and the Goddess, taking a few steps towards the window, distancing himself as much as he could from the activities directly behind him. "Knew watching Xena would prove useful one day."

Their arrival at Night and Day Investigations were witnessed by a half transformed werewolf pacing before to portal. As soon as the first foot stepped over from Olympus Oz was there, sniffing them each in turn. Leaving Spike till last.

"Everything ok?" He asked, looking at the humour dancing in his partner's eyes.

"Every bloody thing is beautiful!" Spike grinned at him and gave Oz the fastest hug the world had ever almost seen.

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Chapter 22 by Shamenka and Vixen

Upstairs in the living quarters Spike walked in flanked in the protective presence's of Angel and Hera. Oz walked in front, a vanguard they truly needed to slow the on rush of friends towards Spike and reassurance of his well being. They had let Xander drag behind, no one could fail to empathise with the young man's guilty feeling over his action while Glory was in control of his body. That it was Glory in control and not his mind and conscience would have to remain something Xander figured out for himself. His friends could show him the path to redemption, no one could make him walk it. All he had to do was forgive himself. An action of the soul far easier to think about than do.

On first sight of the happy formerly bleached blond vampire everyone knew their prayers had been answered. The baby was fine. Everyone tried to rush the younger vampire, only to have him duck behind Angel and Oz for protection. As was always his habit, Giles tried to sort out the mess before Spike bolted and none of them learned anything of value about his condition.

As he stepped forwards himself he spied the fourth member of the group of newcomers.

"Xander!" His near shout brought almost instant silence to the roomful of over excited mortals. "But, how? Where's Dawn? Is she alive too?"

At his words the room fell silent. Xander hesitantly tried his best to explain what had happened. He tried desperately hard to be gentle when he talked about how only creatures with a soul could be saved on Olympus. As he did so no one was watching the vampires, no one saw Spike take Angel's hand in a desperate grasp as he fought hard to not shed a single tear before that group of mortals.

"But wasn't Spike saved on Olympus?" It was Tara that spotted the most glaringly awful fact in Xander's story. "That would mean that Buffy has been murdering beings with a soul all these years! What happened to those souls? Were they all just sent to Hell no matter what they were like before the demon took over?"

"I'm afraid so child." Hera pushed Spike and Angel towards a couch and made them sit by the simple expedient of pressing her godly strength against their shoulders. They instantly sat. "But, on the plus side we now have those souls back, the innocent ones that is. Those alien demons can keep the truly evil ones for all I care.

"But if they have souls why did we not know this? Why were the slayers born to kill them?" Wesley couldn't fully cope with the idea that he was as guilty as Giles, as Buffy and as Faith of killing ensouled creatures. "We had it drummed into us constantly that they had no souls and deserved no pity!" He shivered in dread and was grateful for the warmth of Gunn's arms going around him and a strong body holding him tight against it.

"Easy man. You'd never have done anything against any creature you know had a soul and was subject to the control of that same soul. Either they didn't know or they simply didn't tell you. Maybe they didn't want you to have a crisis of faith while facing down an evil vamp? There are plenty of them around, as you so well know for a fact!" Gunn ended his statement with a gentle kiss to the side of Wesley's neck.

"Or they're actually run by the same demon's that have taken over Wolfram and Hart." Hera grinned at the black man still snuggling against his chosen mate, the love of his life. "After all they did try to limit their slayer's activities to vampire's only. And vampire's are the most obvious of the Children of Echidna left in this world. Our children. Olympian created. Oh, they have so much to pay for and the time has come, children to make them start paying back with interest due on all accounts."

"But Dawn?" Buffy finally spoke. For the first time since she watched Xander, Dawn and Hera vanish, she spoke aloud and was relevant to the conversation going on around her.

"She wasn't of our world, slayer. There was nothing Hera and the other's could do. But all her memories and experiences are lock up inside Xander's head. She was created only in this last year. All the memories of her as a child and what have you are totally created. Put them aside and face facts. The Key has been destroyed as has Glory." Spike cast a quick glance towards Hera. "I'm supposing here, but Glory is gone isn't she? No more skanky bitch to come poking her hands into folk's heads and unborn babies?"

"She is gone. She will not be back." Hera turned to the grieving slayer and tried very hard to like the poor girl. Only, she couldn't. It was as if she were tainted with something, something that smelled decidedly unpleasant.

Even Faith was shrouded in that stench, to a far lesser degree than Buffy.

Then realisation struck! They were created from the blood of the demons. They were indeed created by Wolfram and Hart, descended from their original demon spawn. They were human enough to have souls but they were alien enough to be traceable as not of this reality. "It was Wolfram and Hart that weakened the world enough to let Glory and the Key through into our world. And now it is time we destroyed them utterly. Sent them home to their own dimension with their tails, or what ever they have, firmly between their legs.. and did I just make a rather rude analogy?"

"Yes, but only a little rude." Spike reassured his friend and Goddess.

"Anyway, my rudeness aside, we are going to fight back. After all they've done to Angel and Spike I think it is time to show them the errors of their ways. And the first task I have for my children is to go steal their current greatest asset. They are regrowing the body of one Lindsey MacDonald in a..." She read from a sheet of paper suddenly in her hands. "...A maturation tank. Seems his corpse was heavily contaminated by, of all things, vampire ash. Now how could that happen? An employee of those bastards getting that friendly with vampires, utterly dead ones at that?" Not that she didn't already know the answer, but she wanted the mortals to all know the answer too. Including that irritating youngster, Xander Harris.

