

# All In



What happens in Vegas doesn't always stay there. Can Sookie and Eric beat the odds or will their house of cards come tumbling down? Rated M for later chapters. AH/AU

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## Chapter 1: Chapter 1

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### Chapter 1

#### SPOV

As my mind slowly became conscious, I was sure my brain had been invaded by a miniscule version of The Blue Man Group and, given the level of pounding going on, they were giving one hell of a performance inside of my head. My eyes were crusted shut while my body felt like I'd been hit by a freight train, so I lay still, waiting for something to flit through my brain that would give me a clue as to why I felt this way.

The band was still going strong in my head, but I was able to piece together a little bit of the day before. I remembered driving to Vegas from L.A. with my best friend, and former college (and current) roommate, Amelia. On paper, our friendship shouldn't have worked. I was as straight laced as they came having grown up in a small town in Northern Louisiana, raised by my strict but loving grandmother. My brother Jason was one of the most popular kids in school, as the captain of the football team, but I was more of a nerd with my nose always stuck in a book. My nerdy ways got me a full scholarship to UCLA where I majored in Early Education, but Jason ended up having his knee blown out in his senior year of high school during the last game of the season and, with his less than stellar grades, he lost his only shot at getting a scholarship himself.

I met Amelia on the first day I had arrived at college when I walked into our dorm room and saw her dancing around the room in nothing more than her underwear while setting her things up on one side of the room. At least I'd *thought* they were her underwear, but I quickly learned that she was actually *dressed*. Like to go out. In public. I was worried that we'd have a difficult time surviving the year together in the same dorm room (I later learned from Amelia she'd had the same worries), but it didn't take long for us to bond like long lost sisters. Where I was introverted, she was extroverted. I was low key and she was high strung. I'd been raised with very little extras and she'd been given anything and everything she'd ever wanted. I had one steady boyfriend, and then fiancé, all through college while she went through men and women left and right. We were polar opposites, but she was the yin to my yang and we quickly became inseparable. I was there for her when her mother lost her battle with breast cancer our freshman year and she was there for me when I'd learned, after graduation, my fiancé had been playing me for a fool, openly cheating with anything with a pair of breasts the entire three years we'd been together.

That was a year ago. After we broke up I was lucky to have Amelia in my life to move in with because I couldn't afford a place of my own. I'd picked up a waitressing job when full time teaching jobs were more difficult to come by than I'd imagined, so when I'd applied for a position teaching kindergarten at the prestigious private school to the rich and famous, The Brigant Academy, I didn't even expect a call from them, much less an actual interview. I use the term 'interview', but it was more like getting a top secret clearance into a military think tank where all of our nation's secrets are stored. They did in depth background checks, credit checks, and interviewed practically everyone I've ever known from the time I could walk. They took their jobs seriously and being with the children of Hollywood's most elite movers and shakers on a daily basis, they couldn't afford to have anyone who led a questionable lifestyle near them. I'd never gotten so much as a note sent home from my teacher, so I passed their checks with flying colors and I'd just gotten the news that I was officially hired. Once I passed a probationary period of one full school year my position would become permanent, but until then I would be under scrutiny. I wasn't worried though, I was as vanilla as they came.

Amelia and I squealed after hearing the news, jumping all around her condo, when she convinced me to take a drive out to Las Vegas to celebrate. It was a Friday, and now that I knew I had a decent paycheck I'd start earning the following Monday I figured I could afford to splurge some and agreed. We laughed and sang the whole way there and ended up at the Bellagio where her father, a prominent business man named Copley Carmichael, had a fully comp'd high roller suite that Amelia was free to use.

I've never been much of a drinker, which Amelia knows, but I swallowed the two gin and tonics she'd thrust into my hand fairly quickly while we decided what we'd be doing for the night. I had to drink two more before she could convince me to wear one of her outfits instead of one of the many sundresses that were a staple in my closet. Unfortunately, the last thing I remembered was going downstairs to get some dinner, but I was pretty sure my dinner consisted of salt, tequila and lemon wedges which explained the massive case of cotton mouth I had going on in addition to the drumming inside my head.

I'd never had a hangover before so I wasn't sure if the fact that every muscle in my body ached was normal. It felt like I'd spent hours at the gym the day before and now my body was paying the price. I couldn't remember ever feeling that bad and as soon as I could move more than my finger I was going to put a beat down on Amelia for getting me drunk. Growing up Jason Stackhouse's sister had taught me a thing or two about winning a fight.

I shifted slightly and could feel that I was lying down on something both soft and hard. My weight was resting on my left side, under which was the 'soft', but the front of my body was draped over something 'hard'. My whole body felt flushed and sticky and when I tried to lift my head I could feel the puddle of drool that had formed underneath my chin. That explained why my mouth was so dry.

I was in the middle of trying to convince my muscles that our bladder *really* needed for them to get up now when the something 'hard' underneath me moved. A screech left my throat as I sprang up and away, landing with a thud on the floor. I quickly rubbed the crust from my eyes only to see that I was completely naked and I screamed again, ripping the top sheet from the bed in front of me to quickly cover up.

"Quit yelling..." the something 'hard' gruffed out, his voice muffled by the pillow on top of his face.

I scrambled on the floor, wrapping the sheet around my body as tightly as I could, and looked up to see the most perfect male specimen lying completely naked on the bed. He must have been well over six feet tall and his body was long and lean with washboard abs and a perfectly cut 'V' leading from his hips downward. His arms were bent with his hands hidden underneath his head, but I could still see his biceps bulging from their position and since his head was covered by the pillow, I only knew he was a natural blond by the hairs surrounding the base of his...man bits. I was no virgin, but *damn*, he had a monster going on down there and he wasn't even aroused.

I racked my brain, but nowhere in its recesses could I remember a naked man from the night before. I also noticed the telltale signs from both his body and the fitted sheet below that sex had occurred. My hand immediately shot in between my legs where I discovered evidence that the sex had occurred with *me*. I ripped the sheet open so I could see it with my own eyes and said, "Shit!" after coming into visual contact with the gross crusty confirmation stuck to the insides of my inner thighs.

"Shh..." said the pillow.

"You SSSHHHH!" I hissed, both in a panic and in pain from my still throbbing head. "And can you *please* cover yourself? Who are you?" I asked. My whole body was still flushed crimson, but I didn't know if it was from embarrassment or the alcohol. I spied a couple of empty bottles of champagne on the floor at the foot of the bed and suspected it was a mixture of both.

He slowly slid the pillow from his head down to his stomach, coming nowhere near close to covering his privates with it, but even with his eyes still closed I had no doubt in my mind of who was lying there. He'd been my ultimate fantasy boyfriend from the time I was ten and first saw him playing the bad boy with a good heart in my favorite weekly sitcom. My bedroom walls back at Gran's house were still wallpapered with his posters that I collected from every teen magazine I could lay my hands on at the time and my school binders were covered with his name scrawled across every bare inch, only I added a 'Mrs.' in front of it and dotted the letter 'i' with a heart.

Eric Northman.

"Fuck me..." I whispered. What were the odds? Since I was in Vegas, I was sure there was someone around that could tell me. Eric Northman had been acting from the time he was in diapers and I'd seen everything he'd ever been in. His fame started with that first sitcom and skyrocketed from there. He was in movie after movie all through his teens and early adulthood until he became a part of the partying crowd in Hollywood. It was rumored he started showing up late, and still inebriated, to the movie he'd been filming at the time and it showed in his acting once the movie came out. The critics panned it and he seemed to start on a downward spiral from there. He'd been linked with actresses, models, and porn stars in every gossip magazine in the country until he'd been the cause of a near fatal car accident while drunk. He was shipped off to rehab where he stayed for a month and when he got out, it seemed like he'd gotten his act together.

I'd never stopped thinking he was dreamy, but he was just a fantasy so I could omit his douchebaggery from my imagination. Living in L.A., it was hard *not* to know what was going on with celebrities, but I hadn't paid any significant amount of attention to Eric Northman once I'd started college. I knew he was currently on another sitcom that was fairly popular, but I hadn't seen it. Rumors were circulating again that he'd fallen off the wagon and I knew the paparazzi followed him around like he was Princess Diana reincarnated. I also knew from killing time in the grocery store checkout lane that he'd started playing in celebrity poker tournaments, so maybe that was why he was in Vegas. But why was he naked in my bed?

I looked around again and it took a minute for me to realize that while the suite we were in was practically identical to the one I was staying in with Amelia, this one was littered with men's clothing; I assumed they were his.

He still hadn't opened his eyes or moved another muscle so I assumed he'd fallen back asleep. I thought that was a *good* thing so I looked around for my clothes, thinking I could just slip them back on and right on out of his room before my fantasy boyfriend was ruined with reality douchebaggery. I spotted the slutty dress Amelia had convinced me to wear dangling at the foot of the bed, but as soon as I took a step in that direction the soreness between my legs made its

presence known again. My brain was firing on more cylinders, now that I was awake, and the fact I'd had sex with Eric Northman, whether or not I could remember it, sunk in. Eric Northman that dated *porn stars*. I was sticky down there and *he* appeared to be as well.

"FUCK!" I yelled frantically searching the floor and bed for any signs condoms had been used. He groaned again and shifted the pillow back over his head, but otherwise stayed silent while I played 'Where's the wrapper' all by my lonesome. I shuffled into the bathroom and checked the empty trashcan, even holding it upside down in case my alcohol soaked brain missed the condoms or wrappers that may have been hidden inside its pristine interior. Nothing. Nada. Zilch. What were the odds he *didn't* have any STD's? Yet another question to ask the mystery Las Vegas odds maker.

I shrieked again when I saw the massive case of sex hair adorning my head. As if I didn't have enough going on, the tequila from the night before decided it had overstayed its welcome and I barely made it to the toilet in time for it to bid me a not so fond adieu.

Once I was done making my offering to the porcelain God, I went back to the sink and washed my face before grabbing one of the complimentary toothbrushes to scrape the ick from my teeth and mouth. I had decided to just chalk the night up to my one single solitary skeleton in my closet that I would take to the grave. I could just imagine what would happen if Niall Brigant, the school's headmaster, found out about what happened. But if he did at least I could ask *him* what happened, since I was still pretty much clueless, before he fired me.

I was attempting to straighten my sex hair with my hands using water from the sink when an unexpected flash of color caught my eye in my reflection. Looking down, I saw on my left hand ring finger black cursive script at the base where a ring would sit. The tattoo said '*Eric's*' and the 'i' was dotted with a red heart.

I barely made it back to the toilet before the gin and tonics abandoned me too.

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## Chapter 2: Chapter 2

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### Chapter 2

#### EPOV

I thought waking up to the screaming was bad, but I'd take that any day to waking up to the sound of someone calling Ralph on the big white phone in the bathroom. My head was pounding and the inside of my mouth felt like sandpaper so I held the pillow tighter over my head trying to piece together the night before while the screamer continued calling dinosaurs in their native language from the next room.

Alcide and I had gotten to Vegas a little before 8 the night before. Technically, he was my personal assistant, but in reality Alcide's job was to keep my ass out of trouble. He worked

directly for my father, who was also my agent, so I couldn't fire him no matter how many times I'd tried to in the past. It took close to a year and a trip into rehab before I finally started doing things his way.

The public knew I'd gone into rehab after that horrific car crash thinking my only problem was with alcohol, but the truth was the coke with my rum wasn't a carbonated soda but a powdered version instead. I don't know how my father and Pam, my publicist, were able to hide my cocaine addiction from the public, but they did. It took a lot of effort on both of their parts to get directors to even meet with me after that, so I really had to stay on the straight and narrow until I was able to land the lead in another sitcom. I tried to view it as a stepping stone to get back into feature films, but the truth was I hated it. The money was good, great even once we got to be number one in our time slot, but I wanted to do movies, not feed the audience one liners with a cocked eyebrow for laughs.

Alcide turned out to be a nice guy and became one of my closest friends, but he still had a job to do and usually could be both my friend and handler at the same time. He was always quick to get rid of the hangers on who attempted to stay around long enough for the 15 minutes of fame they might get for merely being in my presence and the countless women who wanted me not only for the fame, but for my money as well. I was pretty good about dropping money while drunk or high and the amount I'd spent on girls I knew only in the carnal sense during those times was staggering; at least that's how my father worded it.

Alcide and I ended up bonding over poker games during my straight and narrow stint which led to me hosting games at my house in the Hollywood Hills once or twice a week. I was a pretty good player and famous enough that I was able to snag an invite to some of the celebrity poker tournaments they held in Las Vegas, which was why I was in town now. And while Alcide's main job was to keep me away from blow and those who might have it, he usually didn't let me get so drunk that I couldn't remember the night before. However, the fact remained, I *couldn't* remember the night before and I had no idea who was in the bathroom, but the sound of the toilet flushing and the water running in the sink gave me high hopes their expedition in uneating was over.

I sat up, immediately regretting it when the room spun, and closed my eyes with my face buried in my hands waiting for it to stop. Why was it you were so much more in tune with the earth spinning on its axis when you had excess alcohol in your system?

"Holy shit! You have one too!" the mystery yacker's voice shrieked from the bathroom doorway.

I'd planned on slowly peeking through my fingers to make sure the room had stopped spinning, but apparently she had other ideas because my left hand was ripped from my face and I opened my eyes to see the top of a blond head peering down at the top of my hand.

"Yes, I was born with *two* of them," I said snatching it back and waving both hands in her face, "they came as a matching set."

Even with the horrified look on her face she was still smoking hot and the sheet wrapped tightly around her hinted at a curvaceous figure. It was a shame that I didn't remember fucking her because I was sure I had a great time doing it. Wanting to refresh my memory of her naked body, I felt my eyebrow rise up along with another part of my anatomy, her hurl-fest and my hangover long forgotten, and asked, "What was your name again sweetheart?"

Her horrified expression turned into incredulity before morphing into disgust (as an actor I pay attention to those things) before she spat out, "It's right there on your finger! Read it for yourself!"

What was she, 12? Who else writes on other people's hands but 12 year olds? I looked down and spotted what she was referring to.

"What does that say?" I asked. I licked my finger with my nonexistent spit, but when I tried to rub the ink away I noticed the skin was tender and the ink wasn't coming off.

"It says 'Sookie's'."

"What the fuck is a 'Sookie'?"

An outraged gasp preceded her angry reply. "*I'm Sookie!*" My gaze met hers and I was temporarily thrown by how beautiful her blue eyes were until she dropped them to her feet and mumbled out, "Nice to meet you."

I couldn't help laughing at how innocent she seemed, blush and all, but I knew that couldn't be the case if she was naked in my hotel room. I might not remember the details, but I had no doubts about the crux of what occurred the night before. My sticky johnson was all the proof I needed.

I turned on the charm hoping to get her to agree to an encore performance and purred out, "Nice to meet you *Sookie*. Why don't you come back to bed and we can get to know each other a little better."

"Does *that* not bother you at all?" she asked pointing down at where she'd obviously drawn her name on my ring finger. Who else but a girl would make the two 'o's' in their name into hearts? I was about to make a crude comment about if it was her finger, then it belonged on or in her, but she beat me to the punch saying, "Because *mine* bothers *me!*"

I looked at the hand she was waving around, but I had to snatch it out of the air and hold it still to be able to make out what it said. I grinned seeing 'Eric's' and pulled her hand towards my dick saying, "Well if it's mine, then it belongs with me."

"Asshole!" she yelled pulling her hand away.

"What's the problem?" I asked. "It's pretty obvious we've already fucked, so why can't we do it again?"

"Yeah, about that...do you have any STD's I need to be concerned with?" She was wearing a pissed face now so I doubted I'd be getting any.

If that was the case, I had no more use for her so I went back to trying to get the ink off of my skin and replied, "Not that it's any of *your* fucking business, but no, I do *not* have any STD's. I never head into any port in a storm without my jacket on my johnson." She was hot enough that I probably would've kept her around for the weekend, but her attitude was grating on my last nerve. I'd find pussy elsewhere.

"That's just *fabulous*," she said sarcastically. "Would you mind pointing out where this invisible *jacket* is because it would *really* ease my mind."

The ink wasn't budging at all and it was really starting to piss me off. The last thing I wanted to do was sit at a poker table with fucking hearts drawn all over my finger. "What kind of fucking ink did you use?"

"Ha!" she said, again with the sarcasm. "*I* didn't do that...at least I don't *think* I did." I looked up when she sighed and noted again how pretty she was as she ran her hand through her fucked up hair before she admitted, "I really don't remember much of anything from last night, but I'm almost positive that these," she pointed to our hands, "are tattoos. And I can't find a wrapper or a rubber anywhere so unless they're all hiding underneath your naked ass, I don't think we used any."

*Fuckity fuckity fuck fuck fuck!* I never fucked without protection. NEVER! I hopped out of bed and went to my suitcase knowing I had a brand new box of them packed away inside and prayed for the best. My heart sank when I pulled the new unopened box of condoms from my bag and dropped it onto the dresser saying, "Fuck..."

I eyed this Sookie person in front of me and wondered what God awful diseases she might be carrying and made a mental note to kick Alcide's ass when I saw him later. Where the fuck was he when I was fucking this chick without a rubber on? A part of my hungover brain knew it wasn't, nor would it ever be, part of Alcide's job to cover my dick in latex, but still...*where the fuck was he?*

"Great, that's just great!" she ranted, her southern accent becoming more prominent with her anger. "You *always* cover your *johnson* huh? Are you sure about that? Because God knows you've been pictured with enough skanks over the years so I have a right to know what you could've potentially passed on to me."

What in the hell? She was like an angry kitten and it was kind of turning me on, but her words were pissing me the fuck off. "I assure you *sweetheart*, I'm clean. I get tested regularly, but what about you? You're quick to throw my morals under the bus along with proclaiming my choice of dates as 'skanks', but the fact remains that we don't know each other and yet here *you* are wearing nothing more than my cum and a sheet. So *you* tell *me* who the skank is."



She moved pretty quickly for an angry kitten because I felt the slap across my face without ever seeing her hand move from her side and she angrily choked out an obligatory, "Fuck you!"

I watched her snatch her clothes from the end of the bed and as she stomped into the bathroom I called out, "You already did, but it must not have been any good since I can't remember it!" The only response I got was her slamming the door behind her.

The slamming and yelling had brought my headache back to the forefront of my mind so I crawled back into bed so I could sleep it off once Skankerella (I dubbed her princess of the skanks in my mind) left my room. I heard the bathroom door open up a minute later and the sound of her breath hitching in her throat made me look over at her. I wished I hadn't because the sight of her tears made me feel even worse, but I stayed quiet figuring it was all a lost cause anyway knowing I was the last person she would want comfort from. Besides, I wasn't the comforting type.

I closed my eyes again once she made it through the bedroom door, but the sound of multiple voices made them open back up. It sounded as though she was arguing with someone so I felt better thinking it wasn't just *me* she was a bitch to. I almost closed them again, but I heard footsteps heading my way moments before Alcide strolled through the door.

"Why do you have a black eye?" I asked him. His left eye was swollen and black and blue, but I didn't remember him having it the night before. He'd gotten into more than one shoving match with the paparazzi that perpetually followed me everywhere I went and figured he got too close and personal with another camera.

He had the nerve to look at me as though I should know, but then his expression turned sullen before grabbing a pair of my track pants from the drawer and throwing them at me saying, "Get dressed and come out into the living room." He turned and left the room before I could ask any more questions so I got up and went to the bathroom to drain my bladder and brush my teeth before pulling on the pants and a t-shirt and heading into the next room. I was greeted by the sight of Alcide sitting on one couch facing the opposite couch where my one night stand and another chick were sitting side by side.

Sookie was crying on the other girl's shoulder, literally, and my guilt came back tenfold so I ignored them, pretending I didn't see them, and took a seat next to Alcide asking, "What's going on?"

"After the stunt you pulled last night, you have the balls to ask me 'What's going on?' I'll tell you what's going on, the shit has hit the fan thanks to you and you're missus over there, so now we need to circle the wagons and figure out where we go from here."

I must have killed more brain cells than I'd thought because I could have sworn he referred to Sookie as my 'missus'. She must have been missing the same number of brain cells because I saw her head shoot up in my peripheral right before she screamed, "What?"

Her friend sat back and stuck her finger in her ear saying, "Keep it down for God's sake Sook, I had a bit too much cheer myself last night."

Sookie looked at her like a deer caught in the headlights saying, "But he said 'missus!'" We both looked down at our tattooed fingers before looking up at each other and I ended up thinking out loud when I said, "Fuck my life."

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### Chapter 3: Chapter 3

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### Chapter 3

#### SPOV

I stared back at Eric not really believing what I was hearing. *Married? To Eric Northman? Me?* It was what I'd wanted from the time I was ten years old all the way until I grew the hell up and the phrase *'Be careful what you wish for'* briefly popped into my brain. But I'd always imagined I would wear a white gown befitting a princess surrounded by my friends and family and looking down at the scarlet red hooker dress stretched across my body with my cleavage nearly spilling out looked nothing like the fantasy visions I'd created in my mind as a child. In my fantasy I would have worn a bra and underwear at least and would have known more about the groom than what I'd read in gossip magazines. Neither was true in this case, so reality was nothing like my fantasy.

My tears from Eric's harsh rebuke moments earlier were cut off with my disbelief and I looked over at Amelia saying, "Tell me this is a horrible joke." I scanned the room for hidden cameras praying for Ashton Kutcher to walk out of the closet proclaiming us officially Punk'd and then set my gaze back on her.

Before she could even answer my question I could see from her chagrined expression that it wasn't a joke as she squeaked, "I'm sorry hon, but you really did get married to this jackass last night," with her finger pointing at said jackass in confirmation. Amelia knew all about my childhood obsession with Eric, having tortured me relentlessly after tagging along to visit Gran one summer and seeing his posters adorning my bedroom walls. She let me know how much of a loser my choice in fantasy husbands was every time his name came up in the news with yet more proof of his dumbshitness.

All I could see was visions of pink slips raining down on me as Niall Brigant had me blacklisted from ever working in my chosen profession and I ended up running the register at the Grab It Qwik back home, fighting Maudette Pickens for the attentions of every random truck driver that stopped off the interstate to fill up their gas tank. My brain revolted at the idea and kicked into high gear to try and figure a way out of the mess my life had quickly become.

"We can get it annulled!" I shouted. I knew we weren't the first pair of dipshits to get married in Vegas while being drunk enough to have the entire event blocked from our sober consciousness. "No one has to know it ever happened and we can just pretend it never did!"

The man that had walked into the hotel room with Amelia decided to squash my hopes quickly saying, "Too late for that." I was waiting for him to elaborate, but instead he opened a laptop that was sitting on the coffee table in between the two couches we sat upon and with a simple click of the mouse my life was flushed down the toilet.

I watched in horror at the video playing on TMZ's website of Eric and me stumbling out of the casino the night before with each of us rubbing our bodies against the other like two cats in heat when Eric turned to the throng of paparazzi shouting, "You're all invited! We're getting married!" The jerks in the crowd actually cheered while my eyes were temporarily blocked by more imaginary pink slips. No matter how much I wanted to shut my eyes and will it all away like a bad dream, I couldn't stop watching the train wreck playing out before me.

"Was it love at first sight?" one of them shouted back.

Before Eric had a chance to respond, my big mouth opened proclaiming, "I've always loved Eric." I was thankful I'd already emptied my stomach or else I would have covered the table in vomit.

"And I love you!" Eric said before attempting to eat my face with the world witnessing it all. Our sighs from where we sat on the opposing couches were simultaneous, creating a Dolby surround sound effect that would've been comical in any other circumstance.

In the next frame, the man sitting next to Eric could be seen approaching us from behind and pulling Eric's head down as he said something furiously in his ear. Eric's face became enraged before he turned and punched him in the face causing him to fall back onto the sidewalk with poor Amelia cushioning his fall. I could see her rubbing her backside next me just watching it when Eric said, "What did you say that made me hit you?" to the guy next to him.

My outrage was only tempered by his apologetic glance my way when he answered, "That I wouldn't let you throw your life away on an easy piece of ass no matter how hot she was."

Amelia must have missed the look because she stood up in her furious defense of how my ass wasn't normally so easy. "Is *that* what you said last night asshole? I'll have you know that other than fucktard over there, only one other person has had a piece of that ass!"

I usually appreciated that Amelia spoke her mind no matter the occasion, but in this one instance I was completely mortified that she spilled my limited sexual history to virtual strangers and all I could do was say, "AMELIA!"

As usual, she saw nothing wrong with what she had divulged to 'asshole' and 'fucktard' so her only response was, "What? It's the truth! Hell Sook, you haven't even had sex in over a year so you are by no means 'easy!'"

It was officially the worst day of my adult life and all I could do was bury my head in my hands pleading, "Sweet Jesus, would you *please* shut your pie hole now?"

The sounds of squealing tires from the laptop caught my attention and I looked up to see there was even more video of my monumental swan dive into the pits of Hell. I sat silently dumbstruck as my wedding played out for the world to see on the internet. Apparently after Eric had punched 'asshole', the two of us jumped into a waiting taxicab and the paparazzi followed us to an all night wedding chapel. Eric questioned the cameramen present asking which ones were happy that we were getting married and the first two that raised their hands got to be our witnesses. *How touching.*

And to cap off every bride's wish on her most special day, I got to repeat my sacred vows of promising to love, honor, and cherish my intended for as long as I lived, to a man dressed as Elvis, but could clearly be heard at the beginning of the ceremony saying, "Just call me Bubba." *Of course... Bubba.* Another quick glance around the room left me disappointed when Ashton Kutcher hadn't materialized out of thin air. He repo'd Justin Timberlake's house a few years earlier, so surely, with a little creative computer animation, he could have set this up too, right?

The video changed to us emerging from the 'Love Me Tender Wedding Chapel', *classy*, to the waiting paparazzi who'd been too slow to raise their hands to witness the blessed event firsthand, but Eric was quick to fill them in by twirling me around (ala *Dancing With the Stars* style, but with an added *World's Dumbest* vibe) at his side announcing, "May I present to you, Mrs. Eric Northman!"

I actually squealed in the video. Loudly. Jumping up and down in my whorish white trash dress. The only thing I could be thankful for was that my boobs didn't come out of the top and say 'Hi!' to the crowd.

"Let's see the ring!" one of the spectators yelled making Eric spin around to face me, kissing my left hand and saying, "She'll get her ring from Rodeo Drive when we get back home. My Sookie deserves the best."

I saw Eric's face rise up from his spot on the couch across from me with a glare in his eyes before the sound of my voice on the video made us both look back down at the laptop. I watched Drunk Sookie grab Drunk Eric's head and pull him down for another sloppy kiss before saying, "Baby, I don't need a ring. I just need you." *Maybe I was wrong; I think I had a little bit left in my stomach that could possibly be making an appearance.*

"See? That's why she's perfect!" Drunk Eric professed. "She doesn't love me for my fame or money, she loves me for me." That led to even sloppier kisses with each of us asserting our *love* was forever. It was like a bad Lifetime movie and after school special all rolled into one. I briefly wondered if the Grab It Qwik was hiring.

It was hard to tell who saw it first, but Drunk Sookie and Eric took off running hand in hand across the street to an open tattoo parlor. It was too small for the crowd to follow us inside, but that didn't stop them from filming us through the glass storefront as we had each other's name

and claim permanently etched onto our bodies. I found it ironic that Eric was both literally and figuratively under my skin. We were just exiting the tattoo parlor when Amelia and 'asshole' came running into view and the looks of disapproval were evident from both of them once they'd learned what we'd done. They pushed us into a waiting limo, jumping in behind us, and the video's parting shot was of us taking off down the strip.

Seeing the video graphic evidence of the ceremony, followed by getting our matching tattoos and with our tongues stuck down each other's throats at every opportunity was humiliating. The ultimate culmination of my one lapse in judgment would be appearing on the Jerry Springer show to learn he was my brother/cousin or some other southern stereotype. I could fight a crack whore on stage for his affections while the audience chanted, "Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!"

"Maybe no one will see it?" I asked aloud, not believing the wishful words as they left my mouth.

Asshole spoke up saying, "It's the top story on every news station and the video has gone viral. The news of your marriage is on CNN's tickertape and if you hadn't gotten married in the middle of the night, your pictures would be on the front page of every major newspaper in the country today. As it is, you'll be in tomorrow's edition." He looked at Eric adding, "You made Charlie Sheen yesterday's news, congrats."

Eric ran his hands through his hair looking utterly defeated before asking, "What do we do now Alcide?"

Asshole/Alcide looked at Amelia and I with his eyebrows furrowed and a distrustful look on his face before he leaned in and began a whispered conversation with Eric. I found it rude, but I had enough problems of my own that I didn't really care. Turning to Amelia I asked, "What have I done?"

She reached out and tucked my hair behind my ear saying, "We'll figure it out." She smiled and attempted to lighten my mood adding, "I've been telling you to loosen up for years Sook, but I didn't mean for you to do it all in one night."

"God...I'm going to get fired before ever starting my job," I whined.

"Maybe not," she responded unconvincingly. I watched her hesitantly reach into her back pocket and pull out my cell phone. As she handed it over she said, "It started ringing nonstop this morning, but I just let the calls go to voicemail."

I checked the missed calls seeing numerous ones from Gran and Jason, even one from my ex, John Quinn, who I hadn't spoken to since we broke up a year earlier, but none from The Brigant Academy so maybe I wasn't fired just yet. Or maybe they just wanted to shitcan me face to face. Niall's position as Headmaster had me wanting to call him Professor Dumbledore from the first time I'd met him, so the idea of him poofing me out of the school with a wave of his magic wand was easy for me to visualize.

"What job?" Asshole/Alcide asked breaking into my reverie.

I wanted to snap back that it wasn't any of their business, but seeing how Eric and I were *married* I didn't see a way around it. "I'm supposed to start teaching kindergarten at The Brigant Academy on Monday morning, but after this whole fiasco I'll be lucky if they let me through the doors long enough to give me my termination papers."

The calculated look on his face made me wary and wondering what on earth he was thinking when he said, "If it wasn't in your contract that you had to remain single, they can't fire you for getting married."

"No, but they can fire me for my *questionable lifestyle* once our annulment confirms everything on that video was a giant drunken mistake."

His face remained thoughtful when he looked over at Eric saying, "Maybe we can spin this mess, but it'll take some careful planning." He was silent for another moment when his phone vibrated on the table. Checking his messages, he slowly shook his head before looking back at Eric and saying, "Prepare yourself, she's on her way up to the room now."

Eric buried his head in his hands, his new tattoo displayed prominently, and mumbled, "It's too early to be Pam'd."

I was confused... was it a person or an action? A noun or a verb? I was completely fed up with everything and everyone by that point. Just thirty minutes earlier I'd been asleep, blissfully unaware of the shitstorm we'd created the night before, so I rephrased my fucktarded husband's earlier question and asked, "What the fuck is a Pam?"

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## Chapter 4: Chapter 4

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### Chapter 4

#### EPOV

There was no way to describe Pam. She was something you had to experience for yourself before you could truly understand; like a rollercoaster or skydiving, except not fun or thrilling. More like explosive diarrhea after eating a shitload of lethally hot buffalo wings and your ass felt like it was on fire, burning hot enough to make tears stream down your face on its way out. That was Pam.

Besides, I didn't feel like talking to her fucking bitchified ass, so I completely ignored her question. I was still dumbstruck from witnessing at least part of what had happened last night and if I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I never would have believed it. I had never been so drunk that I didn't remember even one iota of the night before, which was really something considering how much I've put away in the past. If I'd been told the possibility existed that this

could be a consequence of drinking back in rehab, I would have become a lifetime teetotaler. Or, at least, I would have limited my drinking to when I was at home.

I stared back down at her name tattooed on my finger, fucked up hearts and all, while still having no clue what the fuck a 'Sookie' was. Maybe her parents were hippies, or retarded, or just plain fucking demented. Looking over at her again objectively, I had to admit she was hot. Smokin' hot. Her hair and tits looked natural, which was a rarity in my world, but I'd been with far more beautiful women before and I didn't marry any of them. She didn't look familiar at all so I doubted we'd met prior to last night and unless we fucked at some point prior to leaving the casino, which while possible was still doubtful, we'd gotten married before we even had sex. *Maybe she'd given me the best blow job of my life under the poker table and my drunken brain thought that was a good enough reason? She must have no gag reflex and actually swallowed.*

I found those thoughts distracting so I quickly refocused. As bad as the paparazzi videos had been, I wished someone had filmed what happened *inside* the casino so I could try and figure out what would have made me lose my mother fucking mind if it wasn't because of an orgasm to end all orgasms. I didn't have time to continue contemplating my literally blushing bride, she'd stayed nearly as red as her dress the entire time we were watching the video, because the door to the suite opened and in walked the only woman that could make my ass pucker.

Pam.

Her high heels clacked along the marble floor to where we sat, her gaze leveled squarely on me. I had to fight the urge to cower behind Alcide because I'd never seen her as pissed off as she was right then.

"What. The. Fuck. Eric."

I tried not to flinch and just shrugged my shoulders in response mumbling, "I was drunk."

"Well there's a fucking news bulletin. Let me put on my shocked face." Her expression remained unchanged.

Pam's steely gaze was creeping me the fuck out because I had the misfortune of witnessing her unleash her wrath before. I never figured Oliver Stone would be a crier.

We remained in a stare down, waiting for the other one to blink, and when I couldn't take the heat any longer I threw Skankerella under the bus, pointing at her and saying, "It's all *her* fault!"

"*My fault?*" she shrieked in disbelief. My shoulders sagged in relief when my ploy worked and Pam's hatred was directed across from me. I figured I'd be better off if Pam could work off her head of steam on Sookie so I wouldn't have to bear the initial brunt of her anger.

"Yes *your* fault!" *Prepare to be Pam'd!* I thought sitting back with a smirk on my face and my arms folded across my chest feeling vindicated. I figured it had to have been *her* fault because I

sure as fuck wouldn't have come up with the idea to get married. I wondered if her ass was puckering.

"How is it *my* fault? I don't remember *any* of it!" she squawked.

Pam ignored her question, instead doing what she did best...she Pam'd her. "Oh please sweetheart, this is *absolutely* your fault. Eric barely has the wherewithal to decide to take a shit without being told and even then he needs someone to wipe his ass, which is why we hired Alcide," she took the opportunity to smack him up the backside of his head and I scooted a few inches farther away from her before she continued, "so trust me when I say he did *not* decide to get married; he was *convinced* to. And seeing how you're dressed, he was clearly under duress. So, what are you? A wannabe actress? A high-end escort? You look like a bumpkin, but you're wearing Dolce so it's the likely option. Or did you just shove your tits in his face and stroke his dick to get him to buy it for you so you could ditch your flip flops and commemorative Dale Earnhardt t-shirt, wanting to take a ride on the Northman gravy train?"

While I didn't like getting dragged into her tirade knowing I was perfectly capable of wiping my own ass, I kept quiet, trying my best not snicker at the shocked expressions being worn on the couch across from me, while having no doubt she was just another gold digger that I'd been fucked up enough to actually marry. Sookie and her friend looked completely stunned, so I was a little surprised when they both jumped up a second later with her friend saying, "That's MY dress!" while Sookie simultaneously yelled, "I'm not a gold digging whore!"

The three of them looked like they were about to come to blows and I already knew from experience Sookie was quick to let her slapping hands fly, but even two against one, my money was on Pam. I guessed Alcide saw the potential for violence too because he tried to diffuse the situation by saying, "Sookie's a kindergarten teacher at The Brigant Academy."

I could barely hear Sookie whisper, "Not for long..."

That brought Pam up short and seemed to do the trick with everyone's claws retracting a minute later with her only response being, "Really..." I knew her well enough to recognize the look on her face as she moved around the chess pieces in her mind and was completely caught off guard when she faced me saying, "And don't think I'm done with you! While it's a close call, you're not an officially diagnosed retard, but you *are* a rehab graduate so you *know* better than to think you can stop after a couple of drinks. We've discussed this. Many times. What do you think your father is going to have to say about it all? I would have been here sooner, but I had to stop by his house and slash his tires so he couldn't follow me out here and fuck with my spin mojo. Christ, did you even pay attention at the meeting yesterday?"

*Fuck*, my father's reaction hadn't even occurred to me and I wasn't looking forward to it now that I was reminded of him. It wouldn't be good, of that I was sure, especially after the three of us met with the studio executives for the sitcom yesterday morning. The paparazzi had been relentless ever since I got out of rehab and the executives were wary that I was starting back down the path that had led me there. Admittedly, I'd shown up unprepared for rehearsals and tapings several times recently and they attributed it to my lifestyle which was fully documented thanks to the



internet. It was more like a professional intervention kind of meeting and I was warned that I'd be written off of the show if I fucked up one more time. I was pretty sure they would consider my quickie Vegas wedding as a 'fuck up'.

"Yes, I paid attention yesterday," I admitted. I was so screwed. Pam called in a lot of favors, not only to get me on that sitcom, but so I could also meet up with the director of a surefire blockbuster movie in a few weeks to read for the lead part. I wanted that part more than anything and the thought that I'd screwed it all up bothered me more than I thought possible.

Pam forgot about me for the moment and turned back to Sookie saying, "A kindergarten teacher, huh? That's pretty *wholesome*." The way she'd said *wholesome* made it sound exactly the opposite of wholesome.

"What's your point?" she snapped back. I was kind of impressed at her gumption considering she'd just been Pam'd, but then I remembered what a bitch she was and figured it was just a part of her flawed character.

"My *point* is, my job is to keep Eric employed despite his fuckery and he committed massive amounts of fuckery last night, potentially to the detriment of his career. You enabled his fuckery therefore you owe us."

"And just what in the hell do you *think* I owe any of you?"

A small part of me was wondering what Pam had up her sleeve, but the rest of me was thinking, '*Yep, the lovely bride is still a bitch.*'

"I need you to answer some questions for me first and depending on your answers, I might have a, pardon the pun, proposal for you."

What in the hell would she want from Sookie other than her signature annulling our marriage?

I waited for Sookie to tell Pam to go fuck herself, but when she finally spoke she said, "Ask me."

"Ever been arrested?"

"No."

"Any addictions?"

"Sunbathing."

She did have a pretty nice glow about her.

"You'll age prematurely!" Pam was aghast at the idea. She wanted to be twenty-five forever, even though she was already older than that.

"I could get hit by a bus tomorrow. I doubt they'll care how old I look when they're scraping me off the pavement."

Shaking it off, the thought of aging prematurely, not getting hit by a bus, Pam continued.

"Former marriages?"

She sighed before answering, "No."

"Why did you sigh?"

"Why does it matter? Why do any of these questions matter?"

Pam shot me a look I knew all too well. I was to remain quiet no matter what came out of her mouth, but she usually only used it when negotiating deals for me. But, there was no deal to be made here...right?

"I'd like to propose a deal with you. Eric needs to not look insane and quite frankly, he does at the moment. I asked you those questions because at this very moment your entire history is being dug into by every celebrity reporter and paparazzo you can imagine. Your friends and family are going to be offered *huge* amounts of money to offer up every skeleton you're hiding in the closet. Eric marrying *you* is a done deal, so I can't replace you. I need to know everything about you that can possibly damage Eric's reputation even further so I can minimize whatever it was."

What in the hell was Pam talking about? She made it sound like I would be staying married to that bitch which wasn't about to fucking happen.

"You make it sound like I'm staying married to that asshole," she said.

"Just for one year."

"NO!" Our screams were simultaneous.

Pam huffed before saying to Sookie, "Give us a moment please?" and then turned to me commanding, "Eric. Follow."

I would have ignored her crazy ass if I hadn't wanted to know what the fuck she was thinking so bad, so I got up and followed.

As soon as we were in the bedroom, she shut the door and asked, "Do you know what a community property state is?"

"What? What the fuck are you talking about?"

"Do you know what a prenuptial agreement is?"

I fucking hated when she answered questions with more questions. I was gearing up to let loose on her, threats of being Pam'd be damned, when her questions started to sink in. I got married without a prenup. I lived in California and since The Brigant Academy was there, she more than likely did too. She could fight me for half of everything I had.

I looked at Pam in a panic and she smiled saying, "Oh, those little hamsters are getting a real workout in there today. Now keep your mouth shut and listen; you need to make it look like you really *meant* to get married and not like you were filming your new "Eric's Gone Wild" DVD or else you might as well start working on your stand up routine because the only way you'll appear on TV again will be telling jokes about Lisa Lampanelli's ginormous twat on Comedy Central's Roast. We're going to find out what her price is and I'll negotiate it in half; she's going to move into your house; you're going to be seen taking her out to dinner, holding hands and looking all lovey dovey for the cameras; you're going to fucking look like a grown up for one whole year and then you two can have irreconcilable differences and get divorced. By then, everyone will have already seen you as stable for once in your life and you'll get the movie roles you *want* while keeping the TV job you *need*."

"But.." I began to protest, but Pam cut me off.

"Do you *want* that movie role you're reading for in a few weeks?"

*Fuck!* I was so fucking fucked!

"Yes."

Pam knew I'd caved so she merely walked back out of the bedroom without another word with me following behind her like the brainless twit I felt like. Sookie and her friend were standing in the far corner of the room having their own heated conversation, but consisting entirely of whispers. A few minutes later they seemed to have come to some sort of conclusion because they turned and came back towards us, sitting down on the couch.

Sookie spoke first asking, "For one year?"

"Yes," Pam replied coolly.

"Okay." *Okay? Was she nuts?*

"That's it?" Pam asked doubtfully.

She seemed to steel herself before answering, "No, I have conditions or else there's no deal."

I threw myself down onto the couch wondering just how much she was going to fucking cost me now. I knew there was a reason I never bought the fucking cow before.

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## Chapter 5

### SPOV

I wondered if I was in shock as I stood there, silently watching the two of them walk back into the bedroom with Pam's words still echoing around inside of my still throbbing head.

*Just for one year.*

Not fucking likely...

I was so overwhelmed having never felt such a wide range of emotions all at the same time. Between wanting to kick that bitch's ass for insinuating I was a whore (*somewhat understandable with the scarlet red hooker dress and sex hair, but still*); fighting the urge to give Eric the junk punch he deserved; feeling anxious over the status of my future employment; and agonizing over having to explain it all to Gran, all while having the hangover to end all hangovers, I was surprised I hadn't lost my mind. I was sure it was going to happen soon though.

When Alcide brought up my occupation (*Not a whore!*), I could feel the anger drain away, quickly being replaced by the fear of losing everything I'd worked for. I didn't want to watch it all slip away now; not when I was so close to finally reaching my goal. I worked hard for everything I'd ever gotten in life and it made me appreciate it all the more, so the idea of losing everything because of one stupid mistake was heartbreaking.

I hadn't really given much thought to the reasons why Pam asked the questions she did at first, just answering them on autopilot while my brain tried to sort through everything. I had my whole life planned out from the time I was a teenager and while I had to make some adjustments here and there (*Quinn being the major one*), I had pretty much stayed on track to get to where I wanted to be. Now I felt like I was drowning in water that was only ankle deep; if only I could somehow get my footing, I'd be able to save myself. I was smart, so why couldn't I figure a way out of this?

With so many emotions bubbling near the surface, I came close to losing my shit when Pam asked why I had sighed before saying I hadn't been married before. It was none of their fucking business why I'd sighed and just remembering the turmoil Quinn's numerous betrayals had put me through a year earlier had my long forgotten rage building back up to epic levels. I was certainly *over* him, but since I was already feeling utterly disgraced over the TMZ video, it was easy to fall back into the feelings of humiliation I'd experienced thanks to Quinn's infidelities.

"Earth to Sookie," I heard to my right which brought me back into the present. I barely had a chance to look up before Amelia was dragging me into the far corner while glaring at Alcide's curious expression. She started whisper talking again before I had a chance to say anything. "I think you should do it."

"Do what?" Turn back time? Because that seemed to be my only out at this point. I'm sure the DeLorean Michael J. Fox used in *Back to the Future* was in L.A. somewhere. If not, there was always Bill and Ted's phone booth, although I couldn't remember the last time I'd actually *seen* a phone booth.

"Stay married to fucktard for a year," Amelia replied to the question I'd asked, momentarily forgotten by my 80's movies flashbacks.

"Are you *insane*? Why on earth would I want to do that? Isn't my life ruined enough already?" I yelled back, also forgetting that this was supposed to be a whispered conversation even though I didn't know why.

"Because asshole was right. They can't fire you for getting married so if you two play nice until your probationary period ends, then there's no reason for them to question your morals. If you admit to drunk marrying your teenage masturbation material then you're screwed without the benefit of getting the big 'O'." She leaned closer asking, "You did get the big 'O' didn't you? I mean, you've been lusting after him since puberty so just seeing him naked should've thrown you over the edge, right?"

"Ugh..." I sighed, "I don't even remember meeting him last night much less having sex with him, but the evidence is there that we did." How could I not remember any of it? Realizing I had bigger problems than remembering whether or not he was any good in the sack, I asked, "How am I supposed to stay married to him for a year? I don't love him. Hell, I don't even like him now that I've met him."

Amelia looked at me like I was an idiot, which I couldn't really refute after seeing myself on the video from the night before. I *was* an idiot...a big one. "You don't have to like him or love him, just *act* like you do. From the sounds of it, he needs this showmance just as much as you do so if you both make the effort then you both get what you want."

"But he's a manwhore! I'm not gonna sit around pretending to be happily married when he's out screwing any wet hole he comes across. I got enough of that from Quinn, but this time the whole world would know instead of just those bitches he works with. I'm not going through that again Ames; I won't."

Quinn had really done a number on me. I first saw him at the gym I'd joined when I was a sophomore in college. I had always been curvier than most other girls, but I'd put on more than the freshman fifteen and wanted to lose it. Quinn was a personal trainer there and I was instantly smitten, but I should have known he was a shallow self-centered jerk when he didn't so much as look my way until I'd lost the weight I'd gained. I was so blindsided getting any attention from him, having thought he was out of my league, that I overlooked his constant flirting with other women. I'd watched him do it from afar for over six months and just figured it was a part of his personality, so when I was confronted by another woman at the gym telling me my now fiancé had been cheating on me the whole time we'd been together, my world fell apart. Everyone there knew what he'd been doing behind my back, but no one save her ever said a word to me. I had become a running joke amongst them, people I saw on a near daily basis, with them taking bets

on when I would finally figure it out. When I confronted him, he even had the nerve to insinuate it was my fault for not paying enough attention to him. I guess working on getting my Master's Degree and then trying to find a job was *selfish* of me.

I knew next to nothing about Eric Northman in real life, but I was certain he would *never* be faithful, real or pretend. There was no way I would go through that kind of humiliation with the world watching.

"Listen to me Sook. This whole pretend year long marriage is *their* idea, not yours. *You* hold the power here, so if you want keep him blue-balled for a year with nothing more than his right hand for relief, then make it a condition of getting you to go along with it."

"I don't know Ames, I doubt he would agree to that." We both turned when we heard Pam's heels clicking down the hall back to where we'd waited. I turned back to face Amelia silently questioning if she really thought this would work and she leaned in whispering, "It's worth a shot."

We both returned to the couch and sat down as I looked over at them asking, "For one year?" I kept trying to tell myself that it would go by quick, but I knew it would probably be more like dog years and feel like seven.

"Yes," Pam replied.

Eric's glare in my direction made me rethink the whole damn thing, but I really wanted to keep my job. If this was the only way for me to do that, then I would have to suck it up and deal.

"Okay."

Her eyebrows rose up in disbelief asking, "That's it?"

Could I really demand Eric Northman's fidelity, knowing I sure as hell wasn't going to sleep with him? Again, that is.

There was only one way to find out, so I squared my shoulders answering, "No, I have conditions or else there's no deal."

Eric huffed, throwing himself on the couch and crossed his arms across his chest like a spoiled child being told he couldn't have a cookie. I giggled inside waiting to see what his expression would be when he learned he'd have to give up more than cookies.

"We have conditions as well," she countered.

I sat back, crossing my legs as demurely as I could given the sluttiness of the dress, and said, "Let's hear them."

Pam shot Eric a look that clearly said '*Keep your mouth shut*' before looking back my way and saying, "You will move into Eric's home immediately." I opened my mouth to protest before closing it again, realizing I couldn't pretend this was a real marriage if we didn't live together. She waited until it was apparent I had nothing to say before continuing. "He has several bedrooms so you don't have to worry about that, but you *will* be seen out together holding hands and making googly eyes at each other no less than once during the week and twice on the weekends. I don't care what you do or where you go, the paparazzi will follow you everywhere so you need to *look* like this isn't the giant clusterfuck it really is. No one other than the five people in this room will know that this marriage is a sham. *No one*. After a year has passed you two can claim irreconcilable differences and get divorced. We just need a number from you to make this deal official and I'll have the contracts drawn up."

After seeing the throng of paparazzi that followed us the night before, I had no doubt we wouldn't be able to sneeze without them knowing about it. It made the idea of Eric remaining faithful all the more unlikely because if he did end up having sex with someone, it would be found out. I also wondered if I'd be able to keep the secret from Gran knowing I'd be talking to her soon enough. She could always tell whenever I tried to lie to her, but that had always been face to face, so maybe I could get away with it from afar. I knew her phone lines were probably already burning up with calls from all of her gossip mongering friends and there'd be no way she would be willing to outright lie to the everyone she knew. And my brother Jason would never be able to keep a secret with him being an even bigger gossip hound than Gran's friends.

The list of conditions from Pam ran through my mind and as much as I couldn't stand him, I could at least *pretend* to like Eric whenever we were out in public. Three times a week didn't seem *too* bad and there was no question that I would be staying in my own room if I had to live in his house. I kept my deal breaker to myself for a little while longer and asked, "Number? What, like my phone number?"

Pam rolled her eyes asking, "Are you for real?" I silently cocked my head at her in reply so she elaborated, "Money. How much money is it going to take for you to agree to this and how much will you want in the divorce?"

"I can't be bought!" I yelled, completely outraged. I thought we'd already established I *wasn't* a whore.

"Then what *do* you want?"

I looked at Eric, seeing him glaring right back at me, wanting to memorize his expression when he heard me say the words. I cleared my throat and used a tone of voice that left no question as to whether or not I was serious and said, "I want his fidelity."

It was comical really. His eyebrows furrowed like he didn't understand the word, which I kind of wondered might be the case, before his eyes got as big as saucers and his jaw hung open catching flies. I could see he had a million things dying to come out of his mouth, but in their rush to leave they'd created a traffic jam in his throat causing him to merely choke on them all.

Before he could say anything, Pam beat him to it agreeing, "Done."

That one word seemed to clear his airways because he stood up, towering over us all, yelling "No fucking way!"

"YES fucking way," she responded. "Do you really think you can get away with sticking your dick in anything you please *without* getting caught? Even if you *could* do it away from prying eyes and camera lenses, how long do you think it would be before the cum receptacle sold her story to one of the gossip magazines?"

Still in a fury, he lashed out at me asking, "Why? Do you crave my dick so bad that you want it all to yourself?"

"Hardly," I snorted, already immune to his assbattery. "Appearances are everything and I need to *appear* to be in a loving, *stable* relationship in order to have a chance at keeping my job. And, I won't be made a fool of in front of the whole world with you running around fucking anything in your path. Trust me; the only thing I want from your dick is for it to stay in your pants."

Eric continued to stare back to me with each of us eye blaming the other for our current ails. Everyone else seemed to fade away from the intensity of it all until it was just the two of us, each staring the other down with neither one of us willing to blink in concession.

I won.

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## Chapter 6: Chapter 6

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### Chapter 6

EPOV

I stared back at her trying to comprehend the fact that the life I had previously led, foolishly thinking it wasn't so great, had just been made unfathomably worse. Was it worth it? Could I give up my dreams of movie stardom and be relegated to the coveted center spot on Hollywood Squares? Did that game show even still exist? I knew the answer was 'No' to all of those questions, but I did the only thing I *could* do.

I blinked.

Pam knew me well enough from the look of defeat I wore and the sag of my shoulders that I had caved, even if I hadn't said the words out loud. In the time span of less than one hour I had learned I married a She-Devil the night before and would apparently have to stay married to her for a whole year. A whole year of my life where I couldn't cum and go as I pleased. And given the hate/hate relationship we immediately cultivated after waking up this morning, I didn't see the two of us doing the horizontal mambo any time soon, if at all. Looking down at my new



steady girlfriend, my clenched right hand, I got angry all over again and asked, "Now what? I guess I'm supposed to cart your ass to Rodeo Drive and buy you some big ass diamond ring?" It's what every bitch wanted, right?

She just shook her head and stood up saying, "I told you Eric, I don't want anything from you except for your celibacy. If you fuck me over by fucking anyone while we're pretending to do this, I'll go on every talk show out there and paint you as the biggest loser there is. As it is, I wouldn't even have to make anything up yet and we've haven't even been married 24 hours. I'm sure I'll have plenty of material to work with by the time my tear stricken face goes on Oprah. I was a girl scout; a straight A student; I volunteer at the homeless shelter and read stories to the folks at the Senior Citizens Center. I'm so fucking wholesome there should be bluebirds singing on my shoulders as I hand feed the baby squirrels and bunnies that flock around my fucking feet the minute I step outside. *You* are the only skeleton in *my* closet; how's yours looking?"

Was she serious? I didn't know her, at all, but something told me she was. Well, except for the birds and bunnies and shit.

I still hated her, but even more so I hated that my dick twitched imagining her dressed up as a sexy Disney Princess and couldn't help thinking no one that hot could be that much of a do-gooder. The fucking mouth on her contradicted everything she'd just said, but I somehow believed her. Take away the scrap of fabric dress and sex hair she was sporting and she *did* look wholesome. Her blond hair and blue eyes combined with her southern accent made her so fucking girl-next-door that she probably shit apple pies. You'd think, by looking at her, that she'd be a shy southern belle, but I was learning fairly quickly in reality she was anything *but* timid. If my bachelorhood and a whole fucking year of my life weren't on the line I might consider her as a worthy temporary companion, but her wolf in sheep's clothing persona was *too* credible. No one would believe me over her in any allegation she made and thoughts of her going on Oprah telling the world that I shit in diapers while calling her 'Mommy' in the bedroom made me shiver. They'd play the subdued music to open the show, I just knew it.

We were back to staring each other down when Pam intervened by saying, "You *both* need to wear wedding rings, not just for show, but to cover up those monstrosities you had tattooed on yourselves. Hearts? How fucking drunk do you have to be to get hearts?"

"Fucking drunk enough to have blocked the whole thing out," Sookie snapped. I wanted to be skeptical of her claim, but seeing as how I had no recollection of the previous night either, I couldn't call her on bullshitting everyone. "I already have a wedding ring at home that I can wear."

"But you said you've never been married before," Pam glared back at her with her eyes narrowing from her earlier claim.

"I haven't. It was my mother's ring."

When it became apparent that was all she was going to say Pam looked at me saying, "I'll pick one up for you and drop it off later on tonight, minus the fucking hearts. Both of you need to get

cleaned up so the ecstatic newlyweds can make an appearance for the cameras downstairs and we can get the hell out of here. There's a lot to do and little time to do it."

Our eyes locked again, silently loathing the other for what we had to do, before returning to our metaphorical corners. Mine being the en suite bathroom, but as she started walking towards the door with her friend, Pam called out, "Sookie, where do you think you're going?"

"Back to our room so I can get cleaned up!" she huffed. If I was going to last a year I'd have to find the 'off' switch to her bitch setting. With luck I'd find her horny princess setting.

"You can't leave. There could be paparazzi lurking anywhere and it would look odd for you to leave your new hubby's suite to get changed." If Pam wasn't the best at what she did for a living I would have thrown her out a window a long time ago. As it was, I contemplated tossing her off the balcony figuring nothing short of a wooden stake to her cold dead heart could kill her. Since she didn't have one, coupled with the amount of Botox in her system, I was pretty sure she was immortal anyway.

"But my *stuff* is in Amelia's room. What am I supposed to wear because I'm sure as hell not wearing *this*." My brain flashed on the probability of her having that sexy Princess dress back in her room and I was left perplexed over simultaneously hating her while wanting to fuck her. I was pretty sure 'angry sex' had its merits and I could be easily convinced to give it a try.

"Perhaps Amelia can bring your things back to you?" Pam purred, eye fucking Amelia. I'd heard that tone from her before and rolled my eyes that she could find it within herself to try and get some pussy right in front of me, knowing I had to go cold turkey. I was surrounded by nothing but bitches.

Sookie's friend Amelia seemed to have caught on to Pam's flirting and while she didn't flirt back, I definitely got the feeling that she could be open to her advances from the coy look she wore. I looked over towards the balcony gauging the distance and knew it wouldn't take much force to propel Pam over the ledge from where I stood. Before I did something I might eventually regret, I left them to figure it out for themselves and headed into the bathroom to take a shower.

I quickly stripped and stepped under the hot spray hoping it would wash away the fog of the previous night. I'd never lost an entire night before and decided I'd lay off the hard liquor for now and just stick to the few beers I drank when we had our weekly poker games at my house. Hopefully the *missus* could find something to do *outside* of the house on Wednesday nights when the guys came over and I wouldn't have put up with her bitchiness. It was the only time I had to completely relax during the week and I wasn't about to give it up.

I glanced down at the sheet she'd worn earlier that morning, discarded on the bathroom floor, and wished I could remember any part of the evening before. Especially the fucking part and when I walked back into the bedroom I took the time to really look at my surroundings hoping something would jog my memory. The cum stains on the sheets were proof enough we'd fucked as were the sweaty heart shaped ass prints I discovered on the top of the dresser where the lamps

were toppled over and the drywall behind it broken open, I assumed, from the force of our sexcapades. *What was it with us and hearts?*

As I dried off, my mind was still running over everything that had happened and I couldn't let myself believe I'd have to go a whole year without fucking. The *only* way that would be acceptable in my mind would be if I was in prison, but then again, didn't the saying go about spouses being the proverbial ball and chain? I'd wear head to toe pink lycra before I'd willingly put on an orange jumpsuit and join the other husbands on the chain gang.

I still felt dehydrated from the night before, so after I pulled on a pair of jeans I walked out into the main room of the suite to get a bottle of water and saw Sookie sitting on the couch. Her friend Amelia was nowhere to be seen, so I assumed she'd gone to get Sookie's things from their room and my step slowed when I noticed her eyes taking in my bare chest as she swallowed hard before blushing and looking away again. A part of me, the part not still consumed by anger, reveled in the effect I had on her and I wondered how long it would take to seduce her into my bed.

I slowly stalked across the room and made sure to stand in her line of sight as I opened a water bottle and drank it down, making sure to flex all of the right muscles and watching her reaction in my peripheral vision. She refused to look my way instead filling her time by picking imaginary lint from her dress. I contemplated going completely over the top by pouring the water down the front of my chest just to get a rise out of her when a knock at the door had her shooting over to it like she'd just been tossed a life preserver.

Once she established it was her friend Amelia on the other side of the door she opened it up and grabbed her bag, making a beeline for the bathroom. Amelia joined Alcide on the couch while Pam barked orders into her cell phone, so I casually strolled back into the bedroom hoping to amuse myself by making Sookie uncomfortable some more, but the empty room and closed bathroom door put a temporary halt to my seduction plans.

I got a taste of my own medicine, however, when Sookie finally emerged from the bathroom a little while later. I'd chosen the stay in the bedroom scrolling through the various emails on my phone after listening to the voicemails that had been left by my father and numerous fuck buddies. None of them were happy at the news that I'd gotten married, but then again, neither was I so they could just join the fucking club. I didn't give a shit about what any of my apparently now former bed partners thought, but my father was a different story. Once he was through ranting about all four of his tires being slashed, he let me know he'd be waiting at my house when I got home and expected an explanation of why I married some "two-bit floozy". We'd have to get our stories straight before getting home and I had a feeling if my father called Sookie a "two-bit floozy" to her face, he'd quickly learn what it was like to be Sookie'd. I almost felt sorry for him. *Almost.*

But all thoughts of the confrontation that awaited us at home left my head when I saw Sookie walk out of the bathroom fresh from her shower. Her hair was dried into loose curls, left down and framing her face which bore nothing more than a little mascara and lip gloss. The scarlet red dress had been replaced by a white sundress with tiny red flowers scattered across the fabric, the

hem falling just below her knees and accentuating her golden skin. She was the epitome of the word '*wholesome*' and I was momentarily left dumbstruck by just how beautiful she was.

When my eyes traveled back to hers, I closed my gaping mouth from the angry glare on her face and as she stomped from the room I was left feeling nothing but relief. *Thank God, we almost had a 'moment'*, I thought, but I needed the head *above* my shoulders to keep the head *below* my belt in line. I knew it would be a neck and neck race to the finish line between them.

Once we had all of our things gathered a bellhop arrived to take our bags down to the limo that would be taking us back to L.A. Amelia would be driving her own car back while Alcide drove Pam's so the three of us could come up with a plausible story on our whirlwind courtship and resulting marriage.

Sookie and I stood on opposite sides of the elevator as we made our descent to the lobby, but as the floors counted down Pam shoved us together and put Sookie's left hand into my right one saying, "Happy! You two are *happy* to be married."

I glanced down at the blond ball and chain at my right and felt her fingers lace into my own when the elevator dinged announcing the start of our show. I forced a smile onto my face when the flashbulbs and shouts filtered in through the open elevator doors and stepped out, pulling my co-star along with me, knowing we'd have to give the performance of a lifetime.

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## Chapter 7: Chapter 7

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### Chapter 7

#### SPOV

Internally I was a basket case as the elevator took us towards the lobby, silently hoping against hope we would be able to get from the casino to the limo without drawing any attention to ourselves, but knowing deep down that was just a pipe dream. While I had no problems holding my own one on one, or in small groups, I'd always gotten a severe case of stage fright in large settings. It was the main reason I'd chosen to teach young children instead of teenagers whose size and mouthy retorts often surpassed my own. Being the center of attention was never a wish of mine and was instead more like my worst nightmare.

My stomach was dropping faster than the elevator as the floor numbers wound down when Pam shoved Eric and I together, putting my hand in his, and ordering us to look 'Happy'. I was anything but...but when my fingers laced through his and he squeezed my hand ever so slightly as the elevator doors opened, revealing a zoo filled with people shouting questions at us and light bulbs flashing, I felt somewhat comforted that I didn't have to do it alone.

Eric stepped out of the elevator first, pulling me along with him, but my eyes were already clouded by the camera flashes so I had to depend on him to lead me outside. The yelling and

jostling was unreal with a part of me feeling sorry for Eric that he got this kind of attention all of the time. I couldn't imagine being under constant scrutiny 24/7, becoming a virtual prisoner locked away inside somewhere if you wanted any peace from it all.

His stride was much longer than mine so I had to sort of jog to keep up with him, with people's bodies pressing in on us from all sides moving right along with us like we were all stuck in the same rip current. I had no idea where Pam, Amelia and Alcide were and there was no time for me to look behind us to see. The shouted questions pretty much blended into one loud cacophony, but some words got through; 'married' being the main one. Eric continued to plow our way towards the door leading outside, but I just kept my head down with my eyes trained on my feet and trusting his lead when I felt a hand grip my right arm and hold on tight. I turned and looked up seeing a man I didn't know holding a camera in my face, but before he could say or do anything else I felt Eric's hand pull away from my own. The unknown man had released his grip on my arm seconds later, but because my forward momentum had been halted by his grip, I ended up falling to the floor on my ass.

The same man immediately started taking picture after picture while shouting questions at me about our marriage and I was immediately engulfed by the rest of the pack. It was *exactly* like my worst nightmare come true being trapped literally at the center of them all and I felt the fear climb up my spine with tears pricking the corners of my eyes. The flashes and large crowd made it impossible for me to see anyone clearly and I would have given anything at that moment to be able to poof away, if only I had the Headmaster's magic wand.

I couldn't have stood up if I wanted to with the way the cameras loomed over me and just as I felt the first tear fall from my eyes I saw the man who had grabbed me being ripped from the spot where he stood only to be replaced by a very pissed off looking Eric. From the look in his eyes, I had no doubt if he'd had fangs he would have been baring them.

But when he looked down and our eyes met, his expression softened with him leaning down and swooping me up into his arms as though I weighed next to nothing. He carried me bridal style, with my face firmly planted in his chest and my arms clinging around his neck, all the way to the limo. The strength of his arms holding me close and the smell of his skin brought me more comfort than I would have imagined possible and for the first time since we'd woken up that morning, I was *grateful* for being with Eric Northman.

I noticed we'd finally made it through the doors and out onto the sidewalk, but I didn't look up until I felt Eric bend down and attempt to put me into the waiting limo. He had a difficult time doing so because my arms refused to let go of his neck, so he had to slide me across the leather seat as he crawled in alongside of me and pulled the door shut behind him.

"Are you okay?" he asked.

I tried to blink the tears away, but all I could do was nod my head in reply. I kept wondering how he was able to function with that level of crazy surrounding him and that maybe I had judged him too harshly. He had been just as blindsided as me finding out about our drunken stupidity so why wouldn't he lash out? Lord knows I certainly did, perhaps unfairly, at him. He didn't have to

come to my rescue back there, but he did and he seemed genuinely upset about what happened too, so maybe he wasn't a giant jerk wad. I started feeling bad for treating him so poorly, knowing Gran would tan my hide if she'd heard me speak to him the way I did. Besides, we had to stay together for an entire year so it would probably go a lot smoother if we could do it as friends instead of enemies.

Realizing my arms still had a death grip around his neck, I released him and scooted over a smidge, but before I could say anything he grinned asking, "So where are the baby squirrels and bunnies?" and making a show of looking around the limousine floor.

I giggled like a fan girl with the tension I'd felt easing significantly and knowing I acted like bitchzilla back in the room I looked back at him and said, "I'm sorry for the way I treated you earlier. I'm not usually so harsh with someone I've just met and drunk married."

Eric's smile became more genuine as he teasingly asked, "Do this often do you? Do you have a running tab at Bubba's Chapel or do you just pay as you go?"

I smoothed out my dress smiling and replied, "Oh well, you know, Bubba and I go *way* back so I get a discount and your fifth wedding is free." I found myself liking *this* side of Eric and hoped the fucktard side of him wouldn't be making another appearance anytime soon. Remembering his rescue of me from the horde of paparazzi, I added, "Thanks for rescuing me back there in the casino. I don't do well in large crowds and got a little overwhelmed."

His eyes softened again, but before he could say anything Pam bolted through the limousine door and quickly shut it behind her, taking a seat opposite from us. The throng of people and cameras were flush against the sides of the limo and Pam lowered the partition separating us from the driver saying, "Get moving already!" before putting it back up. Her eyes traveled back to us and a big grin spread across her face as she said, "Great acting you two! That shot of you carrying the bride to the limo with her lovingly holding on will make the front page of every magazine by next week. It looked real!"

My heart dropped hearing her speak. Was *that* what that was...all an act? He *was* an actor after all, so maybe his concern wasn't genuine, but a publicity move? My eyes narrowed in suspicion and I felt my bitch levels rise again, but decided to let it go for now. The fact remained that he *did* come to my rescue, genuine or not, and I was grateful for it. But now that I'd seen a softer, more playful, side of Eric I could see myself wanting to let my guard down and would have to remember that this was just an arrangement for both of us. I couldn't afford to get attached to him knowing our relationship had an expiration date. Besides, I knew I'd end up questioning every nice thing he said or did wondering if his actions were genuine or an act. After Quinn, I had a hard time trusting anyone other than Amelia and knowing Eric *acted* for a living wouldn't help one bit.

