

Runaway Guide 1 (Rewrite)

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Runaway Guide 1 (Rewrite)

by [Joan963z](#), [neichan](#)

Summary

I have rewritten RG1 to expand on some details of the story and to correct some errors. The plot remains the same. Spike, from BtVS, is transferred to the Sentinel Universe where he becomes a sentinel. He must find his guide and soul mate, make up for past sins, and protect his guide and his new reality from a rising evil.

Notes

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Chapter 1

Runaway Guide 1

by Joan Z and Neichan

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Thank you to my beta Kerensa and a special thanks to Neichan whose discussions about character interaction helped me to polish this story.

This story is a crossover with BtVS. Runaway Guide 2 and 3 will also crossover with NCIS.

Additional Pairings: Spike/Xander, Jim/Xander, Jim/Spike, Spike/Blair

PROLOG TO RUNAWAY GUIDE

The Cosmic Intervention caseworker raced to where she needed to be.

In an alternate universe of the multi-verse Spike laughed as holy flames consumed his vampire body. Then white walls seemed to form around him and he saw a glowing woman standing before him.

"So," Spike asked, "are you here to inflict eternal torment on me?"

"No," she said, "I don't do eternal torment, it's boring."

"Then who are you?"

"I am tired of answering the same question every time I visit. I'm going to fix it so you'll remember me when you see me." She lifted up her hand and poked Spike in the middle of the forehead; he felt something inside his head click.

"Oh its you," Spike said, "What do you want this time."

"I've come to arrange for your reward."

"How about rest in peace?"

"You are an immortal soul, there is no such thing as rest in peace."

"Buffy went to heaven."

"She was in a waiting area; do you think The Powers didn't know what Willow was planning?"

"So there is hell but no heaven?" Spike asked.

"I didn't say that. Even in heaven there is work to do; hence, no *rest* in peace. Can we get back to your reward?"

"Can I be human and be with Buffy?"

"I wouldn't advise that. Angel asked The Powers to turn back the clock when he became human. He was afraid he would end up getting Buffy killed."

"Angel was human?"

"For twenty-four hours."

"The Ponce."

"Lack of imagination is what he has," the caseworker said with a scoff. "There were all kinds of options open to him, but nooo, he has to go back to being a vampire with a cursed soul."

"What kinds of options?" Spike asked.

"I'm not here to talk about what Angel didn't do, I need to make arrangements for what you want to do."

"Right, Luv, What are my options?"

"You do not have a lack of imagination, Poet, use it!"

Spike thought for a moment. "I want to be human, with the same mystical powers I had as a vampire."

"So, you want to be a sentinel."

"What's a Sentinel?" Spike asked.

"I don't have time for redundancies," she said with a glaring look. When Spike didn't answer she continued with a sigh, "A Sentinel is a male human with enhanced senses very similar to a vampire. It is a common choice for champions from other realities to choose it for their reward. Sentinels bond with a Guide, who is usually a soul mate. They work protecting the helpless."

"Then I can keep working on redemption."

"You're already redeemed, it's the amends you need to keep working on."

"And my soul mate, who is that?" Spike asked.

"You can choose which ever one you like."

Everything shook.

"Was that an earth quake?" Spike asked.

"No the amulet has been called back, I need to get you out of here. I'm sending you to a Sentinel universe. Now!"

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Chapter 1

@@@@@

Spike said good-by to his friends and left the retirement party. If truth be told he was glad to leave. He had turned down his scent dial to keep the smell of booze and smoke to a minimum, but the loud talk and laughter had played havoc with his hearing. He walked down the hall toward the coat check and could hear the band playing at the wedding reception down the hall. The guests were rous, half singing and half yelling 'The Bride Feeds the Groom'. He tried to dial down his hearing, but only succeeded in turning up his scent dial. He cursed his lack of control, he just couldn't find a balance for his put upon senses. He badly needed a guide, but he knew in his soul that none of them he had come across at the guide meets were right for him. He didn't bother to try to turn his scent dial down. There didn't seem to be a point. He would just go home and take a nice warm shower then meditate like he had learned in sentinel training. He'd get a good night's sleep and everything would seem better in the morning.

When Spike got to the coatroom he handed the clerk his tag. It was when she handed him his coat that he picked up the scent. It was ambrosia, heaven sent. He lifted his coat, held it to his nose and took a deep breath. "Guide," he whispered as he realized his life had suddenly and irrevocably changed.

"Let me see the coat that was next to mine," he ordered the clerk in his best police detective voice.

"I can't give it to you without the tag," she said.

Spike scowled, but managed to keep from giving a warning growl, he pulled out his badge identifying him as Sentinel Detective William Spikeman of Lakeview PD, the clerk shrugged and handed him the coat. He inhaled a large whiff. "Guide," he murmured as the essence of his new found guide traveled to his hippocampus and locked into his memory. Now, at this moment the sentinel had only one purpose in life, find the guide. He turned and walked down the hall toward the wedding reception.

"Hey," the coatroom clerk yelled. "You can't take the coat away from here."

"It belongs to my Guide," Spike called back without looking at the clerk. "I'll make sure he gets it." He didn't see the smile on the coat clerk's face. Sentinel Spikeman had taken the bait. The covert plan was working.

As Spike approached the reception room his eyes changed from their usual lapis blue to the dark sapphire of a Sentinel on a mission. Standing just inside the doorway Spike was hyper

focused on separating out the scent of his guide. He turned his head slowly, his nostrils flared and his sight turned to a soft blur as he scent scanned the room. He could smell that the guide was in the room, but the scent was too diluted by the number of guests and their movement around the room for him to get a precise location. He walked over to the nearest table, ignoring the laughter and conversations he began sniffing the men, quickly eliminating each one and moving on to the next.

One of the men at the table took offense, "Hey buddy! What do you think you're doing?"

Spike growled, How dare anyone come between him and his guide?

The man's wife pulled on her half drunk husband's sleeve and whispered into his ear. "That's a sentinel. He's looking for someone, don't interfere."

Spike could smell the fear coming off the woman. He couldn't afford the time to teach the drunk a lesson, and he didn't want to listen to the woman's screams while he did, so he pulled out his police badge and showed it to the people at the table. "Do any of you know who this coat belongs to?"

No one knew so the Sentinel continued on to the next table. He got no more questions, The wedding guests just sat up straight and quiet in their chairs as Spike continued to make his way around each table. By the time he made it to the fifth table the feel of the room had changed. The laughter and loud conversations had turned to whispers as the information spread that a Sentinel was in the room and he was searching for someone.

Alexander Harris, a high level empath, could feel the emotional change of the room take place, from laughter and enjoyment, to curiosity and then to caution. He looked up and saw that a blonde man with a Sentinel's square jaw was carrying his coat and sniffing men. The Sentinel was only two tables away. He stood up, lifting his chair with him as he stepped back. It wouldn't do to make a noise that would attract the sentinel's attention. Xander put the chair down carefully and side stepped away from the table making sure to stay out of the Sentinel's line of vision, he took a circuitous route, putting as many people and tables as he could between him and his hunter as he left the room. He walked swiftly out of the building and ran as fast as he could to his car. He dug through his pocket for his keys, but his hand was shaking so badly he dropped them before he finally got the door opened. He forgot to turn off the alarm, the blaring noise startled him and worse, he knew the sentinel would hear it. He got into the car, but he was shaking so much he had trouble getting the key into the ignition. He banged on the steering wheel in frustration then got a hold of himself. He took a deep cleansing breath, forcing himself to calm. The tremor stopped and he was able to put the key in the ignition and drive away.

Spike was at the empty chair, still strong with his guide's scent. He touched it; it was still warm. Then he heard the car alarm and he knew; his Guide was on the run. Spike's head snapped up and his softly blurred vision changed to sharp focus as he scanned the room for the nearest exit. There was a fire exit steps away and Spike ran for it, pushing the emergency bar and setting off the alarm. The loud siren didn't slow him down, he didn't even flinch, he simply ran, sliding over car hoods to get to the isle where he could see a car backing out of a space. He made it, arriving at the roadway as Xander pulled away. Spike dialed up his vision and got his guide's plate number. Than quickly called 911 to cancel the fire alarm.

Xander glanced in the rear view mirror and saw the Sentinel looking after him. He knew then that he could not chance going home. He was desperate; He didn't want to bond with a Sentinel. His father had made it clear that male guides were nothing but sex slaves. He had no intention of becoming the property of a Sentinel. *Three days,* he told himself. *Just hold out for three days; by then he'll know it's no good and he'll give up.* He went to an ATM across town and took out the limit of his money and then got on the highway. He didn't care what direction he was going in, all he knew, all he cared about was getting as far from the sentinel as he could. He traveled until midnight and found a Residence Inn. He figured the sentinel would get his financial records and know he got cash from the ATM. The sentinel would think he was staying someplace cheap and check those motels first. He paid cash for a one night stay, but had to show his driver's license so he couldn't sign in with a false name. He went to his room figuring he would get a few hours sleep and leave at sunrise, but sleep did not come easy for the fleeing guide. He planned on keeping to the back roads, if the Sentinel didn't have a B.O.L.O. out on him yet he soon would.

Spike ran the plates to get his Guide's name and address. He requested Alexander Harris's files from Guide school, and then called his apartment complex to make sure someone was there to let him in.

Spike knew there had to be a reason Harris was running, find the reason, find the guide. Guides knew better; a Sentinel who had found his 'One True Guide' didn't give up just because the guide ran. "One True Guide" he whispered to himself. Yesterday he hadn't believed in 'One True Guide'; he thought it was just a bunch of hokum made up by mundanes to romanticize the Sentinel/Guide relationship. He had no memory of the promise that his cosmic intervention case worker had made. Spike pulled up in front of Xander's apartment. A maintenance man waited with keys to let him in.

Harris lived in a basement apartment next to the laundry room. Spike could sense something strange about it when he walked in but it took him a moment to put his finger on it. There were no pictures on the wall and no pictures of people anywhere. There was a bookcase full of movies and video games, a TV, a DVD player, an X-box, a computer and a stereo. He looked through the CD collection first. Xander had an eclectic taste in music; Spike smiled, so did he. Then he turned on the computer and waited for it to boot up. Spike found that the computer stored Xander's password so he had no trouble getting into his e-mail. There was nothing personal. Spike signed into the police network and brought up Xander's guide school records.

ALEXANDER HARRIS

IDENTIFIED AS A POTENTIAL GUIDE AT AGE 13. ENROLLED IN GUIDE SCHOOL UPON GRADUATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL AT AGE 18.

TEST RESULTS:

I.Q.: 129

EMPATHIC LEVEL: 8.7

THIS GUIDE HAS DEMONSTRATED HEALING CAPABILITIES.

Spike whistled. The empathic scale went from 0 to 10, anything over 8.0 was quite rare.

TELEPATHIC LEVER: 8.9/2.7

GUIDE HAS DEMONSTRATED A HIGH ABILITY, 8.9, FOR HAZARD DETECTION; HOWEVER, HIS TELEPATHIC LEVEL DROPS TO 2.7 WHEN FACED WITH MUNDANE TASKS SUCH AS CARD READING. IT IS BELIEVED THIS DICHOTOMY DEVELOPED AS A RESULT OF HIS HISTORY OF ABUSE.

Spike re-read the last sentence and then looked around the room. It all fell into place. Someone had hurt his Guide. Hurt him so badly he no longer had the ability to trust. That's why no pictures of family and friends were in his apartment; that's why he ran. It wouldn't help him find Harris, but it did tell him something. Harris was smart. He would do the unexpected.

Spike put out a B.O.L.O. on Alexander Harris stressing his Guide, rather than criminal, status."

RUNAWAY GUIDE: DO NOT APPROACH.

REPEAT: DO NOT APPROACH.

MONITOR AND NOTIFY LAKEVIEW SENTINEL DETECTIVE WILLIAM SPIKEMAN OF GUIDE'S WHEREABOUTS.

He knew no police officer would risk incurring a Sentinel's wrath because of an injured Guide. Next he logged onto the Sentinel/Guide Alliance site and filed an Intention to Bond Certificate. He was surprised to find he had to sign a waiver. Harris had been declared unsuitable to bond, but there was no notice or reason for the declaration on public record. Spikeman signed the waiver, now he was legal. He didn't have to worry about getting a search warrant for Xander's financial records; or relying on assumptions that there was already one on file.

When Spike had done everything a detective could do to track a fugitive on the run he went into the bedroom and laid down on the bed. He moaned. He wanted and needed his guide. He reached out and pulled one of the pillows to him, the bright red pillowcase was in stark contrast to the sentinel's pale skin. The scent of his guide was strongest on the pillow so he hugged it close, as close as he could and still breath. His breath, each glorious breath was not only scented but tasted. He closed his eyes and brought his knees up and curled around the sacred artifact, the pillow, an item to be cherished. Spike's body ached for his Guide. That was something he didn't anticipate, physical pain. He had Xander's scent but he needed to know his feel, his sound and his taste. He wanted to drink him in with his eyes. He needed more than the small picture of him in the Guide school records. He moaned again as he clutched at the pillow, trying to will it to become the warm body of his Guide. He couldn't just lie there; he had to do something.

He got up and started to pace. The detective in him knew the best thing to do was to wait right where he was, but the Sentinel in him wanted to run and track his Guide, the Sentinel wanted to find his Guide, drink from him and claim him as his one and only. The detective was more practical. Any information about which way the young man had run would come through the computer. He couldn't leave until he knew where to go.

With an iron will he tried to force the Sentinel within to calm but the demand for his Guide grew and Spike began to tear through the apartment looking for anything that could ease his demanding senses. The bathroom proved to be helpful; he found Xander's toothbrush and stuck it into his mouth. There was a slight taste of toothpaste but the taste of his Guide was there too. He pulled the hair from the hairbrush and rubbed it between his fingers. It was soft and calming. Then he went back to the bedroom; the smell of Guide was strongest there. He curled around the pillow again and clutching it to his body. Rubbing the bit of hair between his thumb and forefinger he forced himself to meditate on the taste, the scent, and the feel of his guide.

The cougar, Spike's animal spirit guide, came after only a few minutes. The blue-eyed cat gave a rumbling growl as its large silent paws paced back and forth in Spike's meditating mind, its strong muscles rippled under the golden fur and its tail slashed with impatience. Spike's consciousness stood up and followed the big cat as its essence ghosted through the apartment wall and into the night. Spike felt no cold or breeze as he sped through the town of Lakeview. The guide stopped briefly to sniff at an ATM machine, rising up on its hind legs and placing its paws on the keypad it looked back at Spike and growled before dropping down and lopping out onto the highway. The cougar's long graceful strides sped them along too fast for Spike to read the green exit signs, so he had to be content with counting them as he passed them by. He was glad he didn't have to run to keep up. It was as if he were gliding through the star filled night, the street lights a blur as they past. It was only a moment before the cougar slowed and padded its way into a parking lot. A sign at the entrance read, Residence Inn, Cascade Washington. The cougar padded to the back parking lot, it stopped to sniff and rub its cheek against a car Spike recognized as belonging to his guide. The cat walked over to a door and the building dissolved and re-solidified around them. They stood in front of door 227. A hyena, green eyes glowing appeared and walked around the sentinel, sniffing him, judging him. The hyena gave a cackling laugh, Spike had a feeling the spirit guide had just found him acceptable, the cougar answered in a low growl.

"He's in there," Spike said.

Satisfied that his Sentinel understood, the cougar began a deep rumbling purr and the two Spirit guides laid down to guard the door.

Spike came out of his meditation and went to the computer. The pain he had felt was forgotten now that he was taking action to find his Guide. He brought up a map of the Interstate and counted the exits along the way until he found the city he was looking for. Then, just to double check, he logged onto the Residence Inn web site and confirmed that there was indeed an Inn located in Cascade. He called the Cascade police and after some annoying delays was finally put through to a sleepy Sentinel Liaison Officer, Detective Jim Ellison.

Jim growled as he answered the phone. "It's nearly 1AM, this better be good."

"This is Sentinel Detective William Spikeman of Lake View. I have an APB out on a runaway Guide and I have just received an anonymous tip that he is holed up at the Residence Inn in Cascade, room 227. I'm sorry to wake you this early but I was told all Sentinel/Guide police activities have to go through you. I need an officer to confirm the tip."

"Sorry for the gruff greeting, Sentinel Spikeman," Jim said, understanding the urgency in Spikeman's voice. "Is he your Guide?"

"I hold an Intent to Bond Certificate."

"If he's there I'll have an officer pick him up. We can..."

"No!" Spike interrupted. "I don't want him emotionally traumatized. Just confirm his presence and put a boot on his car. With a state police escort I can be there inside of forty five minutes. With any luck he'll still be asleep until then."

"I understand your concerns, Sentinel," Jim said trying to calm the obviously stressed stranger. The last thing he needed was a rouge Sentinel in a bonding thrall running around Cascade. "But your Guide is a runaway," Jim said. "I'd say he is already going through emotional trauma."

Blair spoke up. "Let me talk to him Jim, traumatized Guides and their Sentinels are my domain."

Jim was relieved to hand the phone to Blair. If anyone could calm a Sentinel on the edge, it was Blair.

"Hello, this is Guide Blair Sandburg, I'll be glad to help in any way I can, I've often worked with emotionally stressed Guides."

"We're wasting time, Guide Sandburg." Spike said his impatience growing. "I need to confirm my Guide's presence at the inn."

"Of course we will do that for you, Sentinel. What's your Guide's name?"

"Alexander Harris."

"Alexander Harris," Blair repeated. "I know Xander. Hold on, Sentinel." Blair looked at Jim, he didn't bother to cover the phone as he spoke, he wanted the stressed out Sentinel on the other end to know exactly how things were being handled. "Get an officer to confirm Xander's at the inn but make sure he doesn't approach the guide." Then he got back on the phone with Spike. "I'll talk to Xander myself, I can find out what's going on. We knew each other at guide school. I promise you we'll get to the bottom of this as gently as possible. Can you tell me exactly what happened before he ran?"

Spike felt better as he told the story, something about Guide Sandburg reassured him and he found himself agreeing to let Sandburg talk to his Guide. As Blair calmly reassured Spike,

Jim came back into the bedroom. "He's there," Jim said. "It's ten minutes from here, we should get going."

"Jim just got confirmation Xander is at the inn," Blair said. "We're heading over there now."

"I'll be there as soon as possible," Spike said and hung up the phone.

"So how do you know this Guide?" Jim asked as they pulled out of the parking space.

"I went to guide school with him," Blair said in an uncharacteristically distance voice.

Jim wasn't about to let this go. Something was bothering his guide. Something he needed to get to the bottom of. "So you were friends?"

"Not exactly." Blair said, looking out the passenger side window.

"What exactly?" Jim asked, keeping his voice even, undemanding, showing only interest and not concern.

"It's hard to explain," Blair sighed, "He's very smart and a highly rated empath, Xander was always friendly, but he kept his distance, right from the beginning it always seemed as if he just wanted to be left alone."

"You seem spooked by this." This time the concern did show in Jim's voice. Blair seemed a bit off his game.

"I am, his popping up like this, it's..." Blair's voice trailed off.

"Do you think he came to Cascade because he needs your help?"

"I doubt it," Blair said shaking his head. "Xander has no reason to think I'd help him."

"Of course you'd help him, Chief, that's what you do."

"Now, yeah," Blair said still looking out the truck window. "But not then."

The sadness Blair was exhibiting was more than Jim could bear. He turned into a Seven Eleven parking lot, turned off the truck, and pulled Blair to him. "Tell me now, all of it, or this truck is not moving another inch."

Blair laid his head against Jim's chest. Jim's warmth was comforting and gave him the strength to look at a part of himself he didn't like to look at. When he began to speak it was soft, almost a whisper. "When I attended guide school the director was Ethan Rayne. He's telepathic but not empathic. He used to take Xander for private "tutoring". For a long time there were jokes about Xander being the director's favorite. A lot of the students were jealous, including me. I knew Xander was unhappy but I never talked to him about it. We were an unhappy bunch, forced by law to go to guide school, we all had to put our lives on hold until we graduated. He didn't have contact with his family but I never invited him to

stay with me on school holidays, none of the other students invited him either. I knew Xander spent all of the holidays at the school."

"The Christmas before graduation some of the students decided to play a practical joke on one of the teachers. He had this beautiful sculpture he kept on display in the classroom. I was elected to hide it. I went to a part of the school that was off limits. That's when I found the sensory deprivation tank. Do you know what that is?"

"I've heard of it," Jim said. "They're isolation tanks, lightless and soundproof even for a Sentinel. They have salt water kept at skin temperature. When you float in it you don't even have input from gravity."

"Well a mundane would not want to stay in one for more than 10 minutes, for an empath 10 seconds is too long. I don't even want to imagine what that kind of isolation must feel like. I hid when I heard Rayne coming. I saw him lock Xander in the tank and leave."

"Do you know how long he left him in there?" Jim asked shocked that anyone would hurt a Guide that way. He knew that solitary confinement was a torture technique.

"No, I didn't want to know. Tutoring sessions lasted for about an hour. I don't know if he was in there all that time. I was too scared to report it. Rayne was a vindictive bastard. The students were all empathic; we all knew what he was. I was afraid I wouldn't be allowed to graduate. I was afraid he would keep me there another year and start giving me "private tutoring". It kept nagging at me though. I had nightmares about it, so after graduation I did report it. Director Rayne resigned. Nothing ever came out about his abuse."

"And you feel guilty for not reporting it sooner?"

"I let it go for six months."

"Not your fault, Chief," Jim said, stroking Blair's hair. "Xander didn't report it either."

"To who? He had no family; he never received mail, no birthday or Christmas cards; he spent every holiday at school."

"He could have reported it to one of the teachers."

"I think he tried. I remember going to talk to Mr. Freedmen once, it was before I knew about the sensory deprivation tank, when I got to the classroom he was angry with Xander and called him a liar. He accused Xander of being lazy. He said he didn't want to hear anymore made up stories."

"Still not your fault, Chief. You were a student at the school, the adults were the ones who let Xander down, not you."

Blair sat up and looked into Jim's eyes. "You don't get it, Jim, I knew there was something wrong, I felt it and I let it slide because it was easy, I was scared, and I was jealous."

Jim stroked Blair's hair, it pained him to see his guide suffering. "Chief, you're the best person I know but you're only human. You were young and scared and you made a mistake,

you've learned from it. So now we'll go and help him. We'll make sure he's okay and make sure this Sentinel Spikeman is the kind of Sentinel that will care for his Guide before we turn Xander over to him."

"What if he's not okay?" Blair asked. "What if Spikeman lied and Xander is running because of something Spikeman did?"

Jim started up the truck with a shrug. "Then we'll do whatever it takes."

Chapter 2

AT THE INN

Blair stopped short after turning the corner from the elevator and stared down the hall.

“What is it Chief?” Jim asked.

“Two animal spirit guides laying in front of a door. One is a cougar the other...I can’t tell.”

The hyena gave an unmistakable laugh.

“It’s a hyena, it just laughed at me.”

“Not AT you young one, FOR you, so you would know what I am,” the hyena said in a not quite human voice.

“Ahh... Jim, it’s talking. Can you hear it?”

“Can’t see them or hear them, Chief, and since when do animal spirit guides talk? Ours only make animal sounds.” Jim turned and looked behind him. “Are ours around too?”

Blair looked around. “No, just Spikeman’s and Xander’s.”

“So who’s is who’s, or does it even matter?”

The cougar stood up and faded away.

“Well the cougar just left so I’d say the hyena belongs to Xander.”

“We can’t stand in the hall all night,” Jim said. “You need to talk to Xander and make sure this Sentinel Spikeman is someone we want to turn him over to.” Jim took Blair’s hand and interlocked their fingers, with a small tug they began walking down the hall to room 227.

When Blair got to the door he stopped again. He couldn’t quite reach to knock and he certainly didn’t want to step on the Spirit Guide. The only thing he could think to do was to talk to it. “We honor your presents, Spirit Guide. Is there some way we may serve you?”

“You can honor me and my charge by forgiving yourself.” The hyena stood up, it’s eyes glowed as it spoke. “All that has come before was as it needed to be. It has brought us here to this place. You think you know what is to come, you and your Sentinel have been called. It is your choice to meet the challenge ahead or to wallow in your emotions.” The hyena faded away.

Blair shook his head. ‘Cryptic’ he thought then he knocked at the door, he would deal with the talking hyena when he got back to the loft. When there was no answer he knocked again

and called out. "Xander, it's Blair Sandburg, we went to guide school together. Please open the door. I want to talk to you." There was still no answer. This time he pounded on the door. "Xander, if you don't open the door, the police will take it down."

Xander wasn't asleep, he stopped tossing and turning in a vain attempt to get comfortable and laid very still. When the second knock came he knew it wasn't a mistake. He knew they had found him. But why was Blair Sandburg, of all people, at his door. When Blair banged on the door and threatened a police take down he knew he had no choice but to answer.

No emotion showed on Xander's face as he opened the door and looked at Blair. "You've let your hair grow out."

"Yeah, may I come in?"

Xander stepped back and let Blair in and then started to close the door. A very large foot and arm got in the way.

"The door stays open." Jim said.

Xander turned to Blair. "I see you've been claimed," he said in an exhausted voice as the realization hit him that with a sentinel present he was trapped. The small hope he had of getting away was dashed.

"For two years," Blair said. "The big guy still gets a little overprotective at times." Blair turned to Jim. "Jim, I'll be fine."

"The door stays open or I come in." Jim said in his 'not open for discussion' voice. "What will it be?"

Xander gave an ironic laugh. "You can listen through the door anyway so you might as well come in."

Jim stepped in, closed the door behind him and took up a guard position next to it. Xander and Blair sat in the two kitchen chairs; they looked at each other across a small table. Both guides' eyes were clearly filled with pain.

"What happened?" Blair asked. "Why did you run?"

"I was at a wedding and a sentinel was holding my coat and sniffing necks," Xander said. "I don't want to become a sentinel's property, so I left."

"You never met Sentinel Spikeman?" Blair asked checking to see if what Spikeman had told him was true.

"Is that his name? No, I never saw him before."

"He'll be here soon. You'll have to talk to him. Running isn't the answer."

"Not anymore," Xander said. "He'll claim me and that will be the end of it, until he doesn't want me anymore."

"A sentinel needs his guide; he wouldn't just toss you away. You know a bond is for life, and besides," Blair said, "bonding to a Sentinel is a partnership, not slavery."

"Is that why I have no right to say no to bonding? Is that why we have to live where he wants to live and do the work that he wants to do?"

"That's not what a bond is like. It changes you."

Xander gave an ironic laugh. "Yeah, sure. Guides are like an appliance to a sentinel. We just keep them in balance, like a refrigerator keeps their food cold. They don't give a damn about the person."

"I know you've been hurt by what happened to you with your family and at guide school but a..."

"But, but, but," Xander interrupted with a snicker. "Did you know that Rayne's successor Director Booker declared me unfit to bond or to work as a healing guide?"

"There is nothing on your records declaring you unfit," Blair said.

"Nice of them to cover their own ass," Xander said. "If they put it on the public record they would have to say why I'm unfit and how I got that way. I'm surprised they didn't totally erase me, no one would have noticed. I've never been to a guide meet and no one ever came knocking to find out why."

"You're not unfit," Blair said, "and someone would have noticed if they tried to erase you; I would have noticed."

"You!" Xander said. "Why would you have noticed? We weren't friends, you didn't even like me."

"I'm the one that reported Rayne's abuse," Blair said. "After I made the report I kept checking on your guide status and to see if charges were brought against Rayne. I'm sorry it took me so long to report him. I should have made a reported right away, but I was afraid they wouldn't let me graduate."

Xander could sense Blair's overwhelming emotional pain. "Oh, Blair," he said as his empathic priorities kicked in, his concern clearly showed in his voice. He reached out his hand and put it on Blair's arm "Don't carry that guilt. You were right to wait until after graduation. As long as you were in the school you would have been ignored or worse, punished. I tried twice to report Rayne. The first time I was called a liar and the second time... I may as well have been talking to a wall. Please Blair, let it go, I don't want to be the cause of your pain. It wasn't your fault."