"That would have been my fault." Angel admitted. "After I realised what I had done to Spike I swore an oath to myself that I would make Wolfram and Hart pay. They had systematically driven me insane. Hell, they may have arranged for me to so conveniently find that fucking collar. Your damned collar!" He acknowledged the collar as Hera's originally, only damning their use of it against his child. "Who else would have a track on the Olympian's artefacts other than their greatest enemies. Anyway, I went back to LA, and found Darla, my sire and their weapon of choice against me, and she was in hiding in Lindsey MacDonald's apartment. There were no rescinding entrance spells in place so I jumped up to the open window and entered. They had wanted Angelus, I gave them Angelus. I ripped his head off and threw it into Darla's waiting arms right before I staked her. And I don't see why you want to rescue him? Hell is the right place for him, he'd be so much at home there. If you do get him back and he so much as looks at me funny, I swear, before all of you, I will kill him again. And again and again until he either gives up existing or you get sick of bringing him back!"

To make matters move along a little faster Hera implanted a more detailed account of all Wolfram and Hart had done to Angel, and through him to Spike directly into everyone's mind. She also picked up a plethora of unvoiced agreements with Angel's oath. Even the emotionally see-sawing Xander Harris had admitted to himself at least, that Angel had good cause to hate those lawyers, and the MacDonald guy in particular.

"Look, we are going to get his body back, partially vampired as it is and someone is going to have to finish his turning. He has so much knowledge and information that is going to be invaluable to us in this up coming campaign. And since he has already met Spike's former employers and helped them, and the other lost Olympian souls, to escape their Hell we owe him a debt of gratitude. We pay our debts, granted mostly in the coin of our choosing, but we honour them all the same." When Hera smiled it could only be described as a purely wicked grin.

"I can't turn him." Spike reminded her of the injunction on his eating habits. "Can't drink human blood and if he's not wholly vampire he's still going to be too human for me. I suppose we could get Harmony to do it, but she swore an oath not to drink directly from a living creature ever again when she became your priestess to the vampire temple." The younger vampire nibbled on his bottom lip as he thought through the problem. Angel and Buffy both watched that action, both desired to do the nibbling for him. "I guess I can give Robert a call? See if he can recommend anyone for the job. But being sire to creature such as this MacDonald character sounds like is not going to be a lot of fun."

"I'll do it." Angel's quietly determined voice cut in on Spike's train of thought. "I think I'd maybe enjoy being his sire. All those ancient rules of submission and dominance..." He chuckled, quite evilly, at the idea of his worst enemy being his youngest childe. "Granted, when I thought my William gone forever I vowed I'd never make another childe as long as I existed, but I'm sure you can grant me a dispensation for this special occasion?" He asked Hera directly for absolution for breaking his vow.

"Who's Robert?" Wesley asked, slightly behind the conversation, or so it seemed, but those who really knew him knew he liked all his i's dotted and all his t's crossed.

"Harmony's fiancé, a nice young vampire she met at the temple. He's part of the co-operative group that runs the slaughterhouse that funds the temple and keeps us all in fresh blood. It's a great line of business for vampires."

Spike laughed at the totally confused looks he received from most of his audience.

"Vampires working for a living, doing legitimate business with humans and living off the proceeds?" Wesley really wanted to make sure he had the facts straight. It worried him even more that there was something rotten in the Watcher's Council. All he was learning that night was in direct opposition to all he had been told from birth by first his father, then by his trainers and teachers in the Watchers themselves.

"Yes. Exactly." Hera replied, making absolutely sure the former watcher was comfortable with his new knowledge before they went any further.

"So, once we have this lawyer suitably turned, what next?" Wesley leaned towards the Goddess, revelling in the feelings of parental love and care that seemed to roll off the Goddess of marriage and childbirth.

"Why, then we bring some more friends home, well, to here in fact. By the time we can get Lindsey MacDonald turned and reunited with his soul, a couple of other souls we recently acquired will have rejoined their hibernating bodies and we will all be together again.

"Oh fuck!" Spike muttered. "I knew they would be waking up the moment I uttered my first word in that damn court room! I bet they're pissed at having been left waiting this long, aren't they?"

"Not at all, child, they're keen to see you again. No one has given them any details of your condition, no one has told them much of what is happening and subsequently they are getting a tad restless and suspicious. We thought you'd want to give them any details concerning your life yourself. When they and Gronmann come here. But before that we have to liberate their new friend Lindsey MacDonald for them." Hera stood up, all the better to pace nervously. "A lot rests on our turning Lindsey, and his remaining in the land of the almost living. If you turn him, you must not torture him, must not stake him. If at all possible." She glared at Angel and waited for his sullen nod before turning to more immediate matters. "Good, that's settled. So, what are we going to do about acquiring his body?"

