

## Just One Kiss

Dawn Summers, sister to a Slayer, Key to God-knows-where portals, survivor of Sunnydale, hung up the phone and looked nervously around her bedroom. Well, not really bedroom - the room she was currently inhabiting in the motel that they were staying in, while Giles tried to find them a place to live.

After the 'End of Sunnydale', as they had taken to calling it, and the deaths of some missed (Anya) and not so missed by anyone but one of the countless Slayers (Spike) people, they had all decided to stick together and continue to fight. Well, Buffy and Giles had decided to move to the new Hellmouth. Xander had shrugged. He had fought, or at least tried to fight, this long and wasn't going to give up now.

Andrew had decided to join them, figuring he could always go to college wherever they turned up - his SAT scores were so astronomically high he was looking at a free ride. Besides, he still felt he owed penance for his actions while with the Trio, and had become firm friends with Xander - once he had realized that, like Larry, he would have no chance of a romantic relationship with the one-eyed ex-carpenter.

Willow, her pride in her spell that released all the potentials at an all time high, was the most eager to continue the fight.

It had been another quiet conversation, when the others were all doing 'something' else, that had given Dawn the courage to action 'The Plan'. She had asked him why he was still there, what reason he would have to put up with the crap he still got from his so-called-friends, who treated him like a doormat.

His answer had been revealed in his single eye, even though his words had said something very different. While he had talked about loyalty to the others, fighting the good fight, his eyes told her that he was there because he was worried about her. He didn't think the others either cared enough, or were mature enough, to make sure she was happy and safe.

His eye had sealed his fate; he just didn't know it yet.

"Ok," Dawn said to herself, sat in front of the cheap dresser as it had a largish mirror. "Cute summer dress, check. Hair washed, blow dried and hanging straight in mature fashion, check. Hair scrunchie in purse, for innocent nymph look later, check. Courage... missing." She sighed softly. Today was going to be life changing, and she only had one chance. For a second, she contemplated backing out, but the telephone call remained in her memory, reminding her of what the status quo was like, and how it was affecting her.

"Courage, check."

She slipped on a matching pair of pumps and walked out to change her world.

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"Morning Giles," Dawn said brightly.

"Errm, morning, Dawn," Giles replied, a little distracted. "How are you?"

"Fine," the girl replied, the smile still on her face.

"What can I do for you?" Dealing with teenagers for so long, meant that Giles at least had some clue how they worked, and one turning up in his room at nine am, dressed smartly, normally meant that they had something they wanted to talk about.

Dawn sat down on one of the two chairs in his motel room. Even though it was rented, and full of generic furniture, it still felt English; it was an aura the Watcher carried with him at all times.

"I'm going to start dating Xander, and I wanted to make sure you didn't have a problem with it."

Giles blinked, then slowly reached up and removed his glasses. The movement was automatic, and caused Dawn to hide a smirk. His glasses freshly polished, he replaced them, and then fixed his eyes on the young girl in front of him.

"Well, I'm disappointed that Xander is not here with you, to explain things," Giles said, frowning. The idea of the boy sending the girl to do his dirty work was mildly distasteful.

Dawn laughed softly. "Oh, Xander doesn't know yet."

For a brief second, the English Watcher wished he could polish his glasses again. He could feel the headache, the one that was only ever caused by American teenagers, starting to form. "Excuse me?" he requested.

"Xander doesn't know yet," Dawn repeated, not offering any further clarification. Irritating Giles had been one of Xander's favorite things to do for years, and had become one of hers as well. She had learnt from watching the master.

“And why does Xander not know yet?” Giles asked, almost dreading the answer.

“Because I haven’t told him. I’m going to get his objections out of the way first, then tell him.”

“I see.” He had to admit that it was a good idea, if slightly surprising. “Have you considered this all the way through?” Giles asked. “After all, Xander is several years older than you.”

“Five,” Dawn clarified. “I believe that I have considered all the angles. I want someone who will put me first, will do everything to protect and care for me, and is good looking. Xander qualifies on each part.”

Giles frowned, recognizing his role as the responsible adult here. The problem he was having was that he really had very few actual objections. The age difference wasn’t a problem for him; he had dated people younger in the past, and had the maturity to know that relationships worked like that all the time. For a lot of people, it was almost needed, and Xander had finally matured into an adult. His quiet, behind the scenes work, which had paid for a lot of the essentials in Sunnydale, was under appreciated by his friends. And the fact that it was his savings which were currently paying for their motel stay, had proven, finally, that the boy was his equal, and no longer needed someone to order him around.

“What about Anya?” Giles asked softly. Despite their having split up, permanently, Xander had still been devastated with the loss of his one-time fiancée.

“Xander has laid her to rest,” Dawn said simply. “He did love her, but has slowly realized that she wasn’t the ‘One’. They were just too different, for things to work out for them, and it has taken him these last few months to realize that. He is actually happier now.”

“You’ve talked to him about their relationship?” Giles was surprised.

“Of course. While everyone else has been doing their thing, it was left to Xander to make sure I was alright.”

Dawn smirked internally. It was time to turn up the heat on the nearest thing to a parental figure she had.