Jim began to like this young man. In spite of his own distress, his abandonment by his family, and his misconceptions about a bond, he was willing to comfort Blair. 'If Spikeman's half the sentinel his records say he is he'll bring his guide around, he's one lucky Sentinel to have found Harris, Jim thought.

"I came here to comfort you," Blair said. "And look who's doing the comforting."

"It's what we do, we're empaths," Xander said, pulling his hand back, his resignation showing in his voice. He looked down at the table. "So what happens now, the sentinel will be here in a little while."

"We ran a check on him before we came up to talk to you. His abilities manifested a little over a year ago. He was in a bank during a hold-up and saved a kid from getting shot. He was pistol-whipped and in a coma for 3 days and when he woke up he had sentinel abilities. He left his job and went into law enforcement. Everything we found out about him says he's a good man."

"What did he do before that?"

"He was an English teacher."

"Wow, from a teacher to a sentinel," Xander said, "that had to be a shock."

Jim's cell phone rang. "Thanks Walters," Jim said into the phone and then hung up.

"Spikeman is on the way up. Walters asked him to wait in the lobby but he wouldn't have it."

"Well," Xander said, "I guess it's good-bye then. Thanks for coming, Blair. That was very kind of you."

Spike was about to knock at the door but the conversation inside stopped him.

"It's not good-bye," Blair said, not wanting Xander to feel abandoned, he reached into his wallet. "Here take my card. If you need to talk, guide to guide or friend to friend, give me a call."

"Do you really think that a sentinel is going to let his guide talk to some strange guide?"

"Of course he will," Blair said. "Take the card. If I don't hear from you, I'll call you."

There was a knock on the door.

"Blair's right," Jim said, ignoring the knock and knowing that Spikeman could hear what he said. "If you need a friend or to talk to another guide you call. Are you ready?"

Xander took the card. "I'll never be ready," Xander said. "But open it anyway."

Jim opened the door. Sentinel Detective William Spikeman stood in the hall clutching his guide's pillow with the bright red pillowcase.

Sentinel Spikeman stepped into the room and took a deep breath through his nose.

"Guide," he whispered as he made eye contact with Xander. Spike stepped to the side and placed the pillow on the kitchenette counter then he walked back and opened the folding closet doors. After scanning the area he walked past Xander and into the bathroom to check for anything that might be dangerous to his guide. He came back carrying a towel, which he laid out on the counter top. Spike opened all the drawers and took out all the knives, flatware and utensils; he wrapped them in the towel and placed the bundle, along with his gun, in the guest's safe in the closet.

Jim watched the strange sentinel scan the room. He watched how the man moved, deliberate and controlled. Control, sentinels always wanted it and this one had it in spades. He sniffed the air to see if he could pick up what was different about this sentinel, but he couldn't quite place what it was.

Spike turned to Jim. "It's clear," he said. "You can go now."

Jim nodded to his fellow sentinel. He knew it wasn't the last time he would see Spikeman. He'd wait two or three weeks and then have Blair call and invite them to dinner. "Come on, Chief," he said to Blair, "let's give them some privacy."

Jim and Blair stepped onto the elevator and began the ride down in silence when Jim suddenly pressed the stop button. "All right Chief, out with it?"

"He looked so vulnerable, standing there hugging that big red pillow. I've never seen a sentinel look like that."

"He needs his guide."

"Yeah, but Jim, I'd felt sorry for Xander and then I saw Spikeman. I thought he'd come in all authoritative and"...Blair dropped his voice to a deep baritone, "'Me sentinel, you guide, I take.' 'Tarzan to the rescue.' I've never seen a sentinel like that."

"Damn impressive," Jim said.

"Are you being sarcastic?" Blair asked.

"Not at all, Chief, 'Tarzan to the rescue' is easy. Any sentinel can do it. But control that's hard and control when you're hurting for your guide..."

"I didn't think of it that way."

"And I'll tell you something else Chief, Spikeman's no school teacher, he's a predator. The way he moved, you don't learn that at the academy."

"He a sentinel, you all move like predators."

"All I can say is I never want to be on opposite ends of a fight with him." Jim started the elevator moving again. What he really wanted was to get to know Spikeman better. It

wouldn't be too hard. Lake View was only a forty minute drive from Cascaid. He was sure Blair was open to forming a friendship with Xander.

"It's hard for me to reconcile the vulnerable guy clutching a bed pillow and someone you would never want to fight," Blair said as the elevator doors opened to the lobby.

"That vulnerable guy clutching a pillow was a sentinel holding off a bonding thrall by sheer will and a pillow. Like I said, damn impressive."

Blair shrugged. He had never known Jim to be that impressed by a sentinel. This one didn't seem to be very impressive at first glance. Most sentinels look like football players, tall, broad shouldered, and muscular. Spikeman was muscular but size wise...Xander was bigger than him. Blair yawned and got into the truck. He had to remember to look up hyena spirit guides in the morning, but right now he wanted to get some sleep.

When the pair left Spike slid the night lock into place then he walked over to the kitchen table. He turned one of the chairs around and straddled it, sitting down so that he was facing his guide and the back of the chair and the table were between them. The action was not lost on Xander. The sentinel was putting up a symbolic barrier between them. He was telling Xander to relax he would keep his distance. Spike handed the safe key to Xander. "Here," Spike said. "You say when I get my gun back."

Xander didn't take the key or answer he just stood staring at the most beautiful man he had ever seen in his life. The blond hair was wavy and unkempt and longer than the shortcut that most sentinels wore. His cheekbones were high and sharp and his jawline was as square as any he had ever seen. But the most outstanding feature was his eyes. They were blue, very blue, without a hint of gray that most blue eyes had, and they were framed by thick dark lashes. Odd that the lashes were darker than his hair, framing his eyes perfectly. Beautiful was the only word Xander could think of.

When his guide didn't answer Spike shrugged and dropped the key on the table. "Sit down. Pet, we need to talk this out."

Xander was catapulted from his languor. "I'm not your pet," he said letting his anger at the term show. "I'm not an animal, I'm a human being."

"It was meant as a term of endearment," Spike said softly. "Please, sit down."

"Why bother?" Xander asked. "Why don't you just force me to bond now and get it over with?"

"Don't want to force you," Spike said.

"Then you may as well leave now," Xander said, "because I'm not going to change my mind."

"You know that's not going to happen."

"Why not? If you leave now the drive to bond with me will fade. Scent, sound and sight, that's only three senses. You're not locked in yet with all five, you could go."

Spike pulled a small wad of hair out of his pocket and showed it to Xander, "Touch, he said, "From the hairbrush in your apartment."

"Still not locked," Xander said. "You haven't tasted me yet."

"Wrong again guide."

"What did you do?" Xander asked, "taste my spoon from the wedding?"

"Toothbrush from your apartment...and the pillow," Spike admitted.

"You tasted my pillow?"

"Just the pillow case," Spike said. "I was in pain, I had to do something."

"You ass! Do you know what you've done?"

"I've found my one true guide."

"No, you haven't," Xander said. "I'm unfit. I can't bond with you. You're going to try because you're locked into it now. But I can't give you what you want."

"I signed a waver when I posted an Intent to Bond certificate. I saw your school records. A bond with you doesn't scare me. You think you can't give me what I want, then give me what I need."

Xander shook his head; he sat down in the kitchen chair and buried his face in his hands. Then he looked up at Spike. "You don't know what they did to me."

"True, Some of your guide school records are sealed. I'm trying to get them unsealed. There is a reference that your high telepathic ability for hazard detection may be related to your history of abuse."

"History of abuse," Xander scoffed, "I don't suppose it said who abused me, or how I was tested for telepathic hazard detection."

"How ever it was done, it couldn't have been safe."

"Electric shock," Xander said and watched as Spike eyes turned from lapis blue to dark sapphire.

"Those bloody bastards! They're not going to get away with it." Spike growled as he got up from the chair and walked to Xander. "No one hurts my guide and gets away with it."

Spike pulled Xander out of the chair. He ran his finger over Xander's face and through his hair. "You're mine, Spike whispered. "My one and only. Mine to protect and cherish." Spike began licking Xander's neck, searching for the nickel size gland that sent out guide

pheromones. He needed to lick it, to suck it, to drink from it; he needed to forever lock himself to his one true guide.

Xander stood quietly letting Spike lick him and touch him. He knew the sentinel was lost in a bonding thrall. It wouldn't do any good to resist; the best thing to do was to let the sentinel take what he needed.

Spike nuzzled into Xander's neck and found the spot, the guide spot, the bonding spot. He began licking, soft little kitten licks at first but each getting harder and sending the sentinel more of the precious pheromones he craved.

Xander stood passively accepting the sentinel's attention, it was pleasant, he hadn't expected that. As the laving grew firmer nerve endings began to spark and the pleasure spread down his arms and across his chest. Xander moaned.

Spike heard the sound he had been trying to elicit from his emotionally wounded and reluctant guide. He stopped licking and led his guide to the bed. He unbuttoned Xander's shirt and slid it off of him and then he undid Xander's pants and let them fall to the floor. Xander was already barefoot so Spike laid him down on the bed and removed his own clothes. Then he climbed into the bed beside him. Spike touched his naked guide. He ran his fingers through Xander's hair and traced the contours of his muscled chest.

Xander felt confused. It felt so good the way the sentinel touched him. It wasn't the demanding ravaging he had expected. This was a giving thing like Xander had never before experienced. He craved the touch; the empath in him hungered for it. A tear rolled from Xander's eye and Spike pulled Xander to him and licked it away. "It's okay, Love, cry as much as you need to."

Xander moved back and looked into the dark sapphire blue eyes of a sentinel in bonding thrall.

"Sentinel?" he asked in a quivering voice.

"Guide," was the breathy answer as Spike nuzzled Xander's neck, found the bonding spot and began to suckle.

Serotonin flooded Xander's brain and his carefully constructed emotional barriers came down... and then Spike was there, Spike wanting to give him comfort, Spike wanting to protect him, Spike wanting... It didn't seem possible. It couldn't be. He had never heard of such a thing. Everyone knew guides belonged to their sentinels but Spike wanted to... to belong to him. Xander panicked. Adrenaline surged through his body, his heart pounded and he gasped for air. He pushed away from Spike and cried out, "No. I can't."

Spike pulled his guide to him and rocked him back and forth as if he were rocking a distraught child. "Shhhh, love, It's okay. I'm here, I'm here."

"No!" Xander fought against the sentinel but Spike held him tight. Sobs shook Xander's body. "No. Please, let me go. Please. Oh God, I can't do this. You want to belong to me. I can't. I'm

not good enough for you." Xander stopped fighting and collapsed into Spike's arms. "I'm not good enough for you," he whispered.

Spike lifted Xander's face and looked into his pain filled brown eyes, "Wrong again, Guide. You're the only one good enough for me."

Spike held Xander, skin to skin, rocking him and stroking him. Xander would calm, shiver with fear and calm again when Spike licked the guide spot and whispered unintelligible sounds of comfort.

Xander liked the holding, stroking and rocking. The human contact felt good. He had ached for it for so long. He had cried himself to sleep for lack of it, more than once. And this man needed him, he could sense it. It scared him. Then the sentinel would lick his neck, stroke his body and whisper those things to him. Not words exactly, but sounds, vibrations, that went straight to his soul. Xander liked the mewling whispers the most.

Everything was carried on those sounds and words of comfort. "It's okay, you're not alone, we belong together." And each sound came with a touch, a stroke of the arm, a kiss on the cheek, a foot stroking his leg.

And then the fear would return and the whispering sounds would come again to send it away. "I'm sorry you hurt, let me help, you're not alone."

Xander knew he should lift his arms and cling to this sentinel. He knew the sentinel longed for it, ached for it. But he couldn't. What if the sentinel wanted more? He knew it would come sooner or later the sentinel would claim him, penetrate him.

FEAR!

And then the sounds would come again. "I won't abandon you, I won't hurt you. We'll go slowly. You're not alone, be with me."

Xander finally fell asleep and Spike let himself drift off. The wedding of yesterday evening seemed a lifetime ago and a world away.

It was mid morning when Spike awoke with his new Guide and felt Xander try to wiggle out from under his arm. "What is it, Pet?" Spike asked.

"Pee," Xander said as he lifted Spike's arm, got out of bed.

Spike tried to stay in bed but lost the fight with himself and followed Xander into the bathroom.

"I can pee by myself," Xander said, wondering what was with the Sentinel, there were no windows in the bathroom so there was no way for him to run.

Spike didn't want to spook his guide, he knew he would have to handle things delicately. Xander didn't seem to know a newly bonded sentinel's needs. They needed to pattern the normal behavior of their guide not just the sight, sound, touch, taste and scent. "Did you know," Spike said as he took tiny steps closer to his guide, "that Sentinel's don't let their guides out of their sight for up to 3 months after bonding?"

Xander's body went stiff. Oh God, he thought, he wants to watch me take a piss. That's not going to happen. "I didn't know that," Xander said. He waited for the Sentinel to get the message and leave, he was not interested in sharing the bathroom while he took a leak.

Spike looked into Xander's eyes, there was nothing to do but to tell the truth. "Guide, I'm not leaving."

Xander sighed, it wasn't as if men didn't share public bathrooms, time for a compromise. "Well, can you at least turn your back, I've always had a shy bladder. We'll be standing here for a long time if you keep staring at me."

"Okay, this time, but don't flush," Spike said hoping that his Guide realized that he was making a compromise.

Xander rolled his eyes. He couldn't remember ever being told about any of this kind of Sentinel behavior in guide school.

Spike dialed up his hearing and his sense of smell and listened. There was a moment of concern when he didn't hear anything right away. Then there it was, it sounded like a good stream. He sniffed the air and concern hit him again when he realized the scent was too strong. He forced himself not to panic, not to turn around. He could look at the color when Xander was finished.

Once Xander's bladder was empty he walked to the sink and washed his hands. Spike walked to the toilet looked in and sniffed.

The only explanation Xander could think of was that Sentinels are wacky. "Have fun," Xander said as he grabbed a towel to dry his hands.

Spike could tell that the urine was too dark. It should have been the color of lemonade. But still, if Xander was dehydrated he had to do something about it. Spike flushed the toilet and walked over to Xander. He poked Xander in the fleshy part of his arm.

"Hey," Xander asked, "What's with the poking?"

"What was your fluid intake yesterday?" Spike suddenly asked as he squinted at Xander and looked him up and down evaluating his color, muscle tone, and the scent of his breath.

"What are you talking about?" Xander asked feeling trapped between a nutty sentinel and the bathroom sink. "Fluid intake?"

"How much water did you drink yesterday? Spike asked.

"How am I supposed to know?" Xander asked. "As if I keep track."

"You're suffering from mild dehydration," Spike said and he pulled Xander out of the bathroom and over to the refrigerator. He took out a bottle of water."

"Don't open that water," Xander said. "The inn charges three fifty a bottle. I feel fine." Xander was beginning to panic. Spike seemed to be agitated. That could lead very quickly to anger and the last thing Xander wanted to deal with was an angry Sentinel.

"I don't care if it's three hundred fifty a bottle, Guide, you need water." Spike opened the water took a sniff and then took a swig. He swirled it around in his mouth before deciding it was good enough for his guide and swallowing.

I don't understand why you're spending all that money for water? This place has all the modern conveniences," Xander said. "Including water on tap."

"How can you even suggest tap water. You're not drinking that stuff, it's full of chemicals!" Spike growled. He handed the bottle to Xander, "Drink."

Fear flooded Xander's emotions. he had definitely said the wrong thing and now the Sentinel was pissed at him; it was best just to drink the water down as fast as possible before the Sentinel poured it down his throat. Xander took the bottle and began to chug down the cold water.

Spike could smell Xander's fear. After the night they had Spike had thought that Xander had begun to trust him. At least a little. Then he noticed that Xander was drinking the icy cold water too fast. After the fifth swallow Spike grabbed it away. "What do you think you're doing?"

Xander blinked at his Sentinel. He sure sounded angry. Xander was sure he was in for it. "Ahh, you ahh told me to drink," Xander said wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. He hung his head and stared at his bare toes.

Once again Spike could smell fear. He knew his Guide was sensitive. Maybe he was coming on too strong. He deliberately softened his voice. "Not like that, Pet," Spike said. "That water is cold, you'll give yourself a bellyache." He put down the bottle of water and began rubbing Xander's naked stomach.

Xander lifted his head and looked at Spike. It didn't seem possible that the Sentinel could be angry about the possibility of giving himself a bellyache. No one ever cared about him that way. But there was the Sentinel rubbing his belly. It seemed surreal to Xander.

"Does it hurt?" Spike asked as he watched Xander's muscles for signs of cramping.

"You care if I get a bellyache?"

Spike looked up into soft brown eyes and his heart melted. "Oh, Pet, of course I care. I'm sorry if I came on too strong. It's a Sentinel thing. It's not just your body I have to pattern. I need to learn your behavior too and make sure your safe. It's like...it feels like you're the air that I breathe and taking care of you is like breathing; I have to breathe. Can you understand that, Pet."

Xander knew Spike was telling him the truth. "Kind of," Xander said. "It's just overwhelming, that's all, and I'm not used to it. No one ever cared like that."

Spike felt as if someone had stuck a stake in his heart. His guide should have been cared for and cherished, not battered and neglected to the point that he couldn't imagine anyone caring for him. He understood that Xander needed space, the last thing he wanted to do was to upset his Guide. Spike spoke barely above a whisper "I know you were abused, you have the scars to prove it, I've patterned every one of them. But between us... You do know you can tell me when you're overwhelmed?"

Xander decided he was going to put his Sentinel to the test. "Well, I'm overwhelmed right now," Xander said. "I'm standing here, in the nude, having a life changing conversation with a guy I didn't know existed twenty-four hours ago."

Spike understood he was being tested. He understood that it was a test he had to pass. His bond with Xander depended on it. Sentinel needs had to be set aside and he had to do what was best for his Guide. "Okay. We'll get showered and dressed," Spike said, "and then we'll talk about what we need to do."

"Um, not sure what you mean by we'll shower. I can shower alone?" Xander asked.

"Sure, Pet," Spike said as he combed his finger through Xander's hair.

Spike paced outside the bathroom and listened to the sound of water as he chewed on Xander's red pillowcase. He knew that he should be patting himself on the back for letting Xander shower by himself. Of course his anxiety level was at a ten and he was chewing a hole in Xander's pillowcase, but there was nothing else that could be done about it. He had to let Xander know that he was willing to meet his Guide's needs, so he continued to pace. Xander would be out in a few minutes.

Xander stood in the shower letting the warm spray roll over his body. He usually enjoyed the warm water along with the feel and scent of the soap sliding over his body. But now all he could feel was Spike's distress. For a brief moment he felt annoyed, didn't the Sentinel know he could feel it, all of it. He put both hands on the shower wall and bent forward letting the water hit the back of his neck. Then his empathic priorities kicked in. No, Spike was trying, he knew The Sentinel was doing his best. He was the one that needed to do better, He needed to calm his Sentinel and that's when everything clicked in. Spike was his Sentinel, his responsibility. He stood up and whispered, "My Sentinel," emotion filled him as he realized the bond had happened.

Spike felt his guide's deluge of emotion. Panic hit and he dropped the pillow case, ran into the bathroom, and pulled back the shower curtain.

Xander looked at him with a big soppy smile on his face.

Spike stood dumbfounded for a moment before he could speak. "What happened?"

"You're my Sentinel!"

"Does that mean I can come in the shower with you? ...Please!"

"Sure, you can wash my back.

Spike didn't have to be asked twice.

The things Xander had said to Blair just a few hours ago were forgotten.

Chapter 3

Chapter by [Joan963z](#)

It was 8am and Ethan Rayne was eating breakfast when his butler came into the solarium.

"It's Director Booker sir," the butler said as he handed his employer the phone with a bow.

Ethan took the phone. "Rayne here."

"There's been an Intent to Bond Certificate filed on the boy."

"What!" Ethan Rayne said sitting forward in his chair. "How did that happen?" he asked as he threw his linen napkin onto the table. Someone else had to know about the welp. All he needed was another year at the most then his plan for the boy could be put into action. Now this. He would have to find out who the other player in the game is and eliminate him. Then maybe he wouldn't have to go to plan B which meant he would have to share the profits.

"I don't know; the certificate was filed yesterday evening by a Detective Sentinel William Spikeman. He works for the Lake View Police. Apparently the boy ran because there was also an APB filed and a request for all guide school records."

"Don't let him have the school records," Rayne said. "We have to find the boy before the Sentinel does. What do you know about Spikeman?"

"He's already found the boy. Sentinel Detective James Ellison out of Cascade pulled the APB last night. And Spikeman has some school records. He's requested the sealed records as well."

"Delete any records he doesn't already have," Rayne said through a clenched jaw. "Make sure it looks like a computer glitch. By now they're bonded. But maybe we can make this work for us. We'll break the bond, that should give us the trauma we need to push the brat over the edge."

"You can't break the bond with a level 8 empath, the only way would be to kill the Sentinel," Booker said hoping desperately to make Ethan Rayne see reason for once.

"We'll give them three days together," Ethan said. "That should be enough. I'll take care of the arrangements."

A shiver went through Booker at the sound of Rayne's voice. "You can't kill a Sentinel, they'll swarm down on us so fast..."

Ethan Rayne hung up the phone. "Stupid man," he muttered, "Sentinel's die all the time in the line of duty."

IN A BOOTH IN A RESTAURANT IN CASCADE:

"You should be eating some protein," Spike said as he looked across the table at Xander's bowl of Coco Crisps.

"You're overwhelming me again," Xander said as he shoveled another spoonful of the low nutrition high sugar cereal into his mouth.

"Cereal is a part of a nutritious breakfast," Spike said as he finished his western omelet. "It even says so on the TV adds."

"Yeah, yeah and breakfast is the most important meal of the day blah, blah, blah."

"That was disrespectful, Pet."

Xander hung his head and looked up at his Sentinel with doe eyes, "I'm sorry, I just want to enjoy my junk food breakfast in peace."

"Do you know you melt my heart when you look at me like that?"

"Sauce for the goose," Xander said with a smile as he shoveled another spoonful of cereal into his mouth. He wasn't thinking about how that small statement would effect the sentinel.

"Really," Spike said tilting his head and looking at Xander. When did I melt your heart?"

Xander swallowed his mouthful of cereal and looked at his sentinel. His, Spike was his, he could feel it. With every word, every look, every touch the bond vibrated through his body. Now he had let something slip, something unintended. There was nothing he could do about it. He couldn't take it back, Spike would know he was lying, so he decided to just take the plunge and answer the question. "The first time was when I saw you standing outside the door holding my pillow. You looked so vulnerable and cute with the sleep mussed hair and all."

"You didn't show it."

"Well... it was kind of scary, I didn't expect ..." Xander's voice trailed off.

"What, Pet? It's okay you can tell me."

Xander put his spoon down, this was further than he wanted to go. He could feel the emotions rising up and tightening his chest. "No, I can't," he said looking down at the table. "Can we go now? I don't want to eat any more."

"I know I'm not what you expected." Spike said. "I'm an inch shorter and a bit slimmer than most Sentinels."

Xander moaned he could feel Spike's sadness. No matter his own feelings, he couldn't let his sentinel feel like that, not when he could do something about it. "Now what did you have to go and say that for. You think I'm disappointed? I'm not. I expected an enraged gorilla to come through the door. Instead you melted my heart, and it scares the hell out of me." Tears rolled down Xander's face. "You're gorgeous, okay, I've said it."

Spike got up and slid into the booth next to Xander. He took Xander's face in his hands and began purring and licking the tears away. Xander waited, still unable to open his arms and hold , his Sentinel. Spike was so giving, he wanted to give back but at the same time he was terrified of what was to come. He just wasn't ready, not yet. Blair had told him the bond changes a guide. But he didn't expect this. He actually wanted to take care of his sentinel, he wanted to fill the sentinel's needs. He wondered if it was like this for all guides. From the outside it only looked like the guides were a slave to the sentinels whims. He sure didn't feel like a slave. The bond was new but Xander was sure with every molecule of his being that Spike would never be cruel or abusive to him. But knowing that didn't help. He still couldn't open his arms to his sentinel.

"Xan," Spike said quietly, "I need the card that the guide gave you."

Xander reached into his pocket and handed the card to Spike. "I'm okay, I don't need to talk to him."

"I need to talk to Ellison, I'm swearing out charges against Rayne."

"Why, he's not director of the school anymore?"

"He hurt you, Pet, he's not going to get away with it."

"It's because I'm unfit, isn't it?"

Sentinel eyes looked at Xander. "Never again refer to yourself as unfit. Do you understand me Guide?"

Xander startled at the anger he heard in Spike's voice. "Yes, Sentinel." he said softly.

Spike eyes softened. "Oh, Pet, Don't you know, no one gets through life unscathed, some of us more than others. All we can do is the best we can with what we have. You're doing that, Pet, you're doing the best you can and struggling to make your best even better. I can't ask more of you than that. No one can. But I need to do this. I need to let you know you can trust me. I need you to know I won't abandon you, not your past or your future."

THE BULLPEN, CASCADE POLICE DEPARTMENT

"Hello Sentinel Ellison's desk, Guide Sandburg speaking, how may I help you?"

"Guide Sandburg, this is Sentinel Spikeman."

"Is there a problem Sentinel?" Blair asked, his concern clearly showing in his voice.

"This is just a courtesy call, is Sentinel Ellison available?"

"He's not available at the moment he should be back shortly. Can I take a message or have him call you back?"

"I'm coming in later today to press charges against Ethan Rayne. I just wanted to give him a heads up."

"Thanks Sentinel Spikeman, that's very thoughtful of you." Blair said relieved that Xander was okay.

"Please, call me Spike, and there's one more thing. We're planning on staying in Cascade for a few days. Can you recommend a decent Sentinel/Guide friendly motel? The inn is a bit too pricey for my wallet."

"Why don't you stay with Jim and me?" Blair offered. "We have a spare room. It's got a bed and the price is right."

"I don't want to put you out, Guide Sandburg."

"Please, we're going to be roomies, call me Blair."

"You did what?" Jim asked.

"I told them they could stay with us for a few days. What's the problem?"

"They are a newly bonded Sentinel and Guide. That's the problem."

"I thought you liked the guy. You said he was impressive."

"That doesn't mean I want him anywhere near you."

"Jim, I don't understand, he's a fellow Sentinel in need. I thought you'd be glad to help him out."

"Ordinarily I would," Jim said, "But these are special circumstances."

"What special circumstances?" Blair asked truly confused.

"Sentinels in a new bond tend to be twitchy. You waited six months to report his Guide was being abused."

"Xander forgave me for that, and you don't think I was to blame either. Why would he?"

"Like I said, Sentinel's aren't always reasonable when it comes to their Guides, especially newly bonded sentinels. They haven't even been together twenty four hours yet. I was planning of giving them four to six weeks. Then we could establish a friendship." Jim said, annoyed with Blare for not thinking of his own safety.

Blair blinked at this sentinel, Jim was planning to establish a friendship... well that was different. Simon was the only one Jim ever wanted to socialize with. Blair shrugged off his thoughts and got back on subject. "I doubt if it will come up. He may not even know I waited to report the abuse. Besides, he would be an idiot to try anything with you around. So don't

worry, Big Guy. They're going to stop at a barber for a shave and they need to pick up some things, a change of clothes and stuff. They'll meet us here before the end of shift."

"Either you've forgotten or didn't take me seriously when I said I didn't want to fight Spikeman." Well there was nothing to do about it now. He would just have to hope Spikeman would take out his revenge on Rayne and leave Blair out of it. "I'm going to see what I can find on Ethan Rayne," Jim said. "Then maybe there won't be any reason for Spikeman to stay."

Charles Gunn was a big man with coffee brown skin, a shaved head and cold hard eyes. Anyone who saw him coming and looked into those eyes stepped aside. Gunn was Ethan Rayne's problem solver. He solved people problems efficiently, quietly and most importantly his solutions were final. He was paid well; it was the money that Gunn was loyal to. He knew that one day he would have to kill Rayne, or be killed by him, and he had no intention of letting the latter happen.