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Chapter 23 by Shamenka and Vixen

Spike paced back and forth as he pondered his next action. He had retreated to the safety of his bedroom, alone, and left Oz, Angel and Xander all but tearing at each other's throats. All that rage and anger and they were still no closer to deciding what would be the best approach to getting that Lindsey bloke turned and trailing Angel like the pet dog he would be for the first decade or two of his vampiric existence. Getting all the attention Angel had to spare! Getting in their way when they wanted privacy! Taking Angel's attention when it should be focused on their mortal, living daughter! Being all Angel wanted from the perfectly respectful childe he would no doubt be!

Like all he had ever wanted to be, until he had learned the full implications of his turning and subsequent abandonment. Then his step father had literally stepped in to be his salvation. His teacher. And never treated him as less than his son.

Now Angel was to make another childe, on the demands of their Gods no less.

He had been Angelus' last childe, after his creation his sire had taken no other young souls to be his childer. Minions, certainly, but he had not had the time to create any more childer before the Romany's had gifted him with a very guilty conscience. His so called training period had barely finished before they had all gone to Romania at Darla's behest. It would be interesting to observe, first hand, what he had missed by not actually being raised by his blood sire's hand. All those tender, and not so tender touches Drucilla had talked endlessly of. All those secrets from her early years he had stayed with her just to hear. All those whispered stories he had fallen in love with listening to. Only to finally fall in some semblance of love with the story teller.

Was it the media or the medium? He giggled somewhat hysterically at his own question.

Then he realised that the previously invasive raised voices had reached some sort of stalemate, or that the vocal combatants had mutually annihilated each other and ergo had finally fallen silent; even if only for the moment.

Grateful for the brief respite in their on going war of words, he opened the door a crack, worried that he'd either be greeted by the smell of their freshly spilled blood or they'd simply wait until he emerged before recommencing their very private third world war.

On arriving in the sitting room he saw the whole group of them had split into three camps; Angel, Oz and Xander seemed to each be heading up their own small group of followers. Angel had his friends with him, and Giles and Faith. Oz had Hera and Harmony and Robert, who had seemingly arrived during his very private brooding session. Oz also had Buffy with him. Everyone else seemed to be with Xander. And that group included several vampires from the temple who no doubt had come along with Harmony. He also had Dawn's memories and feelings on any subject as well as having Tara and even Willow on his side physically.

But at least they were all quiet.

"So, no decision as yet I presume?" Spike looked at everyone, one by one, daring them to even speak. A room full of heads all shook in the negative however. "Why does it have to be so complex? We go in, we get the fucker, we leave again? Where is the complexity in that?"

"Oh, we all agree on that, it's the what happens next that we're fighting about now!" Oz informed him, less than helpfully as the war of words seemed about to erupt once more.

"Then Angel bites the fucker, turns him. It was all agreed... wasn't it?"

Spike looked at Hera for an answer, his mixed feelings at the idea of Angel turning anyone so clear to her in his confused, pain-filled eyes.

"Yes, my dear, it was. But, Oz did wonder how Angel's turning Lindsey would affect Angel's work for those damnable powers he works so diligently for. He quite rightly pointed out that we Olympians have no power to absolve him from a breach of oath he made in their names. They might see it as a breach of conscience and make him, and therefore you and Alicia, suffer. So that was where the fight started. If not Angel, then who should turn Lindsey MacDonald?" Hera shrugged her shoulders in a helpless manner. "I offered Harmony and Robert absolution from their oaths on this one very special occasion to perform the deed. Only neither of them have sired a child before. Experience will count for so much in this turning. Lindsey is a powerful mind, trained in all forms of arcane combat."

"Oh." Was as much as Spike could manage at that point.

"And I said there were more vampires available than the three they offered up as choices. Harmony brought over all these other vampires from that temple you talked about earlier and a couple of them have as much experience with childer as Angel does. And they're not so prone to suddenly becoming evil mindless demons. They all agree that they pretty much started out like that and kinda remain like that even though they chose not to bite today. Bit like alcoholics do." Xander looked at the two oldest vampires on his side and shrugged in a self deprecatory manner. Being as friendly with vampires as he ever could be.

"Kinda gives a whole new meaning to the VA, doesn't it? Ain't the Veterans Association it's really Vampires Anonymous!" One of the younger vampires on Xander's side spoke out, right before he stood up. "Hello, I'm Alexander and I'm a vampire. I can't help myself, but I have a need to bite people..."

"Hello Alexander!" The rest of Xander's group of vampires all replied at once, sharing the joke. Even Xander responded with the young male vampire.

Spike could foresee disaster if Xander and Alexander became inseparable friends.

"Hey, that's my real name, buster!" Xander muttered at the vampire once the joke was firmly over.

"Mine too. Snap! As the saying goes." Alexander grinned at his new found mortal ally.

"Oh." Xander was mollified that he was not being lampooned in any obvious manner. "Good joke by the way..."

"At last, someone with a real sense of humour!" And disaster had arrived.

Alexander and Xander clicked.

"And what, pray tell Angel, did you say to all these 'thou shalt nots' being bandied about so freely?" Spike's original accent was clearly in control of his voice. It gave itself over to hard biting

sarcasm so much better than his faux Cockney one did.

"I said I quit the powers that be and offer my services to Hera." Angel smiled at Spike, hoping his beloved would champion his cause with the Olympian Goddess.