“What am I going to do about continuing my education?”

Giles looked blankly at the brunette girl in front of him, before a look of horror slowly spread across his face. “Dawn, I, uhm, I didn’t think... I’m afraid I failed to recognize the problem. You didn’t even finish High School.”

“It’s a good thing Xander recognized the problem, then, isn’t it?” she asked softly.

“I beg your pardon?”

Dawn smiled slightly, the expression suddenly captivating Giles as he started to realize just how much he had missed recently, with patrolling and trying to set up the new Council.

“I took my High school GED last month. Xander explained the situation to the people at Cleveland State University, and they agreed to test me. I passed, with ease, and then took an entrance exam. I start in September, on a full tuition scholarship.” She said all this with a calm expression on her face, as if she was informing him of her plan to rent a video later that night.

“Oh, my,” Giles whispered. “Congratulations, Dawn. I am proud of you.”

She favored him with a more personal smile. “Thank you.”

The Watcher still felt a little guilty over his blunder. It should really have been him sorting out Dawn’s future; he owed it to Joyce, and to Buffy, but he had been so busy dealing with creating a structure to handle the hundreds of Slayers that had suddenly appeared that Dawn had been left out, as she was normal.

“Are you sure your feelings are not just gratitude?” he asked softly, as the question occurred to him.

“Maybe at first,” Dawn admitted. “He was always the one who looked after me, but my brief crush on Spike at least gave me something to compare my feelings with, and it is very different. I can feel Xander here,” she tapped her heart gently, emphasizing her point, “and I want the right to see if we can make it work.”

Giles met her eyes; the last sentence caught his curiosity. “Can you expand that last sentence a little?”

Dawn nodded; she had been warned that that particular phrase would catch his attention. “I’m not claiming that Xander and I will be together forever in true love.” Not out loud at least. “But I demand the chance to see if we can make a relationship work. I am eighteen now, and have waited, pretty much since I existed, to date him. It is time now, and I fully intend to take my chance.”

“What about his prospects?” Giles was, by now, pretty sure he was going to give his approval. He was more interested in finding out what else he had missed in some of his young charges. “He may find it difficult to continue his career, especially with his lack of depth perception.”

“Your concern hasn’t stopped you from draining his savings to pay for our rooms,” Dawn pointed out, a slight frown on her face.

“Err, yes, quite.” Giles was acutely embarrassed to have that fact thrown into his face. “I do intend to pay him back, when I get access to the Council’s accounts.” Xander had promised that he would not reveal that he was the source of their money at the moment.

Dawn was watching him carefully, and she caught the flicker in his eye. “I read his mail,” She admitted without a hint of shame. “Xander likes to

hide the things he does, as if he is unworthy of being thanked. I found out a long time ago that you have to search for evidence where he is concerned.”

Giles remained quiet, looking at the composed girl – no, the composed woman - in front of him. She was sitting calmly, her posture straight, showing no sign of discomfort about the conversation. She was attractive, intelligent and caring. He looked at this from the other angle. Would Dawn be good for Xander? He owed the boy that much at least.

Xander was attracted to strong women, and while it had been mainly physical strength in the past, he could see that Dawn had mental strength, perhaps enough that it would match Xander's. He probably needed someone who would care about him as much as he cared about everyone else. Just the fact that she had bothered to look and find out who was paying for everything told him that she cared about the brunet in more ways than pretty much everyone else in their little group.

Giles nodded slowly, “Dawn. I wish you luck.” He felt a little strange about giving his blessing, as if he no longer had the right, but the smile on Dawn's face reassured him that he did indeed have the right.

They said their goodbyes, and Dawn left with a little bounce in her step.

Giles walked back into the kitchen and made himself a pot of tea. The visit had left him a lot to think about, and the relationship between him and Xander was one of them. The boy was so unassuming at times, when it came to helping out the people he cared about, that Giles had found himself taking advantage of that fact. He swore there and then to stop doing it. Xander deserved better, and while what Giles was doing was important, he would not be able to live with himself anymore, not when he knew that Xander was taking care of all the little things that allowed him to concentrate on the big picture.

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Buoyed with confidence now she had Giles' blessing, Dawn walked towards her next target. Willow. The red-headed witch was currently looking for a cheap base they could rent for them all to live in. Dawn called her cell phone and arranged to meet for lunch.

The café was cheap and cheerful, run by an older married couple.

Willow was already waiting for her when she sat down and smiled.

Before they could come over, the waitress wandered over to their table. “Morning, Dawn,” Maggie smiled. “Want your usual?”

“Please, Mag,” Dawn smiled at her gratefully.

“And you, Miss?”

“I'll just have a coffee, please.”

Maggie nodded and departed to the counter.

“A usual?” Willow asked, looking a little surprised.

“Yeah, Xander and I come here most days for breakfast and lunch. Maggie and Ken are really nice people, they run this place.”

“Oh. Well, anyway, what can I do for you?” Willow asked. She had left Kennedy contacting Realtors, and wanted to get back to her partner as soon as she could.