Gunn came to the solarium per Rayne's summons and stood quietly waiting for his employer's instructions. Rayne liked keeping his employees waiting. Most of them squirmed after a minute or so. Gunn didn't, he just watched calmly looking for any weakness that he may be able to exploit in the future.

Rayne did not look up from his Wall Street Journal as he spoke. "I have two jobs for you, he said in his usual cold crisp voice. The first I want done today as soon as we finish talking. It's Director Booker of Rainier University Guide School. He should meet with a most unfortunate accident. With your skill it should cause you no problems.

The second, Sentinel William Spikeman, should be taken care of on Thursday. He is currently in Cascade but may return to Lake View by then. He has a Guide Xander Harris. It is imperative that no physical harm be done to his Guide. I need Harris physically intact. You should be able to find all the information you need on Spikeman in the Sentinel Registry.

Ethan Rayne took a sip of his tea and turned the page of his paper. "Do you have any questions?"

Gunn knew better than to ask questions, Rayne considered employee's questions, at best, a nuisance or worse, a weakness and he knew that anyone suspected of weakness in Mr. Rayne's employ posed a problem that needed to be solved. "No, sir, Mr. Rayne." Gunn smiled as he left to take care of the Booker problem; he was looking forward to testing himself against a Sentinel. He didn't care why Rayne wanted this particular Sentinel dead. For Gunn, the only thing that mattered was the joy of the kill and the payment afterward.

Director Booker was in a panic. Ethan Rayne intended to have a Sentinel killed. Booker wanted nothing to do with it. He went to his safe and pulled out a large block of cash and a thick brown envelope. He wrote the address of the Cascade police on the envelope, Attn: Sentinel James Ellison and put every postage stamp he had on it. He left the house as if he

had every intention of coming back but gave a silent thanks to God for his account in the Cayman Islands. Booker stopped briefly to drop the envelope in the mail and then sped out of Cascade toward Canada. He knew he was leaving behind a lucrative interest in Washington Genetics; a research company that Ethan Rayne secretly held a controlling interest in; but there was a good chance that if he stayed he would never get to enjoy the good life that Rayne had seduced him with when they first met. Rayne didn't like people knowing about the skeletons in his closet and Booker had a gut feeling he had just learned about one too many.

Charles Gunn waited quietly, in the faculty parking lot of Rainier University, for Director Booker to arrive. He knew from a phone conversation with the director's secretary that he was due in at nine. It was now nine thirty and Gunn was concerned. He called the director's home and got no answer. He felt in his gut that Director Booker was on the run. He got on his phone and made some calls. It was hard to run without leaving a trail and Gunn had people that were very good trackers. Then he headed for the director's home; when someone ran this quickly they always left clues.

Jim and Blair were sure something was wrong. It couldn't be co-incidence that the director of the guide school disappeared just when Jim needed to talk to him about Xander's abuse. He wouldn't be able to get a search warrant until charges were filed. It was all very frustrating.

"Do you have Spikeman's cell phone number?" Jim asked.

Blair could tell by the tone of Jim's voice he was in this Sentinel detective mode. "Sure," Blair said and handed Jim a piece of paper with the number on it.

"See if you can track down any of the other teachers that were at the school when you were students."

"Sure. Ah, Jim," Blair said with a calming stroke to the back of Jim's hand. "Do you think Xander could be in danger?"

"Maybe," Jim said as he dialed Spikeman's number.

Spike picked up on the second ring, "Hello."

"Sentinel, this is Jim Ellison, I need you to come into the station right away. Director Booker has disappeared."

"Do you know when he went missing?" Spike asked as he moved between the window and his Guide; his eyes scanned the parking lot for anything suspicious.

"Sometime this morning. Do you need a police escort?"

Spike thought for a moment, he didn't know the area and having someone who could get them to the station safely would be a plus. "Is there someone available you can trust?"

"Me," Jim said. "Where are you?"

"We're at the Westside Mall, just checking out of Target."

"I know the place; I can be there in less than ten minutes. Look for a blue pick-up." Jim hung-up.

The cashier finished ringing up the clothing just as Spike hung-up the phone. He stepped back and inserted his credit card into the reader. Xander could feel the sudden change in Spike. "What's wrong?"

"Booker went missing this morning, Jim's coming to take us to the station." Spike said as he once more looked out the large windows and scanned the parking lot.

"Do you think it has something to do with us?" Xander asked as he moved up beside the Sentinel.

"I don't believe in coincidences, Pet," Spike said as he grabbed Xander's arm and moved him back behind him. "Jim will be here in a few minutes, he'll take us to the station. You'll be safe there."

"If you let me look out the window, I'll be able to tell if there is anything dangerous out there."

"It's too dangerous."

"Is that supposed to make sense?" Xander asked.

"It does to me, Guide. Grab the bags, we'll stand over by the returns desk. It'll give me a view and keep you out of the line of fire. "

Gunn searched Booker's house. All his clothes appeared to be there. That meant that he would have to buy some soon. Gunn found the safe it was easy for someone with his skills to break into it. It was empty. Next Gunn looked through Booker's desk, that's when he noticed the empty stamp sheets in the wastebasket. Gunn logged onto Booker's computer and backed up all the files onto a thumb drive. Then he looked at the Internet history and when he found what he was looking for. Booker had pulled up directions for a road trip to Canada. Gunn slipped the thumb drive into his pocket and went to the gas fireplace. He disabled the autopilot and turned on the gas, lit the candles on the dining room table and left the house. When Gunn got to his car he made a call and arranged for Director Booker to have an unfortunate accident on a lonely stretch of back road, while on his way to Canada. Then he calmly drove away. Twenty minutes later the house exploded.

Jim dropped Spike and Xander off at the station and then went to find Booker. He was not happy when he returned to the station.

"He's back too soon," Spike whispered to Xander. "Something's wrong."

Spike stood up and made eye contact with Jim as he approached. He didn't have to ask. "Fire," Jim said and Spike understood. Sentinel to Sentinel they had closed ranks, as quickly as that one look a bond was formed and locked into place. A Guide was in danger, they were sure of it now, and nothing was more important to a Sentinel then protecting a Guide. Both sentinels felt it when the bond locked into place, but neither of them thought about it. It was natural, like breathing or opening your eyes to the morning sun.

Spike grabbed Xander's hand and pulled him along as he followed Jim and Blair into Simon's office.

Chapter 4

Chapter by [Joan963z](#)

"Who are you?" Sentinel Captain Simon Banks asked looking at a strange and obviously very tense Sentinel.

"Detective Spikeman out of Lake View."

"Well that was fast, Harry told me he'd ask around to see if anyone wanted to transfer up here." Simon offered his hand. "I'm surprised he didn't call me to let me know you were on the way; but that's Harry, he must have gotten distracted with a kitten up a tree." Simon said with a big smile, "Welcome to Cascade."

Spike shook Simon's hand and looked frustrated. He didn't know what Sentinel Banks was talking about and he wasn't sure of how to approach the subject of Simon's incorrect assumption. He wanted to address Xander's situation. He decided to let Jim handle it.

"Simon..."

Simon braced himself, Jim didn't like having a partner, but he was the best choice to watch over Spikeman until he learned the ropes in Cascade. "No arguments Jim," Simon said assuming that Spikeman's tension was due to Jim not wanting a partner. "He is partnering with you. You're the Liaison Officer."

"Fine Simon, but that's not why we're here." Jim said trying to get things back on track "Director Booker of the guide school went missing today. I just went to his house and it's been blown up. The firemen think it was a gas leak. He's wanted for questioning in connection to abuse that took place at the school."

"And there's one other piece of information," Spike said. "I've been trying to get my Guides sealed school records, I just got a notice that there was a computer malfunction and the records have been lost."

"Booker is covering up Guide abuse," Simon said, his jaw clenched in anger and the argument he assumed he would need to have with Jim, over taking a partner, forgotten. "Why the hell didn't I hear about these charges? When were they filed?"

"I filed them less than an hour ago," Spike said in his crisp detective tone, hoping he hadn't breached protocol by not notifying the Captain right away.

Simon turned and looked at Xander. A combination of anger and concern danced across his face. He wanted to offer Xander a comforting touch but he didn't know this Sentinel and Guide well enough to take that liberty.

Xander gave a soft moan. Spike Guided him to a chair, "Sit down, Pet."

The Guide yanked his arm away and refused to sit. "Does everyone we meet have to know about this? It's over, why can't we just walk away."

"We talked about this, Xan," Spike said in a firm tone while stroking Xander's arm to offer comfort. "We're Sentinels, a Guide has been abused. You may as well ask a fish to walk away from the water."

Sentinel Captain Simon Banks was a very good judge of Sentinel character. He liked Spikman's crisp no nonsense delivery of the facts. He watched the exchange between Sentinel and Guide carefully and he liked the way he treated his Guide. Firm yet comforting. "You want in on this case, Spikeman?" Simon asked deciding that for once fortune was in his favor.

"Yes Captain Banks, I do," Spike said as firmly as he dared, he didn't want to risk disrespecting the team of Cascade Sentinels.

"Sentinel Robert's Guide is pregnant with twins. She wants to be near family. He's asked me for a transfer to Lake View. If you're willing to transfer here permanently I'll assign you and Jim to the case."

This time it was Spike that offered his hand, "Call me Spike, Sir."

Simon shook his hand, "Call me Simon and we have a deal."

"Thank you, Simon," Spike said with a smile, glad that he hadn't been told to go home.

"You'll need a safe house to stay in," Simon said reaching for the phone.

"They're bunking with us," Blair said, he wanted to keep Xander close in case the newly bonded Guide needed someone to talk to.

"Good, one less thing to worry about." Simon said with a sigh of relief. "What else do you need?"

"I want Oz," Jim said. "If anyone can recover those computer records he can."

"Done, now get out of my office. I need to call some calls."

Jim and Blair brought Spike and Xander to the loft apartment after the shift was over. Spike held Xander's hand as Blair showed them around the small apartment. This was Jim's territory and he was first Sentinel here. If Jim said it was safe then it was safe. Spike forced himself to defer to the Senior Sentinel's judgment and refrained from nosing into every corner.

Jim liked Spike, liked him a lot, but he did have that one caution he kept in the front of his mind. Blair waited six months to report Xander was being abused. Spike wasn't acting like he knew or had any animosity toward Blair, but they were investigating Xander's case and it was only a matter of time before Spike found out. Still, Jim felt a pull to Spike. He'd never felt like this with any other sentinel, not even the rangers he had served with in the Army.

They were men he depended on for his life and depended on him for theirs. They were men he cared about, if they came to him in trouble he would do whatever it took to help them. Jim had never been in the trenches fighting a war with Spike, yet he didn't object when Banks assigned Spike as his partner. They worked together without friction. As much as he respected the detectives in his working pack, he did not want to share his cases with them, he had wanted to work only with Blair as his partner. Jim couldn't fathom why he felt the pull to Spike. It just was.

Blair and Xander prepared supper in the kitchen while Jim and Spike compared notes on what they had found in their computer searches earlier that day.

"So both the teachers that Xander reported the abuse to are dead," Jim said.

"Yes, who ever is doing this is playing hardball." Spike said concern filling his voice.

"But why kill them," Jim asked. "Blair was never abused and the other students that were in the school at the time were not abused either. What's the motive?"

"Beats me," Spike said, "Booker ran so whatever the motive is it's on going. That makes me think that this is about more than Xander's abuse."

"Maybe, maybe not. Booker declared Xander unfit to bond or work as a Healer Guide..."

"He's not unfit!" Spike growled.

"Whoa, Sentinel," Jim said throwing up his hands in surrender. "It's a case fact, I'm not passing judgment."

"Sorry, Jim," Spike said with a sigh, "That's a sensitive area."

"I understand," Jim said. "If anyone called Blair unfit I wouldn't be very friendly toward him myself."

"I like Blair," Spike said. "He warm and calming in a bubbly sort of way."

Jim laughed, "I never heard him described that way, but now that you mention it, it does fit him to a T."

"Well I guess we have our jobs cut out for us until this case is over. It's not going to be easy for either of them having to relive this."

"What do you mean?" Jim asked. "Blair was never abused."

"Blair is as much a victim of abuse as Xander is. To know what he knew and not be able to do anything about it had to be hell for him."

There was no use lying, Spike would know if he tried. "How long have you known?" Jim asked.

"Since this afternoon. I found out that Blair was the one to file a report about the abuse while I was doing the computer search on Rayne. That was brave of him."

"I found out the night Xander ran. Blair felt so bad he didn't report it sooner that I knew something was wrong, I made him tell me. But Xander doesn't blame him. He comforted Blair at the inn, in spite of the emotional turmoil he was going through."

"Well Blair went through hell too. I'm glad that they met up. I know it means a lot to Xander to have a friend that doesn't see him as unfit and Blair can have peace of mind now. But still, there must be something in the school records they don't want me to see."

"I agree," Jim said. "Otherwise they would have given them to you right away."

AT THE SAME TIME IN THE KITCHEN:

"I'm telling you, Xan," Blair said, "when I saw him standing at the door hugging your pillow; I thought, Wow...He is the second most beautiful Sentinel I've ever seen."

"Second?" Xander asked.

"Jim is the most beautiful Sentinel I've ever seen."

"Well, that's your opinion," Xander said with a mischievous grin.

Blair laughed. "Maybe we should just agree that they're both tens."

"I'll agree to that."

"So," Blair said as he chopped lettuce for salad, "You seem to have accepted the role of Guide."

"I've accepted that we are bonded, but it's not easy," Xander leaned in to whisper, "He wants to watch me when I piss and he showers with me."

Blair laughed, "Jim did that for about 3 or 4 months. He still does if we are in a strange place and we still shower together most of the time. The showering together I can understand, but I asked him why he wants to watch me take a leak and he said it was to monitor how my body was working and whether I'm dehydrated."

"Yeah, Spike poked me and made me drink water. he said I was mildly dehydrated, and I have to let him shower with me. He chewed a hole in my pillow case this morning because he was so distraught." Xander looked at the floor, "I don't want to fail him as a Guide."

"You're not going to fail him Xan, and he's not going to fail you either."

Xander looked into Blair's eyes. "We haven't...I can't..." He looked at the floor again, "I'm terrified that I won't be able too and he'll force me."

"You've only had one night together," Blair said. "Spike seems to be very concerned with your feelings. I don't think he'll do anything to hurt you. If he didn't claim you last night it's because he can sense you need time."

"What's it like, Blair, to be claimed?"

"All I can say is that I look forward to it. Having Jim fill me up. Oh God, I'm getting hard thinking about it. He's going to smell it and come to see what we're doing."

"Excuse me," Jim said to Spike, "I need to see what my Guide is up to."

Spike stood up and watched Jim walk into the kitchen; he could smell Blair's arousal.

"Chief," Jim said, keeping his voice neutral for Xander's sake. "Can I talk to you alone?"

Blair turned off the oven and walked over to Jim. Jim took his arm and guided him to the upstairs bedroom. "Explain yourself, Guide. Why are you getting aroused talking to another man?"

"We were talking about you, Blair said."

Jim grabbed the back of Blair's head, "What goes on between us is between us. It's not open for discussion, even with another Guide."

"It wasn't exactly a discussion, Jim."

"What exactly was it?"

"Xander is scared, He asked me what it was like to be claimed. I told him I look forward to it. Just thinking about it was getting me aroused so I told him I had to stop talking about it. Ten seconds later you came in."

Jim was breathing heavy, "His Sentinel hasn't claimed him yet?" Jim asked as he nuzzled Blair's neck and unbuttoned his shirt.

"Not yet." Blair said.

Jim pulled Blair's shirt off and laid him on the bed. Then he took off Blair's pants and removed his own clothing. He lay on the bed next to Blair and pulled his Guide to him nuzzling his neck. "You're mine, Guide, and mine alone."

Blair wrapped his arms around his Sentinel, "Yours alone," he whispered.

Jim kissed his way down Blair's torso to his hard cock. Blair stroked Jim's head and arms as the Sentinel began to lick and suck his Guide. Blair bit his bottom lip to keep from moaning loudly.

Jim looked up at his Guide. "Don't do that Guide. Let them hear your pleasure. There is a Sentinel in the house that hasn't claimed his Guide. I need him to know you're claimed. I want him to hear it and smell it."

Blair moaned out loud when Jim bent his head and took Blair's shaft into his mouth.

Jim continued to pleasure his Guide, keeping him on the edge of orgasm but not allowing him to come.

"Jim, Oh! Jim, Yes, Oh! So good." Blair forgot the visitors and got lost in the pleasure his Sentinel was giving him.

Jim sucked one of Blair's balls into his mouth and rolled it across his tongue as he lubed his hands and then he began preparing Blair for claiming.

Blair's moans became louder as Jim stroked his channel with his fingers. Suddenly Jim stopped. "What do you want Guide?" he asked.

Blair moaned, "Please Jim don't tease me."

"Tell me what you want Guide."

"I want you to claim me."

Jim moved between Blair's legs and moved them to his shoulders and then he pushed the tip of his slick hard cock into his Guide. Blair raised his hips to meet his Sentinel but Jim stopped his forward thrust. "Tell me what you need Guide."

"I need you to claim me," Blair answered.

"Louder Guide."

"Please Jim, I need you to claim me." Blair yelled.

Jim slid into his Guide and matched the rhythm of his thrusts with hand strokes of Blair's weeping cock.

"You're mine," Jim shouted as he exploded into his Guide.

"Yours," Blair cried as his own orgasm erupted.

"Jim pulled out of Blair and laid down beside him. "Do you know how beautiful you are? You're glowing."

Jim caught the dripping cum from Blair's stomach and began rubbing it into his own torso.

"What are you doing, Jim?"

"Marking my territory, Chief. Sentinel to Sentinel I need to know that Spikeman gets the message."

"I guess this means no shower?" Blair asked.

"That's right, Chief."

"How am I ever going to face them?"

"They're Sentinel and Guide, this is the way it's supposed to be. From the sounds that I hear down there you're not going to have anything to be embarrassed about."

"Chief," Jim said, "can I talk to you alone?" Jim took Blair's arm and Guided him upstairs to the loft bedroom. "Explain yourself, Guide. Why are you getting aroused talking to another man?"

Spike walked into the kitchen. "That sounds like a good question," Spike said. "Explain yourself, Guide?"

"We were just talking," Xander said looking down at the floor.

"About what?"

"I asked him what it was like to be claimed."

"If you want the answer to that question, Guide, I'm the one to ask." Spike walked over to Xander and began stroking his hair.

Xander looked toward the loft as he heard Blair moan. "I didn't mean to cause trouble."

"That's not the sound of trouble Guide. That's Sentinel Ellison giving you an answer to your question."

"Here, now, with us here?"

"I take it you told Blair I hadn't claimed you yet. He needs to put his scent on his Guide and so do I" Spike said as he took Xander's arm and tried to lead him to the guest bedroom. Xander stood with his feet firmly planted to the floor. "The kitchen table isn't as comfortable as a bed, but if that's your preference, Guide, it will do."

Blair's moans of pleasure were getting louder. Xander still stood firm looking in the direction of the sounds; the scent of his fear flooded the kitchen.

Spike moved in and began licking the bonding spot on Xander's neck. "I don't want to hurt you, Pet," he whispered between licks. "But if you don't come with me now I could lose control. I need to do this."

Xander looked into the dark blue eyes of his Sentinel. "I'm scared," he said with a shiver.

"I know, Pet, just come with me and let me do what I need to do and I promise I won't hurt you."

Spike and Xander walked to the door of the guest bedroom. They heard Blair cry out "Jim, Oh! Jim, Yes, Oh! So good," just before they closed the door.

Xander was passive and accepting as Spike removed his shirt and then sat him down on the bed. Spike knelt down and removed Xander's shoes and socks and then he undid Xander's pants and gently laid him back onto the bed and slipped them off. Spike quickly took off all his own clothes and laid down on the bed pulling Xander to him. Xander shivered at his Sentinel's touch. Spike nuzzled his Guide's neck and sent calming waves of pleasure through his Guide as he whispered sounds of comfort. "Talk to me Guide, tell me what you're feeling? Why are you so afraid of this? It's part of what we are."

Xander clamped his jaw shut and turned his face away from his Sentinel. "Do what you have to do," he hissed.

Spike rolled Xander onto his back and straddled him; He forced his Guide to make eye contact. "First fear, now anger, you will tell me what this is about Guide."

Xander forced his body to go limp and his eyes to go out of focus. "Sentinel, claim your Guide," he whispered.

Spike growled a low, rumbling, fearsome, warning, Xander startled. "Hopeless surrender is not what I want from you, Guide. Tell me what this is about, now!"

Xander took a shuddering breath; he knew there was no other way; he would have to tell. "I was thirteen when the school sent home a letter saying I was a 'potential' Guide. When my dad saw the letter he went ballistic. He started yelling at my mom. He blamed her. He said his grandfather and his uncle were Sentinels. I should be a Sentinel, and then he would get respect from his friends and family. He said now all they would do is laugh at him because his only son was getting it up the ass every night."

Spike moaned. "Oh no, Pet, no." He felt as if a stake had gone through his heart.

Xander continued. "He kept yelling about it, getting it up the ass, getting my ass reamed, how a male Guide was the lowest. He said I was nothing but a leach to him. He got real drunk and dragged me to the police station. He told the desk sergeant he didn't want me. My dad was arrested for being drunk and disorderly and they sent me home to my mom. When he sobered up the police told him he had to keep me until I graduated from high school. My dad never let it go, every day he would yell about it. I was fourteen when he tried too...He said he wanted to show me what I was going to get; but he was so drunk he couldn't... My mom pulled him off of me and he passed out. After that I made sure he never had the chance to try again."

Spike rolled onto his side and pulled Xander to him. "Oh Xan... Pet, you know it's not like that," he said with a voice full of grief for the emotionally battered child.

Blair's voice came to them, "I want you to claim me."

"To my dad," Xander said, "it was all horrible, vulgar, filth. When you held me that first night it wasn't like that. I'm terrified it will turn into filth."

Blair's voice came to them again, "I need you to claim me."

"Do you hear that, Pet? They've been together for two years. Does that sound dirty to you?"

"No," Xander said. "But Jim loves Blair, I don't know whether you could ever love me."

"I already do," Spike said. "I thought it would scare you if I told you."

Blair's voice was louder this time, "Please Jim, I need you to claim me."

Xander put his arms around Spike, "You're my Sentinel"

"Yes I am," Spike said as he nuzzled Xander's neck.

"I need you to claim me," Xander whispered. "I need you to make it beautiful."

Spike kissed his way down Xander's torso and took his Guide's cock into his mouth.

"You're mine!" they heard Jim shout.

Spike began a soft purring growl as he gently licked and sucked; he could feel Xander's cock grow and harden with every heartbeat.

"Yours!" they heard Blair answer.

Xander laid his head back, closed his eyes and moaned with pleasure. The vibrations Spike was sending through his body were beyond description. Xander began to raise and lower his hips with each wave of sensation.

Spike let go and crawled up to his Guide. "I love you, Xan," he said and then he kissed him. "I promise I won't hurt you. Okay, Pet?"

Xander was lost in a bonding thrall; he wrapped his arms around Spike and pulled him down and rolled him onto his back. He lay on top of Spike and rocked back and forth, moaning as their cocks rubbed against each other and then he captured Spike's mouth in a passionate kiss.

Spike held the kiss for as long as he could and then pulled away and gasped for breath. Xander nuzzled Spike's neck in what seemed like a desperate search for the Guide Spot, Spike was confused, Guides didn't normally behave that way so he rolled Xander onto his back and the behavior stopped immediately. "I think you have a bit of a Topper in you, Pet," Spike said. "I like it, but he'll have to come out and play another day."

Spike grabbed the lube that Blair had so thoughtfully left on the bedside table and rubbed a generous amount over his hands. He put Xander's legs on his shoulders and with one hand began slowly stroking Xander's weeping cock. With his other hand he began rimming Xander's hole and gently inserting his finger into the tight channel, then two fingers. Ever so gently Spike readied his virgin Guide, three fingers and then the sweet spot.

"Ohhh! Gaaa! What?"

"Sweet spot, Pet." Spike said as he pulled his fingers out.

"No don't stop, I want it. Oh gods, I didn't know I could want it."

Spike spread lube over his own weeping cock and gently pushed into his Guide. "I'm going to go slow, Pet. If you feel uncomfortable tell me." He continued small thrusts in and out until he reached the pleasure nub.

Xander moaned and began lifting his hips to meet each thrust.

Spike was careful not to thrust in too deep. He didn't want to break his promise and hurt his Guide. He picked up his pace and matched each thrust with a hand stroke of Xander's cock.

"You're mine," Xander yelled as his cum exploded onto his stomach.

"Yours," Spike answered as he filled his Guide with his warm juices.

Jim and Blair were laying in each other's arms when they heard Xander yell out his climax and Spike answer.

"Did I hear that right?" Blair asked confused as to why Xander was claiming his Sentinel and not the other way around.

"None of our business," Jim answered.

"But they'll know we know."

Jim sighed. "The scent I get is a Sentinel claiming his Guide. What I heard is a Sentinel giving his Guide what he needed. I think they'll be okay with us knowing that."

"Sometimes I don't understand Sentinels," Blair said.

"Sentinel's are easy," Jim said. "It's Guides that are impossible to figure out. I'm hungry; let's get some dinner."

CHAPTER 10

Xander wrinkled his nose "You do know we stink?" he asked as he pulled on his pants.

"No we don't," Spike said. "This is necessary. If we went out there without being marked Jim would be within his right as Alpha Sentinel to throw us out of the apartment."

Xander was confused. "Aren't you an Alpha also?"

"Yes, but that has nothing to do with it. This is Jim's "den"; he's the one in charge."

"I hope I can at least wash my hands before I eat," Xander said hopefully.

Spike laughed. "Hand washing is allowed, Guide." Then in a more serious voice he added, "but no shoes or socks."

"What?" Xander asked surprised by the mandate, "Why not?"

Spike ran his fingers through Xander's hair. "Going barefoot shows we recognize Jim's dominance. I either bow to that or fight him. I don't want to fight Jim and I'm pretty sure he doesn't want to fight me. Things get tricky when there's a newly bonded sentinel and guide involved."

"Then why didn't we take off our shoes as soon as we got here?"

Spike sighed. "That was then, before you triggered all this by telling Blair you hadn't been fully Claimed and asking what it was like."

Xander sighed. "So this is all my fault," he said hanging his head. "I'm sorry."

Spike lifted Xander's chin and looked into his eyes. "Not fault, Pet, it's just a consequence. You triggered some Sentinel behavior, is all," he said in a soothing voice. "This would have had to happen sooner or later so don't go thinking you did anything wrong. Let's go wash our hands."

Spike and Xander walked into the bathroom. That's when Xander looked in the mirror.

"What is that!?" Xander squealed with fear when he saw himself.

"Guide Glow," Spike said as he wrapped his arms around Xander. "You've been claimed, Pet. It makes you glow for awhile."

"Human beings aren't supposed to glow," Xander said. "I look like I've got a hundred watt bulb inside me."

"They didn't tell you about this at guide school?" Spike asked wondering why Xander wasn't better prepared to become a Guide.

"I kinda put everything about being claimed out of my head," Xander said letting his shoulders slump.

"Don't worry, Pet," Spike said with an extra hug before letting Xander go. "It'll fade away in about an hour."

"How am I supposed to go out there and face them like this?"

"With your head up and proud," Spike said. "Besides Blair will be glowing too, I can smell it."

Xander moaned and began washing his hands. He scrubbed up his arms trying to wash the glow away. Spike stopped him before he rubbed himself raw and they washed their hands together. When they were done Spike wrapped his arms around his Guide again. "I love you, Xan, and I'm proud of you. You're a warm, loving, and beautiful man."

Xander leaned back into the hug. "Head up and proud, I guess I can do that." Then in a little boy voice he asked, "will you hold my hand?"