"And you said what to that, Hera?"

"I said no. We need him and Cordeilia as conduits to those damnable upstart deities and shouldn't do anything to risk letting them know he had changed sides. Quitting and taking up with us is just not a good move before we're ready to challenge them."

"I see. But his acceptance of your existence is enough to effectively have him denied the grace of his original God. He is that bloody minded. God that is not Angel. He's a damned sight worse, more stubborn in his heart of hearts than any poxy Johnny-come-lately God you could ever imagine!" Spike looked at the sea of faces before him. This was so like the old times, before Liam Saunders and he had ever met. A task force of human and demons under his command. Only, before, he'd never have had a vampire slayer, let alone two of them, nor would he have a pantheon of Gods and Goddesses at his beck and call. Polite beckoning and calling he hastily added to the thought.

Hera caught the thought anyway and giggled almost girlishly at him.

"Okay. I think we should stick with the original plan. But have back ups just in case of emergency. We go, we get that Lindsey bloke's corpse and finish it's turning. We take along Harmony and Michael from Xander's faction as back ups to Angel. The rest of us go in , kick butt, kill as many of the bastards as we can and retrieve as much documentation as possible. Anyone not on the attack force can head over to the Hyperion and vamp proof several rooms. We're not bringing that Lindsey shit back here. He can go stick by his sire's side at his place. When Angel's here he's my Sire!" Then a thought occurred to him. "Did anyone clean up all those bodies from the foyer of the Hyperion? I don't remember anyone saying anything on the subject. Was kinda pre occupied!" He smiled a little sheepishly and rubbed his ever bulging belly, gently.

Every vampire, human et al watched that unconscious action. It was something that gave them all hope, very different, yet surprising similar hopes at that. Hope for their ability to create new life, not simply steal an old one. Hope that their would be a living bridge between humanity and demon kind that hadn't existed since the fall of Greek Pantheism in 350 AD.

"Erm, the bodies have all been removed. We do require the services of a good builder who won't scream at the thought of vampires and all to do some urgently needed repairs however. " Wesley's almost shy voice whispered out into the profound silence Spike's unconscious action had caused.

"Xander and Alexander here are the very man and vampire for the job. Alexander had some interesting ideas about vampire proofing buildings and Xander has the talent and skill to carry them out..."

"Hey, I want to go kick butt and maim and kill the enemy..." Xander interrupted Spike.

"Me too!" Alexander added.

"Did you just compliment me?" Xander asked.

"I get to design the restraining room too?" Alexander asked.

"What's a restraining room? Restraining who?" Xander asked the red haired vampire now sitting beside him.

"For the childe, Lindsey what's is name. New childer are a fuckin' nightmare. They have to be held secure if you want even a minute's peace to scratch your ass or anything." Alexander informed the young builder.

"Sort of like sociopathic two year olds with superhuman reflexes and strength? Hmm, interesting problem." Xander was hooked. "What materials would you want to build with?" And now Alexander was hooked too.

"Shall we simply get on with it then?" Spike glared at everyone else in the room. All their fighting and impassioned arguments and all it took was a cool head. "But we eat before we go! I do not want anyone being tempted to snack on the enemy ok?" A few of the other vampires in the room had the grace to look almost mortally embarrassed, if that was even possible.

"It only happened the once!" Oz replied, also embarrassed.

"You snacked?" Buffy asked him, a firm glare fixed to her face. "You made puppies? Wolflettes, what ever?"

"Can't spread the wolffy thing unless I really want to Buffy. I just snacked. Just the once! Was really hungry..." Oz wolf whined under the slayer's reproving glance.

"We eat, all of us eat! You too Spike!" She glared at everyone too and headed out to the kitchen to hunt blood, snacks and other forms of sustenance for their small army. It was the only way Spike let her care for his needs, to care for everyone else's needs too. "Ok, hands up humans.... and me 9, ok, hands up werewolves, still only the 1 and the rest...1 Goddess and 10 vampires."

"Do we have enough blood in?" Giles followed Buffy into the kitchen.

"Yeah, well, me and Robert brought a load with us. Fresh and all. We thought we'd maybe need it." Harmony smiled hopefully at Giles, hoping someone that she sort of considered family would approve of her actions. And Angel could see it in her puppy dog body language. He also had a sudden shot of family feeling and decided that if Spike's adoptive childe needed reassurance then it was up to her order to give it to her. As head of the Order of Aurelius that task fell to him.

"That was very thoughtful Harmony. Good forward planing." Angel smiled softly at the girl, even as he stood up and crossed to gently touch his beloved's shoulders. As Spike turned to look at him he smiled and Spike's face lit up like the sun in his acceptance of his presence once more in his life.

"Yeah!" Harmony enthused at Angel's supportive comment. "It was, wasn't it?" She smiled to herself, relishing her adoptive Grandesire's approval.

"Sure it was!" Alexander broke away from his in-depth discussion over the size of cherry bomb you'd need to make a big kaboom throughout the LA sewer system to cheer on his priestess. "And if you brought some fresh lamb blood in with ya' I'd be tempted to marry you myself!" He too headed for the kitchen.