Dawn again hid a smirk. “I'm going to start dating Xander, and I wanted to check that you were not going to have a problem with it, or try and cause any issues.”

Dawn's timing had been perfect; as Willow's had been raising a glass of water to her lips as Dawn spoke. Another skill learnt from Xander.

Dawn felt no real compunction to be nice to Willow. Over the past few days she had learnt a lot about the witch, little details that no one had ever told her, which had drastically changed her opinion of the redhead.

Willow spluttered, spraying water halfway across the table. To Dawn's relief, she avoided getting wet.

“What!?” she demanded, her voice rising dramatically.

“I'm going to start dating Xander,” Dawn replied coolly. “And please don't shout, no one else here wants to hear our conversation.”

Willow blushed, and calmed down. Before she could start, Maggie returned with a couple of coffees and a plate full of a delicious looking apple pie for Dawn.

Dawn smiled her thanks, which increased as Maggie said, “I've put it on Xander's tab, honey. He told me make sure you never had to pay when you came here.”

“Thanks,” Dawn smiled. Typically, Xander had never bothered to tell her this.

Willow was frowning; the brunet had never offered to pay her bill.

“I don't think you should date Xander,” Willow stated forcibly. “Just the fact that he sent you alone should prove that he is an emotional coward

unable to have a proper relationship.”

Dawn slowly counted to ten, and found that it did not relieve her desire to punch Willow into next week. She tried again, counting to a hundred this time.

“You really don’t like Xander, do you? Is it because he’s made a success of himself in the real world, unlike you? Or is it because he got really close to Anya after your Fluke thing?”

“How do you know about that?” Willow asked, paling.

“That’s not relevant to our discussion. My question still stands, why do you not like someone who has saved your life multiple times, was willing to face death to stop you from ending the world, and has never been anything but loyal to you?”

Willow gaped at her, her mind suddenly blank.

“I mean, you just called him an emotional coward, making a snap judgment based on incomplete facts. Yet again, you instantly presumed the worst of Xander.” Dawn’s tone was quiet, even, and completely relentless. “You mock him and call him an emotional coward, despite owing him a debt so large you should be on your knees every time you see him.” The long haired girl took a sip of her coffee, and a bite of her apple pie. She spent a moment ignoring Willow and concentrating on just how good this piece of pie was.

“What do you mean?” Willow croaked.

“Well, to start with. Xander sees you and Buffy as being friends, and that you would object to any relationship between us. So, I decided that before telling Xander that we were going to start dating, I’d eliminate some of his arguments beforehand. As for your debt, how do you think your Goddess would react, when you die, to someone who ended the world? A hug and a whispered all is forgiven? Don’t think so.” Dawn’s voice, while still even, now had enough sarcasm to float an armada of 17th century sailing ships.

“But,” Willow started to respond.

“No Buts, Threefold rule remember? I looked up your religion on the net, and it seems that there is this big thing about responsibility with magic. Let’s see, now, what would three times the end of the world be? Eternal torment in hell? I’d say that is the least you could look forward to. So, from my viewpoint, that means that you owe your eternal soul to Xander. And how do you repay him? By backing up my sister at every opportunity, ignoring and belittling him as you have since your fluke, and undermining everything he does.

“So, why did you do it? What has Xander done that makes you feel that your behavior is both acceptable and deserved?”

The witch almost looked frightened. Dawn was throwing things at her that she didn’t know how to reply to. Long since forgotten things like the short lived relationship the two of them had enjoyed was something Dawn should not have known about.

Willow breathed in, trying to get some time to clear her thoughts a little. She picked up her coffee and took a sip. The hot liquid scalded her throat on the way down, but the pain helped a little.

“What do you know about the Fluke?” Willow asked softly.

“You and Xander had been enjoying illicit smoochies, while you were dating a werewolf called Oz and Xander was dating a girl called Cordelia. It ended one evening, when you both had been kidnapped by Spike and your respective partners found you enjoying each other’s company. The evening ended up with Cordelia in the hospital after landing on a piece of metal rebar.

“Afterwards, Cordelia blamed Xander for it, Oz accepted you back instantly, with hardly a reproachful word, and everyone sent Xander to Coventry. Well, except for my sister who, in a rare moment of clarity, stayed out of it and tried to help you both.”

“Oh,” Willow said quietly, a slight wince showing on her face. “That’s pretty much what happened.”

“Why was Xander to blame?” Dawn asked curiously. “After all, it takes two to smooch?”

Willow shrugged. “He was the guy.”

Dawn took another drink of her coffee, watching the flavored water as it shook in her hand. It took every last ounce of her self control not to launch her self across the table and see if she could beat some sense in the girl.

“So why did you not have him prosecuted for attempted rape?” Dawn asked.

“What?” Willow choked.

“Well, if it was his entire fault and he was forcing you, surely that’s rape?” Her face was completely innocent, as if she was only asking like that of a concerned friend.

Willow forget what she had said a second or so ago, and blurted. “Oh no, I was willing at the time.”

Dawn smirked at her. “So, as you were a willing participant, why didn’t you say something to help him out? You know he talked to Oz to try and get him to take you back, don’t you? Why didn’t you give him the same help and try and get him back with Cordelia?”