Spike and Xander held hands and walked to the kitchen. Spike was right Blair was glowing, but he busied himself in the kitchen as if nothing was out of the ordinary.

The table was set and the wine had been poured. Jim defused any awkward silences by immediately offering a toast, "to new friends and new beginnings."

"To new friends," the other three chimed in.

"I was planning on rare roast beef," Blair said. "But this has turned out to be more medium well."

"It'll be fine, Chief," Jim said as he gave Blair an affectionate pat on the ass.

Dinner went well and afterward Blair showed slides of his trip to Machu Picchu in Peru.

Everyone went to bed tired but feeling good about Spike and Xander starting their first official day with the Cascade police in the morning.

Jim and Blair got up half an hour earlier than usual to shower together and make breakfast for their guests.

Xander didn't give Spike any resistance about showering together; he knew everyone expected it.

As soon as their guests were in the shower Jim whispered into Blair's ear, "I'm going to invoke the ritual today."

"What ritual?" Blair asked.

Jim looked a bit annoyed with the question. "Welcoming him into the pack."

"So soon? Don't you usually wait a week or two for that? Besides you think Spike is hiding something with the schoolteacher past."

"I still think he's hiding something; but I know he's a damn good man. No point in making him wait."

"You know?" Blair asked. "It's not just a gut feeling?"

"He knows about you. He told me you must have gone thru hell knowing about the abuse and not being able to do anything about it."

"He said that?" Blair looked over at the bathroom. "Xander must have told him."

"No, he came across the computer records himself."

"He never said a word," Blair said in awe. "The guy likes me, I can feel it, and it never wavered not one bit. I'm a level 8 empath I would know if he were hiding any animosity toward me."

"So you're okay with this Chief?"

"Sure, but what about Simon?"

Simon and H can hold off if they want. I'll make it clear that it's personal. Spike is going to be my partner at the squad plus he's bunking here, that gives them an out if they want to take it." They heard the shower turn off and went back to making breakfast.

Blair wanted to ask Jim why he felt bringing Spike and Xander into the pack was personal instead of business, but it would have to wait.

Xander's car had been towed to police impound the night Spike found Xander. A uniformed officer had retrieved Spike's car from the Mall and brought it to Jim's apartment so Spike and Xander followed Jim to the station. As soon as they arrived Simon called everyone in the bullpen together to introduce them to the new Sentinel and his Guide.

"Everyone, may I have your attention please," Simon called. "As you know Sentinel Roberts' Guide, Anna is pregnant with twins. They have transferred to Lake View to be near her family. We have been lucky enough to have Sentinel Detective William Spikeman and his Guide Xander Harris transfer in effective immediately."

Jim stepped forward. "I've spent some time with Sentinel Spikeman and his Guide and I would like to personally welcome him into our ranks." Jim took Blair's hand and walked over to Xander and then he leaned in and sniffed Xander's neck to signal to Spike his intent. Blair reached over and gave Xander a reassuring pat on the hand and a big smile.

Spike was surprised, he hadn't expected to be invited into the pack so soon; but Jim did say it was personal. Maybe he thought it was the best thing to do since they were bunking together. Spike ran his fingers through his Guide's hair. "This is a Sentinel rite, Pet. Nothing difficult. Jim just needs to lock us in as part of his pack."

"I am Sentinel Jim Ellison. This is my Guide Blair." He ran his fingers into Blair's hair and tilted his head to the side exposing Blair's claiming gland to Spike.

Xander was shocked. He knew what Blair meant to Jim, and Jim was offering Blair's neck to Spike.

Spike looked at Blair's exposed neck and an odd thought crossed his mind. 'Sorry Luv, I don't speak Chinese.' And then it was gone and Spike took one long hard lick of Blair's neck. The taste of a Guide, which was not his own, filled Spike's mouth. Spike looked at Jim. "I am Sentinel William Spikeman," he said in a clear firm voice so that everyone in the bullpen could hear. "This is my Guide, Xander." Spike stood at Xander's shoulder, put his hands into his hair and tilted his head to fully expose the claiming gland to Jim.

Xander stood impassive as Jim leaned in and gave a firm long lick to his neck. No one other than Spike had ever touched him there. He considered it a private place even a sacred place and now Spike, his Sentinel, held his head and offered it to another.

Jim had welcomed other Sentinel's and their Guides into his pack. Everyone was unique and yet under it all was the taste of Guide; but when he licked Xander he tasted something else familiar, something he recognized but couldn't name.

When he looked up, Jim took Spike's face into his hands and then waited for Spike to do the same to him. Then they kissed with open mouths; their tongues dance and mingled the taste of themselves and their Guides. Now they were family, now they were pack.

Xander empathic senses absorbed the beauty of what the two men were giving each other; it was a pledge of life and brotherhood beyond anything Xander had ever sensed before, he knew it touched all their souls.

Next Simon stepped forward. "I am Sentinel Simon Banks," he said. "This is my Guide Tara." Tara was a tall voluptuous woman with long sable brown hair and beautiful large hazel eyes. She could see Spike was lost in the ritual as he leaned in and licked her neck.

Spike repeated his ceremonial introduction to Simon and once again exposed Xander's guide gland. This time Xander understood as Simon licked his neck, he wasn't being forced to endure an intrusion, this was a form of communion and the Guides were the sacrament.

Simon was surprised when he tasted Xander. As elder Sentinel he had done this ritual many times. He knew "guide taste" and he recognized the other familiar taste right away. He wondered if Jim had identified it. He continued with the ritual and took Spikes face in his hands.

Spike looked into Simon's eyes. He had expected Simon to wait before linking with him in the pack. It was his right to do so.

Simon let his hand wander to the back of Spike's head as he kissed him Spike returned the kiss with equal passion. When the kiss ended Simon whispered, "true brothers," in a voice so low only the Sentinel's could hear it."

Spike was so moved by the Senior Sentinel's endearment that he momentarily lost his ability to speak and all he could do was look into the big man's eyes and nod as a tear rolled down his cheek. Simon took Spike's head into his hands once more and kissed his face, catching the tear, before stepping back and allowing H his turn in the ceremony.

H had watched the ritual closely. He was unsure whether to join in but he was the only other Sentinel in Cascade and if he held back until he got to know Spikeman better it could look odd to the mundanes in the office and could cause some friction. Rafe understood what Henri was thinking and leaned over and whispered, "Simon's welcomed him, and we should too."

"I am Sentinel Henri Brown," H continued. "This is my Guide Rafe." Spike licked Rafe's neck and still lost in his ritual thrall made the introductions and then tilted Xander's head. H

smiled at Xander and whispered, "you're doing great," before licking his guide spot. Xander was grateful for the bit of encouragement.

Henri also noticed a second familiar taste but thought it must have come from Simon's saliva.

Spike turned to Henri for a kiss. The kiss with Jim had been deeply spiritual; the kiss with Simon was full of passion. Henri's kiss was one of comfort and abiding friendship. Spike felt everything click into place, as if he had come home. From this day on he would never be alone. He had a pack. His eyes turned back to their lapis blue and he ended the kiss with Henri. The ritual was over.

As the Sentinels started to return to their desks they came face to face with a five foot four redheaded man dressed in a leather jacket. "This is just a guess," he said in an absolutely serious voice, "but I would say there's a new Sentinel in town." He stuck his hand out to Spike. "Daniel Osborn, I let my conscience be my guide."

Spike took his hand. "The computer genius," he said. "Sentinel Spikeman, everyone calls me Spike."

"Everyone calls me Oz."

"So, what exactly do you guys need?" Oz asked.

"I got a notice that some of my Guide's school records were lost in a computer glitch. We need to recover them," Spike said.

"Who sent the notice and when?"

"The director of the guide school, Booker, sent it on Monday."

"Warren Meers is the I.T. at the school and if he stays true to form Monday's hangover day, Today's Tuesday so he'll be playing catch up. We may have a shot of doing this the easy way. Where can I work?"

"You don't need to go to the school?" Jim asked.

"Not if you bring my alter ego out of retirement, I'll need about fifteen minutes, we'll know then, one way or the other."

"You can work at my station," Jim said. When Jim got to his desk he sat down and brought up the Sentinel Registry. He typed in Red Wolf, Oz's honorary Sentinel name, restored the retired Sentinel to active duty and assigned him to the case. Then he gave his seat to Oz.

With a Sentinel password, Oz could get into any city, county or state computer network. He sat at the computer. "Okay Warren, full moon rising." Oz's fingers moved across the keyboard so fast that they were a blur. "Let's see what you're up to today."

An I.T. activity report came on screen. Oz pointed at the screen "We're in luck. He's just erased the records for an Alexander Harris and he's partially erasing others to make it look like an accident." Oz's fingers began to fly across the board again.

Jim was curious, he trusted Oz but he didn't always understand him. "How is that lucky," he asked. "If they've already been erased."

"He's still covering his tracks, that means the files are still in the trash can. All I have to do is turn your computer into the town dump. Do you care if Warren knows about this?"

"Not unless he can stop you," Jim said, "He'll be under arrest ten minutes after I get the file."

Oz finished typing in the new code and logged out of the guide school and then he logged into the Fire Department.

"Why are you accessing the Fire Department?" Spike asked.

"Because I like playing computer dominoes," Oz said in his usual deadpan voice. "Domino one, fire drill at the guide school's computer room. The second domino to fall is the fire alarm that gives Warren 20 second to get out of the room before fire suppressant is released. Domino three the school's computer shuts down causing the trash can to dump all the files it holds onto Jim's computer. If either of you gentlemen have a problem with that let me know now before I press enter."

"Go," Jim said as he picked up the phone and put out a Sentinel order of arrest on Warren Meers.

Oz pushed the button and thirty seconds later everyone watched as the files from the guide school computer's trashcan were downloading onto Jim's computer as promised.

"You better erase your footprints," Jim said when the download had finished. "I don't want to have to hunt down Sentinel Wolf."

"All taken care of Big Guy," Oz said, "but thanks for watching my back. Is there anything else you need?"

"I have a computer that was in a fire, any possibility of getting anything off the hard drive."

"Possible, unless the drive is melted. I'll need to work at the lab."

"Sure, I'll get you set up," Jim said as he and Oz went to the evidence locker to withdraw Booker's personal computer.

Spike sat down and began to read Xander's file. Blair and Xander pulled up a chair and read over his shoulder. The first thing he noticed was a report from Washington Genetics. What he found surprised him. Xander not only had a guide gene he also carried a dormant sentinel gene. Spike and Blair looked at Xander surprised at what they had read.

"Don't look at me like that," Xander said to Spike. "I told you my grandfather and my uncle were Sentinels."

"You didn't know?" Spike asked.

"How would I know? Rayne never told me if that's what you mean."

"Rayne never told you what?" Jim asked as he returned to his desk.

"Xan carries both the sentinel gene and the guide gene," Blair said.

"That's what I tasted," Jim said. "I couldn't place it during the ceremony but now that you say it..."

"Why don't I taste it?" Spike asked.

"No basis for comparison, is the most likely reason," Blair said.

Spike got up from the computer and gave Xander's guide spot a long hard lick. He swirled the taste around in his mouth. "Guide and Sentinel. It's there; I recognize it now."

"This may be bigger than we thought, we need to let Simon know," Jim said.

"I know, I recognized it during the ceremony." Simon said to the two Sentinels and their Guides. "What interests me is, why that information was kept sealed. It's well documented that a Guide can carry both sets of genes."

"It must have something to do with the abuse," Jim said. "What if Rayne was trying to activate Xander's sentinel gene."

"That's not possible," Blair said. "The guide gene is dominant; the sentinel gene is recessive."

"I'm not sure I understand what you're saying," Simon said. "Can you put that in layman's terms."

"Sure, I'll start from the beginning," Blair said. "The guide gene is carried on the X chromosome. Women have two X chromosomes, men have one. A woman can inherit a guide gene from their mother, their father, or both. If they inherit from both they are a mindwalker.. The sentinel gene is carried on the Y chromosome. Only men have a Y chromosome. Both parents can pass on the guide gene, but only the father can pass on a sentinel gene. Now the sentinel gene is always inactive unless it is triggered somehow. Jim's was triggered by his time in the jungle. Spike was triggered while in a coma and yours Simon while you were working undercover on that drug bust. But the thing is the gene can and does sometimes stay inactive for an entire lifetime. In the case of Xander's father it never triggered. We also know that the guide gene requires no trigger. If you're born with a guide gene you'll be a guide. But nature seems to have put in a kind of safety valve. No Guide with a sentinel gene has ever become a Sentinel. The sentinel gene stays inactive."

Spike was worried about Xander and took his hand. "Why do you call it a safety valve?" he asked.

"Because a person would probably go insane if he were both," Xander said.

"That's an assumption," Tara said.

"An assumption yes, but a logical one," Blair said. "A Guide has different brain patterns than a mundane; we can bond mentally with our Sentinel. We are different physically than a mundane; we have a guide gland in our neck. We have bioluminescence in our skin. Our pheromones are different and we're wired to be bi-sexual until we bond then our sexuality gets locked in. A sentinel's brain patterns change after the gene is activated and both a sentinel's and a Guide's brain patterns change after bonding. Areas of the brain that weren't active become active and new pathways are laid down. It's very possible that a conflict could occur if a man were both a sentinel and a guide."

"That wouldn't necessarily cause insanity," Tara said. "It could cause traumatic stress disorder, or the person could go into a zone and not be able to get out, or depression. There are any number of things that could happen."

"None of which are desirable from my point of view," Xander said sounding put off by the possibilities.

"Can anyone think of an upside to having a Sentinel/Guide?" Simon asked.

"Maybe Rayne figured that a Sentinel could be his own Guide," Jim said.

"That's ridiculous," Tara said. "It's the bond that stabilizes the Sentinel, they need the link with another human being. It's not the empathy alone."

"I agree," Xander said. "But Rayne wouldn't know that. He's a telepath but not an empath; he doesn't understand empathy at all."

"We're missing something," Spike said as he went through the facts about Xander and then it hit him. Rage at Ethan Rayne along with fear and worry for his Guide flooded his emotions.

"Spike," Xander said as he pulled his Sentinel into a hug. "It's okay I'm here."

Spike backed out of the hug and put his hands on Xander's shoulders. "I know what the bastard wants to do, Pet." Spike looked at Simon then at Jim. "He wants to create a telepathic Sentinel. A sentinel with 6 hyper-senses instead of five."

"What do you mean?" Simon asked. "How can a Sentinel have 6 hyper-senses?"

"Xander has a high telepathic rating for hazard detection," Spike said. "That is certainly a sense a Sentinel could use."

"Sure a sentinel could use it," Xander said. "But what's the up side for Rayne? I don't see what he gets out of it. And then there is still the possibility that I wouldn't be able to function at all."

"What did you two do during the private tutoring?" Blair asked.

"Okay," Xander said throwing up his hands, "it was telepathic hazard detection training, or punishment for failure to improve my telepathic abilities; but I still don't see what he could get out of it."

"Well it has to be something," Jim said. "We need to talk to everyone that had anything to do with the school while he was director."

The rest of the day was spent interrogating Warren Meers and tracking down and interviewing Guides that had gone to the school while Ethan Rayne was the director, as well as any teachers and staff. Nothing new was learned and the two Sentinels and their Guides were weary by the end of shift. No one was in the mood to cook, so Jim and Blair decided to introduce Spike and Xander to their favorite Italian restaurant.

When they got back to the apartment both Sentinels were in need of their Guide's comfort. Jim asked Spike to accompany him on his usual nightly rounds of the apartment before the two couples retired to their respective bedrooms to renew their bonds.

Xander, while still a bit nervous, was not unreceptive to Spike's foreplay and they both found the sounds coming from the loft bedroom arousing. Spike took his time pleasuring his Guide and Xander returned each touch and felt fulfilled when Spike moaned in ecstasy.

37 Minutes Later

Jim couldn't sleep; he could smell the members of his pack nearby but not near enough.

"What's wrong?" Blair whispered.

"They're too far away," Jim whispered back.

"Xan and Spike?"

"Yeah," Jim said as he swung his feet over the side of the bed and started toward the stairs.

"Wait, Jim, what are you planning to do?"

"Bring them up here. They're in danger. I need them closer."

Blair jumped out of the bed and caught up with Jim on the stairs. "In our bed?"

"You don't expect me to ask them to sleep on the floor do you?"

"I didn't expect you to ask them into our bed, we're naked, we don't even own pajamas. Besides there in our apartment. Since when is it not safe here?"

"I can't sleep, Chief, I need them close by."

"You didn't need them close by last night," Blair said.

"Last night they weren't members of my pack, I wasn't their Alpha. It's my responsibility to make sure they're safe."

"Xan," Spike whispered into his Guide's ear when he heard the conversation begin between Blair and Jim, "we have to sleep upstairs."

"Why, what's wrong?" Xander asked.

"Jim needs us to sleep upstairs." Spike wasn't about to worry his guide about safety concerns. Jim had taken him around to check the apartment knowing Spike needed to see for himself that the apartment was secure.

"No way, besides, we're nude."

"So are they, Pet, come on."

"I'm not going out there nude!"

Spike sighed. "Then put some briefs on and come along or I'll have to carry you."

"I'm bigger than you are; you'd never get me up the stairs," Xander said, still not moving off the bed.

Spike growled, bent over, picked up Xander and put him over his shoulder.

Xander started to struggle so Spike had to hold him with both arms. "Jim," he called, "open the door."

Jim, who had been pacing outside the guest bedroom waiting for Spike to finish dealing with his Guide, reached out and opened the door. He stood aside to let them pass.

"Put me down," Xander said.

"Xan," Blair said as Spike headed for the stairs, "unless you want your Sentinel to feel the need to claim you once you get upstairs, you should stop struggling."

Xander stopped struggling and looked in the direction of Blair's voice. "You're kidding, right?"

Spike growled and then Jim growled at Xander.

"I think it's too late, you've already triggered a bonding thrall in both of them," Blair said as Spike began to take the stairs two at a time. "It's a Sentinel thing, you're endangering the pack and you're doing it in front of another Sentinel and Guide."

Spike growled again as he lay Xander on the bed and climbed on top of him; he found Xander's guide spot and began to suckle.

"Don't fight it Xander," Blair said, "you're not going to win."

Jim was equally distressed, as Blair got into bed Jim climbed in after him and pulled Blair to him. He nuzzled Blair's neck and began to nibble and suck at his guide spot. Blair made soft mewling noises of submission as Jim ran his hands over his Guide in a frenzy of hard touches and answered his Guide's mewling with more growls. Blair knew he would have bruises in the morning.

Xander had never experienced Spike in a full out claiming thrall. Spike's hands held his head tight as he sucked and nibbled at Xander's guide gland. Xander could feel his Sentinel's need so he wrapped his arms around him and began stroking his back and imitating the sounds he heard Blair make. Spike answered with a growl but loosened the hold he had on Xander's head.

Jim grabbed the lube from the bedside table and readied his Guide and then left the lube on the bed within Spike's reach.

The more Spike nibbled and sucked at Xander's guide gland the more Xander felt as if he were on a merry-go-round. He tried to force his brain to think in a straight line but it wouldn't cooperate. Finally, he could no longer make the mewling sounds and he just clutched at his Sentinel with both arms and legs.

That was the signal Spike was waiting for. "You're mine, Guide," he growled in a deep baritone Xander had never heard before. "And you will obey."

The words had meaning to a primal part of Xander's brain and he heard and felt something click in his mind. All he could do was moan in response.

Spike moved off his Guide and rolled him onto his stomach and then he grabbed the lube and readied his Guide. He spread a generous amount of lube on his own cock and then pulled Xander up onto all fours and entered him. Spike had never fully entered Xander; he never pushed beyond Xander's comfort zone. But this was a Sentinel in a claiming thrall that had been triggered by a disobedient Guide. Sentinel Spike was in charge and all the Sentinel knew was that his Guide had disobeyed the pack leader and that behavior could not be tolerated. He continued to push into Xander, deeper than he had gone before. He had to show his pack leader he had control of his Guide.

Jim entered Blair, The Guide moaned as he always did when his Sentinel entered him. Jim closed his eyes and concentrated on the pleasure that was being transmitted through his shaft and immerse himself in his bond with Blair.

Xander gasped as he felt Spike slide into him deeper than he ever had before; It wasn't painful, but it wasn't comfortable either, he could feel Spike's pubic hair brush against his cheeks and then Spike pulled out and started to push in again. Xander tried to hold his head up but it only fell forward. His brain was flooded with Endorphins, Serotonin and Dopamine.

All of his empathic pathways were fully open to his bond with Spike. He would have fallen over onto his side if Spike were not holding him.

For the third time Spike fully entered his Guide and then lifted him up into a kneeling position. He leaned Xander's head back against his own and held him tight across the chest. "You're mine, Guide," Spike said in the strange deep baritone that was the Sentinel voice.

Suddenly, Xander felt as if he had been wrapped in a warm blanket. All he knew was his Sentinel. He belonged, he was cherished, and somehow he had disappointed his Sentinel and forsaken his sacred duty. He cried out in despair and his head fell forward.

Spike lifted his head and pulled it back against his own. "You're mine Guide," he repeated as he continued to slide in and out of his Guide.

"Yours," Xander breathed.

Spike growled as he came and the sound triggered Jim's orgasm.

Afterward the four lay together on the king size bed; two Guides protected and cherished between two Sentinels. Jim settled and fell into a restful sleep. He was one with his pack.

Chapter 5

The two couples awoke the next morning to the harsh sound of the alarm clock. Xander found himself tightly sandwiched between Spike and Blair. He didn't mind cuddling up against Spike, but being scrunched up against a naked Blair, when he was naked himself was very different. He was embarrassed enough by the incident that had taken place the night before and now this, He just wanted to close his eyes and bury himself under the covers.

Jim and Blair got up first and showered together. Blair was surprised that Jim, usually a very private man was so totally unselfconscious.

"It really doesn't bother you that they are in our bed?" Blair asked as he washed Jim's back enjoying the familiar feel of hard muscle.

Jim leaned back into the touch of Blair's hand. "I'm the one that insisted they be there, Chief."

"I never thought I'd see the day that you would share our bed with anyone," Blair said as he handed Jim the soap and turned around to have his back washed.

"Not anyone," Jim said as he ran the specially scented soap over Blair's back. "They're Sentinel family and they're in danger."

"Sentinel family," Blair whispered then sighed, "I feel it too, especially with Xander, but I never thought you'd invite anyone into our bed. What I don't understand is; why do you say they are in danger? I thought it was only Xander."

"Come on, Chief, put it together, Booker's missing, his house is blown up, both teachers that Xander reported the abuse to are dead, No one knows where Ethan Rayne is, but we do know he was keeping track of Xander. It makes sense that Rayne will try to kill Spike."

"Have you mentioned this to Spike?" Blair asked, shocked that anyone would try to murder a Sentinel.

"Not in words, but he knows," Jim said with a feral grin. "I almost pity the man that comes after him."

"I don't understand, you've only worked with him for two days and that was all desk work. You've never seen him work on the street."

"It's a sentinel thing, I don't know why I know how good he is, I just do."

"Well, for their sake I hope you're right. I feel like they're family too and I don't want to lose Xander's friendship. But I'd prefer they weren't in our bed."

"Well, Chief, as long as they're in danger they're going to be in our bed or I won't be able to sleep. Besides nesting is normal sentinel behavior. Didn't you cover this in guide school?"

"Sure for soldiers in a war zone. We're detectives in a city; it's hardly the same."

"From my point of view it's the same. They're pack and they're in danger."

"Come on, Pet," Spike said when Jim and Blair had finished in the bathroom. He pulled the sheet out of Xander's fist. "We have to shower and have breakfast before we go to the station."

Xander curled himself into a ball and clutched his knees to his chest.

"Guide, stop this behavior right now," Spike said.

Xander didn't move.

Spike picked him up, took him into the bathroom, laid him in the tub and turned on the cold water.

Xander squealed, stood up and turned off the shower. "What did you do that for?" he yelled.

"You weren't responding to me." Spike got into the tub and turned on the water and readjusted it to a comfortable temperature. He picked up the soap and began to wash his Guide. "There is nothing to be embarrassed about," he said as he rubbed his hands over his Guide's body in an attempt to give comfort. "We were all together. It was just normal Sentinel behavior."

"That was normal?" Xander asked in disbelief.

"For a Sentinel, yes." Spike said in a sultry voice as he rinsed the soap from his Guide.

"No wonder you're all so damn tight mouthed about what goes on between you," Xander said as he took the soap and began washing Spike. "Oh, and for the record, my ass is sore."

"How sore Pet?" Spike asked. His concern was clearly showing in his voice.

"Just enough to be annoying. On a scale of one to ten I'll give it a solid two."

"You can ask Blair for a quick touch healing before we leave for work."

"You want me to ask Blair to heal my ass? NO WAY! The embarrassment would be more painful than... Look just forget I mentioned it okay."

Spike frowned but nodded his head. "Okay, Pet, but I expect you to tell me if it gets worse."

Xander scowled, but said, "I promise."

When the foursome got to the station Jim and Spike picked up where they had left off interviewing Guides and faculty from the guide school.

"I think we need to talk," Blair said to Xander who had refused to make eye contact with anyone during breakfast and was now doing his best to disappear among the office furniture. They went to a conference room and put a busy sign on the door.

"Xander," Blair began as they took seats beside each other at the large table. "I know you're embarrassed about last night, But that was normal..."

"Normal Sentinel behavior," Xander interrupted. "I know Spike told me."

"We need to talk about this," Blair said. "You're letting it interfere with your Guide duties."

"I let him down, Blair," Xander said as he studied the tabletop.

Blair waited for Xander to continue.

After a few moments Xander sighed and started to speak again. "It's not just the sex, I mean Spike is really good, He's sweet and gentle and attentive and then I go and spoil it all because I didn't want to get out of bed. Part of me says what's so wrong about wanting privacy? But I know Sentinels are different. They have different social rules and I violated them and caused that whole...whatever it was, I was the cause of it."

"You made a mistake, Xan, now you know not to do it again."

"I feel so lost. What was the point of going to guide school when I'm so unprepared?" Xander moaned and lifted his head toward the ceiling, "God it hurts, I didn't know it could hurt like this; I don't want to disappoint him again. What am I supposed to do?" he said, looking at Blair. "I don't think I'll be able to respond to him with you and Jim there. It was damn embarrassing being jammed up against you like that this morning."

Blair took Xander's hand. "Believe me, I understand the embarrassment, I was embarrassed too. We're both in new territory here and I think we both have some adjustments to make in regard to this nesting behavior. I'll talk to Jim, I think I can get him to let you and Spike have some private time as long as you come upstairs afterward. I know it's a compromise, but Jim can't sleep until he knows you're safe and that means the four of us in the same bed. "

"Safe? Jim would never live there with you if the loft were unsafe." Then Xander understood. "It's me again isn't it. All this stuff with Rayne is affecting Jim as much as it is Spike."

"It's pack mentality," Blair said. "Booker is missing and his house was blown up. The two teachers that you reported the abuse to are dead and there's no sign of Rayne. Jim says you're family and he's your Alpha. He needs to have you close by. He needs to smell, hear, and feel that your safe."

"How do you feel about it, Blair?"

"I won't lie to you it kind of unnerved me. But you and Spike being in our bed calmed Jim last night so, until this case is over, I guess we'll be spending the night together."

"Okay then. I'll live with the compromise."

Jim was busy on the phone with yet another Guide interview when the envelope from Booker arrived. It was unusual for him to get mail at the station, so as soon as he finished the call he picked it up. Spike's desk was beside him so he turned to give Spike a heads up about the envelope.

"When did that come in?" Spike asked as soon as he saw what Jim had.

"Just a few minutes ago," Jim said as he slit open the envelope, tipped out the contents and handed half to Spike.

Spike and Jim began to scan the pages, "A lot of this has to do with a company called Washington Genetics," Spike said.

"Yeah, mine too," Jim said.

"This stuff goes back years," Spike said. "Washington Genetics, isn't it this side of Tacoma?"