"Ew!" Harmony's scolding tones followed him. "There's no lard butt making lambs blood. Deal!" She put her hands on her hips and looked as if she were about to stamp her foot too. Alexander had turned to watch her performance. His favourite pastime these days was winding up the priestess.

"But you know I only like lambs blood." He mock pouted at her.

"But it's too fatty, not good for you. Pig's is closest to humans blood and you know it!" Harmony

did stamp her foot. "It's my job to keep you all fed and healthy, so no lambs blood. Got that?" She tried to frown at Alexander, but it clearly had no effect on him. He just laughed at her.

"I don't want to be looked after. I can look after myself, make my own choices, and I choose lambs blood..." His tirade was interrupted by Angel. A lot of the vampires Harmony had brought with her knew of Angel by reputation. This was not a master vampire you wanted on your case. Ever!

"And if you want the distinctive sour smell that comes from drinking the fatty lambs blood, drink it! Just remember that if you do that you live, travel and fight alone! In a war that relies on stealth I don't want a rancid vampire by my side. But, hey, maybe Xander does? He knows exactly what it's like to live with a permanent target on his back. You drink Lambs blood again before spending time with him and you're targetting him too!" Angel had moved to stand beside Harmony.

"Grandchilde, go help the others in the kitchen, will you?" He smiled at her and she saw up close what Spike had always denied seeing in his sire.

"Yes, Grandsire." She smiled, blushed and headed off to claim sanctuary with the Vampire Slayer and her watcher of all people.

"It's a little known fact that vampires can get fat, you know?" Angel turned at the sound of Spike's very amused comment. He smiled at his love, egging him on to finish his explanation. "Oh, come on sire, you remember that vampire nest we crashed in that ponsey mansion in Bishop Auckland? Outside Newcastle?" He jogged his sire's memory of happenings more than a century past.

"Oh, Gods, them? Bow to me the Lord high shit for brains! I remember him now. Oh yes, they were immensely fat vampires. Couldn't run or fight even to save themselves, or their thralls. Dracula was well pissed when we dusted the lot."

"That's them, the cheating bastard never paid up on his bet either, still owes me money. But at least I got to see him finally get his arse whipped, by the slayer no less. So revenge, of a sort, was finally had." Spike shot a sly grin at Xander making the young man feel the blaze of his embarrassment flushing his face.

"I whipped who's ass?" Buffy asked having brought Spike's blood out first.

"Dracula's. Angel and I were just telling Xander the second here about a bunch of Drac's fat boys we dusted." Spike actually looked at her as he spoke. It was the first sign that he might eventually forgive her her rash and stupid actions of five months ago.

"So how did they get fat? I always thought that all that stalking and hunting kept a vampire all fit and trim. So long as they died fit and trim that is?" Buffy was picturing a nest of obese vampires in her head and the image did leave a lot to be desired in it's wake.

"They had been told to lay low. No hunting till Dracula got there himself. Vlad was off noshing on the snooty matrons and their delicate flowers in the resorts of Whitby and Scarborough further south a bit, on the coast. His little band of bad boys were noshing on the local sheep population, which was and probably still is, pretty vast in that area. Sheep's blood does indeed make vampire's fat! Seems we can't digest the high fat in it and since we don't..." Spike coughed delicately and waved a vague hand around his nether regions, Buffy cottoned on and blushed. "Well, not as often as humans do, so we can't get rid of the excessively fatty blood waste and we get fat. And stink. The fat goes rancid real fast and the smell is awful!"

"All right, all right! I get the picture!" Alexander snarled almost in Spike's face at the reprimand. What he didn't expect was Angel and the slayer to both draw stakes at him. He was doubly shocked when Xander dashed over and did the same.

"He is telling the truth, you know?" It was Hera's voice that had everyone backing down as they

all turned to her. "Spike and Angel were both telling the truth. Hence why Harmony was acting on my instructions and not supplying lambs blood any more. Now, do you want to snarl at me? Maybe try and bite me and see what that earns you, hmm?" She glared at Alexander until he fully backed down before his Goddess.

"I'm sorry, Hera. It's just that it taste much sweeter than any blood I've had before. Maybe I've got a sweet fang?" He tried a sheepish smile and the joke in that idea made him laugh slightly, softly. "I'm feeling sheepish now..." He muttered to the room at large.

Xander groaned as he put his stake away.

"That was awful, worthy of me infact!" He guided his new acquaintance into the kitchen. "Time to pig out I think!" He punned right back at him.

"Well, don't have a cow about it!" Alexander replied.

"I was only horsing around!" Xander answered.

And thankfully the door closed behind them. Angel was having a bad enough time tolerating Buffy so close to his Spike, Xander and Alexander's pun fest was a little more than he could stand.

"They were beginning to get my goat... all those puns!" He looked so innocent as the room resounded with groans and requests that he desist.

Within the hour everyone was fed and ready for their respective roles in the upcoming action. Those that were assigned to helping Alexander and Xander with the essential repairs and vampire proofing as many rooms as they could left for the Hyperion. Everyone else headed to the faux travel agent's shop that fronted for the hidden cryogenic chamber Wolfram and Hart were storing Lindsey in.