The limo started moving with Pam breaking the silence saying, "We need to come up with a plausible story as to how you both met that *doesn't* involve getting drunk." She turned to me saying, "Since I know everything there is to know about Eric, why don't you tell me about you and I'll pick out something you have in common that we can work with."

As it turned out, Eric never hung out at UCLA; the library; the homeless shelter where I volunteered my time every Sunday morning; the Senior Citizens Center where I read stories every Sunday afternoon; or ate at the hole-in-the-wall diner I waitressed at until getting hired at The Brigant Academy. He'd also never been to my home state of Louisiana. Go figure.

Pam looked back at me seemingly frustrated asking, "That's it? No clubs or bars? Do you go to Vegas a lot? Eric's here every few weeks."

I shook my head replying, "Nope. This was the first time I've ever been."

Pam's head dramatically fell back onto the headrest behind her saying, "Nothing. You two have *nothing* in common besides being married to one another."

*News flash*, I thought, but kept my snarky comment to myself knowing that little tidbit wouldn't make it onto CNN's tickertape.

She sighed asking, "Is there *anything* else you've done or gone to in L.A. since you moved there? *Anything?*"

I sat there quietly thinking over where I'd been, but nothing really stood out. I doubted Eric shopped at Wal-Mart so there was no point in bringing it up. I didn't really do much because I never had a lot of free time between school, Quinn, and working. That's when the light bulb lit up above my head.

Quinn.

The gym where he worked was used by a lot of celebrities, but I'd never seen Eric there. I'd always gone in the afternoons in between classes and work and never saw anyone of notable fame, but Quinn had talked about the different stars that worked out there all the time. Of course, he only ever mentioned *female* stars. I hadn't been back ever since I'd been confronted with Quinn's cheating which was a year ago.

*Pig.*

As soon as I told Pam where I used to work out, her eyes danced with relief as she said, "Thank God! Eric has belonged to that gym for years and goes at least three times a week."

My stomach dropped again as I turned to Eric and asked, "Who's your trainer?" A lot of the celebrities used trainers and if there was a God, Eric's wouldn't be Quinn.

His eyebrow rose up, seemingly thrown off by my question, and responded, "Tray Dawson. Why?"

"Just wondering," I said a little too quickly. I didn't want to have to explain the Quinn ordeal, especially with everything else we were dealing with at the moment.

Pam saved me from having to fess up to my one failed relationship by saying, "We'll say you two met at the gym last year and maintained a casual relationship until recently when you realized you'd fallen in love. Because of Eric's fame, you both chose to keep the relationship secret for Sookie's sake, but decided you no longer wanted to hide and while the ceremony was spur of the moment, the relationship was not."

I tried to find some way to pick apart her logic, but I could only think of one thing that could blow a hole in that version of events. "Well, how long have we supposedly been seeing each other?" I looked at Eric both accusingly and apologetically saying, "No offense, but you've been *pictured* with a lot of different women and I won't claim to have been in a mutual relationship with you only for one of your other *friends* to come out and say you had sex with them while supposedly seeing me. Everyone who knows me knows I wouldn't tolerate something like that." Ever...just ask Quinn.

Eric seemed somewhat stumped by my statement and remained quietly in thought. But the longer he thought, oddly enough, the angrier I seemed to get wondering if both hands would be enough to count them up or if he'd have to pull off his fugly black untied boots and use his toes as well. It must have shown on my face because the amusement and concern from earlier was gone from his features, replaced with boredom and a cavalier arrogance as he said, "Before you..." He tapped his finger on his stupid perfectly sculpted chin in pseudo thought for a minute and said, "Best guess is about two weeks, give or take a few days."

*Two weeks?* I was expected to pretend all it took was *two weeks* of his exclusive attention for me to fall in love and marry him? I said as much out loud, unable to keep the sharp bite out of my tone.

I watched his stupid eyebrow rise up and had a sinking feeling that I would be seeing a lot more of the fucktarded side of his personality over the next year versus the sweet side as he quipped back conceitedly, "Apparently I'm much better than that darlin' because you married me after *two hours*."

Unable to refute his claim, I flung myself to the far side of the limo and stared out the window in a huff while I stifled the urge to give him that junk punch he was due, thinking it was going to be a long ass year.

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## Chapter 8: Chapter 8

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### Chapter 8

#### EPOV

The crowd waiting for us in the lobby was the largest I'd ever had to contend with and any thoughts I might have entertained that the news of our marriage wasn't *that* big of a deal were instantly crushed. My height advantage was the *only* reason I could see the outer doors that led to



our relative freedom from the masses, so I started moving in that direction pulling Sookie along with me. Her now sweaty hand held mine in a death grip, but I didn't take a chance to look down at her knowing if I did it would only prolong the ordeal.

We were nearly at the door when I felt her grip tighten, but the moisture between our hands made our hold slip and just as our fingers gave way I looked back to see one of the paparazzi pricks had grabbed a hold of Sookie's arm. The fear on her face looking back at him was clear as day while he shouted something in her face, but she disappeared from my view as the rest of the crowd surrounding us both filled the space between us and I felt something inside of me snap.

Up until that point, I'd always had a relatively good relationship with the paparazzi that always seemed to be wherever I went. I knew they had a job to do and it was *my* job that caused them to seek me out. I understood it was a necessary evil I'd have to put up with if I chose stardom, knowing they only sought out the few popular ones of my chosen profession.

But Sookie *hadn't* chosen fame and considering we were both drunk out of our minds, the night before, I didn't consider her marrying me to be her choice either. That credit went to Jose Cuervo and if she were any one of the other women I'd fucked, I would have kept heading towards the doors because every one of them were fame seeking whores. They'd revel in the shit surrounding us now, but at some point over the last hour I'd come to realize that Sookie was nothing like them. Her quick temper and mouthy retorts got under my skin like nothing I'd ever experienced before and while her one demand to be a part of our sham marriage was pretty bad in my eyes, it was understandable on her part. She could have asked for anything, but as it turned out she only wanted respect and that one desire made her rise above every other woman I'd ever been with.

Sookie could bring out the absolute worst in me in a heartbeat, but seeing the fear on her face while getting manhandled and shouted at brought out something else in me that I'd never experienced before; protectiveness.

I spun around in the spot where I stood and made my way back to where I'd last seen her. Most of the crowd parted like the Red Sea and those that weren't quick enough to get out of my path were forcefully shoved away with my eyes glued to the one man who'd caused my Disney Princess' distress. His back was to me with his camera pointed towards the floor in front of him, shouting nonstop, but I heard nothing; I only saw red.

As soon as I was close enough I grabbed the cocksucker by his collar and lifted him up throwing him off to the side, not caring where he landed, and my eyes swept across the area looking to see who else wanted to fuck with me. I'd never felt such rage before and was about to start picking them off one by one when my eyes fell on Sookie sprawled out on the floor. The sight of this woman, who I wanted to fight in a match to the death just a short time earlier; the cause of my year long fuck ban; whose tears now brought me down from going over the cliff of having a complete sociopathic anger induced breakdown, calmed me enough to get a hold of myself. I leaned down, scooping her up in my arms, and her scent calmed me even more as I carried her out of the casino knowing if she could get this reaction out of *me*, I'd be completely fucked if she ever *did* go crying on Oprah.

She still seemed frightened when I got us in the limo with her arms still clinging around my neck so I tried to calm her down by jokingly asking her where her little woodland friends were. It seemed to do the trick and once I got her joking about her other nonexistent Vegas weddings she appeared to be back to herself, or at least a non-bitchy version of herself. I liked it. Her apology for how she'd acted earlier and gratitude for my 'rescuing' her just moments ago threw me and I found myself liking her even more. There was a sweet side to her that I didn't even think to look for earlier having never been around anyone 'sweet' in my life. I'd only ever been surrounded by people who wanted something from me (fame or money), people who did what I told them to do (for either fame or money), and people I took direction from (for both fame and money). 'Sweet' wasn't in the genetic make-up of any of them, but I suddenly found myself wanting more now that I'd gotten a taste.

Unfortunately, Pam decided to put a halt to that by climbing into the limo at that very moment and once we were on our way her words gave me pause.

"Great acting you two! That shot of you carrying the bride to the limo with her lovingly holding on will make the front page of every magazine by next week. It looked real!"

I looked back at Sookie wondering if that was what her tears were; an act. She'd already threatened to use them in a systematic attack on me if our arrangement ever went south and seeing how quickly her stricken face had gotten a reaction out of me, I started questioning if it had all been a lie. *Could she be that good of an actress?*

The doubt alone reinforced the protective shield I'd built up as a child raised in show business and it scared me how quickly she'd managed to poke a hole in it to begin with. I'd have no problems fucking her, that was for sure, but it would take a hell of a lot more than sweet words and a few tears to completely breach the armor I already had in place. The slight glare in her eyes I noticed forming after Pam's praise, instantly doing away with the damsel in distress persona she'd had a minute earlier, helped strengthen my defenses. I was wrong about her; I just didn't know which one was her true personality.

The do-gooder life she led didn't help when it was time to figure out a cover story for our relationship until she finally mentioned the gym she used to belong to. I wondered if she knew Tray after asking who my trainer was, but Pam kept right on talking so I didn't get a chance to ask. The question was completely forgotten when she turned her glare filled eyes back at me more or less asking when the last time I fucked anyone was. Seeing her look at me that way, it was hard to reconcile the sweet girl I had been hoping she might be when confronted with the bitch I already knew she could be.

I knew my last fuck had been with a brunette that had been cast as an extra on the show, but I really couldn't remember exactly how long ago it had been at first and I definitely couldn't remember her name. One look at Sookie's face, now flushed with anger, brought the asshole in me out instantly and I fucked with her, tapping my chin before giving them my best guess.

Her indignation over the thought she could be seduced by me in a mere two weeks made me even more irritable. I was a hot commodity with a huge fan following. There were tumblr

accounts dedicated to nothing more than *me*, with any woman I happened to be pictured with torn into cyber shreds. I wasn't conceited enough to Google myself and only knew about them from Pam telling me, but still. I was wanted by thousands and had sampled a good portion of them with no complaints yet, so the mere notion that I couldn't seduce her in that time frame was preposterous.

How one look from her could swing my emotional pendulum from wanting to protect her one moment to wanting to wrestle her into a choke hold the next was baffling and my response seemed to be based on them, whether I wanted to react or not. I was pretty sure I liked getting her riled up too and she didn't disappoint when she flung herself as far from me as she could and pouted looking out the window. At least she was never boring.

I looked over and saw Pam taking in both Sookie and I with a small upturn of her lips, probably from too much Botox, before checking messages on her cell and leaving Sookie and I in our own uncomfortable silence.

It only lasted a few seconds before Sookie spoke up saying, "Do you really think we need to lie to our families? I don't know if I can..."

Pam's cell phone ringing cut Sookie short with Pam yelling, "Are you fucking kidding me?" before ending the call in a huff. She reached over and turned on the TV, changing the channel to 'E Entertainment News'. I heard Sookie say, "Oh my God," when she saw some shirtless guy with tousled blond hair standing in the doorway of what I assumed was his house. Pam turned up the volume.

*Interviewer: You are the brother of Sookie Stackhouse who recently married actor Eric Northman are you not?*

*Jason: Sure am. (Grins and waves at the camera)*

*Interviewer: Their marriage last night was unexpected and Miss Stackhouse, or should I say Mrs. Northman, were never seen dating one another. Can you tell us how long they've been seeing each other?*

*Jason: (Scratches head; examines something he pulled from his scalp; shrugs shoulders and flicks unknown debris to the side) I'm not sure, but she's always liked him. Hell, her room back at Gran's is still covered in his posters. Sookie's been livin' out in California since she left to go to school there and only comes back a few times a year. She mostly stays in touch with Gran, uh, our Grandmother Adele Stackhouse. I tried callin' Sook when I heard last night, but she didn't answer it bein' her weddin' night an' all. (Waggles eyebrows and elbows interviewer)*

*Interviewer: So you had no idea that she'd been seeing Eric Northman?*

*Jason: Nah...we don't talk 'bout no relationships. We mostly catch up on what's goin' on 'round here and the Bon Temps High School football team's record. (yells) We're gonna kick your*

*(bleep) this year Clarice! Yah hear me? (Holds up pointer finger in 'We're #1' fashion with big grin)*

*Interviewer: So what you're saying is you have no knowl...*

*Jason: (Interrupts) Say, that Eric Northman fella was a real ladies man like myself, right?*

*Interviewer: Well, he has been linked with several women over the years...*

*Jason: (Interrupts) So, now that he's married to my sister an' all he won't be datin' none a them fine ladies no more. (Leans in whispering conspiratorially) Ya think he'd give his new brother-in-law his little black book? (Winks at the camera)*

*Interviewer: (Mouth gaping)*

*Jason: Never mind, I'll just ask him myself. (Unknown female voice heard in the background saying, "Jason, come back to bed.") (Looks at interviewer) That's just between you an' me, kay? (Winks again; shuts door)*

There was no fucking way that idiot was her brother. No. Fucking. Way. I refused to believe I married someone with branches of Hee Haw in their family tree and looked over at Sookie expecting her angry denial that she'd never even met the poster boy for 'Sofa King Wee Todd It', but instead she had her head buried in her hands, that damn tattoo on her finger taunting me, saying over and over, "No no no no no..."

Pam broke into her denial asking, "Does *that* answer your question?" Then she turned her anger to me snapping, "I swear. If I hear even one *whisper* that you've opened a twitter account I will cut off your balls and hand feed them to you before you can say 'WINNING!'"

I shrank back in my seat staring at my newly inked ring finger and doubted Sookie heard Pam's muttered, "I am *so* charging extra for this shit."

If she could spin *that* clusterfuck we'd just watched, she'd earn every fucking penny.

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## **Chapter 9: Chapter 9**

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### Chapter 9

#### **SPOV**

I sat there staring out the window fuming over having to look like a twit for having married Eric after a supposed two week courtship. *What kind of dumbass does that?* Then again, what kind of dumbass gets drunk enough to marry a complete stranger (I didn't count my former fan girl status as *knowing* him) after two hours?

I guess *I* was that kind of dumbass, proven by the stupid tattoo on my ring finger.

The interior of the limo had gone quiet allowing me to think over everything and the more I thought about it, the more I realized a *whirlwind courtship* could work to my advantage at The Brigant Academy. When I'd filled out the equivalent of the Yellow Pages worth of forms for their background investigation, I'd been asked to list the names of any significant others I had an *intimate relationship* with in the previous six months and I filled in the truth, a big fat 'None'. I would have just shredded the stacks of papers right there and then and applied for a job at Doggy Daycare if I'd had to list Eric's name, with his notoriety, but since I'd turned in those papers a month ago they couldn't accuse me of lying by omission on their forms.

A weak thread to hold onto, but a thread nonetheless.

The only problem was Gran. She knew me well enough to know that I wouldn't go off and marry someone after two weeks. I just wasn't *that* kind of girl, regardless of the fact his face littered my childhood bedroom walls, and I didn't think I'd be able to sell her on the cover story Pam had come up with, so I broke the silence asking if she really thought it would be best to keep our families out of the loop. And just when I thought my day couldn't possibly get any worse, it did.

*Jason.*

My lovable, adorable older brother who had a heart of gold, but was as sharp as a marble and as thick as a brick, mocked me from the television screen. He was like Forrest Gump without the dumb luck to strike it rich with the wheel still turning, but the hamster long dead.

I sat there stunned, unable to even blink, until he leaned in whispering into the microphone asking about Eric's Dial-A-Skank list (no doubt *bigger* than the Yellow Pages), as if no one but the guy holding it would hear him. I had to hide behind my hands hoping we'd just plow into a tractor trailer at some point on the way back to L.A. and I wouldn't have to deal with any of it.

I vaguely heard Pam say something about twitter, but I was too lost in my own horror, silently wailing about the injustice of it all, to really hear anything else. I had tried to live my life as a good person and wondered why God had forsaken me after one drunken night. Maybe I had unknowingly married the Devil and God was pissed off?

After hearing everything Jason had said on national TV I no longer had any illusions that I could share the truth about my spur-of-the-moment marriage to Eric with my family. I loved Gran to death, but her one fault was, oddly enough, her love for her grandchildren. She'd always given Jason more credit than he deserved in the 'smarts' department and while I knew she might be able to keep our secret from her friends, she'd think Jason would know better than to tell anyone else our dirty little secret and would share it with him in the belief that, as family, he should know. I'd always had Gran to confide in no matter what, with her words of wisdom always making me feel better, and my heart sank knowing I couldn't run to her confessing my biggest fuck up ever.

Pam's harsh tone snapped me out of my self-imposed isolation asking me, "Are there any other hillbilly gems in your ancestral line we can look forward to seeing? A sister perhaps that we'll

get to see wearing a stained wife beater, holding one of her five babies, by five different baby daddies, in one hand and a Pabst Blue Ribbon in the other?"

I wanted to snap back at her use of snarky southern stereotypes, but seeing as how Jason had just made them all true I couldn't muster up any righteous anger over her words and sighed out a resigned, "No."

"No?" she asked again, clearly not believing me.

"No!" I snapped. "Jason is my only sibling, and other than our Gran, there's no one else." I paused for a moment internally cringing at the possibility of my one other relative, who I no longer considered a part of our family, turning up out of the blue for the first time in over five years. Seeing as how God seemed to have it out for me, I confessed, "Well...I do have a cousin that we haven't seen in years. She got hooked on drugs and disappeared with the money Gran had given her to go to rehab. For all I know, she's dead."

Pam rolled her eyes saying, "Fabulous. I'm sure she'll be showing up on tonight's episode of 'Extra' or 'Inside Edition'. If we're *really* lucky they'll be interviewing her from the street corner where she's turning tricks sporting a black eye from her pimp. Who else are we going to have to worry about coming out of the woodwork?"

I decided it was time to pull up my big girl panties because, knowing his love of attention, I was sure we'd be hearing something from him soon. I had no doubt the missed call on my cell phone from Quinn was due to the news I'd married Eric. Amelia used to love to tease me about my childhood obsession with Eric in front of him with Quinn always making some nasty comment about Eric in response. I'd thought it was funny and cute that he'd be jealous over something like that at the time, but I was sure it was chafing his ass now. Served him right. Asshole.

*Huh, another silver lining resulting from my dumbassness.*

"I have an ex fiancé named John Quinn. We broke up a year ago." Looking over at Eric I continued, "He's a trainer at the gym you go to which is why I asked who you used."

Eric's face took on a look of recognition and I thought I detected a waft of smugness coming from him, no doubt from his new knowledge of my Eric Northman poster collection thanks to Jason's big mouth, but he remained silent. I'd expected him to have gone off on me about Jason's shitastic interview by now, so when he didn't say a word about it or the posters, I was grateful and wondered if I was only getting a temporary reprieve.

"Why'd you break up and who did the breaking?" Pam asked.

"If you *must* know, it was because he was a lying cheating bastard and had been during our entire relationship. Once I found out, I broke up with *him*. It's also the reason why I stopped going to that gym." I hated even thinking about it, much less talking about it, and felt the need to make myself clear once more to Eric reiterating, "I won't be made to look like a fool again, so if you want this imaginary marriage to work you'd better keep your dick in your pants."

His eyes narrowed angrily and his mouth opened to retort while I braced myself for whatever douchey-ness he was about to let fly, but I was merely left shocked when his hands clenched into fists as his mouth shut again with no pearls of wisdom about his cock or his cum to chew on. *Figuratively, that is.*

Just when I thought I knew what to expect from him and he decided to change things up. I kept my wary eyes on him however, waiting for the fucktard from this morning to make an appearance, but he just silently glared back at me until Pam called an unspoken timeout saying, "If it appears his dick might present a problem, I'll just keep it in my purse until your anniversary. Good enough?"

I glanced to her right where her large Birken bag sat noting after what I'd seen that morning when Eric was still an unknown entity dubbed Mr. Pillow Face, I wasn't so sure what he was packing would fit in her already full bag.

*No!* I silently chastised myself. *Don't think about his nakedness!* It was pretty hard not to after having fantasized about him for so many years, especially now that I had firsthand knowledge that I hadn't been giving him his due in the *size* department, but he made it easier *not* to think about his dick whenever he acted like one. Part of me was hoping he *would* so I *wouldn't*.

I was starting to confuse myself and was happy when Pam started talking again. "We'll need to make arrangements for your things to be packed up and brought over to Eric's house."

"That's not necessary; I can do it myself!" I snapped, whether it was from the thought of Eric humiliating me on a worldwide scale; the thought of Quinn's shameful betrayals; or the thought of wanting to see Eric naked again and knowing what a *bad* idea that would be, I wasn't sure. Eric definitely had his dickface moments, but the softer side I may have gotten a glimpse of was still eating away at me. Besides, he was *HOT*.

Pam looked at me like I was dense saying, "Have you already forgotten the circus in the lobby of the casino? Hell, they've already tracked down your dim-witted brother in whatever swamp town you call home, so what makes you think they won't be waiting for you back in L.A.?"

I guess I was pretty dense because the media never crossed my mind and I couldn't imagine trying to carry my boxes of books and whatnots out to my car being surrounded by mayhem.

When I didn't say anything more, Pam continued, "It'll be pandemonium around you both for the next few weeks, so I suggest you let that sink in. I'll have movers go to wherever you were staying and pack up your things and bring them to you, but it would be easier for you to just remain at Eric's house unless the two of you are going out together for your photo ops. He lives in a gated community so, barring any long range shots taken with telephoto lenses, you should be able to have some peace there."

"How fun!" I barked out sarcastically already hating my gilded cage. I glanced over at Eric, but he seemed lost in thought looking out the window and left Pam and I to work out the details on our own.

Pam gave me a scolding look saying, "You need to just buck up and shut the fuck up. No matter what the cause was, the two of *you* created this shitstorm and now it's time to deal with the fucking consequences. I'm not going to listen to you bitch and whine for the next fucking year over how unfair it all is. Life *isn't* fair sweet tits. Learn that lesson *now*."

I knew she was right, but I still wanted to stomp my feet and have a tantrum. It was a shock to my system to go from absolute anonymity to being thrust under the spotlight literally overnight. I didn't want the fame, but I'd have to do whatever needed to be done if I wanted to keep my job.

I looked back at Pam ruefully admitting, "You're right. I'll try to keep a more positive outlook on things. It's only for a year right?" I forced a smile on my face while thinking just how long a whole year was. It was *too* long.

Pam nodded her head seemingly appeased by my response before her look became darker and she said, "Sookie, you need to prepare yourself for when you meet Eric's father. He can be...difficult."

I noticed Eric's body tense beside me, but he continued to just look out the window without offering anything to our conversation. He seemed lost in thought, but I had no clue as to what it was and found myself wishing I could read his mind. That would have been a handy skill to have when I was still with Quinn. After dealing with the two of them for the last few hours, I thought I'd done alright holding my own if you didn't count my mini-meltdown when I'd gotten separated from Eric in the lobby. Remembering him coming to my rescue warmed my insides again, but I quickly doused them remembering he was an actor. He was *acting* concerned...*acting*.

But her hesitation alone gave me pause because describing either her or Eric as 'difficult' would be akin to calling an angry Tasmanian Devil mother protecting her young 'moody', so just how bad could Eric's dad be?

"When you say 'difficult'..." I asked questioningly.

"I would be canonized as a Saint before Mother Theresa in comparison," Pam replied.

I knew my jaw was hanging open, but I couldn't close it fearing how bad he must really be for *Pam* to acknowledge his *difficult* personality.

"You're taking the time to warn me, so what are you expecting him to do or say when we meet?" I asked.

Pam shrugged her shoulders saying, "You never can tell. He's like the worst stage mother, living through their child's stardom vicariously, but he'll attack anyone he thinks will impede upon his success. And when I say *his* success, of course I mean *Eric's* success. He doesn't differentiate between the two."

"So, what...you think he won't be charmed by my southern grace?" I nervously laughed out.



I thought I detected a hint of a smile on Eric's face, but at that very moment the limousine turned up a steep incline and it was the first time I noticed we were back L.A., or technically, the Hollywood Hills. Sure enough there was a sea of people, the majority of whom were holding cameras, and they swarmed the car as we approached the gate.

It was opened by the guard on duty and the car continued forward before turning up a long winding driveway before coming to a stop in front of one of the most beautiful homes I'd ever seen. I looked at Eric, speaking to him directly for the first time since snapping at him earlier, asking, "You live *here*?"

It wasn't what I expected at all, even though I really didn't *know* what to expect, but it surely wasn't the mansion in front of us with the beautifully landscaped gardens. Gran would love to toil around in them all day long.

Eric looked back at me with no expression whatsoever, but said, "I guess now, you do too."

A man of many words, he was not. Both Eric and Pam climbed out of the limo with me right behind them and as we approached the front door, it opened revealing a man who was undoubtedly Eric's father. His features were nearly identical to his son and could very well be what Eric would look like in thirty years.

I remembered Pam's warning and put on my 'church' smile looking up at him, but before I could say a word he looked harshly from Eric, to me, and back to Eric biting out, "So, *this* is the tart you're ruining your career for?" His eyes fell on me again, raking over the front of my body and leaving me feeling violated as he added, "Don't tell me...it was her tits right?"

*Difficult?* I could think of better words to use to describe Mr. Northman.

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## Chapter 10: Chapter 10

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### Chapter 10

#### EPOV

I was lost in my own mind imagining Sookie's theoretical white trash sister and hooker cousin, thinking I'd take her dipshit brother over them *any* day of the week and twice on Sunday. He seemed a few fries short of a Happy Meal, but it would be hard to miss the charisma oozing off of him and an 'aw shucks' demeanor, so after thinking it over I doubted we had much to worry about from his interview. Hell, he probably had a new fan following. But a drug addicted lot lizard cousin turning tricks at some random truck stop along an interstate? *That* would be hard to publicly laugh off.

My attention was brought back to their conversation when I heard the word 'fiancé' and listened as Sookie said his name. John Quinn. At first I thought it couldn't be the *same* John Quinn I knew from the gym, but as it turned out that was *exactly* who he was. *Un-fucking-believable.*

I knew who Quinn was in passing over the years and while I'd never really talked to him, I always got the distinct vibe he didn't like me. I didn't give two shits and just ignored the missing triplet from SNL's 'We're going to pump you up' skit thinking he was nothing more than a bald headed purple pansy eyed fucking pussy. *What guy has purple fucking eyes?*

It was Tray who had brought up his name during one of our private workout sessions a couple of years earlier asking what I had done to Quinn for him to hate me so much. I'd had no idea what he was talking about, but according to Tray, Quinn couldn't bad mouth me fast enough to anyone who would listen.

Like I said, I didn't give two shits. There were always people who didn't like me for whatever reason, be it jealousy or my acting or my choice of women, so I lost no sleep over wondering where his hatred came from. But, I also excelled at being an asshole and wished it was a sport because I would have gone pro, so when Tray began telling me how Quinn liked to chase tail at the gym, even though he was engaged, I thought I'd give him a little competition. I would watch from across the room as Quinn would select his prey for the day and walk over putting all of my best moves on whomever he'd chosen. They'd drop him faster than Lindsay Lohan drops bail money.

The only *good* thing I could say about Quinn was that he always went for hot women, so at least I didn't have to worry about following through. It pissed him off. Every. Single. Time. And the best part was there wasn't anything he could really do about it. I was a paying customer, as were the other women, and Quinn merely worked there, so he couldn't outwardly retaliate with anything stronger than glaring at me with his creepy colored eyes. It quickly became one of my favorite pastimes.

Tray had spoken of Quinn's fiancé and how she was a sweet girl that deserved someone better than him, but I figured she must have been an airhead or blind to *not* know what kind of guy Quinn was. Or maybe she was just as bad as him and fucking whomever on the side as well, but now that I've met her? I seriously had my doubts that had been the case at all.

While Sookie's brother could become President of the National Association of Mimbos, I no longer kidded myself that she was any sort of bimbo. She couldn't have held her own with Pam for this long if that were the case and the sheer fact that Pam kept coming at her without her backing down was garnering Sookie some respect from not just me, but Pam as well.

It would also be fun to rub it in his face that the girl he'd actually wanted enough to propose to and then lost due to his fucking around had married me, the guy that kept stealing his fuck buddies and hindering his fucking around. I guess, in a way, I'd been unknowingly doing Sookie a favor by being a competitive asshole with her former 'lying cheating bastard.'

But when she opened her mouth warning me again about the yearlong pussy ban (*like I would've forgotten!*), my pendulum instantly swung to 'seek and destroy' and I opened my mouth, about to tell her that maybe if she hadn't been such a bitch, she could have had Quinn's dick all to herself and I shocked myself finding I *couldn't* do it. Something inside of me put the brakes on my mouth knowing what a low blow that would be to her and I felt both sides warring inside myself with one wanting to give her her comeuppance and the other wanting to protect her from it at the same time.

It felt odd to say the least, but the side wanting to protect her came out ahead with my mouth staying shut.

I spent the rest of the ride silently staring out the window wondering what it was about this girl that was making me feel and do things that were out of character for me. Sadly, I never found the answers in the passing scenery and before I knew it we were at my house.

I had involuntarily tensed up hearing Pam warn Sookie about my father, but like being 'Pam'd', there was really no way to prepare her for him. She'd just have to experience it for herself and hopefully be able to hold her own because if he scented any fear or weakness coming from her, she didn't stand a chance. I had no doubts he would be waiting at my house when we got there and wanting an explanation as well as dishing out his disapproval over our marriage.

He was my main supporter and biggest adversary all rolled into one, which was confusing as a child, but I learned to cope. Add in his love affair with Jim Beam and Johnny Walker; let's just say I was glad to have Pam in my life and on my side as a buffer. His alcoholism would necessitate keeping him ignorant of the truth surrounding our marriage because he'd gone off on drunken rants to strangers that turned out to be reporters in the past. If he and Sookie didn't get along, which I didn't think they would, he'd have no problem throwing us both under the bus the next time his bottle ran dry and he got pissed off over me ruining his life. I'd been hearing that one for as long as I could remember, so it was nothing new.

As soon as he opened the door I could smell the stale whiskey on his breath before he opened his mouth calling my new bride a tart and questioning if I had fallen in love with her tits. While they appeared to be spectacular, I didn't love them. I was in very deep like with them though and wouldn't mind getting to know them better.

Before I could say a word though, Sookie took matters into her own hands. Literally. She left a hand print on his left cheek and a scathing, "How *dare* you!" left her lips while I heard Pam toss in a, "Prick."

I looked down seeing her flushed with anger, for once not directed at me, and snickered over the fact my new bride wasn't only a blushing one, but a slap-happy one too. Sookie definitely had a fiery personality so at least it wouldn't be an uninteresting year. Hopefully my forlorn cock would find solace in that if he couldn't find solace inside of *her*.

I caught sight of my father's arms tensing and his chest puff up out of the corner of my eye. I didn't think he would try to hit her back, but I wasn't taking any chances and stepped in front of

Sookie blocking her from him completely. The space in between them wasn't all that big to begin with and I could feel the breasts that were the current cause of our standoff, pressed against my back for the briefest of moments before Sookie took a step back. I held back my grin at my newfound knowledge I'd guessed correctly that they were real (I'd done *a lot* of research in my time) and instead looked my father in the eye saying, "Back off. You don't even know her and she sure as hell doesn't deserve to hear some fucked up shit like that meeting her father-in-law for the first time."

He actually seemed shocked I'd stood up to him, probably because I rarely did, but if he didn't learn to leave her alone now he never would. He'd either relentlessly torment her or try to fuck her, possibly both, but I didn't want to have to spend the next year having to deal with it, nor did I think Sookie would want to either.

He glared back at me before finally turning and walking back into the house towards the living room. Pam brushed past me to go inside and turned around to face us, digging in her enormous purse, saying, "I could've *sworn* I had your balls in *here*, but I guess you took them back. Good job putting them to use."

*Bitch.*

She turned towards the living room and I started walking after her until I realized Sookie wasn't behind me. I turned around and saw her still standing just outside the still open front door with no discernable expression on her face. The blush from her anger was gone along with the fire from her eyes. Now she almost seemed insecure, so I walked towards her and when I took her hand in mine without thinking, I realized she was trembling a little. Worried, I asked, "Are you okay? He can be a real dick, but he should back off for now."

She didn't answer me at first and we stood there, holding hands, for a moment when a sound to the side caused both of our heads to turn in time to see a squirrel digging in the mulched flowerbed next to the house. I looked back at her and teased, "I guess you weren't kidding about them flocking around your feet, huh."

Her smile broke the tension in her shoulders and I filed the knowledge away that joking with her when she was upset made her feel better. I glossed over the fact I *wanted* to remember how to make her feel better by justifying it with the simple fact it would make the next year go by easier for both of us.

Sookie finally seemed to find her voice and admitted, "I didn't know 'difficult' was a synonym for 'asshole'."

Wondering if I still needed to keep it light to keep her spirits up I said, "So is wrinkle star."

"What?" she asked.

"And balloon knot," I answered.

Her eyebrows furrowed before she playfully smacked my chest with the slap-happy hand I wasn't holding and she lost the battle to not smile as she laughed while scolding me with, "I was *not* asking for synonyms for the word 'asshole'!"

The sound of her laugh and seeing it reach her eyes made me feel...I wasn't sure and it brought back my earlier ruminations. I brushed it off figuring whatever I was feeling was probably just tied to my dick and knowing she would be my only acceptable option for the next year, so I'd just have to work a little harder to get her to give in.

"I know but it's more fun thinking up those than about him," I sighed, "but he won't be around much and I'll have the locks changed so he can't just come in on his own anymore now that you're going to be living here."

"He doesn't live here?" she asked with relief?

"Hell no!" What a fucking nightmare *that* would be.

She peered up at the house and moved her head from side to side looking in through the open front door before asking, "So who else lives here besides you?"

"Just me."

I could tell she was chewing on the inside of her bottom lip in thought before asking, "So it'll just be you and me living here? Alone?"

As I nodded my head in reply, my dick twitched again. More like it was a drug sniffing dog and she was a kilo of coke which was a bad analogy since I was staying away from coke, but still. I found she was much nicer to be around when she wasn't screeching at me and even when she *was* screeching, I still wanted to fuck her.

And it would just be me and her here.

Me and her.

Alone.

I'd never really had the need or desire to work for any woman's attention, but for whatever reason I didn't mind having to put in the extra work with Sookie. My mind started making plans like having to make sure there were plenty of bottles of water in the pantry for me to pour down my naked chest whenever she was looking and, ever the opportunist, I surprised her by scooping her up in my arms bridal style like I had earlier that day.

"What are you doing?" she gasped in surprise.

"I'm doing what the groom is supposed to do when he gets his bride home. I'm carrying you over the threshold." And she totally missed my hand running over her ass on its way to hook under

her legs. I fell instantly 'in like' with both her ass and her legs and wanted to get to know them better too, just as soon as I was BFF's with her breasts.

"But..." she started to protest.

Inhaling and enjoying her scent again, I interrupted her by saying, "Shh...my father will hear you," and quickly darted inside so my father actually *would* be able to hear her in case I had pushed my luck and was about to be Sookie'd.

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## Chapter 11: Chapter 11

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### Chapter 11

#### SPOV

I think I was in a bit of shock after my run in, or should I say 'slap in', with Eric's dad. I'd been raised to respect my elders and I'd come to expect the politeness that usually came with their age. My Gran and all of the folks at the Senior Citizens Center I met up with each week had never shown me anything different except for an occasional Grumpy Gus thrown in the mix. Even then, they'd never spoken to me in such a rude and disrespectful way. I had no problem going head on with anyone I considered my peer, but it was ingrained in me to be respectful to those of an earlier generation.

The fact that I *wasn't* expecting it, I think, is what led to my hand whipping its way across his face before my brain had a chance to catch up.

*What was it with me smacking around the Northman men today?*

Oh yeah, they'd deserved it.

But still, here I was hoping to win over Eric's dad with my charming personality and I'd all but slapped the veneers out of his mouth. Shocked at my own actions, I didn't realize Eric had stepped in between us until I felt his back brush up against the front of my body and I took a step back thinking he was going to make sure his father okay before commiserating with him over what a bitch I was. I was shocked again hearing him rebuke his father instead and looked up taking in, for the first time, Eric's defensive stance in front of me.

He was protecting me.

Again.

My insides were quickly turning into jelly over the thought, but I fought off my silly notions knowing this was just a part of the charade we were playing.

He was performing his role very well. So well, he should get an Oscar.

My mind churned through everything we'd been confronted with in the few short hours since we'd awoken that morning and I quickly felt myself approaching a massive meltdown. I wasn't used to so much happening to, and all around, me and I started to shutdown. I didn't even realize everyone had walked away until I felt Eric's hand grab my own and looked up when he asked if I was okay.

I couldn't form any words, in my mind or my mouth, with my brain completely engulfed by a tornado. It was frozen and safe within the eye, but the events and feelings of the day spun violently all around it, threatening to pull it into its grasp and tossing it God knows where.

But for the third time that day Eric came to my rescue; once from the casino lobby, again from his father's wrath and now here from myself. Only this time there was no one around to act for unless you counted the squirrel in the flowerbed, which I didn't. Somehow his gentle touch and teasing words calmed me enough to get a hold of myself.

Maybe I'd been wrong about him all along.

And just when I thought he could actually be a sweet guy underneath it all he went and groped his way down my ass before lifting me up into his arms scaring the bejeezus out of me. He was lucky he'd run inside as quickly as he did, where there were witnesses, before I could give him a piece of my mind.

I wasn't lost on the fact that he carried me with ease as if I weighed no more than a dinner plate and it made me feel good. I'd gained a couple of pounds after quitting Quinn and the gym, but Eric didn't seem to be struggling at all holding my weight. Quinn would always make comments about there being a 'bit too much' of me to hold if I put on a single pound and I would stupidly run myself ragged to lose it again. I was nowhere near as skinny as a lot of the women in L.A., but I liked my curves. Fuck 'em.

He'd moved too quickly for me to take in my surroundings until suddenly we were front and center in what I assumed was his living room. Eric's father and another woman were seated on one couch, with her hand resting on his thigh, and Pam was seated in a chair opposite of them with a coffee table in between. That only left the chair to Pam's right and a spot on the couch for Eric and I to sit with me really hoping he'd take the one on the couch so I didn't have to sit too close to them.

Just like every other hope I had that day, it too was dashed, with Eric simply plopping down in the single chair next to Pam, but he hadn't taken the time to put me down so I was sitting firmly in his lap. I tried to squirm loose from his grip, but he merely tightened his hold on me and unless I wanted to cause a scene (another one) I had to begrudgingly stay there.

The tension in the room was palpable with his father's harsh gaze flicking back and forth from Eric to me. Pam appeared to be enjoying it all with a slight smirk on her face, but the unnaturally

blond woman seated on the couch was clearly not happy, apparently with me since she was shooting daggers my way.

Finally Eric spoke up saying, "Sookie, you've already met my father. Sitting next to him is his cocksucker, Rosemary."

I gasped in shock at his insult and looked towards Rosemary apologetically while waiting for his father to explode over his son's chosen description of the woman in his life, but his facial expression didn't change at all. Rosemary didn't appear any more affected than him and instead gave Eric an obvious eyefuck purring, "My name is Ginger."

*Huh? Not 'What the fuck did you just call me?', but 'Oh hey, by the way, my name is Ginger!'*

By the way she was running her hand along his dad's thigh I had assumed they were together and absent any denials, his apparent cock sucker, so I was left confused over her glaring interest in Eric.

Glaring at *me* that is.

Silence had fallen in the room once more and I kept wondering if this was just some horrible dream and I wasn't really married to Eric or a part of this odd grouping. I glanced around hoping Luke Skywalker and Obi Wan Kenobi would come into the room waving their Jedi mind trick magic hands saying, "This is not the family you've married into."

But, alas, I wasn't that lucky. Instead Eric's dad started yelling, "WHAT WERE YOU THINKING?"

Since I was sitting in Eric's lap I couldn't tell if he was asking me or Eric so I just stayed quiet. I felt Eric shrug his shoulders behind me and pull me closer to his chest before saying, "We're in love and saw no reason to wait."

Damn my jelly turning insides hearing him say that we were in love. I knew it wasn't true, but he sounded really convincing.

"Have you learned *nothing* in your 26 years?" he asked.

I found myself confused again knowing Eric was 29. We shared a birthday only I was four years his junior. When I was younger I'd always thought it was just a sign that we were fated to one day be together. Fate is a fucking funny bitch and I was sure I had another slap in me with her name on it.

"It's not the same," was his only reply.

"You're damn right it's not the same! At least I'd known your mother for a couple of years before she lured me into marrying her. Is *that* what this is?" His glare locked onto me asking, "Did you get knocked up to trap him?"



I fell back into Eric's chest in shock sputtering out, "No!" I felt more than heard Eric's resigned sigh at my back along with the slump of his shoulders behind me and wondered what kind of asshole his father specialized in, but figured he was probably more of an all-around asshole.

I could feel Eric's forehead leaning against my back and I found myself wanting to protect him from the man in front of us. *I owed him at least that much after everything he'd done to save me from today.*

I squared my shoulders and placed my hands on top of Eric's where they gripped my waist, lacing my fingers through his, and leveled my own glare at his father saying, "I'm sorry you're unhappy with our news, but I assure you that I love your son very much and will do my best to make him happy."

I hoped I'd sounded convincing and ignored the fluttering in my chest.

"I've never even seen you before so how can you already be *in love*," Ginger mocked from the couch.

"Stay out of it Nutmeg, you're not a part of this family no matter how much of his cum you swallow," Eric chided from behind me.

*Good Lord!*

But once again her glare turned eyefuck as it went from me to where Eric's face now peeked over my shoulder as she purred, "My name is Ginger."

*Luke? Obi Wan? Fucking Yoda? Fucked up this family is, out of here you must get me!*

"Of course neither one of you has ever seen her, she doesn't live at the bottom of a whiskey bottle," Pam piped up grinning with glee.

"Her fat ass wouldn't fit in a bottle," Ginger snarked out, making my hackles rise. She was a lot closer to my own age, which made it easier for me to justify wanting to knock the bleach off of her lollipop head.

But before I could say a word Eric's body stiffened behind me saying, "Her ass is spectacular Oregano," and running a possessive hand from my hip, down my outer thigh, and back again. "And since you're constantly offering me a piece of your own ass, Sookie's status as *my wife* should let you see for yourself just how far out of *her* league you are."

There was so much going on with that sentence I didn't know where to start. One, he liked my ass. I'd already gathered that little bit of info from the way he had groped it earlier. Two, from all of the cocksucker and cum swallower references, that neither one of them denied, I assumed Eric's dad and Miss McCormick were together. And seeing how she was a *whore*, I gathered she normally offered herself to Eric because she was a *whore* (*did I mention she was a whore?*). But Cumin didn't make an '*Uh oh*' face or anything from Eric dropping the dime on her whorish

advances with his father *right there*. Nor did Eric's dad look upset or shocked over the news that the woman currently stroking his leg routinely tried to have sex with his son.

*She must suck a mean dick.*

But lastly, my heart shouldn't have jumped nor should my girly bits have throbbled over his possessive leg stroke and proclamations of me being his *wife* coming from his lips. I didn't realize until that moment that I was leaning back onto Eric's chest with my hands doing some possessive stroking of their own, running up and down his forearms. I also noticed how much I actually liked being held in his arms, but I would issue a strong denial if asked. Even under oath.

*My whole body was a fucking traitor.*

Pam apparently decided she'd had enough and said, "Well now that you've welcomed Sookie into the family, it's time for you to go. We have a lot of things to get done and I'm sure the Liquor Mart is putting up "Missing" fliers with your pictures all over town."

She must wield a lot of power because they both stood up without protest to go with Eric's dad turning his venom on Pam snapping, "You owe me for four new tires! I know it was you!"

Pam just smirked saying, "I'm sure I have no idea what you're talking about. But *if* I did, I would tell you that the tread was worn and you needed new ones anyway."

I tried to stand up, southern grace dictated I should, but Eric's grip remained tight around my waist until I gave up. Looking over at our departing guests I tried to think of a polite farewell, but the whore's glare and eyefuck pushed the sentiment right out of me.

"Mr. Northman...uh, I guess maybe we can have you over to dinner sometime." I heard Eric say, "Not likely," behind me but I ignored him and turned to the cum swallower and smiled saying, "Paprika, it was wonderful meeting you. Please, don't come again."

I fought the urge to smile in order to keep my bitchface on, but Eric's snickering against my back broke my resolve and I giggled right along with him. They both walked out with Pam making sure they were gone before coming back into the room and giving me the once over saying with a smile, "I think you'll do just fine."

I was glad at least one of us was confident.

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## Chapter 12: Chapter 12

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### Chapter 12

**EPOV**

I found myself feeling comforted by Sookie's presence in my lap when I had to deal with my father's outbursts. I knew he would jump to conclusions about why we'd chosen to get married so quickly with him guessing a pregnancy as the cause from his own experience. It was the reason my own parents had gotten married, or at least that's what he'd told me my whole life. Both of my parents had been struggling actors before I came along and my mother disappeared when I was just a few months old, leaving a note behind that she wasn't cut out to be a mother, and leaving my father to raise me on his own.

He could no longer take the bit parts he'd been able to get once he was solely responsible for my care since he couldn't afford a babysitter and because show business was all he'd ever wanted to do, he decided to use me as his way to stay in it. My infancy and childhood were filled with audition after audition with me appearing mostly in diaper and baby food commercials until I'd been upgraded to smaller parts in TV and movies as a young child. I lucked into a role on a sitcom when I was 14 that became a hit and my fame rose from then on. My father was both proud and resentful of my success because I'd achieved a level of stardom that he'd craved for himself and he blamed my birth as the catalyst that ended his career. He never bothered to hide any of his feelings from me and I'd spent the majority of my youth feeling guilty about the sacrifices he'd had to make because of me. A part of me still felt guilty about it all which was the reason why I still let my father be my agent even though, in reality, Pam called all the shots. He put up with her too knowing how good she was at her job and he was unwilling to let even his own ego derail the gravy train he'd been riding for so long.

I was beating myself up over it all when I'd felt Sookie lace her fingers through mine as she sat up a little taller in my lap and declared her love for me to him. If I didn't know any better, I would have believed she was telling the truth and an odd warm sensation spread through my body hearing her words. I figured it was partly Sookie's own body heat along with how great her body felt sitting in my lap. She was soft and firm in all of the right places and I felt the telltale signs my dick was about to let her know just how much I liked it by pressing up against her amazing ass.

I was sure she'd struggle to stand with renewed vigor and wondered how I'd keep her in my lap if that happened, but Coriander took care of that problem for me. Just the sight of her alone was enough to make my dick try and crawl back inside of my body, but when her lustful stares and grating voice were added to the mix I had doubts I'd ever see my cock again.

Of course I knew what her name was, but it was only due to the fact that she fucking refused to give up on her belief that if she stuck around long enough, I'd eventually fuck her. My father knew what her end game was, but his standards were just as low as hers. He always had women surrounding him that were just using him to get to me, but his only response to me when I'd pointed it out was, "I don't care why they fuck me, so long as they do."

I sometimes wondered if other sons were gifted with similar life lessons from their fathers. Probably not.

Those women were seriously mistaken though if they thought I'd ever be willing to stick my dick in any orifice of theirs my father had already been in because it would never happen no matter

how hot they were. Usually it didn't take long for them to figure out I wanted nothing to do with them and they'd drop my father, but Chives had been around for a couple of months at least. I didn't know if she was just that tenacious or just that stupid.

Probably the latter.

It didn't matter what I said or how I treated her, she'd simply bat her lashes back at me muttering whatever inane bullshit back as though I'd paid her the highest compliment. How much more plain could I be that she was a slut than by calling her 'my father's cocksucker'? Maybe next time I'd try calling her his 'infected cunt.'

*I could already see her smiling like a preening dipshit in my mind if I did.*

I felt my whole body relax when they were finally gone and couldn't help chuckling at Sookie's politely spoken, but bitchy, parting words when she'd bid 'Paprika' a fond farewell. Pam was right; she'd do just fine.

Sookie turned to look back at me giggling, "I must have missed Skanky Spice when the Spice Girls were popular." I laughed and when her amusement calmed she implored, "Please tell me that Chesapeake Old Bay Seasoning isn't your stepmother."

"Ha!" I barked out, both repulsed and amused by the idea. "No, she's not."

"Good because it'd be kind of gross considering she's with your father but clearly has a thing for you. Since she looks around the same age as you, she can't really be classified as a pedophile, but it still just seems wrong." Her eyes crinkled asking, "Why did your dad say you were 26 when you're 29?"

*Because he's a drunken bastard that doesn't feel the date of his only son's birth is worth remembering.*

I had to ask because it begged the question, "How do you know how old I am?"

Her blush was instantaneous as her eyes darted down in embarrassment and she muttered, "Don't you know it's rude to answer a question with a question?"

I liked Blushing Sookie much better than Red-Faced Sookie and admonished, "And two wrongs don't make a right with you doing the same exact thing just now." Since she was still in my lap, I pulled her closer and whispered in her ear, "Tell me."

Her scent invaded my senses once more and without Parsley there to will my erection away I'd lost my only tool to keep from prodding Sookie's spectacular ass with, well, my tool.

The slight shiver that made its way down her spine and the small intake of breath she had from my whispered words only fanned the flames burning down below. My hands started moving of their own volition, teasingly caressing her hips and thighs until her own hands stilled mine as she

turned to face me again. I hadn't yet backed away from her when I'd leaned forward, so our lips were just a hair's breadth apart and I was caught up in her blue eyes unable to move back even if I'd wanted to, which I didn't.

I could see the indecision warring inside of her mind behind her eyes, but didn't know if it was from whether or not she would answer my question or if it similar to my own indecision; whether or not I should close that paltry distance that felt like miles in between us to kiss her. My eyes fell to her lips and when I saw her tongue dart out to moisten them I decided that was enough of an invitation for me.

"Alcide will be here soon. He followed your friend Amelia home so she could pack some more things for you that he'll bring back with him." Pam's amused voice filtering through, breaking into the bubble we'd surrounded ourselves in, was like ice water being thrown on both of us. We'd both forgotten her presence and I couldn't bite back the growl that left my throat as Sookie's head whipped around to face where Pam stood. Pam was the quintessential predator with her ability to lurk in the shadows until she lunged in for the kill. Most of the time it was fun to watch, but if she'd been within my arm's reach at that moment I would have snapped her neck.

"Oh...okay," Sookie sputtered out. "That's very nice of him."

I glared at Pam's grinning face while making plans to repay her for her cockblocking me and wondered if the tread on her tires was worn.

Realizing she was still sitting in my lap, Sookie pushed my hands away and stood up saying, "Sorry. Your legs are probably falling asleep from my *fat ass* sitting on them for so long."

Nothing below my belt was falling asleep. Quite the opposite actually, but I reassured her by saying, "Your ass isn't fat, it's magnificent and considering the fupa Dill Weed is carrying around, she's got no room to talk."

Sookie's eyebrow rose up as she questioned, "Fupa?"

Her blush had already disappeared and I couldn't wait for its inevitable return when I answered, "Yeah, that roll of fat hanging low on her stomach." Her clothes always looked two sizes too small so it was impossible to miss.

I wanted to draw it out and savor it like a good meal, so when I didn't elaborate she said, "I still don't get it."

I smiled, counting down in my mind. *Three...two...one...*, "Fat upper pussy area. Fupa."

She didn't disappoint. Her shocked expression preceded the bloom of red on her chest that quickly rose up to her cheeks before she chortled saying, "That's gross!"

Yes, I definitely preferred this Sookie over Bitchy Sookie, but thoughts of pounding into her having angry sex had its merits as well. Who was I kidding, having *any* sex with her had its

merits and those thoughts, combined with the already uncomfortable tightness in my pants, weren't helping.

"That's Eric," Pam interjected, "gross." My eyes shot in her direction to give her my '*Shut the fuck up*' glare, but she was too busy eyefucking Sookie.

I didn't think Sookie swung that way, but I wasn't waiting around to find out so I stood up and claimed Sookie's hand saying, "Let me give you a tour of the house," as I pulled her along with me and gave Pam a look letting her know she wasn't invited.

The living room was decorated by Pam who said I needed at least *one* room that didn't scream *frat boy*, but I only let her have her way because I got tired of hearing her complaints. The rest of the house I'd pieced together over time on my own. It suited me and my tastes.

The first room we walked into was a family room of sorts and housed my 72" flat screen TV with surround sound and a large leather sectional sofa that seated 12. There was a wet bar along one wall that came in handy whenever the guys came over to watch the Super Bowl.

I did a Vanna White move with the hand that wasn't keeping Sookie tethered to my side and said, "This is the family room."

She looked around the room taking in the neon bar signs and framed posters of the movies I'd been in hanging on the walls saying, "Um...wow. This is pretty big."

I started to walk again when I heard her mutter something under her breath that I didn't catch, so I halted my step and asked, "What was that?"

"Nothing," she answered, but the blush had returned full force and I wasn't willing to let it drop with the curiosity already eating away at me.

I invaded her personal space so that our bodies were touching and softly asked, "What did you say?"

She gulped and her eyes darted around the room, searching for an escape, but I had no intention of letting her get away from me now that we were alone. I was hoping for another opportunity to kiss her when I noticed her expression changed to disgust when her eyes became affixed to one spot on the wall over my shoulder and Sookie wrenched her hand out of mine, so I looked over to see what had upset her.

*Shit.*

It was one of a few posters I had hanging up that had been personally autographed by one of my previous...lady friends. From the look on her face I guessed Sookie didn't have an appreciation for adult movies.

She angrily stomped into the dining room with no explanation and upon seeing the massive pool table there she snapped, "What the fuck is this, Delta Tau Chi? Is Dean Wormer gonna come storming in looking for Bluto?"

Red-faced Sookie was back and pissing me off so I snapped back with, "What the fuck is your problem?"

"I don't *have* a fucking problem," she retorted and stomped into the kitchen. Before I could follow I heard her say, "Jesus fucking Christ. You're like a prepubescent teen with a credit card."

The sound of Pam laughing from the living room pissed me off even more and I walked in to see her glaring at the poker table sitting in the breakfast area. "Where do you sit down to eat?" she asked.

"Wherever the fuck I want! It's *my* fucking house so if you don't like it, just leave!" I regretted the words as soon as they left my lips, but I was still too pissed off to try to do any damage control.

"FINE! I WILL!" she shouted back. I could hear Pam's high heels clacking our way at a furious pace, but before she could get there the sound of Sookie's cell phone ringing drowned it out. She ripped it from her pocket and put it to her ear without looking at it yelling, "WHAT?"

My chest was heaving and the adrenaline was still coursing through my veins as I tried to think of a way to get her to stay. She could rile me up like no one else, but that didn't mean I was ready to let her go yet. The million dollar question was whether or not I could admit it out loud.

I watched as her red face paled and her eyes shot up to mine as she whispered into the phone, "Gran?"

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## Chapter 13: Chapter 13

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### Chapter 13

#### SPOV

*I almost kissed him.*

*I almost kissed Eric Northman.*

How many times in my youth had I imagined that very thing? Many more times than I'd ever admit to, but never once in those countless scenarios had it been on the day after our Vegas wedding that neither one of us could remember.

My willpower around him crumbled faster than a house of cards in a hurricane and given the fact that I'd actually married him after only having a few drinks, I knew I'd have to find some way to resist giving into my urges again. But he smelled so good; the feeling of the strength of his arms; the warmth of his body; the trail of goose bumps he left behind along my skin from both his breath and fingertips was overwhelming, easily drowning out the alarm bells going off in my mind to put a halt to it all.

*Maybe I could order a chastity belt from the internet?*

From the lustful look in his eyes I doubted even that would keep him at bay for long. Thank God Pam interrupted the inevitable by speaking up.

*Maybe Pam could move in?*

I would just have to keep telling myself that this whole thing was an act. Not that I didn't believe Eric wanted to have sex with me, even *I* could see that, but I *would not* be just another conquest in a line of women he'd bedded. God only knew how long *that* line would be and I'd only ever given myself to one man and only *after* I thought we were in love.

Or, at least that was true until the night before, but since neither one of us could remember it, it didn't really count. *Did it?*

Alright, it *counted*, but at least I'd waited until we were married. Hopefully. Justification much?

In any case, Eric and I were definitely *not* in love. In *like*, maybe, but not in love. Other than the fact he was raised by an asshole father, I barely knew him and my mind was still partly in a tailspin from the events of the day. It was difficult to distinguish if what I was feeling towards him now was because of what he'd *shown* me or because of how I'd *fantasized* him to be for so many years.

Where were Confucius' wise words when you needed them? Maybe Eric had an old fortune cookie lying around somewhere because I was definitely lacking any wisdom at the moment.

*She who sits down with Jose Cuervo, lies down with Eric Northman.*

Yeah, that would have been the fortune cookie I should have read the night before.

I leapt off of his lap thinking the lack of physical contact between us would help lessen my desire for him, but it backfired because all it did was enable me to see his whole body; and what a nice body it was.

*Maybe I could find a chastity belt at one of those Renaissance Fairs.*

I wondered if he knew the effect his skin on mine had when he stood up grabbing my hand, but I just couldn't bring myself to pull free from his grasp and allowed him to drag me into the next room. The butterflies in my stomach increased, knowing we'd be all alone, from both worrisome



anxiety and hopeful anticipation when Pam resumed her sitting position in the chair. I tried to ignore it and take in my surroundings instead, but all I could really focus on was the size of the room and its contents. Everything was huge with that one room probably being the size of the entire first floor of the farmhouse where I'd grown up. The flat screen TV was bigger than my whole body and all I could say was, "Um...wow, this is pretty big."

Eloquent, I know.

It made me remember the sight of him naked in the bed that morning and my mouth operated without the consent of my brain, muttering my thoughts out loud. "I guess *everything* about you is *big*."

Of course I didn't realize my brain mouth filter had decided to shit the bed until Eric asked me what I'd said. I felt my body flush in embarrassment and tried to come up with a believable lie with my eyes darting around the room looking for ideas. When they landed on one of the numerous posters decorating the walls I saw that it wasn't like the others I had glanced at when we'd walked in. Those had been of movies Eric had acted in, but this one was for a porn movie with a barely clad brunette practically screaming, '*Cum one, cum all. Cum inside of me because I'm a disease-ridden whore.*'

My 20/20 vision zeroed in on the scrawl at the bottom of the poster reading, '*To Eric Northman, the man with the best tongue in the business. I hope you and your award winning cock take me up on my offer of co-starring in one of my films.*'

I didn't bother to read what her name was having already dubbed her Bambi Big-Hole, the Grand Canyon of Cunts.

How could I have been so *stupid* to want to kiss him? I would be just like her, another notch in his bedpost, if I gave in and slept with him.

Fuck that.

I ripped my hand from his and stomped into the next room, afraid if I looked around any longer in that one I'd be confronted with more reminders of his man whore days. That room was smaller than the last and given I could see the kitchen from where I stood, it was obviously the dining room. Only the table was for playing pool instead of having a meal on, reminding me of the fraternity in 'Animal House.'

His father and I were both wrong; he wasn't 26 or 29; he was 16.

The fact that I'd actually *married* someone like him and had to stay married to him for a whole year just fueled my anger and seeing the poker table in the kitchen, instead of a dinette, made me lose it completely. Eric turned right back into the asshole I'd met that morning and when he'd all but kicked me out of his house, I couldn't agree fast enough. Fuck my new job. I'd rather wait tables for the rest of my life than have to put up with one more minute of his bullshit.

My rage precipitated my ungracious greeting when my phone rang and I felt my stomach completely drop when I heard the voice on the other end of the line.

"Gran?"

I hated that my eyes automatically went to Eric's seeking comfort. After the blow up we'd just had, I was unlikely to find any there.

*"Is that how I taught you to properly answer the telephone young lady?"*

Gran's hearing had started deteriorating with her age and I hoped my screeching into the phone wasn't as loud to her as it was to me, but I could picture the stern look I was sure she was wearing from my tone alone when I meekly responded, "No ma'am."

*"What's wrong sweetheart? Are the reporters bugging you to death too?"*

How could I tell her that my anger was over my dipshitness from marrying a man slut the night before? When I didn't answer right away she continued talking.

*"They've been bothering me too, but I've just been ignoring the doorbell after seeing your brother on the news this morning. Why sometimes I think he's got no sense whatsoever in that brain of his."*

I've been trying to tell you that for years...

*"Now I won't say I'm not just a little upset that you got married without me being there, not to mention the fact that you never even mentioned you were seeing him, but I'm sure you had your reasons and I'm very happy for the both of you."*

Huh? I'd expected to be able to feel the paddle's sting across my ass from here with her swinging it back home in Louisiana, so my shocked response was, "You're not mad?"

*"Of course not dear. Your crush on your new husband was no secret when you were growing up so how could you not fall head over heels in love with him?"*

She sounded so happy for me it broke my heart having to tell her the truth. "About that Gran..."

She interrupted me saying, *"And you're not one to make rash decisions, like your brother, so I'm sure you thought long and hard before agreeing to marry him after just a couple of weeks. Your instincts have always served you well."*

Quinn and Jose Cuervo might think differently, but her words made me ask, "How did you know we'd only been seeing each other for a couple of weeks?"

My eyes fell to Pam who had joined us in the kitchen by then and she smiled before turning to walk back into the Den of Iniquity. Eric and I followed behind her and I gasped when she turned on the news as Gran was filling me in at the same time.

*"Oh darling, it's all over the news. I guess you two released a statement to the press saying that while you've been friends for a year now, you've only recently started seeing each other exclusively in the last two weeks. I explained to Maxine when she called that while it seems a bit fast, you're a grown woman that's never been led astray before so I'm sure this is no different. Besides, isn't that always the way it happens in the movies? You don't realize the person you've been friends with is actually the one you're meant to be with and with him being a movie star it just seems so fitting!"*

Fucking Pam! We'd only agreed to that bullshit story a couple of hours earlier. How in the hell did she get it on the news so fast? And Maxine Fortenberry's mouth was bigger than Bambi Big-Hole's twat so I was sure the news was already spread all over town with her own embellishments added in.

My traitorous eyes locked back onto Eric as I asked, "So you don't think two weeks is too soon?" How in the world was she buying that cock and bull story?

*"I told you Sookie, I trust your judgment. I know you would never disappoint me that way. And it's just so exciting! My phone lines have been burning up with everyone in town calling about the news. Why I feel like a celebrity in my own right!"* she giggled.

Did she have to throw in the 'disappointment' card? Up until now, I'd never had to worry about disappointing Gran, nor did I ever think I could. But now...fuck.

*"Now, when are you two coming for a visit so I can meet this young man in person? I hope he's not like your last beau who couldn't find the time to come and meet your family. I know you'll be busy with your new job and I'm sure Eric has commitments as well, but I was thinking you two could come visit for Thanksgiving?"*

I felt my eyes go wide like a deer caught in the headlights. Eric had just basically told me to get out of his house and I was all for the idea, but I'd never heard Gran so happy in my entire life. She *giggled* for Christ's sake. Gran was *not* a giggler.

There was no way I'd be willing to keep up this farce to keep a job, but I'd swallow my pride and tough it out for Gran's sake. The humiliation I'd be sparing her from alone with the town gossip that would be sure to follow her every footstep outside of the house was worth it. The question was, would I be able to convince Eric to reconsider?

I tried to gauge his reaction by looking him in the eye as I repeated back to Gran, "You want us to visit for Thanksgiving?"

He didn't scoff, so that was a good sign. In fact, if I were to guess, I'd say he looked relieved, but surly that couldn't be the case. *Did he like a big turkey dinner that much?*

*"Yes! Do you think you both could make it? Your Gran is an old bird now and I don't think I'd be up to making the long trip out to see you both, but if you think you can't come I'd certainly be willing to give it a go and come out there."*

Gran's arthritis had been getting progressively worse over the years and I knew having to sit on an airplane for that long would be a painful experience for her, so I would never want or ask her to go through that.

I didn't know if Eric would be willing to come along though, or if we'd even still be living this lie by Thanksgiving so I just swallowed a big dose of my pride and gave him a beseeching look as I said, "Well, I'd be more than willing to come home for Thanksgiving, but I don't know what Eric has going on then." While it was a statement, my tone ended in more of a question as I stared back at him now that the ball was in his court.

*"Well then put him on the phone and I'll find out for myself. I want to at least say that I've spoken to my granddaughter's new husband even if I haven't met him yet."*

Gah! "Oh Gran, um...Eric's busy right now. I don't think he's got time to talk to you just yet. Maybe..."

That was all I could say because Eric chose that moment to snatch my phone from my unsuspecting grip and put it to his ear saying, "We'd love to come."

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## **Chapter 14: Chapter 14**

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### Chapter 14

#### **EPOV**

If I hadn't still been so worked up over our fight it would've seemed almost comical watching Sookie go from a seething hellcat to a remorseful southern belle in an instant, squeaking out a, "No ma'am," into her phone. The horror on her face, I assumed from yelling at her grandmother, made me want to wrap her up in my arms. I probably would have, but Pam's arrival in the kitchen saved me from acting on that errant thought as well as getting a kick in the balls which would most likely have been her reaction if I had hugged her.

*What the fuck was wrong with me? Why in the hell would I want to hug a harpy bitch like her? Why was I still staring at her completely riveted by every little flicker across her face and concentrating on every word that was coming out of her mouth?*

I was so fucked.

From what I could gather her grandmother wasn't mad, about what I had no idea, but I thought it probably had to do with our last minute marriage. Then again it could have been from her

dumbass brother's interview. I moved forward just a little hoping to catch whatever was being said by her grandmother, but stopped as soon as I realized what I was doing.

*When did I turn into such a little bitch?* I glanced down at my left ring finger and seeing the tattoo there I remembered; *Oh yeah, when I had two little hearts for 'o's' drilled into my skin.*

I was still racking my brain trying to come up with a way to get her to stay, especially after figuring out she'd been upset over seeing Yvetta's poster on my wall. That had to mean she was jealous, at least a little bit, which probably meant that she liked me even though it was more than likely she was probably disgusted with me as well.

I never brought any women back to my home so I didn't think twice about hanging it up on the wall. A part of me wanted to be pissed that she had the nerve to get upset over it considering we didn't even know each other until yesterday, but I still felt like a dog with his tail between his legs. While her more pronounced southern accent when she was angry was a definite turn-on, I still preferred the sweet side of her and I'd much rather fight over which side of the bed she wanted to sleep on with her lying on top of me in the dead center as a compromise.

My conquests were no secret and I got a kick out of the guys seeing it hanging there knowing they wished they could be me. If they could see me now, acting like the pussy whipped husband I'd morphed into overnight and hoping for his wife's forgiveness, their envy would fade in an instant. Thank God Alcide hadn't made it back yet, but I might have to kill Pam to keep her from spreading the news.

Yep. Fucked. That was me.

Sookie's face took on a look of sad resignation and when the words, "About that Gran..." came out of her mouth my heart sank. If she admitted our lie to her grandmother now it would be unlikely that I'd be able to get her to agree to continue on with our pretend marriage. The *really* disturbing part of that was I was more concerned she wouldn't be around any longer than I was worried about my career.