Willow paled even more. It was impressive, Dawn thought, that the red head had so many different shades of pale.

"I didn't know he did that," Willow admitted in a small voice.

"Did you try and find out?"

"No." This was not a conversation the witch had been expecting when she had been invited to meet Dawn for lunch.

"So, how can you claim to have loved Xander for so many years, to have been shooting cow-eyes at him in High School, while posting obvious 'Do Not Poach' signs in front of my sister, but now have grown to the stage where you treat him like shit?"

Willow gaped at Dawn again. "How do you know about that?"

"None of your business." Keeping calm, when she wanted to scream, was a lot of work for the younger girl. "Now, answer the question."

"I don't know," Willow moaned. "Besides, gay now."

"So? That doesn't excuse you being a bitch."

"Hey," Willow protested, frowning at Dawn.

Dawn shrugged lightly, "Are you denying it?"

Willow tried to ignore the question. "What is all this about?"

"I want to date Xander. I know that you will have an opinion about it, and I want to make sure that you don't do anything stupid and make the decision yourself. Then, I want you to think about everything that has happened over the past five years and decide whether or not you really want to be friends with Xander. Once you have made that decision, you are going to tell him one way or another. Even telling him no, would be kinder than the crap you have put him through.

"Now, what are your thoughts on me dating Xander?"

Willow frowned, moving the previous conversation to the back of her mind for a second. "He's older than you."

The hypocrisy was almost the last straw. "I am two months older than Kennedy."

"So?" Willow asked, confused.

"So it's alright for you to date a girl much younger than you are, but it's not for Xander?" she ground out through her teeth.

"This isn't about me," Willow retorted, defensively.

"I do not accept your rank hypocrisy as a valid reason for me not dating Xander," Dawn's voice was now cold enough to put liquid oxygen to shame. "Do you have anything else?"

"Xander's not had the best dating history," Willow started.

"True," Dawn admitted openly, interrupting the Witch. "I have no dating history at all; however, I have seen the mistakes that have been made by Xander, and by Buffy – in fact, by the whole Scooby Gang at one time or another, so I believe that we can overcome those mistakes. As for your particular reference, Xander never cheated on Anya, even after she slept with Spike. He was loyal to the end. I can't ask for much more than that from a guy, and it would certainly beat out most of the relationships my friends had in high school.

"The question is: Are you going to try and save your relationship with Xander, and support him, if he decides that he wants to date me as much as I want to date him, or are you going to continue with the same behavior you have shown for the past seven years?"

Dawn stood, and smiled at Maggie. "If you order another coffee, Maggie will put in on Xander's tab. Think about it, Willow. I'll tell Xander to expect your answer tomorrow." She walked out the door, leaving the shell shocked red-head to think about everything she had said.

Willow sat at the table, and for the first time in a very long time, started to think about her relationship with her supposed best male friend.

She didn't move for quite some time.

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Dawn checked her watch, then returned back to their motel. Faith should just be waking up, with Wood, her boyfriend. They both tended to be night owls these days.

She knocked on the door firmly.

Faith opened it, and smiled. "Hey Dawn, what's up?"

"Can I have a quick chat?"

"Sure, come in. Robin's gone to get me some smokes."

Dawn entered the room, which was identical to hers; well, apart from the leather clothing that was strewn wildly around.

"Good night?" she asked, with a small smirk.

"Damn right," Faith agreed cheerfully. "He's perfect for coming home hot, hungry and horny. Anyway, what can I do you for?"

"I'm going to start dating Xander, and wanted to check you were ok with it."

Faith tilted her head and looked at the younger girl quizzically. "I'm guessing you haven't told the Xand-man yet. If you had, he'd be right in front of you."

Dawn smiled, pleased that someone had a little trust in Xander. "Yep, I figured the best way was to deal with you guys first, then tell him last."

Faith grinned widely. "You go, girl. I'm completely five-by-five with it. Just do me a favor?" For the last part her voice changed from the normally confident and sassy tone.

"What's that?"

"Be good to him. Xander deserves someone special."

Dawn moved forward and hugged the dark Slayer. "I wouldn't be doing this if I didn't think he was worth treating special."

"Do you want me to come with you when you tell, B?"

"Nope, I'm gonna do this myself. I've talked to Giles and Willow this morning. Xander's due in his room at six, and I want to talk to him before he does anything else today."

"Sounds like you've got a plan, Dawn."

The girl in question smiled her smirk again. "Oh yeah."

She walked out, leaving Faith wondering exactly who had been helping Dawn.

Dawn took a deep breath, and approached the person she had dreaded confronting most. Her sister.

"Hey, Dawn," Buffy smiled as she opened the door.

"Got a few?"

"Anything for the Slayer sis."

"Actually, I'm not the only Slayer-sis any more."

"No, I guess not."

Dawn settled into the chair, watching as Buffy sat on the edge of her bed. She was almost looking forward to the reaction to her next sentence.

"I'm going to start dating Xander, and wanted to check that you didn't have any problems with that."

Buffy looked blankly at Dawn.