"Yes, It's one exit down off of I-5. About a fifteen minute drive from here. it's a big company, specializes in stem cell research, and treatment of genetic diseases with gene therapy. They've had a couple of good breakthroughs."

"But what does this have to do with Xander?" Spike asked. "He's not sick, he's..."

Both Sentinels looked up from the papers they were holding and locked eye contact as the realization of why Ethan wanted Xander hit them with an accompanying wave of rage.

In the conference room Blair and Xander froze for a split second. "What the hell?" Xander said as they stood up and ran for their Sentinels.

Jim and Spike were on the move toward Simon's office as the silent shout for the pack rippled across the bullpen.

H and Rafe stood up; the empathic call was impossible to resist and they made their way toward the meeting place.

Tara gasped when she felt the emotional ripple, her eyes opened even larger and her heartbeat increased. Simon stood up and opened the door to his office; three Sentinels and three Guides entered.

"What is it?" Simon asked without sitting down.

"We know why Ethan wants Xander," Jim said as he tossed the papers he held onto Simon's desk.

Xander looked at Spike. "You do, you figured out what's in it for him?"

Spike put his hands on Xander's shoulders and leaned his forehead against Xander's. "Yeah, Pet, we did."

Everyone waited for Spike to tell his Guide what he knew. It was his right and obligation as Xander's Sentinel.

"He wants to harvest your genetic makeup," Spike began, "and use gene splicing to make super soldiers. If he can trigger your Sentinel gene he'll be able to make millions. Every country in the world will want an army of Sentinels with 6 hyper-senses."

Xander's mouth dropped open in shock and he backed away from his Sentinel. "Harvest? Like I'm nothing but a tomato plant. What makes him think he has the right..." Xander looked at the four Sentinels in turn, Spike, Jim, H and Simon; and then he laughed hysterically, "Oh, but we know don't we. Guides don't have any rights except what their Sentinel gives them. I'm just a slave so why shouldn't Ethan hop on the gravy train."

Spike reached for his Guide. "You're no slave, Pet. Come on let's go where we can talk this out alone."

Xander yanked his arm away. "A pet, that's all I am to you," he said, his anger clearly showing in his voice. "Do you really want to talk this out or just suck on my guide gland until my brain is scrambled and then fuck me silly?"

"He's too stressed," Tara said. "We have to get him out of here and do a healing."

"We'll take him to the Guide Hospital," Blair said.

"I'm not going anywhere with you," Xander growled.

"Yes, you are, My Love," Spike said in a soft voice as he reached out to stroke his Guide's face.

Xander backed away until he was against the wall and had nowhere to go.

"Blair and Tara," Simon said, "You're both healers; the six of us should stay together. H, call the hospital and tell them we are on the way and then make sure the bullpen knows we're off duty for a while. Meet us at the hospital. I think the pack needs to do this together."

"Oh, goodie," Xander laughed, "an orgy."

It was rare that a Guide got so stressed that he or she needed the pack to heal, but Ethan's plan was more than an affront to Xander; it was an outrage to the pack. Xander was family, bonded by spirit and body to the pack; to wound Xander was to wound the pack and they would do whatever it took to heal him and bring him back to the fold.

The healing suite at the guide hospital was specially designed for pack healings. It consisted of a 14'X14' sunken nesting room; sleeping together was not a problem as the floor was paved with foam mattresses. Pillows and comforters were folded around the perimeter giving

the room the look and feel of a nest. The bathroom was quite large with a whirlpool big enough to hold 10. Four could shower together comfortably in the stall shower. The only windows in the rooms were heavily frosted skylights; Sentinels liked their privacy from the outside world. The room was painted green and there was a sound machine capable of playing a rain shower, waves on a beach or a babbling brook along with several other soothing possibilities. When Henri called the hospital to let them know the pack was on the way he told them to make sure the whirlpool was ready when they arrived.

Xander had gone quiet during the ride to the hospital. It was worse than the rage, far worse. It was as if he had simply removed his consciousness from the world. Spike took off his shirt and Xander's, they sat together with as much skin-to-skin contact as the van ride would allow. Tara reached over and stroked the pair offering her empathic support.

When they reached the hospital, Spike carried Xander to the suite. Simon was surprised that he could handle the larger man so easily; even though Spike was in a dead tie with Ellison for the most perfect pecs he had ever seen.

Nothing was said when the group reached the healing suite. Spike sat Xander against the wall and finished removing Xander's clothing as well as his own. The rest of the group disrobed and let their clothes fall to the floor forgotten as they moved with one thought, heal the Guide.

Jim climbed into the whirlpool first and held out his arms to take Xander so Spike could enter. Jim sat Xander down and Spike sat next to him on the left. Blair sat next to Spike and Jim next to Blair. Tara sat on the right of Xander with Simon on her other side. Spike held Xander with both arms; one arm around his shoulder the other across his waist. He looked up at Tara with a pain filled expression that broke her heart.

"I know this is hard," she said to Spike. "Xander's been through a lot in his life. Finding out what Rayne had planned was just the last straw. He's always been alone, until you. He just needs to learn to trust that we're here for him; then he'll come back to us."

Jim sat in the warm whirling water, cuddled as closely to Blair as the seats would allow. One hand stroked Blair's thigh, the other arm was around his shoulders, but the hand was rested on Spike's shoulder, his fingers moved gently offering to the other Sentinel what small comfort he could give. The two healers continued to touch and stroke the emotionally wounded Guide and his Sentinel, pouring their energy and support into each stroke.

When H and Rafe arrived, they picked up everyone's clothes, guns and badges and put them away before removing their own and entering the tub to sit next to Simon.

When the warm water and the comforting sound of the bubbles made them sleepy the group moved to the main room. Pillows were brought to the center of the nest and Spike and Xander lay on their sides facing each other with their legs entangled. Blair spooned up behind Spike and Jim cuddled in behind Blair. Blair poured his healing energy into everyone he touched.

Tara laid down against Xander's back hugging him, stroking his arm and pouring her healing energy into him. Simon was behind her then Rafe and H. All laid with their arms outstretched

touching as many of the pack as they could. Their hands moved up and down with gentle stroking. All the Sentinels began to purr and the two healing Guides made soft mewling sounds.

Xander didn't respond. His mind sat in a dark room. Something on the other side of the dark kept touching him and calling to him. He refused to respond, they were in the light and being in the light hurt. Xander retreated into sleep.

By afternoon Jim could feel that Blair was exhausted he pulled him away so that he was no longer touching Spike. "That's enough for now Chief, you need to rest.

Spike had had all he could take of Xander's suffering. As soon as Blair moved away he stood up looked up at the ceiling and started shouting with an English accent. "Why are you hurtin' im? 'E doesn't deserve this!"

Blair tried to get up and go to Spike but Jim held him down and called H and Rafe. "Hold him, I'll get Spike."

Spike continued his rant, "I'm the one that's suppose' ta be payin' for wha' I did. 'E never did ena thin' but fight for the good."

"Sentinel," Jim said quietly as he reached for Spike.

Spike slipped away from Jim's grip and looked him in the eye, "She said I could come 'ere and be a Sentinel. It was my reward for savin' that world. Said I could bond with my soul mate." Spike looked back up at the ceiling and shouted. "Where are you? Come 'ere and fix this." Spike collapsed on to his knees in tears; he buried his face in his hands.

A glowing ball of light grew to the size of a beach ball and hovered over Spike's head.

"Your guide has free will," Candle, Spike's caseworker, said.

Spike looked up into the light. "You said I could have my soul mate with me in this life. He's only been with me for a few days."

"You are needed here. You will not be alone. You will bond with Champion Ellison and fulfill your destiny. There is much work to do. If your guide chooses to leave this life it is his choice. The guide's cosmic intervention case worker is talking to him now. We can not interfere with free will." Candles light faded away and the memories that she had ever been there faded with her.

Jim dropped to the floor and grabbed Spike hard. "Sentinel," he shouted, desperate to get Spike's attention and snap him out of the bizarre fugue.

Spike startled and then looked into Jim's eyes. "Jim, what happened?"

Blair lay back exhausted, Jim could take care of Spike; he closed his eyes and fell asleep.

"You were in some kind of fugue state," Jim said softly as he stroked Spike's face. "How are you feeling?"

"Disoriented."

"Here, lay down," Jim said.

"No. Xan," Spike said.

"Tara has him and he's sleeping right now. You need to regain control. Lay down; I'll help you."

Spike let Jim lay him down onto his back. Jim stroked Spike's arm and torso and gently kissed his shoulder.

Simon watched with surprise, he knew the Sentinels bonded when in a war zone, but only when a Healing Guide was unavailable. The bond was always second to that of a Guide but no less permanent. It could stabilize a Sentinel until a Healing Guide could be reached but he had never experienced a Sentinel-to-Sentinel bond; he had never been in a situation where one was needed.

Jim pulled Spike onto his side and stroked his face. "You're beautiful," he whispered.

"Jim," Spike whispered back sadly as he touched Jim's face in return. "I'm mated to Xander."

"And I'm mated to Blair and that's not going to change, for either of us, I promise."

"Then I don't understand," Spike said. "It feels..."

"Right," Jim said as he captured Spike's mouth in a kiss.

Henry left Blair with Rafe and moved over beside Simon. He needed the elder sentinel's touch and reassurance. He could sense that what was happening between Jim and Spike was sacred and he wasn't sure whether it required witnesses or privacy.

Spike pulled away from the kiss. "I can't, Jim, Xander needs me."

"You need to regain control before you can help Xander to heal," Jim said.

Spike leaned back and moaned in despair.

Jim pulled Spike to him again. "I know it hurts," he whispered. "Let me help you bear it."

pack

It was the call of the pack leader and Spike could not resist. This time when Jim kissed him he opened himself to it.

H and Simon felt the call, it was more than a Sentinel offering help to another. They moved closer to witness the bonding of a pack leader to his chosen second.

Jim and Spike explored each other's bodies with their hands as their kisses became more passionate. They moaned and purred and made comforting mewling sounds to each other to

satisfy their need to hear one another. Their hands explored each other's bodies, tracing the hills and valleys of perfectly toned muscles to satisfy their sense of touch. They drank each other in with their eyes, Spike's blond wavy hair and Jim's square jaw line. They licked and sniffed their way around the other's body, nowhere was off limits, arm pits were nuzzled and tasted, vertebrae was stroked and silently counted, Cheeks were pulled apart and fingers and tongues sent waves of pleasure through their bodies. Their eyes were the dark blue of a sentinel in thrall when their tongues found each other's erection; rock hard, hot and weeping pre-cum the wet lick of a tongue made the sentinels moan in ecstasy. Hands found their way between legs to gently rock testicles over their palm, as hungry mouths demanded more. And more was given as each sentinel drank in the other's essence in an explosion of body and will. They didn't want to let go. They continued to lick until each flaccid shaft was rested back into its fluffy pubic nest. Only then did they break away and pull each other into a kiss; with that soft enduring promise of devotion they were sated and fell asleep in each other's arms.

When Spike and Jim awoke they exchanged a look and a nod and then each went to their respective Guides. Rafe moved back with H when Jim took Blair in his arms.

Spike lay down next to Xander. "I'll take Xander now, Tara, you should get some rest."

"No," Tara said. "I can wait until Blair wakes up."

"It's okay, Tara," Spike said with a melancholy smile. "I've got him."

"Spike's right," Simon said. "You've been at this long enough, you need a break." He pulled Tara into his arms.

Spike held Xander, rocking him gently "Xander, I need you, come back to me luv."

Xander sat in anguish in the eye of an emotional cyclone. He could perceive a presence on the other side of the storm "Help me," he cried out. "Make it stop."

"I can not," Glitter, Xander's cosmic intervention case worker told him. "You are the maker of this storm you are the only one who can stop it."

"It hurts so much."

"The pain in this life will continue. You have a choice, you can come with me now or you can stay in this life and continue to learn from the lessons this life can teach you. If you choose to stay you will no longer be alone. What is your choice?"

Xander could hear Spike's voice from far away. "Xander, I need you, come back to me luv."

"I can't desert my sentinel," Xander told her.

"Your choice has been made," Glitter said. She disappeared and took the memory of her visit with her.

Xander woke up, something was touching him and it was in terrible pain. Xander tried to curl up against it but he couldn't; his empathic sense demanded that he pay attention. Someone was in pain and he was causing it. He moaned.

Spike felt Xander's body twitch and heard him moan. "Xan?" he called. "Love, it's okay, you're not alone. Xan? Please, Love"

Xander began to cry, softly at first and then hard body jarring sobs. "How can you love me?" he choked out between sobs. "I'm just a thing."

"No, no, you're not; I need you, Xan."

Blair woke up and moved to lie against Spike's back, followed by Jim. The rest of the pack came together, stroking one another and offering comfort and healing to Xander and Spike.

"I let you down," Xander said. "I'm sorry."

"You came back to me; that's all that counts," Spike said with a kiss to Xander's forehead, and the Sentinels purred.

The pack cuddled together for a while before going into the whirlpool again and then each couple went to their own corner of the nest to renew their bond before coming back to the center to sleep intertwined.

Xander was still very much on edge after the whirlpool, so Spike did not fully claim him. He licked and stroked and pleased Xander to orgasm orally. Spike was willing to let it go at that but Xander insisted on bringing Spike to climax, whispering that he had already let his Sentinel down enough and didn't want a non-mutual on his conscience.

Spike and Xander were the first couple to return to the middle of the nest. Xander lay on his side and Spike spooned him. As soon as they got comfortable Blair cuddled in behind Xander and Jim behind Blair. Jim's big arm stretched across the two Guides and rested on Spike. Spike entwined his fingers with Jim's and they slept well through the night.

The other group of 4 formed their own tangle of bodies, also with the Guides between the two Sentinels.

They woke naturally in the morning. Simon and Tara were the first to shower, dress and leave the group. Tara offered her neck to each of the Sentinels before leaving and she gave a sisterly kiss to each of the Guides. H and Rafe were the next to go, Rafe also offering his neck to the two remaining Sentinels and kissed the Guides, European style, on each cheek.

Jim wanted the remaining members of the pack to shower together. Xander had learned his lesson about saying no to the pack leader so he agreed. Jim wanted to wash Spike's back, but Xander was resistant to the idea, saying he needed to resume his Guide duties, so Jim said he would settle for washing Spike's hair. Blair was surprised, hair washing seemed more intimate than back washing, but it was puzzlement as to why Jim wanted to wash Spike at all.

As the group was getting out of the shower Jim pulled Spike back in saying he still had suds in his hair.

"We have to tell them," Jim said. "The longer we wait the harder it will be."

"I know," Spike said. "But Xander's still kind of shaky."

"I'll do it," Jim said. "It's my place as head of the pack."

When they left the shower, Blair was drying his hair and Xander had found some disposable razors and was shaving.

Jim wiped himself down so that he was no longer dripping before speaking.

"Chief, Xander," he said. "There's something I have to tell you."

Spike moved beside Xander and took his hand.

"Yesterday, with Simon and H as witnesses, I claimed Spike as my second."

Xander was confused. "Your second what?" he asked.

Blair wasn't confused. "I should have known," he said. "But I didn't want to believe it. I felt it when he was standing there with that stupid pillow and the way you watched him move around the room and the things you said in the elevator. You couldn't wait to bring him into the pack."

Xander suddenly understood. "It's my fault isn't it?"

"No," Spike said. "It's no one's fault."

Xander yanked his hand away from Spike, "Don't lie to me. I wasn't there for you. You needed me and I wasn't there. So you bonded with the pack leader."

"It was my idea and my right as pack leader to choose a second," Jim said.

"Pet, listen to what he is saying; I'm second. We agreed Guides come first."

"He's telling you the truth," Blair said still angry and with a touch of sarcasm. "A Sentinel-to-Sentinel bond is always second to a Sentinel-Guide bond."

Spike tilted his head and looked at Xander. "You're first and you'll always be first," he said, his blue eyes pleading for his Guide to understand.

Xander looked into Spike's eyes, his empathic sense could see the pain, the hope, the fear and the overwhelming love, and he made a decision. He was going to stop running away; he was going to stop being a scared little boy and start being a man and Xander, the man and One True Guide to Sentinel Detective William Spikeman, stepped forward. "I love you," he said, and he pulled Spike into a hug. "I'm sorry for any pain I've caused you. I'm going to do better; I promise."

Spike threw his arms around his Guide. "I love you too, Pet... I love you too," he said as he nuzzled his Guide's neck.

Blair walked out of the bathroom and stood in the nesting room with his back against the wall looking up at the skylight.

Jim came into the room and walked over to his Guide. "Are we okay, Chief?"

Blair gave an ironic little laugh. "I feel like I got punched in the stomach. I keep trying to figure out why I wasn't enough."

"It's not like that, Chief, this had nothing to do with you not being good enough, You're more than good enough. You're my soul mate. This was different it was...I don't know...Primal...Instinct...It felt like an overwhelming necessity, I can't explain it any better than that. But he's a Sentinel and you're my Guide, I won't let him come between us."

"He already has," Blair said.

"Only in your mind. He doesn't want me. He wants his Guide and I want mine."

Blair sighed. "How are we supposed to make this work, Jim, four alpha males in the same household?"

Jim smiled.

"You think this is funny?" Blair asked, with renewed ire.

"You're thinking about how to make it work." Jim said as he ran his fingers through Blair's damp hair. That means you've accepted it."

"Don't have much of a choice," Blair said pushing away from the wall. He walked into the bathroom and approached Spike. He pulled his hair away and offered Spike his neck. "Welcome to the family," he said.

Xander watched as Spike held Blair and licked and sucked at his neck. His stomach gave a small jolt but he told himself it was all pack behavior and what was good for one Guide was good for both. He walked over to Jim. "I don't think welcome to the family is the correct thing for me to say so I'll just say: Care for a taste?" And he offered his neck to Jim.

Jim couldn't help thinking this was a different Xander as he took him in his arms. This was the alpha male Blair had mentioned. The healing had worked.

It was late morning when the four men left the hospital. They called a cab and stood in front of the main entrance waiting for it to arrive. They were chatting about the weather when Xander was suddenly hit with a red alert. He screamed, "Get down" as he swept a leg out from under Spike and fell on top of him. Jim and Blair hit the ground a split second later. The sniper bullet flew over their head and hit a Guide standing at the reception desk inside the hospital. Jim had his gun out and was scanning the parking garage for the sniper. Spike

pushed Xander off of him and then took out his gun as he got on top of his Guide to shield him from any further bullets.

"Roof," Jim said and started shooting, "Get them to cover."

Spike ushered Blair and Xander into the hospital and down the corridor where a Sentinel had taken his injured Guide for safety.

"We're healer's," Blair said as he took the injured Guide out of the Sentinel's arms and Xander put pressure on the wound.

"Call for backup and stay with them," Spike told the strange Sentinel and then he was gone.

Jim had grabbed an empty ambulance and blocked the exit and entrance to the garage. Spike ran across the courtyard and found Jim behind a car waiting for him.

"A Guide is down, a sentinel is with them, backup's on its way," Spike whispered.

Jim nodded and signaled for them to start a sweep of the garage. They found Gunn on the second level holding an un-bonded female Guide as hostage.

"Let the woman go," Jim said as Spike crept closer, unseen by Gunn.

"I'll trade you the Guide for Spikeman," Gunn said.

"Spikeman's not here, he stayed in the hospital, he's guarding the Guides."

"You've got a cell phone, call him, or you'll have a dead Guide on your conscience."

Jim needed to stall for time. He knew exactly where Spike was. He could smell him and hear him creeping around trying to outflank Gunn.

"Back-up is on the way," Jim said. "You kill a Guide and you'll never get out of here alive."

Spike was in position. He put away his gun; he would need both hands.

Jim never saw a human being move so fast.

Spike was a blur as he jumped at Gunn. He grabbed the gun first, and a bullet hit the ceiling. The gun clattered to the floor as Spike snapped the hit man's wrist. Jim ran for the Guide as she screamed hysterically. Gunn tried to twist around to fight but Spike had him by the head. Jim heard Gunn's neck snap and he was dead before he hit the ground. Jim hugged the distraught Guide as he watched Spike go through Gunn's clothing for evidence. Back-up arrived. A Sentinel took the distraught Guide to the hospital and the area was cordoned off.

Gunn was a pro and they found nothing in his pockets. The pair left the scene to the CSI people and walked back to the hospital. Jim grabbed Spike's arm and stopped him halfway across the courtyard. "What did you do before you became a Sentinel?" Jim asked. "And don't give me that bullshit about being a teacher."

"I was black ops," Spike whispered.

"I was black ops, elite team. I didn't know you."

"I was blacker," Spike said and started to move.

Jim grabbed his arm again. "I'm your pack leader, you're my second, we're bonded; I have a right to know."

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Try me," Jim said.

Spike shook his head and then looked into Jim's eyes "I was in the coma for three days," Spike said. "During those three days I lived a whole other life. That's where I learned how to be a predator. I don't remember much. Just bits and pieces really. And nightmares, sometimes I have nightmares. I know I did things, bad things, and I became a Sentinel to make up for them."

"That was just a dream," Jim said.

"Then tell me how I managed to kill a professional hit man, bare handed, in less than 10 seconds?" Spike asked.

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Please feed the muse. Comments get her to come back to work on my new stories. RG5 - The Aftermath is started but the muse needs some encouragement. Thank you.

Chapter 6

Chapter by [Joan963z](#)

Simon was at the hospital again, waiting and watching over his pack's Guides for Jim and Spike's return. Blair wasn't a problem but Xander had tried to get to Spike and when he heard the gunshot it took both Simon and Blair to keep Xander from rushing out the door.

When the Sentinels returned, they were concerned when they saw the blood from the wounded Guide on their guide's clothing.

"Pet, are you okay?" Spike felt compelled to ask even though he could smell that the blood was from a female and if Xander had been wounded he would be in an exam room or surgery, not waiting in the lobby.

"I'm okay," Xander said. "It's not my blood."

Spike began to remove Xander's shirt to check for wounds.

"Please," Xander said. "Not here, we'll go someplace private."

Jim had already removed Blair's shirt, without a word, and was tracing his finger over Blair's chest checking for injuries.

"Jim, this is a crime scene," Blair said. "I'm okay; we can go somewhere else for this."

Simon decided to intervene. "I'm taking the four of you back to the loft," he said. "I don't want to see you in the bullpen until Monday morning."

As soon as they got to the loft, Spike and Jim made the rounds of the small apartment to make sure it was safe and then Jim and Blair showered and went up to the loft.

The smell of Guide blood on Xander so distressed Spike that he stripped Xander naked and examined his body while they waited their turn in the shower. When their turn came to use the shower Spike, once again, carefully checked Xander's body for wounds as he washed away all traces of the female Guide's blood. Afterward they retired to their private bedroom and climbed into bed naked. Spike stroked and purred to Xander as he slowly became more amorous. It was obvious to Spike that Xander was forcing himself to respond.

Spike looked into Xander's eyes. All thoughts of making love to his beautiful Guide were gone and only concern flooded his awareness. "What is it, Pet, what's worrying you?"

Xander refused to make eye contact. "I'm okay. Really."

"No you're not, Xan, you're try'n hard to be, but you're not." Spike said as he stroked Xander's hair. "Let's talk this out."

Xander shook his head, "No, this is something I should just put behind me and move on."

Spike lifted Xander's chin. "Sometimes," he said, continuing to hold Xander's chin in his palm, "the best way to put things behind you is to put them in front first. Tell me...Please. You know you can tell me anything."

"I'm worried that I'm not a good enough sex partner," Xander said, still refusing to look Spike in the eyes.

"So this is about Jim and me?"

"I guess." Xander said, a bit ashamed that he was once again letting his emotions interfere with his Guide duties.

Spike held Xander's chin in one hand and stroked his hair with the other. "Look at me, Love," he said in a tender but firm voice.

Xander managed to look into Spike's eyes.

"What happened had nothing to do with sex. You weren't there, and I know it may seem like Jim taking me for his second was done behind your back, but that wasn't the intent," Spike said with a soft voice. "I had gone a bit bonkers. I don't remember exactly what I said; I was disoriented when Jim pulled me out of it. Blair was exhausted. He had been pouring healing energy into the pack and needed to sleep. He couldn't have helped me. Tara was concentrating on healing you." Spike sighed and then continued. "I would have died before I took her away from you. Jim knew that; all the Sentinels knew that. So Jim offered to bond to help me get stable. I said no, I told him that you were my mate; he said that he was mated to Blair and he promised he wouldn't try to come between us. I was still resistant to the bonding but then...it became more than just a stabilizing bond. I knew that he would call me to be his second someday. I knew it from the time we kissed in the pack ceremony. Maybe it wasn't the best time with me a bit wonky but it was the only way he could get me to accept the bond."

"So he forced you," Xander said as he jerked upright and let his anger creep into his voice.

"No, Pet, he didn't. A Sentinel can't force a bond with another Sentinel; they both have to be willing. I wanted to be his second. He knew I'd accept when it was offered. Jim and I have a link that I've never felt with any other Sentinel. I don't know what it is but it's there and it's not going to go away; in spite of that he is not more important to me than you are."

"So you wanted him to top you?" Xander asked.

"Top?" Spike said. "There wasn't any top. We were equals."

"How did you manage to do that? You're his second."

"In the field we are pretty much equal. He has the final say because someone has to and he is pack leader. But we are equal partners. As far as the bonding goes it was done with mutual, oral, 69. Is that what this is all about, Pet; you thought I let him top me?"

"Partly," Xander said feeling a bit embarrassed about discussing sex.

"Well, Xan, I'm not totally opposed to being topped, but when that happens it will be with you."

"You'd let me top?" Xander asked.

"If it's what you need, yes"

"It's still difficult," Xander said. "Knowing that you've been with him and that you'll be with him again."

"Whoa, Xan, Where did that come from?" Spike said, confusion flooding his emotions. "The only way I would be with him again is if there is another crisis and no guide was available. I'm not interested in another sex partner. Sex was just the path to the bond."

"But the bond, aren't you going to keep the bond?"

"Love, it's not like bonding with a Guide. Sentinels have to renew their bond with their Guide to keep their stability. This is different. It's done and it's permanent; it doesn't have to be renewed."

"He washed your hair."

"We'll feel the need to touch from time to time," Spike said. "We'll continue to sleep in the same bed but that's all."

"So you're saying if there were a crisis and I wasn't available you would be with Blair before you would be with Jim?"

"Yes, Pet, Blair is a Healer Guide. It's his job to stabilize a Sentinel in distress."

"I have one more question," Xander said. "What if it's Jim that's in distress and Blair that's not available, what then?"

"You're a Healer Guide," Spike said as he stroked Xander's face. "I've accepted that. I know that it may be difficult for you, but if you could heal Jim I would be very proud of you. If it weren't something you could do I'd understand, knowing your history; but I would do what I could to help him. Look, Xan, if it's going to bother you this much I'll put in for a transfer as soon as this case is closed."

"But you're Jim's second; you'd do that for me?" Xander asked.

"I can't break the bond but I could put distance between us. I'd quit the force if I have to and go back to teaching. I'll do whatever it takes."

"Wouldn't that hurt you, Jim and the pack?"

"It would be difficult but not impossible," Spike said as he tilted his head and looked into his guide's eyes. "I'd do it if that's the only way for you to feel secure."

"No," Xander said. "It feels good that you offered but I don't want to run away any more. I like the people here. They're good people; they care about us, even though I do have issues. I want to make this work. I want to make this place home."

"Then that's what we'll do," Spike said as he pulled Xander into a kiss.

Xander returned the kiss.

Blair was resting with his head on Jim's chest when he felt the Sentinel's muscles tighten and Jim hold his breath. A moment later he exhaled in relief.

"Are you eavesdropping?" Blair asked.

"Can't help it; I can hear them," Jim said.

"You could dial back your hearing and give them some privacy," Blair suggested in an annoyed voice.

"They were talking about me claiming Spike as my second, that's pack leader business."

"Of course they're discussing it. I don't understand why that would make you hold your breath."

"Spike offered to transfer out of Cascade or quit the force."