Maybe she was a witch and I was under some spell.

The question she posed to her grandmother about how she knew about our cover story had Pam written all over it. I should have known her fingers flying across her BlackBerry in the car on the way back would lead to her attempt at getting us in front of any potential damage our videotaped cluster fuck from the night before had made. Sookie followed Pam back into the family room with my feet following behind Sookie's. I stared at the TV seeing the press release Pam had made on the screen and turned back to see Sookie looking utterly mortified. I took another quick glance around the room and wondered if it was from whatever her grandmother was saying or if it was from the three posters in addition to Yvetta's that were scattered on the walls.

I briefly contemplated picking her up and carrying her back into the kitchen so I could take them down without her noticing, but her eyes caught mine again, asking her grandmother, "So you don't think two weeks is too soon?"

Could it be? Was there a God and was he actually doing some damage control for me? From the look on Sookie's face and the fact that she hadn't yet spilled the beans I thought there just might be.

I had to restrain myself from pumping my fist in the air when I heard her ask, "You want us to visit for Thanksgiving?" The relief I felt was instantaneous with the end of our fight, at least for the moment, almost in sight. It was only early September so that would mean she'd have to stick around for at least a couple of months. Normally the idea of being with the same woman for that long would have me running for the hills, with no one before her lasting more than a long weekend, but just like every reaction she was able to get out of me was different than my norm, there was something different about Sookie. In any case, that should be more than enough time to get her in my bed and fuck her out of my head. I didn't want to even think of the possibility that it might not work.

The fucking her out of my head part; not the actual getting her to fuck me part, but failure to accomplish either one of those tasks was unacceptable.

The slight hesitancy in her voice when she asked her grandmother the question was the minor obstacle in my path at the moment and all I needed was something extra to push to her over the finish line.

Her questioning tone as to what my plans might be for the holiday seemed to be it and when she appeared to be trying to maneuver a way for her grandmother to not get to talk to me, I seized the opportunity to grab her phone and agreed to a visit from both of us. If I could charm her grandmother then it would only work in my favor.

*"Well I'm delighted to hear that young man. Now I won't give you any guff over not asking me properly for Sookie's hand in marriage because I know the times have changed, but I do hope you know what a treasure you have in her and treat her accordingly."*

I almost 'Aww'd' out loud over how sweet she was until she continued with, *"Because if you don't and my grandson doesn't get to you first, I have a shotgun with your name on it and I know how to use it."*

Well, at least now I knew where Sookie's fiery personality came from and after seeing her granddaughter in action, I had no interest in finding out just how good of a shot she would be.

Sookie looked mortified that I'd taken her phone away from her and was jumping up and down in an attempt to climb up my body to get her phone back while whispering death threats at me, so I tried to hold her back with my free hand while saying, "I want to reassure you Mrs...."

Shit, what was Sookie's last name?

"Stackhouse!" Sookie whispered before having another go at climbing up my side.

"Stackhouse that I know how special Sookie is and I would never do anything to jeopardize that."

*"Well I'm glad to hear it and you can call me Gran. I imagine with all of the hub bub surrounding your wedding last night that Sookie might be out of sorts. She was never one for attention, so she might be a little moody and fuss at you. Is she doing alright?"*

The words 'moody' and 'fuss' would be the understatement of the year, but I couldn't resist replying, "Sookie's doing very well. At the moment she's trying to climb me." I laughed at Sookie's horrified expression and added, "You know how it is, newlyweds and all."

Pam's laughter joined my own as Sookie's body stilled with one hand and one leg still firmly wrapped around me and her whole body flushed crimson. Since she was securely attached to my side I took the opportunity to walk us back into the kitchen before she had a chance to notice the other posters that would be disappearing as soon as I could find the two minutes it would take to get them off of the walls without her seeing me.

Gran laughed with me saying, *"I remember the days of young love. I envy you both."*

Love? No. Lust... infatuation maybe, but not love. I wouldn't dream of contradicting her though and once I promised that I'd have Sookie call her after her first day at work to let her know how it went, we ended our phone call.

"What did she say?" Sookie asked impatiently as soon as we hung up.

I couldn't resist teasing her saying, "She said that you might be *moody* and *fuss* at me for all of the attention we've been getting today. Oh, and she wants you to call her after your first day at work." I figured reminding her of her original reason for agreeing to go along with everything couldn't hurt since I'd already gotten the seal of approval from her Gran.

Sookie stood there looking dumbfounded asking, "That's all she said?"

I shrugged my shoulders answering, "Basically." There was no need to add the bit about her shotgun named Eric.

Her shoulders sagged in relief before she looked incensed again and smacked my arm saying, "I can't believe you told her I was trying to climb you!"

I couldn't help laughing again saying, "It was true! I figured a country girl like you would have practiced on trees or something. Really Sookie, it was a pretty pitiful attempt."

She scowled back at me, but she remained quiet and her expression quickly changed to uncertainty.

*Yes, Sookie could definitely be called 'moody'.*

"Why did you agree to visiting her for Thanksgiving? You practically kicked me out five minutes ago. What changed?" Her eyes were studying my face with suspicion.

"Did you not want me to agree? Do you still want to leave?" Chicken shit, I know, but I was nowhere near ready to admit to the strange feelings her presence produced within me.

The corners of her lips turned up ever so slightly as she said, "There you go again, answering a question with a question."

I smiled back saying, "Perhaps you can break me of the habit before Thanksgiving gets here."

Sookie seemed unconvinced and said as much. "I doubt there's *anyone* that can break your habits, least of all me."

I wanted to agree with her, but my own internal bullshit meter read that as a false before I could say the words. Instead I pretended to be sad and gave her my puppy dog eyes saying, "But I thought you were a teacher. Don't you have some sort of code or something that you have to at least try?"

Her lips twitched before she rolled her eyes in an 'I'm not falling for the sad look' fashion. Before either one of us could say anything else, Pam walked back in with Alcide in tow, who was carrying a suitcase in each hand.

"Amelia said she packed everything she thought you would need for a few days, but if there's something missing I'll go back for it." His eyes kept darting back and forth from me to Sookie so I was sure Pam had filled him in on what he'd missed.

I should have killed her when I had the chance.

Sookie ran forward and tried to take the suitcases from Alcide saying, "Oh my gosh, thank you for doing this for me. If there's anything I need, I'll go back for it. I don't want you to have to go through so much trouble on my account."

"It's no trouble at all Sookie," he said smiling at her. The way he was checking out her cleavage before she smiled up at him didn't sit well with me; his staring at her or her smiling at him, so I glared at him and grabbed the suitcases from his hands saying to her, "Come on. I'll show you where the bedrooms are."

The master bedroom was the only one that was fully furnished and two of the three others were full of leftover stuff from the movies and TV shows I'd acted in, so I carried her bags to the one other bedroom that had at least a bed in it. It was next to mine and had only ever been used on occasion by one of the guys if they'd gotten too drunk to leave after one of our poker games.

I set her bags down on the floor while she looked around and said, "I'm sorry it's not really furnished, but at least there's a bed. Maybe we can go out and get you some furniture for in here tomorrow."



I watched her wander in and out of the attached bathroom and walk in closet before she finally stood still saying, "That's not necessary. You have more closet space than I have clothes, so it'll be fine."

We stood there staring at each other in an awkward silence. I knew how to deal with a Blushing Sookie or an Angry Sookie, but Silent Sookie was throwing me for a loop so I bowed out saying, "Well, I'll leave you to get yourself settled. There are clean sheets and towels in the hall closet."

I hurried up and got out of her room before she could corner me on the whole Thanksgiving thing again, hoping she'd stay in there for a few minutes. I had some quick redecorating to do in the family room.

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## Chapter 15: Chapter 15

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### Chapter 15

#### SPOV

After quickly hanging up everything Amelia had packed for me in the enormous closet I took a minute to plop down on the bed to catch my breath. The reality of my situation was sinking in quicker than the Titanic after pulling out my mother's plain gold wedding band and slipping it onto my left ring finger. The red heart that dotted the 'i' in Eric's name peeked out over the top of the band like a ruby solitaire; a redneck ruby solitaire. I was starting to feel overwhelmed all over again because before now, everything had seemed almost unreal like it was a dream, albeit not a *good* dream for most of the day, but now it was definitely *real*.

*I had really married Eric Northman.*

*I was Mrs. Eric Northman.*

*Would I have to change my name?*

The getting-smaller-by-the-minute old fashioned part of me said that I should take my husband's last name, but even thinking about it made me want to hyperventilate. I didn't even know if Eric would be okay with me doing that, but I knew for sure Gran would have something to say if I didn't. Decision made.

*I would have to remember not to dot my 'i's' with a heart.*

And now I would have to live here for the next year and hope that we didn't kill each other because it seemed to be a likely outcome. That man's ability to make me want to spit nails one moment and jump him the next was frustratingly confusing; especially the times when I was spitting nails and jumping him at the same time. From what I'd seen in the few short hours we'd

spent together I had deduced he was an asshole; a man whore; a teenager encased in a man's body; but he was also sweet; protective; mistreated by his father; and sexy.

*Oh yes, he was definitely sexy.*

He never did answer my question as to why he'd agreed to visit Gran with me for Thanksgiving. I was grateful he did because I know it would have been difficult to explain his absence to her without her raising too many questions, but I still didn't know why he had changed his mind about wanting me to leave. I guessed his career really meant a lot to him to agree to keep living the lie surrounding our marriage, but I couldn't really fault him there since I would do anything to spare Gran the embarrassment it would cause her for the truth to come out.

I looked around the room and was pretty impressed at the size of it. It was bigger than any room I'd ever had as my own and wondered what Eric's room looked like. Surly the master bedroom was bigger than this one and it brought back my earlier musings; *everything about him was big.*

That thought brought back the autographed poster I'd seen that set off our latest bout, reminding me I wasn't the only one who thought that about him.

*Fucking Coochie Monster.*

*'C' is for Chlamydia.*

I envisioned an adult version of Sesame Street with her twat lined with a double row of shark teeth chomping on unsuspecting penises who only thought they were going in for a quick dip; if only I didn't teach kindergarteners I could work it into my lesson plans instead of the importance of washing your hands.

Now that I had calmed down it dawned on me that I'd been irrationally jealous when I'd seen the poster and that was what set off our umpteenth fight for the day. I knew perfectly well Eric's reputation as a player, but being confronted with the Sharpie laden evidence made me lash out. Being around him seemed to turn back time with my maturity level falling to that of a thirteen year old; ruled by hormones and mood swings.

*Gran knew what she was talking about.*

I was jealous. Irrational but true and I would deny it to my dying day if asked. I knew I had no right to be and even though we were legally wed I still didn't feel like I should have been mad because we weren't *really* married. Technically yes; in our hearts, no. And after seeing her written praise of his man parts I hoped like hell he hadn't been lying about normally always using a condom and getting tested regularly. If I got an STD from him I would definitely kill him. My new job came with health benefits, which I had been lacking before, so I would be sure to get myself tested as soon as I could find the time just in case.

Even though it wasn't really my house I still felt like I was shirking my hostess responsibilities by remaining in the bedroom while there were guests in the house so I set aside all of my

confusing thoughts and set out for the kitchen where I'd last left everyone. I found it empty and wandered around the other rooms until I had no choice but to go back into his Larry Flynt Lair of a den, but it too was empty.

And I mean *empty*. The poster I'd flipped out over was missing from the wall and I could tell by the gaping holes between pictures, there were at least a few more missing as well.

*Well fuck...*

That could only mean that Eric not only *knew* what the cause of my anger was earlier, but that there had been even more cum trophies hanging up that I'd missed. I didn't know whether or not to be thankful he had removed them or pissed at him for having more than one. He came running back into the room looking around frantically before spotting me standing there and then tried to lean against the back of the sofa looking casual.

"Everything alright?" I asked wondering what was wrong. I could see a light sheen of sweat glistening on his arms and had to force myself to maintain eye contact.

He brushed some loose strands of hair out of his eyes and, somewhat out of breath, said, "Yeah. Did you find everything okay?"

His eyes were still darting around the room while he kept his head still and it made me look around as well before answering, "Yes. Umm... what are you looking for?" I wasn't about to mention the missing horde of whores wondering if he would bring it up himself.

"Nothing," he answered too quickly. "Just making sure I didn't leave any... shoes or anything lying around." His acting skills were definitely lacking when he didn't have a script to follow.

I was about to press the issue when he lifted up the front of his t-shirt, using it to wipe the sweat from his brow and was stunned silent by the sight of his abs.

His muscles literally rippled as he wiped his face reminding me of the men I often read about in my trashy romance novels. I'd been too distracted by his other naked parts that morning to appreciate the cut muscles of his midsection. Quinn was muscular, but more like a bulky body builder. It was actually something I didn't particularly care for, but I overlooked it seeing the person underneath it all. Or at least I *thought* I saw who he really was. Maybe my vision wasn't 20/20 after all.

But Eric's build was absolutely my type. His long and lean body was enough to make me drool and I may have groped a muscle or two of his when I was trying to get my phone back.

Sue me. I'm human.

Where was that chastity belt because I needed it ASAP? Now I kind of wished Cum Twat's poster was still on the wall because looking at it would help douse the fire between my thighs his body was stroking.

I meant stoking.

Stoking.

The sound of Eric's voice pulled me back into the moment when he asked, "Are you hot?"

*You sure are.*

"Not especially. Why?" Mr. Sweaty McFuckMeNow.

I was able to tear my eyes from his abs once they were covered again and looked back at his amused leering eyes as he replied, "You're fanning yourself."

I looked down and sure enough, my hand was fanning my flushed chest and neck like I was sitting in front of Satan himself. But I wasn't; I was standing in front of Satan and his evil forbidden abs.

I really wished my brain would get along with the rest of my body instead of letting my mouth and limbs act all on their own.

"It's a bit warm in here, but it is still summer. Where did everybody else go?" I asked, completely avoiding eye contact and searching around the room with my eyes as though Pam and Alcide had just blended into the background.

"Alcide," he practically spat out, "left and Pam's gone too, probably kicking puppies or something."

I wondered if they had a fight or something when I was putting my things away, but all I could think to say was, "Oh." And I had a Master's Degree from UCLA with a minor in English Literature! You can tell from my extensive vocabulary.

We were alone for the first time since that morning which seemed like a lifetime ago. I suddenly felt nervous. Very nervous.

My stomach decided to make its presence known by growling loudly and making me blush yet again.

"Hungry?" Eric asked. From the way he was looking at me something told me he wasn't talking about just food.

"Yes." I wasn't just talking about food either, but since neither one of us had eaten that day and it was almost dinnertime, I turned and practically ran back into the kitchen thinking I could fashion a makeshift chastity belt out of tin foil before getting started on dinner.

I immediately started rooting through his cabinets like they were my own figuring I could keep myself focused on cooking and not Eric's rippling muscles while keeping an eye out for the tin

foil. They were disappointingly bare and the refrigerator held nothing more than condiments and beer along with a couple of suspicious looking science experiments. The freezer was no better filled with nothing but vodka and ice.

I shouldn't have been surprised considering the whole frat house vibe he had going on, but I was and when I heard Eric walk into the room I looked up and stupidly stated the obvious just in case he wasn't aware there was no food in the house.

"There's no food." I was so glad I got a scholarship so I didn't feel as bad as I would have if I'd had to pay for my education.

He actually looked embarrassed before saying, "Sorry, I usually eat out."

"Every meal?" Who does that?

"No," he said somewhat affronted. "Sometimes I order in."

Exasperated, I grabbed a notepad and pen from the counter and started making a shopping list.

"You're making a list?" Eric asked.

I smiled, glad that I wasn't the only one that stated the obvious. I wrote down a few basic items and looked up at Eric asking, "What kinds of foods do you like to eat?"

He looked confused saying, "I can't cook."

His gourmet kitchen, poker table aside, was gorgeous and it was a shame no one had been able to enjoy it for what it was. I planned on rectifying that as soon as there was actual food in the house. I smiled back at him saying, "But I can, so tell me what your favorite foods are." I hoped it was nothing too exotic, but I could always look up the recipes online.

Eric's only response was, "You would cook for me?"

Was that so odd? "Well I wouldn't just cook for myself. I enjoy it actually."

He didn't say anything for a while and just when I was about to ask again he said, "I'm sure I'll like whatever you make. I'm not picky."

Well that was easy enough. I planned out several meals for the week and planned on making extra so there would be leftovers too. As I finished making the list I saw Eric's hand come into my view with his finger touching the gold band that I now wore covering most of the tattoo.

"The heart still shows," he said, again with the obvious.

I shrugged my shoulders saying, "I don't mind. The whole world already knows it's there anyway."

I set the finished list aside and looked back at him seeing an odd expression on his face. I could tell something was bothering him and for whatever reason I wanted to make it better. Eric wasn't so bad when he wasn't acting like an ass.

His eyes stayed on my ring so I took the opportunity to take in his features. He really was handsome, enough that he'd even done some modeling for a couple of designers and I would often sigh whenever I saw him up on a billboard along the highway as I drove to school or work.

Now I could look at him whenever I wanted.

I swallowed my sigh and grabbed the list, adding tin foil at the bottom.

When I couldn't take the silence any longer I wiggled my fingers and he seemed to shake off whatever he'd been thinking before saying, "Since there's nothing to eat, how about we order something in and we can go shopping tomorrow? Are you in the mood for anything in particular?"

Eric's hair had fallen in his eyes again when he bent over rummaging in a drawer full of what appeared to be take-out menus and his damn muscles were making an encore, rippling through his tight t-shirt. I could feel every decision I had previously made concerning our relationship flee my brain like rats on a sinking ship. The tension that had been building, coiling in the pit of my stomach all day long suddenly had a name.

Inevitability.

"Chinese," I said and adding a not-so-afterthought, "Can we get extra fortune cookies?"

Confucius don't fail me now.

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## **Chapter 16: Chapter 16**

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### Chapter 16

#### **EPOV**

After leaving Sookie's room I walked back into the kitchen on my way to the family room to get those posters off of the walls and out to the garage. Hopefully I'd be able to slip in and out like a ninja with Sookie none the wiser, but the sight of Pam and Alcide still standing there halted my step. No fucking way was I going to let them see me acting like the pussy I seemed to be turning into, so I leveled my gaze from one to the other and said to them both, "Don't let the door hit you on the ass on your way out." There was no time to try and be subtle; I needed them gone. There were ninja moves to be made.

Alcide just shook his head, already accustomed to my dick moments, and said with a grin, "I could wait around; see if there's anything Sookie might *need* me to do."

Fucker.

I glared back and hotly retorted, "I can take care of Sookie's *needs*. All of them." Alcide was a big guy, but as the video from the night before had proven, I could take him down with one punch. Maybe I'd hit his right eye this time so he'd have matching shiners.

Alcide just grinned wider and said he'd see me at the studio on Monday morning before leaving. That just left Pam and me in a stare down with her making no moves to leave.

"Don't you have children to scare or something?" I asked. "It's Saturday, I'm sure the park is full of them right now."

Her eyebrow rose up with her ignoring my question completely as she said, "I'm worried you two might kill each other if I leave."

*No, if you leave we might fuck each other.*

I started walking towards the foyer hoping she would follow behind so I could just shove her out the door when she wasn't looking. "We'll be fine. Hell will freeze over before *you* move in to referee and besides, if we *do* kill each other I'm sure you'll find a way to spin that too." I could already see the headlines: Eric Northman Fucked to Death. The only killing I had in mind with Sookie was *la petite mort* – orgasms; lots of them.

While Pam had followed my footsteps, she still seemed unwilling to leave. Operation Seduce Sookie was due to commence, but those posters needed to go first. The only movement Pam made was a slight smirk appearing on her face. Frustrated, I finally asked, "What Pam?"

"You're smitten," she replied.

"I am NOT smitten," I denied.

She smiled bigger, clearly enjoying my unease from her observations, and said, "You *are*. But I think it's a *good* thing. Maybe her magic pussy can keep you on the straight and narrow."

My unease was quickly morphing into anger and made me deny every feeling Sookie had managed to produce in me in the few short hours I'd known her; not to mention the fact that I couldn't remember if her pussy was magical or not. "I want to FUCK her Pam; nothing more. You and Alcide want to fuck her too, so it's not like I'm the only one."

Her eyebrow quirked up again as she asked, "So you wouldn't mind sharing?"

"NO!" Just the thought of either one of them, or ANYONE else, touching her made me see red. I could see the 'I told you so' expression on Pam's face, so I justified my outburst by saying, "If I'm not allowed to fuck anyone else for a year, than neither is she."

Pam's tiny chuckle seemed to echo too loudly off of the marble floors before she finally started moving towards the front door. "You need to keep practicing that line if you want it to sound believable." When I just glared at her in silence she finally put her hand on the door saying, "I'll be back tomorrow afternoon with some rings for you and Sookie to choose from. The paparazzi will be waiting for you on Rodeo Drive, since you told them you'd be taking her there, and I don't think she'll be up for another spectacle so soon." Without another word, she left the house, with me hauling ass back to the family room.

I wasn't sure how much time had passed since leaving Sookie's room and I ripped all four of the framed posters down, literally running with them out to the garage. Even with my longer arm span the size of them, and the fact I was carrying four of them, made me work up a sweat trying to maneuver them through the doors. I had to shift some boxes around to hide them behind, until I could get them out of the house entirely, the whole time silently cursing myself for doing it at all.

Why was I going through so much effort? So what if she saw them; she had already let me know exactly what she thought of the women I'd bedded, earlier that morning, when she was probably still dripping remnants of me from the night before. It wasn't like she was under the assumption I had led the life of a saint, so why was I trying to hide my past?

My actions stilled as I tried to sort through it all. While her mouth could lead you to believe she was a full time sailor, she couldn't hide the southern belle that lived inside of her for very long. I found her to be confusing; irritating; frustrating; but also beautiful; sweet; caring; sexy. I had become so accustomed to the women around me practically falling down at my feet in their attempts to get me to notice them, stroking my ego among other things, that I found her willingness to stand up to me quite refreshing. I knew she found me attractive, I wasn't blind, but it didn't deter her in the least from giving it to me with both barrels.

She was a shotgun named Sookie.

The fact remained that I *did* want to fuck Sookie and it would take longer than one day to figure her out, or how I felt about it all, so I gave up for the time being and ran back into the family room to make sure I hadn't missed anything. I didn't realize she was standing there watching me until it was too late, but I tried to seem like nothing was amiss, making small talk while my eyes darted around the room. It was apparent I was no ninja because she asked me what I was looking for and didn't appear to buy my lame ass excuse.

It felt like it was hotter than Satan's balls after running around and shoving boxes aside in the garage, so I used the front of my shirt to wipe the sweat from my face while I waited for Sookie to call me out on my lie, having already learned that she wasn't the type to hold back whatever it was she was thinking. I may have taken longer than necessary, hiding behind my shirt, until I finally pulled my face free and looked over seeing Sookie staring at my chest and abs with her



mouth slightly open. It was the same expression she'd worn that morning when I walked into the room shirtless and I filed another tidbit about Sookie away for future reference; if I want to distract her, remove my shirt.

She wasn't blushing like earlier; she was flushed with her hand fanning at her chest and neck like a preacher's daughter having wicked thoughts in church on a hot Sunday afternoon. Sookie seemed completely unaware of what she was doing, or that I was watching her, so I finally asked, "Are you hot?"

She was hot enough, literally and figuratively, that Al Gore could blame her for global warming and I couldn't help undressing her with my eyes wishing I could remember the sight of her naked, but she denied it and asked about Alcide and Pam instead. Just hearing his name on her lips made me want to hit him in the balls the next time I saw him and was like a bucket of ice water being thrown on me, temporarily putting a halt to Operation Seduce Sookie.

She must have been ravenous because after her stomach growled she ran into the kitchen and I followed behind seeing her fruitlessly searching through the cabinets and refrigerator that I already knew were bare. I felt bad, another new sensation, that I didn't have anything in the house for her to eat and was dumbfounded when she began making a grocery list. I knew normal people cooked the majority of their meals, but my father wasn't normal even in that sense of the word, so I grew up eating out or ordering in with the occasional frozen dinner thrown into the mix. When she asked me what types of foods I liked to eat I was stuck trying to remember if I'd ever even *had* a home cooked meal.

*Did Pop Tarts count?*

I glanced at the list she'd already started, seeing things like chicken, pork chops, potatoes, and onions, and didn't think they did. I wondered why she would go through all of that trouble to cook for me when only thirty minutes earlier she was ready to walk out the door. I knew on some level it had to do with her grandmother, but a part of me was wary.

*Was she doing it to be nice or did she have her own end game?*

Maybe she had her own battle plans dubbed Operation Seduce Eric with her first move being trying to lure me in by acting like 'good wife' and cooking for her husband. Now that she'd seen my house, maybe she had decided that she could get used to living this way and was no longer in a hurry to leave. Only time would tell, but I couldn't afford to let my guard down. It seemed like everyone in my life wanted to use me for one thing or another, so why would she be any different?

*I'd still fuck her though.*

I stared down at her hands as she continued writing the list and noticed the plain gold wedding band she now wore. It couldn't have cost much and the red heart sat above the band entirely. Sookie said she didn't mind, nor did she mention my promise to take her ring shopping on Rodeo Drive, but if she *did* have plans to use me for my money, she might just be waiting for the right

time. The true test would be when Pam showed up the next day with rings for her to choose from. If she chose the biggest of the bunch I would know she was just like everyone else.

After I ordered our dinner (extra fortune cookies?), Sookie said she was going to change the sheets on her bed so I decided to take another shower since I still felt sticky with sweat. By the time I got out and walked back into the kitchen I saw she'd already set up plates and silverware on the breakfast island in preparation for our dinner. It looked odd sitting there because I always ate out of the container the food came in while sitting on the couch watching TV, but I didn't say anything because I didn't want to draw any attention to the gaping spots on the walls from the missing posters.

Sookie came in carrying the sheets that had been on her bed asking, "Do you have any laundry that needs to be done? I'm going to wash these, but it would be a waste to do just half a load."

I'm sure I looked at her like she had three heads saying, "Sookie, you don't have to do my laundry. You don't even have to do your own. I have a maid service that comes in on Wednesdays that takes care of that and the house so you can just leave them in the hamper."

She looked back at me like *I* had three heads saying, "That's ridiculous! There are only the two of us living here, so why would we need someone to come in to clean?"

Maybe she had *four* heads. "Why not?"

From her look, I must have four heads too. "Because it's a waste of money!"

Irritating Sookie was back it seemed. "It's money well spent because I'm sure as hell not doing it and it's *my* money; end of discussion."

I could practically *see* the steam shooting out of her ears before she snapped, "You did *not* just 'end of discussion' me."

The doorbell rang a second later and I stood up grabbing my wallet and walked out saying, "Yes, I did."

I strode to the front door muttering under my breath over how infuriating she could be and paid the delivery guy for our food before heading back into the kitchen with the bags. I plopped them down on the counter and met her eyes, glare for glare, waiting for her to go off on me again. Instead she surprised me by taking the bags and spreading out the containers in front of our plates. She glanced at the receipt attached to one of the bags and pulled some cash out of her purse, laying it down on top of my wallet.

"What's that?" I asked.

"Money," she replied, infusing her voice like I rode the little bus to school.

I rolled my eyes wondering if I could last a whole year like this and replying, "I *know*. What's it for?"

"For my half of dinner." She refused to look at me and just started filling her plate with food.

I didn't know what to say after that. I was *always* the one to pay for, well, everything so her just assuming that she had to pay for half of our meal threw me and dampened my anger from moments before.

"Sookie, you don't have to pay for *your half* of our dinner." She still refused to look at me and instead just stared at her plate without touching it. I tried to lighten the mood saying, "Isn't it the husband's job to provide for their wife?"

She continued to stare at her plate of untouched food while chewing on her bottom lip before she took a deep breath and said, "Listen Eric. This is all a bit overwhelming for me and to be honest, I'm not used to not doing things for myself." She looked up at me before sweeping her hands out in front of her and continued, "This house; the way you live; is like nothing that I've ever experienced before and I don't know how to act. I'm used to earning my own way and I already know that I couldn't even afford to pay for the utilities on a house like this much less pay you for half of your mortgage."

I could see the tears welling in her eyes and they completely doused whatever anger I was still holding onto when I interrupted her saying, "Sookie, I don't expect or want you to pay for anything while you're living here. I own the house free and clear so there's no mortgage."

"But I won't feel right living here for free, so the only way I'll be okay with staying here is if I pay for the groceries and do all of the cooking and cleaning in exchange."

"What? No! Sookie, I have more money than even Pam could spend so it's no hardship for me to have you living here." In the back of my mind I wondered if this was part of her plan to lure me in, but from the stray tears falling from her eyes, I didn't think so.

"Well then I can't stay here Eric," she replied, standing up and leaving her untouched food on the counter to walk out.

I grabbed her arm, halting her departure, and asked, "You would really leave if I didn't let you pay your own way? What about your grandmother?"

She stared back at me and said with conviction, "My Gran would rather live with the shame that I had foolishly gotten married on a drunken binge to a man I didn't even know than to know I allowed myself to be a kept woman."

Playing poker had really made me attuned to people's body language and I could normally spot a bluff a mile away. Sookie wasn't bluffing.

"I pay for the groceries, but I'll cancel the cleaning service," I offered. It helped when I pictured Sookie wearing a French maid costume bent over the coffee table waving a feather duster around.

"I pay for half of the groceries and you cancel the cleaning service," she countered.

Maybe I could hide her purse when we went shopping the next day. "Fine," I agreed.

We sat and ate in silence, mostly. There were no words spoken between us, but the moans coming from Sookie as she ate were making my jeans uncomfortably tight. I wondered if she was doing it on purpose, but whenever I glanced at her she seemed oblivious about it all. She'd filled her plate and I was pleasantly surprised to see that she wasn't shy about eating it all. I was used to women that considered a Tic Tac a full meal, so it was nice to see she wasn't like them.

She was nothing like them.

I was surprised again when she got up and started clearing away the leftovers and loading the dishwasher with our dirty plates. I would have just left them in the sink for the cleaning service, but I guess Sookie was in charge of that now. She found the cleaning supplies underneath the sink and began wiping everything down while trying to stifle her yawns that were becoming more frequent.

When she deemed everything, "Done!" She followed up with, "I think I'm going to get some sleep. It's been a long day."

I didn't really want her to leave me just yet, but since I hadn't exactly been talking her ear off there was nothing for me to say other than, "Okay. I'll see you in the morning."

She smiled at me and I felt better seeing it reach her eyes as she said, "Goodnight Eric."

"Goodnight Sookie." My eyes stayed on her retreating form until I could no longer see her while I replayed everything in my mind. Everything about her confused me and I was left trying to figure it all out. After a while I decided that I would just have to adopt a 'wait and see' approach, but I would still move forward with Operation Seduce Sookie in the meantime.

On that front, I stood up and headed back out to the garage to take the posters from their frames so I could put them through the shredder now that I had the time and made a mental note to remember to hide her purse before going to bed.

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## Chapter 17: Chapter 17

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### Chapter 17

**SPOV**

I woke up fairly early Sunday morning after a fitful night's sleep. The bed was comfortable, more so than my old one, but I just couldn't seem to stop fidgeting and tossing and turning all night long with my thoughts invariably returning to Eric.

*What was I doing here? Could I really pretend to be his loving wife for an entire year? Would I be able to resist my own urges to have sex with him? Would he be faithful even though I had no plans to sleep with him?*

I wasn't so sure he could, or would, and I didn't subscribe to the whole 'a man has needs' bullshit. Women have needs too; that's why God gave us hands and a shower massager. But all I'd have to do was picture Gran's face and it would immediately strengthen my resolve to remain with Eric. It didn't help that my 'fortunes' consisted of *'The greatest danger could be your stupidity'* and *'It doesn't matter. Who is without flaw?'*

What the fuck? Did Pam have a side job stuffing fortune cookies?

The few times I *was* able to fall asleep, I was plagued by nightmares of Eric fucking one faceless woman after another and I woke up feeling hurt and humiliated every single time. It did nothing to improve my mood and I ended up getting out of bed altogether just to avoid having any more God awful dreams.

My muscles, among other parts of me, were still sore from what I decided to call *'that night'* and I was surprised when I'd stripped off my nightgown discovering bruises in the shape of fingerprints on my hips. I must have been too shocked and hung over to notice the morning before and I'd been so tired that night that I just undressed and pulled on my nightgown in the dark. They definitely weren't there pre-Las Vegas, so they had to have been from *'that night'* and judging by the spread they were made by large hands; Eric's large hands.

*Yep, everything about him was big.*

I was just grateful I was hickey free and the bruises couldn't be seen unless I was naked or in my underwear, so no one would have to see them.

Stepping into the shower, I stayed under the spray for a while hoping to wash away my leftover sour mood and if the fingerprints disappeared, that would be okay too. I slipped on a t-shirt and shorts, not bothering with make up or anything more than towel drying my hair, feeling in desperate need of coffee. I didn't have any the day before and the lack of caffeine, plus the lack of sleep, were taking a toll on me.

I didn't remember seeing any coffee grounds when I was rummaging through Eric's kitchen the day before and when I walked in looking around, the lack of even a coffee pot on the counter was already guaranteeing me a piss poor start to my day. I went to grab my purse thinking I could run out and buy some, but I couldn't find it anywhere. I could have sworn I left it on the kitchen counter, but I went back and checked my room just to be sure. It wasn't anywhere and only made me more pissy, but when it dawned on me that my car was still at Amelia's I got even pissier knowing I couldn't have gone anywhere anyway. I was stuck. Trapped. With no coffee.

Fuck.

It was barely after 8 a.m. and I had no idea how long Eric normally slept in, so I prepared myself for the worst and went into the '*Have a whore? Hang her picture here!*' room to see if I could find at least a can of Coke behind the bar.

Since it was Sunday I said a silent prayer to God, apologizing for unknowingly marrying the Devil with evil abs, and stepped into the room, forcing myself to take a good look around. Surprisingly there wasn't a tit or an ass to be found and the empty spaces from before had disappeared with all of the other posters rearranged evenly throughout the room. I didn't know what to make of that.

*Did he do it because he knew it would bother me to have to see them all of the time or was he trying to hide his true nature?*

Gah...I could, and probably would, drive myself crazy with questions about Eric's motives, but nothing could change the 'how' in how we got here. Now we both just needed to deal with it and hope for the best. Once I found my bottle of artificially sweetened liquid caffeine behind the bar, I pulled back the curtains on the outer wall of the room and gasped seeing Eric's backyard.

It was huge with a large patio and built in grill, which must have come with the house since he didn't cook, but the best part was the in-ground swimming pool. I jerked the door open and ran outside like a kid on Christmas morning 'ooing' and 'aahing' to the birds and squirrels that scattered in my wake. A year wouldn't be so bad if I could spend it floating in the middle of the pool and working on my tan. The days were still hot so I made plans to use it once we came back from grocery shopping.

I decided to give Eric one more hour before he got a passive aggressive wake-up call with me turning on the vacuum and leaving it outside of his bedroom door. I was afraid to knock or just walk in after seeing what he wore '*that night*', knowing he was tempting enough when clothed. Naked...yeah, my willpower wasn't *that* strong.

I took a leisurely stroll around the yard enjoying the flowerbeds strategically scattered around the yard, eventually making my way to the front of the house and stopped short seeing something even better than flowers.

Eric was jogging up the driveway wearing a fitted Under Armor shirt and loose shorts with the morning sun highlighting his blond hair that was plastered to his sweaty head. It was probably the lack of coffee, but it looked like he was running in slow motion with his arms pumping at his sides, showcasing those biceps I was becoming too fond of and his mouth was open just enough to force the air in and out of his lungs, making his chest all ripple-y and me all drippy. Not with sweat either.

Just the sight of him forced away my bad mood and the bad dreams of the night before. I couldn't move, not that I wanted to or had anywhere to be just then, and when his eyes found me, the

smile that followed it made my knees a little weak. My hands too because I dropped my almost full can of Coke and was sprayed with soda from my thighs down to my bare feet.

*Could I be any more of a dork?*

Of course Eric saw the whole thing, but at least he didn't laugh at me, much, and as soon as he got close enough he said, "It's a good thing your little woodland friends are already gone or else you could've taken one out."

I grinned replying, "Of course they're gone. The big bad wolf is huffing and puffing his way up the driveway."

He came to a stop right in front of me and even though he was still catching his breath he managed to sound sexy, saying, "But you're standing outside. How am I supposed to *huff* and *puff* and *blow* your house down?"

You'd think he would smell bad from sweating so much, but he didn't. At all.

He was *way* inside my personal space, but I tried to act unfazed and met his leering eyes with my own, licking my lips and purring back, "But it's *your* house so you'd just be *huffing* and *puffing* and *blowing* yourself."

Eric swallowed hard before grinning back and replying, "Oh, Miss Stackhouse, if I could do *that* I'd never leave the house."

*If I could do that I'd never leave your house either.*

His choice of name for me brought with it one of the billion questions I'd been meaning to ask. "About the whole name thing, would you be terribly put off if I changed my last name to Northman? I mean, it's just that Gran is old fashioned and if I didn't then she would ask questions and I suppose I could just tell her that it's the 21st century, but she wouldn't let it go and I might end up snapping back at her and it's not really wise to talk back to her unless you want a whooping and..."

Eric raised his hands up interrupting my nervous rambling and laughed saying, "It's fine Sookie, I don't mind."

"Oh, well...thanks!" That was easy. Maybe I could ramble my way into getting him to agree to move the poker table out of the kitchen and I could pick up a dinette at Target or something.

Eric turned to pick up the soda can that had rolled away from me and I got an up close and personal view of my new favorite body part of him. It was unfair really; I never once thought that when I got married I would have to talk myself *out* of throwing down my husband and fucking him unconscious, but that was exactly what I had to do. Didn't I?

Yes. Yes I did. I could imagine it though.

My mind immediately turned to wicked thoughts about Eric and when I heard, "Sookie?", at first it blended in with my fantasy. The second time Eric's voice broke through, my daydream ended and halted what had been quite a spectacular display of flexibility on my part involving me and him on one of the chaise lounges in the backyard. Daydream Eric had been well on his way to passing out, but because Real Eric looked so much like Daydream Eric I was confused at first that he was coherent, much less talking, and had to shake it off. *My bad.*

"Huh?"

He seemed amused, staring back at me and apparently repeated himself. "I asked if you were ready to go inside."

I got the sneaking suspicion that he knew I'd been thinking about him and his makes-me-stupid sexy ass, but I just nodded my head in reply. I hadn't even noticed the sprinklers had turned on and were watering the lawn until Eric said, "But first you have to rinse the soda off," and he pulled me under the spray. I screamed in surprise as the cold water hit my overheated skin and tried to run away, but Eric's hand had a tight hold on my own and I couldn't get loose.

I spun my body thinking he'd have to let go, but I turned the wrong way and ended up with his arm wrapped around me completely. I made a good show of trying to get away, but I was pleased to find his chest and abs felt just as hard as they looked. I could feel his whiskers graze across my cheek as I tried to squirm away and sent another silent prayer to God to give me the strength to *not* tilt my head up and kiss him.

We were both laughing and panting by the time he let me go a minute later and I playfully smacked his arm chastising, "You got me wet!"

*If only he knew how true that statement was.*

"Did I now?" he asked with a cocked eyebrow.

"With *water* Mr. Dirty Mind!" I was sure I sounded believable. Most likely.

We walked straight through the front door and into the kitchen, using dish towels to dry off. I had to not look at him to quell the overwhelming urge to lick the water from his skin. How could I be soaking wet and feeling so parched at the same time?

I kept my eyes anywhere but on him and when they swept over the counter where I last saw my purse it made me ask, "Have you seen my purse? I could have sworn I left it there on the counter last night."

When Eric didn't answer me right away I looked to where he was standing and regretted it immediately. He was standing there shirtless, wiping his chest down with the soaked dish towel which was doing little more than pushing the water around his skin. Satan and his evil abs were back.



*Yea, though I walk through the shadow of the valley of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.*

As I ran from the kitchen to my room I'm pretty sure I told Eric I was going to church when I meant to say 'change', but I really needed to do both because at that moment I was feeling like a very bad Christian and wanted nothing more than for his *rod* and *staff* to comfort me in as many different positions as I could bend.

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## **Chapter 18: Bonus Chapter The Wedding Night**

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### Bonus Fucking Chapter – The Consummation

(What? Their wedding and rings weren't classy, so why should their wedding night be?)

#### **EPOV**

I couldn't get her into our room quickly enough. Her scent alone was driving me wild, but I needed to feel her bare flesh underneath my hands. Now that I had her in my grasp I would never let her go. Ever. She was mine as much as I was hers; I made sure our tattoos said so.

The now empty champagne bottles we carried with us from the limo clattered to the floor when I shoved her up against the wall, pinning her body with my own, and I told her again, "I love you so fucking much," before attacking her mouth with my own. How her lips could still taste like cherry lip gloss after I'd kissed them a hundred times that night was just another reason I was glad she was mine. I fucking loved cherries.

Her dress, red like the cherries I loved so much, did spectacular things for her figure. My Sookie was a *real* woman, soft and curvy; not like those boney ass bitches I was constantly surrounded by in Hollywood. It didn't matter that we hadn't known each other long. I knew from the moment I laid eyes on her that she was different; different from any other woman I'd fucked and I wanted her. Even her name was different; Sookie. It rhymed with cookie and I loved fucking cookies.

Mine.

I couldn't wait to get her to the chapel so I could legally claim her as my own and now here she was; my wife. Just the thought made me smile against her skin as I licked my way across her neck to her ear and I whispered, "Mine," to remind her again just in case she forgot.

"Yours," she purred back, her fingers weaving into my hair and her legs wrapped firmly around my waist. Her short dress had already ridden up her hips, with the hem now around her waist, so my hands automatically went down to cup her ass while my cock strained to reach her through my jeans and I growled discovering she'd gone commando. I'd gone commando too, but I decided she wasn't allowed to because it was one less layer separating her from the horde of

cocksuckers she'd been surrounded by when I first saw her, all of them itching to get their dick beaters on her.

She was mine; just look at her finger.

"Where are your panties Mrs. Northman?" I rasped out, biting her shoulder as a penalty she seemed more than willing to pay given the way her back arched towards me with her drenched pussy soaking the front of my jeans as she ground herself against me.

"In my suitcase," she giggled until one of my fingers slipped inside of her. My dick got impossibly harder feeling how tight she was and I slipped in a second finger to prepare her for what I'd been dying to do all night long; fuck her. Her head fell back and banged on the wall behind her, urging me on with choked out, "*Fucks*," and commands of "*Harder*" and "*Faster*". When my palm ground against her clit and my fingers curled inside of her I felt her pussy clamp down on my fingers a split second before she screamed out my name with her release.

She was fucking spectacular when she came and I wanted to see and hear it all over again.

I carried her to the dresser and swept everything to the floor with my arm before setting her down on top. It was the perfect height for me to fuck her, but I wanted to taste her first. I pulled her dress over her head and tossed it behind me, leaving her completely naked except for the red lace bra she wore. Her skin was flushed with color and her eyes wandered up and down my body before she reached towards me saying, "You're overdressed Mr. Northman."

Her fingers grabbed a hold of my shirt, pulling it over my head and dropping it to the floor before running her hands down my chest, with her fingertips tracing each and every muscle. Her touch was driving me mad with want and I flicked her bra open, wanting to see the last part of her that I'd been denied up until now.

"Fucking beautiful," I whispered in awe, which she was; every part of her was fucking beautiful and I captured her mouth with my own, grateful that she was mine; grateful that I was a lucky enough bastard for her to have chosen me.

Her hands got to work freeing me from my jeans and when my cock sprang out at her I pulled back slightly and chuckled at the look of surprise on her face as she stared unabashedly. She licked her lips and wrapped her hand around the base, stroking me up and down, whispering, "You're so big." I leaned my forehead against hers thrusting into to her hand before placing my lips back on hers, acknowledging, "And I'm all yours."

My hands massaged each of her breasts while my mouth was still busy on hers and I marveled at how perfect they felt, filling my large hands easily, and feeling her nipples harden under my fingertips drew my mouth to them like a moth to a flame. I licked and sucked, teased and kissed my way across each of them, enjoying every whimper and gasp and cry I could draw out of Sookie. She was nothing like the other women I'd fucked in the past and I wanted to show her just how special she was by worshipping her the way she deserved.

When I felt her legs wrap around my body once more, giving her the leverage she needed to grind her hips against my chest, the wet trail she left behind made me move farther down her body knowing I couldn't leave her pussy feeling neglected. Her hips bucked towards me with the first swipe of my tongue through her folds and I moaned at the taste of her. I heard her head hit the wall again as she begged, "Oh God...yes... more baby, more."

I had to grab onto her hips with both hands just to keep her still and gave her what she wanted. My tongue traced along her slit, licking up and down from her center to her clit, trying to memorize every detail like her pussy held the secrets of the world. As perfect as she was it probably did and only made me more grateful for being smart enough to make her mine.

Her pants and moans were becoming louder and more frequent and my eyes traveled up to her face as my lips wrapped around her small bundle of nerves with my tongue, softly stroking and suckling in a slow and steady rhythm; willing her body to explode from nothing more than the gentle coaxing of my mouth. All it took was one last appreciative hum from me and her whole body went rigid with her lips contorting into a silent 'O' and incoherent cries left her throat.

Seeing her like that left me aching with need and I stood, lining my cock up with her pussy, and teasingly gliding it along her slit, coating myself in her cum knowing it was going to be a tight fit. The sensations made Sookie's eyes flutter open and I kept my grip on her hips as I continued teasing her with my dick and asked, "Do you want me Lover?"

Her half lidded eyes opened wide and filled with desire as she declared, "I've wanted you my whole life now fuck me already!"

I couldn't help grinning, thinking if this was how she chose to henpeck me as her husband I would die a happy man, and responded, "Yes dear," pushing my way inside of her.

Did I say 'tight fit'? She was so tight I was afraid when I came it would be forced out through my eyes and I made myself hold still, worried I might be hurting her. "Lover, are you okay? Am I your first?" Even with all of the alcohol in my system I knew I couldn't fuck her on a dresser if it was her first time.

Sookie just wiggled her hips in frustration and said, "No, you're my second and my last. Now fuck me already...please!"

Oh, okay.

We both moaned once I was fully encased inside of her and if she hadn't already been so relaxed from her first two orgasms I probably would have hurt her, but she surprised me matching me thrust for thrust. Sex had never felt so good before and only cemented the notion that she was made for me. I'd fucked a lot of women in my life, but none of them compared to the one in front of me.

Fuck Alcide and Sookie's friend. They didn't know what they were talking about. Sookie and I were meant to be together.

Watching her writhe around in front of me, holding onto the dresser for dear life as I pounded into her over and over was threatening to break my control. Her hair hung wild and tangled around her shoulders, her body glistening with sweat, and when I felt her inner walls starting to contract around me she yelled out, "Oh...fuck...me!"

It probably wasn't a challenge, but I took it as one and I fucked her just like she wanted, right through her orgasm and right into another one. I damn near fucked her right through the wall before I couldn't hold back anymore and came with a roar in long hot spurts inside of her, my whole body shuddering from the hairs that stood up on the back of my neck to my toes that were curled inside of the boots I still wore.

It took a few minutes for both of us to catch our breath and I slowly eased myself out of her and carried her to the bed. I settled her in the center of it and removed my boots and jeans before climbing in next to her and pulled her up against my side. I felt a little dizzy and out of it, but I chalked it up to all of the fucking we'd just done. I couldn't ever remember feeling so good and when I felt Sookie's fingertips trailing up my inner thigh I guessed she was feeling something too.

## **SPOV**

It was so unreal. I married my fantasy boyfriend. I was really Mrs. Eric Northman. I always knew we were fated to be together no matter what Amelia said. So what if I had a little too much to drink, how could I ever regret marrying my first love?

And he was such an amazing lover I knew I'd never be able to get enough. Even now, four orgasms later, I still wanted more.

It had been so long since I'd had sex and now that I had access to the man I'd always fantasized about in my bed I didn't want to waste a single minute. Even though a part of me felt like a wanton whore I wondered if he'd be able to go again so soon afterward and trailed my fingers up his inner thigh to the crease at the top of his leg and saw his dick twitch. I decided to call it 'Mr. Big' and giggled feeling a little like Carrie Bradshaw.

That telltale movement seemed promising so I continued tracing along his lower abdomen, which was worthy of its own star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame, before retracing the same route on his other leg, purposefully avoiding the part of him I wanted the most.

I watched, completely mesmerized, as he slowly became aroused again, and when I finally touched him with a firm stroke of my hand he moaned before chuckling, "You're a greedy little thing; I like it."

He was right; I *was* greedy and I sat up, throwing one leg over him and lined him up with my entrance. As I slowly took his length inside of me I admitted, "I *am* greedy, only for you." I braced my hands on his chest and lifted my hips again before forcing myself back down on top of him. The liquids left inside of me were forced out by gravity and friction, but neither one of us

seemed to care. His hands found my hips and he moved in concert with me building us both towards yet another release.

"I can't get enough of you," I admitted. I rocked my hips, swirling them down his length on every downward stroke and forcefully gripped the base of his cock with my inner muscles before raising myself up only to repeat the process all over again. "I'll never have enough. I'll always want more."

Eric's hands moved up to massage my breasts and then slid one down the front of my body, finding my clit and said, "I'll always have more to give you. I'd give you whatever you want, you only have to ask."

His fingers flew over my clit at a furious pace and the rhythm of our hips became more forceful. "I only want you," I cried out. I could feel him swelling even larger inside of me and it was enough to send me over the edge, pulling his orgasm out with mine.

My head was spinning and I fell on top of Eric's naked chest with him still inside of me. I couldn't have moved if I wanted to so it was a good thing I had no desire to move. Ever. My eyes fluttered shut and right before I fell asleep I felt his fingers brush my hair aside and barely heard him whisper, "You have me Lover and you always will."

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## Chapter 19: Chapter 18

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### Chapter 18

#### EPOV

After I hid Sookie's purse underneath the pile of sheets in the laundry room I went to bed, but I couldn't fall asleep for shit. I kept going back and forth over whether or not I was doing the right thing; not about hiding her purse, but whether or not I should go through with our fake marriage. There was something about her that bothered me, or rather *my reaction* to her that bothered me.

Never before had I gone through so much trouble to try and make a girl happy. Why would I? I didn't give a shit about them once I'd gotten off and there was always another willing body to take their place. I didn't even have any guarantees that Sookie would eventually give in to me, so was I willing to blue ball it for an entire year?

*No.*

Even if she did give in and I got to fuck her and actually remember it, would I be willing to deny myself the pleasures of other women for an entire year?

*Not likely unless her pussy actually was magical.*

The more I thought about it, the more worked up I became feeling pissed off all over again. She was definitely getting a lot more out of the deal than I was by getting to live with me. By her own admission she'd never experienced a life of luxury so I was sure it was just a matter of time before her tastes started to reflect what my bank account could afford despite her pleas for me to allow her to pay for something. She had more personalities than Sybil, flipping back and forth from sweet-girl-next-door to fire breathing dragon and my reactions to each of them were just as psychotic. Only twenty four hours earlier I was single, footloose and fancy free, able to fuck any woman in my path. Now I was married to a woman I didn't know, she was sleeping across the hall in her own bed, and I couldn't seem to have a civilized conversation with her for longer than an hour, so if fucking her was to occur I'd have to make it a quickie.

I tossed and turned all night long before deciding to get up and go for a run. I normally ran on the days I didn't go to the gym, but hardly ever on weekends because I was usually up late the night before, whether it was from partying, gambling, fucking, or all three. Running always cleared my head and with every fall of my footsteps on the pavement, I started to feel better. In the light of day the things I'd gone over the night before didn't seem that bad as I recalled her sense of humor (if she cooked she probably had a whole list of spice names she could use on the cocksucker) and her willingness to go toe to toe with my father. I still didn't know what I wanted to do about any of it, but in the meantime I resigned myself to try and just go with flow for now and at least give Sookie a chance until she'd given me a reason not to, however I wasn't going to try and be someone I wasn't just to please her.

I was making my way back up the driveway when I saw her standing in the yard staring at me. It had only been a few hours since I'd last seen her, but my memory didn't do her justice. It was a lot easier to dismiss the idea of being with her when I wasn't confronted with just how beautiful she was and I felt the smile form on my face before I could hide the way she affected me. Her responding smile only weakened my resolve and once I had her wrapped in my arms, with the two of us laughing in the spray of the sprinklers, every thought I'd had the night before of not bothering to go through with the charade left my mind.

I was thankful Sookie didn't look at me when we were in the kitchen drying off because her soaked white t-shirt hid nothing, nor did my loose shorts hide my obvious arousal seeing her. Her nipples were hard, straining the light pink lace bra I could clearly see under her shirt, and I vaguely considered offering to do *her* laundry right then in the hopes that she might strip her clothes off in the kitchen. At least I still had the presence of mind to remember to pull off my own shirt when she asked about her purse and was relieved when it seemed to distract her enough to run from the room muttering something about going to church. I thought we were going shopping, but if she wanted to go to church I'd just drop her off and pick her up later, already convinced I'd be unable to enter the house of God without a personal invitation from the Man himself.

I took a quick shower, throwing on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt when I was done, and found Sookie waiting for me in the kitchen. I had to hide my grin when I noticed she was hesitant to look at me with the relief showing on her face when she finally chanced a glance and saw that I was dressed.

"I still can't find my purse."

*Would it be too obvious if I took my shirt off again?*

"I'm sure it'll turn up later, so you can get it next time. Did you want to go shopping or to church?" I asked, hoping my offer to let her pay for the next trip would appease her and the change of subject would work. I'm sure I could find another reason to take my shirt off then too.

I wondered why she blushed from my question, but it seemed like I would probably never figure her out anyway. She bit her lip before replying, "Shopping. I need to buy a coffee pot too."

I was glad I'd removed the posters from their frames the night before as I grabbed a hold of Sookie's hand, ignoring how natural it felt, and led her out to the garage. Pointing at the stacks of boxes in the corner I said, "I'm pretty sure there's one in there."

Not long after I first moved in, Pam had gone shopping not only for furniture for the living room, but items she said a grown-up's house should have, however the only things that got unpacked were the dishes, silverware, and glassware. I'm pretty sure she took her housekeeper along to help her pick out the items knowing Pam probably couldn't toast a Pop Tart and I took smug satisfaction in the knowledge that I *could* if I had a toaster.

Sookie dove into the pile like it was Christmas morning, pulling things out left and right, listing the items out loud as she went. "Pots and pans...serving dishes...here's the coffee maker...utensils for the grill...a toaster..."

"Add Pop Tarts to the list," I interrupted. I couldn't remember the last time I had them and since Sookie seemed hell bent on cooking, I could at least make her breakfast one morning. Hopefully it would be breakfast in bed. Together. Naked.

She started loading up what she could and brought them into the kitchen with me doing the same. "Why is everything in the garage?" she asked on our way back to grab the rest.

I shrugged my shoulders saying, "I've lived here for three years and haven't needed any of it yet. Pam bought all of it." When I noticed her shaking her head I had to ask, "What?"

"Nothing really. I just couldn't imagine letting so many beautiful things going to waste when there are so many people out there, literally, without a pot to piss in."

Her tone was more 'matter of fact' than it was confrontational, but I couldn't help feeling defensive and bit back with, "*I didn't waste* money buying shit I would never use, *Pam* wasted my money. Money I worked *my ass off* to earn, but if someone were to knock on my door begging for one of those pots to piss in, I'd give it to them. Better?"

Sookie had already loaded up her arms with more boxes when her face flushed in an instant and she turned to face me, every bit as incensed as I was, saying, "*I wasn't* trying to call your *upstanding character* into question, I was just making an observation. And I'll have you know

that *a lot* of those people who don't have a pot to piss in are good hardworking souls that are too proud to *beg!* They'd much rather have a hand up than a hand out. Besides, they couldn't get into your *ritzy ass gated community neighborhood* to knock on your fucking door to *ask* for one of your fucking *five hundred dollar* pots to piss in. Fuck!"

Before I could verbally retaliate Sookie marched back into the kitchen, dropping the boxes on the floor, and grabbed the cordless phone from the counter. I was pissed off enough that if she was calling a taxi, I'd drive her to the fucking gate of my *ritzy ass neighborhood* myself, but she didn't even put the phone up to her ear and I was too curious to *not* follow her when she left the room. I could hear her cell phone ringing before she even opened up the laundry room door and retreated back into the kitchen berating myself for not thinking to turn it off when I saw it sitting in the side pocket of her purse.

I pretended to make myself busy by stacking the boxes on the counter and didn't bother to look up when I heard Sookie walk back into the room until I heard her speak.

"I'm so sorry for flaking out on you this morning, I should have called..." I looked up and saw she was talking into her cell phone.

*Who the fuck is she talking too?*

"Oh, you saw that, huh? No. No *honeymoon...*"

*If she asks me to take her to Hawaii or some shit, she's outta here.*

"You have no idea...So you got along okay this morning without me?"

*Maybe it's her friend Amelia?*

"Alright darling...so I'll see you next week?"

*Darling? Did girls call each other 'darling'?*

"Trust me...you're still my favorite guy."

?

"I love you too Laf, bye."

The anger I felt hearing her profess her love to her *darling*, her favorite *guy*, was all consuming so my calm tone belied the rage that roiled underneath my skin when I asked, "Is there something you want to tell me?"

When her eyes travelled to my hands, I glanced down and saw I was white knuckling some sort of metal spatula. It probably didn't come bent in the 'U' shape it was now in.



Sookie cocked her eyebrow and replied, "I found my purse?"

*Bitch.*

"We need to pick up another spatula?"

*Smart ass bitch.*

I didn't want to have to ask outright, but she was leaving me no choice. It was her fucking condition that there would be *no fucking*, so if she had some fuck buddy missing out on their Sunday morning tryst I thought I had a right to know.

And irrationally, a right to *kill him*.

"Who were you talking to?"

She gave me a triumphant smirk, but I couldn't be bothered being upset over having lost the battle to give in and ask, so her one word answer just pissed me off more.

"Lafayette."

"Is *Lafayette* someone that's going to go to the media telling the world you're *in love* with *him* or is he just some random guy you fuck on Sunday mornings?" I tried to convince not only her, but myself, that I was just concerned about another cluster fuck like her brother's interview. I don't think I succeeded.

It felt like hours had passed while we stared each other down before she said, "I'm not *in love* with Lafayette, I *love* him like the sister I never had and he would much rather fuck *you* than *me*. He runs the homeless shelter I volunteer at."

*Why didn't I figure that out from what she'd told me the day before? Why did I give a shit whether or not she 'loved' someone else? Why did I feel so fucking relieved when I heard her explanation?*

I tried to sound indifferent as I replied, "Oh." When she didn't move or say anything else I started feeling the awkward tension creep back into the room now that Silent Sookie was back and grabbed my keys, saying, "Are you ready to go?"

I didn't wait for her to respond and walked out to the garage, choosing to take the Audi since we'd be hauling back groceries and knowing they probably wouldn't fit in the Corvette. Sookie climbed into the car and remained silent until we got to the *ritzy ass gate* and upon seeing the circus waiting on the other side she pulled a pair of sunglasses out of her purse and put them on saying, "Fuck me..."

I couldn't resist and chuckled at the glare I was sure she was aiming my way when I replied, "Maybe when we get back if you're a good girl."

Chapter 19

**SPOV**

*What the fuck just happened?*

One minute I was doing all I could not to crawl inside of a box of high end pots and pans to hide from how much I enjoyed Eric holding my hand and the next we were at it all over again, and not *at it* in the naked sense like I really wanted. That's what I get for trying to make small talk instead of finding a way to spill something on his shirt so he'd have to take it off again.

At least the anger cleared my horny brain and it occurred to me to just call my cell phone and hope it wasn't dead so I could hear it ringing and possibly find my purse. I forgot all about the fact that I should have been at the shelter two hours earlier to help prepare and serve breakfast like I did every Sunday morning until we were fighting about pots to piss in. My intentions weren't to insult him, but his dickfaced attitude about the whole thing made me enraged. If only he could *see* the young kids waiting in line to be served one of the few hot meals they'd be getting that week or talk to their parents who lost everything because of the shitty economy and upside down mortgages, he would know just how fortunate he was. Then again, he might just be too self-centered to care.

Lafayette was very understanding as I apologized for leaving him high and dry without any notice, but he'd told me he hadn't expected me in after seeing the news about our wedding on TV. I'd been volunteering there ever since my freshman year in college when I couldn't afford to go home for Thanksgiving and walked in the door asking what I could do to help. Lafayette's bubbly personality and foul mouthed innuendos drew me to him like a hooker, or 'hookah' as he liked to call me, to a pair of dime store pantyhose.

I could tell it was eating away at Eric, not knowing who I was talking to, and I played it up calling Lafayette 'darling' to see what would happen. The poor spatula didn't last long and the satisfaction I felt was rewarding, especially since no matter how angry I got at Eric my body still wanted to wrap around his like a barnacle. I wondered if it was because my body could remember how I got those bruises even if my brain didn't and it wanted a repeat performance.

*Heavy duty tinfoil. Heavy. Duty.*

My body betrayed me yet again with his snarky offer to fuck me later on if I was a good girl, making my freshly changed panties soaked all over again without the benefit of the sprinklers. My whole body tensed and all I wanted to do was ignore the fact we were even in the car together, lest I jump over the center console to see if his offer was genuine, but even that didn't go as planned because Asshole with the evil abs decided to grab a hold of my hand and lace his

fingers through mine, resting our entwined hands on my left thigh and making me all squishy in between my legs wishing I'd worn pants instead of shorts.

I tried to pull away from his grasp, gritting out, "What are you doing?"

His fingers only held on tighter and I looked up to see him facing forward, smiling as he tried to maneuver the car in between the crowd of paparazzi all taking pictures and yelling out questions at our closed windows, and he said, "They're taking pictures so I'm trying to make it look like we're *happy*."

Well, my girly bits were happy, but that was the only part of me that was. I let out a stern, "Fine!" through my gritted teeth and tried to smile while ignoring how much I enjoyed the feeling of his thumb rubbing small circles on my hand. I'm sure it was just an unconscious action on his part.

It felt like forever before we were finally moving away from his neighborhood at a decent pace, but the caravan of cars full of paparazzi behind us gave me pause as the reality of our situation sunk in. "They're going to follow us everywhere aren't they..."

I was surprised he could hear me from how low my voice was as it was all I could do to not curl up into a ball over the thought of being in the center of a three ring circus as I picked up a box of tampons. I was also surprised I was still holding hands with Eric until he gently squeezed mine and said, "They'll stay outside. Once we're in the store everyone will pretty much leave us alone."

"Pretty much?" That didn't sound very promising.

Eric shrugged his shoulders saying, "Sometimes people come up wanting autographs, or something, but everyone more or less leaves me alone."

We hadn't been on the road for very long and just as I was about to ask what store we were going to, Eric pulled into the parking lot of Bristol Farms. Seeing how his house was basically void of anything to eat I asked, "How do you know where the grocery store is if you don't shop for groceries?"

He pulled into a parking space and shut the car off before turning to me and saying, "Sometimes I want pretzels to go with my beer." Of course.

It was only seconds later when the caravan pulled into the parking lot after us, so Eric and I quickly exited the car and he grabbed onto my hand, pulling me through the crowd and into the store. He grabbed a hand basket and raised his eyebrow at me when I grabbed a shopping cart instead, before putting the basket back. "How much stuff are we getting?" he asked.

"More than pretzels and beer," I muttered and started going through the fresh produce at the front of the store. Eric just draped himself over the handle of the shopping cart while I picked out fresh apples thinking I would make a pie later on and moved on to the vegetables. When I turned

around to put a bag of potatoes in the cart I saw Eric walking towards me with a bag of lemons. Wondering what they could be for I asked, "Did you want fresh lemonade?"

He put the bag in the cart and grinned saying, "No, while I don't remember it, I was under the impression that you enjoyed tequila shots, so I'm merely making sure we're prepared."

I was about to tell him he could go fuck himself if he thought he could get me drunk like that all over again, but it was obvious we were being stared at by everyone standing nearby and my glare was only able to disappear entirely when he unconsciously rubbed his hand on his stomach, lifting his shirt up slightly and revealing those damn abs of his.

I tried to ignore him. *Really I did!* I even turned around from my own personal kryptonite and became engrossed in a bag of onions hoping the smell would tame my urges, but Lex Luthor decided to saddle up behind me and put his hands on my hips, kissing the top of my head and making me melt like a chocolate Easter bunny left out in the sun.

"What are you doing?" I whispered, pissed at myself for my inability to *sound* pissed.

The bastard nuzzled my neck, inhaling my ire away, and said, "I'm touching my *wife* like a loving husband."

My entire body stiffened realizing Eric was just acting for those around us and I pushed away the disappointment I felt, not only from his words, but from my own growing desire that he might one day mean it.

*That was stupid, right?*

I was stupid, so I threw a bag of onions in the cart and peeled myself away from him moving on to the next aisle. We shopped together in silence for the most part with Eric occasionally reaching out to touch me in some way and when I couldn't take it anymore I sent him off in search of a bottle of hot sauce I needed to season the chicken I planned on frying for dinner. I needed comfort food in a big way and Gran's fried chicken recipe was calling to me. I also needed the other women to stop shooting daggers my way or else the paps were going to earn a fortune off of me today when I knocked one of those bitches to the ground.

I kept shopping and once I'd gotten everything on the list, I went in search of Eric wondering if he got lost since he hadn't returned yet. But he wasn't lost, he seemed to be *exactly* where I should have expected him to be.

I recognized the redhead from the movies, even though I couldn't remember her name just then, and I also recognized the flirty and familiar way she was touching Eric's arm. He was smiling right back at her and didn't even see me glaring at them from the end of the aisle. I cursed the stupid tears that welled in my eyes and brushed them away, thankful I hadn't put on any make-up that morning, and pushed the cart to the checkout line. I busied myself loading the conveyor belt with everything from the cart when the cashier broke into my mental tirade over Eric's inability

to not flirt with another woman, barely 24 hours after our agreement. I guess I should have been more specific.

"You're *her* aren't you?" she asked.

"Huh?" What? I'm not at my best after I've married a man whore, with no coffee in my system, while mentally castrating my *husband*.

"Here," she pointed at the magazine rack before continuing, "You're the one on the cover. You're the one that married Eric Northman."

Don't remind me. I looked up to see what she was talking about and there it was in glossy color for the whole world to see. I had no idea how they got it printed and on the shelves so fast, but on the cover was a picture of Eric carrying me out of the casino from the day before with the caption, 'Happily Ever After?' underneath it. The other pictures surrounding ours should have answered that question already. They were of Eric and a different whore for every day of the week, each one circled with a line through it and the word 'No' under their faces. If I had a marker I would have drawn one over my own face and written 'No' just to save them the trouble of doing it later on.

I felt Eric's hand on my back before I saw his arm placing the bottle of hot sauce on the conveyor belt in front of me and jerked away from his touch as he said, "Well *that* was quick."