Dawn waited calmly for her sister. She idly wished she had brought a bottle of water with her.

Buffy continued to look blankly at Dawn, before she slowly sank it. "That bastard," she swore. "I'm going to kill him." The Slayer was on her feet and half way to the door before Dawn could blink.

"Buffy. Sit Down!" Dawn's voice was cold, commanding and held a quality that shot straight through the enraged Slayer and forced her to obey.

'Wow, it worked.' The younger girl thought to herself in surprise.

"Killing Xander will do nothing, since he doesn't even know yet. I knew you would react like this – you always do. Act first, think later, so I figured I'd just tell you beforehand."

"What do you mean, he doesn't know? How can he not know?"

"I haven't asked him out yet. I know Xander. I know how he thinks, and despite your treatment of him over the past few years, he still considers himself your friend. It's just one of the things I love about him."

Buffy swayed slightly, and then sat down on the edge of the bed. "You're in love with Xander?"

"Yep." Her cheerfulness was probably out of place, but she didn't care.

"You and Xander?"

"Yes."

You...Xander?"

"I'm going to start getting annoyed if you don't stop saying that."

"What? Oh." Buffy was mentally groping for something to say. The whole idea was preposterous.

"Why on earth would you want Xander?"

Dawn's smile left her face with an almost unnatural speed. "What? You'd rather I fell in love with a vampire, who lost his soul after I slept with him, beat up and tortured my father figure and killed hundreds because I was too close to him to act like a Slayer and kill him?"

Buffy paled. "You have no right to mention him."

"I have *every* right to mention Angel. I might not have been here physically, but the memories of him are just as real for me as anything else in my life."

Dawn made a visible effort to calm herself. "You know, I asked Willow this same question earlier. Why do you not like Xander? Was it because he never accepted Angel?"

"What do you mean?"

Dawn sighed, and made unwarranted assumptions as to her sister's hair "For years, you have pushed Xander away, treated him like dirt, ignored and belittled him, and he has stuck by you all this time. Why?"

"I didn't want him to be hurt," Buffy said.

"Liar," Dawn retorted. She had retrieved her temper now. "If that was the case, you would have helped train him, so he wouldn't get hurt. You should know by now that Xander is never going to take a back seat while others are going out at night. So you are either lying, or mind numbingly stupid. Which is it?"

"Dawn!" Buffy spat, about to launch into a rant.

"Stop that right now!" the girl demanded. "You are not dealing with a Trainee Slayer here; you are talking to your sister. Your one surviving blood relative. Your sister, who is now a legal adult, and who is perfectly capable of making her own decisions. Shouting at me will merely end our relationship here and now." Dawn knew she was being a little dramatic, but sometimes it took that to get through to her sister.

"Now," Dawn continued, drawing breath. "Say what you are going to say without the personal insults and without shouting."

"Xander betrayed me, twice." Buffy admitted softly; it wasn't what she was going to say originally. It was something that had only just occurred to her. "He sent Angel to hell, by not telling me Willow was going to restore his soul, and then he brought me back from heaven."

Dawn smiled to herself; finally, they were getting to the root of the problem. If only someone had talked to her sister like this, years ago, their recent history could have been very different.

"Why do you think that Xander did these things?"

"Because he was in love with me and hated Angel, and couldn't live without me."

Dawn blinked. "And that's the only possible explanation?"

"Of course," Buffy replied, as if she was dealing with a five year old.

"And you don't think that Xander didn't tell you about Willow's Soul spell because Angelus has kicked your ass several times, and he was concerned that if you didn't go all out, Angelus would kill you and drag the world into hell? Not to mention the fact that Willow was in the hospital at the time, with a concussion, and had never performed a spell that complex and powerful before."

"How do you know about that?" Buffy gasped.

"It's not relevant. Now, why do you blame Xander for pulling you back from heaven?"

"It was his idea. He pulled me back from where I was happy."

"And who told you it was his idea?"

"Spike did."

Dawn growled under her teeth. "And you never thought to ask anyone else? You took the word of a vampire and added it to some stupid hurt from several years before and have treated Xander like shit ever since then? Well, I was there, Buffy. I was there crying, on Xander's shoulder because my sister had died. I was there when Willow started talking about a spell to bring you back. I was there when Xander said it was a bad idea. I was there when Willow persuaded him that you were in a Hell dimension. So, from Xander's point of view, he was helping to rescue you. Some thanks he got, huh? He was marginalized even more. Of course, it was good in one way; it meant that he finally got over his crush on you."

"Xander's not over his crush," Buffy protested.

Dawn laughed, throwing her head back. "Do you really believe that? He loves you, but he hasn't been \*in love\* with you for years. He was completely in love with Anya, and even after that, he never went back to looking at you like that.

"He's not in love with me?" the blonde Slayer asked, a little shocked.

"No," Dawn stated categorically, before switching tracks. "Why didn't you tell anyone that Angel was back from Hell?"

"What?"

"You said you blamed Xander for sending Angel to hell. When Angel came back, why did you hide it from everyone?"

"I had to, no one supported me."

"So you made a mistake?"