Spike tried to put a lid on his feelings for their plan. If Angel had to turn this shit for brains lawyer, well he had to. He tried to not see this new Childe of Angelus as a threat to his renewed relationship with Angel. Even if they had not gotten as far as the relationship part of the deal. It was too soon and he feared what his feelings for this Lindsey being in their lives all the time would compel him to do. Something stupid too soon, before he was emotionally ready for it.

For Angel, the idea of sharing anything, especially his blood, with Lindsey was making him nauseous. He could imagine himself drinking from him, and keeping right on drinking from him. But giving him the drink of eternal life? The idea of that man's lips on his flesh for any reason made that same flesh crawl!

Hera could feel her favourite children's fears and contemplated the other vampire's as the journeyed to Wolfram and Hart's outlying stronghold. She did fully understand why each faction thought their idea the best. But she still saw Oz' as the only viable one in the long run. It was best if Angel did not do the turning. He could help supervise the training. But not do the biting. Nor could her dear William.

All Buffy could think of was that Spike had talked to her. Not a simple instruction, but a story from his past. He'd talked to her like friends talking together. Amongst all the anxious faces, hers wore a huge, happy grin.

In a quiet house, in a quiet village in the West Midlands in England, the morning post arrived. A brightly coloured envelope, with pictures of clouds and aeroplanes bore the occupier's name in

clear type face. Gronmann tore open the envelope carefully and pulled out the contents. Travel documents, import licenses and a timetable sat in his hands. He looked at the travel date and smiled. A warm glow filled his heart as he reached for the phone and dialled the contact number on the covering letter. He knew this firm, new to the demon that ran it. But he hadn't instructed him to arrange this travel for him and his charges. That mystery needed to be solved before he could let his excitement have full reign.

If the details of the letter were accurate he would be in Los Angeles in three days. 72 hours until he would see his beloved boy for the first time in nine decades. He had had so many letters from him over the years, but they were not the same as seeing his Alicia's youngest son on a daily basis. His William hadn't really ever known his real father, nor much of his actual vampiric sire.

He was going to be with his dear son in three days time.

The phone was eventually answered by a voice he knew well. A fellow Trasker demon.

"Nemalian? I greet you, brother Trasker, and pray to the Pantheon that life treats you well. It is I, Gronmann that does greet you. I received from your company some three sets of travel documentation. May I enquire as to the origin of the instruction to issue such documents?" He waited for a response before he let his hopes rise even further.

"Gronmann? I greet you too brother Trasker. It has been such a long number of years since you moved throughout the world as is only right. But, rest assured your divine task is almost at an end. Your documentation was called for by the high Goddess herself. I was given the privilege of sharing words with her. My praise to you dear friend that you raised such a fine son as your human child William. He is her very right hand! And she sang his praises to me as she bid me bring her dear William's father to his side. I will have a team of helpers over to your residence on the hour of ten tomorrow to assist you packaging everything for the journey. Everything is arranged for you." Nemalian sounded like an over excited child rather than the coolly logical adult demon Gronmann knew him to be. He had been a friend of his own parents whilst he had been little more than a child. Gronmann had known this demon that long and this behaviour was so atypical that it added to his own building excitement.

"It will be good to see my son again. To know that if he has recalled my charges then his heart is his own once more. I always knew he would return to the way of living beings. Maybe he is still a vampire, but his heart is no longer the demon's to rule. Did the high Goddess say anything directly about my son? Is he well? Happy?" Gronmann's voice trembled slightly at the idea of being greeted by his son's embrace in three days time.

Three days plus the flight over there. He would count the hours but was unsure how many he should count.

"How long is the flight?" He asked his old friend.

"The flight is of 9, maybe as much as 11 hours if the wind is wrong. The Goddess did not say much of your William, she may not have known that I had knowledge of the boy from meeting the man demon as a human child. But I think he needs his father's hand to help him. She said he had need of his father, as children are wont to do as their lives change. She said he made her tasks on this world possible. That she valued him as she would a child of her own. Such fine words for a Divine being as she uttered about a child born human and childered in such an unsavoury fashion. Give your son warm greetings from my heart and let me wish you a fair and swift journey to his side." Nemalian sighed as he pictured the moment his old friend's son and his human born child would meet up before the eyes of one of the Divine ones.

"I thank you for your information and for your warm greetings. I will share them with William gladly, in three and one half days hence. May they who are the Divine go with you and guide

your choices and course!" Gronmann smiled as he spoke the traditional benediction of his people for the first time since he last bid farewell to his William.

"And may they go with you too and guide your hands in your endeavour and your steps in your journey. I will see you in three days before you board the plane. Till then dear friend..." Nemalian hung up.

As the dialling tone sounded in his ear Gronmann could still hear his friend's unspoken excitement, that their people's stories of equality and a fair share of the sunshine were about to come true. That humanity was finally going to have to remember their demon brothers and sisters as something other than a nightmare filled with hate and loathing. After all, his own dear grandfather had told him of life when they could walk the Earth as equal as humanity. Of the time before the new Gods had deposed their own Devine Beings.

The only thing he lamented was that he would never walk beneath Apollo's sun with his dear William again. Sharing only the night was nothing compared to the joy of sharing all of the day.

But he would accept with a full heart a walk in the night with his beloved William. He welcomed the hope of sharing his son's life once more. In three and one half of a day hence.