I didn't know if he was referring to the picture already being published, my dislike of his touch, or the quickie he probably had in aisle 12, but I just ignored him and reached for my wallet as the cashier said the total out loud.

"Honey, put your wallet away," Mr. Can'tKeepHisDickInHisPants half whispered in my ear. Maybe Pam knew Justin Timberlake and I could borrow his 'Dick in a Box' box for Eric's.

The cashier sighed and looked all swoony from his fake endearment as I turned and saw him reaching in his pocket for his wallet, but I beat him to it and swiped my debit card before he had a chance to do anything about it. I didn't want a goddamn thing from him.

We bagged everything and since my hands were full of groceries he couldn't try and hold it, *pretending* he actually gave a shit about me, and my anger helped shield me from the panic attack I would have gotten over the crowd awaiting our departure in the parking lot. I merely plowed through them all, ignoring their questions about 'Are you happy to be married?' *No!*; 'Was it love at first sight?' *No!*; "Any plans on expanding your family in the near future?' *Do divorce attorneys count?*

As soon as I unloaded my bags into the trunk I flopped myself into the passenger's seat and practically ripped the seatbelt from the car in my effort to get it snapped into place before crossing my arms so he couldn't try and grab my hand for another fucking picture opportunity. Eric got in and as we drove away he calmly said, "Well that went as well as could be expected."

*Why? Did fire crotch blow you in the dairy cooler?*

The silence was deafening and I could feel Eric staring at the side of my head as I stared out the window swallowing every nasty thing I wanted to say to him. I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of knowing what I'd seen had upset me.

"Is something wrong?" he finally asked?

We'd pulled up to the *ritzy ass gate* by then so I continued ignoring him knowing I could be free from him in just a couple of minutes. I planned on floating in the middle of the pool with my ear buds in and letting the sun burn the images of him and his whores away. When we pulled into the driveway and I saw what was waiting there, I could feel the relief flood through my body so I was even more incensed when Eric's voice broke into my joy asking, "What in the fuck is that?"

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## **Chapter 21: Chapter 20**

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### Chapter 20

#### **EPOV**

*What the fuck just happened?*

One minute we were holding hands and I even got to kiss her (hair, but it was still a kiss) and the next minute she hardly says a word and turns into Princess Bitcharella. I felt bad for starting our fight over pots and pans in the first place and tried to apologize with my actions without actually saying the words. I thought everything had been going good at first; I held her hand; I tried to soothe her obvious tension over the crowd by rubbing circles over her skin; I did my best to ignore how silky smooth her leg was and kept everything G rated; everything seemed fine.

When it looked like she was going to get pissed about the tequila comment, I realized I'd overplayed my hand and was quick to raise my shirt a little, relieved it actually worked. I was never one for public displays of affection, but found I actually enjoyed holding Sookie's hand and missed the skin on skin contact. Since she was busy picking out onions (who knew you had to be so selective?) I took a chance and walked up behind her, placing my hands on her hips. Her height placed the top of her head just below my chin and the smell of her shampoo drew me in. It was cherry scented and cherries were my favorite fruit. My kiss to the top of her head passed without an angry comment from Sookie so I decided to push my luck and nuzzled her neck to see what other scents she held, knowing she was unlikely to smack me out in public.

I couldn't place them all, but the combination made Sookie's scent irresistible. I could happily get lost in it, not that I would admit to it, and figured she was getting worked up too when she pulled herself away. I couldn't stop staring at her, fascinated by every little thing she did, but since she seemed to want to shop in silence I kept my questions to myself. Sometimes she seemed lost in

her thoughts, like when she stared at the different boxes of tinfoil for 5 minutes straight, so I would reach out and touch her hand or her back and she would seem to 'come back'.

It dawned on me halfway through the store, as we stood in front of the shelves lined with a fuckton of different flavors Pop Tarts now came in; when she asked me which ones I wanted that Pam was right; I was smitten.

*Now what?*

I knew it couldn't be anything more than a crush, but what the fuck should I do about it? She ran hot and cold so quickly, half of the time I didn't know which way was up or down. Did I want her because she didn't fall at my feet? Because she presented me with my first real challenge? Or was it something more?

When she asked me to go and find the hot sauce she needed to make dinner that night, I was happy to go so I'd have the opportunity to try and figure out what it was about her that drew me in without having to look at her. Seeing her in front of me was my Achilles Heel, at least when she wasn't screeching at me, and I wanted to see if my thoughts would clear up if I wasn't confronted with her perfectly round shorts clad ass.

It took me wandering up and down three different aisles before locating where they kept the hot sauce and as I was trying to find the brand Sookie said she needed I heard the voice of the woman I'd been dreading having to talk to behind me. Sophie-Anne LeClerq was an almost A-List actress, but her reputation around Hollywood was more for her casting couch skills than her acting ability. We'd never worked together before, but on the few occasions we'd run into each other at various premieres and parties she'd been quite vocal in her attempts to add me to her list of conquests.

Her presence alone grated on my nerves, but even if it didn't, I knew firsthand some of the men she'd fucked in the past and wanted no part of being included in that group. I wouldn't fuck her with Pam's dick, but I had to be nice to her now that she'd fucked her way into the lead female role on the movie I was reading for in a few weeks. It was no secret in Hollywood that the director was completely enthralled by her so I had to make nice to her if I had any hopes of getting the part.

"Eric, I didn't figure I'd run into you here after hearing about your wedding yesterday. What's wrong, the little woman couldn't keep you interested enough between the sheets already?"

*Bitch.* Her hand was touching my arm and I fought the urge to pull away, drawing on every acting skill I had and forced a smile saying, "Quite the opposite actually. We've been going at it like rabbits and had to take a break to get some food before we passed out from lack of nutrition. As much as I'd like to, I don't think I could actually survive on the sinfully delicious creations my wife produces between her thighs."

I held back the smirk I felt forming seeing the jealousy in Sophie-Anne's naturally green eyes. She was a fucking cunt to insult Sookie without even knowing her and knowing Sophie wouldn't

like being reminded that Sookie had succeeded where she failed I made sure to add a little salt to the wound saying, "With *her* I'm more than willing to try though," and added a wink with a sly smile.

I smiled wider as her hand fell from my arm and her lips formed a thin line as she forced out, "Lucky girl."

"Nope. I'm the lucky one." The smile on my face was actually genuine and I didn't want to waste it on Sophie-Anne, so after grabbing the bottle of hot sauce I gave her a halfhearted, "See ya!" and took off to find Sookie. She was already at the checkout and I was surprised to see the picture of us leaving the casino the day before had already made its way to the magazine rack. Sookie didn't seem to be too happy seeing it, nor would she let me pay for the groceries, but I figured she'd cool off once we were in the car. I tried to ask her what was wrong, but she completely shut me out with her arms crossed over her chest and wouldn't even look at me.

The longer she remained silent, the more pissed I became, wondering if there was some medication for a psychiatric disorder I didn't know about she'd forgotten to take or if she had a raging case of PMS. Whatever it was, I didn't feel like she should be taking it out on me and planned on confronting her once we were in the house until I saw the monstrosity sitting in my driveway.

"What in the fuck is *that*?" I asked. It looked like four tires being held together by yellow painted rust.

"That's *my car*," she huffed out. At least she was speaking to me again, but there was *no way* that *thing* was staying.

"How does it even still run? That thing should have died along with leisure suits at the end of the 70's." There was no fucking way she was going to be driving that thing. No matter how I felt about her, I still wasn't really sure myself, I wouldn't feel right letting Sookie drive around in a piece of shit deathtrap. With our luck her car would breakdown on the highway and she'd have to hitch a ride with one of the paparazzi guys.

I parked behind it, not even realizing Alcide's truck was parked there as well until I got out of the car. He must have towed it to the house because the hitch to pull it was still attached to the back of his truck and he got out, walking over to Sookie with too big of a fucking grin on his face saying, "Amelia figured you'd want your car since you're starting your new job tomorrow. She packed all of your stuff and put it in the backseat and trunk."

*All of her stuff* fit in that tiny ass car? The scowl Sookie had been wearing just for me turned into a sweet smile for *him* as she said, "Thank you *so* much Alcide for going through so much trouble. I would've been stuck tomorrow for sure. Is there any way I can repay you? Would you like to stay for dinner?"



Before he could answer I interrupted with, "You're not driving that tomorrow, or ever. You can drive this," and pointed at the Audi. I was sure a stiff wind could take the windshield out and she could be killed in a head on collision with a ten speed Schwinn.

"What the fuck do you mean '*You're not driving that*'? You're not my goddamn keeper and you're sure as shit not gonna *tell me* what I *can* and *can't* do!" Ahh...there's my scowl.

I ignored her and looked at Alcide saying, "Once we empty her stuff from the car, take it with you and have it scrapped."

Sookie marched closer to him saying, "You will do *no such thing!* I swear, if you try and take it I'll call the police and report it stolen!"

Alcide looked from her and back to me when I said, "No one in their right mind would *believe* anyone would steal *that* car. Besides, I'll rip the phones from the walls and throw the cell phones in the pool. You will take that car and if I ever see it again I'll sic Pam on you."

Seeing the fear on Alcide's face at the threat of being Pam'd Sookie decided to turn her argument to me. "Why are you being such an asshole? I realize my car isn't up to your snooty neighborhood's standards, but it's what I could afford and it's mine!"

"I don't give a shit about my *snooty neighborhood*," I yelled back. "I give a shit that you'll be driving along one day and get taken out by a fucking *hummingbird!*"

My argument seemed to make her stop short and after a moment her eyes narrowed back at me as she asked, "So this has *nothing* to do with how *you* would look if I were seen driving around in my car?"

Actually, that hadn't even occurred to me. I'd only been worried about her safety, not appearances, so I honestly said, "No. I don't want you breaking down somewhere and while I'm sure there would be plenty of cameramen willing to give you a lift, I doubt you'd want that. I usually drive the Corvette so there's no reason why you shouldn't use the Audi."

If she refused to give in I'd push the damn thing into a lake in the middle of the night and deal with the consequences in the morning. Sensing our deadlock, Alcide broke in saying, "I'd love to stay for dinner."

*The fuck you will.* Before I could tell him to fuck off and leave Sookie turned to him and said, "I hope fried chicken, home fries and biscuits are okay?"

He smiled a little too wide and replied, "That sounds great!" The fucker even had the nerve to lift his shirt a little and rub his stomach. *That was MY fucking move!*

Sookie was facing away from me so I couldn't see her reaction and I didn't want to give her the chance to have one so I walked over and opened her car door, pulling boxes from the backseat and shooting Alcide a '*Get the fuck over here and help me!*' look. Hopefully the rust bucket

would collapse in on itself while he was leaning inside of it, crushing his upper half. *Problem solved.*

Sookie unloaded the groceries in the kitchen while we carried her things into her room and I almost put a beat down on Alcide when he stared at her bed for a second too long. When we were done, Sookie had already put everything away and was busy washing the things we'd carried in from the garage earlier that morning so I came up next to her and dried each one as soon as she was done washing it. *That was a domestic thing to do, right?*

She kept eying me suspiciously while making small talk to Alcide and I was getting really fucking sick and tired of him being there. I wanted to get to know Sookie a little better to try and figure out what it was about her that made me put up with the amount of bullshit I'd been putting up with, but I didn't want to do it with Alcide as an audience. And while she hadn't really been a 'good girl', fighting with me over her car, I was perfectly willing to overlook it and still fuck her.

I let Sookie put everything away in the kitchen since she would be the one using it all and was about to pull Alcide aside and tell him to come up with an excuse and fucking leave already. I had a feeling if I kicked him out in front of Sookie she'd get pissed at me all over again and that wouldn't work well with Operation Seduce Sookie which was still in effect.

Also not working well with Operation Seduce Sookie?

Pam strolling through the front door without knocking, but waving her hands in the air, with each finger having its own diamond ring, and saying, "Knock knock."

A quick look at Sookie's face told me this wouldn't work well at all.

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## Chapter 22: Chapter 21

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### Chapter 21

#### SPOV

*GAH!* That man was so infuriating! I wanted to tell him to take his highhanded bullshit and shove it where the sun don't shine when he appointed himself executioner of my car, but when he yelled back that he was worried about me breaking down I found I couldn't yell back. I was so *sure* he wouldn't want me seen driving my car because of how it would make *him* look, that when he seemed to be genuine when he gave his reasoning why (he gave a shit...), I didn't know what to say.

*Did he really give a shit?*

To be honest, I got worried every time I got in my car over whether or not it would start and planned on buying another one after saving up enough money. Could I drive Eric's car in good

conscience though? I didn't want him to think I was using him. Living rent free in his house was doing enough to put a dent in my self-reliant armor, so how would I feel driving his car for free too?

Once Alcide broke into our temporary ceasefire I decided to keep quiet and think it over before committing to anything. As I put the groceries away I thought about how I would feel if the situation was reversed and it was Eric using my car. Would I think he was a freeloader using me for the things I had? Probably not, especially if I had been the one to make the offer without being asked. I still didn't know what I would end up doing, but *if* I decided to take him up on his offer there was no way I was letting him scrap my car. I would need it after our year was up, or until I could buy another one, and there was more than enough room in his four car garage to store it in the meantime.

I was surprised when Eric decided to dry the pots I washed and wondered what he was up to. He wasn't the domestic type, as he'd already told me the day before, so I couldn't help being a little suspicious over his motives. Alcide already knew the reality of our situation so there was no need for him to *act* like a husband, like he did back at the grocery store. I started regretting inviting Alcide to dinner and really wished he would leave so Eric and I could talk, *really talk*, about things like the car and his flirting with random redheads (and possibly getting blown by them in the dairy cooler) when I'd already made it perfectly clear I wouldn't be publically humiliated again.

Jealousy was a bitch and I hated even admitting to myself that I'd felt it seeing Eric with her, but everything he did and said was so confusing I didn't know what to think. He'd definitely been jealous over Lafayette at first and the hateful glares he was giving Alcide made me wonder if something similar was going on there too. Alcide was good looking enough, but I didn't think he'd been flirting with me and why would I look at *him* anyway when Eye Candy Eric was right there? Even when he lifted his shirt, all I could think was his abs couldn't compare to Eric's.

*I was so fucked.*

I had just finished putting everything away and was pulling things out to start making sandwiches for everyone for lunch when Pam walked in flashing more bling Snoop Dog at the Hip Hop Awards.

"Party tonight at Death Row Records?" I asked, trying to keep my temper in check having a clue what the rings were *really* for.

She cocked an eyebrow at me in return saying, "Don't be silly...that was *last* week. Now pick a ring, any ring, I have to get the rest back before I'm stuck sitting next to LiLo in court for walking out with them all."

I gritted my teeth and looked over at Eric who had no expression on his face whatsoever. I didn't know if this was his idea or Pam's, so I didn't know who to be pissed at, and opted for a generically pissed response of, "I already *have* a ring so you can take them *all* back!"

Pam's eyes glanced down at my ring finger before rolling back into her head and said, "Yes and as *lovely* as it is, you need to wear something more befitting someone of Eric's stature. Speaking of which, I hope that car in the driveway belongs to an immigrant landscaper I failed to notice pruning the bushes in the yard because there's no way you can be seen driving *that*. Use one of Eric's cars."

I heard Eric's sigh right before I exploded. "No! There's no fucking way I'm wearing one of those rings so just take them all back! It wasn't a part of our agreement and I'll be damned if I'm gonna wear some fake wedding ring!"

"FAKE?" Pam yelled back. Clearly I'd hit a nerve., "I'll have you know *every one* of these rings are very *real* bumpkin and any one of them cost a hell of a lot more than that tin can you call a *car* outside!"

"Fake *sentiment* you hoity bitch. I have no doubt those rings are real because anything less than the real deal touching your skin would probably burn hotter than Holy Water getting splashed on you during fucking Christmas Mass. The ring I'm wearing may not be worth much *money*, but my father gave it my mother with love so it's fucking *priceless* to *me*."

"Quit being so goddamn stubborn. If things had gone differently and Jack Daniels hadn't been the best man at your wedding, you can't tell me that you'd turn down a ring like any one of these. What is everyone going to think when they see a \$50 ring on your finger?"

"Maybe they'll think I was telling the fucking *truth* on that shameful video when I said I didn't marry Eric for his money!"

"Quit feeling so worthless!"

"Why would I feel so fucking entitled? You know what? You all don't *know* me so I'm gonna clue you in; I was *dumb enough* to give away my virginity to a man who I thought loved me, that I had planned on spending the rest of my life with; I was *dumb enough* to marry a man I didn't even know and now have to live under a fucking spotlight for the next year just so my Gran can show her face at church; but I'm not *dumb enough* to walk around sporting a fucking big ass diamond ring that means absolutely *nothing*. It's bad enough that I can't give away my innocence or my ability to be a first time blushing bride to whomever I end up with in the future and I'll be damned if he has to think he's got to give me a ring like one of *those* in order for me want to marry him."

The room was completely silent after my impromptu speech and I silently cursed myself when I realized I'd made a plate full of sandwiches for everyone while we'd been arguing. My appetite was completely gone and I didn't care *how* rude I was by leaving them all standing there when I said, "Help yourself," and left the kitchen as fast as my feet could carry me.

I stayed in my room for an hour putting everything away and contemplated taking a nap, but I knew I'd never be able to fall asleep. Then I remembered the glorious swimming pool just waiting for me in the backyard and threw on a bikini, wrapped a sarong around my waist, and

grabbed a towel before leaving the room, hoping I could slip out back without anyone noticing. I crept down the hallway quietly, but didn't hear any sounds so I peeked into the kitchen and found it empty. The den was empty too so I darted out the backdoor and tossed the towel and sarong down on a chair before diving into the warm water.

I swam for a while, feeling the tension leave my body with every slice I made through the water, and eventually climbed onto one of the floats to lounge in the sun like I'd been dying to earlier that morning. My eyes closed to block out the rays while my skin warmed in the sun and I let my mind wander over everything that had happened to me in such a short amount of time. I had no idea of how much time had passed and didn't realize I was no longer alone until I heard Eric's voice ask, "What happened to your hips?"

My eyes shot open and *Save me Jesus...* Eric was standing by the edge of the pool in nothing more than a pair of swim trunks. The cloudless sky suddenly became very interesting to me and I was glad my bikini bottoms were already wet from the pool water or else the jig would have been up. I heard the splash from him diving into the pool (I hadn't seen it happen since I was trying to burn out my retinas in the sun) and the next thing I knew he was breaking through the water right beside me.

"Where's everyone else?" I asked, hoping they'd come strolling along and give me a reason to be a proper young lady instead of shameless hussy like my body wanted me to be.

"I told them to leave," he said with his eyes never leaving the side of my body. I watched as he placed his hand over the bruises on my hip and sure enough, they fit so we couldn't acquit.

"I did this," he said, barely above a whisper; barely a question.

*You're doing something else too,* I thought. Having him touch me in such a personal way should have made me want to push him away instead of using my traitorous hand on the opposite side from him paddling in the water to keep me closer. "Well they weren't there *before* I went to Vegas, so...yeah, I guess they were from *that night*."

He used his fingertip to trace the pattern of bruises before looking up at me with a sly grin saying, "I'd say I was sorry, but I have a feeling if I could remember how you got them I wouldn't be."

*Stupid inability to NOT smile back.*

"If I could remember, I doubt I'd accept your apology."

*Stupid mouth working before stupid brain filter could kick in.*

Were his lips always so soft and full looking? Did the sun have to make the water look all shimmery as it trailed down his face from his hair? Were his shoulders really that broad that they spanned half the length of my body?

Neither one of us said anything with only the sound of the water lapping at the edge of the pool to fill the silence. I couldn't help gasping a little when Eric's left arm came up to rest on top of my calves since he had to have been treading water because I'd been floating in the deep end. The sun glinting off his hand made me notice the plain gold band that covered his tattoo and before I could say a word, he noticed and said, "We match."

*Did I want to open this can of worms?*

"Why didn't you even *look* at any of the rings Pam brought over before deciding you didn't want *any* of them?"

*Oh, I guess HE wanted to open the can of worms.*

"I told you why, or at least I told *Pam* so you should have been paying closer attention," I teased. I'd already figured out it was Pam's doing seeing how she basically did *everything* for Eric, like buying him toasters and shit.

"Why were you so angry when we left the store earlier? Was it the tabloid picture?"

*Damn, he was opening a REALLY big fucking can with that one.*

I chewed through all of the '*skank*', '*whore*', and '*bitch*' words before I swallowed them and said, "I saw you flirting with that redhead. It's probably just a part of your personality or something, but I won't be humiliated in public like that, so I'm asking you now to *refrain* from doing anything that could be misconstrued by others." *Others like me.*

I wasn't prepared for his reaction.

*He laughed!* Not a chuckle or a guffaw, but a *big booming hold your sides before they split open I'm about to pee myself* laugh!

I didn't think my request was all that fucking funny and I pushed his stupid arm porn off of my legs and slid off the pool float on the opposite side, finding it *very* difficult to stomp my way out of the water in the deep end. I didn't get far before he grabbed onto my arm and pulled me back to him, trapping me in over six feet of sinfully sinewy muscle. *Damn him!*

I was getting ready to take a cheap shot knowing I could care less if he could ever have kids in the future when he said, "Sookie, I wasn't *flirting* with that skank."

If I were a Schnauzer, my ears would've perked up with my head tilted to the side. Since Eric had the courtesy to regurgitate the word I'd previously swallowed, I let his balls have a temporary reprieve and gave him a look so he'd know he had 5 seconds to continue before he became a soprano.

"Her name is Sophie-Anne LeClerq and I can't *stand* her. She's fucking the director of the movie I want the lead role in so I can't tell her to fuck off like I want to."

"So you *flirt* with her instead?" *Bullshit; a prime example.*

Eric's eyes traveled from my face to my cleavage, of which I was currently sporting *a lot* of seeing as how my boobs were pushed up from how he was holding onto me, and his arms tightened around me before his eyes came back up to my own. Only now the amusement they held had been replaced by something else. Something I tried desperately not to give a name to.

"I wasn't *flirting* with her. In fact, I was talking to her about *you*."

"What about me?" What could he possibly have to say about me to her?

He raised his stupidly sexy eyebrow and asked, "Do you *really* want to know?"

I raised my own non-sexy eyebrow and said, "What did I say about answering a question with a question?"

He grinned asking, "Like you did just now?"

Why were his smiles so fucking contagious? "Are we going to play 'Who's on first?' next?"

He got that look again, that I still refused to name, saying, "I'd much rather play spin the bottle."

*Just how many cans did he plan on opening today for Christ's sake?*

The atmosphere surrounding us suddenly changed with even the birds and squirrels disappearing, like a tornado was on its way. His eyes slowly moved back and forth from holding my gaze, down to my lips and back again. I was completely caught up in it all; his eyes; his arms; in just him and I was both afraid to move and afraid not to.

*God, give me a sign...*

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## Chapter 23: Chapter 22

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### Chapter 22

#### EPOV

Pam and her big fucking mouth. As soon as she mentioned Sookie's car I wanted to bitchslap her knowing Sookie would probably balk at the prospect of driving the Audi just out of spite. I was still curious as to which ring Sookie would choose and realized I was holding my breath watching the two of them yell back and forth waiting to find out, but for some reason I wasn't really surprised when she chose none of them. Other than mentioning the price of one of my pots to piss in, like I would have any clue as to how much they cost, she hadn't shown any indications

she was impressed by her new surroundings. If anything, she seemed unfazed by them and maybe even a little uncomfortable.

What I found impressive was how she managed to make very appetizing looking sandwiches as she argued with Pam, barely paying any attention to what her hands were doing as her mouth was going a mile a minute. I really wanted one but I was afraid to call any attention to myself, from either one of them, by moving close enough to grab one. My appetite disappeared though when Sookie said she didn't want one of the rings because she didn't want her *next* husband to have to compete with what I could afford to give her. While I couldn't really fault her for her rationale or not wanting to wear something that held no meaning for her, my chest bowed and my shoulders squared automatically at the idea of her having a future *anyone*.

It made no sense, least of all to me, for me to feel that way. I hadn't even known her for forty eight hours and if I hadn't been drunk out of my mind, we sure as hell wouldn't have gotten married, so why did my fists clench at just the thought of her running off with someone else? *I should want her to, right?*

As soon as she'd left the room I turned to Alcide and Pam ordering, "Get the fuck out."

"But Sookie invited me to dinner," Alcide protested like a whiny bitch.

I walked over and grabbed the plate full of sandwiches she'd made and thrust them at his chest saying, "Here's your fucking dinner, now get the fuck out."

He grabbed the plate, took a bite out of one of the sandwiches and with his mouth full he said, "You're such an asshole," and walked out the door, plate and all.

I turned to face Pam and was thrown off by the big grin she was wearing. I was thrown off even more by what she said. "I think you should keep her."

"What the fuck are you talking about? I'm not kicking *her* out, I'm kicking *you* out."

I watched her eye all of the diamond rings on her fingers, getting momentarily distracted by *the shiny*, before pulling out a black velvet drawstring bag from her purse, pouring the contents into her hand and thrusting it at me. "Pick one. I'm talking about keeping her for *good*. Hell, even *I* might have considered riding your dick for the rings she just turned down."

I looked at the men's wedding bands cupped in Pam's hand and picked the one that matched Sookie's the closest before her words really registered in my brain and responded, "Well it's a good thing I don't want to ride *your* dick and unless she's up there packing her shit because of your big fucking mouth, I don't see why she wouldn't stay for the year." I slid the gold ring over my tattoo and stared at it as though it were an alien life form. It felt odd sitting there since I'd never regularly worn jewelry before and even odder still, I'd already gotten used to seeing the tattoo on my finger.



Pam poured the other rings back into the bag saying, "You're such a dipshit sometimes. I'm saying you should keep Sookie around for good. Forever."

"What?" It was the only word my mind could make my mouth say since everything else instantly went into a tailspin whirling around and around.

"Why not? You're *clearly* already smitten and I'm already in love with her so you just need to get over yourself already and woo her before she figures out what a dipshit you can be and runs off. If I *never* have to deal with another one of your fucking bimbos, it'll be too fucking soon."

"Even if I *was* smitten, and I'm not saying I *am*..."

"You *are*," she interjected.

"...that doesn't mean we'd end up riding off into the sunset together. I barely know her Pam and we've probably argued more than talked since the moment we met, or woke up together, or whatever. And you two were seconds away from a full-on cat fight, so what do you mean you're *in love* with her?"

Again with the looks like I should be wearing a bib and a helmet before I get taken for my daily walk around my padded room.

"Eric," she began, "we've known each other a long time, yes?" I just nodded, not sure of where she was taking this. "Have you ever seen anyone stand up to me like her? Christ, I get hard just thinking about it. And have I ever steered you wrong? Hell, have I ever *been* wrong? No. My instincts are spot on and they're the *only* reason I even still bother with *you* after the shitload of grief you pile into my workday. *You're* worth it and *she* is too. Trust me when I tell you that little steel magnolia upstairs is the girl for you."

If I didn't know her any better I would say Pam was *gushing* over Sookie. Pam doesn't gush. She Pam's.

"How can you be so sure? What if she's really some crazy person with a rap sheet a mile long and she gets outted on Snopes?"

"Idiot, as soon as she said she worked at the Brigant Academy I had it confirmed. If she passed their litmus test, then she would exceed ours by a landslide. Although I imagine she probably kept her colorful language to herself during her interviews, but who knows, they'd probably like the fact bluebirds sit on her fucking shoulders while she hand feeds the baby squirrels and bunnies that flock around her fucking feet the minute she steps outside," Pam giggled.

Pam giggled. It was like I was in the fucking twilight zone.

I was done listening to her bibbity bobbity bullshit and said, "Leave. I need to put that piece of shit car into the garage and try and figure out how to make it not start so she can't take the fucking thing to work tomorrow."

Her eyes lit up when she said, "Don't worry, I know just the thing."

Five minutes later I had it parked in the garage and a big black smudge on the front of my shirt where Pam had wiped the grease from her fingers after pulling some wire off of some dirty black thing in the engine. Before she left, she waved her diamond laden fingers in my face and said, "Trust me Eric, I'm the fo shizzle."

I didn't know if she was talking about the car not starting or Sookie, but I just ignored her and went back into the house to change. Sookie still hadn't come back downstairs so I went into my room to get another shirt. I really didn't want her to leave because of Pam's big fucking mouth and I stood there, dirty shirt in hand, staring out the window wondering how I could convince her to stay if she tried to go since I doubted my ability to follow her everywhere sans shirt. I was at a loss and decided to grow a pair and just ask her what I wanted to know.

*Why didn't she even bother to look at any of the rings?* I heard every word she told Pam, but it still...I was a bit bothered that she didn't want anything like that from *me*.

*And why was she so fucking pissed when we left the store?* I'd only glanced at the picture, but she looked okay in it to me. She had to have known something like that would be published sooner or later with all of the fucking cameras shoved in our faces when we left.

I was more confused than ever by everything about her and was just about to say *fuck* it and go crack open a beer and see if there was a game on TV. My bedroom windows faced the backyard and as I was turning to go back to my closet I saw Sookie sprinting through the backyard towards the pool wearing hardly anything.

I hadn't yet had the pleasure of dealing with Nearly Naked Sookie and couldn't get changed quick enough before I was back downstairs in my swim trunks less than a minute later. She obviously didn't plan on leaving any time soon so Operation Seduce Sookie was back in play. I watched her from the backdoor, swimming laps in the pool, her tanned skin looking all the darker against her white bikini, and found myself rooted in the spot where I stood. I had thought her beautiful before, but now? Wearing the equivalent of two dinner napkins? She was...just...there were no words to describe her; I only knew how I *felt* and I felt like she should be mine.

*Not forever, but at least for now.*

I waited for a few minutes after she'd settled herself on a float in the pool before heading outside. Her eyes were closed so I was able to really *look* at her without her knowing and liked every bit of her I saw until I noticed the ugly blue and purple bruises on her hip. They weren't that old and I worried she might have gotten hurt the day before when she'd fallen in the casino and hadn't said anything, so I asked, "What happened to your hip?"

Her eyes shot open and landed on me for a split second before she looked back up into the sky without answering me. I figured she was still pissed from earlier and wasn't about to play with Silent Sookie when Nearly Naked Sookie was right there, so I dove into the water and popped up

right next to her. As soon as I did I could tell that the bruises were patterned like a handprint with the fingertips darker than the faint lines where the fingers had been.

When she asked about Pam and Alcide I told her I made them leave, but I couldn't take my eyes from her side. I knew the bruises came from *my* hand even before I laid it on top of her skin and didn't realize I'd spoken my admission out loud until Sookie admitted she thought the same thing.

What I would give to be able to remember that night. What was it about her that drew me to her; that kept me here now? I found I couldn't remove my hand from her hip and my other one came up to rest on her legs just so I could touch more of her skin. Her relaxed demeanor when I asked about the ring thing made me think it would be okay to ask what had made her so angry back at the store and when she said it was because I'd flirted with Sophie-Anne I had to laugh out loud at just the thought. I knew she was pissed when she shoved my arm away and slid back into the pool, but too bad for her because I wasn't done touching her yet and quickly wrapped myself around her.

Once I explained she seemed okay, but I was quickly losing my focus on our conversation. Her skin was so warm and soft and smooth, with her breasts resting on my forearm and all I could think about was what her skin would taste like. At the moment, probably like chlorine, but I didn't care. I wanted her and I was pretty sure she wanted me too. A soft breeze blew across us and I could have sworn I smelled cherries again. Maybe Pam was right and she *was* the girl for me. She smelled like cherries; I loved cherries; it wasn't the *best* reason to stay together, but it was a reason.

My eyes went to her lips wanting to taste them for myself and traveled back up to her eyes seeking her permission. I could practically see the volley of thoughts going through her mind spinning like a roulette wheel and hoped like hell the ball would land on me because mine would be blue enough if she made me wait any longer.

I could feel her heartbeat pounding away underneath her skin, beating against my own pressed all around her, and her eyes darted to my mouth with her tongue licking her lips a second later. It was all the invitation I needed and I leaned in slowly, not wanting to frighten her with sudden movements and when she started to lean in towards me I could almost taste victory.

I bet it tasted like cherries.

"STACKHOUSE!"

We both froze for a split second as victory turned into defeat when Sookie's body stiffened and she started trying to push me away, but I held on and spun us around to face our latest cockblocker. Sookie's friend Amelia stood there just outside the open backdoor, pissed I would guess from the hands on hips thing she had going on.

I was starting to second guess not going to church that morning since God was obviously pissed at me and when Sookie finally succeeded in removing herself from my grasp I vowed if I couldn't make it to church, I'd at least start remembering to lock the fucking front door.

Chapter 23

**SPOV**

*Well...*

I don't think God could have been any clearer with his sign, nor clearing the lust from my head, than by having Amelia screeching my name. As much as I didn't want to leave his arms, or any other part of him, I pushed myself away and climbed out of the pool trying to decide if I should hug Amelia or punch her square in the face.

"What the *fuck* Sook?"

Punching her was in the lead at the moment when I replied, "What the *fuck* Ames?"

"Oh gee, I don't know. Maybe I just thought my best friend would think to call me at some point after running off with the guy whose balls you wanted to rip off yesterday morning. The Senior Citizens Center called looking for you since you didn't show up this afternoon and I got worried and tried your cell phone, but it went straight to voicemail. For all I knew fucktard was busy burying your body!"

"Shit!" I couldn't believe I flaked out twice in the same day, but Eric had a way of consuming my every thought lately. "I forgot," and added, "and Eric's not a fucktard!" He was definitely growing on me and hearing Amelia calling him names got my hackles raised. I could see she was still fuming, but when her eyes glanced behind me, her jaw fell open and I turned in time to see Eric had just gotten out of the pool. I had wrapped myself in the towel I'd brought out with me and he had apparently forgotten to grab one so he simply stood there and shook the water from his hair. The water droplets flew out in every direction and his kryptonite chest and abs rippled with the movement like he'd walked straight out of a fucking magazine ad for stupid high end cologne, but they should really use it for panty liners because I was in dire need of secondary containment measures down below, all from just looking at him. They'd make a mint.

*Dear God, your signs are confusing the shit out of me. Amen.*

"Wow," Amelia whispered.

"Uh huh," I agreed.

"No wonder you haven't called."

"No shit."

"He ripples."

"I know."

"Can I move in too?"

"Nope."

"Have you taken him for another test drive yet?"

"Nope."

"Can I?"

"Fuck no."

"Some best friend *you* are. Oh fuck!" she gasped. "I interrupted something didn't I?"

"Not sure. Maybe...but it's probably for the best."

Eric walked over and grinned at me before shooting daggers at Amelia asking, "How the hell did you get through the gate?"

"Eric!" I chided. "Don't be an ass. Amelia's my best friend!" He had a point though, so I turned to her and asked, "How *did* you get through the gate?"

Amelia was getting lost in Eric's chest now that it was so close. I couldn't really blame her since the same thing kept happening to me, so I took my towel and threw it over the front of him, like a barber's cape, and it seemed to do the trick.

"Umm...when you didn't answer your cell I jumped in my car and came here. Alcide had left me the address so I could forward your mail and after I threatened the gate guard with a homemade vasectomy, he tried the house but didn't get an answer so he called Pam and she said it was okay."

I looked up at Eric to see if that was a good enough explanation for him, but I wasn't sure he even heard her since his eyes were glued to my body. Remembering the bruises I had and not wanting to go there with Amelia, I ran over and grabbed my sarong, wrapping it around my waist and headed into the house.

"I'm just going to go change," I told Eric and grabbed Amelia's hand, dragging her up to my room with me.

"So you two seem to be getting along better," she said after plopping down on my bed while I grabbed the clothes I'd worn earlier and stepped into the bathroom.

I left the door open while I changed, telling her all that had happened from meeting his father and Mrs. Dash to the blow out with Pam over the rings and everything in between. She stayed silent through it all, a rarity for Amelia, and once I was done she asked, "So how do you feel about it all? Do you still want to go through with it?"

"I *have* to for Gran's sake. You've been to Bon Temps. Can you imagine the shame she would feel facing those people if the truth came out? Besides, she sounded so *happy* for me. I don't want to disappoint her."

She thought about it for a second and replied, "I suppose you're right, but what about Eric? I know you two were at each other's throats yesterday morning, but how about now? I mean, you two ran off and got *married* after a couple of hours for Christ's sake, so there's no denying you've got chemistry. Do you think there could be more?"

*Could there be?* "I don't know," I told her honestly. "He has his twat-tard moments, but he can be funny and sweet too. God knows he's sexy as all get out, but what if he's just being nice to get me to sleep with him? I doubt he's looking for a serious relationship and I'm not just gonna fall into bed with him because he's hot."

Amelia eyed me saying, "Sook, I've seen your fan girl shrine to Eric Northman on your bedroom walls. And judging from what I saw down in the pool, the attraction is still mutual when you're both sober, so why not keep an open mind about it? Neither one of you can go looking for anyone else for the next year anyway, so quit over analyzing everything and just live in the moment. If it happens, it happens. There's nothing wrong with that."

"But that's just it! Do you really think *he* could ever be faithful? You saw how pissed he got when I demanded it from him in order to even agree to go along with this. What if I sleep with him and then he gets bored and goes off fucking some starlet? Not only would I be humiliated, but more than my pride would be hurt if I let him get that close to me."

Her eyes softened when she said, "Don't let Quinn take away your ability to trust someone. That fucker already took your virginity, but you can't let what he did dictate how you live your life. Not everyone is a cheating bastard and if you hold back a part of yourself from everyone else, worried you might get hurt again, that's just one more piece of you he gets to hold onto."

I threw my wet hair up into a messy bun and slumped down next to her saying, "But he's *Eric Northman, fuck buddy of porn stars*. Do you really think *he's* the one I should be testing your '*trust someone*' theory out on?"

Amelia wrapped her arm around me and kissed my cheek saying, "But you're *Mrs. Eric Northman*, at least for the next year, and with the amount of attention you two are getting you'll know if he's fucking around. And I'll be here to help you give him that homemade vasectomy if he does."

I giggled when she waggled her eyebrows at me and admitted, "I don't know, we might get distracted from our work when you see what he's got going on down there."

She pulled back demanding, "Spill!"

I held out my hands in the approximate measurements and her eyes bugged out with her saying, "Whoa."

"I know," I agreed. "And he wasn't even aroused at the time."

"What the fuck are you waiting for?" She stood and pulled me up alongside her saying, "You've got your own personal fuck toy down there wanting to do the mambo number five in between the sheets and you're sitting here talking nonsense to me?"

She pulled the door open, walking out with me whispering behind her, "I'm *not* fucking him!"  
*Yet*, I silently added.

"Yet," she added not so silently.

We walked back into the kitchen to get a drink with Amelia noticing the poker table and she looked back at me with her eyebrow cocked.

"I know," I shook my head in agreement over the retardedness in his choice of décor.

Eric walked in a moment later, thankfully dressed, and Amelia turned to him saying, "I love what you've done with the place. Very frat boy chic."

He gave her a dazzling smile and we both gulped, immediately disarmed by it, before he replied, "Thanks. Care for a tour? Have you seen the outside of the front door? I'd love to show it to you."

"Eric!" It was hard to be pissed when he was flashing so many pearly whites, but I was trying damn it.

Amelia smiled back saying, "Thanks, but I've already seen it. You should really think about locking it you know. Anyone could walk in."

"No shit," he muttered. I watched him walk over and open the refrigerator, staring at the contents, before saying to no one in particular, "There's nothing to eat."

We'd just bought three hundred dollars in groceries since I had to set up the kitchen basically from scratch and I walked over to see for myself just in case someone *else* had walked in and emptied the contents while we were out of the room. It was just as full as I'd left it and realized we were establishing a pattern of stating the obvious when I said, "It's full of food."

"No, it's full of *ingredients*."

Obviously.

"You're not full from the sandwiches I made?" I asked, realizing as I looked around that they were gone.

"Alcide took them all."

He looked so sad that I took pity on him and took everything out to make him one saying, "I'll make you one, but that's it. I don't want you to spoil your dinner."

The smile I was rewarded with made me drop the bag of rolls in my hand and I was rewarded again when Eric bent over to pick them up. I'd have to drop things around him more often.

I guess Amelia didn't miss where my eyes, or thoughts, had gone to because she cleared her throat to get my attention and smiled saying, "Well, I'll leave you two to your domestic bliss. Call me and let me know how the first day on the job goes Sook."

"You don't have to leave Ames," I said as Eric muttered, "About fucking time."

I swatted him and followed her to the front door, hugging her goodbye and she whispered in my ear, "If he's as big as you said he is, you might want to get some lube."

"AMELIA!" I shouted, blushing at the thought. I just about fell on the floor when I realized Eric was standing right behind me and refused to look at him not knowing if he'd heard her. We said our goodbyes and I darted back into the kitchen to avoid looking at Eric, but not before I heard him locking the front door. I couldn't make his sandwich fast enough hoping to keep his mouth occupied with eating so he wouldn't talk about anything he might have overheard and shoved the plate at him when I was done.

"Aren't you going to eat?" he asked.

I shook my head no and started making the pie crust for the apple pie saying, "Dinner will be ready in a couple of hours. I'll eat then."

His moan made me look up at him and his eyes were closed as he chewed before he swallowed and said, "That's the best sandwich I've ever tasted."

I blushed again from his compliment and muttered, "Thanks," before going back to making the pie crust.

He was quiet after that, except for the occasional moans which were wreaking havoc on my girly bits, and I made a mental note to pick up a pack of those panty liners. Or a case.

I continued making the pie, peeling, slicing, and coating the apples in the cinnamon sugar mixture and stealing occasional glances at Eric. He remained sitting on the kitchen bar stool silently watching me work, after finishing his sandwich, with rapt attention. Being under his constant scrutiny was making me self conscious and as I finished placing the crumb topping on the pie I finally had to ask, "What are you staring at?"



He shrugged his shoulders saying, "I've just never watched someone make a pie from scratch. I order dessert and it's brought to me. I never really thought about how it came to be a pie."

I chuckled saying, "It comes from *ingredients*. What did you think, there are pie fairies out there just poofing them into existence?"

He smiled saying, "You're the one with the mad fairytale skills charming woodland creatures left and right. You tell me."

I slid the pie into the oven admitting, "You got me. I'm really a fairy, but don't tell anyone. I'm trying to keep it on the down low."

"Your secret is safe with me."

I knew Eric was no Prince Charming, but it was hard to remember what an ass he could be when he acted so sweet and normal. His enchanting smiles were weakening what little resolve I had left so I concentrated on preparing the fried chicken instead of how his eyes crinkled in amusement whenever I would blush seeing him staring at me.

I made enough to feed an army and had a difficult time fitting it all on the breakfast bar, but it was all worth it once I took my first bite. I hadn't realized how hungry I was, or that I was making the same noises of appreciation as Eric, but I couldn't help laughing when it finally dawned on me.

"What's so funny?" he asked in between bites.

I took a sip of sweet tea before replying, "If anyone were to walk in now and heard us, they'd think we were doing something other than eating."

I almost choked on my final bite seeing his eyes darken with lust and his voice dropped an octave saying, "I'm game if you are. I'd hate to disappoint them."

"But the door is locked. No one's going to walk in." *Way to go dumbass. Not 'I'm not having sex with you!', but 'The door is locked.'* It's not my fault though. He made my brain fart when he licked his lips. *LICKED HIS LIPS!*

Eric apparently liked to take advantage of a dumbass when he saw one because he smiled asking, "Shall I unlock the door?"

*Why was it so hot in here?* I glanced at the oven to make sure I'd turned it off after taking the pie out, but I had so that wasn't it. We'd both pretty much cleaned our plates, so I stalled answering him and got up clearing them off the counter, before slicing the pie and setting a piece down in front of Eric. I didn't trust him, or myself, by sitting down next to him again so I stood on the opposite side of the breakfast bar not eating the slice of pie in front of me with Amelia's words running through my head.

He wasn't eating his either, waiting on my answer I supposed, so I gave it to him.

"Our wedding night notwithstanding, I'm not one to just sleep around. Being with someone like that has to *mean* something to me and we barely know each other."

"But you're attracted to me and *I'm* attracted to you," he said, again stating the obvious.

"And I thought the guy that delivered the cases of Snapple at the diner where I worked was attractive, but I wouldn't have *sex* with him." I noticed his expression flicker at my admission, but it was so brief I couldn't pinpoint the emotion behind it so I continued. "Any woman and probably a lot of men would find you attractive Eric, you're practically a walking talking Adonis, but I need an emotional tie too and I doubt you're looking to get involved in a relationship. I would need to be *in* one for that to happen."

There. I said it. *Shields UP Mr. Spock, maximum power! Scotty! We need more power to the shields!*

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## Chapter 25: Chapter 24

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### Chapter 24

#### EPOV

Fucking Pam. Only *she* could cockblock me through fucking osmosis by allowing Amelia entrance through the gate. I was pretty sure they were talking about me when I'd gotten out of the pool and made sure to put enough swagger into my step walking up to Sookie and grinning, knowing how much she liked my bare chest. Now I just needed her fucking friend to leave, but the outlook wasn't good when they both hightailed it up to Sookie's room.

I followed behind them a moment later to change as well, but being the bitch I had turned into lately, I stopped outside of her bedroom door and eavesdropped on their whole conversation. I knew Sookie liked me, but from what I could hear she must have been pretty hurt over that douche bag Quinn cheating on her and was worried I would do the same thing. I don't know what the fuck she saw in him, but thinking back on a few of my former sex partners, I couldn't really throw stones.

She wanted a *relationship*. A *monogamous* one. Even thinking the words felt odd, so I couldn't even imagine saying them out loud. I'd never been in one or a part of one. I never *wanted* to be in or a part of one. I wouldn't even know where to start.

*Did I want to start?*

I could admit, at least to myself, that I was drawn to her. It was no longer just because of her body or her beauty; there was something else about her that I just couldn't seem to put my finger

on. Maybe if I got to put my fingers on her for longer than five minutes I could figure it the fuck out.

Hearing her friend refer to me as Sookie's new fuck toy raised her up in my estimation, but she still needed to get the fuck out if that was going to happen and I barely got into my room and the door shut behind me before I heard them walking out. It only took me a minute to change, but I stood there for another minute or two thinking about what I'd overheard.

Pam seemed to think Sookie was 'the one', but then Pam also thought her fecal matter retained no odor. I wasn't looking for 'the one'; I didn't want 'the one', but I couldn't deny I *did* want Sookie and I had no current desire for anyone else.

Maybe that would be enough for now.

I did my best to be a charming asshole to her friend because while I liked what she had to say to Sookie when they were talking upstairs, her presence was making my dick ache and not in a good way. As soon as she said she was leaving I made sure to follow behind them so I could lock the fucking door. I didn't want anyone else dropping in unannounced, wanting Sookie all to myself.

The sandwich she fixed for me was damn near orgasmic and while I enjoyed it more than any food I'd eaten recently, I worried knowing Sookie hadn't eaten since dinner the night before. I knew a lot had happened during the day and hoped it was only due to that and not some ridiculous thought that she needed to lose weight. I'd seen her in a bikini and the only thing she needed to lose was *it*.

Watching her make the pie was both amusing and confusing. She obviously didn't feel comfortable having me watch her every move, from the blush that would flood her cheeks whenever she looked up, but it wasn't just her making the pie from memory that confused me. It was Sookie as a whole package. Her bitchy persona could make a Teamster cower and hide (or endear her to Pam), but it was the other side of her I was having a difficult time with. I hadn't even said the words and only alluded to the fact I was hungry and she was right there, ready and willing to make me a sandwich. I knew she said she'd cook for me as part of her silly exchange in order for her to live with me, but I didn't think that was why she did it. I had a feeling it was because she wanted to take care of me in some small way. It was something I wasn't used to unless there was ass kissing to go along with it, either for my favor or a large tip. But Sookie seemed to just want to do it simply because I was hungry.

I watched her silently for over an hour as she moved around the kitchen like she'd always lived there and the more I watched her, the more I liked seeing her there. I'd never felt lonely living here by myself before, but now that Sookie was in the house I could easily see how different it would be without her there.

Confusing.

The smells alone wafting around the kitchen would call me into the room had I been anywhere else in the house, but the taste of the actual food could possibly keep me there forever. I'd watched her do everything, but I must have missed her adding her magic pixie dust to make it taste so good. I had no idea I'd been so vocally appreciative until she laughed and told me what we'd been sounding like.

Suddenly I was hungry for something else and it wasn't the apple pie.

I was glad I had overheard her earlier conversation so I was already prepared to hear her say the words before they left her lips or else my reaction, both inwardly and outwardly, might have done irreparable damage to our already fragile relationship.

*Relationship.*

The word and what it represented no longer seemed as farfetched when she was standing right in front of me. I couldn't even get pissed over her own spoken doubt about me wanting to be a part of one since I wasn't sure myself until I heard her tell me it was what she would need.

I still didn't know if I could *be* what she needed, but I was willing to try.

"Sookie, I've never been in a *relationship* before." I was happy I got through the first hurdle and hadn't choked on the word and continued. "I've never wanted to be in one before, never felt the need, but if that's what *you* need then I'm willing to give it a try."

Based on the look of shock on her face, my answer was unexpected and after a moment she asked, "Are you only agreeing because of our arrangement? I don't want to jump into anything with you already knowing there's an expiration date."

"No." My reply was quick because it was the truth. "There's something about you that keeps me coming back no matter how many different ways you find to call me an asshole," I smiled.

She smiled softly back at me whispering, "Asshole." She chewed on her lip asking again, "Are you sure? I'm sorry to keep harping on it and we don't really know each other that well, but honestly Eric I just don't see you being in a committed relationship."

I chuckled responding, "Sookie, I *married* you. How much more of a commitment do you want?"

Her eyes flashed when she said, "That wasn't *real*. We didn't even know each other!"

"While that may be true, our marriage is as real as the tattoos underneath our rings and the license Bubba signed. We may have agreed to stay married for different reasons, but I'm finding even more reasons now to continue on." I could tell she was still hesitant and knew the cause. "Sookie, I won't betray you. I have no idea of how things will turn out for us, but even if they don't I won't break the terms of our arrangement."

I felt the truth in the words as I spoke them and I'd never been more anxious in my life for someone to tell me 'Yes.'

"Can I ask you a question?"

Not the 'Yes' I was hoping to hear, but not a 'No' either. "Sure."

Her eyes dropped to the countertop in front of her as she asked, "Why did you kiss and touch me at the store? Was it because people were watching us?"

"Yes," I smiled, but before her look of disappointment could get any bigger I followed it with, "But only because I thought you wouldn't hit me in public. I *wanted* to kiss and touch you for my own selfish reasons, not to put on a show for the woman wearing pajama pants squeezing every melon in the bin."

The smile on her face grew slowly until she finally gave me what I wanted to hear, "Okay then, yes, I'm willing to give it a shot."

I stood up ready to sweep her off her feet, but her raised hand made me stop as she said, "How do you want to do this?"

I sat back down figuring she didn't mean me having her sit on the counter as I pounded into her versus bending her over it. "I guess you'll have to let me woo you."

Her snicker at my choice of words made me cock an eyebrow at her and she stifled it saying, "Of course. Woo away."

She started wrapping up the leftovers from dinner as I put the first bite of pie into my mouth and damn near came in my pants. My God, as if the warm apples and cinnamon weren't enough, she'd drizzled some sort of caramel syrup on top of the crumb topping and my feelings of horror, as my fork struck my empty plate, must have shown on my face because she slid her untouched plate across the counter to me.

I dove right in mumbling out, "My God, Sookie your pie is so good, I could eat it every day for the rest of my life."

I heard something crash to the floor and Sookie said, "Shit," as she bent down behind the counter.

I got up and ran over asking with my mouth still full, "Are you alright? Did you get hurt?" Not only did I not want her to get hurt so she'd be okay, I also wanted her to be able to make more pies.

She waved me off without looking up at me saying, "Sorry, I'm fine, I just dropped a plate. Go back to eating."

I could care less she broke a plate. I'd buy her a million plates if she'd fill each one with a slice of pie.

When I was completely stuffed I sat back and pat my distended belly saying, "If you keep cooking like that I'm going to get fat."

Sookie was done wrapping everything in tinfoil, but she was still using a sheet of it to make something that sort of looked like underwear. "Is that going to turn into one of those swan things restaurants give you to take your leftovers home?"

"What?" she asked, finally looking up at me from whatever aluminum origami thing she'd been working on.

I pointed at the foil underneath her fingers and said, "That. Is it going to be like one of those swan things?"

She didn't seem to know what I was talking about so I thought that maybe she hadn't been to a restaurant that did those kinds of things and knew where our first date would be. When she looked back down her face turned red and she crumpled it up into a ball and threw it away before starting on the dishes.

She put everything in the dishwasher with the exception of the pots and pans, so when she started washing them by hand, I stood next to her and dried them as she handed them to me. "Trying to woo me already I see."

I flashed her a smile asking, "Is it working?" I was still pretty full from eating too much, but I wouldn't turn her down if she was willing to jump right into the meat of our relationship, so to speak.

"Hardly." She tried to laugh, but I got the feeling she wasn't being entirely honest. About what, I had no clue.

Once everything was washed and put away I had a good laugh watching Sookie play Tetris, trying to fit everything into the refrigerator, before she finally got the door to close. Turning around she eyed the poker table asking, "Is there somewhere else we can move that thing?"

That thing! "That *thing*," I pet it to let it know everything would be okay, "is my good luck charm. I haven't lost big on any hand I've played sitting at it since I got it."

Sookie rolled her eyes saying, "Well I don't know how to play, but I *do* know that it'll be a bitch to eat every meal at the counter. Can't you move it into the other room and I'll pick up a grown up table at Target?"

Sookie had eaten damn near as much as me so how she managed to retain her delectable shape was a mystery, but I couldn't keep my eyes off of it. "How about I teach you to play right now

and if you beat me, I'll move the table. I have to warn you though, I don't have any chips so we'll have to play strip poker."

My heart started racing when she sauntered up next to me, pressing her body against mine as she reached down, and pulled open the table drawer where the poker chips were kept. Fuck.

"I may not know how to play, but I do believe *these* are poker chips." She grinned taking two steps back while my dick kept reaching for her through my jeans.

"Oh, there they are. Fine, we'll play with chips. For now."

I wanted to pout, but couldn't when I saw her yawn before she said, "I have to get up early for work in the morning so I'll take a rain check. I didn't get much sleep last night so I need to catch up."

Since yawns were contagious it wasn't long before my own eyes were watering and with my belly now full I was feeling pretty beat too, so I begrudgingly replied, "Okay." I took two steps closer to her getting my dick highly agitated with me and asked, "Do I get a goodnight kiss?"

Her breath hitched in her throat and she placed her hand on my chest before saying, "I'll admit that you've already wowed me Eric, but you haven't wooed me yet." She gave me a soft smile and said, "Goodnight," turning around and heading up to her room.

I smiled back, responding in kind, and doubted my dick would ever forgive me.

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## Chapter 26: Chapter 25

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### Chapter 25

#### SPOV

I was surprised I'd felt as well rested as I did when I woke up the following morning. It took a while for me to fall asleep with my mind going over our talk and his subsequent porn speak over dessert. From the way he was moaning and groaning over the pie I wouldn't be surprised to find out he moonlighted doing voiceovers for adult movies. As if that wasn't bad enough, when he said he'd eat my *pie* every day, it didn't take much for that plate to slip through my hands since he'd apparently made my fingers just as slippery as my hoohah. He'd obviously had no idea of where my dirty mind had traveled to, just like I had no idea I'd been subconsciously making a pair of tinfoil panties, needing a whole other kind of shield I didn't think Mr. Spock or Scotty could help me out with.

I knew I had gotten the rest I'd been lacking, but the dreams that filled my night left me just as worn out as I'd felt before going to sleep. Like the night before, they'd been filled with Eric only this time, instead of him fucking one faceless woman after another, he'd been fucking me;

thoroughly. I had to take a cold shower just to cool off, both my body and my thoughts, and forced my mind to think of the day ahead so I could focus on something other than just how talented his tongue might be.

I dressed comfortably in a pair of nice slacks and a short sleeved shirt, twisting my hair up into a chignon on the back of my head, knowing I'd be doing a lot of work today. School was getting a late start due to renovations on the building that weren't quite done and didn't actually open for students until Friday with the rest of the week filled with meetings over the upcoming school year and the teachers preparing their classrooms for the incoming students. I hoped I wouldn't get too much grief over my impromptu wedding from Mr. Brigant, but the fact he hadn't called over the weekend gave me some hope that it wouldn't be too much of a big deal.

It was a little before seven when I finally made my way out to the kitchen already looking forward to a cup of coffee I'd set up to brew in Eric's fancy coffee pot the night before and was shocked to see Eric waiting for me, cup in hand. His face lit up with a huge smile as he handed it to me and said, "Good morning Mrs. Northman."

My insides turned to mush, even though it still felt weird hearing my new name, and I smiled responding, "Good morning Mr. Northman." I took the cup from his offered hand asking with a smile, "Why are you up so early?" Even though he'd been up early the morning before, for some reason I didn't picture Eric as an early riser.

I thought his smiles could end wars if all of the world's leaders were women, so I was left a little awestruck seeing it while he said, "It's your first day at work. I wanted to see you off and wish you good luck." The sound of the toaster popping up made us both turn and he took the two Pop Tarts from it and put them on a plate, handing them to me and saying, "I made you breakfast."

If this was all part of his master wooing plan it was working. He looked so proud when he handed them to me I couldn't help but smile back at him and saying, "Thank you." I sat at the counter and broke one in half so it could cool a little, but when the smell hit me I realized it was cherry flavored and couldn't stop the frown from forming on my face before he saw it.

"Is something wrong with it?" he asked.

"No," I lied and took a bite, trying not to spit it back out and pretended that I liked it.

His eyes narrowed watching me and he took the other half from my plate, taking a bite, and saying, "It tastes okay, so why are you making that face?"

"What face?" I asked and chugging my entire cup of coffee to wash it down.

"That face," he pointed back at me, "and I believe you said it was *rude* to answer a question with a question."

I sucked it up and decided to tell him the truth. "It's just that I really don't like cherries."



His eyebrows rose up into his hairline like I'd just admitted to draining kittens in back alleys as my preferred meal. I was confused when he walked up beside me and leaned down smelling me, maybe for a minute longer than necessary and I wondered if I smelled bad, before he pulled back and said, "But you *always* smell like cherries!"

He was right, I did and admitted, "I know it's weird, but I really like the way they *smell*, just not the way they taste."

The way he stepped back and looked at me made me feel like I'd just admitted to having a penis at birth and I wondered if it could be a deal breaker, putting a halt to any future wooing, but he just shrugged his shoulders saying, "Okay."

Crisis averted, I slid the plate back to him and watched him gleefully eat what was left as I poured another cup of coffee while toasting a slice of bread and asked, "So what do you have going on today?"

"I'm meeting Tray at the gym in an hour and then going to the studio for rehearsals. I should be home by 6."

I wondered if he knew Quinn, but since Quinn had never mentioned meeting Eric I figured their paths hadn't crossed and pushed all thoughts of him from my mind. We programmed each other's cell phone numbers into our phones and Eric gave me a key to the house and explained how to disarm the alarms since I would get home before him while I finished eating. Once I was done, I grabbed my things and said, "I guess I'll see you later." Awkward was suddenly a third presence in the room and I wondered if I should give him a kiss goodbye. I wanted to, but he just waved at me saying, "Have a nice day dear," from where he stood so I took my cue from that and turned, walking out to the garage.

We hadn't discussed me driving his car again, nor had he given me the key, so I had every intention of driving my own car when I stepped into the garage, but I stopped when I saw what he'd done. My car had been backed into the garage and a homemade poster was draped across the windshield with a crudely drawn bird in the center and the words, "Save the Hummingbirds" underneath it. I wanted to be pissed he thought so little of my car, but I couldn't and laughed instead. I didn't hear Eric come up behind me so I jumped a little when his hand suddenly appeared in front of me dangling a car key in my face and a shiver went down my spine when he leaned down whispering in my ear, "Please take my car."

Christ on a cracker that man smelled good and I closed my eyes, willing my reactive libido down, before I took the key from his fingertips and turned to face him saying, "Fine."

He held up his other hand, offering me the piece of fruit he'd carried with him saying, "An apple for the teacher."

Eric Northman: Master Wooer.

Fuck it. I took the apple and stood up on my tippy toes kissing his scruffy cheek and said, "Thank you," before pulling back and walking quickly to the car before I climbed him like a monkey. I chanced a glance at him while waiting for the garage door to open and felt a small sense of satisfaction seeing the still stunned look on his face.

*Welcome to the club.*

I gave him one last wave and pulled out of the garage, making a mental note to pick up that case of panty liners, and headed down the driveway. I had hoped I could make a discreet departure figuring it would be too early for the paparazzi to have already congregated, but I was wrong. I put my sunglasses on and did my best not to run any of them over before getting onto the main road and headed for the school. The caravan followed me for the entire ten minute drive and I was thankful the school was gated, like Eric's community, so once I was through it and onto the school grounds I was free of them.

My first stop was the main office where I met up with a nice woman named Belinda. I'd met her during the interview process and she sat me down with a stack of forms I had to fill out as a new employee, so I felt even better thinking they wouldn't have me bother with them if I wasn't going to be employed. I had to constantly remind myself to write down 'Northman' as my last name, but it didn't take long before it started to become second nature to me. It felt like I was in the sixth grade all over again, minus the hearts.

When I finished them all I found Belinda and handed them to her, anxious to see my new classroom, but felt my stomach drop when she said, "Mr. Brigant would like to speak with you. He's in his office." I knew it was coming, but that didn't help lessen the ominous feelings I had as I walked down the short hallway and knocked on his door.

I opened the door when I heard him say, "Enter," and he looked up from his desk without smiling and said, "Miss Stackhouse, or should I say Mrs. Northman?" His longer than average white blond hair was pulled back and fastened at the nape of his neck and his light blue eyes showed nothing of his emotions as they bored into my own.

I forced a smile and said, "It's Northman now, but Sookie is fine." What else could I say? I didn't think 'Fuck off you pompous prick' would be received very well.

"Yes, so I saw on CNN. You had a very eventful weekend, but I'm somewhat perplexed since you failed to list Mr. Northman on any of the background forms you submitted prior to you being selected for the position."

I recited our practiced lie saying, "Eric and I were merely friends when I turned that paperwork in with our relationship moving forward in the last couple of weeks. No one informed me, nor did I read in any of those forms, that I should inform anyone of any changes in my life short of being arrested for a crime. It's not a crime to get married."

"So our lawyers have informed me." He let that massive statement hang in the air before adding, "I'd heard of your husband in the past, but I googled him after hearing the news. He's got quite the history of being a...loose cannon."

Fuck you; he made me Pop Tarts and a poster. "Yes, a *history* and I assure you it's all in the past."

We stared each other down for a minute before he finally said, "I hope it stays that way."

*Me too.*

Once I was dismissed I found Belinda and she showed me to my classroom where I spent the rest of the morning cleaning and hanging up posters and whatnot. I took a break around lunchtime and strolled the grounds, eating my apple, and met a few of the other teachers. They all seemed nice enough and one of them, Sam Merlotte, gave me a tour of the school. The rest of the afternoon was filled with meetings so when I made my way back to my classroom to get my things at the end of the day, I was surprised to see a bouquet of red roses sitting on my desk and I opened the card wondering who could've sent them. I should've known.

*I hope you're having a good day.*

He'd signed it with a heart and the letter 'E'.

*Master Wooer indeed.*

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## Chapter 27: Chapter 26

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### Chapter 26

#### EPOV

I don't know how long I stood there after Sookie pulled out of the garage, but I couldn't seem to make my feet move with my mind completely dumbstruck from her kiss. A simple peck on the cheek was all it was; I'd received and given a million of them over the years as a part of the artificial Hollywood scene, but hers was different. I could still feel the heat of her lips pressed against my cheek; the scent of cherries, that for whatever fucking reason she didn't like the taste of but always smelled like, invaded my senses; my body reacting like she'd stroked my cock with her lips instead of my whiskers.

*What the fuck?*

The effect she had on me was a little frightening, but it was overridden by my imagination wondering if a simple kiss could get that kind of reaction out of me, I might just die once I was actually inside of her.

*I'd die a happy man.*

Even with a full stomach, I'd barely gotten any sleep for the second night in a row racking my brain on ways to woo Sookie. The concept alone was completely foreign to me, but researching character portrayals wasn't so I turned to the internet. I read article after article, blog after blog, on ways to be romantic. I watched clips of romantic movies on YouTube and almost called Pam at 3 a.m. for advice, but thank fuck I was able to catch myself beforehand. She'd never fucking let me live it down, nor did I want to know Dear Abby's take on things.

Ultimately I decided to work with my short term goals and what little I could do in the middle of the night. I sure as hell didn't want her driving her car to work (it would be impossible anyway thanks to Pam) and I already knew confronting Sookie over anything wouldn't work out well, but making her laugh hadn't failed me yet, so I got out of bed and made a poster to leave on her car hoping it would work to get her to drive my car instead of that deathtrap. I thought it turned out well, although the hummingbird probably resembled a piece of Smurf shit, but I didn't think she'd mind. If she did, I thought could always take off my shirt.

I eventually wandered back inside and stood in the kitchen at a loss. I'd lived alone from the time I'd turned eighteen, both to my own and my father's relief/delight, but at that moment I felt neither relieved nor delighted.

I felt empty.

Both me and the house were empty, suffering the loss of the little blond woman I hadn't even known existed until 48 hours earlier. The kitchen still held faint traces of the dinner she'd cooked the night before and I tried to soothe myself by eating another piece of pie, but all it did was leave me hungry for something else; something that smelled like cherries.

I decided to head out early rather than risk turning into a complete fucking pussy and rolling around in her sheets, inhaling them like a junkie desperate for their next fix. The horde of paparazzi at the gate wasn't as bad as the day before so I hoped Sookie didn't run into too many of them when she'd left earlier. I stopped at a florist, cameramen in tow, on the way to the gym to have flowers delivered to Sookie at the school thinking while it was cliché, it couldn't hurt and she seemed sentimental enough that she would probably like them. After picking out the floral arrangement I wanted to send, I stood there staring at the card wondering how to sign it. The word *'Love'* wouldn't be true and I didn't want her to get the wrong impression, but *'I can't wait to fuck you blind'* would probably be a little too honest. The glint of my new wedding band caught my eye, so I settled on drawing a simple heart and figured if it was good enough for our tattoos, it was good enough for now.

I got to the gym early, but Tray was already there so I met up with him in the weight room and got started on my normal routine.

"I ate a lot yesterday, so I should probably do some extra cardio," I grunted to him as he spotted me from behind while I did bench presses.

"Seriously?" he asked.

"Yeah and I had Pop Tarts and apple pie for breakfast too." I had a feeling I'd have to do a lot of extra cardio as long as Sookie kept on cooking like she had the night before, but I'd rather burn it off with her between the sheets than at the gym.

"Dude, that's all you've got to say? You need to put in extra time on the elliptical?"

"Was there something *else* I should've said?" Our conversations at the gym mostly consisted of whatever I might be working on at the time, if it was interesting, or whatever hot chick might be working out in close proximity to us. I hadn't even noticed any other women when I walked in, so once I'd completed my set I put the bar back in its holder and took a look around seeing what I might have missed. Like always, there were women scattered around and while they could be considered pretty, I didn't think any of them were worth noticing. My attention was currently being monopolized by thoughts of Sookie in her bikini from the day before and none of the other women around me could hold a candle to her.