"And?" Blair asked as he moved to sit up. "Is he going to leave Cascade?"

"No, Xander said no, he wants to make it work here."

"So he's accepted the bond between you and Spike," Blair said. "You can stop listening in now."

Jim sat up in the bed "Chief?" he asked. "What do you know about Sentinel-to-Sentinel bonding?"

"Just what I've read. Sentinels will bond for stability in the field if a Guide is not available. It helps for a time but eventually they'll need a Guide and I know that some pack leaders will bond with a Sentinel they choose as a second. You combined the two with Spike. The Sentinel-to-Sentinel bond is permanent, but it doesn't have the same drive to renew as a Sentinel-to-Guide bond."

"That's all you know?" Jim asked.

"Why do you ask?"

"Xander had some misconceptions."

"What misconception?"

"That I topped Spike; and that we would have to renew the bond."

"I know Spike was in distress, but I never thought you would let him top you. You're the pack leader."

"Neither of us topped, it was mutual fellatio," Jim said

"Why are you telling me this, Jim, Do you expect it to change how I feel about you having sex with Spike? I've accepted it but I'm not happy about it. You did what had to be done. I know that."

"It's enough that you've accepted it. We never meant to hurt you."

Blair had to ask the question that was nagging at him and would not let go. "Do you love him, Jim?"

"Spike?"

"Yes, Spike"

Jim sighed, "I don't feel the same way about him that I feel about you. So I would have to say no."

"Then what is it with you and him?" Blair asked. "Simon was your best friend for years; you never bonded with him. Why Spike?"

"Simon is my Captain. He's the high-ranking sentinel at work. We have a working pack bond, Simon is my boss, I can't take him for my second and I don't want to be his second. Spike is my equal, but I can trust him to be my second and not challenge me to be first alpha. I know if something happened to me Spike would take care of you."

"You don't trust Simon to take care of a guide in his pack?"

"Yes, I do, but.... I don't know how to explain it in words other than to say Spike and I have a link, I don't understand it but it's there, and it's deep. He's a strong sentinel. I know he can and will protect you. You'd stay in his bed. Simon wouldn't bring you into his home and never into his bed."

"So it's about me?"

"Chief," Jim said as he looked into his Guide's eyes. "Don't you know by now that for a bonded Sentinel everything is about his Guide?"

Ethan Rayne was livid with rage. Gunn had failed. 'Well at least he had the good sense to get himself killed in the process,' Rayne thought. 'It saves me the trouble.' He turned off the newscast and considered his options.

Killing the Sentinel now would be all the harder, he no longer had the element of surprise. Also the more attempts made the greater the chance that it could lead back to him.

Shutting down Washington Genetics was out of the question. WG was the lock and Xander was the key. Washington Genetics was going to make him one of the most powerful men in the world and it was his safety net. He could go to any country on the planet in exchange for sentinel gene splicing technology.

There was also Plan B, the option of kidnapping the whelp. He could take him out of the country and set up a lab. The Sentinels can't track an airplane. There were several possible countries in Western Europe, South America and the Middle East that would allow the kind of human experimentation he needed to do, with no questions asked. The promise of the rewards would justify them looking the other way. Ethan Rayne felt secure in his arrogance as he picked up the phone to make arrangements. He would put the whelp's hazard detection up for auction on the international black market. He had no idea the Sentinels had already linked him, in name if not in actual fact, to Booker and Gunn.

Xander yawned and poured himself a cup of coffee.

"Still tired, Pet?" Spike asked.

"I'm not sleeping well. The bed is cramped and I feel like I'm going to push you off the edge every time I move."

"It's the best we can do for now," Jim said. "But you're right, we need to look for a bigger place."

"Bigger place?" Blair asked, surprised at Jim's admission.

"Yeah, Chief," Jim said, "a house with a nesting room and at least 2 bedrooms for privacy. With the four of us pulling down a paycheck we should be able to find a place to suit our needs."

"Do they build houses with nesting rooms?" Xander asked.

"No," Spike said, "but there is a company that will convert a bedroom into a nesting room."

"Sounds good," Xander said with another yawn.

"I'll call the realtor right after breakfast," Jim said.

Spike grabbed the coffee out of Xander's hand. "No coffee for you, you need to get some sleep." Spike led Xander into their private bedroom.

"So," Blair said, "you think we also need a private bedroom?"

"I think it will make everyone more at ease," Jim said. "Spike and Xander have to go into their bedroom now to give us privacy and this place is small; it won't be long before we start

getting on each other's nerves."

"I agree," Blair said. "This three days off is going to be a trial for all of us."

"That's why we should keep busy and look into new housing."

"What kind of house did you have in mind?"

"I thought a four bedroom ranch would be nice."

"Four bedrooms, are you planning to invite H and Rafe to live with us?"

"No, Chief, but we had talked about adopting or asking Tara to be a surrogate mother."

"I thought that went out the window when you bonded with Spike. Besides, they're going to be living with us and we don't know how they feel about having children."

"Spike wants children."

"How do you know that, eavesdropping again?"

"I just know it, from the bond."

"The bond," Blair scoffed in a whisper.

Jim was very concerned about his Guide's emotions, "I thought you were okay with it," Jim said.

"I've accepted it. I just don't like to be constantly reminded of it," Blair said, trying to cut off his emotions, but Jim could hear the annoyance creep into Blair's voice.

"So you're willing to deal with it as long as you don't have to deal with it?" Jim asked.

"Look at it from my point of view," Blair said with a sigh. "What if I had bonded with Spike, how would you feel?"

"I've accepted the fact that you are a Healing Guide and there may come a time that you need to have a healing bond with a Sentinel. Do you want to bond with Spike?" Jim asked, "Would it make you feel better?"

"Listen to you," Blair said, hardly able to believe Jim asked that question. "Would you let me bond with Spike?"

"I'll do whatever it takes to keep this from festering out of control. If it takes a Healing Bond with Spike then so be it."

Blair's panic at the idea shifted into anger, "Jesus, Jim, why don't I bond with Xander too while I'm at it? Hey, do you think Spike will let you bond with Xander? Just think of the time we'll save in the morning all showering together. We can stand in a little circle and wash each other's hair."

"Is that what pissed you off, that I washed his hair?"

"Yeah, Jim, it pisses me off. You did what you had to do to stabilize him and make him your second. But you didn't have to wash his hair. That's what you do with ME. You wash MY hair, and the way you reach for him at night, you think I don't know that you sleep with your fingers intertwined with his?"

Jim walked over to Blair and fell to his knees. "I can't undo what's done, Chief. Just tell me what you need," he asked in a soft pain filled voice.

Blair knew what he needed. He ached to touch Spike, to know Spike the way Jim did. He needed to be part of Jim's bond with Spike. His own bond with Jim had been complete and whole, but since the bond with Spike there was a part that he couldn't touch. As Jim's Guide he felt a frantic need to go to the place, within his Sentinel, that was closed to him and he knew emphatically that Spike was the door. But want and need are not always the same and Blair did not want to bond with Spike. So he pushed his pain aside looked down into Jim's eyes and lied. "I don't know what I need. All I know is that I used to be your one and only and I'm not anymore."

"You're still my one, my first, you're my Guide; you give me life. Spike could never take your place. I'm sorry that washing his hair hurt you and I'm sorry that claiming him as my second is causing you pain, but I am not sorry that I have a bond with him."

"Well you're nothing else if not honest," Blair said with a pain filled laugh.

"We've always been honest with each other, Chief," Jim said still on his knees and looking up into Blair's eyes, "so I'll ask you again, tell me what you need, Guide?"

Blair looked away from Jim and was silent.

"You've never blocked me out before, why can't you tell me what you need?" Jim asked.

"I'm not the one that's blocked you out," Blair said.

Xander suddenly sat up in bed. His empathic need to go to Blair was overwhelming.

"Xan," Spike said, "lay down and get some rest. They need to work through this themselves."

"No, they can't," Xander said as he swung his feet over the side of the bed. "They need us." He pulled on his pants and went into the kitchen and knelt down beside Jim.

"Oh, bloody hell," Spike said as he put on his jeans and followed Xander into the kitchen.

"Blair," Xander said as he laid his hand on top of Blair's, "you have to tell him. He's your Sentinel."

One look at Xander and Blair knew, Xander understood everything. He could feel Xander sending him positive energy, giving him comfort, letting him know he understood his need for Spike and it was okay. "It's not what I want, Xan," Blair said, he didn't want to hurt his friend.

"I don't want it either, but it's what we need. We'll never find peace without it."

"What is it, Xan?" Spike asked as he knelt down beside his Guide.

"I didn't know, Spike," Xander said. "I swear I would have told you. I thought it was being stuffed in the bed between you and Blair that made me feel so restless. But it wasn't. I slept fine that way before you and Jim bonded."

"Are you saying that my bond with Jim is interfering with your sleep?" Spike asked as concern for his Guide mixed with confusion of how such a thing could happen.

"Not exactly," Xander said. "It's more like I used to have a clear signal to you, now there is static on the line sometimes. You're my Sentinel, I'm responsible for you and sometimes I don't have a clear sense of you; that makes me nervous. I couldn't put my finger on it until I felt what Blair was going through."

Jim turned Blair's face to him. "Is that what you're feeling?" he asked Blair.

"I feel like there is something new that is a part of you but it's walled off from me," Blair said. "Xander is right, I haven't been able to find peace since you asked to wash Spike back in the hospital yesterday."

"That was before you knew about the bond," Jim said.

"You may not have told me about it," Blair said, "but I sensed the difference in you."

"Then what do we do about it?" Jim asked wanting to get the situation with the Guides resolved.

Blair looked at Spike and then back at Jim. "I don't even know if it is possible."

"If you need it we'll make it possible," Jim said without a shadow of doubt in his voice.

Blair took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I need to share your bond with Spike."

The two Sentinels and their Guides were sitting in the living room discussing how best to deal with their situation.

"What do you mean by 'share the bond?'" Spike asked Blair.

"I'm not sure," Blair said. "All I know is since you bonded with Jim there is a part of him that is walled off from me. It feels like I'm separated from him and I find it difficult to tolerate."

"What about you, Pet?" Spike asked Xander. "Do you need to share my bond with Jim?"

"It scares the hell out of me to say this, but yes," Xander said. "No offense Jim, but I love Spike, the thought of being with anyone else...it's just..."

"Scares me too, Xanman," Jim said in his best 'soothe the Guide' voice. "We'll take it slow and Spike will be there too," Jim said.

"You don't mind being there?" Xander asked Spike.

"You couldn't keep me away, Pet," Spike said as he gave Xander's arm calming strokes. "We'll make it beautiful for all of us."

Xander looked at Blair and Jim cuddled together on the sofa, Jim was quietly stroking Blair's arm. He watched the Sentinel carefully; he obviously loved Blair and wanted what was best for his Guide. "When are we going to do this?" Xander asked.

"Tonight," Jim said. "I want this stress you are feeling ended as soon as possible, I think we should use one of the nesting rooms at the hospital."

"The nesting room is a good idea." Blair said. "But I think we should go after lunch. I need to get used to Spike touching me and I'm pretty sure it will be a lot easier on Xander if he gets used to Jim's touch. The hot tub and the shower will also help. We have more than one night so we won't have to force this, we can let it happen."

Xander shivered at the thought of allowing someone that was not Spike touch him and be intimate with him. Jim and Spike could smell his fear and then they smelled his resolve.

It was one p.m. when they arrived at the Sentinel and Guide Hospital. The nest was ready for them. Everyone was feeling a bit self-conscious, so Spike decided to take matters into his own hands. He encircled Xander in a hug and started whispering. "Everything is okay pet," he said in a soft, soothing voice. "I'm going to take off Blair's shirt, just his shirt for now. When you're ready just nod to Jim and he'll take off your shirt. Okay, Pet?"

Xander managed a breathy yes and then watched as Spike, his Sentinel, began to unbutton another Guide's shirt. Xander forced the thought of 'other' out of his mind. Blair was a member of his pack and his friend. He was a Guide in pain and needed to heal. Xander put aside his fear and awkwardness; he reached out and took Blair's hand.

Blair looked over at Xander, smiled and gave Xander's hand a little squeeze. He looked over at Jim and saw he was watching intently for any sign that his Guide was too stressed to continue. Spike unbuttoned the last button on Blair's shirt and looked up at the Guide.

Blair looked into Spike's impossibly blue and expressive eyes and saw the caring and the questions they held. 'Are you ready? Is it okay to touch you?' Blair nodded his consent and Spike opened Blair's shirt and placed his fingertips on Blair's torso. Blair took a deep breath at the first sensation of Spike's touch, he closed his eyes for a moment and then opened them; Spike was looking at him, head tilted, his mouth slightly open with a half-smile and Spike's eyes, so willing to take Blair's pain away, and still the question was there, 'should I go on?'

Blair lifted his free hand. "Spike," he whispered as he stroked the Sentinel's face.

Spike's hands began to move upward. They slid gently over the peaks and valleys of Blair's muscles leaving a trail of marvel in their wake. Blair could feel Spike giving of himself. It was healing energy that poured into him and it was a touch that penetrated into Blair's soul. His eyes opened wide, Sentinels weren't supposed to be healers, but Spike was different, a Sentinel, yes, but there was an other-worldliness about him. Blair understood, with that touch, that Spike was 'something more'. As Spike's hands reached his shoulders and began to slowly slide the shirt down his arms, Xander let go of Blair's hand and the shirt fell to the floor.

Spike placed his hands back on Blair's chest. This time the touch was firmer as his hands wandered over Blair's skin.

Blair reached out and unbuttoned Spike's shirt and Spike put his arms down by his side as Blair removed the shirt without touching him. He stood in front of Spike; unsure of himself, he looked up at Jim. This was another Sentinel not his own, to willingly touch him felt like a betrayal.

Jim understood Blair's reaction. He walked behind Blair and encircled him in a hug. "We'll do it together," he whispered into his Guide's ear. He put his hands on Blair's shoulders and slid them down Blair's arms until his palms rested on the back of Blair's hands and their fingers were between one another. Then he lifted Blair's hands and gently placed them on Spike's chest.

The touch was wonderful, Sentinel mixed with Guide; Spike's breathing slowed and deepened, and for the first time since they arrived Spike felt the familiar throbbing in his cock as it grew harder with each heartbeat.

Jim slid his hands back until it was only Blair's fingers caressing Spike's chest. Spike closed his eyes and lost himself in the touch; he let himself float free in the sensation of Blair's fingers ghosting over his skin. Suddenly a vivid picture filled his head. He was helping wounded young women out of a winery and then he heard Xander howl in pain. Spike opened his eyes wide in panic and screamed, "Xander!"

Xander wrapped Spike in a hug. "It's okay, I'm here, I'm here," He repeated as he peppered Spike's face with kisses.

"Oh gods, it was so vivid," Spike said.

"Lay down with me," Xander said as he continued to hug and stroke Spike. "And I thought I was the one that was going to be all quirky about being touched," he said as they reclined in the nest.

"Blair!" Spike said as he suddenly sat up. "Are you alright?"

Blair and Jim knelt down beside Spike. "I'm fine," Blair said, "but I'm worried about you."

"What happened?" Jim asked.

"Just one of my vivid past life visions," Spike said, still shaken from the experience. "I really need to be with Xan, right now." Spike laid back down, nuzzled Xander's neck and began to suckle. Xander closed his eyes and hugged his Sentinel.

Jim and Blair laid down beside their pack mates. Blair reached over to give Spike a comforting stroke and Jim began to purr.

After a few minutes of suckling his Guide, Spike began to calm and the panic he felt that Xander might be hurt dissipated.

Blair suggested they enjoy the whirlpool and all agreed.

Xander was still dressed, although Spike had undone all the buttons on his shirt. When they stood up Jim helped Xander off with his shirt. His touch was kind and gentle but it held none of the sensuality that Spike showed to Blair and Xander began to wonder if he would be able to bond with Jim.

When the foursome got out of the whirlpool, Jim got a towel and began to dry Xander. "You're very serious about this," Xander said, as he watched Jim's face.

Jim looked into Xander's eyes. "Is there any other way to be?" he asked.

"How about serious with a smidge of pleasure on the side?"

"You're a Guide, you need to be taken care of; it's a little early to be distracted with pleasure."

Xander sighed, picked up a towel and began drying Jim off. "I don't think you understand what I'm trying to say. Doesn't it please you to take care of a Guide?"

"It pleases me to have a job well done," Jim said.

"Okay, maybe I'm being a little blunt here," Xander said. "But all serious and no joy makes Xander a stressed out Guide. If you know what I mean."

"You expect me to be happy about this situation?" Jim asked.

Blair opened his mouth to say something but Spike pulled him into a hug. "Shhh," he whispered into Blair's ear, "they have to work this out themselves." Blair remained quiet.

"This isn't about the situation, this is about me?"

"You're not MY Guide."

Xander let the anger show in his eyes and his voice. "You are one POMPOUS ASS!"

Jim growled a warning.

Xander stepped up nose-to-nose with Jim and growled back. "YOU," he said, poking Jim in the chest with his finger, "invited my Sentinel into your pack, THAT makes me your Guide. YOU bonded with my Sentinel as your second, THAT makes me your Guide." Xander turned

away from Jim and hung his head. "I thought I could do this," he said, his voice soft and full of pain. "When you called me Xanman at the loft it felt good, for that moment I was sure I could do this. But now you've cut me off. I'm nothing to you, you don't even like me."

"That's not true," Jim said in an equally soft voice. "I do like you. That first day, at the Inn, I remember thinking how lucky Spike was to have found you."

Xander turned around and walked back to Jim. "Tell me that again," he said. "But touch me while you do it."

Jim looked over at Blair, his eyes were full of pain, he finally understood what Xander needed but Xander was right, he had put up a wall. A wall made of fear. Letting himself show feelings to another Guide, especially one that he admired as much as he admired Xander, was scary as hell. Blair gave his consent, "It's okay Jim,"

Jim put his hand on Xander's arm and looked into his eyes. "That first day at the Inn," he said, as he stroked Xander's arm, "I thought about how lucky Spike was to have found you. Since then, learning about your past, I've come to admire you and I'm proud that you're a member of my pack."

Xander put his hand on Jim's chest. "Thank you," he said, with a half-smile.

Jim felt the warmth and caring of Xander's soul through his touch. "Xanman," he whispered and then pulled him into a kiss.

Chapter 7

Blair watched his Sentinel kiss Xander and was undecided about how he felt. He had never seen Jim kiss another Guide, man or woman, not even Tara, who he knew that Jim admired enough to ask her to be a surrogate mother of their child. He could see that Jim's kiss did not have any of the demanding need that Jim had when he kissed him but it did have a kind of passion, not demanding, but a sharing of himself and a willingness to receive from another. Blair doubted that Jim's willingness to share himself would extend beyond their little quartet but it was still more than Jim was willing to do a month ago. He decided he felt good about the kiss.

Spike watched the kiss and smiled. He was secure in his love for Xander and Xander's love for him. Xander was his touchstone, his rock. No matter what the storm he could stand firm as long as he had his Guide. Jim was a visitor to Rock Xander, but only a visitor, just as he was only a visitor to Jim's rock, Blair.

Blair was the perfect Guide for Jim, warm, friendly and outgoing to Jim's 'pompous ass' demeanor. But Xander was his perfect Guide. Warm, sweet, caring and willing to heal another, even when he himself was in pain. But the biggest reason Xander was perfect for him was because Xander needed him as much as he needed Xander.

The kiss ended and Jim looked into Xander's eyes and smiled and then he turned to Blair. "Are you all right, Chief?" he asked.

"That was beautiful, man," Blair said. "I'm proud of you."

Jim took a step toward his Guide and opened his arms. "Proud?" he asked.

Blair stepped into Jim's arms. "Yes, proud that you were able to open up to him. I know that it's not easy for you."

"I was scared of what I would feel for him," Jim said, burying his face in Blair's hair. "I didn't want to hurt you."

"It's not the same as what you feel for me," Blair said. "I could tell by the way you kissed him."

"No, it's not the same, Xander is a wonderful person, but he is not my One True Guide and he is not my mate. You are."

"And may I say how glad I am about that," Xander said with a smile.

Jim looked over at the Guide. "Was there something wrong with the kiss?" he asked, deciding to tease Xander a bit.

"No, no, the kiss was great. In a different sort of way than the way kisses are great with Spike. I just mean that it was obvious to me that Blair is a better fit with you than I could

ever be."

"And you, my love," Spike interrupted, as he wrapped his arms around Xander, "are a better fit for me than Blair could ever be."

"And don't you ever forget it," Xander said with a quick kiss to the tip of Spike's nose.

"Not bloody likely." Spike said in a perfect English accent and then began to tickle Xander. Xander broke away and started running around the nesting room, giggling. Spike took off after him and when he caught him the couple fell on the soft floor kissing and pawing at each other. Spike kissed his way down Xander's torso and captured his Guide's cock in his mouth. Xander lay back to enjoy the sensations Spike was giving him and moaned in pleasure.

Jim and Blair smiled at Spike's and Xander's antics and lay down on the floor themselves. Jim began kissing and stroking Blair. "Do you know how precious you are to me?" he asked his Guide.

"Tell me," Blair whispered.

"I love you," Jim said, "you're my shelter in a storm, you keep me sane, you give me control, and I just want to kiss you and make love to you."

"Then what are you waiting for?" Blair asked.

Two hours later the four sated lovers decided they needed a shower to slough of the remains of their lovemaking. Once in the shower, they again switched partners. This time they were more relaxed and at ease with each other and after drying off they returned to the nesting room to lie together.

Jim's Sentinel behavior kicked in and he began exploring Xander's body, first with smell and then with touch. He ran his fingers over Xander, patterning him and committing this Guide to Sentinel memory. Xander attempted to respond with touch, but Jim stopped him, and when Xander looked into the dark blue eyes of the Sentinel he understood the bonding had begun so he lay back and allowed Jim to explore him. It was a slow process, the touching, seeing and smelling followed by the tasting. Jim started with Xander's face and then moved down to his neck. He suckled Xander's guide gland for a few minutes and then moved down his arms. Each finger was lovingly licked and sucked. Xander was rolled over and a warm wet tongue ran down his back. Each vertebra was counted and licked. The Sentinel took particular delight in nipping at the most sensitive areas of Xander's cheeks before moving down his thighs and on to his toes. It seemed to Xander that Jim wasn't just sucking and tasting his toes but worshipping them. He looked over at Spike who was watching with such love in his eyes that Xander's heart filled to nearly bursting.

Jim licked his way up between Xander's legs and then picked up his legs and put them over his shoulders. He leaned in and began licking Xander's crack. When he came to Xander's bud he encircled it with his tongue licking and sucking. Then he laid Xander onto his side and looked at Spike.

Spike understood the summons and moved in behind his Guide; he slicked his finger and began making Xander ready as Jim continued to give Xander oral pleasure. When Xander was properly stretched Spike entered him. Jim and Spike synchronized their rhythm and Xander became lost in a bonding thrall.

Blair moved in and began stroking Jim's weeping erection.

And then Xander felt it. Both Sentinels were there in his mind and soul, wanting to protect him and care for him. Xander was overwhelmed with the love he felt from them and he called out Spike's name as his seed filled Jim's mouth. Jim and Spike reached their climax together as Spike called to his Guide. "I'm here, Pet, I'm here."

Jim licked the last drops of cum from Xander's cock and pulled away to look into Xander's eyes, "Are you all right?" he asked.

"Oh gods," Xander said. "Oh gods that was...intense. I didn't know you were both going to...You were both there in the dance with me."

"It just seemed the right thing to do," Jim said with a smile that held just a bit of smugness.

"Yeah," Xander said. "Definitely the right thing."

"Did it work?" Blair asked. "Are you bonded?"

Jim moved back and placed Blair between him and Xander where he belonged. "Yeah, Chief, we're bonded, But you're still my One True Guide and my mate."

Blair snuggled in against Jim. "I didn't think otherwise," he said.

The three spent men closed their eyes to rest, but they quickly fell asleep. Blair tried to sleep with them but sleep was elusive. He resorted to meditation in an attempt to calm himself but sleep still would not come. He was gradually getting more stressed. He tried to put the lust he felt for Spike behind him. He knew it was a result of Jim's bond with Spike and his need to share that bond but the frantic need only seemed to become more demanding. And then they woke. All of them could feel a Guide in desperate need.

Xander moved out of the way so that Spike and Jim could tend to Blair.

"It's time, Chief," Jim said, and with a nudge encouraged Blair to roll over and face Spike.

Spike put his hand on Blair's shoulder and gently helped him turn over. "Tell me what you need, Blair?" Spike asked, as soon as Blair faced him.

"Do what Jim did for Xander," Blair said.

Spike could smell Blair's lust for him. He could feel it pounding through Blair's body. "You're not Xander, that's not what you need. It's okay, tell me what 'you' need."

"I need to bond with you."

Spike began kissing Blair as he spoke. "Do you know how beautiful you are?" He said with a kiss. "So warm," kiss, "caring," kiss, "so willing to give," kiss. "And so beautiful to look at." Spike captured Blair's mouth in a softly passionate kiss. He brushed his tongue against Blair's mouth and the Guide opened to the Sentinel. Their tongues met and danced as Spike slid his hands down Blair's back and cupped his ass, pulling the Guide to him. Their erections rubbed against each other and Blair broke the kiss with a soft moan. Spike nuzzled Blair's neck and began to suck and nibble at Blair's guide gland.

"Spike, please," Blair gasped. "I can't, I'm not supposed to want you like this."

"It's okay, Chief," Jim said as Spike continued suckling and rubbing his erection against Blair's. "You need to bond with him; you have to let go."

Something inside Blair snapped, as if Jim's words had broken a barrier; he could no longer hold back his need. He pulled Spike's head away from his neck and captured his mouth in a brutal kiss. He sucked in Spike's lower lip and worried it between his teeth as he rolled Spike onto his back with him on top. He wiggled down's Spike torso and sucked in one of Spike's nipples. He sucked hard and when the nipple was swollen and tender he bit into it.

Jim had never seen Blair be brutal. He reached out for his Guide but Xander stopped him. "Let him take what he needs," Xander said, empathically feeling Blair's need.

Spike allowed Blair to take control. He simply held the Guide and gently stroked him as he took what he needed. Spike hissed from the sting when Blair bit his nipple but then suddenly it wasn't Blair on top of him in the nesting room but a blond woman in an alley. "That's right, Luv," Spike said to the woman, but it was Blair that heard the words. "Let me have it. Give it to me; give it to me good, give it all to me."

And then as suddenly as it started it was over. Blair stopped, looked at Spike and gave a heartfelt moan as he pushed away and rolled off of Spike. Spike blinked; the alley and the woman disappeared and he was back in the nesting room.

"I hurt you," the Guide said in a pain filled voice.

"No, Love, no," Spike said, as he sat up and pulled Blair to him. "You just got some things out of your system that's all." Spike stroked and planted little kisses on Blair's face as he talked. "I'm all right."

"I was so angry at you," Blair said. "And even more angry at myself."

"Why would you be angry at yourself?" Jim asked. "You didn't do anything wrong."

"You have to tell him," Spike said, "or what happened just now will come back on you."

"What I feel isn't real," Blair said. "It's because of your bond with Jim."

"What is it that's not real?" Jim asked. "If it's not real why not tell me?"

Blair looked at his Sentinel. "When we talked about doing this," he said, "Xander and I said it wasn't what we wanted but it was what we needed. It would have been more accurate for me

to say I don't want to want it."

Jim pulled his Guide into a hug. "It's okay, Chief," he said. "I can't fault you for it, when I wanted it myself."

"Jim," Blair said, his anguish at what he was about to say was evident. "I need to bond with Spike. I don't understand why I have this drive. I've tried to push it away. It just keeps coming back harder. I don't know what it is but it just... won't... stop. I just feel like... Ohhh," Blair gave a pain filled moan, "I can't feel a part of you, Jim. It's like a big dark room and Spike is the key... My gut tells me I have to bond with him. It doesn't make sense. I've tried to push it away, Jim, honest I've tried, but it just comes back, even stronger."