"I guess," Buffy admitted.

"How did Xander react?"

"He was mad."

"Is he still mad about it now?"

"Of course not."

"So it's ok for you to hold a grudge for years, but not him?"

"Yes. No. I don't know."

Dawn sighed hoping it was enough to at least getting her sister to start thinking about her relationship with Xander.

"Now, what were your reasons for not wanting me to date Xander?"

Buffy looked relieved. "He's too old for you."

"You dated a Vampire who was turned in his mid-twenties and lived for several hundred years when you were younger than me. Then you dated another vampire centuries older than you. Are you saying you were wrong to date them?"

"No," Buffy denied instantly.

"Then age can't be an issue. Xander is only five years older than me, and has the bonus of being human and not in danger of losing his soul."

Buffy scowled at her younger sister. "Xander can't protect you properly."

"Really? Then it was another Xander who forced your boyfriend to come rescue you from the Master, and later acquired a rocket that let you take out the Judge? Or to note something more recent, maybe it was a different Xander who stopped Willow from ending the world?"

"Would you rather I dated someone who knew nothing about what happens in the dark? So he can be killed one night because of that lack of knowledge?" the long haired brunette demanded.

"No," Buffy admitted. "Where did you find out about that stuff?"

"It doesn't matter. It does matter that I know it's all true. Xander has saved every one of our lives over the last seven and a half years. I don't think your argument holds water. Why else do you object?"

"What does it matter?" Buffy was starting to sulk now.

Dawn heroically refrained from rolling her eyes and reminding Buffy who was the older sister. "It matters because you are my sister, and if you have a valid reason I haven't thought of, I will not talk to Xander this evening. If you haven't, then I am going to go ahead. I mainly want to ensure that you know it is my idea, not his, and that you don't get violent. Because if you do, sister or no sister, Slayer or no Slayer, I will get Xander to press charges against you, and with your record, I'm sure you would get a very long sentence."

As with Willow earlier, Dawn's voice was cold enough to freeze water. "Now, do you have any genuine, intelligent reasons for me not to date Xander?"

"He's blind in one eye, he can't support a girlfriend," Buffy stated.

"He's currently supporting five, and two boy friends." Before Buffy could jump to a conclusion again, she continued. "Did you know that it's Xander's savings, specifically the savings he put away in case he and Anya ever got married, that we are all living on?"

"No we're not. Giles is paying for everything."

"Giles is broke. He hasn't been able to access the Councils accounts yet. He's borrowing money from Xander for the accommodation and food for us, Willow and Kennedy, Faith and Robin and Xander himself. Besides, if one thing has been proved recently, it's that Xander can look after



himself in the real world, not the world we inhabit at night.”

“Oh.”

Dawn looked at her watch. “I’m going to talk to Xander when he gets home. Yes, I am going to ask him out. I want you to think about whether or not you are his friend. Then tomorrow, I will tell him to expect your answer. Please be honest, he deserves that at least. If only for saving your life several times. Even telling him you never want to see him again is nicer than what you have been doing. We are in a new place in a new time. Take advantage of it, Sis, to see how you treat people in general, and him in particular. Think about everything that has happened since you arrived in Sunnydale, and make your decision. Just make sure it is your decision. Willow is doing the same thing.” The brunette stood and quietly walked out, leaving the blonde Slayer on the bed.

Buffy slowly collapsed backwards, a thin trail of tears visible down her cheeks, as she did what her sister had requested, and truly thought about things. For the first time in years, she didn’t call Willow, she didn’t call for her boyfriend, or for any one else. She thought for herself.

Dawn walked into her room and sat in front of the mirror again. She checked the list on the side, and started to apply a small amount of makeup. A little red lipstick, to make her lips darker, and eye shadow, to emphasize her eyes.

She pulled her hair into a long pony-tail and held it in place with the scrunchie, then smiled at herself. The effect was exactly what she wanted, innocence with a hint of something else.

Strangely, she was no longer nervous. Talking to her extended family had settled all of that, so she sat on the chair and idly watched bad daytime TV till Xander got home.

Six o’clock found her outside his door, knocking firmly.

Xander had obviously just stepped out of the shower, as all he was wearing was a tight pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He was towel drying his hair.

“Hey Dawn,” he grinned, sliding backwards to invite her in.

The girl was very glad he did that, because she was suddenly seriously distracted. ‘Mmmm, wet Xander.’

“So, what’s new in the world of the Dawn-meister?”

“Dawn,” Dawn replied firmly.

“Huh?”

“Dawn. It’s my name. I’m eighteen, Xan.”

“Oh, sorry. What’s new in the world of Dawn?”

Dawn shot him a wide smile. “Now that I am eighteen, I think we should go on a date.”

Xander stopped moving, his towel still in his hair. “What?”

The girl smirked at him slightly. “Hearing going, Xan?”

“Dawn,” Xander said slowly, his reasons for not dating her in his mind.

“You’re about to say that you are too old for me, that Willow and Buffy would object and that you don’t think of me like that, right?”

Xander sat down on the edge of his bed. “Pretty much,” he admitted.