He tapped my wedding band saying, "You fucking *got married* over the weekend! To Quinn's ex fiancé no less! You never even mentioned *knowing* her much less getting serious with someone."

*Oh, that.* I should've expected it, but I was distracted by thoughts of Sookie's tanned skin (more specifically wanting to see her tan lines) and cherry scent. I tried to shrug it off like it was no big deal and smirked, replying, "What's there to say? I came; I saw; I conquered, just not in that order."

"Dude," Tray replied and when he paused, if I didn't know him better, I would've thought he could be the L.A. stand-in for Sookie's brother. "*Married.*"

I knew what he was getting at since *he* knew *me* well enough to know I was a love 'em and leave 'em type of guy, but I had a script to follow, so that's what I did with a little bit of inspiration. I thought about everything Sookie and replied, "What can I say? There's something special about her, addictive even. She's not like the others," I let my eyes sweep across the room where the women whose surgically enhanced tits were just as fake as everything else about them (I would know having been with several of them in the past), and knowing I was speaking the truth. Sookie was nothing like them.

Before either one of us could say another word my eyes were temporarily blinded by the bald head approaching us, but my fists automatically clenched when he opened his mouth.

"I guess you're the one going after *my* sloppy seconds now, eh Northman?"

My fist connected with his face before I even had a chance to fully straighten my legs as I stood up and the spray of blood from what looked like his now broken nose peppered the front of my shirt. If only Sookie was there, I'd have a reason to take it off.

"You broke my fucking nose," he sputtered.

Tray got in between us, not that it appeared as though the fucking douche bag was going to retaliate, but I leaned around him looking Quinn in the eyes and said, "If you *ever* speak about *my wife* like that again I'll do more than just breaking your fucking nose." I was seething inside, barely able to control my instincts to beat the shit out of him, but all he did was wander away mumbling he was going to sue me.

*Pussy.*

"Well," Tray said as he turned around to face me with a smile and followed up with, "your break's over." He pointed at the treadmills saying, "Run. When your fists relax we'll move onto something else."

Six miles later and the rage I felt had just barely diminished. All I could think about was kicking Quinn's pathetic ass up one side and down the other. During the seventh mile I started thinking over how I'd tell Sookie about my encounter with numb nuts. Would she be mad at me for hitting him? For not telling her beforehand I sort of knew him? She'd never asked and I really hadn't wanted to volunteer the fact I used to steal the majority of his hook-ups out from under him, figuring it would be a reminder she didn't need about my past or hers. While I didn't want to spoil our evening with reminders of either, I couldn't keep it from her if he planned to sue me and decided I'd just feel out her mood when I got home. If she seemed bitchy at all, I'd just talk her into taking another swim in the pool and tell her after my shirt was off.

Tray officially declared me a lost cause when my hands hadn't loosened up by the start of mile eight, so I hit the showers and drove to the studio. We were doing fittings and rehearsals that day in preparation for the Tuesday night taping in front of a live studio audience and the season premiere would be airing that Friday. It had already been filmed a couple of weeks earlier, but there was a party of sorts that night I would have to attend and made a mental note to tell Sookie later on that night.

I was heading towards my dressing room when I caught sight of the brunette I'd fucked a couple of weeks earlier coming down the hallway towards me and looking like she wanted to talk. I still couldn't remember her name and I'd seen the look she was wearing before: it was always worn by the women I'd *previously* fucked after they found about the woman I'd *last* fucked. Those were conversations I had no interest in, just like I had no interest in her, and when I saw one of my co-stars hanging around near the door to my dressing room, I started talking to him hoping she'd go the fuck away.

"Are you still good for our Wednesday night poker game?" I asked. While I didn't consider Bill Compton a friend, he was a worthy opponent in the game of poker and I enjoyed playing against him. It was another thing I'd have to remember to tell Sookie and hoped she wouldn't give me too much grief about having the weekly games.

Bill followed me into my dressing room and when he didn't answer I looked over at him seeing a confused expression on his face before he said, "Uh, yes?"

"Did you have other plans? You don't seem too sure."

"I just thought perhaps your new bride would want to forego our weekly tradition."

Why the fuck he always talked like he was from another era was just one of many reasons why I didn't really like him and if it wasn't for his stellar poker skills I'd have nothing to do with him. Now, however, he also served the purpose of blocking the brunette behind him from being able to say whatever the hell was causing that glare on her face. I gave her an *'I don't give a fuck'* look, because I didn't, and motioned for him to close the door.

He cocked an eyebrow at me when she made it apparent that she had something to say, so I got up myself and shut the door in her face not giving a shit. Avoiding not only her, but his inquiring look as well, I responded, "I'll talk to Sookie tonight, but I don't think she'll mind."

I was again left dumbstruck hearing myself saying the words. I clearly remembered two days earlier thinking I could care less what she thought about the weekly games and hoping she'd find something else to do outside of the house on those nights. Now, however, I hoped she would want to stay having already learned I didn't like it when I was home and she wasn't.

*Maybe she drugged the pie?*

I flexed my hand, still sore from punching Quinn, and knew my fascination with her had nothing to do with her pie.

*Well maybe, but not the kind that gets baked in an oven.*

"Weren't you scheduled to participate in the celebrity poker tournament on Saturday night in Las Vegas? I didn't see you there so I just assumed it was because of your new bride."

I looked over at him forcing myself not to think of Sookie's *pie* and noticed something seemed off. Bill wasn't very demonstrative with his emotions and it served him well while playing poker, but relegated him to playing the straight man in our sitcom and, as far as I knew, he'd only ever acted in serious roles before that. From the slight sneer on his face and the narrowing of his eyes I would almost say he was *pissy*.

"Something *wrong* Bill? Do you have something against *marriage*?" I knew he had a habit of picking up my castoffs around the set so I would think he'd be happy I was off the market.

"Not at all, I just never thought you'd be one to settle down. Weren't you just with Dawn the other week?"

"Who?"

He pointed at the door saying, "Dawn Green."

I assumed he meant the brunette on the other side of the door and just shrugged, wondering when he'd become so interested in my sex life, saying, "None of them were anything more than relief. I

guess you could say 'I saw the light.'" I did too; it shimmered over Sookie's wet golden skin; skin I wanted to see more of and the thought of it was making my pants tight.

Bill still didn't look convinced, but I didn't give a shit what Bill thought so I picked up my script and headed out for rehearsal without another word. The rest of the day got progressively better, so long as I avoided Dawn, and the producers of the show gave me halfhearted congratulations on my weekend wedding. Luckily for me I'd married a kindergarten teacher and not a Vegas showgirl or else the conversation might have been a little more strained.

When I headed back to my dressing room to get my things at the end of the day I noticed I had a text on my cell phone from Sookie thanking me for the flowers and a kissy face emoticon.

It brought back the feelings I'd had earlier that morning when she'd left for work and I barreled past Dawn, nearly knocking her over in the hallway, as I sprinted for my car hoping that emoticon was a hint of what my evening had in store for me.

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## Chapter 28: Chapter 27

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### Chapter 27

#### SPOV

I left my shopping bag on the kitchen counter next to my bouquet of roses before going upstairs to change, hoping my frazzled nerves would calm down. I'd been too caught up with thoughts of Eric's wooing and thought nothing of swinging by the grocery store to pick up the ingredients to make him white chocolate cherry shortbread cookies figuring he could do with some wooing as well. They were part of the assortment of cookies Gran baked every Christmas and were a hit with everyone that received them, so even though I didn't eat them I was sure Eric would like them.

The paparazzi must have not known when I'd be leaving the school because they didn't immediately bombard me when I drove through the gate on my way out and my mind was with Eric so I'd forgotten their existence until they swarmed around me in the parking lot as I left the store. Their shouts and shoving each other, trying to get in front of me, left me a trembling mess by the time I made it into the car and I was thankful Eric's car was fancy enough to have a push button to start it since I doubted my shaking hands would have been able to negotiate getting a key into the ignition. The drive home wasn't much better with them flanking me at every opportunity in their own cars and I missed having Eric at my side telling me it would all be okay. How he could remain calm in the middle of a shitstorm was beyond me, but I could've used some of his calming influence right about then. By the time I pulled up to the gate, I vowed to never again bitch about his ritzy ass neighborhood thankful to my bones they wouldn't be able to follow me any longer.



Once I was comfortable in a t-shirt and shorts, I marinated some steaks and stuck them in the refrigerator before getting started on making the cookies. I used to love baking with Gran during the holidays and having everything spread out in front of me made me miss her even more than usual. I'd gotten used to being away from her for long stretches of time, but I knew she was getting on in years and it killed me not being able to see her more often knowing her time on earth wasn't infinite. Before I could depress myself anymore, my phone rang and I smiled seeing the caller ID.

"Hi Gran! I was just thinking about you."

*"I would've thought your mind would've been occupied with thoughts of your new husband,"* she chuckled.

"I guess we're both right in a way. I'm making your white chocolate cherry shortbread cookies for him at this very moment, so I'm thinking of you both!" The one humongous lie I had to tell her was enough, so I would do my best to be as honest about everything else and nothing I'd just told her was untrue.

*"It must be true love if you're making him cookies you don't even like,"* she teased. Since I'd opted to not outright lie to her I remained quiet long enough for her to ask, *"How was your first day at the school?"*

I launched into telling her about my classroom and the teachers I'd met, minus my minor run in with Mr. Brigant, and ended with me finding the flowers from Eric on my desk at the end of the day. Gran was big on little things like that and even though she'd never said it out loud, I knew Quinn's lack of thoughtful romantic gestures irked her when we were still together. I should've known better when I caught him ogling another woman at the gym while we were running side by side on treadmills and he responded to me giving him the stink eye by asking, "Wanna get married?" Romantic, he was not, but I wasn't very bright when it came to him anyway. It was a lesson learned, but Eric's sweet gesture had unknowingly wooed not only me, but Gran as well with the flowers.

Gran filled me in on the town gossip, all centered around me and my marriage, but according to her no one had anything but nice things to say about it all. They were all eager to meet him when we visited for Thanksgiving and even though the idea made me nervous, I kind of couldn't wait to get Eric in front of Gran. After all, I'd already been subjected to Pam, his father, and Cumin the cocksucker, so it was only fair for him to get scrutinized by Gran face to face even though I clearly had the worse end of the deal there.

We stayed on the phone until I was pulling the last of the cookies out of the oven and I called Amelia while they cooled enough for me to dip them into the melted white chocolate. She ooh'd and ahh'd over the wooing Eric had been doing, but when she started giving me the pros and cons for different brands of lube like she was the Roger Ebert of sex products, I made excuses to end the call. It was nearing five o'clock by the time I was done so I cleaned up my mess and emptied the dishwasher from running it the night before and threw some laundry into the washer.

I was still confused over how my purse had ended up there the day before, but figured I was so discombobulated over everything I must have taken it in there with the pile of sheets.

I had just started making our salads to go with dinner when I heard the now familiar, "Knock knock," followed by high heels click clacking towards the kitchen. I didn't even look up as I continued chopping the lettuce asking, "The door was unlocked?" I'd come in through the garage so I hadn't even thought to check, but I would from then on if Eric was so careless.

"I have a key," Pam replied like I should've known. "Aren't you the happy little homemaker," she said looking at the cookies on the counter.

"They're just cookies Pam." I wasn't going to give her any ammunition, not fully trusting her yet. Even though we argued a lot, I couldn't help liking her somewhat, but I would wait and see before letting my guard all the way down with her. "Would you like to stay for dinner?" I wanted to be alone with Eric, but the hostess in me demanded I make the offer.

"What are you making?" she asked, seemingly amused I was *making* anything at all.

I shrugged my shoulders replying, "Nothing fancy; just steak, baked potatoes, and salad."

Her face scrunched up in distaste as she said, "I'll have to pass."

Since I was happy she wouldn't be staying, I didn't call her out on her rude facial expression and turned on the broiler when I saw it was almost six. "Eric should be home soon if that's why you're here?" I got the steaks out and put them under the broiler while I put the potatoes in the microwave, but stilled with her next words.

"Actually," she started, "I wanted to talk to you alone first. Tell me about your ex fiancé."

My head whipped around from her unexpected query as I asked, "Why? What about him?" as words like *dickface* and *douchetard* ran through my head.

Her eyebrow rose up as she replied, "Quid pro quo. You answer me and I'll answer you. What is he like? Have you spoken to him recently? Do you think he's the type to make waves in light of your new fame?"

"He's a lying bastard!" I answered. "I thought we were in a committed relationship and he thought he could stick his dick in every woman he met. There was a missed call on my cell phone the morning after *that night*, but I didn't call him back nor have I spoken to him since I threw his ring back in his face and told him to fuck off a year ago. Now what's this all about?" I could hear Eric coming in through the garage, but Pam started talking before he could make his way into the kitchen.

"Apparently he and Eric got into some sort of fight this morning at the gym. Tray called and gave me a heads up because Eric was too pissed to see straight and Quinn left with a broken nose muttering he was going to sue him."

Eric had walked in while she'd been talking and we both looked over at him while he stood there, like a deer caught in the headlights, after seeing the pissed off expression on my face. He remained quiet, seemingly at just as much of a loss as I was since I didn't know who I was more pissed at; Eric for not saying something sooner, or Quinn for finding a way to continue to fuck with my life. He put on an innocent expression saying, "Honey, I'm home." When my expression didn't change he asked, "Cookies?" and walked over shoving three of them into his mouth at once, probably hoping it would keep him from having to explain. I just bided my time knowing he'd have to swallow eventually.

"Why did you hit him?" I asked. I was internally giddy he'd clocked him good enough to break his nose, but I still wanted to know his reason for doing so.

Eric reached for another cookie so I smacked his hand away and glared at him until he said, "He pissed me off."

I turned and opened the oven, flipping the steaks over so they wouldn't burn, and faced him again asking, "What did he do to piss you off?"

He'd snuck more cookies while my back had been turned and took for-fucking-ever to finish chewing before asking, "Cherry cookies? They're very good, but you don't like cherries." *It was going to be a long fucking night.*

My only reply was to cross my arms and glare so he finally turned to Pam and said, "Go away. Sookie and I need to talk, but *if* he sues we're not settling. I'll fight that pussy tooth and nail before I give him one red fucking cent."

I could see Pam in my peripheral darting her eyes back and forth between Eric and me before she shocked me by standing up and saying, "Good," as she walked out.

As soon as we heard the front door close Eric started pulling up his shirt asking, "Do you want to talk about it in the pool?" but my hands shot out, tugging his shirt back down before I could glaze over seeing his abs as I shouted, "No! I want you to answer my question!"

Eric sighed looking back at me long and hard before he finally said, "I don't want to hurt you."

"What? Why? How?" My stomach dropped realizing just how similar Eric and Quinn were when it came to their man whoring ways. *Jesus fucking Christ*, I thought as I turned and got the steaks out of the oven. They were probably fighting over some bimbo at the gym and there I was baking cookies for him actually *believing* him when he'd said he wouldn't betray me like that; that he wanted to try being in a *relationship*. I was so fucking stupid. I slapped a steak onto a plate along with a potato and set it down on the counter with enough force I was surprised the dish hadn't broken.

When he still hadn't said another word I said, "Here's your dinner." I looked him in the eyes adding, "When *I* make a deal, I keep it," and stomped out of the kitchen up to my room hoping I'd turned around in time before he could see the tears forming in my eyes.

I tried to muffle the sounds of my crying in my pillow wishing I could just hop in my car and go somewhere, but knowing what awaited me at the gate made me stay put. How could I have let my guard down so quickly with someone I *knew* wasn't the relationship type? How could I fall for all of his cutesy little wooing without question? Why did it already hurt so fucking bad when I barely knew him at all?

Not much time had passed when I heard a knock on my bedroom door followed by it being opened. My back was facing the door and I mentally kicked my own ass for forgetting to lock it and wondered just how much of Eric had already rubbed off on me. I didn't bother turning around and shoved my tear covered face into the pillow when I heard him say, "I'm sorry."

Hearing his half-assed apology just pissed me off and I rolled over, rising up onto my knees and not caring he could see my tears, spitting out, "I think I deserve a little better than *that*."

Eric's face had softened at first but became hard again while he gritted his teeth saying, "I already said I was *sorry*. What more do you *want*?"

I rolled my eyes replying, "It doesn't fucking matter. I wouldn't believe a word that came out of your mouth anyway."

He rubbed his face with his hands before running them through his hair muttering exasperatedly, "I can't believe we're fucking fighting over this." He glared down at me saying, "You should have said something if you were still so fucking hung up on your ex before spouting off all of that bullshit about wanting to be in a relationship with me last night."

*Huh?* "What the fuck are you talking about? *You're* the one who agreed to give *us* a shot and then got into a fight with my asshole ex over some bimbo!"

Eric looked back at me confused asking, "What the fuck are *you* talking about? I hit him for what he had to say about *you*. You're *not* mad that I hit him because you're still in love with him?"

I quickly replayed our conversation over again in my mind and realized Eric had never actually said why they fought; I'd just assumed.

*Yeah, ass u me, I get it.*

I felt so stupid and tried to smile saying, "No, I'm not mad that you hit him; I'm not still in love with him. Our whole relationship was based on a lie anyway, so there's no one for me to even mourn for." I had unconsciously moved closer to the side of the bed where he was standing and it was high enough that we were almost eye level when I asked, "Broke his nose, huh? I wish I could've seen it."

Seeing his smile released every bit of tension I'd felt thinking he'd been out trying to hook up with other women and I couldn't help smiling in return. He reached out, cupping each of my cheeks in his hands and wiping the last of my tears away with his thumbs when I reached up,

holding onto each of his hands with my own and turning my head, placing a kiss on each of his palms.

I looked back at Eric saying, "I'm sorry." He looked shocked at my actions and my words. I couldn't really blame him, but the apology he was owed and the kisses just felt right, so I did it. There were so many emotions playing behind his eyes; fear, worry, affection, along with some residual anger. I wanted so badly to take it away from him, knowing I was the cause of it all, but would he let me? After what I'd just falsely accused him of, I couldn't blame him if he said no, but I had to ask anyway.

For him and for me.

Placing my hand on his chest, not realizing it was trembling until it stilled against his body and feeling his heartbeat pounding underneath my palm with our eyes locked onto one another, I whispered, "Kiss me?"

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## Chapter 29: Chapter 28

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### Chapter 28

#### EPOV

I watched her turn and walk away not believing we were fucking fighting over that pussy Quinn. The only thing I'd overheard Sookie tell Pam about him was that she'd told him to fuck off and threw his ring back at him, but after seeing firsthand just how hotheaded she could get, coupled with her meltdown now, I had to wonder whether or not she wanted him back. Did she still love him? When she slammed the plate down on the counter and said when she made a deal, she kept it; did that mean she'd wait a year before going back to him?

It took all of my willpower to not destroy the kitchen after she'd walked away. What the fuck was I doing? Why was I going through any of this bullshit? This was why I avoided *relationships*.

I glanced around the room seeing the dinner she'd made, the kick ass cherry cookies she'd baked even though she didn't like them, and the flowers I'd sent to her sitting on the counter. The sight and scent of it all made the house feel like a home for the first time and suddenly the anger evaporated. I remembered all too well how I'd felt that morning after she'd left for work and the emptiness I'd been engulfed in, already dreading the time when she would leave for good. I knew without a doubt the emotional tie she'd said she would need, the improbability of the concept I had questioned for myself, had already begun to form for me. By some strange twist of fucked up fate the Gods saw reason to have me marry the one woman I'd ever come across that I didn't want to see go, but I didn't want her to stay if I wasn't the one she wanted. I didn't want to be the one she settled for; I wanted her to choose me because I was the one she wanted to be with.

Knowing what had to be done, I turned and headed upstairs cursing Quinn the entire time and planning to break his nose all over again once it healed, still unable to comprehend how Sookie could want him back. I didn't want to hurt her by telling her about our history or what he'd said to cause my right hook, but I also thought she should go into it with both eyes open if he was the one she wanted to be with. My emotions flip flopped from being upset to being completely pissed off with every step I took, but by the time I reached her bedroom door and heard her crying I knew my only option was to try and make it as painless as possible for her. He didn't deserve her tears and I would be damned if I would be the one to cause her to shed any more of them.

I stood there listening for another minute trying to convince myself it was for the best. It was better for her to leave now, our careers and her family be damned, before I got any closer to her. In the span of three days she'd already managed to get through some of the barriers I'd built over the years and if she stayed only to spare her grandmother any shame, or for her job, I knew she'd manage to knock a few more down. Her words from the night before ran through my mind and I was in complete agreement; I couldn't start something like this with her knowing we already had an expiration date before whatever *this* was could even begin.

I knocked lightly before opening her door and seeing her back shake as she cried into her pillow was like a knife to my gut. I'd much rather deal with a feisty pissed off Sookie than to see her like this and I said the first thing that came to my mind. "I'm sorry." It was true, no matter what the cause of her tears were; me for hitting Quinn, him being a cheating bastard, or because she felt like she was stuck with me for the next year, I *was* sorry.

When she whipped around and said she deserved a better apology than the one I'd just given her, actually seeing her tears threatened to make me fold, but the idea of begging her forgiveness for giving Quinn exactly what he deserved was more than I could give her even if my mouth asked what more she could want. I couldn't believe every stride we'd made had completely dissolved down to fighting over that asshole and said as much. I was ready to pull my hair out wondering why she would have said the things she had the night before and angrily spat out, "You should have said something if you were still so fucking hung up on your ex before spouting off all of that bullshit about wanting to be in a relationship with me last night."

I was floored by her response. Where she got the idea he and I had been fighting over another woman was momentarily set aside with hope filling my chest that maybe *we* still had a shot. Hearing her saying she wasn't still in love with him, seeing the truth of the words in her eyes when they locked onto mine, made me reach out and wipe the tears from her face. They didn't belong on someone like her.

Her apology threw me, but the tender kisses she placed on my palms threw me even more. I'd been with more women than I could count, but never in my life had I been given a kiss like that; affection and an apology all rolled into one. I was afraid of the effect she had on me; worried about the potential of her being the hummingbird and me the windshield, able to make me come apart at the seams with nothing more than a tap of her wing. But even so, I didn't think I couldn't walk away unless she asked me to.

"Kiss me?"

Two words. No two words had ever made me feel more alive than hearing them coming from her lips, but before I could give in to what my body was screaming for, my mind knew we had one more thing to get straight.

"You thought I hit him over another woman."

Her eyes dropped to the bed beneath her, her shame written across her face as she whispered, "Yes. I'm sorry."

I tilted her face back up to look in her eyes needing her to see my own when I said, "I told you I wouldn't betray you."

"I know," she interrupted, but I wasn't done.

"I'm not Quinn."

"I know but..."

Tears welled in her eyes again, but she had to understand what I was only now starting to realize. "I don't know how to be in a relationship; one half of a couple, but I meant what I said. I won't hurt you that way." Her eyes searched mine and I hoped she could see the truth of them I felt inside. As the first tear made its way down her cheek I caught it with my thumb and said, "I *want* to see where this goes," indicating the two of us. "I only *want* you, but I have to know you feel the same."

I held my breath waiting for her response, taking in the features of her face. Her breaths were still uneven from crying a few moments earlier and even with her swollen red eyes, I'd never found anyone more beautiful than her. I could feel my heartbeat threatening to pound out of my chest and I was pretty sure it stopped when she reached up and cupped the side of my face, took a deep breath, and said, "I do."

I'd been wrong when I thought the two words she'd spoken a few minutes earlier had made me feel so alive because those two words she'd just uttered made me feel positively electric and ironically held much more meaning to me than when I watched her say them at Bubba's chapel on the video.

The distance between us closed in slow motion with our eyes still locked on each other and my last coherent thought was that she still smelled like cherries when our lips finally met. The kiss started softly, chastely, with both of us tentatively feeling the other out and my right hand moved to the back of her head with my fingers weaving into her hair, afraid she might pull back, while my left hand wrapped around her waist, settling on her lower back. Never before had I felt lips as soft as hers and her own hands moved to grip the back of my neck and shoulder as she pressed her lips more firmly against my own. My tongue swept across her lower lip seeking entrance, the

taste of cherries eliciting a low growl in my chest, and when her lips finally parted with a small sigh I dove in.

My tongue sought out hers in a slow sensual dance while the front of our bodies made contact beneath us and I could feel her heartbeat thundering against my chest. She felt so small in my arms, too small to have such a large effect on me when I realized I could happily kiss her forever. Before Sookie I viewed kissing as a means to an end, but with her I would stay locked away for days happily doing nothing more than just that. My hand at her back slipped underneath her shirt seeking the warmth of her skin and she surprised me when she leaned back onto the bed, pulling me down with her, our lips never parting.

I relished feeling her body underneath my own, pressing down on her while keeping my weight off of her tiny frame, but I knew if we continued on I wouldn't be able to stop, already not wanting to. I removed my lips from hers, kissing along her jaw and inhaling the sweet scent of her neck and hair while my hand ran along her side and my body protested as my mouth said, "Sookie, we need to stop if you want to take things slow."

My actions and words weren't in agreement since my hips ground against her own with my erection rubbing against her center and making each of us moan out loud.

"You're right, we need to stop," she said, her own body just as traitorous as my own when her legs wrapped around my waist so her hips could return the same sentiment my own had just made.

My lips wrapped around hers again as we continued to dry hump each other through our clothes, but when my hands forcefully gripped her bruised hips and she yelped in pain, the sound of it cleared enough of the lust from my brain for me to stop.

"I'm sorry," I said as I pulled back. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt her.

We were both panting by then, but she still managed to smile as she ran her thumb across my bottom lip gathering the moisture left behind as she replied, "You said you wouldn't apologize for that and I can tell you now, even if I can't remember that night, I'm not sorry. Apology not accepted."

Christ. Seeing her swollen lips and having her underneath me was making me want to throw caution to the wind, but somehow I knew she wasn't ready for that yet. Her stomach chose to growl a second later and gave us the excuse we needed to peel ourselves apart since the house was surprisingly empty of cockblockers. I gave her one last chaste kiss on her lips before standing and pulling her off the bed with me saying, "Come on. You need to eat and if we don't leave right now I'll be having *you* for dinner."

I had to force my feet to move when she licked her lips and replied, "Okay," not knowing if her response was in agreement or an invitation.

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### Chapter 29

#### SPOV

Not only were my lips still tingling as we made our way downstairs, but it felt like my whole body was on fire. Even though the evidence was there we'd had sex on *that night*, I couldn't remember it so being locked in such a passionate embrace was wreaking havoc on my insides. I never knew lips could be so soft and yet so forceful; a kiss could be so sweet yet so demanding. Even the fact that he tasted like the cherry cookies he'd eaten couldn't make me pull away and the feel of his arousal rubbing against my center, providing the friction my body desperately craved, only made me more wanton.

"Sookie we need to stop if you want to take things slow," he murmured against my skin while his hips ground against mine.

We both moaned with the contact, much like the night before over dinner, and even though I agreed with his statement out loud, my body wanted nothing to do with separating from him and my legs wrapped around his lower half with my hips intent on ignoring my spoken words. I'd seen him naked, the memory forever seared into my mind, but *feeling* him on top of me, pressing against every bit of me, forced all rational thought to leave my brain. I *wanted* him, *needed* him, in ways I'd never imagined or felt with my one and only other lover. My hands danced across his back feeling his muscles stretch and contract with each movement he made. The heat of his body burned straight through to my soul and points farther south while our mouths clashed together as he stole the air from my lungs. I would willingly give him all of it if only he'd never take his lips from mine again.

As my hands decided all on their own to begin removing his shirt, the pain from his grasp at my hips brought with it a yelp from my lips and my body silently cried out feeling the pain of losing his warmth as Eric pulled away apologizing. I wouldn't accept his apology, now knowing how wonderful a minutes long make out session with him could be, and I had no doubt I enjoyed earning each and every one of the bruises on my skin. I could see his erection straining the front of his jeans and another bolt of fire shot through my body, but before I could give in to my desires my body betrayed me again with my stomach growling out loud. He leaned in to give me one last kiss with my lips chasing after his as he pulled away, pulling me to my feet, and the lust was barely clearing my brain when he warned he'd be having me for dinner if we didn't leave the room. Rationally, soberly, I knew it was too soon; we hardly knew each other, and yet if he hadn't started pulling me to the door I would have gladly changed the dinner menu for both of us.

Before I knew it we were standing in the kitchen without me remembering taking the path that led us there. Less than 10 minutes had passed since my initial moment of being an ass that led to our fight, so our dinner was still warm and I made up a plate for myself before sitting down next to Eric to eat. We lapsed into a comfortable silence filled with stolen glances at each other as we ate and I waited until we were nearly finished to ask, "So why *did* you hit Quinn?"

Eric's fork stilled in midair and I could see his mind chewing over my question more than his mouth was chewing on his dinner before he finally looked over at me and said, "He said something derogatory about you and I took offense." My eyes indicated he should keep talking so he sighed as he blurted out, "He said I was getting his *sloppy seconds*."

"What?" I screeched, nearly choking on the piece of steak in my mouth. "Why in the hell would he say that? I mean I know *why*, but what would possess him to be such a prick? Do you two even know each other?"

Quinn had *never* mentioned Eric's name to me, much less having met him, but then again he'd never mentioned *a lot* of things so I wasn't all that surprised when Eric answered, "We sort of know each other, but it was the first time we'd actually spoken to one another."

I could tell Eric was hesitant to say any more which only made me ask, "What is it you aren't telling me?"

He chewed on the corner of his lip before asking, "Are you sure you want to know? I'm pretty sure you won't like what I have to say."

I smiled and rolled my eyes saying, "Haven't we established answering a question with another question is rude? I'm pretty sure we have and I'd rather know the *truth* over living in the dark." I put my fork down and turned my body to face him, bracing myself for the worst and saying, "Come on, out with it."

His shoulders slumped as he shoved another piece of steak into his mouth to buy extra time and I slid his plate out of his reach before he could prolong the suspense. Finally he admitted, "We used to compete over women at the gym. Actually, it wasn't really a competition because I walked away with the girl every time." My jealous streak rose up, but I willed it back down knowing I couldn't hold it against Eric since we didn't even know each other back then. I felt absolutely no jealousy towards Quinn's actions and when I didn't say anything he continued, "Tray had mentioned Quinn's *dislike* of me not long after I joined the gym along with his pastime of chasing women." Both his voice and eyes softened when he said, "Even though he was with you at the time."

I knew he was gauging my reaction to the news, but it was nothing I didn't already know. Quinn had definitely left scars on my heart with Eric having paid the price of my damaged psyche only thirty minutes earlier because a part of me now *expected* to be betrayed. Eric's reputation certainly didn't help ease my mind, but I was sure I would have been on guard no matter who I ended up being in a relationship with.

I guess my lack of emotion threw him off so I smiled letting him know I was okay and he smiled back adding, "I actually enjoy being an ass sometimes so whenever I saw him trying to pick up another woman I'd swoop in for the kill just to piss him off."

I pushed my unreasonable jealousy aside and laughed saying, "Yes, I recall that side of you very well." Both personality wise and physically, his ass was spectacular.

"So you're not upset about it at all?"

I shrugged my shoulders replying, "No. It is what it is and it's why he and I aren't together anymore." Eric didn't seem convinced and I wondered if my earlier jealousy had shone through so I slid his plate back in front of him hoping to distract him with food. When he didn't even look down at it I chose a different method and said, "I don't know whether to thank you or be mad at you." His expression said it was what he'd been waiting for so I cocked my eyebrow saying, "I should thank you for making it more difficult for him, but I want to be mad at you interfering. Who knows? If you hadn't I might have found out he was a cheating bastard that much sooner." I ended with a smile letting him know I wasn't really upset, but when his expression still didn't change I got desperate and said, "I guess I'll just say thank you for sticking up for me, so thank you."

I leaned in intending to give him nothing more than a peck on the lips now that the initial barrier between us had been dropped, but Eric was having none of that. He softly growled as soon as our lips made contact and his hand gripped the back of my head at the same time his tongue swept into my mouth. I could no longer remember what we'd been talking about with my brain switching to Eric mode, also known as 'shameless hussy' mode. No wonder he'd been with so many women, who in the hell would turn him down when he had me halfway to climaxing from nothing more than a kiss? Instead of feeling jealous at the thought I felt proud and a little smug knowing he was all mine for the foreseeable future.

I didn't realize we'd moved until I heard his plate clatter to the floor and my ass hit the cold hard granite of the countertop. It was the perfect height for Eric to rub his denim clad erection against my center and he kissed and licked his way across my collarbone from ear to ear mumbling something, but the sex haze surrounding my brain also clogged my ears. He could have told me he was a thousand year old vampire for all I knew and I wouldn't have cared one bit, so long as he didn't stop what he was doing.

My hands reached the hem of his t-shirt during their trek across his back and seconds later I was facing Eric's naked chest thanks to their overzealous glee in being released from the servitude of any higher brain function. I couldn't spare my runaway hands any thoughts since his chest was so much better up close and I wasted no time mapping out everything I could reach with my mouth as Eric's hands did a little exploring of their own before claiming my lips with his once more. My harlot hands ran in between our bodies stroking his length through his jeans and he hissed into my mouth, thrusting forward, as I internally readjusted his even more impressive measurements. My hands, now dubbed 'wicked' and 'immoral', were teetering over the button of his jeans hell bent on releasing the Kraken when the smell hit me and it was only when we both pulled away to cough did I see the smoke.

"Holy shit!" we said in unison as Eric ran over and removed his smoking t-shirt from the stove and throwing it into the sink. I jumped down from the counter hurrying to turn off the broiler I'd left on as Eric ran water over his now ruined shirt while I said for the third time that night, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" he asked smiling, completely nonplussed about me almost setting his kitchen on fire.

"For almost burning your house down? For forgetting to turn off the broiler? For tossing your t-shirt on the stove?" It was weird feeling contrite while my girly bits throbbed and I remained that way for another two seconds as I felt my shorts fall from my hips, catching them as they hit my knees. It seemed Eric's hands had been much quicker and stealthier than my own and I hastily righted them before shooting a look at Eric.

I had no idea of what my look conveyed since I was both amused and a little embarrassed, but Eric merely smiled back completely unrepentant as he said, "Sorry?" I was very glad my shorts were back in place since I was sure my panties vanished seeing his pearly whites attempting to dazzle me into debauchery.

It was working.

In a feeble attempt to keep me from stripping him completely naked where he stood, I turned and started cleaning up the broken plate and food that had been strewn across the floor becoming a casualty of our impromptu foray of frisky fingers. As I threw it all into the trash I remembered the dish I'd broken the night before and turned saying, "At this rate we'll be eating out of the pots and pans by the end of the week."

"Well worth it," Eric smirked.

I'd forgotten about my inability to think clearly when he wasn't wearing a shirt and I turned to start clearing the remaining dishes from the counter to avoid looking at him when my eyes fell onto the poker table. There was plenty of room in the den for it so I thought I'd make another attempt at getting it moved. I remembered clearly how Eric spoke of and stroked it the night before as if it were a living entity so I gestured towards it and asked, "Can we please move him? Her? It? Into another room?"

Eric strode forward and dropped down into one of the surrounding seats sprawling his upper half across the table top and gripping the cushioned sides saying, "Don't listen to her my precious. She doesn't mean it. Once she gets to know you she'll love you like I do."

I pressed my thighs together feeling the tiny gush of moisture seeing his bare back on display just begging to be licked and instead let out a very unladylike snort saying, "'My Precious', huh? You do realize Gollum, Smeagol, whoever you are that the *precious* was pure evil don't you?" Amelia had gone through an Orlando Bloom phase and made us watch the entire Lord of the Rings trilogy in a one day marathon while she made snarky comments on his skeletal girlfriend at the time.

Eric gasped in mock outrage and continued petting the table while whispering sweet nothings into its brass cup holders.

I wished he would put on a shirt because I was sure I could come up with a convincing argument, but my mind simply turned to mush whenever he had that much skin on display. It dawned on me then all of the other times I'd been blindsided by his bare body and while I couldn't be sure he'd been doing it on purpose, the fact he'd suggested swimming for our talk about Quinn before dinner set off alarm bells. He was lucky I enjoyed the view too much to complain, but thought turnabout was fair play. My t-shirt wasn't tight, but it was fitted and the v-neck style was just what I needed. Since Eric was facing away from me I quickly gave the girls a little boost while I pulled the hem of my shirt down and walked around the table until I was in Eric's line of sight. I bent at the waist and practically purred, "There's plenty of room in the den. Wouldn't it be nice to sit at an actual table for our meals?"

His eyes never strayed from my cleavage which was nearly spilling out of my bra and I was sure one good sneeze would do me in. I wanted to laugh seeing the faraway glazed over look in his eyes, but kept it to myself asking again, "Wouldn't that be nice Eric?" as I nodded my head.

While his eyes never left my breasts he must have subconsciously seen my head nodding and his head mimicked my own with his cheek rubbing against the light chocolate colored cloth covering the center of the table since he was still laying flat across the top. I started swaying my body very slowly hoping to keep him hypnotized and asked while nodding again, "So we can move the table into the den?"

His cheek kept rubbing against the cloth as his eyes swayed with my chest and I quickly said, "That's great! I'll look for a dinette tomorrow," and gave him a quick peck on the top of his head in thanks before I went back to cleaning up the rest of the dishes while I tried to convince myself I hadn't just felt his tongue dart in to lick my cleavage when I leaned in.

If only I could convince my libido.

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## Chapter 31: Chapter 30

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### Chapter 30

#### EPOV

*What was she saying?*

I could see that her mouth was moving, but all of the blood had rushed from my brain into my dick when she bent over in front of me and once I caught sight of her breasts I had no clue what she'd been talking about. Luckily the table hid my physical reaction seeing her practically spilling out of her top, but my hands were itching to return to our earlier mutual exploration and I had to maintain my grip on the table's edge before they shot out and freed her breasts from their lacy confines.

*Surely she'd be more comfortable without her bra on. It was probably healthier for her since it wouldn't restrict her airflow, right?*

My fingers and dick twitched at the same time while my brain attempted to plot a way to talk her into letting me take it off for her, but everything fell by the wayside when she leaned forward. It seemed like a dream with her movements happening in slow motion and I was frozen, unable to move with the exception of *one* muscle.

My tongue darted out tasting the skin at the top of the valley of her breasts, each side of my tongue gliding along each of my future BFF's before Sookie pulled away leaving me no way to give them a proper greeting.

*How were we supposed to become best friends if they didn't stick around?*

As I pulled away from where my head had been resting on the tabletop I swiped the line of drool from my mouth and turned back to face Sookie. Her entire body was flushed red and she was fanning herself again. I was feeling a bit hot and bothered too, but my reaction had to do with her while hers was probably from the heat of the stove and I tried to will my erection away so I could focus on something other than Sookie sprawled out underneath me. All it took was remembering our earlier conversation about Quinn and imagining her sprawled out underneath *him* for my desire to disappear. The thought of his hands on her made my own clench into fists and had he been there I would have hit him again.

I knew my jealousy was irrational and I could hardly throw stones when it came to our sexual histories, but the caveman inside of me kept screaming out she was *mine*. I didn't like knowing there was *anyone* else who'd known her intimately, especially knowing *he* could remember it and *I* couldn't, and if I thought I could get away with it Quinn wouldn't live to see another day.

*Maybe Pam had a hitman on her payroll.*

"Eric?"

The sound of Sookie's voice pulled me from my violent fantasies and judging by the look on her face she was waiting for a response to an unheard question. Her ability to calm me down with nothing more than her presence was still a bit unsettling, but I mentally shrugged it off saying, "Sorry, what were you saying?"

*And can you take off your bra?*

She smiled replying, "I asked how your day was."

My day? Who gives a shit about my day? My night, however, was fan-fucking-tastic after we got our daily fight out of the way, but since she was there for all of the best parts I doubted she needed a recap and it did seem like a couple-y thing to do. Couples talked about their day, right? I thought it over for a moment and said, "Well, you know how my morning went at the gym and after that I just went to work."

She rolled her eyes, I assumed about my lack of detail, but nothing really jumped out to tell her about aside from that brunette trying to pin me down all day long and I *really* didn't want to go there with Sookie *now*. Thinking about my initial run in made me remember using Bill as a shield, reminding me about the poker game on Wednesday nights.

"Uh, I don't remember if I told you, but I normally have a couple of the guys over on Wednesday nights for a poker game around seven. Is that okay with you?"

It felt odd not only *asking* for her approval to do something I'd been doing for months in my own house, but *wanting* her approval as well. We found enough things to fight about already and until we reached the stage where we could have make up sex, I didn't want to find any other things to fight over. However, when we finally *did* reach that stage, I'd be picking fights left and right.

A smile lit up her face as she replied, "Of course I don't mind. Would you like for me to make dinner for everyone, or I could make a bunch of different finger foods?"

I stood and walked over to stand next to Sookie in what was becoming our routine and dried the pans she'd washed saying, "You don't have to go through the trouble. I normally just pick up some chips and pretzels to go with the beer."

She bumped my side with her hip replying, "Don't be silly, it's no trouble at all. Will you be home around the same time that night? I can still have your dinner ready by six and then put out some hors d'oeuvres for everyone. Are they a buffalo wings and loaded potato skins type of crowd, or mini-quiche and cucumber sandwich set?"

I laughed at the mental image of Alcide and Tray holding up their pinky fingers eating a dainty little sandwich, especially after seeing Alcide wolf down the sandwiches Sookie had made the day before. Bill would probably prefer the 'Ladies-who-lunch' cuisine, but that was tough shit because I wanted wings.

"Wings and skins would be great," I responded with a playful return bump of my hip against hers. Sookie hadn't been looking at me when I did it and either she wasn't prepared for it or I was a bit more forceful than I'd meant to be because her body slammed into the counter and she cried out in pain. My hands had been occupied with a pan and a dish towel so I couldn't grab onto her in time and I exclaimed, "I'm so sorry! I was just playing around. I didn't mean to hurt you." *Fuck!* The *last* thing I wanted to do was give her more bruises; at least not the kind that didn't come from cumming.

I quickly emptied my hands and as I reached out to make sure she was okay Sookie turned with a smile on her face saying, "Gotcha!" I didn't see the sink spray nozzle in her hand until it was too late, nor did I notice her turn the faucet to cold and screeched like a girl when the icy water hit my face, neck, and bare chest while she laughed. I was too flustered to think to do anything more than reaching for a pot still full of soapy water in the sink and tossed the sudsy contents right at her.

Sookie just laughed harder yelling out, "At least it was *warm* water before turning the nozzle to face my crotch. I couldn't turn in time to avoid the first few seconds of spray with the icy blast turning my already blue balls even bluer and I decided it was time to declare all out war. She must have seen the change in my expression because she looked panicked as she yipped and took off running out of the kitchen with me hot on her heels a second later.

I followed her into the next room where I stalked her, circling around the pool table, and feeling every bit the predator hunting his prey. "Sookie..." I purred with my eyes locked onto hers, "I'm going to *get* you..."

*In more ways than one.*

The look on her face was both frightened and amused as we continued to dance around the table and the sexual tension between us when she said, "You have to *catch* me first," and took off into the family room. By the time I skidded around the table, noting wet feet on hardwood floors don't mix well, and entered the room I saw the drapes blowing through the open backdoor with a flash of her blond hair flying out in the backyard.

I picked up speed once my feet hit the patio pavers and, thanks to my longer legs, I was able to snatch Sookie off her feet and into my arms near the edge of the pool with her screaming and laughing the whole time.

"*Caught* you..." I whispered into her ear as she calmed down and I couldn't resist running my teeth along the outer shell of her ear, feeling her whole body shiver in my arms.

"What are you going to *do* with me?" she whispered back.

*Many things. Many naked things. Sometimes partially clothed, but mostly naked.*

Since I didn't want to push her too much just yet on that front it left me with no other option.

A part of me worried the neighbors would call the cops when she screamed again right before her head was swallowed up by the pool water, but it was worth it seeing her bobbing back up to the top sputtering '*son of a bitch*' and '*mother fucker*'.

"You teach *kindergarten* right?" Mouth. Like. A. Sailor.

She just shot me a dirty look trying not to laugh and I dove into the pool already not liking the distance between us. I grabbed her waist, popping up next to her, and pulled her back flush against my chest, wrapping my arms around her, and saying, "I forgot to ask. How was your day dear?"

She giggled and relaxed in my arms as she began reciting everything that had happened at school that day. Her boss sounded like an asshole, but I was glad there wasn't anything they could do to Sookie because she'd married me and I was sure she would have hated the media shit storm I would have had Pam create if she had been fired. The protective feelings she managed to



produce within me only grew with every passing day and while it was a new sensation for me, it wasn't unwelcome.

My body tensed a little and I held her a little tighter hearing about her new co-worker Sam. Sookie hadn't said anything more than he'd been nice and gave her a tour of the school, but I had a tough time pushing the jealous beast inside of me back down since it would be difficult to pee on her and mark my territory while we were still in the pool. It lessened when I caught a flash of the gold band on her finger and the red tattooed heart above it and it evoked the image of the rest of the tattoo I could still see clearly in my mind.

*Eric's*

Had it *really* been just two days earlier when the sight and realization of what our tattoos meant seemed like the biggest nightmare ever?

I nuzzled the back of Sookie's wet blond head as she continued prattling on about her day while we floated in the water and I reminisced over the time we'd spent together since then already starting to question if maybe she was just a dream come true I'd never even realized I'd had.

*Or maybe I was a pussy.*

We stayed in the pool until well after dark with Sookie talking the majority of the time. I mostly paid attention, but sometimes my thoughts would drift from her words to just her. Even having her in my arms wasn't enough with my mind plotting ways to get her to at least stay there, but I knew she'd balk if I suggested her moving into my bedroom right fucking now. I didn't even want her there for sex, well...I *did*, but that wasn't my primary reason at the moment. More and more I was coming to hate any distance between us, physical or emotional, and I felt better when I was touching her.

I was nowhere near ready to *admit* that though so when she mentioned needing to clean up the kitchen since it was getting late I racked my brain trying to come up with a way to spend the night with her. It came to me as we were making our way into the house in our wet clothes having already failed in my attempt at convincing Sookie we should just strip down outside.

"Do you want to watch a movie later on?" I figured she'd be tired after her long day and if she happened to fall asleep in my arms in front of the TV, so be it.

We'd made it into the kitchen and Sookie handed me a towel she'd retrieved from the laundry room before asking, "What movie?"

We both dried off as best we could still clothed and I tried not to leer too much at her in her wet t-shirt while we cleaned up the kitchen and I listed off as many movies in my collection as I could remember. I had hundreds of them and said as much. If I owned it, I liked it, so she could pick whatever she wanted.

It didn't mean I was a giant pansy for practically prancing out of the room in glee when she'd said 'okay', right? I barely even *felt* like one.

I took a quick shower to rinse off the pool chemicals and threw on a t-shirt and a pair of pajama pants before heading back downstairs. Sookie had just requested something either 'funny' or 'action-y' so I dug through my collection while she got showered and changed. I found the perfect movie, both funny and action-y and popped it into the DVD player a minute before she came into the room carrying a plate of those cookies she'd made for me. She sat down next to me on the couch sipping her tea and I was overrun with the scent of cherries again, from her and from the cookies. Since I couldn't eat *her* just yet I bit into one of the cookies and dimmed the lights before turning the movie on.

Sookie had been taking another sip of her tea when she sputtered and coughed with me looking at her concerned asking, "Are you okay?"

"Uh huh," she coughed out. "Is this 'Pirates of the Caribbean'?" she asked gesturing at the screen.

"Yes; why? Do you not like it?" I secretly loved the whole trilogy and was excited there was a fourth installment coming out soon.

"No, I do," she said. "Which one is it?"

I sat back and wrapped my arm around her shoulders urging her to tuck into my side which she readily did before saying, "Dean Man's Chest. It's the best one because they *RELEASE THE KRAKEN!*"

It took a while for Sookie to stop coughing from her inhaled tea, but I found her a straw to use so she wouldn't choke to death and it wasn't long after that, that I had her right where I wanted her – asleep in my arms.

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## Chapter 32: Chapter 31

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### Chapter 31

#### **SPOV**

I slowly woke up still in a bit of a daze, but feeling completely well rested and more than a little warm. When I went to stretch out is when I realized I wasn't alone and my eyes shot open to see a sleeping Eric lying underneath me.

*At least I didn't feel like screaming and launching myself from the bed, or couch, or whatever.*

His face usually so full of expression, either good or bad, was completely relaxed in slumber making him appear younger than his 29 years and I couldn't resist running my fingers over his

whisker covered jaw line. Eric had definitely gotten extra in the looks department when God was handing them out and if he'd asked for them, I figured God might be a woman because it was damn near impossible to deny him.

*Unless he was being an asshole.*

But he hadn't been an asshole, to *me* anyway, since our fight over his choice of décor (or my irrational jealousy) before Gran called on my first day in his house. It was hard to believe it was a mere three days earlier when I'd woken up in this exact same position, sans clothes, and wanted to get as far away from him as quickly as possible. With that thought and noting it was still dark out, I laid back down on top of him completely content where I was as I thought about everything that had happened the night before.

I was sure the movie he'd picked was God's way of making a joke, as was trying to make me watch Captain Jack Sparrow without a hint of the lust I felt for him since Eric was right there. Orlando Bloom was in that trilogy as well, so of course I'd seen them all thanks to Amelia and with Johnny Depp on screen the majority of the time it wasn't a hardship.

But out of all of the things that happened between Eric and me, I was shocked at what I found I loved the most. The kissing and groping was great, as were the playful moments in the kitchen, but I think what I enjoyed most was being in his arms and telling him about my day. It was something I used to do with Gran (the telling her about my day part) that I missed more than I'd realized after moving away. Amelia and I barely saw each other when we lived together because our schedules never seemed to match up between work and school. Quinn would always do the majority of talking whenever we were together telling me all about *him* and rarely asking anything about me unless it had something to do with him.

Eric of all people, a celebrity practically from birth, not only *asked* me about my day, but *paid attention* when I spoke. I worried because of his stardom he might think and act like the world revolved around him, but he'd barely had anything to say about himself or his day. Even though I'd been facing away from him I could feel him nodding in all of the appropriate places and he'd asked relevant questions at times, so I knew he'd been listening, but mostly he just let me talk. It felt nice being heard, as well as the comfort I felt in his embrace, and it was something he could definitely add to his accomplishments on his wooing checklist.

I felt Eric begin to stir not long after the sky started to lighten outside and when I went to move off of him his arms, already wrapped around me, tightened their hold as he murmured, "No," and threw one of his legs over both of mine just in case. I wanted to giggle feeling like a Sookie-sized security blanket, but stifled it seeing he wasn't truly awake yet. As I lay there contemplating different Cirque de Soleil acrobatic feats I'd never actually be able to do in order to get out of his grasp I felt something else underneath me stir.

*The Kraken.*

I knew it was normal for guys to get morning wood and all, but did it have to be so damn tempting? Nothing more than a few scant millimeters of fabric separated me from his bounty and

I had no doubts when it was finally unleashed I'd be completely shattered when all was said and done.

I shoved all innuendo about *vessels*, *swords*, *walking his plank*, and *ports in a storm* from my mind (shiver me timbers indeed) before I soaked us both all over again without need of the kitchen sink and just looked down at him. I never would have thought I could already be so comfortable with someone having barely known them, but the fact remained that I did.

I'd meant what I said when I told Eric I no longer loved Quinn; I'd actually convinced myself I never really did. I loved who he *portrayed* himself to be, but the man he *truly* was deep down inside, was someone I would want no part of now or ever. His actions and the hurt he'd caused left me wary, but knowing that I resolved to do my best to not make Eric pay for Quinn's transgressions. Amelia kept telling me the best way to get over a man was to get under another one, but I was sure *this* counted in her book no matter who was on top. Even though Eric and Quinn were alike in many ways, their differences made them worlds apart and it was *those* differences that I loved about Eric.

*Liked* about Eric.

*Liked*.

"Sweet baby Jesus," I whispered trying once more to break free from my sinewy ripple-y Heaven/Hell before I ended up farting rainbows to complete my fairy tale now that I could feel where Eric was hiding the requisite unicorn.

A low growl vibrated from his chest and shot straight to my ovaries only making my situation even direr until I finally started wriggling in earnest to break free before I could pull his waistband down and my sleep shorts to the side going for an early morning ride on the unicorn.

Shameless. Hussy.

"Good morning," his voice rumbled beneath me still hoarse with sleep.

I looked back down seeing Eric's eyes halfway opened, squinting as they adjusted to the morning light, and a small smile on his kissable lips; lips I would have probably leaned down and kissed last night without any thought, but the morning light brought with it a bit of hesitancy on my part.

*What if the Eric from yesterday turned back into the asshole from Saturday?* It was just the start of day four in our relationship and I was still afraid and feeling a bit vulnerable having woken up on top of him. It didn't turn out so well the last time that happened, no matter *what* my libido was saying.

"Good morning," I finally replied.

His small smile turned huge and I felt my unnecessary unease fly away, much like my panties wanted to seeing him all sleepy/smiley/cuddly. It wasn't fair he had all of that going for him *and* his bare chest in his arsenal when all I had were the twins. He was still staring at me so I added, "I guess we fell asleep?"

Eric smiled lazily and stretched a bit saying, "Yes we did, but *you* fell asleep before the Kraken was released."

*Well, shame on me.*

"That's too bad," I replied, thankfully without choking on my own tongue. "Maybe I'll be awake for it next time." As if I could possibly sleep through the monster in his pants being unleashed. I glanced at the clock and noting the time I said, "I need to get ready for work."

His arms tightened their hold again saying, "Okay," in a complete contradiction to his actions.

I wiggled a bit which he seemed to enjoy given the smile on his face and said, "I can't get up if you don't let me go."

The look in his eyes changed from playful to intense as he said, "Maybe I don't *want* to let you go."

*Oh.*

Before I could formulate a response Eric's hand snaked up my back to my head pulling me down for a kiss that made my toes curl and my earlier hesitancy was gone with the wind. Wicked and immoral joined the party running along the sides of his body from his tapered waist up, forcing their way underneath his back and gripping his shoulders from behind as if *they* wouldn't be late to work right along with me while his other hand wrapped around my lower back keeping me pinned down on top of him. At the moment I had no issue with that because my libido was firmly in charge of my body.

The unicorn trapped in his pajama pants was trying to make a break for it almost convincing me to give him a happily ever after right fucking now, but somehow rational thought fought its way back into my head. I knew not only was it too soon, but I doubted calling in 'fucking' on my second day of work would be taken well by the Headmaster.

Reluctantly I pulled away saying, "I can't be late on my second day of work."

"Speed," he replied as he kissed a spot underneath my ear causing my whole body to shudder.

I found it to be a very convincing argument at the moment, but I knew the longer I stayed on top of him the more difficult it would be to separate my body from his. "Eric," I sighed hoping he'd get the hint and let me go.

"I like the way that sounds, but I think you can put a little more oomph into it," he murmured against my skin while he thrust his hips upward causing both of us to moan out loud.

"*Errriic...*" Yep, a shameless hussy.

"That's better."

He claimed my lips again and I had a feeling I would never get away, not that I really wanted to, but I knew I *had* to so I racked my brain to figure out a way out of his grasp when it came to me.

*Wonder twin powers: activate! Form of a visual distraction.*

I pulled my face away from Eric's and rubbed my body up his until my sleep shirt covered braless breasts were front and center in front of his face. Eric's eyes flashed with lust as his hands loosened their hold on my body and ran up to cup them at their sides, but it was a dual edged sword because if I let him spend too much time with them I'd be fucked. Literally.

As Eric leaned up to do exactly what my body was screaming at me to let him do I pushed up away from him and leapt off of the couch. The sad look on his face with his outstretched hands reaching for where my breasts had been would have been comical if I wasn't panting with need myself and I grimaced when his eyes furrowed at me saying, "That was mean."

I refused to look anywhere below his waist and instead focused on his face, "Sorry, but I'm going to be late. I didn't do it to be mean; we're being clockblocked."

He pulled one of the couch pillows on top of his face like he had that first morning we'd woken up together and I faintly heard him say, "I know." He sounded so defeated and God knows I was feeling his pain, but it couldn't be helped so I took the opportunity to kiss the top of his head not covered by the pillow and went to my room to change. I was thankful I'd showered the night before so all I had to do was wash my face and brush my teeth before getting ready. Once I was dressed and ready for work I made my way back to the kitchen with less than five minutes to spare before I had to leave and Eric was waiting for me again with a cup of coffee in his hand.

I took it from him saying, "Thanks. Does this mean you're not mad at me?"

He cocked an eyebrow at me before smiling and said, "How can I be mad at you? The clock, however, will feel my wrath after you leave."

Thank God. I didn't want to have yet another argument and after I finished my coffee I packed a quick lunch of the leftover chicken knowing I wouldn't want to leave the school grounds if the paparazzi would be waiting. As I gathered my things to leave I turned and asked, "Will you be home around six again tonight?" I wanted to know so I could have dinner waiting for him.

Eric pursed his lips saying, "No. We're taping tonight so I probably won't be home until after eight."

"Oh." It was silly to already miss him, but it was his job so I guess we'd be clockblocked again. "I guess I'll see you when you get home then."

He walked forward with a smile, handing me another apple and saying, "Have a good day." Before I could contemplate whether or not I should kiss him he leaned down giving me a tender kiss goodbye and I kept a firm reign on both Wicked and Immoral knowing I had to get going. I also needed to pick up those panty liners.

We said our goodbyes and I left in an Eric induced daze not even caring about the awaiting horde of cameraman at the gate. The day passed by in a flash filled with more classroom preparation and meetings. Sam and I ate lunch together outside and I learned he ran a collie rescue in his spare time as he tried to recruit me into fostering one, but I'd politely declined knowing I had enough on my plate as it was. Before I knew it, it was time to go home, but I wasn't really looking forward to it knowing Eric still wouldn't be home for hours so I decided to fill my spare time with actually cleaning the house since I wouldn't have him to distract me.

The kitchen was already clean since I tended to clean as I cooked and he wasn't a slob that I could see so it didn't take long to dust and clean the floors in the downstairs either. I gathered the laundry I'd accumulated so far into an empty laundry basket and paused outside of Eric's closed bedroom door. Would it be presumptuous of me to walk in to get his laundry? I decided it wouldn't be since we'd already agreed I would be doing all of the cleaning and opened the door seeing his room for the first time.

It was huge with large windows on two walls with French doors leading to a balcony overlooking the backyard and in the center was a humongous platform bed. The dark blue comforter on top was crumpled to one side with the impression of where his body had been lying still imbedded on the white sheets. The furniture was dark wood with sleek modern lines and the walls were bare. Aside from the messy bed you wouldn't know anyone lived there. His walk-in closet was filled with more clothes than I'd ever owned in my entire life and as I gathered his dirty clothes from his hamper I decided I would wash his bedding as well.

The bed sat up higher than the one in my room and I couldn't resist jumping up onto it before I actually removed the sheets and buried my face into his pillow enjoying his scent. I rolled into the middle of the bed and sprawled out with both of my arms and legs stretched wide, neither one even close to touching the edge, and giggled again about *everything* with Eric was *big*.

I rolled around like a lunatic laughing and tangling myself up in his sheets, but my fun came to an abrupt end when my body flushed with embarrassment and I screeched hearing a voice at the doorway saying, "If you wanted to get into my bed, all you had to do was ask."

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## Chapter 33: Chapter 32

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## EPOV

I watched her pull out of the garage and drive off to work while looking through the front window with the taste of her still in my mouth, still feeling her body against mine, and a part of me wondered when everything changed. I could feel it inside of myself as surely as I could feel my dick was still hard and I couldn't help but question what it was about her that had changed me. I'd been attracted to plenty of women and both given and gotten pleasure from them since I'd hit puberty, but never before had I been so...*happy?*

*Was that the strange sensation I'd been feeling?*

The closest feeling I could compare it to was satisfaction, but it was more than that and I could easily become addicted to the high I felt in her presence. Even though we had yet to go any farther than a tortuous bump and grinding session, that we could remember anyway, I was perfectly content for now. I couldn't think of one woman in my past that I would have bothered with sticking around for four days trying to bed them, but for Sookie I would wait. I just didn't know why.

My dick still needed relief though and after stroking one out in the shower to take the edge off, while recalling our early morning tease, I could finally walk normally again and headed to the studio. The morning and early afternoon was filled with last minute costume fittings and a dry run rehearsal in preparation for the taping that evening. I hadn't seen Dawn at all, so that was a plus, but other than regurgitating my lines, my mind had stayed focused on Sookie. I missed her...a lot and the thought of spending another five hours without seeing her was starting to make me cranky, as were Alcide's inquiries about how she was doing.

*She'd be doing ME eventually so he could just fuck off.*

When we broke for our usual early dinner break I tried calling her cell phone hoping for a quick fix just hearing her voice, but she didn't answer. Then I tried the house phone, but she didn't answer that one either and I started to get worried.

*What if she was choking to death on her tea because I wasn't there to give her a straw?*

We had two hours before we were due to be in costume and on set so I took off and went home to check on her. When I walked into the house I saw her purse sitting on the counter and called out her name, but got no response. Hoping I'd catch her sunning herself in the pool again I peered outside, but didn't see her and saw the backdoor was still locked so I headed upstairs. I was about to call out her name again as I made my way up when I heard her laughing and wondered if her friend Amelia had come over, but there weren't any other cars parked outside.

As I reached the top of the stairs is when I realized the sound was coming from *my* bedroom and my first thought was that Sookie had brought someone home with her. And they were in *my* room. And she was laughing so whatever they were doing was something she was *enjoying*.

*In my room.*



*With someone other than me.*

I stormed down the hallway fully prepared to rip someone's head off when I got to the doorway and my inner beast calmed instantly seeing Sookie rolling around in my bed all alone like it was catnip and I had to wonder if she'd been getting her drunk on without me. I'd never had another woman in my bed before, but seeing her rolling around giggling and disappearing underneath the comforter left me feeling both happy and satisfied. I *wanted* her there and since she seemed perfectly happy being there I thought I would let her know what I was thinking.

"If you wanted to get into my bed, all you had to do was ask."

Sookie screeched and the top of her now messy head peeked up out of the comforter she was trapped in with her whole face flushing red as she saw me standing in the doorway. She seemed too stunned to speak having been caught red handed and appeared to be trying to untangle herself from the bedding, more than likely preparing to bolt, but I would have none of that. I took off like a shot and leapt onto the bed landing at her at her side, but I'd grossly underestimated my weight in comparison to hers because as soon my body bounced on the mattress I heard her muffled scream as hers flew up into the air and off the opposite side of the bed. She landed on the floor still cocooned inside of the blanket with me scrambling across the mattress towards her, while visions of domestic violence charges danced in my head saying, "Shit! Are you okay?"

She struggled untangling herself from the comforter when her head finally came free and her eyes glared back into my own as she spat back, "If you wanted to get me out of your bed, all you had to do was ask." She let out an indignant huff and tossed the blanket back over her head, but before I could apologize again her muffled laughter filled the air.

When I realized she was fucking with me, and not in the way I'd hoped for our first time together in my bedroom, I slithered off the side of the bed and wrapped my body around her blanket covered one growling, "Well then consider *this* as my request that you get back in it," before lifting her up and putting her back on top of the bed.

She shrieked with laughter again and fought her way loose from the blanket asking, "What are you doing home already? I thought you said you had to work late."

Seeing her in my bed, with loose strands of hair that had been pulled free from her ponytail dangling around her face and the laughter still clearly visible in her eyes, made me want to close the distance between us, so I pulled her body against mine and answered her with a kiss. She'd gasped in surprise so I used it to my advantage and swept my tongue into her mouth with her brief hesitation quickly disappearing as her hands grasped the sides of my head keeping me in place when she gave into the kiss. Her lips quickly became just as demanding as mine and her moans echoed my own while I once again savored my new favorite flavor. Sookie beat cherries hands down any day.

At various points throughout the day I had tried to convince myself that kissing her wasn't as great as I'd made it out to be in my mind, if only so I could keep my Man Card and not admit to

being utterly destroyed by her lips, but feeling her body pressed against me and tasting her all over again proved I'd only been kidding myself.

*Who needs a Man Card anyway?*

I felt her arms and legs wrap around my body as I moved to lie on top of her and pulled my lips away from hers allowing her to breathe while I kissed my way along her jaw and neck as she panted out, "But I didn't cook you anything for dinner because you said you were working late."

*What was she talking about?*

My hands were already working their way up her torso underneath her shirt as her words brought me back to the real world and I growled out, "Fuck..." against her skin. I *wanted* and *needed* to be inside of her in the worst way, but I knew if I didn't leave soon I'd be late for the taping. I didn't want our second first time to be a quickie and I honestly had doubts I'd be able to walk away from her so soon after finally having her. Again that is.

She stiffened underneath me and her hands let go of my head as she said, "I can still make you something to eat now."

I propped myself up enough to look down at her face, the earlier laughter now replaced with confusion, and I said, "It's not that Sookie, I have to get back to work. We're just on our dinner break." It had taken me a bit longer to get home with the rush hour traffic and would take even longer to drive back in it. I missed her already and I was still lying on top of her.

*I'd never get that Man Card back.*

"Oh, I guess we're clockblocked again." Her face fell as her eyes filled with disappointment, but before I could think of a way to make it better she asked, "Can I come with you? You know, just to watch you work?"

Fucking brilliant! "I think that's a great idea," and I showed her just how fucking much I'd meant it by capturing her lips in another kiss. Her hands and body were tormenting me nearly as much as the time was before I finally pulled away saying, "We need to leave in a few minutes if we're going to get there on time."

I'd expected another pout or indignant huff from Sookie so I was surprised when she started pushing on my chest saying, "I need to change!"

I reluctantly rolled to the side so she could get up saying, "You look fine." And she did. Just ask Eric Junior once he was done crying in my pants.

Sookie ignored both my statement and my weeping dick as she ran from the room. I noticed the laundry basket full of clothes lying on the floor by my closet door and carried it downstairs, pausing for a brief moment outside of Sookie's closed bedroom door while I contemplated opening it to catch her half dressed, but knowing we'd never leave the fucking house if I did. She

appeared in the kitchen a few minutes later in a red summer dress with a new ponytail and no visible signs I'd been mauling her with my hands and mouth only moments earlier. The dress hugged every one of her curves, the red color doing wonders against her bronzed skin while reminding me of how hot she'd looked in what had become her wedding dress, and I had to clench my hands into fists to keep myself from making us late.

*Eric Junior was inconsolable.*

I must have been staring because Sookie started fidgeting under my gaze and asked, "Do I look okay?"

"You're beautiful." It was the understatement of the fucking year, but I didn't think she'd appreciate me saying she was dick-weepingly gorgeous because she probably didn't consider pre-cum to be the same as tears.

She followed me outside and I held open the door for her as she climbed inside the Corvette before getting in on the driver's side and heading down the driveway. "This is a nice car," she mused, drawing my attention from the road to her.