Jim was overwhelmed with concern for his Guide. "That's why we're here, Chief, so you can bond with Spike," he said as he stroked Blair.

Blair hung his head. "I think I need more than what you did with Xander," he whispered.

Confusion mixed with concern for Blair flooded Jim's emotions. "What are you saying, Guide?" Jim asked. "You want the Sentinel to claim you?"

"I want to be his second," Blair said, "He's your second, I want to be his."

Anger suddenly welled up in Jim. "Two Sentinel's can't claim the same Guide!" Jim growled.

"Let him do it," Xander whispered.

"What?" Jim asked, as anger, worry and confusion swirled into a kaleidoscope of feelings "You want Spike to claim him?"

"I want Blair to live, that black place where Blair can't touch you, that's death," Xander said. "Something dangerous is coming, I feel it. We need this; the pack needs this. If Spike doesn't claim Blair he won't survive."

"Xan," Blair said, "I never wanted to hurt you."

"You're not hurting me, Blair," Xander said. "Really it's okay, it would hurt me more to lose you as a friend."

"Are you sure about this?" Jim asked as worry for his Guide won the battling emotions.

"On a scale of 1 to 10, I'm 8.9 sure." Xander said.

"Hazard detection," Blair said. Xander nodded.

"Do you know what the danger is?" Spike asked.

"No," Xander said, "I don't even know when, could be tomorrow, could be next year."

Jim got up and started pacing; Blair sat on the floor, cross-legged, watching him.

Jim stopped pacing and ran his fingers through his hair. He looked down at his Guide. "Can this drive you have to bond with Spike be your hazard detection kicking in?"

"I'm not as sensitive as Xander, but yeah, It could be," Blair said. "It would explain a lot."

"Then do it," Jim said, determined to do what was best for his Guide.

Spike got up and walked over to Jim. "Blair's your Guide now and he'll be your Guide when this is done. It's why we did this in the first place, to keep our Guides safe. This is just one more step."

Jim looked into Spike's eyes. "If it were anyone else I'd kill him," he said as a statement of fact.

"If it were anyone else," Spike said, "I'd help you."

Jim pulled Spike into a passionate kiss. "Brothers," he said when the kiss ended.

"Brothers," Spike repeated with a nod.

Xander walked over and put his hand on Spike's shoulder. "Make it beautiful," he said with a smile.

Spike pulled Xander into a hug, "You're mine," he whispered, "and always will be."

"And you're mine," Xander said, "And always will be."

"I need to do this now, Pet," Spike said.

"I know," Xander said then he turned to Jim. "You don't have to watch this. We can go to the cafeteria or another room and I'll hold you if you like."

"I'm not leaving this room," Jim said through clenched teeth, and then calmed himself. "Holding me would be good. I think I need a Guide's touch."

Xander reached out and began stroking the distraught Sentinel. "We'll sit over here," he said as he took Jim's hand and led him toward the nest wall.

Jim's eyes never left Spike and Blair as he slid himself into a sitting position against the wall. He watched as Spike began to suckle and Blair's pheromones filled the air. He gave a soft moan as the Sentinel call of 'Guide!' rose within him and his eyes turned to the dark blue black of a Sentinel in thrall. Jim began to stand but Xander pulled him back.

"Whoa, big guy, you need to stay with me," Xander said.

The Sentinel looked at Xander, and then Xander realized it wasn't Jim he was talking to but an ancient Sentinel's soul. "You're not mine," the Sentinel said and once more tried to go to Blair.

"Do we have to have this conversation again? I am yours!" Xander put his hand over Jim's heart and sent healing energy. "Feel it?"

The Sentinel's eyes opened wide as he looked at Xander and then at Blair and back to Xander. "I need my Guide," he said, as he lay Xander down on the nesting floor, nuzzled into Xander's neck and began to suckle.

Spike was lost in a bonding thrall with a Guide that was his but not his own. He touched and stroked Blair's body, patterning it and committing the feel to memory. The hill and valley of each muscle was traced and with Sentinel sensitive fingers and tongue. Each sound, breath, heartbeat, moan and word, were indelibly etched into the Sentinel's memory. Each taste and smell were cataloged and filed for instant recognition when future need arose.

And with each lick, smell, and touch Blair could feel the Sentinel's joy of bonding with a Guide. Blair was awash with the feelings that bombarded him and sunk into his mind.

Spike took Blair's cock into his mouth and made love to it. He reveled in the feel of Blair's jewels rolling over his tongue and the sound of pleasure that escaped as he returned to Blair's cock to lick more pre-cum from the sensitive tip.

Spike slick fingers slipped into the Guide reading him, and one word escaped from Blair's lips, "Please."

Spike crawled toward the Guide, his finger turned under, his eyes blue-black, his muscles taunt.

For a moment it was a golden cougar that crawled toward Blair and then it was Spike again, his pure sexual energy so beautiful that Blair gasped and his heart skipped a beat.

Spike kissed Blair as he stroked their cocks and coated them with lube, and then he got into position, put Blair's legs on his shoulder and claimed his second guide.

Spike slid into Blair, body and mind. Emotions seemed to collapsed inward and explode outward at the same time. And with each stroke Spike became more a part of Blair until he cried out, "Sentinel," and his seed burst from him.

And Spike answered the call, "Guide."

Blair was glowing and at peace for the first time since Jim had bonded with Spike. He cuddled in Spike's arms for a few minutes as Spike stroked and kissed him.

"You're beautiful when you glow," Spike said.

"You love me, I can feel it," Blair said.

"I can't bond with anyone I can't love," Spike whispered.

"That means you love Jim too," Blair said.

"I hope that doesn't hurt you. I'm not going to take him away from you. We're family is all."

"It doesn't hurt, not anymore. The interference is gone. But I know something else. This isn't the only time we're going to bond."

Spike ran his fingers through Blair's hair and gave a melancholy smile. "Xander will take away my need to bond with you, but it won't stop me from loving you." Spike kissed Blair on the forehead. "I have to go to Xander now, Love."

"And I need to get back to Jim. I'm surprised he's not over here already."

The pair got up and turned toward Jim and Xander. Xander laid with his back against the nest wall. Jim was holding him, protecting him with his body but both could see the unmistakable glow emanating from Xander.

"It's only fair," Blair whispered, when he felt the sudden cringe of emotions emanating from Spike. "You claimed me."

"You wanted me to claim you and your Sentinel gave me permission," Spike said.

He could hear Xander whisper, "Let me go to him."

And Jim's answer, "I'll take care of it, Xan."

Spike walked over to Jim. "Sauce for the goose, Jim?" he asked in a tone that was neither friendly nor confrontational. It was as if he were asking a stranger for the time.

"I needed him and he gave himself to me," Jim said, without turning to face Spike and then he kissed Xander and stood up to look into Spike's eyes. "If you have a problem with that, you have it with me, not with the Guide."

Xander got up and started to walk toward Spike. Jim put his arm out and stopped him.

"Spike said he'd be proud of me if you ever needed me and I could help," Xander said to Jim. "He'd never hurt me. He's my Sentinel, let me go to him."

Jim put his arm down and Xander walked into Spike's embrace.

"Are you okay, Pet?" Spike asked.

"Ummm," Xander said as he laid his head on Spike's shoulder.

Spike took Xander's head in both hands and looked into his eyes, "Xan," he asked in a soft but firm voice. "Are...you...okay?"

Xander understood what he was asking, "It wasn't ugly, Spike, he didn't force me and he didn't hurt me."

Spike pulled Xander back into his embrace. "I'm proud of you, Pet," Spike said with a smile and then he looked up at Jim. "He's not like other Guides," he said.

"No, he's not," Jim said. "He's astounding."

Ethan Rayne had everything arranged. Monday was a go. The lucky thing was that he would not have to leave the country, but the military refused to reveal their exact plans to Rayne. A black ops team from the U.S. Military would take care of everything. And he had full lab facilities available, all he had to do was supply the research scientist, himself included, and the notes on the progress he had made so far. In less than twenty-four hours Xander would be his, and this time there would be no interference and no escape.

Monday morning the detectives were working on the Guide abuse case when a call came in that there was a silent alarm at The National Savings Bank on Main Street. The Guides were told to wait at the station where they would be safe from a possible shootout while all the Sentinels and several uniformed officers sped to the bank.

The black ops team entered the building as soon as it emptied out. They carried Theta brainwave blockers to impede Xander's hazard detection and dart guns that would knock out anyone still in the building as well as erase memory for up to ten minutes. The operation went smoothly. All the Guides were together and Xander never sensed them coming. The Guides were tranquilized and Xander was carried out of the building and put into a van, the team got away without incident.

When the Sentinels got to the bank they found it was a false alarm. Spike sensed that something was wrong and cursed himself for not keeping his Guide close by. He and Jim started back to the station immediately. A traffic accident, arranged by the black ops team, had backed up traffic and the Sentinels had to go several blocks out of their way to get around it. When they got back to the station they found chaos. Jim and Spike didn't wait to see what happened, they ran to their Guides.

The smell of drugs was everywhere. Tara and Blair had just woken up and were attending to Rafe when the Sentinels arrived.

"Where's Xander," Spike asked with barely contained rage.

"I don't know," Tara said, "I was the first to wake up and he wasn't here."

"What happened?" Blair asked.

"They took Xander," Spike growled and hurried away.

Jim and Blair followed. "Where are you going?" Jim asked.

"To get him back," Spike said.

"We don't know where to look," Jim said.

They had reached the sidewalk and Spike stopped. Blair felt relieved that Jim had managed to keep Spike from going rogue. Spike shook out his arms, closed his eyes, took a deep breath and slowly let it out. "This way," Spike said, when he opened his eyes and then he started walking.

"I don't smell him," Jim said and grabbed Spike's arm.

When Spike turned to face Jim his eyes were ablaze with yellow fire.

"What the hell?" Blair said.

'Ell is what they asked for; 'ell is what they're gona' get," Spike said with an English accent. "I don't 'ave to smell 'im; if 'e's anywhere on this sodden planet I'll find 'im" Spike started walking again.

"Stay with him," Jim said to Blair, "I'll get the truck."

"Spike wait," Blair said when he caught up with Spike. "Jim will come with the truck and we'll look together."

Spike stopped and nodded his agreement.

"Um, your eyes are yellow. I've never seen a Sentinel's eyes turn yellow, darken to nearly black, but never yellow."

"The buggers took Xan," Spike said, as if that explained everything.

"And you're talking with an English accent."

Spike turned and looked into Blair's eyes, "You have a problem with that, Luv?"

"I'm just wondering if I'm still talking to Sentinel Detective William Spikeman?"

Jim drove up and the two men got in. "Take the highway, west, toward the abandoned army base," Spike said

Blair wasn't about to let his question go unanswered. "Are you William Spikeman?" he asked again.

"You won't believe me if I told you."

"We know you're different," Blair said. "We're both bonded to you. You can tell us anything."

"I'm Spike," he said, resigned to the fact that Blair wouldn't just let the matter drop. "Also known, in my last life, as William the Bloody. I choose to come here, to be a Sentinel. I told her I wanted to keep all my mystical abilities, to do that, she had to make the demon a part of me. But she couldn't wipe the memories from the demon so sometimes I remember."

"Demon?" Jim asked. "You're telling us you're part demon?"

"Told ya', ya' wouldn't believe me."

"I believe you," Blair said.

Spike scoffed. "You can't lie to me, Luv, I claimed you as my own."

"Well it is kind of hard to accept," Blair said, sorry he attempted to lie.

Spike took his eyes from the road and looked at Blair. "Then why are my eyes yellow, Luv?"

"He's telling us the truth, Chief," Jim said. "I saw him kill the hit man in the parking garage. He's faster and stronger than he should be and we both sense an other worldliness about him."

"Spike's no demon, Jim, he's a healer. A meta-physical being... that I can believe, but he's no demon."

Spike laughed at the irony of Blair's words. "Okay, Luv, meta-physical being it is then."

"It was you that came out at the nesting room while we were healing Xander, wasn't it?" Blair asked.

"That was me, Luv."

"But your eyes weren't yellow then."

"Didn't want to kill anyone then," Spike hissed.

Blair shivered from the venom he heard in Spike's voice. "And you do now?"

"My kind don't tolerate anyone taking what's 'rs; most won't admit it but we 'ave a strong sense of family. 'Urt what's mine and ya' won't live long enough t' regret it."

Spike looked over at Jim. "Get off at the next exit and turn north," he said in a tone that made it clear he expected to be obeyed.

Jim didn't know how Spike was tracking Xander but he had no doubt that when they got to wherever they were going Xander would be there.

When they got to the abandoned army base, Spike told Jim to park off road behind a stand of trees. Jim got binoculars, 2 flak jackets, an assault rifle and a couple of Bowie knives from the locked toolbox in the back of his truck. Spike went to get a closer look at the buildings as Jim assembled the rifle and put on his jacket.

"You're staying here, Chief," Jim said.

"Oh come on, Jim, you may need me," Blair moaned. "What if Xander is hurt, you may need a healer."

"Jim's right, Luv," Spike said when he returned from his recon. "These guys won't 'esitate to use you against us. We're safer with you 'ere. Give me your word you'll stay with the truck."

Blair sighed. "Okay, I'll stay with the truck."

"Good, then in you go."

Blair got into the truck and before he knew what was happening Spike handcuffed him to the steering wheel.

"Hey! What are you doing?" Blair asked as he tugged at the cuffs.

"I told you, Luv, you can't lie to me. Best you drive back to Cascade."

"No way I'm leaving the two of you here by yourselves."

Spike ignored Blair as he took the bulletproof vest from Jim and put it on.

"I only have the one rifle," Jim said. "Are you going to be okay with just your service weapon?"

"A rifle will get in my way." The two Sentinels strapped the knives onto their ankles. "Let's go."

Blair attempted an appeal to the head of the pack. "Jim?"

Jim stopped and looked at his Guide. He shook his head no. "Drive back to Cascade, Chief, and let Simon know where we are," and then they were gone.

Blair waited about two and a half minutes to make sure the Sentinels were far enough away before reaching for the handcuff key he kept hidden under the passenger's seat. He had hid it there shortly after bonding with Jim. Jim had threatened to cuff him to the truck if he didn't stay put 'this time', after Blair had disobeyed him and left the truck during a convenience store robbery. Jim never made good on the threat, so he never knew the key was there. It wasn't easy reaching it. He had to take off his belt, loop it, and pull the key within reach. The whole thing took a bit of time but in the end Blair was free. "Crazy Sentinels," he muttered under his breath. "Haven't you ever heard of cell phones?" Blair took out his cell and called Simon for backup. By then Jim and Spike had taken out two of the three guards patrolling the area.

Sentinel General Henry Gideon had been hand chosen to oversee the operation. The promise of highly reliable hazard detection becoming part of a Sentinel's hyper-senses was too valuable a possibility to pass up. He had lost his Guide during a black ops mission due to an undetected booby trap. Reliable hazard detection would have avoided his Guide's untimely death. But he didn't quite trust Ethan Rayne. Kidnapping a bonded Guide, even one unfit to bond, was a major dereliction of Sentinel protocol. He justified his part in the operation by telling himself that having no Guide was better than having an unfit Guide and the Sentinel, an ex high school English teacher, must be unfit himself to chase down an unfit Guide.

The General believed the operation needed to be overseen by someone who could keep Rayne in line and understood both Sentinels and Guides needs. He knew of the accusations of abuse that Rayne had been charged with and he was determined that no such abuse would take place under his watch. He would allow Rayne to extract DNA from the boy (the general could not bring himself to call Xander a Guide, or a man, due to his unfit status), but he would make sure the boy was well cared for.

Xander had been kept sedated for the ride to the base. Now he was strapped to an exam table and Rayne was giving him a shot to wake him up. The General had insisted on being present, Rayne was not happy about having 'the tight assed bastard', in the room but he figured if he didn't argue in the beginning the General would lose interest soon enough and he would have the whelp to himself.

Xander struggled to wake up; he opened his eyes, looked into the face of Ethan Rayne. And laughed. "You are soooo dead," he said.

Ethan slapped Xander hard across the face.

The General grabbed Ethan's arm. "You will not strike the boy again," he hissed.

"Yeah, that'll work," Xander said, with a roll of his eyes. "You're a Sentinel, I can feel it. What are you doing, helping him kidnap a bonded Guide?"

"You may be bonded to a Sentinel," the General said with disgust, "but you're no Guide. You're unfit and the school teacher that choose you is better off without you."

"I'm not unfit!" Xander growled. "Ethan Rayne, had me declared unfit so he could get away with using me, he's manipulating you. When Spike gets here you are going to have one mega pissed-off Sentinel to deal with."

"Your Sentinel won't be coming," the General said. "I know how to thwart a Sentinel's hyper-senses. You were in a specially designed compartment for transport here. A Sentinel can't track what he can't sense."

"He will come," Xander said.

A sergeant came into the room and handed the General a note telling him what they had intercepted on their cell phone scanner. General Gideon's face turned red with anger as he read what it had to say. "How did this happen?" he asked the Sergeant.

"General, Sir, I don't know, Sir," was the clipped reply.

"Stay with the boy, Sergeant, Rayne, you come with me."

Rayne didn't like taking orders, this was supposed to be his operation, now that Xander was in custody. "I'm not leaving until you tell me what's going on."

"They're here," Xander said. "That's what's going on. So put your head between your legs and kiss you ass goodbye, Rayne."

Rayne advanced on Xander and lifted his arm to slap him again. The General grabbed Rayne and twisted his arm behind his back. "I told you not to strike the boy, he may be unfit but he is still a Guide, I can smell it, and you're no Sentinel." The General shoved Rayne toward the door as he left orders for the sergeant. "Guard the boy, no one gets in here without me being present. That includes medical staff. Shoot to kill if you have too."

The General shoved Rayne out the door and down the corridor while he screamed for his Lieutenant. "Take six of your men and find the intruders. Bring them back here for questioning. I want to know how the hell they found us."

"We should get out of here," Rayne said. "Take Harris and the medical staff and get out of Dodge."

"I'm not running," the General growled. "We have fifteen men here and counting myself, eight of them are Sentinels. They are the best the Army has to offer. We'll capture the intruders."

"And then what?" Rayne asked. "One of those intruders is bonded to the brat and the other one is his pack leader. They'll want him back."

"If I can't reason with them, I'll keep them in custody. I need to know how they tracked us."

Spike stiffened. "Bloody hell!" he whispered. "Blair's loose and they know we're here, they're hunting us."

"Do they have Blair?" Jim growled, not caring how Spike knew Blair was loose.

"Not yet," Spike said. "He's this way. Let's go"

Blair found a flaw in his plan. He had made it across the open space and was at the group of buildings but he had no way of knowing which way Jim and Spike had gone. He decided to go right since that afforded him the most cover and he called out softly to Jim as he crept along; he knew only a Sentinel would be able to hear him. Then he felt the sting in his neck, when for the second time that day, he was hit with a dart. He managed to knock on the building twice as he lost consciousness, he only hoped his Sentinels would hear.

Chapter 8

Chapter by [Joan963z](#)

Blair awoke to find himself in a room with a sergeant, who Blair's empathic sense told him was a Guide, a high-ranking Sentinel, and Ethan Rayne.

"Hello Guide," the general said. "I am surprised that you caught up with us so soon."

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Sentinel," Blair said. "Ethan Rayne is despicable. He's tortured Xander and had at least three people associated with the guide school murdered. He had Director Booker declare Xander unfit. He's a psychotic murderer."

"Those are harsh accusations, Guide. Why should I believe you? From my point of view, Xander Harris is unfit. He's been bonded to his Sentinel for 8 days and almost half that time has been spent in the Guide Hospital, surely a Guide that needs that much healing in such a short time is far from fit for duty as a Guide."

"And why do you assume that Xander was the one being healed? Xander is a Healer Guide. Did it ever enter your mind he was the one doing the healing? I demand that you put Ethan Rayne under arrest for Guide abuse."

"This is ridiculous," Rayne said. "He is obviously lying to save himself, it won't work this time, Sandburg. No one is going to listen to your lies."

Blair spoke using his Guide command voice, "I know what Ethan Rayne did to Xander. I saw some of it, and I'm the one that reported him. I heard Xander try to report Rayne's abuse. Both teachers Xander talked to are dead. Rayne will kill you too if he gets a chance. He can't be trusted. Arrest him and call this off, General, before more of your men are killed."

The General dialed up his sense of smell and sniffed the air. The Guide didn't smell like he was lying and he could always sense when a Guide was telling a lie. It had a subtle scent like milk, not gone sour, but no longer fresh either. One thing was for sure, he didn't trust Rayne, the man set off his 'red alert' sirens. He decided he had better check on the Sentinel's that were patrolling his perimeter. He sent the Sergeant out to get a report and then turned back to Blair. The General dialed up all his senses and began to compare what he had read about the Guide in his mission report to what he could sense coming from him. Blair was bonded to the pack leader in the Cascade Police Department. He was extremely intelligent and well trusted by his superiors. The General evaluated his Sentinel input and decided that Blair was a highly superior Guide.

He had kept his senses dialed low when he was in the room with the Harris boy. He simply didn't want the sour taste that evaluating an unfit Guide would leave behind. The General decided he would have to take a closer look at Xander Harris. If what Guide Blair was saying were true, and the General believed it was, Ethan Rayne would have to be removed from this operation. There were others that could extract the genetic component of hazard detection from the Harris boy.

But right now there was one other question that needed to be answered. "How did you find us so quickly?" the General asked.

"We tracked you," Blair said.

"How? Using what sense?"

"Sorry I'm not answering anymore questions until Rayne is in custody and I can talk to Xander."

The Sergeant came back into the room and whispered to the General. "There are five Sentinels unaccounted for General.

The General looked at Blair, "I'll bring Xander to this room. If what you say is true I'll arrest Rayne and call off the mission."

"It's true," Blair said.

"General, we have a once in a lifetime opportunity here," Rayne said.

"Shut-up Rayne," the General growled and then he turned to the Sergeant. "Hold them here. If Rayne tries to touch the Guide or leave, shoot him."

The General left the room and ordered his remaining men, mostly Guides, to use delaying tactics on the two approaching Sentinels. "These men are Sentinel's," he said. "They will not willingly hurt a Guide. I need as much time as you can give me to interrogate the detainee. Do whatever you have to, just get me the time I need."

The General had been unable to dial his senses back down after evaluating Blair. He had been using the Guides in his squad to keep him stable but that was a temporary measure and the need for a Guide of his own had been steadily increasing. The stress of this operation had catapulted that need into a nagging demand. When the General got to Xander's room he had one question to ask. "Is it true that Ethan Rayne tortured you while you were in Guide School?" he asked.

"Why should I answer you," Xander said. "You won't believe me."

The General leaned down and sniffed Xander's neck. He ran all the subtle smells through his mind, evaluating each. He prided himself on his ability to evaluate a Guide. He judged his Sentinels on the Guides they chose. He knew now that Blair was telling the truth. Xander Harris was not unfit. He was, in fact, a highly superior Guide.

The General stood up and looked at the sergeant that had been guarding Xander. "You can go to your Sentinel now." The sergeant nodded and left. The General turned back to Xander bent down and licked his Guide spot.

The smell of fear flooded the small room. "It's all right Guide," the General said. "I'm not going to hurt you."

Xander looked into the General's eyes and saw the dark blue of a Sentinel in a bonding thrall. "Henry," Xander said in his best commanding voice. "I am a claimed and bonded Guide.

Unless you want to find yourself on the losing side of a fight to the death you will stop this behavior, now."

The General drew his dart gun and aimed it at Xander. "You deserve better than an ex-school teacher," he said, and then he shot 'his' Guide.

Spike and Jim were almost to the building where Blair and Xander were being held when they saw a group of men exit the building and take up defensive positions. They could smell that almost all of them were Guides. A firefight broke out as the only Sentinel in the group saw Spike and Jim's attempt to out flank them.

The General un-strapped the unconscious Xander from the gurney and carried him down the hall to an exit away from the firefight. He took Xander outside and across an open area to a chopper where he strapped him into a rear seat. He shot Xander again to make sure he stayed sedated during the flight, then he took the pilot's chair. He knew that his getaway depended on his men delaying the Sentinels long enough for the choppers engines to get up to speed for takeoff. He went through the pre-flight checklist turning on each gauge but saving the engines for last. When everything was checked out he flipped a switch and the chopper's engines whirled to life.

Spike and Jim both heard the engines turn on. Spike knew that Xander was on the chopper. He couldn't wait any longer. "Cover me," he ordered Jim, and then he ran in the direction of the sound. He came within sight of the chopper just as it was lifting off from the ground. Spike launched himself at the rising copter. He missed by a fraction of an inch. When he hit the ground again he gave a blood-curdling roar. Every Guide and Sentinel that heard it shivered as one word echoed through the deserted Army Base. "MINE!"

It wasn't in a demons nature to feel sorry for himself, a demon much preferred to get even. Spike turned toward the building, he could sense that Blair was in there. If he couldn't save one Guide he would save the other.

When Spike entered the building he dialed up his sense of hearing. There were only 3 heartbeats in the building and one of them was Blair's. He crept down the corridor, past the room he could smell Xander had been held in, to the room Blair was in and peeked through the small window in the door. He could see one guard with his rifle trained on Ethan Rayne. Spike charged through the door, knocked out the guard and had Rayne, out of his chair, by the throat before anyone in the room realized what had happened.

"Where'd they take 'im?" Spike growled.

"I don't know," Ethan said. "If I had known they were going to leave, I would have gone with them."

"Spike," Blair said. "Don't kill him. He has answers we need."

"I think he lost all 'is answers when that chopper took off, Luv." Spike threw Ethan back in his chair and started to search the guard. Ethan tried to make a run for the door but Spike

caught him and slammed him down on the floor. "Ain't got time for you right now," he said, as he aimed the dart gun, he had retrieved from the guard, at Ethan and fired. "You stay here, Luv, tend to the Guide." he said to Blair. "I'm gonna' get Jim."

Spike ran toward the firefight. When he got to the door he stepped out, took cover and shouted. "Cease fire, lay down your weapons, you're surrounded."

General Gideon's troops knew that the battle was over. They all heard the chopper take off. They laid down their weapons and came out with their hands raised. Jim kept his rifle aimed at the troops and herded them into the building and then into one of the empty offices. Spike got the sergeant that had been guarding Ethan and put him in with the other soldiers and then he used the dart gun to put them all to sleep.

Rayne was their next order of business. He was still out cold and Spike didn't think enough of him to carry him so he dragged him down the corridor to the room Xander had been held in, and none too gently, picked him up, dropped him on the gurney and strapped him down. Spike and Jim sniffed the air and both gave a low growl.

"What is it?" Blair asked as the hair on the back of his neck stood up.

"Who ever was in here with Xander," Jim said, "was aroused and most likely wanted to bond with Xan."

"The General," Blair whispered. "I think he lost his Guide recently I could sense grief coming from him and I know for sure he didn't trust Rayne."

Spike had found the drugs required to wake up Ethan and administered the shot to his neck and pulled out the bowie knife he had strapped to his ankle.

Ethan gave a small moan and then struggle against his restraints as he returned to consciousness. When he opened his eyes they were met with the fire yellow eyes of a very angry demon Sentinel.

Spike looked at Jim, "Best get Blair ou'ta 'ere. Doubt 'e's got the stomach for what I'm gonna do."

"Aren't you going to question him?" Blair asked.

"I'm 'open 'e won't answer the questions, Luv."

"We'll be down the hall," Jim said. "I'm going to give Simon a call, see how long before he gets here."

When Jim and Blair left the room Spike turned to Rayne and showed him the knife. "It's been a lifetime since I've done this. Used railroad spikes back then, that's how I got my name. Ain't got no railroad spikes so I guess a bowie knife will have to do."

Rayne started to scream hoping that Jim or Blair would come back and stop the crazy yellow-eyed Sentinel. "Please, stop don't hurt me!"