“The age difference is not relevant; you dated a thousand year old demon, remember. As for Buffy and Willow, I told them earlier today I was going to ask you out, and they are ok with it.” Dawn was speaking fast, partly through nerves and partly to get this all out before he could interrupt. “As for you not thinking about me like that, it is the one flaw in my plan.”

“I was also going to add that I’m not exactly the best prospect financially at the moment. My lack-of-eyeness is not exactly helping in the job hunting stakes.”

“You will get a new job,” Dawn said firmly. “I have complete faith in you, Xan. And even if not, so what? I want you for who you are; not what you can earn.”

She looked directly at him, her eyes as wide as she could make them. “I think I deserve one kiss, at least. Just one kiss. If you can kiss me, properly, and tell me you don’t think about me like that, I’ll leave and we will never have this conversation again.”

Xander looked at the girl before him, and nodded slowly. It seemed a good idea, it would only be a little kiss, and it would end her crush for ever.

He ignored the little voice inside him that reminded him that he really liked her crush, and that he didn’t want their relationship to change at all. The fact that she had already told Buffy and Willow was surprising, but it was something she had done. He had been encouraging her recently to set her eyes on something, and steamroller everything in her way to get it. He had just never imagined that it was him that she wanted.

"So, you agree? One kiss?"

With a slightly amused look, Xander nodded. "Just one kiss."

Dawn stood in front of him, and reached around her back. With a practiced movement, she undid the zip holding her dress up. She shrugged her shoulders and let the dress pool around her feet.

Xander gaped at her, his mouth suddenly dry. "What are you doing?" he croaked.

"One kiss, Xan," Dawn reminded him huskily.

Xander tried to avoid looking at her, but he couldn't. He knew he shouldn't be thinking of little Dawnie like this, but little Dawnie had definitely grown up. She was gorgeous, standing with one foot slightly in front of the other, unconsciously posed. He ran his eyes from the brown pumps she was still wearing, up her smooth tanned legs and over her black panties. His gaze continued up, drifting across her stomach. He paused, almost unwillingly, at her breasts, seeing them nestled in a matching black bra was another obvious sign that Dawn definitely wasn't fourteen anymore.

She slinked towards him, his gaze had settled her nerves once more, and rested her hand on his chest. Dawn slid her hand up, over his shoulder, his neck, to his chin. She lifted his head slowly, and lent down, fully aware of the affect it would have on her breasts. An almost inaudible groan from Xander proved that she was right.

"Just one kiss," she whispered, her soft breath caressing his mouth.

He nodded, once, focusing again on the fact that he didn't think of her that way.

She closed the distance between them, and softly placed her lips on his. She moved them slowly, just feeling him, enjoying the feel of his lips. After an endless moment, she opened her mouth a little, her tongue flicking against his lips.

Xander wasn't kissing her back, and Dawn was starting to get worried. Her confidence was starting to vanish and she felt her heart starting to break as she realized she had been wrong, that he didn't think of her like that after all.

Suddenly, Xander moved. He fell backwards on the bed, his hands wrapping around the girl in front of him and pulling her with him. He twisted, pushing her onto her back and laid half on top of her, his jeans slightly scratching against her soft legs.

Dawn gasped, then realized what it meant, and felt her heart explode in happiness. She kissed him, pouring everything she felt, everything she had locked away for so many years. The feelings from the crush, from his reassuring talks to her, everything coalesced into a single kiss as she gave him everything she had wanted to for so many years.

She arched against him, trying to get more body contact, the feelings he was generating in her too much to resist.

He slowly broke the kiss, and looked down at her, at her obvious signs of arousal. "Dawn?"

"Yes, Xan?"

"Will you go out with me? On a date?"

His only reply was her sliding her hands through his hair, and kissing him again, as hard as she could.

A few minutes later, Xander broke the kiss again. Her innocent rubbing against him was playing havoc with his self control. He shifted a little, looking down at her body.

"You can, you know, if you want?" Dawn offered, a faint blush appearing.

He kissed her lightly, once more. "This is not the place, Dawn."

"Don't you want to?"

"Oh yeah," Xander ground herself against her, and enjoyed the look on her face as she realized exactly what had been pressed against her. "But not in a cheap motel." His reluctance to let her go was obvious in his face and his eye.

He dropped another kiss on her swollen lips, and smiled. "As my girlfriend, you want to help me look for an apartment tomorrow? I'm fed up of living in cheap motels."

"Huh?" Dawn asked, rational thought not really working to its full capacity.

Xander eased himself off her, and smiled at little at her protesting groan. He walked over to the table and picked up a piece of paper. He looked down at Dawn and felt his resolve wavering. Her hair had escaped her pony tail, and was spread over his pillow. She was watching him, making no attempt to cover herself at all, a picture of innocent sexuality.

He laid back down next to her, and offered her the letter.

She read it, and then read it again. Her eyes fixed on one spot, then grew even wider. She threw the letter to one side, shifted her weight, and then pounced on him, pushing him onto his back. She kissed him, hard, with a hint of possessiveness.

She quickly realized that every time she writhed on top of him, he would give out a soft groan. She liked the sound; it meant that he was hers.