She wasn't the first woman I'd had in my car, but recalling some of my previous exploits in it with some of them now made it feel dirty. I loved my car, but I didn't like seeing Sookie sitting in the same seat they had once occupied and made a decision to trade it in the next day. It was only a year old, but I'd get the new model and switch out the black colored one I had now for a red one. Sookie looked good in red.

When I didn't say anything Sookie asked, "So why did you come home early?"

*Because I missed you and nobody's ever asked to see my Man Card anyway.*

Not wanting to admit that out loud, I racked my brain for a way to deflect that particular conversation and just shrugged my shoulders asking, "Why were you rolling around in my bed laughing?"

Sookie turned nearly as red as her dress with her eyes darting to the passing scenery outside of the car before finally replying, "I was just getting your sheets to do the laundry."

Before I could call, '*Bullshit!*' she asked, "So what's your show about?"

I guess I really had been hanging around too many hangers on because I was stunned that she didn't know and forgot all about calling her out on her bullshit response asking, "You've never seen it?" It was one of the highest rated shows on television which was a big factor in why we were currently being dogged by the paparazzi on our way to the studio.

"No," she said apologetically, "I don't watch much television." The sincerity in both her voice and her expression told me she was being truthful and irrationally I was upset by it. I was quickly

becoming almost obsessed with her and the thought that she wasn't just as enthralled by me made me feel a little insecure.

*What the fuck was with all of the new feelings she was bringing out in me?*

I absentmindedly recited the premise of the show, like I had on the many talk shows and press junkets I was required to attend, while she listened quietly with my synopsis ending as we pulled up to the studio gate. I parked in my designated spot where Alcide had been standing apparently waiting for me and got out of the car. His eyes lit up seeing Sookie was with me and I shot him a death glare as I went around and helped her out of the car, keeping her hand in mine once she was standing.

"Hi Sookie!" he said to her before looking at me, his happy expression changing to a scolding one as he said, "You're cutting it close don't you think? Why didn't you tell me you were leaving?"

I pulled Sookie along with me as I went into the studio and headed towards my dressing room saying, "Because you're not my fucking keeper." And if he kept looking at Sookie like a lovesick puppy he wouldn't be fertile for much longer either since his balls would be dangling from the rearview mirror of my new car.

We had just stepped into my dressing room when I heard, "Actually, he *is*." I looked over to where I'd heard my father's voice coming from and saw him sitting on the couch with the cocksucker at his side and sighed. He rarely came to the tapings anymore so I hadn't expected him to be there and I was worried about Sookie feeling uncomfortable with him there.

I felt her squeeze my hand a little tighter as she stepped close enough to me that the sides of our bodies were touching and looked down seeing her looking back at them, each glaring directly at her. Apprehension and dread started filling my body knowing she'd be subjected to them for a few hours until I heard her whisper, singing, "Yo I'll tell you what I want, what I really, really want. So tell me what you want, what you really, really want."

The laughter erupted from my chest hearing her sing a Spice Girls song and her face turned up to mine with a smile, instantly setting my nerves at ease. God, I loved her.

*What?*

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## **Chapter 34: Chapter 33**

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### Chapter 33

**SPOV**

Not wanting to make Eric late, I ran into my room knowing I needed to change my panties first and foremost since they were now drenched thanks to his unexpected early arrival and sneak attack on my already hopping libido. He didn't seem to care that I looked a mess from cleaning the house, and having a fan girl moment in his bed thinking I was all alone, but I didn't want to look like a slob standing next to him when I knew I'd be meeting some of his co-workers for the very first time. Gran had always stressed the importance of making a good first impression so I chose a pretty red dress that wasn't too casual, but not too dressy either and slipped it on before running a brush through the rat's nest on top of my head and pulling my hair into another ponytail.

Hearing him call me beautiful after I'd come downstairs made my insides all squishy and I wondered how much longer I'd be able to resist him and his body thinking if it weren't for the constant cock and clock blocks, I probably would have already given in like the wanton whore my body was screaming for me to be. I had been *thisclose* to agreeing anyway and decided to just let the chips fall where they may from then on. We were technically married after all and we'd already agreed on being in a real relationship together so why deny him or myself from what we both inarguably wanted? I almost giggled out loud thinking those chips could very well fall on his precious poker table that I would be moving into the den, but I still needed to get a real table first and decided I'd stop somewhere on my way home from work the next day to get one before his poker party. If I had to, I'd use the Wonder Twin powers I had at my disposal to get him to help me move it before his guests arrived.

He seemed lost in thought while we were driving to the studio and my earlier question came back to mind about why he'd come home early at all if he wasn't done working. He'd made it sound like he wouldn't be home until later on when I'd asked him about his schedule that morning, so I didn't think coming home in the middle of his day was something he did normally. Of course when all he did was shrug his shoulders in response and instead asked why I'd been rolling around in his bed like a pig in shit my whole body turned hot in embarrassment while I quickly did the calculations of successfully throwing myself from the car while it was in motion. Surely one of the paparazzi would break my fall, right?

I eventually spouted off my half-truth about doing the laundry and quickly got him talking about his show figuring as long as he was talking about that he wouldn't be able to ask me any more embarrassing questions. His friend Alcide was waiting by Eric's parking spot and I could tell by the tension in his shoulders Eric didn't want him there. He seemed nice enough so I had no idea what could be going on between them and wondered if Alcide would be at the house the following night for the poker game. If he was maybe I'd get a hint of what their issue with each other was.

I tried to take a good look around like any tourist would while Eric pulled me along behind him on his way to what turned out to be his dressing room, but I didn't register who the man's voice belonged to when we'd heard him speaking as we walked into it. I felt Eric's body tense next to mine seeing his father and Skanky Spice sitting on the couch glaring daggers at us and given his posture, I didn't think he had expected them to be there. I didn't think it was fair of them to be making Eric so uneasy knowing he was due to start shooting his scenes soon so I tried to lessen the tension in the room whisper singing the opening lines to a Spice Girls song hoping it would

loosen Eric up. I beamed inside and out when he burst into laughter and looking up at him it appeared to do the trick. At first.

His expression went from amused to aghast in a split second and I had no idea why. I know my singing could make cats in heat sound like the Boston Philharmonic, but I didn't think it was because I was pitchy.

*Maybe he inadvertently let out a silent but deadly fart?*

I grew up with Jason Stackhouse so it would take something epic to knock me down and I did a discreet test inhale through my nose, but all I smelled was Eric's distinct scent. If he could bottle it and market it with pictures of him emerging from his pool he'd make a fortune.

My whole brain glazed over just thinking about his Kraken shaped bottle it would come in until I heard Eric's voice break through the fog asking, "What are you doing here?"

I didn't think he was asking me since he was the one that said I could come along, so I looked back at the couch where his father sat with Peppercorn at his side dropping her glare from me to give Eric a thorough eye fuck and I stepped in front of him, pulling his arms around my waist and blocked as much of Eric as I could with my body.

*He was mine!*

I felt better feeling Eric's hands lace together in front of me like it was completely natural, but I could still feel that his body was tense when I leaned back against him and wished we had the time for me to massage it out of him. Picturing my hands rubbing every part of him soft while working on the one muscle of his I wanted hard made me glad I'd chosen to wear a dress since I was sure the moisture invading my crotch would make the BP oil spill back home seem like a drop in the bucket.

"I've come to make sure your work isn't going to shit now that you've become so enamored of a piece of ass you felt the need to marry it. Haven't you learned *anything*?" Eric's dad reached around and smacked the side of Tarragon's ass adding, "They're a dime a dozen."

I was already prepared for his less than stellar view of me and had seriously started to question Saffron's mental capabilities when her only response to hearing how disposable she was in their relationship was to press herself against his side and giggle. Hell, I might have even started feeling bad for her if she hadn't followed that up by looking at Eric, licking her collagen filled lips and winking at him.

*I just wasn't THAT good of a Christian.*

I felt more than heard a low growl in Eric's chest, but before he could respond the telltale click clack of heels coming into the room made us all turn and see Pam sweep in like a runway model, hands on hips, as her head turned from side to side taking in everyone in the room. All she was missing was a fan to make her straightened blond hair blow out behind her and she'd be all set.

Focusing her glare on the couch she asked, "What the fuck are you and cum stain doing here? Eric has a job to do and he doesn't need you fucking with his head."

*Don't hold back Pam; tell us how you REALLY feel.*

His father glared back at Pam saying, "I *know* Eric has a *job* to do. I'm his *manager* and I'm here to make sure he actually *does* his job instead of doing *her*."

*Well shit, I guess no one around here holds back.*

"You're only his manager because Eric still hasn't come to his senses yet, but now that the Navy SEALs have taken out Osama I'm sure they're looking for their next target. I could always plant something on WikiLeaks and hope for the best. I'm sure the only thing the sniper would feel after shooting you would be recoil."

The sound of someone clearing their throat in the doorway made us all turn around again with me wondering who else could possibly be added to the cast of *The Fucked Up and the Furious*. An older woman stood there with her makeup case in hand looking like she'd rather be plucking her nose hairs out with tweezers one by one than interrupt, but Eric came to her rescue saying, "Come in Octavia." He glanced back at the couch adding, "They were just *leaving*."

After a brief stare down with his father and Fennel, they finally stood up with his father saying, "We'll be on the set," before walking out the door. Eric shot another unfriendly look towards Alcide who I'd forgotten was even in the room and he left too, leaving just the three of us and a slightly relieved looking Octavia.

Eric had turned us to face the door and said, "Octavia, this is my wife Sookie. Sookie, this is Octavia. She does my makeup for the show."

I still hadn't gotten used to the fact I was Eric's wife much less hearing it said out loud, but manners were so ingrained in me by Gran that I didn't hesitate thrusting my hand out with a smile saying, "It's nice to meet you Octavia."

Her eyebrow rose up like she hadn't expected me to greet her, but she smiled and shook my hand anyway saying, "It's a pleasure." She looked back at Eric and said, "We should really get started if you don't want to be late."

Eric was still standing behind me and he leaned down kissing the top of my head saying, "I need to get ready. Pam can take you out to Craft Services to get something to eat in the meantime if you're hungry."

He let go of my waist and went to sit down in a chair in front of a large mirror where Octavia had already begun getting her supplies out, but before I could say anything Pam grabbed me by the arm and said, "Yes. Let's go so Eric can concentrate on his lines while we take a walk."

She was a lot stronger than she looked as she pulled me from the room and I wondered how she knew what recoil was, but was too afraid to ask. Some things I was just better off not knowing.

"So tell me Sookie, do you have an appropriate dress for Friday night? This one is fine for running around in, but it wouldn't do for the premier party." Her feet never slowed as we brushed past people in the hallway who were all rushing around in a hurry.

I turned to look at her asking, "What are you talking about?"

"Didn't Eric tell you? There's a party on Friday night for the season premier that he has to attend, so *you* need to attend as well. It can count as your weekday photo op if you want, but you definitely need to be there. It would look odd if you didn't attend it with him since everyone brings their spouses."

"No, Eric didn't say anything about it." Why wouldn't he have told me? We'd spent hours in the pool talking and he'd never mentioned anything about it.

"It probably just slipped his mind," she offered as people scattered out of her path seemingly afraid of her. After seeing her in action, I couldn't really blame them.

"I guess." I could feel my insecurities creeping back up wondering if maybe Eric didn't tell me because he didn't want me to go with him, but I couldn't think of a single reason why he might feel that way and brushed it aside.

As we came up to where they had set up trays of food for the cast and crew Pam's phone rang and she stepped off to the side to take the call while I headed for the table. None of it really looked all that appetizing so it was no wonder Eric seemed to really enjoy the home cooked meals I made for him. I decided to just grab some fresh fruit, not trusting any of the other food since I didn't know how long it had been sitting out, when a pretty brunette strode up and stood at my side with a smile asking, "Are you the one that married Eric over the weekend?"

I smiled back replying, "Yes. I'm Sookie." I put my hand out to shake hers asking, "Are you a friend of Eric's?"

Her smile turned into a sneer while she looked at my outstretched hand with disdain before looking back at me saying, "You could say that since he was *fucking me* just a couple of weeks ago."

My insides were boiling with Quinn deja vu all over again that not only did this floozy think she had the right to confront me like that, but that Eric didn't have the decency to at least warn me that I might run into one of his fuckbuddies. Then again, he'd probably have to give me a blanket warning to cover the entire greater Los Angeles area.

I pulled my hand back not wanting to catch whatever disease she might have and infused a bit of recognition into my smile asking, "Oh, was that *you*?"



She seemed shocked that I would know about her, but I kept right on talking and smiled wider saying, "I guess I should really thank you. If you hadn't been such a horrible lay, according to Eric, he probably wouldn't have come running to me, begging me to marry him so he wouldn't have to deal with the likes of someone like *you* anymore."

*Whore.*

Her eyes flashed with anger as she yelled, "YOU BITCH!"

*Did I mention I grew up with Jason Stackhouse?*

Not only had I built up an immunity to noxious gas, but I could spot the signs when someone was about to rear back for a punch and I dodged her flying fist, grabbing onto her arm and using her forward momentum against her by pulling her down face first as I moved out of her path. I was still holding onto her outstretched arm and she wasn't quick enough to break her fall with her other one when her face bounced off of the floor while everyone standing around turned to face us. I could hear Pam's click clacking barreling towards us when she asked, "What the fuck is going on?"

I didn't want to say anything with everyone gawking at us and just shrugged, dropping the arm I was still holding, and saying, "She tripped. I tried to catch her but I just wasn't quick enough."

The whore was clutching her bloodied mouth crying, lisping out that she'd broken a tooth, and I had to swallow the smile that threatened to appear on my face masking it with a look of concern as people rushed over to her aid. Pam and I quietly slipped away blending back into the crowd and she leaned in asking what had really happened. I guessed I wasn't as good of an actress as I'd thought since she clearly didn't buy my initial version of events, so I repeated verbatim what had really transpired fully expecting her to go off on me for making a scene in public. Instead she surprised me and everyone within earshot by cackling out loud. I would guess it wasn't something they often heard coming from her and she shocked me again by giving me a hug and whispering in my ear, "I'm so glad you and Eric got drunk married. Nothing is boring with you around."

"Glad I can be here to amuse you Pam," I whispered back.

If only *I* could feel amused. Instead I just felt angry and hurt at Eric's complete disregard for my feelings. I knew he was no angel; I'd accepted that fact about him, but the least he could do was give me a little warning if he knew I could potentially run into one of his harem of whores. After all, I had warned him about Quinn not knowing they already had a history at the gym. I assumed she worked with Eric in some capacity so he must have known I might meet her. It made me wonder if perhaps that was the reason why he didn't tell me about the party on Friday night. Even me coming along with him to the studio that day had been my idea and while he agreed, perhaps it was more *my* presence than everyone else's that had caused his tension. Maybe he didn't really want me there.

Pam pulled me to where the studio audience would soon sit with us taking a couple of seats near the back so she wouldn't be subjected to *'the unwashed tourist vermin'*, but I could barely concentrate on what was happening on stage. My eyes locked onto Eric in every scene he acted in, but all I could think about was whether or not he was keeping things from me on purpose. Was every action he'd made towards me genuine or an act to get me to sleep with him?

*I guess only time would tell.*

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## Chapter 35: Chapter 34

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### Chapter 34

#### EPOV

*Do I REALLY think I'm in love with Sookie?*

I stared back at her afraid of even my own thoughts, so I looked at my father and asked what he was doing there to distract us both, but I didn't hear a word he said. I could see his mouth moving but I couldn't hear him over my mind's voice throwing up shields labeled *'HELL NO'*, *'IMPOSSIBLE'*, *'NO FUCKING WAY'*, and *'GET THE FUCK OUTTA HERE'*.

There was *no way* I could be in love with Sookie. Not only was it way too fucking soon to be thinking in those terms, I honestly doubted I was even capable of having that emotion. *Obsessed? Pussy whipped?* Yes, those were feelings I could identify with and reluctantly admit to myself that I felt them about her, but *love?*

No.

I loved my car; my career; her cooking. Material things, not people.

I *liked* her a lot and I *lusted* her even more, but that was it.

End of story.

The end.

Once I set myself straight I realized the room had gone quiet and wondered if everyone was waiting on a response from me to a question I didn't hear, but I didn't like the way either one of them was glaring at Sookie and I felt my protective streak kick in with a low growl building in my chest until Pam showed up diffusing the situation as only Pam can.

I was still in a fog as I sat in my chair so Octavia could get to work on my makeup and stared at the now closed door to my dressing room where Sookie had just exited when she broke through my reverie saying, "Your Sookie seems very nice and she's quite beautiful."

Octavia always made small talk when she did my makeup, but it had always been about something innocuous like the weather or the news. God knows she'd been around my father enough to have had something to say about the people in my life so I was a little surprised she'd mentioned Sookie at all.

"She is," I replied. After all, it was true.

She continued working on my face saying, "I guess I've been around Hollywood folk too long. I'm almost too ashamed to admit that I wasn't expecting her cordial greeting. So many of the beautiful young ladies around here are too full of themselves to give us common folk the time of day, but I can tell she's different. It's no wonder you fell in love with her."

If she hadn't been working on my eyes I'm sure they would have popped right out of my head when she said what my brain was adamantly denying. I couldn't correct her due to our situation, but I was a glutton for punishment and couldn't resist asking, "Does it show?"

*Please dear God, don't let it show.*

*Not that there's anything TO show.*

"That you love her?" she asked. When I nodded she confirmed, "Yes."

"How does it show?" *Glutton; remember?*

After a long moment she said, "Look at me." I'd thought she was going to line my eyes since we all looked pasty and pale without heavy makeup on film, but instead she pulled back a little and laughed. At my quizzical look she said, "Because *that's* the first time since she walked out of the room that you haven't been trying to stare a hole into the door. You love her."

I had already prepared myself to dismiss whatever flowery nonsense I was sure she was going to spout off about love and romance, blah, blah, blah, but I couldn't. She was right; I *had* been staring at the door since Sookie walked out of it. But that didn't mean I loved her. It just happened to be where my eyes landed when I was thinking things through. The fact that I'd been the one to suggest she leave so I *could* think things through and now wished she'd return because I missed her also did not mean I was in love with her.

I just *missed* her; perfectly acceptable.

Octavia soon finished up and left the room so I could change and get out onto the set. I overheard a couple of the crew talking about one of the extras getting hurt, but it seemed like *everyone* had a SAG card around here so I doubted it would take much to find a replacement if one was needed. I was standing off to the side going over my script one last time when my father walked up saying, "Where's the gold digger?"

I made a pointed look at his crotch and said, "Since she's not attached to your dick I assume Garlic is off trying to trade up." I was running low on spice names and would have to study the

aisle they were kept in the next time I went grocery shopping with Sookie if she hung around for much longer because I certainly wasn't going to sing to her '*If you wanna be my lover*'. Not. Fucking. Happening.

"I was talking about *your* whore, not *mine*."

I'm sure we were equally shocked when my hand clasped around his throat as I shoved him against the wall and while I still felt *something* for him as my father, it was *nothing* compared to the rage I felt hearing him call Sookie a whore. While we were the same height and build, my father had let himself go to shit a long time ago and I was a lot stronger than him so I nearly laughed at his feeble attempts to remove my hand, but I was too fucking pissed off. I leaned in until we were nose to nose and said, "This is the *last* time I'm going to say this. Back the fuck off. If you've got nothing nice to say about *my wife* then keep your fucking trap shut because if you say one more negative thing about her, you and I will be done. Not only won't I consider you my father anymore, but you sure as hell won't be getting another paycheck from me."

He was starting to turn blue so I released him from my grip and as he choked air back into his lungs he looked back at me incredulously saying, "After all I've *done* for you; *sacrificed* for you; you're willing to just kick me to the curb over some two-bit white trash?"

His voice had risen with every breath he took and I knew we were starting to attract attention, but before I could respond, *his* whore walked up asking, "Fighting about *me* boys? No need, there's plenty of me to go around."

Un. Fucking. Real. I pointed at her, too angry to think of another spice name, saying to my father, "*That* is two-bit white trash." I then pointed at the door saying, "And don't let *that* hit you on the ass on the way out. You're fired."

He straightened up in shock sputtering, "Eric! You're being unreasonable! It's *always* been just you and me against the world son. Once you calm down you're going to regret *all* of this."

He couldn't backpedal fast enough, but I was done with his bullshit. We'd fought before but I'd never actually *fired* him so he knew I was serious. I'd only kept him around out of the guilt I felt over the very things he'd mentioned earlier; the sacrifices he'd made for me, but after experiencing a mostly blissful four days with Sookie (no matter *what* my feelings for her were, she was my new personal sun) I could no longer deal with the toxic cloud my father had been in my life. Maybe he was right and I *would* feel bad after I calmed down, but I doubted it.

Someone must have called Security when I was in the middle of choking him to death because I saw them watching everything from the sidelines and motioned for them to come forward, pointing at my father and saying, "*This* is my *ex* manager. *This* is his infected cunt. Neither one of them are welcome here any longer. Understand?"

After they were escorted from the set amid the gossiping crowd, the producers approached me asking if I'd still be okay to tape the show having seen the majority of what had gone down between me and my father, but I assured them I'd be fine. I actually *did* feel fine; almost like a

huge weight had been lifted from my shoulders and I couldn't wait to tell Sookie the good news. While I was sure she'd miss harping on All-Spice with me, I had a feeling she'd be more than willing to give that up if we didn't have to deal with them any longer.

I glanced around when I could looking for Sookie during the taping, but I never saw her and when I finally returned to my dressing room I was surprised to see just Pam waiting for me. Before I could ask her where Sookie was she asked with glee, "Did you hear about the fight?"

I started cleaning the makeup from my face with some wipes before I washed it off with soap and water saying, "What do you mean *hear* about it? I was *in* it."

"What are you talking about?" she asked, all glee gone from her face.

"Between my father and I before the show. I fired him."

"GET. THE. FUCK. OUT. Are you shitting me? Because if you are I'm going to crazy glue your dick to your stomach the next time you fall asleep anywhere near me."

I couldn't help cringing at the imagery she'd painted having no doubts about her follow through and said, "No, I'm not." Realizing she'd been unofficially doing his job for years I thought it only fair for me to actually ask her to do it now that he was gone. "Want the job?"

"Pfft..." she waved me off saying, "I've been doing the job for years, but that sure as hell doesn't mean I won't be issuing a press release declaring me as your Master." She started making her way out of the room with her fingers already flying across her BlackBerry when I asked, "Where's Sookie?"

"Waiting by your car talking to Alcide," she called over her shoulder as she walked out the door.

*Son of a bitch!* I quickly changed and washed the shit off of my face making my way outside and finding Sookie exactly where Pam said she would be; waiting by my car talking to *Alcide*, only instead of *talking* they were *laughing*. I knew I was feeling irrationally jealous and I'd had no problems with Alcide until Sookie came into the picture. I actually liked him and while I wanted to rip his arms from their sockets before his dickbeaters could even *think* about touching what was *mine*, I knew I *would* regret *that*. He seemed nervous when he glanced at me, probably wondering if he was now out of a job since he technically worked for my father, but I simply couldn't do that to him. Yet. Instead I opened Sookie's door for her and said to him, "See you in the morning?"

I shut Sookie's door once she'd climbed into the car when he asked, "Will I still be able to get into the studio come morning?"

"Don't be a dipshit. You'll just have to answer to *me* now." I smiled knowing I would never again hear him say '*But I don't work for you*'. His answering half-grimace half-smile let me know he was thinking the same thing. Since we weren't girls there weren't any hugs involved so I got into the car without another word to him.

We'd been driving on the main road with me still lost in thought about what had happened earlier with my father when I realized how quiet it was in the car and looked over to see Sookie staring out the window. My personal sun looked a little gloomy so I asked, "Is something wrong?"

She didn't say anything at first and I was about to ask again when she sighed saying, "Yeah, I guess there is." Her ominous tone put me on alert and I asked, "What is it?" If my father had somehow gotten to her before he'd been booted from the studio, heads were going to roll.

Sookie finally turned to face me and said, "Pam told me there's some party she expects me to attend on Friday night for your show."

Fuck. "I was going to bring it up, but it kind of slipped my mind. Do you not want to go?" I knew Pam would be pissed if she didn't, but I'd handle her.

"Do you *want* me to go?" she retorted.

"Why wouldn't I?"

She just sighed again and chewed on her bottom lip which I'd come to learn meant she was thinking so I kept quiet until she finally said, "My inner tween is wanting me to huff at you while crossing my arms and stomping my feet because I don't know how you *really* feel about me, but I can't really fault you there because *I* don't know how *I really* feel about you."

She might as well have been speaking Mandarin since I didn't understand a fucking thing she was saying and asked, "What are you talking about? I thought we cleared this all up the other night when we agreed we were going to try being in a relationship with each other."

Fear gripped my chest at the thought that Sookie no longer wanted me and I swear to fucking God, if she said it was because she wanted to be with Alcide I would kill him.

"I'm talking about the fact you *failed* to mention the party just like you *failed* to mention I might run into one of your previous *lady friends* at the studio. I know enough about your sexual history thanks to those porn posters that you had hanging on the walls, by the way; thanks for taking them down, and I'm okay with that. I *really* am because that's what it all is; *history*. But I can't help but wonder if maybe you didn't say anything because you didn't plan on me being there, either at the party or the studio tonight. After all, I invited myself to come along. So tell me Eric; which is it? You didn't say anything because you didn't plan on me being there for some reason or because you didn't think enough of me to have the decency to warn me I might run into one of your ex whatever's?"

Her voice had never risen above a normal range, but I could see the hurt and anger in her eyes. Unfortunately I was still a little raw from the fight with my father and I was hurt and angry too that she would question my motives where she was concerned. It was also unfortunate I didn't seem to have as much control over my inner tween as she did.

"Are you fucking serious? How many times do I have to say it? I. Want. You. And I don't give a shit about any of the rest of them nor can I possibly predict when you might run into someone I've fucked; there've been A LOT of them, but *I'm sorry*. There. Happy now?"

I regretted it immediately but said nothing as she turned her head back towards the window mumbling, "I'm fucking ecstatic."

We remained silent for the rest of the drive and I wanted to apologize, but I couldn't. I'd spent a good portion of the day going over and over the way Sookie had made me feel; I'd even contemplated whether or not I was actually falling in love with her and yet she was questioning our entire relationship based on me forgetting to tell her about some stupid party. I guessed it was Dawn she'd run into at some point in the night, but I'd find out from Pam later since I didn't want to ask Sookie as it appeared she was done talking to me for the night.

As soon as we walked into the house she refused to even look my way and went up to her room without a word while I stayed downstairs hoping she'd come back down to talk. When an hour had gone by I realized there'd be no more talking for the rest of the night and went to my own room hoping to sulk myself to sleep. I'd forgotten about our earlier rolling around on my bed until I saw the comforter all bunched up to the side and quickly straightened it out not wanting to be reminded of what almost was. I also did my best to ignore her scent on the sheets when I'd finally gotten into the bed after showering and changing into a pair of pajama pants, but like The Borg said: Resistance is futile.

The thought she was just across the hall made the seemingly miles wide chasm between us all the more ridiculous as I thought over what she'd said in the car. Her argument was much more adult than mine and I remembered again one of her first statements; she didn't know how I felt about her.

How *did* I feel about her? I still didn't think it was *love* I felt for her, but it was something like that. I definitely felt more for her than I had for anyone else I'd ever come across.

Would that be a good enough answer?

I hoped it would be and eventually went to sleep intending on telling her the next morning what I should have said in the car. Imagine my surprise when I went downstairs an hour before she would have had to leave for work only to later discover she was already gone. She'd taken the Audi again, but knowing her car wouldn't have started, that knowledge didn't make me feel any better. I ran up and checked her room seeing her clothes were still there, but I still couldn't help feeling anything other than unsettled.

*What if it had gotten bad enough she just left? What if last night had been a deal breaker?*

I stood at the front window staring at the empty driveway feeling an entirely new sensation.

*Grief.*

I finally turned and headed back towards my room to get ready with the house feeling emptier than when I'd first moved in. I wasn't sure I could go back to living the way I was before she'd come into my life and I didn't know if I'd even *want* to. The only thing I knew for sure was that I wanted the opportunity to apologize and try and make it up to her. Of course she'd actually have to be there for me to do that.

For now all I could do was hope like hell she planned on coming back. If she didn't, I'd go to her.

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## Chapter 36: Chapter 35

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### Chapter 35

#### SPOV

I crawled into my bed after getting home, too numb to cry, and thought over everything that had been said in the car. The night had ended so far from where I had thought we would be, but I knew it was mostly my fault. I guessed I didn't have as good of a control on my inner tween as I'd thought after spouting off only two options for Eric to choose from as to why he didn't tell me about the party or possibly meeting the newly Jack-O-Lantern'd brunette. He'd already given me a perfectly logical excuse before I opened my mouth and let my own insecurities ruin our night.

He forgot.

The more I thought about it, the more it made sense because there was no way he could have hidden from me the fact he'd attended the premier party. And admittedly, we'd been somewhat preoccupied with each other from the get go. As for the toothless tart? Could I really expect him warn me whenever I might run into someone like her? Did I really even *want* him to?

The thought of him handing me glossy eight by tens of possible encounters I might have, before every outing we made together, caused my stomach to churn. I already knew he was out of my league so I couldn't imagine being confronted with pictures of all of the beautiful women he'd bedded before I came along.

I knew I'd lashed out first with all of my *fail* talk, but I still didn't think that excused his response. I never thought hearing him say he wanted me would make me feel so bad and it was almost like he'd turned back into the Eric I'd woken up to that very first morning. Everything around and between us had moved so fast from that moment on, I'd let myself get caught up in it all just hoping for the best when what I should have done was slowed down.

The mutual attraction and chemistry between us was undeniable, but so was the fact we both had the ability to make each other batshit crazy. Our passion seemed to feed off of one another's whether good or bad and I was just now realizing our relationship had progressed a hell of a lot faster because we were forced to live together. Had we just met and been dating, I more than likely would have given him a kiss by now, but I sure as hell wouldn't be contemplating sleeping



with him already like I had just a few hours earlier. If we really wanted something between us to actually work, which I did, we'd need to build a foundation first and it was glaringly apparent that we both still had issues.

I was insecure and he was an asshole.

I knew it was an unfair assessment of him and after spending the short amount of time I had with his father, I was surprised Eric was a functional adult on any level. Eric had shown me many more good sides of his personality that outweighed his one bad one and I kept chanting over and over to myself that he'd never been in a relationship before. Granted, I'd only been in *one*, and it turned out to be a pretty shitty one, but hadn't I just resolved that I wouldn't make him pay for Quinn's fuck ups?

I couldn't expect him to suddenly become my Prince Charming overnight and after our initial fiery confrontation that first day, up until our blow up tonight he'd actually been very sweet and attentive. We just needed to work on our communication skills and maybe we'd be able to get our ship back on course.

*After all, I still needed to take a walk down his plank.*

Sleep didn't come easy for me that night and as I tossed and turned while the sky began to lighten outside my bedroom window the fear that Eric might not *want* to try and salvage our relationship crept along my spine.

*What if last night was a deal breaker?*

Gran's humiliation back home suddenly took a backseat to my own grief over the thought Eric might want to break up and I had no idea how I'd be able to handle hearing the words come from his lips at all, much less deal with the aftermath while trying to work. So like a complete chicken shit, I jumped out of bed, rushed through my shower, and ran out the door like my ass was on fire. I knew Gran would be disappointed at my cowardice, but what the hell, I was already on a roll in my efforts to make Jason look like a star pupil.

The first upside to my day was the fact there weren't any cameramen waiting for me at the gate because I was leaving so early and I was able to stop and pick up a cup of coffee since I didn't have time to make any before taking off. Having the guy behind the counter hand it to me brought none of the warm sensations I'd felt as when Eric had given me my coffee on the previous two mornings and I guessed it showed on my face when the barista shot me a withering look. I wasn't in the mood to be scorned by yet another man, so I just huffed my way out of the shop without so much as a thank you.

*Poor Gran, she really DID try to make me a good person.*

Thankfully the guard was already at his post at the gate and I was able to get into the school early. I tried to make myself busy preparing my classroom most of the morning, but it was hard to do considering I kept one eye on my cell phone both hoping for and against a call or text from

Eric. I hadn't even realized it was lunchtime until Sam appeared at my door asking, "Do you want to sit outside and eat lunch together today?"

I didn't know much about him, but he had seemed pretty nice so far in a brotherly sort of way, although I doubted he would consent to giving an interview about his baby sister from his doorstep after her Vegas wedding to a movie star. My stomach was too full of knots to have much of an appetite and I admitted, "I'm not really hungry. Besides, I forgot to pack my lunch this morning. I was in a bit of a rush."

"That's okay," he smiled, "You need to eat and I'll share mine with you."

*What the hell*, I thought. I smiled saying, "Thanks," and followed him out the door thinking it might be my only interaction for the day that didn't involve glares.

As soon as we were settled on a sunny spot near the playground Sam handed me half of his sandwich and asked, "So how's married life so far?"

Of course he knew, *the whole WORLD knew*, who I'd married and I said a quick, "Fine," and took a bite to keep me from having to elaborate. I looked down and saw the gold band circling his left ring finger and after swallowing I asked, "How long have you been married?"

Sam smiled, clearly a man in love, and said, "Terry and I got married on June 16th, 2008, but we've been together for over ten years. We met while we were both in the Army and he moved out here to be with me once his enlistment ended in 2007." He went on to tell me about their life together rescuing collies, 'their children', and how Terry was still dealing with some post traumatic stress disorder from the time he'd spent in Iraq, but they were working through it together. He said their biggest fight had been over picking out the furnishings for their house and I couldn't help but laugh wondering what they'd think of Eric's choice of décor. Sam looked at me knowingly and asked, "You too?"

I nodded replying, "He's got a poker table in the kitchen and a pool table in the dining room. We have to eat at the breakfast bar."

Sam snickered shaking his head saying, "Sounds like something Terry would do. Have you been able to talk him into changing things up a bit?"

I smiled remembering the power of boobs, although that probably wouldn't work in Sam's and Terry's relationship, and said, "Sort of. I was going to go looking for a set for the kitchen this afternoon, but I just realized I'd have no way to get it home in time for his poker party tonight." There would be no way I could fit it in the car and I wasn't *that* much of a hick that I'd strap it to the roof with some twine and hope for the best.

Sam smiled wide saying, "Well Terry's got a pick up and we have some time before the staff meeting this afternoon. I know of a great little place not too far from here where they usually have some pretty good stuff if you want to go take a look now."

"Oh Sam, I don't want you to have to go through the trouble and besides, it's a nightmare for me to go anywhere anymore with the paparazzi everywhere. I don't want to subject you to that."

Sam just chuckled and stood, pulling me to my feet, saying, "Sookie, I've worked at this school for five years now. I've learned how the celebs do 'incognito'."

He did too! We took his car with me ducked down in the backseat and he had a baseball cap I wore along with my sunglasses into the store. No one seemed to recognize me and once I picked out a set and paid for it, they put it aside for Sam to come by and pick up later on that afternoon. On the way back to the school I told Sam, "Thank you so much for doing this for me. Would you and Terry like to stay tonight for the party? Do you play poker?" I wasn't sure whether or not Eric would mind, but I could use the moral support of having a friendly face there since I didn't know who Eric usually invited.

"There's a lot of downtime in the Army so playing cards was one way of dealing away the boredom. Terry's actually quite good at it, but I think I should warn you before I ask him to come along." He looked at me and smiled admitting, "Terry's got a crush on your husband."

While my reaction to Marjoram had been to stake my claim on Eric, I couldn't help but laugh hearing Sam's husband had the hots for him and said, "I think I can take it. He *is* pretty easy on the eyes."

"I'll say," Sam muttered under his breath and chuckled again seeing my raised eyebrow.

I gave Sam directions to the house and ran home after school making sure to leave their names with the guard at the gate so they'd be able to get through. I'd never heard a word from Eric all day long and he hadn't left me a note, so I didn't know what his frame of mind was and decided to go ahead with what we'd already planned for the night. Sam and Terry showed up an hour later with the table and chairs loaded in the back of their truck while I was seasoning the chicken wings.

While Sam had an average build and boyishly good looks, Terry looked more like a rugged man's man with a broad chest and thick arms, standing around six feet tall. His warm smile put me immediately at ease and I could see the easy familiarity they had between them that came with a solid relationship. I watched them longingly wondering if Eric and I would someday have the same thing.

Sam had a really good eye when it came to arranging furniture and I let him have it in the den moving what he wanted in order to fit the poker table. They brought in the new kitchen set and before long the house had started to look more like a home.

Terry was sitting at the kitchen table drinking a beer while Sam helped me prepare the potato skins, as we all got to know each other, when Eric came home a couple of hours later. My entire body stilled seeing him walk through the doorway as I waited for his reaction, either to me or the new furniture.

His body was tense and his eyes went from Terry to Sam before settling on mine as he said, "Hi."

Eric's tone of voice and facial expression gave nothing away and while I didn't know where *we* stood at the moment, I also didn't know what the protocol was for our interaction together when others were present who weren't in on our fake/real marriage. I took a stab at pretending nothing was wrong and said, "Eric, this is Sam," motioning to my left, "and that's Terry."

Eric's eyes had traveled back to Sam with a look I couldn't quite place, but it didn't appear all too welcoming when Terry stood up and thrust his hand out towards Eric saying, "I'm a really big fan of yours."

Knowing what I did, I couldn't help smiling seeing the blush on Terry's cheeks as he shook Eric's hand while he replied, "Thanks, nice to meet you."

He turned back to us and gave Sam a small nod when I said, "I invited them to stay for the party. I hope that's okay?"

*Please say its okay. Please say its okay.*

I was worried, not knowing whether or not we were standing in front of *my* Eric or Asshole Eric, so I breathed a sigh of relief after he took a long pause and responded, "Of course, the more the merrier. The table seats six and I only invited three others to play tonight."

It was then that Eric glanced over and saw our new kitchen set and his eyes shot back to me asking, "Where's my poker table?"

I half expected him to call it his *Precious* and pasted on my crazy smile hoping he wouldn't have a conniption fit saying, "It's in the den. Remember, we talked about getting a new table?" I knew he would remember my boobs, but maybe not the conversation.

"When?"

*I knew it.*

"On Monday night, when we were talking about the Lord of the Rings."

I wasn't sure at first if the tension between us was noticeable, but Terry came to the rescue saying, "It's a great table." He gave Sam a knowing look adding, "*I'd* sure like to have one."

Before anything else could be said, the doorbell rang followed by footsteps and voices calling out, "Eric! Where's my beer?"

I watched as Alcide came into the room with a smile and wave, with Tray behind him. I recognized him from the gym even though we'd never been officially introduced and a moment later another man with dark hair filed in next to him.

He seemed familiar, in a dream like sort of way, but I couldn't think of where I might know him from. His eyes latched onto mine and a chill shot down my spine. Even if I didn't know where I knew him from, I did know *one* thing; I wouldn't want to be left alone with him.

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## Chapter 37: Chapter 36

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### Chapter 36

#### EPOV

I think Tray could sense something was on my mind when I met up with him at the gym because he didn't say much to me other than he'd see me later on for the poker game. Thankfully I didn't run into Quinn at all, which was a good thing, considering I'd probably kill him if he said anything to me about Sookie. All through my workout and on the way to the studio I kept trying to figure out what I should do to try and patch things up with her.

*Should I call her?*

I knew her classes hadn't started yet, but didn't know enough about her schedule to know whether or not she'd be able to talk during the day. Besides, after our blow up the night before, I thought it might be better for us to talk face to face. As I passed by the flower shop I'd stopped at two mornings earlier I half thought about sending her flowers again, but what would I write on the card?

*Sorry for throwing my fuck history in your face last night.*

Even though I was new to being in a relationship, at least I *hoped* I was still in one, I knew better than that and since I couldn't think of anything better to write at the moment, I just kept on driving. After my reaction to Quinn on Monday, I really did feel bad about not giving her a heads up about Dawn. At least I assumed it was Dawn she'd run into, but since I hadn't fucked anyone else recently that worked at the studio it had to have been her. It really hadn't even occurred to me though, but I supposed it should have, although the thought of having to try and remember who we might run into and where in the future, and then telling Sookie about them didn't appeal to me at all.

*Sookie, I've been with that blond who's standing on the other side of the room. The one glaring at us right now, but it might be because she just learned from the redhead next to her that I've been with her too. The redhead barks like a dog when she cums and the carpet doesn't match the drapes on either one of them. Would you like to dance?*

Christ, Sookie would never let me touch her again.

I pulled into my parking space at the studio and headed inside for the weekly wrap-up meeting we had every Wednesday, after taping the previous night, before they handed out the following

week's script. I noticed everyone giving me sideways glances, but thought it had to do with me publicly firing my father as my manager right before the show. It wasn't until I met up with Alcide in my dressing room that I learned they might have been looking at me for a wholly different reason.

"So did Sookie say what made Dawn throw a punch at her yesterday?" he asked as soon as I walked into the room.

"WHAT?" That fucking cunt had better not have laid a hand on Sookie and she sure as shit wasn't going to work on THIS show anymore. They might not want to listen to me, but Pam already admitted to her love for Sookie and I doubted the producers wanted to get on *her* bad side. For such a small woman she sure had a lot of weight to throw around.

"Didn't she tell you?" he asked. When I gave him a look that said '*Keep talking*' he continued, "One of the crew guys was standing by the craft services table and heard Dawn call her a bitch and then she threw a punch at Sookie. Sookie dodged it, grabbed her arm, and pulled Dawn down onto the floor; said she broke a tooth." He smiled adding, "He was impressed. Sookie's got a fan club now."

"So Sookie didn't get hurt?" Dawn got what she deserved, but I still wondered why Sookie hadn't said anything to me about it. No wonder she was pissed that I hadn't warned her about Dawn; apparently being my wife was a dangerous thing.

"No, Sookie didn't get hurt. I saw the whole thing. She's such a turn on; I'm pissed that you found her first."

I hadn't noticed Pam's arrival until I heard her voice and turned asking, "Is *that* the fight you were talking about last night?"

She looked at me like I was retarded asking, "Do you think I'd give a shit about any of the vermin throwing down?" When both Alcide and I had a look on our faces that said clearly '*No*' she continued, "Anyway, I have a busy day today getting your father blacklisted from any and everywhere, but I just stopped in to tell you to let Sookie know that I'm taking her shopping for a dress for the premier party tomorrow night. I don't want her showing up in one of those sundresses looking like a lamb for the slaughter. "

Shit. After last night's blow-up I didn't even know if Sookie would be there when I got home, but I didn't want to tell them about our fight either. Pam would kill me and Alcide would try and make his move on Sookie.

"Umm...I don't know. She might already have plans." Like moving her stuff back out of the house.

"Then she'll have to change her plans," Pam said while scrolling through her BlackBerry, "*I'm* your Master now and since she's married to you, I'm officially her Master-In-Law." She turned

and walked back out the door throwing out over her shoulder, "I'll pick her up at your place around six."

The rest of the day was filled with rehearsals and fittings, but my mind was distracted with thoughts of Sookie. When I finally got done a little after four o'clock I sat in my car both wanting and dreading to go home. If we hadn't had that fight the night before, I'd be racing to get there hoping to catch her in my bed again, but now I was afraid I'd catch her boxing her stuff up so she could leave. I stared at the empty passenger seat next to me and recalled the hurt in her eyes, hearing my thoughtless apology, and recalled my decision to get a new car. Not only did I not want any reminders of the women I'd had in this car before her, I didn't want the memory of her being hurt by me when she sat in it.

Hoping I'd have a chance to make new memories with her, I headed to the dealership in search of a fresh start. It took longer than I'd expected to get the red Corvette I wanted because the only one they had available with the options I wanted was still sitting on the back of a truck containing their new shipment, so I had to wait for them to unload it and get it ready so I could take it with me. The interior was a dark charcoal gray which was different than the beige one the black car had, so it gave me a peace of mind with it being completely different both inside and out. I always thought beige only belonged on walls anyway.

I knew I wouldn't have much time before the guys arrived for the poker game, since getting the car had taken so long, but I hoped to have at least a few minutes alone with Sookie so I could tell her I was sorry. When I got to the house I noticed an unfamiliar truck sitting in the driveway and my stomach dropped thinking Sookie had borrowed it so she could move her stuff.

*Move out.*

*Out of the house.*

*Out of my life.*

I parked in the garage and entered the house, filled with dread inside, when I heard the sound of unrecognizable male voices along with Sookie's laughter coming from the kitchen. As I entered the room I immediately noticed the brawny looking one sitting with a beer and had a stray thought, wondering if Sookie had brought him as a bodyguard, before I looked over and saw another one standing alongside of her at the counter. When my eyes finally met hers I could tell she was apprehensive, but with no indicators as to why, all I could do was say, "Hi."

Sookie introduced both men and I recognized Sam's name as one of the teachers she'd said she met at the school. I could tell she felt comfortable around him and I wondered briefly if there was more to the story than what she'd told me. Was she playing games and this was her way of paying me back for the night before? It wouldn't be the first time a woman tried to use another man to get me jealous.

*It would be the first time it was working though.*

The bodyguard stood and shook my hand, seemingly friendly enough, and I gave a short nod towards my maybe-rival, when Sookie announced she'd invited them both to stay to play poker. I didn't mind because that meant Sookie wasn't going anywhere anytime soon and I both saw and smelled that she'd been cooking for everyone, so it set my mind at ease a bit. Besides, the poker table was big enough to hold all of us, but when I looked over and saw it had been replaced by a regular table I was happily confused. I didn't remember any of what she'd claimed we'd talked about moving it into the den two nights earlier, but just the fact she'd gone out that day and bought a new table for the kitchen brought me hope. I didn't think she would have bothered if she didn't plan on staying.

I was about to ask her if we could talk in private for a minute because I was dying to apologize, but the sound of the guys making their way into the house made it impossible at the moment. I watched Alcide smile and wave at her, happy to see her like a dog wagging its tail, followed by Tray. I could tell Sookie recognized him from the crease in her brow, but what really shocked me was when her eyes landed on Bill. She stared at him for a moment too long and the color drained from her face making me wonder what the hell was going on.

*Did she know him?*

When no one said anything I figured it was my turn to make the introductions, but I kept my eyes on Sookie watching her reaction when I introduced Bill.

"Sookie, this is Tray Dawson, my trainer at the gym, and this is Bill Compton. He's one of the actors on the show."

She was still studying Bill's face before she tore her eyes away from him to look at Tray and smiled saying, "I remember you from the gym. It's nice to finally meet you." Her eyes went back to Bill, but the smile disappeared from her face when all she said was, "Hello."

*'Hello', nice to see you again? Or 'Hello', we've never met before?*

When it became apparent she wasn't going to say anything else I made a mental note to find out what was behind it all before pointing at Sam and saying, "That's Sam; he works with Sookie." I looked at him and said, "Sorry, I didn't catch your last name."

"Merlotte," he offered as he shook hands with the guys.

I turned to the bodyguard and said, "This is Terry. I don't know your last name either."

"Merlotte," he smiled back at me.

"Oh, are you guys brothers?" I asked. They didn't look like it, but maybe one of them was adopted.

He smiled wider answering, "No, we're married."



*Oh.*

"Oh, well that's great." It really was. Not only did I feel better knowing Sam wasn't a potential rival, I now knew that Sookie wasn't trying to play games. I should have known better than to think she had been and felt even worse for assuming she was. The desire to apologize was eating away at me inside, but Sookie chose that moment to put a stack of plates on the counter next to the food she'd prepared saying, "Eat up while it's hot," and the others swarmed around the countertop like a pack of animals.

When it appeared they were all distracted by the food on their plates I took the opportunity to walk up to Sookie and quietly asked, "Can I speak to you for a minute in private?"

She hadn't been eating anything, but swallowed hard anyway, and nodded following me into the laundry room where we could have some privacy. As soon as I shut the door behind us I turned to face her and said, "I'm sorry about last night."

Relief flooded her face and my chest ached seeing tears fill her eyes as she said, "I'm sorry too. I've been a wreck all day and it was unfair for me to be so nasty to you last night. I guess I've just been feeling a bit overwhelmed still."

My arms automatically encircled her waist, drawing her closer to me, wanting to take away her sadness and I was ridiculously happy feeling her arms wrap around me as she snuggled into my chest. I inhaled her scent, having missed it all day long, and kissed the top of her head saying, "It's my fault. I shouldn't have snapped at you the way I did. You had every right to be mad at me, especially after I heard what happened to you last night with that bitch Dawn."

My heart lightened both hearing and feeling her giggle as she asked, "Is that Jack-O-Lantern's name?" At my prodding she went on to tell me everything that was said between the two of them and I could see why Pam was so enamored of her; they were practically cut from the same cloth. Only Sookie had been cut from cashmere and lace while Pam had been cut from leather and chainmail.

"It's true you know," I said, not realizing I was speaking my inner thoughts out loud.

"What's true?" she asked with her face still pressed against my chest.

I couldn't believe I was admitting it to her out loud when I finally said, "If I really had known you all along, I would've come running to you, begging you to be mine so I wouldn't have to deal with the likes of them anymore."

I felt her gasp hearing my admission and worried that maybe I'd said too much. The last thing I wanted to do was scare her away, but she'd said she didn't know how I really felt about her right before our fight last night. Now she knew.

My body stiffened when I felt her pull back from my embrace, but something else stiffened when her hands snaked their way up my chest and pulled my head down to hers for a kiss. My arms

held her tighter as I was once again lost in the taste of her with everything outside of our embrace momentarily forgotten. It wasn't a feral and demanding kiss like our last one had been in my bed, but tender and sweet; a promise and an apology to each other all rolled into one.

It was perfect, just like her.

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## Chapter 38: Chapter 37

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### Chapter 37

#### SPOV

I was sure I could feel my stomach actually turning inside out when Eric asked to speak to me in private. It was something I had both been looking forward to and dreading all day long, but it was time to bite the proverbial bullet and I pulled up my big girl panties as I followed him to the laundry room preparing myself for whatever he had to say. The relief I felt hearing him apologize made the temporary wall I'd built up to buffer his possible rejection of me come crumbling down with tears welling in my eyes. I hadn't realized until that moment how invested I'd already become in him and us, and while it scared me, I still welcomed it and him with open arms.

I had to stifle my giggle feeling him growl low in his chest as I told him about my fight with Spawn, but my desire to laugh was soon replaced with a lump in my throat. Having already seen the softer side of Eric's personality, I knew he could be sweet, but hearing his confession as to how he *really* felt about me left me in awe. I could hear the struggle in his voice as he admitted his feelings and knew it cost him on some level to say them out loud. A million responses flooded my brain, but my body demanded to be heard first by pulling him down for a kiss and my brain quickly got in line happily turning over the reins to my body, perfectly willing to communicate in that way. I knew we both still had a lot to talk about, but at that moment we needed that kiss more than words. It was better than any salve or ointment we could ever use to heal our raw nerves.

Feeling the beast coming to life against my stomach and knowing we had guests just a few feet away made me pull back from our kiss, but my arms refused to let go of his body while we caught our breath. My mind kept saying we had to take things slow while my body told my brain to shut the hell up and take his clothes off instead.

"What are you thinking?" he asked.

I had a feeling Eric would agree with my body's demands and not wanting our second first time to take place with me on top of the washing machine (all bets were off after then though) I instead replied with a combined truth saying, "I can't think straight when I'm this close to you." I couldn't either. Feeling his body pressed against mine in any capacity made rational thought damn near impossible. He was my Kryptonite.

His hands slid down my back and gripped my ass as he ground himself against the front of my body making both of us moan while he whispered against my neck, "I know what you mean."

I had my doubts, but it was a weakness in him I would willingly explore just as soon as I could convince all of me we were ready to take that step. *I'd explore it a lot.*

My libido was working overtime doing its damndest to convince the rest of me just how romantic the laundry room could be, after all it was the perfect place to remove any resulting cum stains, and right before I was about to hop on top of the washer and ask him to show me his stain stick we were both brought back to reality by a fist pounding on the door and Alcide's voice saying, "Let's go Northman!"

Eric growled loudly then, which only made my lady bits throb harder, and he yelled back, "I can fire you now you know!"

*Couldn't he always?*

The sound of Alcide's voice was retreating back down the hallway when he responded, "Yeah, but you won't."

I reluctantly pried Eric's hands from my ass and took a step back so I could smooth out my now rumpled clothes before looking up and seeing the longing on Eric's face. I forced out a laugh attempting to lighten the mood and patted his chest, which was a bad idea when I felt his muscles underneath my hand, and said, "This wasn't *my* idea. It's *your* party."

He tried to pull me back to him saying, "I can kick them out," but I slapped his hands away before he get a hold of me.

I put my hand on the doorknob saying, "We have guests! You can grope me later."

I really only meant to say the first half of that sentence out loud, but of course he heard the second half and I felt the slight sting of his hand slapping my ass before he said, "I'm holding you to that."

I was halfway out the door when an unbidden, "I hope so," left my lips. *Stupid faulty brain/mouth filter.* I wondered if there was some sort of Best Buy Geek Squad that could fix it for me. *Best Brain?* If so, I knew what I'd be buying Jason for Christmas.

I felt Eric's arm wrap around my shoulder as we made our way back to the kitchen and I saw Sam look up and smile at us when we appeared in the doorway. I knew he was seeing the comfortable familiarity between Eric and I that I had envied between him and Terry just a short while earlier. We weren't anywhere near where they were after having spent ten years together, but I now had hope that we might get there one day.

"The food was really great Sookie," Alcide said with all of them nodding their heads in agreement.

Tray chuckled saying, "I can see why you said you need the extra cardio now," to Eric and I looked up at him questioningly. He just shrugged his shoulders in response as I pondered over a healthier menu, not wanting him to have to go through any extra work to maintain his sextacular physique all because I liked to cook down home southern comfort food.

"What happened to it all?" Eric asked which made me look back to the counter which held nothing but empty plates.

"We ate it," Alcide retorted. "If you wanted any, you should have stuck around," as he gave him a look making me wonder over just how loud we had been and I felt the blush flush my cheeks.

Eric sighed with a pout on his face and I patted his chest again before pulling away from him and retrieving the second serving platter of food being kept warm in the oven and placing it on the counter. I loaded up a plate for Eric and handed it to him before anyone else could go back for seconds or thirds and he gave me a kiss in thanks before eating it all. I squeed inside over the domesticity of it all.

As I loaded up the dishwasher with the dirty dishes, I listened to them banter back and forth the way men do when they all congregate together talking about sports and whatnot, with jabs at each other added to the mix. Sam and Terry seemed to blend into the group just fine which was a relief to me. I wasn't sure how Eric's friends would react to them admitting they were married to each other, but my fears were unfounded when they were treated just like everyone else. The only tension I witnessed was when Tray asked about Terry's time in Iraq, but Sam came to his rescue and took over the conversation subtly steering the it away from an obviously still painful topic for his spouse.

I kept chancing glances at Bill, feeling his eyes on me the entire time, and it made my skin tingle in a bad way. I figured I must have seen him the night before when I watched the taping of Eric's show, but I'd really only had eyes for Eric at the time and didn't register anyone else on stage with him. I kept moving around the room and strategically stopping when his view of me was blocked by the body of someone else. There was something about him that gave me the willies, but I decided to keep it to myself for now since I didn't know how good of a friend he was to Eric. Hopefully they weren't friendly enough that they normally hung out together, but if they were, I'd make myself scarce whenever he was around.

When all of the food was gone they migrated into the den and I could hear Eric complimenting Sam on how he'd chosen to move things around in order to fit the poker table. I'd followed them there ready to jump in at Sam's defense if Eric had gotten upset over it, but seeing the smile on his face I doubted there was much that *could* upset him at the moment.

After everyone had their beverage of choice from the bar, I declined since I hadn't eaten yet and wasn't in any hurry to have the Blue Man Group do a repeat performance in my head anytime soon, they all took a seat and divvied up stacks of chips before Eric dealt out everyone's cards. He explained to Sam and Terry that they didn't play for money, just for bragging rights, and I felt better knowing Sam and Terry lived off of Sam's salary and the benefits Terry received from the military. Terry couldn't handle the pressure of working a regular nine to five job so they were

working on turning their collie rescue into a business, training them to be service dogs for veterans with PTSD. When we had gone shopping together earlier Sam had told me how cathartic it was for Terry to spend time with their dog Dean, who seemed to have an innate sense of what Terry needed from him, and they'd looked into different programs around the country to learn how to properly train dogs for other soldiers. After getting to know both of them I couldn't help being excited for them.

I watched them all play hand after hand completely confused. I hadn't been exaggerating when I'd told Eric I didn't know how to play poker. If it had been Uno, I'd be all over that like flies on shit being a 'Wild Card Draw 4' magnet, but any other card game left me clueless. I could see Eric getting a little frustrated after losing his fourth hand in a row and hoped he wasn't superstitious thinking the new location of his Precious was affecting his game. Precious was officially banned from the kitchen whether he knew it or not and the Wonder Twins were ready and willing to activate at the first sign of an impending invasion.

The real reason he was probably losing was the fact he couldn't seem to stop looking at me where I sat on the couch. I knew because I couldn't seem to take my eyes off of him. Thankfully everyone else had chosen their seats quickly and Bill was left with the one chair sitting across from Eric, so he couldn't look at me without turning around in his seat and making it obvious. When Eric lost his fifth hand in a row, I got up and quietly walked back into the kitchen so he could concentrate on his game and not my breasts because I was almost certain they weren't the pair he needed to win any of his chips back.

I was standing at the sink washing the pots and pans when I jumped, startled at the voice suddenly at my side as he said, "Hello Sookeh."

I turned seeing Bill all up in my personal space and took a step back, holding the soapy pan still in my hands in front of me like a shield, acknowledging, "Bill." My damn southern sensibilities kicked in as I asked, "Is there something I can get for you?" *A neutering perhaps?*

He smiled wickedly making me shudder all over as he took another step closer saying, "I just thought we could have a little chat. I feel like I'm the only one here that doesn't know you as well the others. I've known Eric for a while now and I must say I was quite surprised hearing he got married given his reputation with the ladies. I must say, I'm intrigued by you Sookeh, tell me about yourself."

I matched his step forward with another step back. Other than reminding me of Eric's *reputation* he hadn't really said anything yet that warranted the kick to his balls my feet were aching to deliver so I said, "Not much to tell. Eric's life is much more exciting than mine." *And he's much bigger than you so you'd better step the hell back before I scream.*

"Is *that* what drew you to him Sookeh?" His face darkened as he continued to ask, "Does money and fame *turn you on?*" He drew out the last three words and was leaning in close enough for me to smell the alcohol on his breath. That coupled with his words was making me queasy and my fight or flight instincts kicked in, overriding my nausea and my knee flew up into his crotch in outrage over his lackluster assessment of my moral character. He couldn't even yell out because

it appeared his lungs were connected to his balls and it was taking them a while to re-inflate as he crumpled to the floor in front of me.

I leaned down over his pathetically curled up body, quite offended at his verbal examination of my drunken proposal acceptance, and asked, "You want to know something about me? How's this? My name is *Sookie*. It rhymes with *cookie*, but YOU can just call me *Mrs. Northman* from now on!"

"WHAT IN THE HELL IS GOING ON?" Eric bellowed from the doorway. I jumped, startled again, and had a quick thought about installing a sensor that buzzed whenever someone crossed the threshold like they had in convenience stores. Seconds later he was flanked by everyone else, the poker game seemingly forgotten, while they all looked back and forth from me to Bill, who now looked nauseous too. Served him right.

I really did hate being the center of attention and the last thing we needed was for Eric to go all caveman in front of everyone, but by the looks on their faces I had a feeling they just might join him. I glanced down at the still moaning peckerhead before looking back at Eric and shrugged saying, "He tripped?"

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## Chapter 39: Chapter 38

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### Chapter 38

#### EPOV

I couldn't seem to take my eyes off of Sookie during the game, wishing like hell I'd cancelled the whole fucking thing, so we could be alone. She was only a few feet away and yet both the upper and lower halves of my body were aching over the ten foot distance between us, albeit for entirely different reasons. I almost asked her to come and sit on my lap, but I knew that would only make things worse because I doubted she'd agree to grind herself on top of me in front of guests while I snuggled against her like the needy little bitch she'd turned me into.

The longer we sat there, the more frustrated I became, throwing hand after hand wanting the game to end early, but when I saw her quietly stand and leave the room I knew I really had no other choice than to let the night progress normally and concentrated on the cards in my hand.

"Sookie seems really nice," Tray said once she'd left the room. "She's nothing like how Quinn described."

My cards were forgotten again as I looked up asking, "What do you mean?"

He shrugged his shoulders saying, "Whenever anyone would bring up the fact they were engaged when he was making a play for another woman, he'd say that she wasn't very attentive. Selfish."

A smile came on his lips when he looked back at me and said, "It must have been just him because she certainly seems to pay *you* a lot of attention."

I had to consciously keep my fingers from crushing the cards in my hand and tried to end the conversation on Quinn saying, "He's a dick and didn't deserve someone like her," before throwing a few chips into the pile, raising the stakes, and pretending to focus back on the game. I had an entire litany of examples of how Sookie wasn't selfish at all, but I kept them to myself. The last thing I needed was for Tray to be fawning all over Sookie; Alcide was bad enough.

Bill folded his hand and got up saying he needed to use the bathroom before leaving the room. Sookie's odd reaction to him when he'd first arrived didn't dawn on me again until he'd been gone for a few minutes and I suddenly stood up, leaving the room and seeking her out. I could hear her voice as I walked through the room where I'd chased her around the pool table and as I got closer to the kitchen, I could hear her saying something about cookies and calling her Mrs. Northman.

*Did he go for one of the cherry cookies she'd made without asking first?*

When I reached the doorway I could see Sookie standing over Bill's balled up form on the floor and knew whatever had went down had nothing to do with cookies and asked, "WHAT IN THE HELL IS GOING ON?"

My instincts to protect her were screaming at me she was in danger, but other than Sookie being startled hearing my voice she seemed fine. I felt the others surround me on both sides, but I didn't spare them a look since my eyes were stuck on Sookie and Bill.

The danger was in front of me, not behind me and I knew whatever it was, they had my back.

Sookie fidgeted where she stood obviously uncomfortable, although I didn't know from what, and she looked down at Bill before meeting my eyes again saying, "He tripped?"

It was the same line she'd told me she used after putting Dawn on the floor, so I knew Bill must have done something pretty bad to incur her wrath. I stepped into the room with my eyes quickly assessing her physical state before pulling her away from him and tucking her behind me as I loomed over his body gritting out through my teeth to him, "What. Did. You. Do?"

I could see that he was in pain and from the way he was hiding his balls like it was Colonel Sanders' secret recipe, I knew where Sookie's aim had struck. It only made me angrier knowing she must have felt really threatened to go for his balls and I had a hard time not finishing the job for her when he finally sputtered out, "Nuh...nothing!"

The pain on his face was the most expression I'd ever seen him wear, but his acting skills were failing him at the moment because he looked guilty as fuck and I yelled, "BULLSHIT! What did you do you piece of shit?"

I pulled my leg back intent on kicking him when I felt Sookie's arms wrap around me from behind with her wrapping her right leg around my own, keeping it from flying forward, as she said, "I'm fine, really. I just think maybe he had a little too much to drink."

Recalling what turned out to be our wedding video and how much I'd been groping Sookie after having too much to drink made me see red and my body tensed with even more rage as I yelled, "DID YOU PUT YOUR HANDS ON MY WIFE?" I hadn't paid any attention to how much Bill had had to drink and he'd never been one to overindulge in my presence, but I didn't care. If he touched her for *any* reason I'd kill him.

The others had formed a circle around Bill, looking just as pissed as I sounded, and I felt Sookie scale my body and latch onto me in a bear hug from behind with both of her arms and legs wrapped around me as she tried to soothe the beast threatening to explode from within by saying, "He didn't touch me. I swear!"

Bill said nothing and shook his head agreeing with her testimony, but I still wasn't convinced. I pulled on Sookie's small frame until she loosened her grip enough for me to pull her to my front and looked into her eyes, softening my tone, and asking, "What did he do? Don't give me that bullshit that he tripped."

Sookie cupped each of her hands on both sides of my face attempting to calm me down more before leaning forward and placing a soft kiss on my lips. I tried to fight against her magical powers to pacify me, but it was useless. I was putty in her hands. When my body relaxed underneath her she pulled back looking at me pleadingly and asking, "Can I tell you once our guests leave?"

My eyes never left hers when I said, "Leave," to the others still present in the room.

I could tell she was annoyed by my rudeness from the irritated look on her face as she fought her way free from my grasp, now that my fury was contained, and she turned to face the guys saying, "I'm sorry for ruining your night."

Alcide was roughly pulling Bill to his feet, even though his body was still unable to completely straighten out, and I smiled watching Tray kick Bill's feet out from under him making him topple back down to the floor with a yelp as he muttered, "Asshole. I never did like you."

That made two of us.

Sookie continued to apologize to everyone while they continued to reassure her it was okay as I silently followed them all and watched them file out the front door. When we were finally alone again I wasted no time in pulling her to me where she belonged and said, "Tell me." I'd had to fight every instinct I had allowing Bill to leave before knowing what had happened and comforted myself in the knowledge I could always beat his ass the following day when Sookie wouldn't be there to witness it all.

"Can we at least go and sit down first?" she asked with her face pressed against my chest.



I was tired of her stall tactics, but it appeared I could refuse her nothing because I picked her up and carried her into the family room, placing her in my lap as I sat down on the couch. She turned her body to straddle mine as she faced me and I looked back at her waiting for her to start talking. It showed how much I wanted to know the details of what really happened between them since it was the first time we'd ever been in that position when I was more interested in what she had to say versus how her body felt on top of mine.

"He said he wanted to get to know me better," she finally said.

"And?" My fists clenched at my sides hearing his dumbass pick-up line, but I knew there was more to the story.

She sighed before adding, "I told him there wasn't much to say and that you led a more exciting life." When I didn't offer any response, she continued, "He asked me more or less if that was the reason why I was with you. He asked if fame and money *turned me on*." She tried to lighten my ever darkening mood by smiling and adding, "You already *know* how I feel about be called a gold digger."

No, I knew how she felt about being called a *gold digging whore* which is exactly what it sounded like Compton had called her. If she hadn't been sitting on my lap I knew I would have bolted from the couch and gone in search of him, hell bent on killing him. She must have read it in my eyes because she dug her knees into the couch on either side of me, trapping my legs between hers, with her hands gripping the cushion behind my shoulders. Her determination to keep me from doing anything made me ask, "Why are you minimizing it all?" It made me remember her earlier reaction to seeing him and I added, "Did you already know him?"

"No?" she said unconvincingly. "I must have recognized him from watching your show last night, but I really didn't notice anyone but you on stage." She blushed a little before continuing, "He just gave me the heebie jeebies as soon as he walked in tonight and they never went away. Something about him screams '*Stranger Danger*'."

Still confused, I asked, "So then why didn't you say something? You said he 'tripped'. Why did you let him leave without telling me what really happened first? Why didn't you let me protect you?"

"I didn't know if he was a close friend of yours and I didn't want to spoil your party."

The anger within me was rising again hearing her come out and say she didn't feel safe with him there and yet she'd said nothing. It was like she had a complete disregard for own personal wellbeing. Just another example of not only how unselfish she was, but foolish too.