Spike clamped his hand over Rayne's mouth and held the Bowie knife to his throat. "You shut the fuck up, you worthless piece of shit, or I'll cut off one of your balls and use it for a gag." Spike removed his hand and Rayne lay quiet. "Now tell me, who's funding this operation?"

"The U S government," Rayne said.

"Who's the man in charge?" Spike asked as he began to slice the buttons from Ethan's shirt.

"General Henry Gideon."

"What exactly did you plan on doing to Xander?" Spike asked as he opened Rayne's shirt and drew the point of the knife down Rayne's torso leaving a shallow cut from collarbone to belt.

Rayne clenched his jaw and closed his eyes to keep from screaming. "W-we were j-just going to extract DNA."

"Liar!" Spike growled and he slid the knife between skin and pants and cut through Ethan's belt.

"No, no, I swear," Ethan said, as beads of perspiration ran down his face.

Spike once more slid the knife down Ethan's pants. The captive whimpered as he felt the cold steel slide down his thigh and the razor sharp edge run along his cock. "Please, uggg it hurts."

Spike grabbed Ethan's pants and ripped them off, "How many times did Xan tell you it hurts? How many times did he beg you to stop?"

"It wasn't like that, I was only trying to make him a better Guide," Rayne said in desperation.

"You had him declared unfit!" Spike roared, and then he leaned over and whispered in his ear. "I don't have a lot of time to play, got to go get my boy, so if you know anything that will save your life, tell me now."

"I've got money, lots of money," Rayne said in a breathless rush, "I'll pay you, whatever you want."

Spike tilted his head and looked at Rayne. "How much do you think your life is worth?"

"I'll pay you a million dollars. Just let me go."

Spike laughed. "Peanuts, you're trying to buy your life with peanuts."

"Five million," Rayne said.

Spike held the knife to Rayne's throat. "You think I don't know how much you're worth?"

Rayne swallowed hard. "I have 25 million in a bank on the Cayman Islands. I'll give it all to you just let me go."

"You know what your problem is Rayne?" Spike asked. "You really believe I'd betray my Guide, my Luv. I won't, not for money, not for anything. It's a pity I don't have more time to

teach you that." Spike lifted the knife and plunged it into Ethan Rayne's heart.

"Rayne's dead," Spike said when he returned to Jim and Blair.

"Simon's on his way with a Sentinel S.W.A.T. team and a Sentinel Prime. He should be here any minute," Jim said. He wasn't surprised that Rayne didn't survive Spikes interrogation. Any sentinel would do the same thing under the circumstances.

Spike tilted his head; "I think I hear the sirens now."

"What will they do about Rayne?" Blair asked.

"Nothing, Luv," Spike said. "You know the law. A Sentinel has the right to use deadly force on anyone who tries to break a Guide bond, kidnaps a Guide, or intentionally injures a Guide. We'll have a ceremony. A Sentinel Prime will declare Rayne guilty and that will be the end of it."

"Yes, but Rayne was strapped down on a gurney."

"It doesn't matter, Chief," Jim said. "I doubt if the black ops team knew what they were doing. But Rayne knew and we have the evidence to prove it. His kind of behavior has to be discouraged."

The sirens had gotten closer and Jim grabbed a flashlight and went out to signal the S.W.A.T. team to the correct building.

Jim met the S.W.A.T. team along with the rest of his pack members outside the building. The head of the team was a Sentinel Prime that Jim had worked with when he was in special ops. They went into the building and Jim introduced him to Spike. "Sentinel Prime Peter Wall this is my second Sentinel Detective William Spikeman."

"I thought you were going to join my team when you left Lake View," Peter said as he shook hands with Spike. "And what's with the yellow eyes?"

"Things didn't work out, Pete. As for my eyes, they'll stay yellow until I get my Guide back."

"Well," Peter said with a smile. "If I had to loose you to someone there's some consolation that it was to Jim. Not much but some."

Peter sighed as he got down to business. "Simon filled me in on this Rayne guy. Is he still alive?"

"No," was Spike's only answer.

"Where's the body," Pete said.

Spike, Pete, Jim and Blair started down the hall when Spike turned to talk to Blair. "No, Luv, not you." Spike said as he ran his fingers over Blair's cheek and through his hair.

Peter watched the exchange and wondered why Jim allowed it. Spike should have told Jim to keep Blair away. And the touch was too intimate, even for pack mates, along with the fact that Blair stepped back without even a glance at Jim, Peter knew there was a dynamic that he didn't understand and he didn't like being in a situation he didn't understand.

The three Sentinels walked into the room where Rayne's body lay. Peter walked over to the naked body and looked at it. "I'm surprised he's not more cut up."

"Considered it," Spike said.

"Okay, what's going on?" Peter asked, determined to get an answer.

"You know what's going on," Jim said. "Rayne had Xander kidnapped and Spike killed him for it."

"Yeah, that part I know."

"That's all you need to know," Spike said.

"You're Spikeman, every Sentinel sense I have tells me you are. But you have yellow eyes and an English accent. And you just touched Jim's Guide in a way that would get my arm broken. Not to mention you ordered him to stay out of here. Blair didn't so much as glance at Jim and Jim... Well good buddy, what the fuck is going on?"

"We're cross bonded," Jim said.

"What? Are you saying you've both claimed Blair? Why would you do that?" Peter asked.

"It was necessary," Jim said.

"All I can say, good buddy, is you must really love the guy, to let him claim Blair."

"You got it backwards," Jim said.

"Backwards?"

"Blair needed Spike to claim him, I gave my permission."

"Jesus, Jim, your Guide tells you he wants to be claimed by another Sentinel and you not only don't kill him...you take him for your second? Have I just dropped into Bizarro World?"

"Spike was already my second. And what I do in my pack is pack business."

Peter was astonished. He knew Jim well. He was not the kind of sentinel that played fast and loose with his guide. "Okay, Jim," Peter said, raising his hands in surrender. He knew that Jim had cut him all the slack he was going to, and more than he would have given any other sentinel. It was only the fact that they had claimed each other as sentinel brothers that he was

allowed the leeway he got. "Let's just get the ritual over with," Peter turned to look at the body. "I Sentinel Prime Peter Wall find Ethan Rayne guilty of conspiracy in the kidnapping of Guide Alexander Harris."

Spike pulled the knife out of Ethan Rayne's heart. "I, Sentinel Detective William Spikeman and Bond Mate to Guide Alexander Harris, exercise my right under sentinel law." Spike lifted Ethan Rayne's package and cut off one of his testicles and dropped it onto the floor. He crushed the bloody ball under foot and then he handed the knife to Jim.

"I, Sentinel Detective James Ellison, pack leader and Second Bond to Guide Alexander Harris, exercise my right under Sentinel Law." Jim cut off what remained of Rayne's genitalia and dropped it on the floor. He crushed the testicle then he placed the knife on Rayne's stomach and the three Sentinels left the room.

Well that was an interesting bit of pack business, not only had Spike claimed Blair, but Jim had claimed Xander. Peter decided he wasn't going to ask any more questions about pack business. Ellison had warned him to stay out of it. "And all this happened in eight days," he whispered. "Must have been a week from hell."

"It's not over yet," Spike whispered back.

"Didn't mean to imply it was," Peter said.

When the three Sentinels returned to the group Peter called everyone together for the remainder of the ceremony, including the Black ops team who had recently recovered from being drugged. "I am Sentinel Prime Peter Wall, Ethan Rayne was found guilty of conspiracy to kidnap the bonded Guide Xander Harris. Sentinel Detective William Spikeman, Bond Mate to Guide Xander Harris, has chosen to exercise his legal rights under Sentinel Law and is found not guilty of any possible wrongdoing in the death or mutilation of Ethan Rayne or the death of any of Guide Harris' kidnappers. In addition Sentinel Detective James Ellison, Second Bond and Pack Leader to Guide Xander Harris, has chosen to exercise his legal rights under Sentinel Law and is found not guilty of any possible wrongdoing in the death or mutilation of Ethan Rayne or the death of any of Guide Harris' kidnappers. Are there any Sentinels or Guides present that are opposed to this finding?"

The room was silent.

"All those in favor of the finding please signify."

"I," the group shouted.

"I find this matter now closed." Peter turned to Jim and Spike. "You may wash the blood from your hands Sentinels."

Blair went to his Sentinels as they washed their hands. "Mutilation, Jim?"

Jim didn't look at Blair as he spoke, the two sentinels simply continued to scrub the blood from each other's hands. "He showed total disregard and lack of respect for Sentinels and

Guides in his life," Jim said. "We showed total disregard and lack of respect for him in his death. Don't ask me anymore, Chief, he deserved what he got, It's the Sentinel way."

Spike looked at Jim as they scrubbed off the last of the blood, "The choppers 'eading south west. Feels like Xander's unconscious."

Jim nodded. "We'll get him back. The chopper's maximum range is 250 miles."

General Gideon landed at an Army Base outside of Portland Oregon. He couldn't wake Xander up when they landed for refueling and the General was concerned that he had gotten an overdose of drugs. He called for a car and driver to take him to the base hospital.

Sentinel Dr. Rupert Giles, a specialist in Guide care, met the General at the emergency door with a gurney and immediately took the pair into an exam room.

"He needs a stimulant," the General said. "He's received an overdose of tranquilizer."

Dr. Giles ignored the General and continued his exam. When he was finished he glared at the General. "His breathing is shallow, his pulse rate slow, his blood pressure is low and his pupils are fixed and dilated. Are you responsible for this man being in this condition?"

"It was an accidental overdose, Doctor, now please administer a stimulant and I will be on my way."

"No, his condition is far too delicate for me to chance a stimulant."

"Administer the stimulant, Doctor. that's an order."

"I don't take orders on medical matters," Dr Giles said. "I am going to admit him, General, when he is stable I will have him transferred to a civilian guide hospital. There is an excellent one in Cascade. I need his name and guide number... please."

"You don't understand doctor, I am on a classified mission. We can not stay here."

"Then leave the Guide here, General and continue on your mission without him. He is not fit to travel."

"I can't do that doctor. I plan to Bond with this Guide as soon as possible."

"This Guide is already bonded," Dr Giles said. "His Guide gland is marked."

"This Guide is mine!" the General growled.

"He is medically unfit to attempt a bond, General. He is in critical condition. Any attempt to break his current bond in favor of another, before he is fully recovered, will risk brain damage."

"Brain damage?"

"Yes," Dr. Giles said. "His pupils are fixed and dilated. I believe the tranquilizer used has a memory eraser in it. Any attempt at bonding is likely to cause a synaptic cascade resulting in stroke, or worse, a brain embolism."

"I was told the drugs were perfectly safe," the General growled.

"Yes, they are, in the correct dosage. But as you yourself said, this Guide has been overdosed. He is in need of physical touch with a Healing Guide that has healed him in the past and his bonded Sentinel should also be present."

"That Sentinel is unfit. We'll stay until the Guide is stable," the General said, "but I need complete secrecy."

Something was amiss. There were proper channels to go through for a guide with an unfit sentinel. Drugging the guide was not one of them. Add to that that the General wasn't reacting the way a Sentinel should when faced with a Guide in critical condition. Dr. Giles decided it was best to get the Guide to a room where he could do a more thorough exam. "I will have you assigned to a private room with my Bond Mate, Guide Nurse Calendar."

Sentinel Dr. Rupert Giles felt very uneasy about having an un-named bonded Guide in his hospital. He knew the possible consequences of helping a Sentinel to steal another Sentinel's Guide and had no intention of being killed for complicity in such a heinous act. He locked his office door, turned on his sound deadening machine, and put in a call, over a secure line, to the Sentinel Prime.

"Sentinel Prime Peter Wall's office, how may I help you?"

"This is Army Sentinel Dr. Giles, I need to speak with Sentinel Prime Wall on a very urgent matter."

"I'm sorry, the Sentinel Prime is away at the moment. May I take a message and have him call when he returns."

"No, it is imperative that I talk to the Sentinel Prime. When do you expect him to return?"

"I'm sorry, I'm not allowed to give out that information. If this is an emergency I can connect you to another Sentinel."

"No this is Sentinel Prime business. Can you forward a message to him?"

"If it is an emergency, yes."

"I have an unidentified bonded Guide in my hospital. He has received an overdose of drugs. I fear he has been kidnapped."

"Where is your hospital located Dr. Giles?"

"I'm sorry I can not give you that information. I'll call back in five minutes. I'll talk to the Sentinel Prime only." Dr. Giles hung up and waited for the five minutes to pass.

Four minutes later Dr. Giles' phone rang. "Dr. Giles' office."

"This is Sentinel Prime Peter Wall. Am I speaking with Dr. Rupert Giles?"

"Yes, this is he. You found me very quickly."

"You gave your name Doctor. I have full access to Army records. You say you have an unidentified Guide. Would he by any chance be accompanied by a General Henry Gideon?"

"Yes, he is."

"The General is not to be allowed to bond with Guide Harris. The Guide has a history of abuse and a forced bond could cause immeasurable emotional damage."

"I have already told the General that I can not allow a bond. Guide Harris is in critical condition. The General claims that he is on a classified mission, that an overdose of drugs was accidental and that the Sentinel that is currently bonded to Guide Harris is unfit. I have no authority to disregard those statements. All I can do is treat my patient. This matter is in your hands Sentinel Prime."

"I understand doctor. I am assuming that since Guide Harris was unidentified to you he is unconscious. Is that a correct assumption?"

"That is correct."

"Is Guide Harris's life in danger?"

"The prognosis is not good. My guess would be less than a 50% chance of recovery. "

"What are his injuries, doctor?"

"The guide has been overdosed with a psychotropic tranquilizer. The tranquilizer has a memory eraser in it. That is the true overdose and it has affected his brain. The Guide is in a coma. His best chance would be to find a Healing Guide that has had contact with him before the overdose. A Healer the Guide already has a healing bond with will not have to lay down new pathways. I fear a brain cascade, resulting in stroke or an embolism, resulting in death, if a healing with an unknown healer is attempted. His bonded Sentinel should be here so we can save him if his guide doesn't recover."

"I will have his Sentinel and a Healing Guide there as soon as the Army gives its permission. Thank you doctor." Sentinel Wall hung up the phone and prepared himself to face his friends with the news.

"The good news is we know where Xander is. He's on an Army base just outside of Portland Oregon. The General is with him."

"The bad news?"

"The General tranquilized Xander with a drug that causes memory loss. We use it all the time in covert ops. But Guides are sensitive to the drug. Xander received an overdose."

Spike began to pace, "I need to get to him." Blair went to Spike and held him in his arms.

"How bad is it?" Jim asked.

Peter didn't want to tell his friends the whole truth so he put the best spin he could on the news. "Bad enough to get the Army to let us on the base. They have to call off this mission now."

Spike growled and moved out of Blair's arms. "I need to get to 'im now."

"You can't just charge onto an Army base," Pete said. "You'll be shot. By now the General has made sure the base is sealed off. We have to go through channels, there's no other choice. My Guide has question the opp's team. None of them knew this was an illegal opp. They all said it was, 'need to know'. The Army won't want this to get out. That gives us the upper hand."

Blair pulled Spike back into his arms. "Spike, we'll get to him. Let Peter do his job. He's Sentinel Prime." Blair stroked Spike's hair and tilted his head offering Spike his guide gland. Spike began to suckle.

Peter watched the exchange between Spike and Blair and then looked at Jim. "Jim, are you okay?" he asked as Blair's pheromones filled the room.

"No, Pete, I'm not okay, nothing about this is okay. My Guide is missing and hurt."

"I meant..." Peter glanced up at Spike and Blair.

Jim got up and wrapped his arms around his pack mates and then he looked over at Pete. "Just get the Army to call off the mission, Pete. Because if you don't they're not going to like the body count. I've seen what Spike can do and I know what I'm willing to do... We'll kill them all."

A chill went down Peter's spine. He knew that they were capable of a very large body count. There were six well-trained and armored black ops sentinels that lay dead in the makeshift morgue and all Jim and Spike had was one rifle, two handguns, and two Bowie knives. It was the sheer number of troops on the base that would stop them, if they could be stopped, but they would make the Army pay for their arrogance before they were brought down.

He watched Jim with Spike and Blair. He had worked with Spike in Lake View, tracking a rogue Sentinel. The Sentinel detective was as good as they come. He invited Spike to join his team as soon as he got a Guide, but he had always sensed that there was a part of Spike he never let anyone see. Peter knew he had seen it today, the yellow eyes, to look into those eyes made a man glad you could call him friend instead of enemy.

And then he thought about Jim saying 'my Guide is missing' not his pack mate's Guide but his Guide. He owed Jim. The Sentinel had saved his life and pulled him through with a sentinel

to sentinel bond when his first Guide was killed while on a mission. Pete came to a decision. "We can't let the Army get away with this, Jim, if they don't call off the mission I'll stand with you, Good Buddy... I swear, Sentinel Brother-to-Sentinel Brother, if we have to, we'll kill them all."

"You know it won't be a fair fight," Jim said with his face buried in Blair's hair and stroking Spike's back.

Pete smiled at his friend. "I know, against the three of us, they'll be hopelessly outnumbered."

Pete left the room and went to make the calls.

It was just over an hour later when Peter finished negotiations with the Army. He found his friends in an office, cuddled together in one of the portable, inflatable nests that Sentinel troops take with them on missions. He could see right away that Blair was glowing and he could scent that both Sentinels had taken comfort from their Guide. He spoke softly to Jim, as he was head of his pack, and asked permission to enter the nest.

"Do we have authorization to go onto the Army Base?" Spike asked, as Peter settled himself in the nest.

"If you agree to the conditions," Peter said.

"What conditions?" Spike growled.

"General Henry Gideon is a Medal of Honor winner. He lost his Guide three months ago while on a mission. The Army doesn't want to lose him. They recognize his need for healing, a new Guide and psychiatric counseling, but feel that he was vulnerable due to his grief and deliberately mislead. He was not acting out of any selfish drive to steal another Sentinel's Guide. We have permission to go onto the base only if you and Jim agree not to exercise your rights under Sentinel Law, as it applies to General Gideon."

"I'll only agree to that if he agrees to give up Xander without a fight," Spike said.

"I have a plan," Peter said. "The four of us will go to Xander together, Jim and I will remove the General. He will be transferred immediately to a secure Sentinel facility in Boston, Massachusetts. He will receive healing and will not be released until he bonds with a new Guide." Peter took a deep breath. "It's a good deal, Spike, I had to press hard for the agreement that he remain in hospital lock-up until he bonds. In addition, a Sentinel Prime along with a Mindwalker Guide will have access to the General for questioning. The Army may want to sweep this whole thing under the rug but the Sentinel Guild won't allow it. Someone in the government recruited the General for this mission and the SG wants to know who that person is. That's where the real culprit lies."

"And if the General puts up a fight?" Jim asked.

"You and Spike have to give your word. I don't. I want the General to live so he can be questioned. The Army knows that. So I'll give you my word. If the only way to get to Guide Xander Harris is to kill General Gideon, I will kill him myself."

"In that case, you have my word," Spike said.

"And mine," Jim said.

Peter looked at his watch. "The chopper will be here in about five minutes. I'll be bringing my Guide and some of my troops on the chopper, just in case they're needed, but there's no plan for them to be involved with extracting the General from Xander's room. We will meet with a Sentinel Dr. Rupert Giles when we get to the base. He's been treating Xander and is one of the best Guide doctors in the country. I'll meet you in the back of the building in five minutes."

The flight to the Army base had been terribly long, from Spike's point of view, and now being forced to meet with Dr. Giles, when Xander was in the building, was nearly intolerable. If it weren't for the bond with Blair he doubted he would be able to control himself.

"I need to get to Xander," Spike said, interrupting the conversation.

"Were you able to follow anything we have said?" Dr. Giles asked.

Spike stood up and growled at the doctor.

Dr. Giles looked startled for a moment and then he understood. "Oh, I apologize Sentinel. I simply meant that all your focus is at getting to your Guide. It's understandable, under these circumstances, that you may..."

"Apology accepted," Spike interrupted. "Let's go," he said to Blair.

Blair and Spike entered an office two doors down and waited.

Dr. Giles called General Gideon. "General Gideon," he said. "I have the results of Guide Xander's blood tests, please come to my office so that we can discuss them."

"We can discuss them on the phone," the General said.

"No, General, we can't," the doctor said. "Even though the Guide has slipped into a coma he can still hear our conversation. I will not take the chance of any negative impact on my patient. Please come to my office, Guide Nurse Calendar will remain in the room. I assure you that she will notify me immediately if there is any change in his condition."

"How long is this going to take, doctor?" the General asked.

"I don't anticipate a conversation longer than fifteen minutes, General."

"Fine, I will be right down." The General hung up the phone and walked to the elevator. He was worried about what Dr. Giles had found, if the doctor felt discussing it in Xander's room could have a negative impact then it couldn't be good.

Jim and Peter moved to a back corner of the doctor's office where they would not be in the General's line of sight when he entered. Nurse Calendar had helped the General dial down all his senses in an effort to keep from zoning out and to help lessen his drive to attempt a bond with Xander. When he entered the doctor's office, he was not smiling. The doctor invited him to sit down and it wasn't until he saw movement out of the corner of his eye, as Jim took up a guard position at the door, that he noticed anyone else in the room. All his senses immediately went to full alert and he glared at the doctor.

"I told you my mission was classified, doctor. I'll have you court-martialed for this."

"Thank you doctor," Peter said. "You may leave now." Dr. Giles got up from his desk. Jim moved aside to let him leave the office and then closed the door and took up the guard position again.

The General glared at the two men and a low growl rumbled from his chest.

"I am Sentinel Prime Peter Wall," Peter said, ignoring the growl and its implied challenge. "We need to talk General." Peter walked around the doctor's desk and sat down. "Please, General, sit."

"I don't have time for this," the General said, "I need to get back to my Guide."

"General!" Peter's voice held a tone of command that made the General turn around. "Sit down."

"I don't take orders from you," The General said, and turned back toward the door.

"I have new orders for you, from the Army, General. They order you to stand down!"

The General turned once again and watched as the Sentinel Prime pulled an official looking packet of orders from his dispatch pouch.

The General walked over and grabbed the orders from Peter Wall's hand. He read them and then looked up at Peter. "Where did you get these?" he asked.

"I've been in touch with the Army, General. You've been lied to. The Sentinel guarding the door is Sentinel Detective James Ellison of the Cascade Police. He is Sentinel Liaison Officer, Pack Leader and second bond to Guide Xander Harris."

The General's eyes got big and then he flopped into the nearby chair as thoughts raced through his head. Guide Harris had already bonded with a new Sentinel, he couldn't have him, Xander wasn't his, could never be his. He had unknowingly kidnapped another Sentinel's Guide. No, that wasn't true. He had known Xander was a bonded Guide. He had knowingly kidnapped and put a Guide in danger. In a moment of clarity, the ramifications of his act hit him hard. His thoughts continued to swirl in a cyclone of horror and guilt for what

he had done and Sentinel General Henry Gideon zoned out.

As soon as General Gideon passed by Spike and Blair left the office they were hiding in. Unwilling to wait for the elevator, Spike headed for the stairs. Blair tried to keep up, but Spike's preternatural speed was too much for Blair and he fell behind. As soon as Spike got to the room he began to strip. He ordered the nurse out and then ignored her, as all his focus went to Xander. He climbed into the bed and took his Guide, his love, his soulmate into his arms. "Xan, I'm here, Pet. Sorry it took so long. Come back to me, Xan, please. You have to come back to me."

Blair came into the room as Spike continued calling to Xander. He undressed as he spoke quietly to the nurse and she stared at the strange Sentinel with yellow eyes. "It's okay," Blair said. "That's Xander's Bond Mate and I'm a Healer Guide. I'm going to take off my pants now so unless you're into voyeurism you should leave."

The nurse left the room as Blair's pants hit the floor. Then he climbed into the bed, pressed his naked body against Xander's back and wrapped his arms around his pack mates. He searched carefully for himself in Xander's mind. He knew he had to avoid laying down any new pathways. What he found shocked him. The overdose of memory eraser had wiped out almost everything since Xander's bonding with Jim. What were left were only fragments, disjointed words, absent of feeling. Xander couldn't find his way back because there were no clear pathways back. Blair knew new pathways had to be built and with Xander's condition it would be a long, slow healing, if they could heal him at all.

When Jim arrived in the room, Blair got out of bed to tell him what he had found in Xander's mind.

"He remembers the cross bonding?" Jim asked.

"Yes, after that things start to fade. By the time he gets kidnapped most everything is gone."

"Can we get him back Blair? I don't want to lose him, the only thing worse would be losing you."

"I think we can but it has to be done very slowly and gently."

"How slowly?" Jim asked.

"At least Twenty-four hours to bring him out of the coma and then he'll need weeks or more of healing after that to get him out of danger of a brain cascade."

"Can I help? The doctor said only healers he had before the overdose and his bonded sentinel should touch him. If he remembers me...I want to help."

"Yes," Blair said. "We can switch off. I need to keep my strength up, so while I rest you can be with him."

Twenty-eight hours later Xander came out of his coma.

"What happened?" Xander asked, when he woke up and found Spike and Blair pressed against him in the same bed.

"What's the last thing you remember?" Spike asked.

"We were all in the bullpen and then I was in a room with just the guides and then I was strapped down and Ethan Rayne hit me. But that can't be right. It doesn't make any sense."

"You were kidnapped," Spike said, "and given an overdose of a memory erasing drug."

Just then Jim came into the room carrying a tray full of food. "Xanman," he said with a big smile on his face, "You're awake."

"Yeah, big guy. A little the worse for wear, but awake. I'm starving. Is any of that for me?"

"Sure, Pet," Spike said, as he took a plate from Jim.

Jim put the tray on the bedside table. "I'll go arrange for transport home," he said, and left the room.

"Transport home?" Xander asked, "Aren't we in the guide hospital?"

"We'll tell you all about it on the way home," Spike said. "Right now you need to get some food into your stomach." He offered Xander a forkful of mashed potato.

"You know you're overwhelming me," Xander said, as he reached for the fork.

A blue-eyed Spike smiled at his Guide and pulled the fork away before Xander could get a hold of it. "Nice try Guide," he said, and then offered the food to him again. "Now eat."

Blaire chuckled and got out of bed. 'Things are back to normal,' he thought, as he got dressed.

The healer Guides at the army base tried to bring General Gideon out of his zone, but he just kept slipping deeper in. The same day that Xander came out of his coma, the Sentinel Prime made a decision to send the General to the Sentinel Hospital in Boston, as they had planned to do. The General was strapped onto a gurney and secured on an Army transport plane. Three and a half hours into the flight a stealth fighter was sent out from a secret base in the mid-west. Without warning an anti-aircraft missile was fired at the plane carrying the General, everyone on board was killed instantly as the plane exploded into a giant fireball. The burning debris fell into Lake Huron leaving dark gray streams of smoke to mar the cloudless blue summer sky. Families boating on the lake called the Coast Guard to report a possible plane accident.

EPILOG:

That evening Spike sat on the sofa watching the news, while Xander laid curled up asleep, his head resting in the crook of Spike's neck. Xander's even breath brushed along Spike's naked

chest, giving him comfort as he watched the TV, turned low, so as not to disturb his love's rest.

It was a news report of a meteor shower over the great lakes, which stabbed at his psyche. A family, boating on Lake Huron, had sold their video of the event to the network. Spike watched with Sentinel sight as fire fell through the sky, not round balls of a meteor shower, but angular shapes. He saw a wing, a fuselage and other pieces too small to recognize. And he knew.

Spike whispered to Jim who sat near by watching the same news report. "Call the hospital in Boston. Find out if the General arrived. That was no meteor shower."

When Jim returned to the living room, his eyes were filled with pain as he looked at Spike. "Boston said that the General never got there, he was sent to Bethesda instead. Bethesda said the General was never scheduled to be transferred there."

Blair looked at the two Sentinels; he had been in the kitchen when Jim made the calls. "Don't tell Xander, not yet," he whispered. "He needs to do some more healing before he deals with this."

The two Sentinels nodded their agreement.

End...Story continues on Runaway Guide 2 - The Healing
Runaway Guide 1 by Joan Z and Neichan:

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