Gronmann put aside his urge to run around his home and shout for joy. He had a journey to prepare for. He had his goods and chattels to pack away. He had his guests to inform of their impending reunion with their body's own souls. Not that he thought they might hear him, but it seemed the only polite thing to do.

"My dear friends, we unite with William in three and one half of a day from now. The final days of your forced sleep is here. Patience just a little longer my friends." And he set to washing and dressing his charges for the day. Planing what he must pack himself and what his dear friend Nemalian's people could safely be left to pack for him.

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Chapter 24 by Shamenka and Vixen

In a quiet house, in a quiet village in the West Midlands in England, the morning post arrived. A brightly coloured envelope, with pictures of clouds and aeroplanes bore the occupier's name in clear type face. Gronmann tore open the envelope carefully and pulled out the contents. Travel documents, import licenses and a timetable sat in his hands. He looked at he travel date and smiled. A warm glow filled his heart as he reached for the phone and dialled the contact number on the covering letter. He knew this firm, new the demon that ran it. But he hadn't instructed him to arrange this travel for him and his charges. That mystery needed to be solved before he could let his excitement have full reign.

If the details of the letter were accurate he would be in Los Angeles in three days. 72 hours until he would see his beloved boy for the first time in nine decades. He had had so many letters from him over the years, but they were not the same as seeing his Alicia's youngest son on a daily basis. His William hadn't really ever know his real father, nor much of his actual vampiric sire.

He was going to be with his dear son in three days time.

The phone was eventually answered by a voice he knew well. A fellow Trasker demon.

"Nemalian? I greet you, brother Trasker, and pray to the Pantheon that life treats you well. It is I, Gronmann that does greet you. I received from your company some three set of travel documentation. May I enquire as to the origin of the instruction to issue such documents?" He waited for a response before he let his hopes rise even further.

"Gronmann? I greet you too brother Trasker. It has been such a long number of years since you moved throughout the world as is only right. But, rest assured your devine task is almost at an

end. Your documentation was called for by the high Goddess herself. I was given the privilege of sharing words with her. My praise to you dear friend that you raised such a fine son as your human child William. He is her very right hand! And she sang his praises to me as she bid me bring her dear William's father to his side. I will have a team of helpers over to your residence on the hour of ten tomorrow to assist you packaging everything for the journey. Everything is arranged for you." Nemalian sounded like an over excited child rather than the coolly logical adult demon Gronmann knew him to be. He had been a friend of his own parents whilst he had been little more than a child. Gronmann had known this demon that long and this behaviour was so atypical that it added to his own building excitement.

"It will be good to see my son again. To know that if he has recalled my charges then his heart is his own once more. I always knew he would return to the way of living beings. Maybe he is still a vampire, but his heart is no longer the demon's to rule. Did the high Goddess say anything directly about my son? Is he well? Happy?" Gronmann's voice trembled slightly at the idea of being greeted by his son's embrace in three days time.

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In Hades domain two demons stood side by side as their old friend Gronmann's voice drifted to them. Eighty four hours and counting until they faced their dear sweet William once more. They were as eager as Gronmann to see what changes time had wrought on their efficient, yet almost terminally shy William. Would his cheeks still bear the ruddy hue of a ready blush? Would his voice still quaver slightly when relaying orders or organising his team into their given tasks? Would he welcome their return or fear their supposed wrath?

"Has our Aunt said anything about our dear William? He still does not blame himself for our hurried departure, surely?" Connors asked his eternal companion and brother.

"For truth, brother, I have heard nothing. For you surely know I would not keep sweet morsels like whispers of our William to myself?" Becker looked up, as all souls did when thinking about the living, or the undead even. "I fear we are being prepared for some form of surprise."

"I don't like surprises. Especially when it is our family that are creating them!" Connors sighed as he too looked up.

"We should be of good cheer. We can not go to greet our sweet William as if we suspect the world must end. Everything will be just fine!" Becker looked from life to his brother beside him in the realm of death.

Silently they agreed that having waited this long, they could wait patiently a few days longer.

"If we are to return, then dear Lindsey must also be set to return. Come, we shall tell him the good news. Someone should be of good cheer at this news. And perhaps his good cheer will wash away our own doubts." Becker didn't wait for his brother's response he simply wandered off looking for Lindsey's soul and knew his brother would follow.

"He will be so excited! To know he is to return! Excellent!" Connors murmured to himself as he followed in his brother's footsteps.

That they never found his soul not in Tartarus, not in Elysia not even in the crowded plains of Asphodel. They did find another lost, modern soul wandering the gray plains, waiting for Hades to finally devise what he judged as the most fitting purpose.

In the absence of Lindsey, then their dear William's Grandsire would have to do.

"My word, it is the lady Darla?" Connors had put a hand to Becker's arm, stopping his dear brother in his tracks. With a rock steady hand he pointed at the vampiress they had sent on a wild goose chase all over Cumbria in the summer of 1873.

"You think she would remember us after all these years?" Becker asked, pulling his brother into the lea of a score or more meandering souls. Asphodel was the most heavily populated area in all of their uncle Hades' realm. The vast majority of those that fall under his hand for judgement, the neither good, nor the wicked. And those awaiting his word, his decree.