"I knew you could do it," she said with a hugely proud smile. "And that's a hell of a salary, mister."

Xander smiled. "Well, after that pep talk you gave me last week, I stopped trying out for general jobs, and went for a managerial one. I had such a good reference from my last job that they were more than happy to hire me, despite this." He indicated his eye patch.

Dawn smiled at him proudly, before quickly going back to kissing him. All those years of dreaming about kissing Xander Harris paled into insignificance when compared to the real thing. As far as she was concerned, she had a lot of years worth of kisses owed to her, and she was going to collect.

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Later that night

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Willow knocked on the door to Buffy's room, and smiled as Giles joined her.

The blonde slayer let them both in, her face still a little pale.

"Dawn talked to you as well?" Willow asked, knowing the answer, but wanting to start the conversation some where.

Buffy and Giles both nodded their agreement.

"What are you going to do?"

Buffy took a deep breath. "Rein in my homicidal instincts," she smiled slightly. "It was a hell of a shock to realize that my little sister was more grown up than I was. I had trouble telling mom about Riley, after I had been dating him for ages, never mind telling her beforehand."

Buffy took a deep breath. "Then I am going to try and explain why I've acted like I have for the past few years, and apologize. Then, I'm going to try and prove to Dawn that I am grown up as well, and thank him for everything he has done for me since we met, for saving my life and for going above and beyond friendship, despite what I put him through. I'm going to try and have an adult conversation with him for the first time. I just hope he accepts my apology, and that it isn't too late."

Buffy looked up, and met her Watcher's eyes. "I need to apologize to you as well. I should have staked Spike from the start, and listened to what you said. I'm sorry."

A second later, the Slayer was hugging her watcher tightly, crying on his shoulder.

He awkwardly patted her on the back, his forgiveness for the closest thing to a daughter he had, given automatically.

Buffy reached out and pulled Willow into the hug, and the two girls spent a few minutes apologizing to Giles.

Willow leaned back. "I'm going to apologize to Xander as well, for everything, and then I'm going to spend the rest of my life being the very best friend that Xander should have." Her voice was clear and calm, her decision made.

"Kennedy?"

"Kennedy will either accept it, or leave. For too long I've have put everyone in front of Xander, and he has stuck by me regardless. The very thought of Xander not being there for me terrifies me more than anything else. Dawn pointed out how close I was to him being gone for ever, and it made me think."

"What do you think of Xander and Dawn being together?" Giles asked the two girls.

"It's going to take some getting used to," Buffy admitted. "Xander and my little sister. But, it's what she wants. Of course, if he hurts her, friend or no friend, I will kill him."

Willow laughed softly, and corrected her, "You'll shout and get him to explain, but nothing more. He's my friend, remember?" Her voice had just a touch of warning in it, carefully letting Buffy know that, as his friend, she would protect him.

"Mine too, Will. Mine too."

The three of them spent the rest of the evening talking about the past, and re-affirming their friendships to each other.

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Dawn picked up the phone and dialed a number from memory.

"It's Dawn," she introduced herself.

"Well, come on. Tell me, how did it go?" The voice on the other end was excited.

"Perfectly."

"Way to go, Dawn," the voice yelled triumphantly.

"I can't thank you enough. Everything went just as planned."

The smug smile was visible through the phone. "Of course it did. Did Xander like the underwear?"

"Oh yeah," Dawn's voice had a new layer of confidence to it, that of a female who now knew, without a shadow of a doubt, that she was attractive to the man she was in love with. "I was so nervous when I took off my dress, I almost ran to the bathroom and puked. Then I kissed him, and for a second he didn't kiss back, and I was about to burst into tears, when he grabbed me, threw me on the bed and kissed me, then did this thing with his tongue."

"I knew he'd love the underwear, I have impeccable taste. And yes, that boy can certainly kiss. You're lucky, Dawn."

"I know."

"So, did you? You know?"

"Nope," Dawn replied. "I was more than willing. Hell, the way he was making me feel, I'd've done anything. He said that it was the wrong place and a little too early in our relationship."

"You weren't disappointed?"

"A little, but hey, I was just happy to have a relationship. The rest can wait." She paused, thinking for a second. "Not for long, though. Oh God, can he kiss."

"What about Buffy, Giles and Willow?"

"I used all the arguments and tactics you gave me, everything. I then switched subjects quickly and asked them for any reasons for me and Xan not to date. They were so busy thinking about everything else, they couldn't come up with anything serious."

"That's because there isn't a real reason," the voice interrupted.

"I left them so stunned that they only put up a small fuss about it. They had no idea that I knew anything about what happened back then. Thank you for answering that email and for everything you have done for me since. Oh, and thank Angel for me, for telling me about some of that stuff as well."

"Dawn, it was more than a pleasure to make friends with you, especially now you've grown out of the bratty stage," Dawn could hear the teasing in the voice. "Besides, I'd wanted to say that stuff to the Buffy and Willow for ages, at least this way I did it by proxy. Just do me one favor though?"

"What's that?"

"Bring Xander to see me."

"I will, Cordy, I will."