"Do you think I give a fuck about some poker party when you're being attacked in the next room, friend or not? Why didn't you yell for me? What the fuck were you thinking?"

I didn't realize how hard I was gripping her hips until she said, "Ouch!" and tried to push my hands away. I felt bad thinking I'd probably just reinforced the bruises on her skin that had been

healing up until then, but I was still too upset to really be bothered by it at the moment. She tried to jerk herself free from my lap, but I refused to let her go even as she spouted, "Let me go!"

"NO! Tell me *why* you didn't say anything? *Why* didn't you call out for me?"

Her entire face flushed red in anger as she redoubled her efforts to stand with me finally letting her go or else I risked hurting her again. As soon as she was on her feet she looked back at me saying, "Because there was no need! I can take care of myself! In case it's escaped your attention, I'm pretty self-sufficient, not a damsel in distress that needs rescuing like in some fairytale! I didn't back down from Pam, your father, Turmeric or Spawn and I didn't need you to save me from a creep like Bill Compton!"

"That's complete bullshit!" I yelled back now on my feet and towering over her. I had a good ten inches in height over her, but to her credit she didn't back down at all. If anything, she leaned in closer completely unafraid of my tirade, but then we both knew I would never hurt her. At least I *hoped* she knew. "He's bigger and stronger than you! What if he hurt you before I could get to you?"

"He didn't!" she yelled. "Did you not *see* him rolling around on the floor trying not to puke up his future demon seeds?"

"You were lucky!" I yelled back. "What about the next time? Why can't you just admit it was a stupid fucking move on your part?"

The sharp intake of air in through her mouth and the intensifying of her glare let me know I'd crossed the line, but before I could even think about my next move, good or bad, she took a step back and held her hands up in front of her body declaring, "I can't talk to you when you're *this* full of testosterone. We can try again in the morning after you've calmed down." I managed to keep my mouth shut before I could make it any worse and watched as she turned on her heel walking out of the room with a harsh, "Goodnight Eric."

It turned out I was still capable of making noises even with my mouth clamped shut because I let out a frustrated roar as I flopped back onto the couch wondering what the fuck just happened and trying to figure out when our evening all fell apart.

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## Chapter 40: Chapter 39

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### Chapter 39

#### SPOV

I stomped my way to my room utterly flabbergasted over the way our night had ended. Having already witnessed Eric's ability to bow up faster than a cobra poised to strike, I knew he would overreact to Bill and his broken ball sack, which was why I'd wanted to wait until the house was

cleared out before telling him the real story. Nothing said 'white trash' better than airing out your dirty laundry in front of guests and anything to do with Bill Compton was nothing *but* dirty.

I was hoping to use his admitted weakness of not being able to think straight when I was near and pressed my body on top of his as I spilled the beans on what really happened in the kitchen. It became immediately clear that he'd either been exaggerating the way I affected his mental faculties, or he had tunnel vision ending in the complete obliteration of one Bill Compton. He didn't even seem to notice when I inched my shirt down a little in the front giving him a better view of my cleavage, so the Wonder Twins had to power down, which was okay because I got angrier and angrier the more he spoke. I'd had to put up with a lot of shit from a lot of different people ever since we'd gotten mixed up with each other and I was incensed over his complete disregard for how well I'd managed thus far.

When everything between us dissolved into an all out war of words, as soon as he uttered the one word that could magically transform me into a complete bitch, 'stupid', I knew it was time to return to our corners. The last thing I wanted was to keep going because I knew whatever I said in the heat of the moment I would regret later on. I'd learned that lesson the previous night and I refused to repeat it, so I removed myself from the room before any more damage could be done.

I stripped off my clothes and jumped into the shower hoping to wash my foul mood and hotheaded thoughts away with the cool water. The Stackhouse temper was legendary and able to ignite into an incendiary explosion capable of putting the 'Shock and Awe' invasion of Iraq to shame, so as the water rained down on me and the red haze cleared, I thought back on everything that had been said between us. While a part of me still felt Eric had overreacted, I had already known from day one that he was the protective type. He'd shown that side of his personality when I'd been ripped away from him as we'd tried to make our way out of the casino and he came back for me like a man possessed.

*And he didn't even like me then.*

Now he *did* like me, a lot even, so I had already known he would be ten times worse when he learned about Bill, but perhaps I'd overreacted as well. From the moment Bill had walked into the house I'd felt uncomfortable and had he actually tried to make a grab for me, I know I would have been the first one to scream out Eric's name wanting him to do exactly what I'd just told him I didn't need; for him to rescue me.

*But did that make me wrong for not calling out for Eric just because Radiohead's 'Creep' song played in my head whenever I looked at Bill?*

Christ, it was all so confusing. I had handled Bill in the way I thought it was warranted at the time, but could I be mad at Eric for wanting some justice of his own? Granted, I had bounced Spawn's head on the floor like I was trying to make it explode like a pack of Snaps, but she had attacked me first and I didn't kick her when she was down. I may have *nudged* her with my foot, but nobody saw it so it didn't count in my book.

But how would I feel had I been the one in Eric's shoes?

*Custer's last stand would've looked like child's play and given a whole new meaning to The Battle of not-so-Little Big Horn.*

Fuck. I remembered my initial thoughts of not wanting to be caught in a dark alley with Bill as soon as I laid eyes on him and while Eric expressed his concern over what would happen *next time* (not that I believed for one second Eric would invite him back to the house) I knew he was right. My gut instincts had told me to stay away from Bill and I might have been just lucky he hadn't tried something physical versus verbal. Eric had merely reacted out of his fear for my wellbeing.

We both overreacted, me more so than him, and proved yet again that neither one of us could think straight when we were that close to each other, good or bad.

I hurried through the rest of my shower hoping to catch Eric before he went to bed so we could clear the air. I remembered all too well the tossing and turning I'd suffered through the night before and had no desire for a repeat performance. Hopefully Eric would have calmed down enough to rationally discuss things and I put on a pair of pajama pants and a t-shirt, covering as much of my skin as I was willing to on a balmy September night, so he wouldn't get distracted and have no recollection of our discussion the next day.

He wasn't anywhere downstairs that I could find, although I did notice he had finished washing what was left in the sink and put the pots and pans away and I smiled over his thoughtfulness. I'd checked the garage, hoping he hadn't just up and left in his anger, and was surprised to see a new red Corvette where the black one was normally kept. Prince's song automatically started playing in my head as I made my way back upstairs, wondering why he'd gotten rid of his old car when it had appeared to be brand new as well, and figured it must be a guy thing. Like boob fascination; I just didn't get it.

I knocked on his closed bedroom door and when he didn't answer, I knocked again calling out, "Eric?" I wasn't sure if he would have already gone to sleep and pressed my ear against the door faintly hearing the running shower coming from his bathroom.

*Should I just walk in?*

I hemmed and hawed for a few moments before deciding to try the doorknob to see if it was locked. If it was then I'd know he'd meant to keep me out, but it wasn't so I not-so-casually strolled in like I was breaking and entering, with my eyes darting around the room like a SWAT team was about to storm the room. There was nowhere for me to sit down other than on his bed and seeing it again, remembering our last time in it together, made me stay on my feet.

*It was covered in Eric Crack and I was already a full-blown addict.*

It wasn't much longer when I heard him turn off the water and it dawned on me that he might just walk out buck naked. I'd already seen Eric buck naked before I'd even known it was his face underneath the pillow and if I thought his bed was like crack, than his body was like oxygen. I simply wouldn't be able to resist filling myself up with him, like a drowning victim tossed

overboard the S.S. Northman. Or maybe he was more like a submarine and my mind suddenly filled with thoughts of him flooding tubes and firing off torpedoes, so I didn't notice he'd entered the room until I heard him say, "Sookie?"

*Yes Captain?*

I'd already gotten a flash of his bare chest and ignored the sounds of the angels singing, immediately squeezing my eyes shut and squeaked out, "Are you dressed?"

I wasn't sure what reply I wanted to hear more, yes or no, and I was disappointingly relieved to hear him say, "Yes."

I opened my eyes and thought, *Liar liar towel on fire.*

Since when did having a towel loosely wrapped around your waist constitute being *dressed*? At least it was a big towel and if our relationship continued to progress to a more intimate level I might just replace them all with a single washcloth.

Eric chose that moment to run his hands through his wet hair and while I was sure I had a reason for coming into his room, other than gawking at him, it completely escaped me. It must have run down into my panties when my tube was flooded.

"Did you need something?" he asked.

*A vaginal cork?*

"Umm..." My brain refused to fire up. At all.

*Give me a ping Vasili. One ping only please.*

No longer appearing upset, Eric merely looked amused while my brain ran through scene after scene of 'The Hunt for Red October' until I remembered '*Russians don't take a dump, son, without a plan.*' I had a plan! What was it? I was almost positive it had nothing to do with ripping that towel from his glistening body, so why was I calculating the distance between us versus my arm reach?

I wondered if Eric was telepathic when he walked towards me, closing the distance between us while I mentally threatened Wicked and Immoral to stay at my sides, and he came to a stop in front of me saying, "I feel like I've done nothing but say I'm sorry to you lately, but I am, again, for earlier."

He reached up running the back of his fingers down the side of my face and I wanted to kick my own ass for wasting so much time on arguing over Bill Creepton. I took a hold of his hand and kept it in my own as I looked up into his eyes saying, "No, I'm sorry. I'm the one who overreacted. You were just being protective and I don't want us to go to bed mad at each other. Again."

I proved my earlier admission to not thinking clearly when he was near to be true because my arms automatically wrapped around his damp, practically naked form, and my t-shirt soaked up whatever moisture had been left on his chest. His nearly naked form was also to blame for my soaked panties and they were becoming wetter by the second when Eric wrapped his arms around me leaning down for a kiss. His tongue moved against mine as my hands moved up into his wet hair, the droplets falling down and cooling my quickly overheating skin. I'd never been so affected by a man's kiss, but Eric could make me forget my own name. If that happened I supposed I could always look underneath his wedding band to remember.

When I pulled away to catch my breath Eric, undeterred, kissed his way across my cheek whispering in my ear, "I don't like fighting with you. It feels wrong."

My heart melted even more while I wholeheartedly agreed with him and just as soon as I could form the words, I would. Instead, Wicked and Immoral took off on their own undetected by me until the feel of terrycloth underneath my fingertips gave away their location.

*Horny bitches.*

'Too soon' my brain kept saying while my body chanted '*not soon enough*'. Eric's body was doing some talking of its own, damn near yelling right against my stomach, and it was making a very good argument pleading its case, but I knew we needed to get to know each other a little better before taking that next step. Our perpetual back and forth bickering over the stupidest things proved we needed more time.

Reluctantly, *very reluctantly*, I pulled away from Eric saying, "We should stop before this goes too far."

Eric half-sighed/half-growled leaning his forehead against mine with his eyes closed and said, "Right. I still have to woo you." He paused before adding, "And get an icepack for my blue balls."

*Get me some panty liners while you're at it.*

Remembering the spotless kitchen downstairs, I smiled saying, "You're off to a good start by cleaning up the kitchen for me." He smiled back at me without a response, but since I could only think of the depraved things I wanted to do to him, with him so close, I took another step back and realized the front of my shirt was practically soaked through and plastered to my skin when the cool air hit it. It wasn't the cool air that made my nipples hard either.

You'd think they'd speared through the front of Eric's eyeballs from the way he couldn't seem to take his eyes from them and I pulled the material away from my skin saying, "I should probably change."

"Just take it off," Eric offered with a sly grin. "I'll give you my towel to dry off."

I attempted to scold him with my eyes, but I don't think I succeeded since I couldn't help but smile as I said, "How very gracious of you."

I turned to leave the room, but Eric caught my hand saying, "Don't leave."

I looked back at him and he no longer looked amused or lustful; he looked upset and it halted my steps. "I'm just going to change my pajamas." Did he think I was leaving?

"Here," he said tossing me the t-shirt he'd been wearing earlier. "Just wear that."

The scent of him hit me as I caught his shirt in midair and being the Eric addict I was, I could find no reason to deny his proposal. He was still wearing just the towel and I knew all it would take was one brain fart on my behalf for Wicked and Immoral to claim it like the spoils of war and declare his ass Sookie Territory. "I'll wear this if you put something else on."

Eric merely smiled wider saying, "Deal." Perhaps if I hadn't been so distracted by his smile I would have seen his hands grip the towel, but it was too late when the terrycloth flew through the air and I raised his crack shirt up, covering my eyes and blushing clear down to my toes, yelling, "ERIC!"

I could hear him laughing before he asked, "What?" His voice dropped an octave as he said, "You've seen *all of me* before so what's the big deal?"

"It's not the same!" I said to the shirt pressed against my face. "You were Mr. Pillow Face then!"

"Would you feel better if I wore a pillow over my face?" he asked laughing again. "I'd be more than willing to accommodate you if it would ease your mind."

"ERIC NORTHMAN! You put some pants on right now!" *Before I start marking my territory.*

I started feeling the area in front of me with my toes and inching my way out of the room where I thought the door should be, blind by choice, and shrieked when I felt his hands grab my waist a moment later pulling my back against his front. "Eric!" I laughed. It was impossible to reprimand him when my heart felt lighter than it had all day long.

I felt him nuzzle my neck as he said, "I just saved you from walking into the wall. You should *thank me.*"

"I must not be as gracious as you," I replied, still talking through the t-shirt.

I felt him grab onto my hand and pull it down before I could think to stop him, but let the t-shirt fall from my face when I felt him place my hand on his cotton covered ass. I didn't turn around until I'd slid it farther down his leg ensuring he was wearing something more substantial than boxers and swatted him saying, "That wasn't nice."

"Says the girl taunting me in a wet t-shirt."

"You're the one that *made* me wet!" In. Every. Way.

"Need help changing? Consider it my way of making amends." His hands started to slide up my shirt as he whispered, "I'd be righting a wrong."

That about summed up our current situation; it felt equally right and wrong.

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## Chapter 41: Chapter 40

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### Chapter 40

#### EPOV

I stayed in the shower long after I was clean wondering how receptive Sookie would be to me in the morning. She'd taken off early that very morning after we'd fought in the car the night before and I didn't know her well enough yet to know if running away was a pattern for her. I couldn't blame her for walking out of the room after I'd basically called her 'stupid' when I knew she was anything but, but my mouth had a mind of its own when I was angry. It didn't excuse it though and I wanted to apologize; I just hoped she would let me.

When my skin started to prune I turned the water off and wrapped myself in a towel before heading into the bedroom and was surprised to see Sookie standing there. I could tell her mind was elsewhere and waited as long as my patience would allow before saying, "Sookie?"

She still seemed out of it and I started to worry until I remembered her reaction to seeing my bare chest and smiled. If I'd thought about it the night before I would have ripped my shirt off before we ever got home so she wouldn't have stormed off before I could apologize. I had no intention of covering myself now that I had her in the same room and when she still couldn't seem to find the words as to why she was there, I walked over and told her what I seemed to be saying a lot lately; I was sorry. Again.

And I *was* sorry for calling her stupid, but I was *not* sorry for wanting to tear off Bill's dick and shove it down his throat. I just didn't go into that much detail in my apology.

Standing that close to her I couldn't resist touching her in some way and ran my fingers down her freshly scrubbed face. She was beautiful without a doubt, but it was her inner beauty that shined the brightest and even though I'd been filled with nothing but regret over our marriage when we'd first learned of it, I was now grateful to have been forced to get to know her. Just the thought of having missed out on finding someone as special as Sookie made my chest ache, so when she apologized as well and I knew we were okay again, I claimed her lips in a kiss. She was my new favorite place to be and I hated fighting with her; hated seeing her walk away from me for any reason. Having her here in my arms is what felt *right* and I'd do whatever I had to, to keep her there.



The sight of her wet shirt stuck to the front of her body, perfectly encasing her breasts, was just another reason I wanted to keep her there, but when she'd said she was going to change and turned to walk out the door, I reacted without thought grabbing her hand and practically begged her to stay. I had no idea what the fuck was wrong with me, but I knew I still felt too vulnerable from our earlier fight to watch her walk away again.

*I was such a pussy.*

Hoping Sookie was unaware she was now in sole possession of my Man Card, I attempted to lighten the mood by amping up the already massive amount of sexual tension between us by taking off my towel. If she was distracted by my bare chest then I thought the sight of my completely naked body should be *interesting*.

At least that was my plan and it might have worked had she not covered her face with my shirt before trying to inch her way out of my room like a wayward pinball. I gave up and quickly pulled on a pair of pajama pants and grabbed a hold of her before she could hit the wall. My only intent had been to save her from a stubbed toe, but standing so close to her was making my body's intentions known to her as well. While it hadn't been all *that* long since I'd had sex last (sex that I could remember anyway), being around Sookie for the last few days had been a heavenly torture. Seeing her in a bikini and her constant uniform of form fitting short shorts tormented each day, but now that we'd moved on to actual touching and kissing, I'd been subjected to the best form of agony imaginable. I knew I would wait however long it took until she was ready, but I started to wonder if it was possible to die from a perpetual hard-on. Didn't the Viagra commercials say something about seeking medical attention if your erection lasted too long?

*Maybe Sookie would take pity on me if I had a note from the doctor?*

I was lost in thoughts of Nurse Sookie performing mouth to dick resuscitation, not realizing I'd been groping my way up her shirt until I felt her hands still mine as she said, "I think I can handle it on my own."

*Handle what? Sexing me up of her own volition without a prescription? She has a medical degree I know nothing about and knows she's the cure for my special brand of deep vein thrombosis so there's no need to dial 911? WHAT?*

Her reply to my unspoken questions came when she slipped my t-shirt over her head and after some contorting of her upper half, showing me absolutely nothing of what lied underneath, she pulled her damp t-shirt through the neck of my shirt she was now wearing with a smile saying, "Ta dah!"

*Yay.*

Because of the differences in our size my shirt almost came down to her knees and when she pulled off her pajama pants I didn't mean to but said out loud anyway, "Yay!"

Sookie smiled before walking towards my closet and tossing her pajamas into my hamper saying, "Don't get too excited there buddy, I only took them off because they were wet too."

Seeing her do something so utterly normal and mundane as putting her clothes in my hamper shouldn't have made me so giddy inside, but it did and again my thoughts left my mouth without the consent of my brain.

"Stay."

She gave me a funny look and smiled saying, "And just where did you think I'd run off to at this time of night in nothing but your t-shirt?" When I didn't respond right away, having been too busy trying to cough up a hairball like the giant pussy I was, she asked, "Or was that going to be followed up with a 'roll over' and 'fetch'?"

"Stay here," I pointed at my bed, "with me...tonight." *And the next night and the next night and the next night...*

I could tell by the look in her eyes she was about to say no, so I made a preemptive strike saying, "Nothing has to happen, we'll just talk. You haven't told me about your day." When she still seemed hesitant I grinned, waggling my eyebrows and offered, "If it'll make you feel better I'll let you tie me up."

I thought she would laugh, but instead a flash of lust went across her face and my mental inventory turned up no scarves in the house, unless she had some; if not, I'd shred a fucking pillow case. More than just my hopes were up when she finally said, "I don't know if that's such a good idea."

"I could tie you up first if you'd prefer."

"Eric! That's not what I meant!" she blushed.

*Shit! I said that out loud.*

"Just kidding," *not really*, "But really Sookie, I promise to be on my best behavior." *However, feel free to not emulate my best behavior.* I walked over to the bed and sat down, pulling back the covers and patted the mattress, but when she still hadn't moved an inch I donned my overdramatic acting skills and flopped onto my back throwing my arm over my eyes saying, "You wound me Sookie. The first time I ask a woman to join me in my bed and you're going to deny me?" I let out an over the top fake sob and added, "My ego is shattered."

I expected her to call me out on my flare for dramatics or perhaps tease me on my overblown ego, but she surprised me yet again when she asked somewhat pissily, "You've *never* had a woman your bed? You, Mr. Hollywood Sex God. Do you really expect me to believe that?"

I reined in my natural urge to snap back, realizing my error in alluding to my sexual history while enjoying her moniker for me, and sat back up to look her in the eyes saying sincerely, "You are the only woman who has ever been in my bed."

"Is it new?" she huffed.

I reveled in her jealousy for a moment before answering, "No. I never even brought anyone to my house before."

*Thank Christ for that. I'd already felt the need to replace my car, but moving to a whole new house would be a pain in the ass.*

*I'd do it though.*

I was just about to stand up and tell her we could talk downstairs instead when she inched towards me asking, "Really? You've never brought any of them home with you?"

I held out my hand and when she placed hers inside of it, I pulled her towards me responding, "Really. None of them meant anything to me so why would I sully my house with their presence?"

Sookie smiled chuckling, "You can be such an ass sometimes."

Apparently not so much of an ass to stop her from crawling into the bed next to me and getting under the covers, which is exactly what she did. As soon as she was settled I turned out the lights and pulled her up against me, spooning her from behind, and suddenly all was right in the world. I nuzzled my face into her hair saying, "It's a good thing I have such a great ass."

"Mhmm...your ego seems to be just fine."

"Of course," I replied while inhaling the scent of her, "You're in my bed." *And you're never leaving it again if I have anything to say about it.* We laid in silence for a moment before I asked her about her day and she told me about having lunch with Sam and going shopping together for the table. I was glad I got to spend what little time together with him that I had that evening or else I knew I would've been insanely jealous and thinking about our fucked up night made me remember what I'd overheard coming from the kitchen before walking in and seeing Sookie glaring down over Bill on the floor.

"What were you talking about before I came into the kitchen? I heard you say something about cookies and to call you Mrs. Northman." Even with the circumstances of why I found them that way, I couldn't help smiling saying her new last name.

"Pfft...that ass kept calling me *Sookeh* like my name, while unusual, is so hard to say. I told him it rhymed with *cookie* but he could just call me Mrs. Northman." She shrugged her shoulders ending with, "I had a Janet Jackson moment."

I hugged her tighter against my body purring, "Does that mean a wardrobe malfunction is in your future? The *future* being *now* of course."

She smacked my arm in fake ire before snickering, "Too bad for you I used my last star shaped pasty on the day before we met." Before I could tell her I was more than willing to forego the star on her breast because it would only hinder my mouth, she said, "Now stop it. Tell me about your day."

I sighed in disappointment having already pictured her naked breasts before saying, "There's not much to tell. I went to the gym and then the studio." I recalled my reason for arriving home later than I'd planned and added, "Oh, and I got a new car."

"I saw," she laughed. "Are you going to change your name to some random symbol and make people address you as the artist formerly known as Eric Northman?"

*Is there a symbol for 'pussy whipped'?*

I suddenly had images of Sookie dancing seductively around me and asked, "If I do will you dance around me on stage and have a wardrobe malfunction?"

*Totally worth the 'pussy whipped' symbol.*

"Why, do you sing too?"

*I wish I did now.* "No, but don't let that stop you."

"You're so bad." Her statement was a contradiction to her movements when she pressed herself back against my body even harder. It made *me* even harder which was difficult to hide given the way I was attached to her body like a blood sucking leech.

My hips ground against her ass without any direction from my brain and my mouth joined the mutiny, saying, "Let me show you just how *bad* I can be. I promise it'll be very *good*."

Her breath hitched in her throat as her body shuddered, trapped by my own, and in another show of inconsistency she brought my hand up from where it had been resting on her stomach to cup her breast as her hips did some grinding of their own while she said, "No, we're just *talking*."

*Talking? If she wanted to talk I could find PLENTY to say.*

I let my teeth scrape along the outer edge of her ear while my hand kneaded her breast and whispered, "What do you want to talk about? How just the sight of you makes hard? How feeling your soft skin underneath my fingertips makes me burn from the inside out? How the taste of your lips leaves me salivating for more? How much I'm dying to taste every part of you?"

I licked and kissed my way down her neck to her shoulder, not seeing in the darkness of the room but feeling the blush on her skin, as she sighed, "Eric..."

"Hmm?" It was the most I could say since my lips and tongue were preoccupied as they worked their way across the back of her neck and my hand got jealous over the skin on skin contact they were enjoying, so it snuck its way up underneath the shirt she was wearing. After all, it was only fair.

My fingers rolled and tweaked her nipple before moving to her other breast, in an effort to maintain all around fairness, and while Sookie's hand slipped behind her stroking me through my pants my other hand trailed up her inner thigh finding her soaked through panties at the top and we both moaned, "*Fuck*," in unison.

When I felt her hand slip inside my waistband and wrap around my painfully hard cock I took that as permission for my hand to delve inside of her panties and growled against her skin feeling the slickness of her arousal awaiting me. Two of my fingers slid inside of her pumping in time with her hand on my dick, each of us thrusting our hips against the other, and when she turned her head towards me I claimed her lips with my own. She whimpered into my mouth as her inner muscles contracted around my fingers and feeling how tight she was made me swell even larger in her hand, my dick's way of making its envy of my fingers known, but willing to concede for now. I knew I wouldn't last for much longer, the days' long sexual tension between us had sapped my willpower, and I rubbed her clit with my thumb as my fingers continued to seek out that hidden spot inside of her, both begging and commanding her as I said, "Cum for me lover."

I found that spot just seconds later and her muscles clamped down on my hand as her hips bucked uncontrollably while she cried out, "*ERIC!*" Hearing my name coming from her lips in ecstasy had me shouting her name in reply as my orgasm erupted from my body. We continued to stroke each other slowly bringing one another back down from our climactic high as our erratic breathing calmed.

I reluctantly removed my hand from my even newer favorite place to be and rolled over retrieving the towel I had tossed onto the floor and used it to clean up the wetness from between her legs and hand before cleaning myself. I tossed it back to the floor and hovered over Sookie, taking the kiss I needed from her in that moment, before lying back down and pulling her back into our original spooning position. I was so content in that moment a Mack truck could have burst through the wall and I doubted I'd be able to get out of the bed.

"What were we talking about?" she asked sleepily.

I buried my face into her neck murmuring, "You were telling me how *bad* I was."

Sookie hugged my arms tighter around her waist and yawned making me yawn in response. I was nearly asleep when I heard her whisper, "You are...in the best of ways."

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## Chapter 42: Chapter 41

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## SPOV

While I lay there in post coital bliss listening to the sound of Eric's breathing as he slept I tried to work up the shameful feelings I thought I should have, but it was an impossible task. I couldn't even be angry at Wicked and Immoral for their wayward ways because thanks to them, Eric had given me the best orgasm of my life. If his hands were that talented, I could only imagine what other abilities he had in his repertoire and I already knew what symbol he could use in place of his name; an 'O' face. As my eyes got heavier with the Sandman on his way, I inhaled deeply, completely blissed out by Eric's scent surrounding me and snuggled even closer to him in the bed he'd only ever shared with *me*. I fell asleep with a smile on my face recalling my thoughts from a few days earlier of me fighting some random woman over Eric on The Jerry Springer Show. Who knew I would've been the crack whore?

I woke up the following morning, thankful for my body's internal alarm clock, in the same exact position I'd fallen asleep in. It was odd considering I usually flopped all over the bed in my sleep, but I didn't know if it was because of Eric's still vice-like grip on my body or the undeniable fact of how much his sheer presence calmed me. It was too early for me to analyze anything too deep and as I attempted to stretch my body I felt my early morning greeter knocking in the vicinity of my backdoor while Eric still slept unaware. When Wicked had introduced herself the night before in a wanton 'How do you do?' I realized how wrong I'd been comparing it to the Kraken and unicorns. Nessie, the Loch Ness Monster, was no longer a modern day myth and I could only hope to, one day soon, have it sinking into my own deep abyss. God knows he had the ability to make it wet enough.

It wasn't much longer when my bladder demanded I get up and as I struggled to remove myself from Eric's grasp I had a moment of déjà vu when he tightened his hold, growling low in his chest. My whole body shivered upon hearing it and it reminded me of his previous night's dirty talk that shot my libido clear up into the stratosphere. Who needs flowery words and poetry when you can hear that instead?

I was pretty sure my panties were damp from something other than pee, but that wouldn't be the case for much longer so I continued trying to free myself wondering if I would need the Jaws of Life. Eric refused to release me, even in slumber, and while it was cute I didn't think he'd appreciate waking up to a golden shower. He'd never ask me back into his bed again.

I couldn't even loosen his arms enough to turn around to face him so I was left with whispering, "Eric!"

Nothing.

If I didn't know better I'd think he was dead, but I could clearly feel his pulse up against my ass. The Wonder Twins were of no use to me at the moment so I had to get creative and rubbed my ass against Nessie hoping it would rouse the rest of Eric. It took a moment, but more parts of him finally came to life as his arms held me tighter with Nessie seeking out a place to hide from prying eyes. I knew it was a gamble provoking him that way, but like a big rig with a double clutch engine Eric's initially tighter grip loosened so his hands could make their way to my hips

and I quickly rolled away from him, nearly falling off of the other side of the bed while his hands stretched out across the now empty mattress beside him, too slow to catch me.

"Where are you going?" he asked with his voice still hoarse from waking.

Seeing him lying there in nothing but his pajama pants with his hair all messy and his eyes half opened, I couldn't remember for a moment why I had been so desperate to get away from him. My bladder soon reminded me, as did the time, and I scooted off the bed saying, "I have to get ready for work." I wanted to give him a quick kiss before leaving the room, but I had a feeling he would find a way to convince me to stay so I ran back to my room to get ready.

I found Eric in the kitchen a little while later, freshly showered, but wearing a weird look. I hoped it didn't have anything to do with our slap and tickle session from the night before, so I attempted to assess his mood by saying, "Good morning."

"Is it?" he asked.

*According to my Eric radar the forecast called for a shitty morning.*

His words stung and I wondered where the affectionate Eric of the night before had gone to, thinking that part of him might have been left in that towel he'd tossed onto his bedroom floor. "What's *that* supposed to mean?" I asked with a little more sharpness in my tone than I'd meant to use.

I watched him shake his head and he dropped his gaze saying, "Nothing." I was about to ask him what was wrong, but he knocked the question right out of my head when he spoke up instead. "Pam is coming by tonight at six to pick you up to go shopping for a dress for the premier tomorrow night."

His tone was one that was meant to broker no argument which naturally made me argumentative. "Oh really...did anyone think to *ask* me or am I just supposed to *obey*?"

Eric grabbed his keys from the counter and headed out the door saying, "Do what you want Sookie. You're going to anyway."

I heard his car start up a minute later and drive away moments later while I stood in the kitchen trying to hold back the tears wondering what in the hell just happened. Thankfully my day at the school was busy enough to keep my mind from wandering to Eric too much since the first day of school would be the following day. Sam was friendly as usual, but when my eyes welled up when he asked about Eric he quickly changed the subject so I didn't have to answer. I arrived home to an empty house having no idea when Eric would be home, since we hadn't had a chance to discuss it, and was still sitting in a fog at the kitchen table, going back and forth between feelings of hurt and anger when Pam walked into the house at six o'clock on the dot.

"Ready?" she asked.

I stood up on autopilot and grabbed my things following her out to her car without any response. We sat in silence while she drove us to Beverly Hills with me staring out the window and it wasn't until she parked when she finally asked, "What is it? Are you premenstrual or pissed I'm making you get a new dress? I can send someone out for chocolate and look for an empire waist dress if you're bloated, but you're shit out of luck if you're just bitchy over having to shop."

I glared at her before getting out of the car and looked up seeing we were standing in front of the Dolce & Gabbana store. There were a few paparazzi milling about, but Pam pulled me inside as I turned to her and said, "I can't afford to shop here Pam. I have a perfectly acceptable dress at home." I wasn't sure how factual my declaration was, but if I was wrong I could always raid Amelia's closet.

"Cutesy little sundresses aren't appropriate for tomorrow night and don't be ridiculous," she chided. "We're spending Eric's money."

She may as well have tossed me into a pit of quick drying concrete because my entire body stopped moving as I gritted out through my teeth, "I am *not* spending *Eric's* money." My hurt was giving way to anger at the moment over his attitude from that morning and I'd be damned if I was going to go gallivanting through some high end boutique shopping with *his* money.

"Are you still pretending you're living on a shoestring budget? You're *Mrs. Eric Northman* and you're sure as hell going to *look* like it when you're standing next to him."

We were already attracting attention by the salespeople, whether it be from them working off of a commission or because of the paparazzi waiting outside, so I refrained from saying my thoughts out loud.

*I'm Mrs. Eric Northman in NAME only.*

Other than that one truth I had no idea where we stood. All day long I kept trying to figure out what had him in such a bad mood when I had walked into the kitchen that morning and the only conclusion I could come up with was he'd finally gotten what he'd wanted from me and was done pretending like he actually cared. Since we hadn't actually had sex the hand job I gave him must not have been good enough for him to want to go any further. I was a fool to think my limited sexual experience could satisfy someone like Eric and an even bigger fool to think he'd want anything more from me than getting his rocks off.

Hurt and anger were still warring inside of me, fighting over which one of them would finally win out, when Pam shoved a pile of dresses into my arms and pushed me into a fitting room before I could utter a word. I stood there with an armful of couture unsure of what I was going to do when my cell phone rang. I dropped the thousands of dollars worth of dresses onto the floor without thought and grabbed my cell from my purse with my disappointment showing in the mirror in front of me seeing it wasn't Eric calling, but Gran.

"Hi Gran," I answered trying to sound happy when I was anything but.



*"Hello sweetheart. I know it's not the weekend yet, but I just wanted to call and wish you good luck on your first day of school tomorrow."*

"Thanks Gran."

Clearly my acting skills were lacking because Gran picked up on my mood asking, *"Is everything alright?"*

No. "Yes."

*"Sookie, I know I raised you better than to lie to your elders. What is it? Are you worried about tomorrow?"*

I didn't think it was appropriate to discuss with my Grandmother my pitiful bedroom skills in not satisfying Eric, so I continued barreling down the road to Hell by lying, "Nothing's wrong."

Pam chose that moment to pound on the door saying, "I'm not getting any younger out here!"

When Gran asked who she'd heard I answered, "That's Pam. She works for Eric and she took me shopping for a dress for some party thing we have to go to tomorrow night." I kicked the pile of dresses at my feet out of spite, but only succeeded in making myself feel even worse.

*"Is that what's wrong? Don't worry sweetheart. You just stand tall and proud next to your husband and don't think about all of the people around you. I know you don't like being the center of attention, but you'll do fine."*

Great. I hadn't even thought about the fucking circus that would surround us the following night and now I didn't even have Eric to lean on anymore, at least not emotionally. Pam banged on the door again and Gran took that as her cue to let me off of the phone. I couldn't bring myself to try on anything, but since Pam obviously had no boundaries she came into the fitting room without even knocking asking, "What's the hold up? I don't have all night." She spotted the pile of clothing on the floor and looked back at me nonplussed by my sloppiness inquiring, "Do they not fit?"

"I wouldn't know. I didn't try any of them on."

Pam's hands moved with lightening speed as she lifted my shirt from my body without me ever seeing her move and my hands immediately moved to cover my bra clad breasts as I gasped, "Pam! What do you think you're doing?"

"Please...you don't have anything I haven't seen before." I wasn't so sure about that statement given the way her eyes raked over my body and she licked her lips as her hands moved to my waistband to remove my pants, but I smacked her hands away. Her eyefuck turned into a glare as she said, "I have other things to do so you need to find something to wear so we can get out of here."

"Fine!" I snapped back grabbing the first dress I laid hands on and pulled it over my head. We took turns finding something wrong with dress after dress with Pam coming and going with what had to be every item in the store. After a few hours had passed I didn't care anymore, wanting nothing more than to leave, and I'd just about given up hope of finding anything when I put on a silky black halter style dress with large white polka dots. The full skirt flared from underneath my breasts with the ruffled hem falling just above my knees.

"That's the one," Pam said. "It wouldn't be formal enough for an awards show, but it's perfect for tomorrow night."

I did like it, but the thought of having to suffer through a whole night of fake smiles with people I didn't even know made me sick. I wasn't sure if I could stomach however long we'd have to be there, much less the remaining 359 days Eric and I were supposed to spend together, and cursed myself for letting my guard down so quickly. The intimacy we'd shared the night before was bad enough, so my only silver lining was that we hadn't actually had sex. My heart was hurting bad enough already.

I was going to put the dress and shoes Pam insisted were necessary on a credit card, refusing to allow her to pay for it with Eric's money, until she finally stomped her foot saying I could consider it a wedding present from her. We were close to an all out fight and with the paparazzi poised with their camera lenses pointed through the glass storefront I finally backed down having had enough drama in my life at the moment.

It was after ten when she finally dropped me off at the house and I cautiously entered it not knowing what, if anything, I would say when I saw Eric. It turned out my worries were for nothing because when I didn't see him in any room in the downstairs I checked the garage for his car and seeing it there let me know he was in the house somewhere. I quietly made my way upstairs and stood in front of his closed bedroom door for the longest time remembering how happy I'd been the night before, but I eventually went into my own room, taking my purchases along with my foolish notions with me, and cried myself to sleep.

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## **Chapter 43: Chapter 42**

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### Chapter 42

#### **EPOV**

I lay in bed completely dumbfounded as I watched Sookie doing what I hated seeing the most; running away. I heard her say she had to get ready for work, but glancing at the clock I saw she had more than enough time to get ready. After what had happened between us the night before I'd thought another barrier had been dropped between us and she would be at least a little affectionate when we woke up, but my eyes were barely open enough to see her scurry from the room without so much as a 'Good morning.' I was admittedly new to the whole concept of being in a relationship, but I was pretty sure after a night like we'd shared some sort of

acknowledgement was called for. I would have settled for a wave hello, but instead all I got was an indecipherable look before she took off.

I forced myself out of bed and got into the shower which only led to my hurt feelings turning into anger as I stood underneath the spray. How could I have been so stupid to let myself become so attached to her or *anyone* for that fact? I couldn't even keep my own mother from running away from me and I'd apparently unknowingly followed in my father's footsteps by picking a woman with that same trait.

*Did she regret what happened last night?*

I certainly hadn't, but I must have been the only one. The least she could have done was act like a fucking grown up and told me. I would've tried to have been understanding if she'd said something, knowing we hadn't been together for very long, but instead she chose to deal with it like she always seemed to; by *not* dealing with it at all. It was a sad state of affairs when *I* could be labeled the *responsible* one in a relationship or whatever the fuck we were in now which felt like nothing more than a massive pile of shit at the moment.

I was already in the kitchen when I heard her coming down the stairs and seeing on the clock she still had another half hour before she would have to leave only left me more pissed off. To me it was a glaring sign that she'd avoided me earlier by running from the bedroom and I could feel my blood pressure rising as I attempted to keep it in check. I watched her enter the room looking hesitant as hell and I cursed myself for both the ache in my chest seeing her as well as falling for her as hard and as fast as I had while she said, "Good morning."

*Too late.*

"Is it?" I asked because it sure as hell didn't seem so great to me.

When she got snippy more or less asking what I was talking about I decided to just end the conversation with a, "Nothing," before it could get any worse. I needed to think about things; about us and couldn't take looking at her face to face for much longer, without losing control of both my emotions and my mouth, but I couldn't help myself when she was in the same room. Sookie was the most beautiful girl in the world to me and I'd already been dumb enough to buy into the idea we were together; a couple. Now I had no fucking clue *what* we were.

Hearing the shittiness in her voice, a far cry from the way she'd sounded the night before, I finally had to walk out of the room and leave, telling her to do what she wanted knowing she would anyway. I'd learned all too well that I couldn't force someone I cared about to do what I wanted and couldn't even revel in the fact *she* was the one watching *me* walk away for a change because deep down I knew even though I'd done my best to show her how much I cared about her, in both my actions and words, it wasn't good enough.

*Maybe I was following my own pattern too.*

With that thought I drove through the city streets until I hit the highway and headed to a spot overlooking the ocean I'd discovered years earlier. The last time I'd been there had been when I was fresh out of rehab and had sat for hours until I'd decided without a doubt I wouldn't allow myself to fall back down the rabbit hole that was my cocaine addiction. Because I'd left the house so early I didn't have to be at the studio for a few hours and once I reached my destination, I parked the car hoping the magical location would work wonders again where Sookie was concerned.

There was no way for me to not remember everything that had been going on in my life when I'd last been there, but the pain I'd felt then had lessened over time. I'd taken ownership of my drug addiction, placing the blame squarely where it belonged; with me, but the reason it began at all was my own secret. Both Pam and my father had just assumed it was because of the crowd I'd associated with back then, neither one of them privy to the real cause of my self-loathing; my unexpected meeting with my mother that had started it all.

She'd approached me on the street one day as I came out of my favorite café at the time. I was just an infant when she'd left so I only knew what she looked like from a picture of her that I'd found hidden in my father's things years earlier. It was difficult at first reconciling the woman that stood in front of me with the fresh faced young woman from the photograph happily standing next to my father on their wedding day. The years hadn't been kind to her, but I'd memorized her picture as a child, whenever my father wasn't home, trying to pick out any similarities in our features and knew from her eyes alone it was the same woman. They were the same eyes I saw whenever I looked into a mirror.

We sat and talked for hours that first day with her apologizing and trying to explain why she'd left us. According to her my father hadn't been the best husband, which was no real surprise, but what did shock me was her admitting to having a drug addiction before, during, and after she was pregnant with me. She wasn't sure whether or not my father knew about it and claimed she'd only 'fallen off the wagon' a few times while she was actually pregnant, but it got worse not long after I'd been born. She said her inner demons had gotten out of hand when I was only a few weeks old and the catalyst to her leaving had been when she'd gone out to get a quick fix while my father was at work. It wasn't until she stumbled back home hours later and found me crying in my crib that she'd realized she'd left me all alone for nearly the entire day. She ended up waiting until my father had come home and fallen asleep later on before taking off in the dead of night figuring I'd be better off with him.

My father rarely mentioned her at all to me growing up and I'd learned early on not to ask about her, so I had no idea if he'd known about her addiction. She'd told me she'd been clean for a few months and was trying to get on her feet again, but wanted me to know she *did* love me which was why she'd left.

I was doing pretty good financially by then and offered to help her out, wanting to make up for lost time and hoping to gain at least one loving parent in return. And I did, for a little while at least. I kept it a secret from everyone, knowing Pam and my father wouldn't be supportive of me allowing her into my life, and the paparazzi weren't interested in me back then, so I could go places in relative anonymity. I set her up in an apartment not far from where I lived and gave her

money to live on while she figured out what it was she wanted to do with her life. It was nice at first, getting together every Sunday and she'd tell me about herself and her life before me. She didn't talk about much of her life after me, but I figured it was too painful and didn't want to make her relive it by asking.

We were a few months in to our new relationship when I started noticing subtle changes whenever we would meet up. Nothing too drastic at first and I didn't think too much of it, refusing to believe anything was amiss, until she started calling me with '*emergencies*' where she needed extra cash. I'd been in denial for a while, giving her the money she'd asked for time and again, until I realized where it was actually going; up through her nose or through a vein directly into her bloodstream. I learned heroin was her drug of choice and no matter how much I begged her to stop, even offering to pay for her to go to rehab, it made no difference. *I* made no difference because in the end she chose heroin over me and when I stopped funding her habit she ran off again without a word. She didn't even bother leaving a letter behind.

The whole episode from start to end lasted less than six months, but the damage she caused to my self-image was long lasting. Inside I felt less than everyone else, not even good enough for my own mother to love, so I surrounded myself with people that fed my broken ego. I hadn't been any kind of teetotaler prior to meeting my mother, but where I'd been a happy drunk before her, after her I'd become a depressed drunk. My 'friends' didn't like the emo me and convinced me to give coke a try to give me a little boost. Boy did it ever and it wasn't long before I couldn't get through the day without it. I was just lucky no one had died in the car accident I'd been the cause of before finally getting the help I needed.

In my mind Sookie and my mother were both worlds apart, in both character and personality, and yet they were the same; both making me feel worthless and each one fleeing from me in their own way. The difference was Sookie hadn't completely run off yet and had also been capable of making me feel like I was the only man in the world for her. As far as I knew, I was also my mother's only child, so I didn't know how much weight I should give to that feeling.

*Talk about a mindfuck.*

So here I was again, knowing I needed to get a handle on whatever it was that was going on with Sookie and me before I went insane. There was no way I'd turn to drugs again, I'd learned my lesson the first time, but I was already in too deep with her, as far as I was concerned, to be able to shutdown my emotions completely. Oddly enough, I felt more for her than I had my own mother during our brief time together and I had to come to some sort of decision as to where my line in the sand would be because I couldn't stand being on the roller coaster for much longer. The highs were great when we were there, but the lows were becoming more and more unbearable for me.

I knew we should talk things out, but I'd probably have to tie her down in one spot just to make her stay in the same room long enough to hear me out. Even then, I couldn't *force* her to talk to me; she had to *want* to talk; *want* to work things out. As much as it pained me to admit, even to myself, I knew *I* wanted us to work out.

I got nowhere quick while sitting in my car looking out over the ocean and before I knew it I had to get to the studio. My earlier anger had abated until I pulled into the studio parking lot and realized I could vent my frustrations out on Compton. I stalked through the building, a man on a mission, until I ran into Alcide and he told me Bill wasn't there having left word he was 'sick'. He tried joking with me over Bill's broken balls, thanks to Sookie, but I wasn't in the mood to laugh so he pretty much left me alone after that. Pam texted me later that day asking if I'd told Sookie about dress shopping later on that evening and I texted back a 'yes', but left out anything else. I had no idea what Sookie's plans were for *anything*.

When I finally left the studio that night, I didn't want to arrive at the house at the same time as Pam knowing she'd be able to spot the tension between us and would demand an explanation. It was something Sookie and I needed to work out together without her Dear Abby helpful hints, so to kill some time I stopped at my new favorite café for a sandwich before heading home. As I walked down the sidewalk, passing various shops on my way back to my car, I came across a window display that held back to school supplies. One thing stood out from the rest, immediately making me think of Sookie, and I had to shake my head at my own stupidity when I threw the purchase into my trunk not knowing if I'd even get the chance to give it to her before I finally made my way home.

It was six-thirty when I pulled into the garage and saw what I'd quickly come to think of as Sookie's car, the Audi, parked where it normally was. Since Pam's car wasn't in the driveway I knew if she wasn't waiting inside she would be with her. I kind of wanted both to be true because while I did want us to get a chance to talk, I also wanted her to be out shopping for a dress for the following night; it meant she planned on actually going with me, so I was happy and sad to find the house empty.

I felt another pang in my chest when I'd gone upstairs to change and saw her pajamas from the night before lying on top in my hamper, but I pushed it aside and tried to keep myself from thinking about it too much. The only problem was I couldn't actually find anything to do. Somehow, in the span of five days, Sookie had wiped my memory clean of what I used to do around the house before she was a part of my life. I sat in the family room, not watching the TV I'd turned on, while the minutes dragged on forever. When eight o'clock came and went I started to get worried thinking something bad might have happened, but knew I was just being stupid. When nine o'clock came and went I started to wonder if maybe Sookie was staying out later than necessary purposefully avoiding me; surely it didn't take *that* long to pick up a dress.

When ten o'clock was nearing, I forced myself to go up to my room so she wouldn't feel forced to talk to me *if* and when she got home. No matter how much I wanted for us to find a way to make things work I wouldn't push my feelings onto her. It was bad enough she'd felt compelled to stay married to me for her Grandmother's sake so I shut my door behind me hoping she'd decide to open it by her own choosing.

Her scent permeated the sheets on my bed and I fought the desire to wrap myself in them knowing it wouldn't help ease my sorrow and kept myself upright sitting against the headboard. I heard her come up the stairs not long after and my hopes rose with every step she took closer to my door, but my heart sank again when I eventually heard her shut the door to her own room.

*No knock; no nothing; not one word.*

I sat there for another hour, not feeling sleepy in the least, and filled the time playing the 'what if' game. What if she was tired and that was why she didn't knock? What if she thought I was sleeping and that was why she didn't knock? What if she'd thought the night before was a mistake; a relationship was a mistake; I was the mistake?

I didn't remember leaving the bed, but I found myself standing at her open bedroom doorway, knob in hand, just the same. I watched as she fitfully tossed and turned in her sleep and, thanks to the brightness of the full moon shining through her bedroom window, I could see the dried tear tracks on her cheeks. I just wished I knew what caused them, but lacking that knowledge didn't seem to matter because all I wanted in that moment was to make it better; make *her* feel better. The only relevant question at the moment was; *could I?*

I walked towards the bed, carefully lifting the covers, and climbed in next to her pulling her body against my own and her fitfulness ceased. For a moment I'd thought my touch had awakened her, but her breathing remained slow and even. I don't know how much time had passed before sleep took me as well, but I savored every moment up until then not knowing what the morning would bring.

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## Chapter 44: Chapter 43

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### Chapter 43

#### SPOV

It was still dark outside when I woke the next morning and it took a minute before I realized I wasn't alone in the bed. Even knowing it could only have been Eric holding me from behind, I would've been able to tell just by my senses alone. As I pushed through the fog of sleep I wondered what he'd been thinking by climbing into bed with me in the middle of the night. I wanted to be angry at him for the way he'd treated me the morning before and a part of me still was; so why was it so damn hard for me to push him away?

I wanted answers; *needed* answers and I mentally prepared myself for the worst, while hoping for the best, when I attempted to remove myself from his GI Joe kung fu grip saying, "Eric!" far louder than I had the last time I found myself in this position. I could tell by the sharp intake of his breath I'd succeeded in waking him and his hold on me disappeared instantaneously which I immediately took advantage of, sitting upright and turning to face him as I asked, "What..."

*What are you doing in my bed? What were you thinking yesterday morning? What in the hell is wrong with you? What in the hell is wrong with ME that I can't bring myself to kick you off of the mattress with my feet?*

Each and every 'what' question I had were clogging up my throat in an effort to rain down on him like a Sookie Tsunami, but when I couldn't get any of them out Eric asked his own questions.

"Why did you run out of the bedroom yesterday morning after waking up? Do you regret what happened the night before?"

He had sat up in the bed as well, so we were face to face when the traffic jam in my throat cleared as I answered, "Huh?"

He stole not only my breath away every time I saw him, but apparently my brain cells as well.

"Are you avoiding the question?" he asked with no malice in his voice. If anything, he appeared hurt as he followed up with, "Sookie, I *need* to know what in the hell is going on. I can't keep going through this every day. If you regret what happened the other night I'd rather you just say so and we can go from there, but you avoiding it all by running away isn't going to work out. *We* won't work out; I won't be able to take it."

*Running away? What in the hell was he talking about?*

*Wait! He still wants US to work out?*

It was impossible for me to snap at him seeing the upset in his eyes and even more so after hearing he might not have wanted to discard me like the countless other women in his past, so I made sure my tone was softened and as gently as I could I asked, "What in the hell are you talking about?"

His eyes implored me to just answer the damn questions he'd asked so I did.

"I didn't regret *anything*, at least not until I came downstairs and you were all snippy. I wasn't *running away*, I had to *pee*."

Eric's eyebrow went up as his mouth fell open, like they were strung together on a pulley, but nothing came out at first. I could see the wheels spinning behind his eyes, more than likely applying my explanation to the scene from yesterday, when he finally said, "You didn't say that. You just said you had to get ready for work."

"Would it really have made that big of a difference? Why did you get so mad?"

I watched as he grabbed the pillow he'd been sleeping on and hugged it to his chest before admitting, "I thought you'd regretted everything and took off. I thought you would've at least acknowledged me in some way before leaving the room after what we'd shared the night before. I...it stung me a little."

Just looking at him I could tell it stung him more than just a little, but I'd been stung too and let him know it saying, "I thought perhaps you didn't find what had happened the night before as pleasant as your previous experiences and *that* was why you were so cold to me."



*It was the most polite way I could think of to say I didn't think he liked my hand job and I wondered if his jaw could unhinge at will given how far open his mouth was hanging.*

While I'd definitely been hurt by his actions the day before, I somehow instinctively felt he'd been worse off than me and pulled the pillow from his arms so I could climb into his lap, facing him with my legs straddled over his own. He seemed more than willing to make the trade and quickly settled his hands on my hips as I looked at him and said, "You were right when you said we wouldn't work out if we kept up with all of our self-made bullshit, so I want us to make a pact that from now on whenever one of us isn't sure about something between us we say something right then and there. No more assumptions."

He slowly smiled before admitting, "But I would have felt like such a pussy chasing after you to the bathroom asking why you didn't kiss me good morning."

My heart soared hearing him say he'd wanted a kiss, but before I gave him one a day late I said, "I would have thought it was sweet and a very masculine, manly thing to do. Besides, it would've been better than the assumptions we each made. You know what they say about assuming, don't you?"

I let my hands fall down his back and gave his ass a quick squeeze in jest, but Eric pulled me down harder in his lap while Nessie stirred beneath me as he said, "Then it's a good thing you like my ass."

Eric's hands were doing some of their own traveling due south of my hips and from the feel of it, he liked my ass just as much. I didn't want us to get too carried away, but it felt appropriate all the same when I looked back at him saying with a smile, "Good morning Eric." I had no idea what time it was and even though it was still dark out, I figured it was safe to make one final assumption it was the morning anyway. If not, I was sure it was morning somewhere in the world.

He smiled back at me, his wounded expression gone completely, as he replied, "Good morning Sookie."

Our lips met in the middle and I couldn't believe we'd wasted an entire day over yet another misunderstanding. I swore to myself I wouldn't let it happen again while we tried to repair the damage we'd inadvertently inflicted on ourselves with that kiss. I was a little surprised when Eric pulled back first, only to hug me to his chest even tighter and he buried his face into my neck, inhaling deeply, before admitting, "I like having you here." I was about to respond that I liked being there, but Eric interrupted my thoughts by saying, "Actually," before he stood up with me still in his arms as he carried me into his bedroom. Once we were situated in the middle of his bed with me still in his lap he reburied his face in my neck, making me giggle with his ticklish whiskers, and finished his statement with, "I like having you here more because there's more room, but as long as you're *here*," he punctuated the word by squeezing me in his embrace, "I'm good."

Tears pricked the corners of my eyes realizing he hadn't been talking about having me in his house, or even in his bed. He meant having me in his arms and I realized the same thing held true for me as well. I tightened my hold on him confessing, "Me too." I kissed the side of his neck and a minute or two later I had another confession to make when I said, "Eric?"

"Hmm?" He really seemed to like sniffing me a lot, but being so attuned to his scent myself, I couldn't throw stones knowing I'd probably be able to track him through the forest better than any bloodhound by now.

"I have to pee and if you hug me any tighter you should do so at your own risk."

I didn't realize how much I'd missed the sound of his laughter until I heard it again and made sure to give him a kiss so he wouldn't feel the need to chase me down as I scooted into his bathroom to take care of business. It was a lot bigger than mine and the tub looked more like a small pool, easily capable of fitting several Eric's inside, as would the shower. If and when we reached the point where shared bathing could occur I had a feeling it would become my favorite room in the house.

Eric made his own trip to the bathroom once I emerged and we both settled back underneath the covers of his bed when he was done. Our tried and true position of him spooning me from behind had worked out well for us in the past, but I found I also enjoyed lying with my head on his chest with him on his back. It made it so I could hear him in stereo through his mouth and chest when he spoke asking me, "How did your shopping trip go with Pam?"

"Ugh..." had been my initial response which I followed up with, "It took forever to find a dress we could both agree on. She has a slutty streak in her, but we ended up getting one without coming to blows."

"Was it *that* bad?" he snickered.

"Yes! And then I half thought about Spawning her when it came time to pay for it," I huffed. Pam was all bark and no bite, I was sure of it.

"Why? She didn't try to make you to pay for it did she?"

I lifted my head to see if he was joking, but he wasn't. "Why *wouldn't* I pay for it?" I asked.

It was odd that he could see my hackles rise in the darkness of the room, but I knew he had because he said, "Calm down. I know your stance on *gold digging* and I certainly don't think of you that way, but can you at least try and see my point before you blow your top?" My only response was silence and a raised eyebrow so he continued, "It was a purchase you wouldn't have had to make if it wasn't because of *me* so *I* should be the one to foot the bill." My head was already shaking my unspoken 'No', but he stopped it by asking, "Would you feel the same if you really considered yourself to be my wife?"

Shit. He actually had me there and he knew it. He smiled softly while running his fingers through my hair, calming me even more, and said, "You *are* my wife Sookie and I would feel bad knowing you were forking out your own money for things having to do with my obligations."

I almost congratulated him on the nicely played 'guilt' card, but just stuck my tongue out instead and put my head back down on his chest saying, "Well you can feel bad for Pam because *she* paid for it saying it was my wedding gift."

"Oh, then I don't feel bad at all considering she's billed me in the past for entire shoe collections claiming hers were damaged from either chasing me down or kicking my ass," he laughed.

I laughed along with him until the sun started rising in the sky outside of his window. I pulled myself on top of him and leaned down for a kiss that got much more heated than I'd planned before pulling back and saying, "I need to get ready for work."

"I know," he smiled. "It's the first day of school. Are you excited?"

My hoo-hah was much more excited seeing him lying underneath me, but I didn't feel the need to elaborate on who felt what and just replied with a generic, "Yes."

Apparently my hoo-hah wanted to answer for herself and she did by way of pressing down on the S.S. Northman from bow to stern. His growl didn't help matters even as his mouth warned, "You're playing with fire Mrs. Northman."

*I think I have just the thing to douse the flames Mr. Northman.*

"Uh huh..." My poor students were going leave at the end of the year having learned *nothing* more from me other than the fact their teacher was an idiot; a horny idiot.

I sincerely hoped it wouldn't come to that and for the sake of their sponge-like minds and my own sanity I removed myself from temptation by standing up and asking, "I'll see you downstairs?"

A small part of me was still raw from the day before, but Eric seemed to understand and got up himself, giving me a chaste kiss, and smiled replying, "Yes, with coffee minus the attitude."

It was exactly what I needed to hear and I smiled through my entire shower and all the way downstairs, but seeing what else Eric had waiting for me made me tear up all over again. Sitting on top of the counter was a brand new pink plastic lunchbox with all of the Disney princesses on the front and when I was finally able to take my eyes from it I saw Eric's uncertain expression at my unexpected emotional response. "Is it stupid?" he asked hesitantly. "I just thought of you when I saw it yesterday, but you don't have to use it if you don't want to."

I lost the battle with one or two tears slipping down my cheeks as I moved forward and wrapped my arms around his waist saying, "No it's not stupid. Thank you, I love it. We couldn't afford extra things like that when I was growing up, but I always secretly wanted one." I'd always been

envious of the kids that got a new everything every school year, but I tried to never let it get to me and was thankful for the food in my brown bagged lunch each day instead. It was something he couldn't possibly have known about me and his thoughtfulness left me overwhelmed.

Eric kissed the top of my head without commenting on my less than glamorous childhood and merely said, "I'm glad you like it."

We stayed that way for another minute before I pulled away, intent on packing my lunch in my new lunchbox, but when I opened it I saw Eric had already taken care of it for me. I looked up to see him, again appearing insecure, as he explained, "It's a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Do you like those?"

"Yes," I smiled. "Who doesn't?" The Master Wooer was making me woozy with all of his masterful wooing.

"Asks the girl that likes the way cherries *smell* but not their *taste*," he replied with a smile, looking a lot more confident.

"Whatever," I volleyed back, having no rational reason for my quirkiness but enjoying our bantering nonetheless, and hating the fact I had to leave soon.

Eric spooned me from behind as I sipped the cup of coffee he'd handed me and I regretted having lost out on a morning like this one the day before. He'd already said he couldn't keep going through that and truthfully, neither could I. We seemed to be a couple of asses, hell bent on assuming our relationship down the drain so I said, "Maybe we should have a safe word."

"Sookie," he asked in a much lower tone, "Is this your way of telling me you're kinky in the bedroom? I don't want to make any assumptions."

I could hear the smile I couldn't actually see on his face, due to our positions, but playfully chided him anyway responding, "No you perv! I meant if *something* came up where one of us might want to make an *assumption* and we weren't able to speak freely because there were other people around, we should have a word or phrase to let the other one know so it doesn't fester until we're alone."

Eric pressed himself against my back and repeated out loud what his body was already telling me. "*Something* is already coming up; feel free to *assume* what I'm thinking."

*Dear God; Please give me the strength to walk away from this man and actually go to work today. Amen.*

Nessie? Kraken? Unicorn? Those were the only words springing to mind at the moment, but I didn't want to explain my own depravity and instead said, "You're not helping."

He nuzzled the back of my head with his cheek saying, "Neither are you. Move your hips," he offered while gripping my hips and rubbing himself against my ass.

I had to laugh at his kitchen seduction so I wouldn't jump on him instead and gave him one swivel of my hips before pulling away saying, "There." I turned to face him seeing he was clearly amused (I had no doubt he was clearly aroused as well, but I refused to look down) and said, "If you think it's a dumb idea, we don't have to. We could just wait until we're alone."

Eric's brow furrowed, the amusement gone, as he responded, "Nothing about you is *dumb*." He thought for a moment before saying, "It would have to be something we could work into an actual conversation that wouldn't seem out of place, but nothing too common that we might actually say offhand. You know, like it would seem weird to say '*Release the Kraken*' out of the blue."

I came back downstairs a few minutes later after changing my shirt and leaving the other one soaking in the sink, hoping the coffee stains would come out, and wondered why Eric had put a straw in my coffee cup, but didn't ask because I needed to leave. "What time will you be home tonight?" I asked. Pam had said we would need to be there by 6:30, so if he came home at his normal 6 o'clock we'd be cutting it close.

"We only work Monday thru Thursday, so I'm off on Fridays. I'll be here when you get home."

*Home.*

It was weird to actually *feel* like Eric's house had become my home, but it did and hearing him call it my home warmed me from the inside out.

"What time *do* you get home?" he asked. "You're always already here when I get back."

"Today is actually a half-day for the students so the younger ones can adjust to being away from home for the first time, so I might get to leave a little early. Normally I get home around four." It was odd to feel so close to him and yet still not know the little things, like our work schedules, about each other. I knew all we needed was time and I was looking forward to learning every little thing about him he was willing to share with me.

Time itself was against me at the moment, so I grabbed my purse and keys, smiling when Eric handed me my new lunchbox and said again, "Thank you. You can be incredibly sweet when you want to be."

He swooped down laying the mother of all kisses on me before pulling back and placing one last kiss on my forehead saying, "Says the girl that actually tastes like cherries."

I would've responded, but once again, he'd drained me of both my breath and the last of my brain cells.

## Chapter 44

### EPOV

I had a sense of déjà vu watching Sookie driving away from the house on her way to work, but so much had changed between us in that small amount of time since I'd last watched the same scene. I knew it when I walked back into the kitchen and the house didn't seem as empty as it had a few days earlier. Somehow I could still feel her presence lingering within those four walls and wondered if it was because now it actually *felt* like this was her home too. The feelings she was capable of bringing out in me were intense, but worth it in the end if we could stay on track and not fall prey to our own stupidity.

Hearing her say why she'd run from the room made me feel like I'd run myself right into a brick wall. I'd been so sure in my quick assumptions of why she'd fled from me that I hadn't considered any other possibilities, so knowing it was all for nothing was like a smack in the face. I'd been through enough private and group therapy sessions while in rehab to know where my insecurities stemmed from, but it was unfair of me to have locked Sookie securely inside of my emotional baggage. I was just grateful I hadn't completely lost it and thrown away the metaphorical key before finding out the truth and vowed to myself I wouldn't let it happen again.

Once our issues had been resolved, everything that happened afterwards only left me in even more awe of her. Her words; her touches, every little thing she did or said was what I'd needed without me having to say a word. Most of the time I hadn't even known what it was that I'd needed until she'd already seen to it like when she'd replaced the pillow clutched in my arms with herself. I needed her embrace in that moment, more than any other, to the point of where I worried it was only her body wrapped around mine that was keeping me together. My need for her was growing fast and with an intensity that should have me running scared which I probably would if I didn't already know I was *more* frightened of the thought of not being with her. My assumptive reactions yesterday proved that point.

Thinking it over now, she should've been angry at me for the way I'd treated her, but she surprisingly wasn't. I also shouldn't have been surprised, but I was anyway, seeing her cry over a ten dollar pink plastic lunchbox like it was the best gift ever after having seen her disdainful face when offered her pick of diamond rings worth tens of thousands of dollars only a few days earlier.

*Maybe Sookie meant 'surprise' in Swahili? I should Google it.*

I ran upstairs to change so I could meet Tray at the gym and when I went back into the kitchen to grab a bottle of water, I noticed Sookie's coffee cup still sitting on the counter with the straw I'd stuck in it when she'd gone to change her shirt. I'd seen her drink from cups and glasses before with no problems, but her violent coughing fits seemed to hit her out of the blue at times and I made a mental note to stop somewhere and get her a reusable sports bottle to drink from hoping that would help since I wouldn't always be around with a straw in hand.

I got back home a little before noon with a bag full of sports bottles and a new travel coffee mug with a lid on it for her and left them on the kitchen counter before taking a shower. My mind had stayed on Sookie all morning long, filled with much better thoughts than the day before, and I wondered what she was doing. Seeing it was lunchtime I decided to make myself a peanut butter and jelly sandwich to eat thinking she might be eating hers at the same time and then had good a look around the kitchen searching for a toy mouse or ball of yarn I could play with afterwards for being the giant pussy I had turned into.

*No such luck. Maybe I could just bury my shit in the backyard and call it a day?*

I instinctively cupped my balls to reassure myself they were still there and headed into the family room to pass the time in front of the TV until Sookie got home. I settled on watching my favorite program on Animal Planet and it gave me an idea on something I could do with Sookie over the weekend. I searched the internet with that goal in mind and after finding what I was looking for I then learned 'surprise' in Swahili was actually 'mshangao' with 'Sookie' meaning 'Sookie' in every language I could think to try. I pondered over using 'mshangao' as our safe word while switching over to my bank's website where I ordered a credit card in her name, adding her as an authorized user. I had a feeling she would balk when I gave it to her, but she hadn't fought with my earlier logic when it came to her having to buy things like dresses for events I had to go to and considered that as an unspoken agreement. I was a bit too happy typing 'Sookie Northman' into the name block, but didn't really care since no one was around to see the grin on my face and I could clearly see I was still typing with *fingers* and not furry *paws*, so my feline transformation hadn't fully progressed.

When that was taken care of I laid down on the couch, fully engrossed in the show, and didn't realize I'd fallen asleep until I woke up a few hours later and found Sookie asleep on top of me. My arms were already wrapped around her waist, so my subconscious self knew she was there and now that I was awake Eric Junior knew she was there too. Before her I'd never been the touchy feely type unless fucking was involved, but now I couldn't seem to *not* touch her if she was within my reach. I still wanted to fuck her though, but I had a feeling it would mean much more than that when it finally happened. Again. And we could remember it.

Using one hand to sweep the hair from her face, the other slowly trailed up and down her back as I watched her sleep. I probably shouldn't think watching her doing something so subdued as sleeping was as fascinating as I did, but...well, I did.

*Maybe they had a Sookie Addiction program at the rehab facility I could look into.*

I shrugged off my own thoughts knowing I wouldn't sign up for it if they did; I was thoroughly enjoying my Sookie addiction. Glancing at the clock I saw it was just after four o'clock, so I figured she must have gotten home early to have already fallen asleep. Instead of being upset over losing out on spending that time with her, by sleeping through it, I was content in the fact she'd felt comfortable enough to crawl on top of me and go to sleep herself. It seemed a very couple-y thing to do and reinforced to me our relationship was back on track.