"Should we risk the chance that she may? After all, we remember her. Granted, our dear friend

Lindsey did say she risked her eternity to bring him his key of light. Mayhap we should avail ourselves of this chance encounter and offer what comfort we can?" Conners watched the vampiress's shade drift aimlessly between the other shades on the gray plain. Whereas the others drifting apart to let her pass were quietly bemoaning the boredom of their fates, Darla almost glowed with an inner joy.

"Other than that she has no one to tell of our presence here, no one that would care that is, I do so want to know what drives her inner glow!" Becker turned to his brother and smiled, a look of utter mischief alighted in his eyes. "She was out William's sire's sire. The same child that kept our sweet William alive to free us from our self-inflicted captivity also is the cause of her being here. Her darling Angelus forsook her in his favour upon a chance meeting, and still does to this moment." The last sentence was spoken with such utter sarcastic delight that he chuckled, a deep rolling sound that had the grey shades around them scatter before their tormenting delight.

The spreading wave of souls left no barrier between them and Darla. She raised her head and looked at them. And remembered them. It was not by luck that she had survived 400 years amongst demons. She recalled every demonic being she met, and every mortal she didn't kill in her passing. The ones that got away always remained with her, just in case the chance to rectify that omission happened along.

"Cumbria!" She muttered at them, and looked away. They were souls, linked to this place somehow, like herself, they were dead, what would be the point in pursuing them? To which point she looked the other way and walked as far as she could get from them and their incomplete story.

Her ignoring of them irked Mister Conners and Mister Becker. In their haste to follow her they quite forgot their continuing search for Lindsey. The quest for Darla's attention had begun. Death was fun again.

In the wide tunnels of the underground sewer system that served Los Angeles, a small army of vampires, slayers and humans made their way towards the basement level of their enemies' outpost. Even as they all moved quietly, several pairs of eyes followed one of their number wherever his steps took him. Never leaving him alone. It was a scrutiny that was beginning to drive him to distraction.

From his position in the vanguard of their army he suddenly stopped dead in his tracks. His abrupt halt caused his audience great worry, they crowded round him to make sure he was all right.

"What is it with you people? I've felt your eyes on me since we left Night and Day's basement! I've seen you all looking away when you realise I'm looking right back at you?" Spike was in the middle of a huge mood swing, paranoia crowded in on him in the confined space of the sewer, yet he managed to keep sufficient control to keep his voice lowered in that echoing place.

"I'm worried about you, both of you!" Buffy blushed as she tried her very best to meet his piercing gaze. "I... I don't think you should be taking Vanguard. You are too vulnerable, you're carrying too precious a cargo to put yourself at risk like that!" Buffy finally met Spike's capricious gaze and felt the force of yet another mood swing.

"Well... that's... I suppose that's a fair enough point, what about the rest of you? Why were you all watching me, staring at me like some slab of meat on a countertop?" Spike met every guilty looking gaze that surrounded him.

"I was trying to make sure you were wearing your chain mail." Willow was all business with the

pregnant vampire, she had found it the best way to approach him, openly, honestly. He had had enough lies and deceit cast his way for several lifetimes.

"Erm, so was I actually. Don't want to have to break in a new partner. Too much like hard work that!" Oz was embarrassed to be in accord with his former lover. He was also annoyed at having to be in close proximity to her anyway.

"And me!" Harmony's concern was part of her self appointed tasks she performed as his adopted child. She thought it showed him she was grateful for his shared status as a member of the Order of Aurelius.

"I never even thought about that chain mail. It didn't do you any good against Glory. And I was just thinking how lucky I am that you've given me another chance." Angel blushed at his intimate revelation.

His honest words brought about yet another hissed war of words as Buffy and Faith decried Spike as a damned fool if he trusted Angel not to become Angelus over nothing important and hurt him all over again some time in the near or far future.

"Enough!" Hera hissed at both slayers. Buffy's reaction she could understand, but Faith hardly knew Spike. In fact they had not met until they stepped into the courtroom to have her plea for parole heard. Taking a deep breath she sighed long and hard as she realised what was driving both slayers to over protect her William. She glanced and saw that all the vampires were just as bad, just as afflicted as Angel and Harmony and the slayers, and Oz too. It was William's pheromone signature, it cried protect me to all who could smell it. This could be awkward once they fully turned Lindsey, he'd have even less control over his urge to react to that almost there smell.

She took another cleansing breath.

"William, my dear, your giving off a very strong pheromone signature that's drawing everyone to you with the almost mindless urge to take care of you. If you try to not over react to us, we'll all try to not over react to you. OK?" Hera smiled at her champion and was rewarded with a shaking, hesitant smile in return.

"Ok!" He whispered. "Only, it's creeping me out, ok?" A sea of eager faces all nodded at him, smiling inanely. "Oh Gods, lets get this over with! The sooner we get into air conditioning the sooner we'll maybe all cope a little better, hmm?"

"Sounds like a sound idea. But, can I walk beside you?" Angel smiled at Spike, a pleading look in his eyes.

"Anything for peace!" Spike walked on, flanked by Angel, closely followed by the slayers and Oz. And Hera. Everyone else strung out behind them, every eye on the two vampires in the lead. As if waiting for one to fall and the other to fail.

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