Knowing Sookie would probably want to wake up soon since we had to leave in a couple of hours and I had no idea of how long she would think she'd need to get ready (women were weird about that kind of stuff) I applied a little more pressure with my hand trailing back down her back whispering, "Sookie," before letting it come to a stop on her ass and giving it a gentle squeeze.

*That's a couple-y thing to do, right?*

It seemed to do the trick because she started stirring on top of me, moaning softly, which made me anything but soft. Her eyes fluttered open and without lifting her head she said, "Honey, I'm home."

"So I see," I chuckled. "And *feel*," I added, grabbing her ass with both hands while my dick tried to impress upon her just how happy he was too now that she was home.

She stirred some more, putting a lot more intent into her movements, and pleasing one part of my anatomy very much, smirking up at me and saying, "Mhmm...I'm *feeling* something too." She yawned asking, "So I *wasn't* too presumptuous by taking advantage of your sleeping body and crawling on top of it without asking?"

"Not at all," I replied while coaxing her to slide further up my body because her lips were much too far away for my liking. When I finally had them where I wanted them (well, at least *one* of the places I wanted them), I brushed them with my own suggesting, "It also wouldn't have been presumptuous of you crawl on top of me naked. You know, just in case you were wondering."

Sookie's eyes filled with amusement as she smiled and was able to get out a quick, "Perv..." before I effectively cutoff the 'ert' I was sure would have followed by seizing her mouth with my own. I'd kissed her plenty of times by then, but it could never be enough for my liking. She seemed to like it just as much as me, pressing her body down on mine, but when she finally pulled back I pulled myself up like I was tethered to her, wrapping my arms around her so I could get one last inhale of her skin before she could get away.

She was definitely addictive.

"I need to get ready soon," she sighed and I smiled against her neck feeling the shiver work its way through her body from the nip I'd given the skin just underneath her ear.

"It's considered fashionable to be late," I said while working my way across her collarbone to see if she had a matching 'shiver spot' on the other side.

She did.

Sookie hugged me tighter, making me think we might just miss the premier altogether, but then she released me and pushed her way up until she was finally standing. I knew I was pouting, but it wasn't fair so pouting was clearly called for.



*Just ask Eric Junior.*

She smiled ruefully and said, "I'm not the *fashionable* type; just ask Pam." Leaning down, she placed her hands on top of mine, as if she could keep them from grabbing her, and kissed my lips saying, "I'll be back down in a bit." I let her go, knowing I actually *did* have to attend the party and didn't mind watching her walking away for once. It had to do with the sway of her hips and the fit of her pants over her perfect ass though, so as soon as it was no longer in view I went back to pouting.

Being a guy I could get ready to go in under ten minutes, but figured Junior and I could use a little bonding time in the shower since I doubted Sookie would be willing to give me a repeat performance right about now. How she could have possibly thought her performance was lacking in any way was beyond me; I left the evidence of just how much I'd enjoyed it in her hand. Her touch was the only one I'd ever truly craved, both sexual and otherwise, and I knew it would only get better from here.

I was back downstairs dressed and ready to go in my black Armani suit, but I held off on picking out a tie thinking I should probably match Sookie, when she came into the room looking more beautiful than I could have imagined. The black silk hugged just underneath her breasts with the skirt flaring out just above her knees, dotted with white circles all over the fabric, and she spun around asking, "Do I look okay?"

Junior tried to answer her first, but our sentiment was the same when I smiled saying, "No, you don't look *okay*...you're stunning."

And she was, along with the blush that bloomed on her skin while she said, "You clean up pretty good yourself." I was seriously considering skipping the premier hoping to convince her we could stay home and get dirty together, but she brought me back to reality asking, "Shouldn't we get going?"

The limo driver rang the doorbell a second later, so I set my fantasies aside and ran upstairs grabbing a black tie to wear and we were on our way not long after. Riding in the back of the limo together to the ArcLight Cinemas, where the red carpet screening would take place before the after party at Boulevard3, was a very different experience than when we'd ridden back from Las Vegas together a week earlier. Gone was the anger and resentment having been replaced with hand holding and Sookie's nervous smile. I tried to ask how her day had gone, but could only get a "Fine" out of her in response while her knees bounced and her hand sweated into mine. When the limo pulled up to where the red carpet began, Sookie looked like she was about to hyperventilate and I recalled her previous reaction to the crowd in the casino lobby, so I did the only thing I could think of to distract her; I kissed her.

I kept it PG, not wanting to mess up her makeup, and when I felt her body relax against me I knew it had worked, so as the driver opened the door for us I looked at her and said, "You'll do fine." Her eyes were full of disbelief, but her smile was genuine and I stepped out onto the sidewalk pulling her along with me. I kept my arm around Sookie's waist as we slowly made our way to the front doors, stopping and posing for pictures and quick interviews along the way, and

Sookie looked every bit the confident woman I knew she was inside. The only hiccup was when I had to let her go and pose with Bill, along with the rest of the ensemble cast, but he made sure to stay on the opposite end from me. He only had a temporary reprieve as far as I was concerned.

Once we were inside Sookie agreed, "It wasn't *that* bad," wrinkling her nose as she said it, that it had in fact been *that* bad to her, but I just laughed and kissed her lightly assuring her those kinds of events were few and far between. The screening went by quickly and we were then whisked off to Boulevard3 for the after party. I introduced Sookie to everyone that came up to us and I watched the producers appraising her with a smile as she charmed them all with her polite demeanor. I'd left her with Pam when I went to the bar to get us something to drink, requesting a straw for Sookie's coke, and as I waited I turned with my eyes automatically seeking her out. I found her right where I'd left her only now it wasn't Pam standing at her side, but Alcide. From the way they were laughing and joking they appeared closer than I'd felt comfortable with and I could feel my inner green beast rising, but I kept it in check until I was heading back towards them and saw Alcide lean down, whispering something in her ear causing her to blush with a smile. Then she kissed him. She only gave him a peck on his cheek, but that coupled with what I'd witnessed leading up to it were too much to keep the beast in me restrained and I marched up to them, looking down at her demanding, "Mshangao!"

"What?" she asked smiling.

Alcide looked just as confused as her for a moment, but then he adopted an 'Oh shit' face and before I could say another word a pair of hands covered my eyes from behind and I cringed recognizing the voice as I heard, "Surprise!"

Yvetta.

Her hands disappeared and her lips were on mine before I could do anything about it, but I pulled away quickly asking, "What are you doing here Yvetta?" A sideways glance at Sookie told me she was *not* happy and I hoped like hell she didn't recognize her from the poster-turned-confetti.

Yvetta moved her hand from my arm to my chest slowly trailing down saying, "I got your message about wanting to *get together* and thought I would surprise you."

Her hand was dangerously low on my body when Sookie spoke up saying, "That's my Kraken!"

If the situation had been any other I would've laughed at Sookie getting the phrase wrong. She'd fallen asleep before getting to that part of the movie and was probably already into her coughing fit when I'd said it that morning, but I got the hint anyway and pushed Yvetta's hand away as I said to her, "I sent you that text over a month ago." I'd forgotten all about it.

"I know," she smiled seductively, "but I was on holiday. I went back home to Estonia and traveled some before coming back."

"Did you visit the Grand Canyon?" Sookie asked.

Yvetta gave her look sizing her up and knowing how freely Sookie's hands tended to fly away from her I kept us from making a scene by pulling her close and saying, "Things have changed. Yvetta, this is *my wife*, Sookie. Sookie, this is Yvetta, my...?" What do you call someone you only ever had sex with? She never meant anything to me; even calling her a friend seemed to give her too much standing in my life.

"Fuck buddy?" Sookie asked.

Yvetta's eyes glinted dangerously at Sookie, but I knew *she* was actually the one in danger here; in danger of losing her teeth. I didn't care what happened to her, but I let out a quick, "*Former* fuck buddy," in the hopes that would help.

It only seemed to spur Yvetta on because she scoffed asking, "You mean to tell me that you'd want *her over me*? I give it six weeks and you'll be between my thighs again."

Sookie placed her body in front of mine, not giving me the chance to respond, saying, "*Trust me* when I say that he *wants* me over any of his former *tramps* and I'll fight to keep him. But if things don't work out between us I'll be sure to give him a parting gift of a harness and a bungee cord so he can find his way back out of the gaping hole between those thighs of yours."

I was sure lunging and hair pulling were only seconds away and grabbed onto Sookie, spinning us so my body was in between them, as Alcide grabbed Yvetta saying, "Time to go," as he dragged her away.

For someone who blushes a lot Sookie was muttering a string of curse words that turned *my* face red and I was worried over how big of a setback our little run in would cause while mentally tallying the list I was certain she'd demand from me of anyone else she might come across. When her breathing calmed I turned her so we were face to face and said, "I'm really *really* sorry." I really really was.

Instead of lashing out at me like I'd expected, she smiled and leaned up placing a kiss on my lips before saying, "It's alright. We both have histories. It's just that mine is a normal one that spans twenty-five years and yours spans the lifetime of someone who's lived for a thousand."

*Well color me Mshangao.*

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## Chapter 46: Chapter 45

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### Chapter 45

#### SPOV

After our run in with Kiki Cums-A-Lot the rest of the night went smoothly. Eric was very attentive towards me, never leaving my side, and even escorted me to the ladies room waiting

patiently for me to return to him. I wondered if it was because there were other women there he was afraid I'd be confronted by, but I was ready for them and kept reassuring him I was okay whenever I could see the remorse from our earlier encounter filter across his face.

I *was* okay. I knew he had a past and I certainly couldn't hold it against him. If anything I should send out thank you cards to all of them because I was going to be reaping the benefits of whatever he'd learned from them. His kisses were enough to nearly bring me over the edge, so I could only imagine what lay in store for me in the future. A future I was more and more confident we were going to have together.

We never really had a chance to talk with so many people vying for his attention so it wasn't until we were finally home that I was able to ask, "What did you say when you walked up to me and Alcide? Mah-something?"

"Oh...uh mshangao," he mumbled seemingly embarrassed. "It means 'surprise' in Swahili."

"You speak Swahili?" I asked. Talk about being mshangao'd.

"Not much," he answered, still looking uncomfortable, and changed the subject by asking, "Why did you kiss Alcide?"

I'd forgotten all about our conversation, but by the way Eric was looking at me I could tell it had bothered him. He appeared to have a jealous streak similar to my own, if I was honest, so I walked over and wrapped my arms around his waist saying, "He apologized for what he'd said about me outside of the casino that made you punch him." That didn't seem to appease Eric enough so I continued with the rest and said, "He said he'd had his doubts at first about our little charade working out, but after spending time seeing us together he's changed his mind. He said we were good together; that you're different now, happier. I told him we'd decided to give our relationship a shot and he said I was good for you and he was glad we were actually going to make a go of it."

Eric looked just as surprised as I had been learning he spoke Swahili, but he eventually shook it off with nothing more than an, "Oh," as the tension left his body. I couldn't stop the yawn from leaving my throat and my eyes watered as our early morning conversation that had eaten into my nighttime rest caught up with me. "Tired?" he asked as his hands moved to massage my shoulders.

"Mhmm..." I replied, turning to jelly underneath his fingertips.

"Come on then," he said, taking my hand in his and pulling me towards the stairs. "Let's go to bed."

*Bed? Whose bed? Our own beds separately or one bed together?*

Suddenly I wasn't as tired as I was a moment ago and when my feet stopped moving, so did Eric's by default. I *wanted* him in the most carnal sense of the word and while I'd enjoyed the

moments of intimacy we'd shared, I still didn't think we were ready to take that next step, but I knew Wicked and Immoral would override all higher brain functions if I didn't say it now while we were still fully clothed. Hell, we didn't even know each other's work schedules until this morning. He seemed to understand my as yet unspoken thoughts because he turned to face me and trailed his fingers down the side of my face saying, "I think you already *know* that I want you in *every* way, but *I* know you're still not ready. I would still prefer it if you'd consider sleeping with me though, *just sleeping*. I like falling asleep next to you and I like it even more waking up with you."

*Would he take it the wrong way if I asked him to tie up Wicked and Immoral? Because they seemed to have a mind of their own.*

I had to admit I did seem to sleep better whenever I was next to him so while I mentally gave my wayward hands a stern lecture on appropriate behavior, I agreed, "Okay, but we're *just* sleeping."

His smile was infectious and after changing into pajamas and washing my face I met him in the middle of his mattress where his body instantly curled around my own. The kiss goodnight he gifted me with would never make its way into any Disney film, but it left me feeling like a princess who'd finally found her prince just the same. He even drove a little red Corvette.

I woke up the next morning feeling very well rested with a very excited Eric lying next to me, in more ways than one. His body was physically thrumming next to mine and when I turned around to face him his face lit up with a smile as he said, "You're awake!" and then proceeded to steal all of the air from my lungs with a kiss.

When he finally let me breathe I said, "You weren't kidding about liking waking up next to me, huh?"

"No, I wasn't," he growled as he covered my body with his own. His *hard* body; *hard*.

My mind was flashing red lights as voices rang out in my head shouting, '*Alert! Alert! DEFCON 5 is in effect! Containment breach will occur in 5, 4, 3,...*' while Wicked and Immoral turned into traitorous double agents looking for any way to help the enemy invasion along.

"Did you have any plans for today?" he asked, his voice pausing my internal countdown.

*Bringing my hands up on charges of treason?*

It took a minute for my mind to clear enough to answer, "Not really. I should probably go to the store to pick up some groceries."

His brow furrowed as he jokingly chastised me saying, "What is this '*I*' nonsense I'm hearing? You meant *we* should go to the store, right? Who would get the hot sauce for you if I wasn't there?"

Was there such a thing as *too* cute? If so, Eric's picture should be next to the definition in Wikipedia, but I smiled hearing he wanted to come with me and agreed, "Yes, I meant *we* should go shopping. Why? Did you have something else in mind?"

I was prepared for a full on frontal assault based on his morning wakeup call, so I was surprised when he jumped out of bed saying, "Yep! And it's a surprise, so go get dressed and we can go. Wear jeans and bring a sweater."

I couldn't help smiling over how excited he was and my curiosity was piqued, so I did just that and we were on our way to wherever not long after. Eric insisted we stop for a quick breakfast and coffee at his favorite place to go for those kinds of things, Joan's On Third. While the food and coffee were good, my only thought was at least Pam couldn't say we weren't pictured together over the weekend. There hadn't been nearly as many cameramen waiting outside the gate as there had been a week ago, but there were enough lingering around Joan's snapping away as Eric and I came and went holding hands. I no longer questioned whether or not he was doing it for show; I knew he was holding my hand because he wanted to and that thought made the smile on my face genuine.

Eric wouldn't give me any hints on our way there and when I saw we were taking the exit for Long Beach, off the highway, I was even more confused since he hadn't told me to bring a bathing suit, but I finally figured it out when he parked at the marina.

"We're going whale watching?" I asked with surprise.

"Yes!" he answered with a big smile. "Have you ever gone before?"

I couldn't help smiling seeing Eric bouncing in his seat and replied, "No, I haven't."

My answer seemed to please him and he got out of the car coming around to my side and helping me out. "You don't get seasick do you?" he asked as we made our way to the line of tourists waiting to board the boat.

"I guess we'll see. I've never been out in the ocean before." I *hoped* I wouldn't get seasick for nothing more than the fact it would ruin Eric's fun because I'd never seen him so excited. We boarded the ship fairly quickly and Eric stopped to take pictures with a few fans and signed autographs, but other than a couple of teenage girls mooning over him from afar we were pretty much left alone by everyone. When we were finally on our way the ship's captain came on the loudspeaker pointing out the permanently docked Queen Mary and said he hoped we all enjoyed our three hour tour which left me in a fit of giggles.

"What's so funny?" Eric asked.

I could barely breathe from laughing so hard before I could choke out, "If we get shipwrecked on Gilligan's Island *you'll* be *Ginger!*"

He tried not to laugh, but lost his stern expression as he jokingly huffed, "I'm nothing like Caraway."

"Nice," I complimented him. "For someone who doesn't cook you sure know a lot of spice names."

He looked a little chagrined as he admitted, "Well, I *may* have watched the Food Network for a few minutes yesterday afternoon and got some new ones."

I smiled saying, "Well I'll make up some flash cards and we can practice before we have to see them again."

Eric no longer looked amused when he said, "I guess I forgot to tell you. I fired my father on Tuesday so I don't think we'll be seeing them anymore."

I couldn't help feeling relieved, but at the same time I felt bad knowing it must have been difficult for Eric to alienate his own father, no matter *how* big of a douche bag he was and grabbed onto his hand saying, "I'm sorry. What happened?"

He squeezed my hand before looking back over the open ocean replying, "It was long overdue. Pam had been doing his job for years anyway. Now she's just doing it in an official capacity."

I was curious if there was more to the story, but didn't want to pry seeing that it still bothered him so I changed the subject asking, "What gave you the idea to go whale watching today? Is it something you do often?" It wasn't something I would've ever guessed about him being interested in.

His shoulders relaxed some with our new topic as he said, "I haven't been in a while, but I've been interested in whales since I was a young boy. I got the idea to come today watching 'Whale Wars' on Animal Planet yesterday."

I was soaking up all of this new information about Eric like a sponge and I wanted to know more so I asked, "What got you interested in them?"

He didn't answer at first and kept his eyes on the ocean for a few minutes before taking a deep breath and saying, "I didn't really go to school since I worked so much and had tutors on the set instead. I had just seen the movie 'Top Gun' and being a young boy I was all gung ho wanting to be a fighter jet pilot when I grew up. One of my tutors had overheard me telling my father about it which he promptly shot down telling me it was a stupid idea and I shouldn't waste my time over wanting something that would never be. The next day she gave me a book called 'The Whales' Song' and while I wasn't much of a reader at the time, the illustrations kept my attention and eventually the story itself got through to me what she wanted me to know. I read it every night before going to sleep for months until I had it memorized, but it got lost when we moved a couple of years later."

My heart ached for him as I asked, "What was the story about?"

Eric proceeded to tell me about a girl named Lilly who lived with her grandmother. The grandmother told her if she left a perfect gift like a sea shell or beautiful stone for the whales, and they liked you, they would give you a gift in return. Her uncle told the grandmother to stop filling her head with nonsense and how whales are meant to be used for practical reasons like their meat, blubber, and bones, and that she shouldn't be dreaming her life away. Lilly chose to believe her grandmother's tale and she dropped a yellow flower into the ocean for the whales telling them it was for them. She sat on a rock at the shoreline waiting and eventually they gave her a gift of their song. He ended by saying, "I guess the underlying message was to follow your dreams and not listen to those who want to beat you down."

I was grateful he hadn't been looking at me when he spoke because I didn't want him to see the tears that had filled my eyes as he told me the story, but it was a lost cause when he whispered, "I used to pick a flower from our neighbor's garden at night, after my father was asleep, and leave it on my bedroom windowsill hoping my mother would come back."

"Oh Eric," I cried wrapping my arms around his waist. In that moment I wanted nothing more than to take away every bad memory and experience he'd ever had, but as it turned out *he* was the one trying to console *me*.

He hugged me tight and kissed the top of my head saying, "It's okay Sookie, really. They *were* just silly dreams. I'm over it."

I knew we were attracting attention from my emotional outburst so we simply stayed in our silent but comforting embrace for the remainder of the trip. I was glad he'd warned me to bring a sweater because the ocean air made me shiver, but Eric never let go of me and we kept each other warm with our combined body heat. I'd calmed down considerably by the time we were headed back to the dock at Long Beach, but I was still in a melancholy mood when the captain came back on the loudspeaker saying, "Well we didn't see any whales today, but we did see some dolphins, sea lions and great bird activity."

In an attempt to cheer me up Eric laughed and hugged me tighter saying, "Isn't that great Sookie?" He released my waist with one arm pointing skyward and said, "Look! More bird activity!"

My melancholy mood was sufficiently snuffed out as I giggled at his over the top enthusiasm over seeing seagulls flying overhead and was replaced with some excitement of my own as I thought of my own surprise for Eric thinking he could use some wooing himself.

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## Chapter 47: Chapter 46

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### Chapter 46

**EPOV**



As the boat continued to move through the water with nothing more interesting to see than waiting for one of the seagulls flying overhead to shit on an unsuspecting tourist, I was grateful Sookie hadn't asked me anything more about my mother. Thinking of her again a couple of days earlier, when Sookie and I were in the middle of our assumptions, left me a little raw and I'd completely forgotten about the flowers I would gather every so often, to leave on my windowsill as a child, until the words were coming out of my mouth. I'd never told anyone about it, not even my therapists, because it had always felt a little *too* personal. It left me *too* vulnerable, but I didn't regret sharing it with Sookie and knew it was probably just a matter of time before she knew the whole story. I'd been wondering myself over the story of what happened to her parents, for her to have been raised by her Grandmother, but knowing it was a conversation that could segue into my own childhood, I was still biding my time. Everything was so great when we were together and happy that I didn't want to spoil our moods with sad tales. We could save those for another day.

Sookie seemed to perk up once we got back to the marina and as soon as we were headed back towards home she started texting someone on her cell. Her smile got wider the more she texted back and forth with whomever it was and I kept quiet until I couldn't take it anymore asking, "Who are you texting?"

"Nunya," she replied with a smile.

I smirked back at her saying, "I happen to know Nunya Bidness *very* well, *so* well in fact that I get to just call them 'Nun'." I wouldn't *demand* she tell me, but it would eat me alive if she didn't.

She must have had x-ray eyes and could see my internal organs being chomped to bits because she put her phone back into her purse and placed her hand in mine saying, "It's a surprise, so you'll just have to suffer until the big reveal."

Surprise? All that did was make me even *more* curious as to what she was planning, but I let it go and we spent the rest of the ride with Sookie scrolling through my iPod picking out songs to play. She was miffed (her word) there were no Prince songs on it and I made a mental note to hide it from her when we got home so I wouldn't be subjected to hearing his purple paisley voice anytime soon.

It was close to four o'clock by the time we pulled into the parking lot at Bristol Farms and, as always, there were a few paparazzi hanging around. Sookie didn't seem as bothered by it as she had been the last time we'd gone there and it made me feel better seeing her assimilate into the weirdness that was my life. It no longer seemed like a chore or burden to her, but more of a price she was willing to pay to be by my side. I couldn't help thinking she was the first person in my life to have wanted nothing more from me than just...me. It felt good.

Sookie smiled when I grabbed a shopping cart inside of the store, having learned my lesson the last time, and we strolled through the aisles side by side picking up whatever she thought we needed. I really didn't care; all I needed was walking right next to me. We were halfway through the meat department with me biting back the urge to tell Sookie she was more than welcome to

check out *my* meat when she turned to me asking, "How about we barbeque some burgers tonight on the grill? I could make potato salad and we can make s'mores for dessert."

"Sure," I smiled. I'd never had s'mores, but I'd always wanted to try them as a kid.

She looked back at me skeptically asking, "Do you know how to work the grill? I noticed it was a gas grill, but we only ever had charcoal ones growing up so I don't know how to get it started."

"Absolutely," I replied. I mean I'd never actually *tried* to use a grill before, but how hard could it be? Men had been cooking with fire since the dawn of time so I figured it would just be an innate ability that came with the Y chromosome, like pissing while standing up.

*My woman want meat cooked on fire. Me make fire for my woman.*

My inner caveman thumped his chest as *my woman* turned back to the hamburger meat in the display case and I later had to force myself to keep my cool at the register when she refused to let me pay for anything. My inner caveman didn't feel right letting her pay for *any* of it, much less *all* of it, but I was learning to choose my battles and it wasn't something I was willing to let spoil our perfect day together. I'd just have to figure out a way to get her to see reason like I had with dress shopping. And since dragging her by her hair would probably hurt, I'd also have to figure out a way to get her to let me throw her over my shoulder so I could carry her back to our lair where I would make a different kind of fire using my own meat.

We hadn't bought nearly as much as we had the first time we'd gone shopping, so it all fit into the trunk of the Corvette and we were back home within ten minutes. After Sookie had changed into a pair of shorts I sat down to watch her make the potato salad, but she booted me out of the kitchen claiming she had a phone call to make concerning my surprise. I half thought about trying to eavesdrop on her conversation, but I could see how excited she was and didn't want to spoil it for her. I had no idea what she could possibly have in mind, but just the fact she wanted to do anything at all for me was already enough of a surprise. I'd never had anyone go through the trouble to do something special for me for no reason so I knew I'd like it no matter what. Even if it was tickets to go see Prince in concert; I'd just bring my Prince-free iPod to listen to.

I went outside to eliminate any temptation to stay in or around the kitchen, both visual and verbal temptation, and took a good look at the built-in grill. It came with the house and I'd never looked twice at it, but I knew part of the cleaning service I'd cancelled per Sookie's request was to keep it maintained. Lifting the lid I peered inside and saw it looked brand new, so at least I had that in my favor. I was busy looking at the numerous knobs and dials and didn't notice Sookie had come outside until I heard her voice saying, "The burgers are ready whenever you want to fire it up."

"Um...okay," I replied still not having one fucking clue how to start the damn thing. I'd noticed an igniter button and turned every dial up high, but after pushing it a bunch of fucking times, while Sookie watched, nothing happened. "It hasn't been fired up in a while," I explained, adding *ever* mentally. Looking around the grill I saw the propane tank attached at the back had a valve on top. When I turned it counterclockwise I heard a hissing sound and figured that was the problem, but when I pushed the igniter button, nothing happened again. I figured there was

something wrong with the switch so I shut the lid so the gas wouldn't escape and went inside grabbing a book of matches while Sookie grabbed the plate of burgers she'd prepared and we went back outside together.

I was just thankful Sookie had been waiting by the patio table instead of next to the grill because when I lit the match and threw it under the lid I'd barely lifted, the flames shot out like I'd been face to face with a very pissed off Godzilla himself. I didn't know who screamed louder, me or Sookie, but I'd luckily been standing to the side and managed to duck in time. Once I got the dials turned down to a manageable level I turned to Sookie and smiled innocently saying, "Ready!"

Sookie had been mumbling something about shepherds and Maddea, but she shook it off and handed me the plate before going back inside to get the grill utensils. Once the burgers were on the grill, I stood watch not sure what exactly I was watching for, but I was pretty sure you were supposed to watch them and when I didn't turn into a pillar of flames, Sookie felt comfortable enough to stand next to me.

I flipped them when she'd said to and was quite proud of myself when I managed to do it without fucking them up and added grilling expertise underneath Pop Tart chef in my mental list of culinary attributes. It was something I'd never given thought to or imagined I'd be doing, but there I was hovering next to an open flame cooking our dinner. We were like a normal married couple; I liked it.

Since the weather was still warm Sookie suggested going for a swim after dinner which I readily agreed to knowing I'd get to see her in a bikini again, so we took turns changing into our bathing suits while the other one watched the burgers. I'd gone first, so I was busy watching the burgers, taking my watch duty very seriously, when she'd come back outside and asked, "What would you like to drink?"

I figured a beer was called for since I was grilling, but when I turned to answer her nothing more than a "Buh" came out. She was wearing nothing more than her bikini top and a pair of those short shorts I'd loved from day one.

"What?" she asked. I had no idea of what her facial expression was, but I was almost certain her breasts were beckoning me forward. Definitely; they were beckoning.

*It would be rude to deny them.*

My feet moved towards her and I heard her say, "Eric? What did you want to drink?"

My one track mind replied, "Breasts," as I got closer to her.

The "Eric Northman!" she followed up with halted my steps and I finally tore my eyes away from her chest to see her flushed face. She didn't look mad, more like she was torn, but before I could read into anything and pounce on her she smirked asking, "Do I need to put a shirt on?"

"Noooo..." That would be like covering the Mona Lisa with a poster of Justin Bieber; totally unacceptable.

"Then go back to the grill," she shooed me away with her hands. I almost remarked I'd spent enough alone time with my meat, but held it in and instead did as I was told.

*We were definitely like a normal married couple.*

I just figured I would wait until we were in the pool to make my move and after we were done eating dinner, Sookie got started on making the s'mores. They tasted out of this world, but the moans she made while eating her own were testing what little restraint I had left after being subjected to watching her eat in nothing more than the equivalent of a bra. I was painfully hard when she started sucking her fingers clean uttering, "I'm all sticky." I must have unconsciously groaned because she asked, "Are you okay?"

"You're killing me," I sighed. It was the truth because I'd looked it up; you *could* die from deep vein thrombosis. I was one clot away from dying of a permaboner.

"Me?" she asked shocked, seemingly unaware of the permanent tent in my shorts. "What did I do?"

Really? Not to brag or anything, but I was sporting a mast in my shorts that would rival the Black Pearl's and I sat back and gave her a pointed look down where the skull and crossbones flag should be flying before looking back up to her as I replied, "*That* is what you're doing."

"Buh," she said with her eyes transfixed to my sail. I didn't think she was requesting a beer so I slid over to the chaise lounge where she was sitting and leaned my body forward over her own until she had no choice but to lie back.

"Buh?" I asked. Her only response was to wrap her legs around my hips which I took as an unspoken 'All aboard' and seeing a small bit of chocolate on the corner of her mouth I leaned down saying, "You have a little something on your mouth. Allow me..."

I traced her lips with my tongue licking away every trace of chocolate and marshmallow to be found until I had no choice but to make sure the inside of her mouth was just as clean.

*What can I say? I like to be thorough.*

Her tongue seemed just as eager to return the favor as her hands snuck under the hem of my shirt to rake up and down my back. It turned me on even more and I wondered just how far we were taking this because surely there was already a clot working its way from my dick towards my heart. Thinking if I was gonna go, I was gonna go big, so I began kissing my way down her chest towards my twin tormenters. Sookie's back arched as I lightly bit down on the hardened peak through her bikini top and she moaned in approval. It seemed there was nothing wrong with *her* igniter button, but I moved over to her other breast just to be sure.

*After all, I was still being thorough.*

When the scruff of my whiskers caught on her bikini top, neither one of us did anything to stop them as they pulled the triangle piece of fabric to the side as my lips moved towards their goal. I stopped long enough to appreciate the sight of her bare breast before me, tracing her tan line with my tongue before covering her nipple with my lips and bathing it with my tongue like a cat cleaning its fur.

*Finally, a reason I could embrace being a pussy.*

Sookie was doing some embracing of her own by way of fisting one hand into my hair to hold my head, where it had no intention of leaving any time soon, while her other one pulled at my shirt. I couldn't tell if she was trying to rip it off of me or pull it up over my head, but she definitely wanted it off one way or another so I obliged her by sitting up far enough so she could slip it over my head.

"Aren't we going swimming?" she asked, completely flustered because it hadn't occurred to her to fix her askew bikini top and the sight of her naked breast still glistening with my saliva was like a homing beacon to my mouth.

My lips were already moving towards her still covered breast in my quest for symmetry, but I altered my route with her question and spoke against her skin saying, "Sure. Let me help you get out of those shorts first."

I left a wet trail down her abdomen, like dropping breadcrumbs so I could find my way back, and pulled the button on her shorts open with my teeth. The zipper came down with nothing more than a tug and since Sookie hadn't done or said anything to stop me I tested the waters by trailing my tongue up her thigh, over the denim, and lightly scraped my teeth over where the 'X' marked the spot on my mental treasure map where I knew the booty was buried. Her hands dove back into my hair as her hips bucked up in response while she hissed, "Who's killing who *now*?"

I momentarily ignored her question and chewed along the center seam of her shorts, pulling it back with my teeth and releasing it so it would bounce off her clit making her hips buck again. My fingers grabbed onto her waistband and she lifted her hips so I could work them down her legs and off of her body completely, leaving nothing more than a scrap of fabric between me and the booty I was desperate to plunder. I could see the evidence of her arousal seeping down her thighs and I placed soft kisses on the inside of her leg trailing upwards saying, "I don't want you to be in pain. Let me kiss it and make it better."

I brought my eyes up to hers while my lips and tongue cleaned up every drop they could find, but merely hovered over her center waiting for a sign of whether or not she wanted to go farther. I could see the warring going on behind her eyes and since I wasn't above wanting the winds to blow in my favor, so to speak, I lightly blew air across her soaked bikini bottom making goose bumps break out on her skin. I watched Sookie's eyes as they glazed over and she released her bottom lip, which she'd been chewing on in contemplation, and a growl left my throat as I watched her finally nod her assent.

Victory was mine.

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## Chapter 48: Chapter 47

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### Chapter 47

#### SPOV

I sat next to Eric on the patio nearly buzzing with anticipation, while we enjoyed our s'mores, hoping he would like the surprise he'd be getting in the very near future. When the idea came to me on the boat I didn't have high hopes of being able to arrange it at all, much less have it set up for the following afternoon, and I hoped I'd be able to keep my mouth shut until then so I wouldn't spoil it before the big reveal. I'd already taken care of calling the Senior Citizens Center, before I watched Eric nearly burst into flames by the grill, and explained that I wouldn't be able to make it the following afternoon, but they were kind and said they understood when I cut down my commitment to once a month so I'd have some time to get settled into our new relationship. There was still a lot of pertinent information about Eric I needed to learn, like he's a big fat liar when it comes to gas grill knowledge.

I was really starting to second guess making s'mores for dessert having forgotten just how sticky melted marshmallows and chocolate could be. I was thinking how those graham crackers were worse than my panties at containing any seepage when Eric moaned seemingly in pain.

"Are you okay?" I asked. He'd eaten two huge burgers, in addition to the potato salad, and was washing it all down with his third s'mores. He was probably ready to explode.

"You're killing me," he sighed.

"Me? What did *I* do?" I didn't force him to eat so much.

Eric looked back at me like I was dense before drawing my eyes down to his lap where Nessie was trying to break free of his swim trunks and replied, "*That* is what you're doing."

"Buh..." I'd been nowhere near Nessie. We hadn't even acknowledged each other since saying 'Good Morning' and with Wicked and Immoral figuratively chained down all day long, I didn't see how I could be to blame.

I tried to form a rational well thought out argument over the reasons why I had nothing to do with stirring the Loch Ness Monster from the deep. I'd use bullet points; Eric could be my alibi, but my skull was as faulty as those graham crackers when it came to containing my brain cells when Eric slid his body on top of mine. Every sane thought was gone, right along with the command over my hands, and as soon as his lips were on mine, I knew I was in trouble.

*Damn those sticky fucking s'mores necessitating Eric's clean up of my lips.*

My legs joined in on the mayhem of Wicked and Immoral proclaiming their newly dubbed names as Heinous and Nefarious by wrapping around Eric like he was the last life preserver and they were going down with the Titanic, so when he'd moved on from my mouth to my chest I was lost in a sea of pleasure. Granted, Eric had given me a really great orgasm just a few days earlier, but his hands were his only tools then. I'd thought their prowess couldn't possibly be topped, but feeling his lips and tongue making their way down my chest made me quickly realize there was a lot *more* pertinent information about Eric I wanted to learn and it had nothing to do with gas grills.

The feel of his whiskers dragging across my flesh would be the cause of starting yet another California brush fire if it weren't for the wetness seeping through my bikini bottoms squelching the flames and a throb shot through me when his tongue made contact with my newly exposed breast. It had been so long since my body had experienced that kind of attention (that *I* could remember anyway) I willingly gave over all control to my lascivious limbs and let them have at it since they seemed to know what they were doing all on their own. My hands pulled his shirt over his head and my mouth uttered the last thought my brain had been trying to form before my corrupt quad of limbs had taken control.

"Aren't we going swimming?" It already felt like I was drowning with desire anyway so I really didn't see the point anymore.

Eric's tongue gliding across my chest was busy licking away what little self control I had left when he said, "Sure. Let me help you get out of those shorts first."

His mouth seemed to be everywhere at once, at least that what my overloaded senses were telling me, and when he scraped his teeth along the center seam of my shorts I wanted to strangle him with my thighs and frustratingly cried, "Who's killing who *now*?"

Eric was definitely up to date on torture techniques. It was another item to add to the 'pertinent info' file.

I was too lost in the fog of foreplay to have noticed he'd removed my shorts (or maybe I did?) until he was hovering over the one spot that was literally crying for his attention. Not crying *tears* exactly, but weeping nonetheless.

"I don't want you to be in pain. Let me kiss it and make it better." His voice was a gentle plea and I really couldn't come up with a single solitary reason to say 'no'. It didn't matter anyway because by the time I came to that decision, my head had already nodded on its own.

The fire in his eyes flared with triumph and I watched as his fingers pulled the ties open on either side of my bikini bottoms, slowly unwrapping my lower half like it was a gift on Christmas morning. I was surprised at Eric's slow pace, having thought he'd rip them off in a frenzy, but instead he pulled the fabric down inch by inch until I was finally bare before him. He stared at my naked sex not moving at all and I started to become uncomfortable at his unwavering gaze until he whispered, "Perfect." I'm sure I would've blushed over his genital compliment, but every inhibition I had flew out the window with the first swipe of his tongue. My eyes slammed shut as

my thighs fell open and Wicked gripped the top of his head, in case he tried to make a break for it while I wasn't watching, while Immoral ran up and down his bicep silently praising him and his talented tongue.

*Kiki's written accolades weren't exaggerated and as soon as I had the wherewithal, I'd chisel them into a stone tablet as pure gospel and carry them up the highest hill I could find to spread the word.*

He moaned in appreciation of whatever he was tasting during his tour of Sookie South, while his tongue lightly traced over every part of me except where I wanted him the most. My head thrashed from side to side while the little man in the boat was waving at him frantically trying to get his attention and cursing the lack of flare guns when I felt Eric pull back as he said, "Look at me lover."

My head stilled and my eyes shot open at his command seeing his own staring back at me. I never knew the color blue could look like a blazing inferno, but I didn't have long to ponder that thought when he leaning forward, circling my clit with his tongue one final time before latching onto it with his mouth and suckling like a newborn kitten. His gaze never left my own and the dual sensation of his tongue lapping over my sensitive bundle of nerves combined with the gentle suction of his mouth left me feeling anything but calm. My hips attempted to bear down on his face, but his iron grip kept them in place, a contradiction to the tenderness his mouth was demonstrating against my skin only inches away.

"Eric..." I chanted softly, over and over while his mouth continued to steadily draw my orgasm out of its hiding spot. The gentle lapping of his tongue soon gave way to stronger and more determined strokes flicking their way across my clit.

*Eric was clearly calling, "Ollie Ollie oxen free."*

It worked.

A strangled cry left my throat as my body exploded like a supernova with the ripples moving through my limbs only to hit the barrier of my skin and travel back again. Every nerve ending I had felt exposed and tingling and I barely registered the loss of Eric's mouth on my most sensitive part before his tongue was back to exploring the Sookie canal.

*Who knew I was married to Christopher Cunnilingus?*

The gentle ministrations of a moment ago were replaced with powerful thrusts of his tongue inside of me, resolute in their multiple orgasm objective. His oral argument was becoming more persuasive by the second and I had no time to mourn the loss of his tongue when it was replaced with two of his fingers sliding inside of me like a glove tailored just for him. His thumb took over steering the man in the boat while his fingers delved deep inside of me and he kissed, licked, and nibbled his way up my torso before pulling my bikini top to the side with his teeth so that both of my breasts were exposed. His tongue swirled, lapped, and flicked its way across each one in turn before he moved further up my body until we were face to face.



I could feel the Kraken rubbing against my thigh and Immoral abandoned her post on Eric's bicep, invading his shorts and capturing the beast singlehandedly having met no opposing forces. As soon as I had Nessie in hand Eric's head dropped to my shoulder and he hissed against my skin, "Fuck..." I had a feeling he meant that in the best possible way and my theory proved true when he continued. "Lover...you're *so tight*. I can't imagine what it'll feel like to be buried inside of you; to feel your muscles clenching around me, trying to keep me inside of you like they are now." It was true. I could feel my walls spasm around his fingers, clenching on their own to keep him there on a permanent basis. They were big fans of Eric Northman's fingers.

"Do you *want* that lover?" he whispered into my ear. "Would you grant me that wish? Because if I were to die without having ever made love to you, that I could remember," he added hoarsely, "it would be my biggest regret."

His tongue flicked into my ear and his panting breaths fanned across the moisture making my throbbing intensify and I wanted nothing more at that moment than to experience Eric Nirvana and sighed out, "Yes." I heard and felt a low rumble make its way through Eric's chest as his mouth claimed mine. I could taste myself on his lips and my tongue dove deep wanting to explore his mouth like he'd explored my nether region and I felt him swell larger in my hand before he gently pushed it away chastising, "You threaten my control." Hearing him admit to the power my touch had over him was yet another turn on and as if he wanted to get the show on the road, Eric's fingers curled inside of me in a seductive 'come hither' fashion brushing over that magic spot he'd found a few nights earlier as his thumb increased its pace over my clit.

I both *came* and *hithered* all over his hand.

His fingers continued to pump lazily inside of me, drawing me down from my orgasm, and I must have been so far gone I hadn't noticed he was buck naked until I felt Nessie gliding along my lower lips in preparation for her sober maiden voyage.

My brain screamed in protest and my body stiffened as my sanity made a brief appearance when I said, "Eric! We need to use protection."

Eric had been busy licking and kissing his way from my shoulder to my neck and he pulled back to look in my eyes as he said, "I wasn't lying when I told you I was clean Sookie. I get tested regularly."

A part of my brain was jealous over the reason why he'd been tested so regularly, but I pushed it away and said, "I believe you, but it couldn't hurt to get tested one last time. Besides, I'm not on the pill." I mentally added a '*yet*' and planned on calling for an appointment with my OB/GYN on Monday morning.

"FUCK!" Eric whisper yelled. I physically shrank back from what I perceived as his harsh rebuke, feeling vulnerable after everything that had just transpired, but when he noticed his face visibly softened as he explained, "No Sookie, it's not that." My eyes silently asked him what *it* was and he answered, "I don't have any condoms."

"What?" I asked incredulously. "You had a *whole* box you pulled out of your suitcase in Vegas!" It was a *big* box too, not one of those little 3-pack jobs, and he'd better have a *really* good explanation why they were gone or Nessie would never be seen again. Ever.

Eric moved his body to half lie beside mine to further himself from temptation and he looked back at me admitting, "I know, but I must have left them there, so unless *you* happen to have any it looks like we're cockblocked again." He tried to smile and lighten our quickly darkening moods when he asked, "Ironic isn't it? To be cockblocked by not having anything to block my cock?"

I probably *would've* laughed at the irony of it all if it weren't for the pained expression on Eric's face. It wouldn't be very gracious of me to leave him hanging, so to speak, after having been given front row tickets to the Eric Northman Traveling Tongue Show and I figured it was only right to pay it forward. I maneuvered Eric's body until he was lying underneath my own and licked my way across his lips until he gave me the entrance I'd been seeking while my hips ground down on his as our tongues twisted and twirled against one another. I couldn't help whimpering over feeling him gliding through my folds; hot, thick, and pulsing between our bodies.

His hands moved from my breasts, which seemed to be their preferred resting spot, and gripped my ass as he pushed harder against me growling into my mouth, "*Sookie...*" in warning.

*He didn't scare me.*

I smiled against his lips before doing my own oral exploration down the chest that was capable of making me stupid in an instant. My tongue swirled around one of his nipples while Wicked explored points further south and gave him a firm upward stroke while I softly bit down making Eric hiss his approval in a garbled, "*Fuck.*"

Eric's body writhed underneath me with him pushing and pulling at my body in an attempt to cover every inch of my flesh with his own and I felt powerful being able to elicit such a strong reaction from him. I continued on my downward trek kissing, licking, and nipping the skin in front of me like he had done, and followed the light trail of blond hair down his stomach. When I was finally eye to eye with Nessie for the first time in his awakened state, only one thing came to mind as Celine Dion's voice filtered into the background of my brain.

*I was about to go down on the Titanic.*

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## Chapter 49: Chapter 48

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### Chapter 48

**EPOV**

There was no consoling Eric Junior and I wondered if I'd injured him permanently. It couldn't be good to get him all worked up time and again without ever being set free. It would be like teasing a starving dog with a juicy steak over and over again knowing, if he didn't fall over dead first, when he finally broke free of his chains all hell would break loose. I almost smirked thinking how dogs liked to chase pussy, but it was halted by Sookie pushing against me so I'd lay down on my back while she straddled my body. Her breasts were still on show, pushed together by her bikini top binding them from the sides, and had me hypnotized. I'd seen a lot of breasts in my lifetime, but hers were the most perfect pair I'd ever seen. They filled my hands perfectly and were yet another reminder of how she seemed to be made just for me.

Her mouth was hot and demanding over my own, but it was nothing compared to the heat I felt gliding up and down my length. All it would take was a slight arch from either one of us and I'd slip right into where I longed to be. "*Sookie...*" I warned. She was teasing the starving beast and the chains were stretched to their breaking point.

I could feel her smile against my lips, completely unaware of how much I had to restrain myself from fucking her until she blacked out, risks be damned, and she teasingly kissed her way down my chest, straining yet another link in my chain as she bit down while her hand firmly stroked my cock. If she stopped at any point I had no doubt my death would follow soon after because she was surely killing me.

My name and claim emblazoned underneath her skin weren't enough. I wanted her so much that I did everything I could to touch every part of her, as if my mere scent on her skin would let others know she was mine, but knowing I'd kill anyone who got close enough to smell me on her.

Ridiculous, but true nonetheless.

The primal need she brought out in me should've scared me; should've made me pause; made me question my own sanity, but it only drove me harder until I could barely see straight. When I caught sight of her hovering over my dick licking her lips like she'd found her own juicy steak, I would've sworn my heart stopped if it weren't for the throbbing of my cock pulsating just underneath her mouth.

The anticipation I felt waiting for her next move rivaled the jury returning in the O.J. Simpson murder trial and I gasped out loud as though I was hearing the 'not guilty' verdict all over again when her tongue came out wiping away the precum on my tip. She smiled and pulled back from me, but before I could yell 'Objection your Honor!' she dove forward again nearly swallowing my Johnny Cock-ran whole.

*Dead.*

That was the only logical conclusion. I must have died from that wayward clot to the heart because it was im-fucking-possible that I'd drunkenly married not only the prettiest sweetest best cook in the world, but she had no gag reflex either? If I *was* dead, I'd certainly find Heaven in Sookie's mouth. In all of my experience, my *considerable* experience, I'd never come across a woman that could take all of me orally and whenever they tried, their gagging and teary eyes

detracted from the overall experience. Not even the likes of Yvetta, a professional cocksucker, could do what Sookie was doing. Her moans vibrated straight through my dick to my balls making them tighten in response as her lips glided up and down my shaft while my hands gripped the sides of the chaise lounge because it was the only thing keeping me from floating up into the clouds. The combination of her hot wet mouth moving up and down over me while the tip of my dick slid down the back of her throat was a *heady* experience with Sookie sucking out every thought unrelated to her from my mind. At that moment there was nothing else in the world but me and her.

There was no way I would last long after the buildup of the evening and when she increased the level of suction while her hand moved to caress my balls I tried to warn her, but my inner caveman chose that moment to speak for me saying nothing more than a, "Sookie...I...cum..."

I wasn't sure if she spoke early-prehistoric or not because her movements sped up and her moans increased, so I hoped she'd been trying to answer in the affirmative. A small part of my brain was embarrassed for not even lasting two whole minutes from beginning to end, but it was overridden by the feeling of euphoria washing over me as I climaxed into her mouth and I shouted out loud shooting stream after stream against her tonsils like Big Ben ringing at high noon while she swallowed it all.

Sookie continued gliding up and down a very sated Eric Junior causing my toes to curl from the stimulation before finally releasing me from her mouth and looked up at me with a coy smile asking, "Better?"

I let out a dubious laugh admitting, "Better? Try phenomenal; exceptional; the best of my entire fucking life." It was true and I pulled her up the length of my body and kissed her, not caring that I could still taste myself on her lips. She was fucking perfect in every way and I wanted her to know how much I appreciated everything about her with that kiss.

Things were starting to heat up again between us when we heard Pam's delighted voice ring out into the backyard saying, "Knock knock."

Sookie shrieked, jumping up off of me cursing, "Jesus Christ Pam!" while she quickly wrapped a towel around her body and throwing another one into my lap. I hadn't ever been shy about my body and didn't even bother using any of those ridiculous flesh colored socks on set whenever I'd been in a scene calling for nudity, so Pam had seen it all before. Besides, I knew she was more interested in Sookie's naked form than my own.

"What?" Pam asked innocently, but smiling like the Cheshire Cat. "I knocked; rang the doorbell. I even tried calling your phones, but neither of you answered so I let myself in and heard some shouting coming from back here and figured I'd make sure everything was *okay*." She cocked an eyebrow at both of us asking, "Everything *is* okay, right?"

Sexpot Sookie from a moment ago was quickly replaced by Blushing Southern Belle Sookie as she snapped out, "Everything is *fine!*" while she avoided eye contact with either one of us and started snatching our dinner plates from the table before she marched into the house mumbling

something about Grand Central Station under her breath. I was grateful Pam hadn't shown up until we'd each had our happy moment, but really needed to remember to have the fucking locks changed.

"What are you doing here Pam?" I asked.

"They're *real* aren't they?" she asked in return.

"What's real?"

"Her breasts you idiot! I got to see them when we went dress shopping on Thursday, but she never took off her bra so I couldn't be sure. She was already in a bad mood and I figured she'd get pissed if I copped a feel."

I glared back at Pam getting pissed myself at the thought of her, or *anyone*, touching my new BFF's. We were tight now; our own little clique and had no room for any other members in our exclusive social circle. Refusing to answer her question, I repeated, "What are you doing here Pam?"

She frowned back at me saying, "Spoil sport." When I merely stared at her in response she finally said, "I came here to drop of the script for Valhalla. We're scheduled to meet with the director and you're reading for the lead."

It was the role I'd wanted to get, opposite Sophie Anne, and if it became the blockbuster everyone was predicting it to be, I could give up the sitcom job and just act in movies like I'd wanted. "When?" I asked, wanting enough time to memorize my lines.

"On Friday, two weeks from yesterday."

Sookie came back outside wearing her shorts and t-shirt from earlier. The blush had mostly faded, but was still visible on her skin as she smiled politely and asked, "Pam? Can I get you anything? Something to drink perhaps or maybe a lesson in etiquette on *not* walking into people's homes without an invitation?"

"Oh Sookie," she responded completely undeterred, "you have nothing to be embarrassed about. Dear Abby says women *need* to have close relationships with other women. Why I'd be willing to give you a breast exam *right now* if you'd like. You know it's best to catch those lumps early on." Pam started walking towards Sookie as she said, "Here, clasp your hands behind your head and we'll get started."

"Pam!" we shouted in unison.

Pam's hands dropped back to her sides as she said, "You two are no fun." When neither one of us refuted her statement she went back into business mode and said, "GQ wants to do an article and photo spread on you for their January issue, but now they also want to include Sookie in some of the shots. You're doing it next weekend."

"What?" Sookie asked looking panicked. "I'm not a model or celebrity!"

Pam dismissed her saying, "But you're married to one and it's good for Eric's career. You make him look stable and we can't afford to waste this opportunity after your little wedding video disaster."

"But...he *IS* stable," Sookie replied, pissed at Pam's character assassination of me yet moments away from hyperventilating.

I stood up and wrapped the towel around my waist before walking over and putting my arms around her, trying to calm her down and ignoring Pam's jibe at me I dealt with Sookie's fear instead saying, "It's nothing like the red carpet events or the paparazzi. It's just a few people and one photographer taking the shots." I'd done a lot of photo shoots in my lifetime and they were pretty boring affairs, so I didn't want her to get worked up over nothing.

"But I'm a nobody," she said into my chest. "Just a girl from a small town in Northern Louisiana."

"Sookie," I said pulling back from her so I could look into her eyes, "you're *not* a *nobody*. You're sweet and sexy and charm everyone you meet. You're..." I was about to say 'my everything', but felt uncomfortable. Whether or not it was Pam's presence or the admission itself, I wasn't sure, so instead I said, "beautiful," because that was equally as true.

I could tell she was uncomfortable hearing my compliments, a habit I wanted to break in her, but she finally snickered saying, "I doubt Spawn and Kiki would agree I was *charming*."

*Kiki?*

I couldn't recall any 'Kiki's' from my past, but was afraid to ask in case it was yet another run in she'd had with one of my previous flings I didn't remember. Pam saved me from having to comment by saying, "A car will be here to pick you both up next Friday evening and take you up the coast to where the photo shoot will take place. You'll be shot on the beach on Saturday and they're putting you two up for the whole weekend so you won't have to come back until Sunday afternoon."

"A honeymoon," Sookie replied, smiling softly. I got the feeling it was her way of finding the silver lining of our unexpected plans for the following weekend and I was again dumbstruck over her lackluster response to being in a photo shoot for a magazine as well known as GQ. Any of the women from my past would've sold their soul to the Devil himself for an opportunity like that, but Sookie's face looked like she was scheduled to have a root canal without Novocain.

Pam seemed to sense it too and just shook her head saying, "I guess I'll be going now." She turned to Sookie and asked, "Are you sure you don't want me to check for lumps? Breast health should be taken seriously you know."

I expected another harsh rebuke from Sookie at Pam's crass request, so I was surprised when she smiled instead and said, "Maybe next time Pam. Eric seems to enjoy playing doctor at the moment, so I think the girls are covered."

I didn't think she'd be so open with what we'd been doing lately, but I was quick to agree with her saying, "Yes, I *am* enjoying it, so you can just go find somebody else to examine Pam."

Pam didn't miss a beat asking, "Sookie, what's Amelia's phone number?"

"Good Lord," she mumbled before rattling off her number. Pam already had her phone up to her ear as she walked back into the house without saying another word to either one of us on her way out.

"Are you okay?" I asked her, not sure if I was asking about her uneasiness over the photo shoot, her embarrassment over being caught practically naked by Pam, or her sexual satisfaction from our after dinner exploits.

"I'm fine," she smiled wrapping her arms around my waist and burying her face into my bare chest. I kept waiting for her touch to get on my nerves, her close proximity to start becoming too much, but it wasn't happening. It still felt like it was exactly where she belonged; where *I* belonged.

I was about to suggest we go for that swim she'd wanted earlier in the evening, but her yawn made me change my mind and ask, "Are you ready for bed?" It was completely dark out and I figured it had to be after nine o'clock. We hadn't woken up too early that morning, but there was something about being out on the open ocean that seemed to sap your energy and we'd spent hours watching fucking *bird activity*.

"Yeah," she replied. "I guess I am."

I picked up our hastily discarded swimsuit bottoms from the patio floor while Sookie grabbed her glass and my beer bottle from the table before we went back inside. I made sure the house was locked up while she went to change and was happy to find her already waiting in my bed when I went upstairs. I brushed my teeth and put on a pair of pajama bottoms, not wanting to tempt fate knowing there weren't any condoms in the house, and as I crawled into bed next to her I wondered over our lack of birth control during our wedding night.

*Should I say something? Ask her about it?*

I wasn't worried about catching any diseases from her now that I knew her better and she'd said she'd gotten tested after breaking up with the douche bag a year ago, but birth control wasn't just about protection from disease. It was also about protection from unplanned pregnancies. I'd *always* worn a rubber before her and never had cause for concern, but Sookie hadn't brought it up yet so she didn't seem too concerned about the possibility. I figured she knew her body and menstrual cycle better than *I* did, considering I knew *nothing* about it at all, so I'd take my cues from her and flip out if she did.

My body automatically curled around hers, with her doing the same, and as soon as she leaned over and kissed me the only thought I had that had to do with a lack of birth control was me internally cursing over not being able to take our kiss any further. She finally pulled away when we were both getting a little too worked up and laid her head back down on my chest saying, "I'll be gone when you wake up, but I'll be back around noon. You didn't have any plans for tomorrow afternoon did you?"

"No, where are you going in the morning?" I asked sullenly, already missing her.

"I have to be at the shelter at six to help Lafayette get ready for breakfast, but it closes up at eleven so I'll be back once we're done cleaning up and then we have some place to be for your surprise."

I could feel her smiling against my chest and while I was intrigued by her mysterious surprise, the thought of waking without her there was more disconcerting to me so I asked, "Can I go with you? To the shelter?"

Sookie lifted her head to look at me asking, "Do you *want* to? You know, I doubt there'll be any paparazzi hanging around if you're wanting to get that out of the way."

"Sookie," I said, trying to not sound as hostile as I felt. "I don't give a shit about cameramen lurking around or what Pam's terms were when we agreed to this." My voice softened when I admitted, "I thought things were different between us now."

"I'm sorry," she whispered. "I didn't mean anything by it, really. I just didn't think you'd want to tag along to the shelter is all."

I couldn't really blame her after our previous fight over five hundred dollar pots to piss in, so I brushed the hair away from her face admitting, "I just want to spend time with you, so if you're going to be dishing out breakfast at the shelter I'd rather be doing it *with* you than waiting for you to get home."

Even in the darkness of the room I could see the tears forming in her eyes, but she blinked them back saying, "You're more than welcome to come along." Her smile grew before she settled back down onto my chest and said, "You should get some sleep. You're gonna need to have your wits about you when you meet Lafayette."

"Why?" I asked. She'd already told me he was gay and I had no issues with that, which she already knew from when Sam and Terry had stayed for the poker game.

"You'll see," she snickered. "Now go to sleep."

I mentally shrugged off her evasive response and closed my eyes thinking he couldn't be *that* bad, before I hugged her tighter and finally fell asleep.

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### Chapter 49

#### SPOV

I woke up a few minutes before the alarm and shut it off so it wouldn't wake Eric, knowing he wouldn't need much time to get ready to go. I was excited about the surprise I'd set up for him that afternoon, but first we had to get through the morning and I was a bit nervous over him meeting Lafayette. He was as flamboyant as they came and while Eric had no problems with Sam and Terry, Lafayette wasn't nearly as subdued as either one of them. He was also fiercely protective of the few people he considered to be his family and I knew I fell into that elite group, so Eric was sure to get an earful on treating me right. I'd had a difficult time getting him to promise to not go after Quinn when we'd broken up and even though Quinn was practically twice his size physically, Lafayette had grown up in South Central LA and wasn't just street smart, but knew how to fight down and dirty. He'd had no choice but to learn to fight back, in order to protect himself, from an early age having never hidden his sexual identity.

*Besides, if anyone was going to rip Quinn's balls off at the time, I figured I'd earned that right.*

Once I was able to pry myself out of Eric's iron grip, without waking him, I scurried across the hall to my room to get ready. As I stripped off my pajamas and got into the shower I wondered if Eric would ask me to move into his room any time soon. He'd already come out and said he preferred sleeping next to me and it seemed silly to keep running back and forth, but I didn't want to just take it upon myself to move my things into his room. I also didn't want to ask him about it and put him on the spot, so I'd wait until I was invited. Unlike some people who just walked into other people's houses and found them in compromising positions in the backyard.

*We really needed to get the locks changed.*

In hindsight, it was probably a *good* thing Pam had shown up when she did because the Titanic was starting to rise again and I don't know that either one of us had the willpower to keep it afloat above water for much longer. We'd definitely need to pick up some condoms soon because *it* was inevitable and we couldn't afford to take any risks in forgoing birth control. I'd have to be on birth control pills for at least one full cycle before it would be safe and I knew we wouldn't be able to wait that long, but I wasn't too worried about our wedding night sexcapades because my period had just ended a couple of days prior to Amelia and me going to Las Vegas. Even without the benefit of asking the mystery odds maker I knew getting pregnant on that night was highly unlikely, but I wasn't willing to take the chance again. The last thing Eric and I needed was an unplanned pregnancy.

Once I was dressed I threw my wet hair up into a messy bun to keep it out of my way while getting the food prepared at the shelter and went back across the hall to wake Eric. I'd nearly cried the night before hearing him say he'd just wanted to spend time with me, but I hoped he wouldn't regret his decision. The people who came there were nothing like the people Eric

normally interacted with and while most of them were very normal people who just had a run of bad luck, some of them were a little off mentally, but Lafayette always kept everyone in line.

I had to stifle the giggle I felt building in my chest seeing Eric lying there in bed. He'd been on his back when I'd left the room, but had rolled over at some point and had one arm stretched across the mattress as if he'd been looking for me in his sleep. Not wanting to disappoint him, I slid back into the bed and as soon as I picked up his arm and lightly draped it across my body, it automatically wrapped around me and pulled me closer to him with his breathing pattern never changing. The giggle I'd been holding in escaped, feeling like I was an Eric-sized security blanket, and his head slid across his pillow burying itself in the curve where my neck met my shoulder making me wonder what on earth he did before I came along.

*That* thought provoked less than warm feelings so I shoved it away and trailed my fingers up and down the bicep bars of my Eric jail cell instead. He really was a beautiful man, I was learning both inside and out, and wondered what he could possibly see in me when he could have anyone he wanted. Women swooned left and right everywhere we went, I'd seen them firsthand, so I was still left a little confused over why he'd agreed to give *us* a shot. I no longer had any doubts over his sincerity in wanting a relationship with me; I just couldn't reconcile why he'd picked *me* to begin with. I certainly hadn't shown my best side when we'd first met and acted like an ass.

*I guessed it was a good thing he like both my physical and figurative ass.*

Knowing we would have to leave soon I set those thoughts aside to think about on another day and started gently raking my fingernails up and down Eric's back whispering, "Eric...it's time to wake up."

I could see goose bumps spring up on his skin as my nails continued to scratch his back and his body started to stir while his grip tightened around me. Something else was already awake I learned when Eric slid on top of me and caged me inside of his arms, but kept most of his weight off of me while he started placing wet kisses over the area where his head was still buried on my neck. The corrupt quad recognized their master and eagerly surrounded him like he'd just returned home from fighting a war.

*I could tell where he stored his weapon without even looking.*

My brain was fighting its own war at the moment just trying to form a coherent thought with me finally sighing out, "This is a bad idea." I wondered if my nose would grow like Pinocchio because it certainly *felt* like I was telling a lie.

Eric seemed to agree I wasn't being entirely honest and, without coming right out and calling me a liar, his tongue traced the outer edge of my ear as he breathed out, "No... it's a very *good* idea," punctuating the word 'good' by thrusting his hips and letting me know my girly bits were currently being held at gunpoint.

"But we'll be late to the shelter," I weakly protested. "It takes a while to cook that much food."

The friction of his whiskers scratching along my skin was igniting a fuse much farther south, quicker than any boy scout rubbing two sticks together, and as his lips moved to hover over mine, with his hair falling over his half-opened eyes, as he said, "We'll pick up donuts on the way." His tongue swept into my mouth before I could protest and my body agreed donuts was a *great* idea, but my brain refused to concede and I finally pulled away hoping logic would win this battle.

"We don't have any condoms," I reminded him.

"We can have anal sex," he suggested. I assumed he was speaking to the Wonder Twins since that was where his face had moved to.

"Eric!" I scolded him for them, turning the shade of his new Corvette. Just because I could swallow him whole and live to tell the tale didn't mean every orifice on my body was an open port for him to dock his ship. *That* lane was outbound only.

"What?" he asked the girls innocently. "I'll be gentle," he told them while kissing them sweetly as though the Kraken wouldn't tear me in two.

I started to worry that it was perhaps something Eric was fond of, not kissing my breasts which I knew he was a big fan of, but ass fucking and figured now was as good a time as any to let him know my stance on the matter. Hesitantly I said, "Umm...I've never done that before and I really don't have any plans to."

*I felt it too hypocritical to say I'd NEVER do it since a little over a week ago I would've been the first one declaring I'd NEVER drunkenly marry a complete stranger in Vegas. Never say never.*

I felt my whole body relax as soon as he replied back, "I've never done that either, but you're the first one to drive me crazy enough to give it a try if it'll get me inside of you."

I mentally silenced Amelia's voice screaming '*I TOLD you to get lube!*' and pushed away thoughts of wrapping Nessie in plastic wrap while keeping our fingers crossed as we gave it the old college try. Instead I swatted Eric's shoulder saying, "Not happening Mr. Northman." I was pretty sure I actually *meant* it too. Yep, pretty sure.

Glancing at the clock I saw we only had another ten minutes until we had to leave, so I gave Eric one final out asking, "Are you sure you still want to come with me? We'll need to leave in a few minutes, but you could stay home and go back to sleep if you want to."

Instead of getting up or rolling back over onto his side of the bed, Eric surprised me by moving back up my body faster than I could see and kissed me stupid. Thankfully he pulled away, because there was no way I would've been able to, and said, "Isn't *that* what we've been talking about Mrs. Northman? *Me cumming with you?*" I was still waiting for my brain cells to re-inflate with oxygen when he smiled and shook his head before climbing off of me and heading towards the bathroom saying, "Honestly Sookie. Sometimes I think you don't hear a word I say."

I finally came to when I heard the shower turn on and hightailed it out of the room before I caught a glimpse of him coming back all naked and damp. It was too late to make coffee, but I knew Lafayette would have a pot brewed so I wouldn't have to go without. My mind stayed on Eric, while I cleaned up the few dishes from the night before in the kitchen, and he came down a few minutes later dressed in his usual jeans and a t-shirt with still damp hair. I'd been lost in thought and hadn't noticed him until he asked, "What do you need that for?"

"What?" I asked looking up at him. His eyes traveled to my hands and back up again making me look down and seeing I was holding the box of Saran Wrap, but without anything in front of me, besides Nessie, that I could wrap I said, "It's for the shelter."

Eric seemed to buy my flimsy excuse and I insisted we take the Audi so I could drive him to his surprise when we were through. There was no way I'd be comfortable driving his Corvette and I refused to give him any hints, which I'd have to if he drove.

There wasn't anyone besides the guard at the gate when we left so we had a peaceful drive to the shelter arriving a few minutes before six. I knew Lafayette had already arrived and figured Eric knew it as well when I watched his eyebrow rise up seeing the bubblegum pink Cadillac convertible we parked next to.

"Lafayette's?" he asked, looking back at me with a smile.

"Yep," I grinned.

We got out of the car and headed for the door, but Eric distracted me when he handed me the box of Saran Wrap he'd carried from the car so I didn't notice Lafayette standing there until I heard him say, "Mmm...mmm...MMM! Honey, you's even betta lookin' in person and I's seen your naked ass traipsin' across the big screen. How about you drop them drawers and let me do a comparison? Hands on o'course."

"Lafayette!" I screeched, as Eric chuckled next to me. I didn't see what was so funny, that was *my* ass he was walking around with.

"Aww Sook, you knows I's jus' playin'! He don' seem to mind none." Lafayette had a playful smile on his face while he batted his silvery glittered lashes at Eric. I couldn't help but laugh as he held his hand out to Eric, like he was the Queen Mum expecting his gaudy butterfly ring to be kissed, as he said, "I'm Lafayette, the sistah Sook wishes she grew up wit, but we's family jus' the same. Enchanté."

Eric played along, taking Lafayette's hand and kissing that same gaudy ring, before dropping it and smiled saying, "I guess that make you my sister-in-law, huh?"

Lafayette smiled wide back at Eric before winking at me and saying, "I think he'll do jus' fine."

He turned and headed back toward the kitchen with Eric behind him and I felt the tension leave my body I hadn't even known was there. Subconsciously I must have known if Lafayette and

Eric didn't get along it would have bothered me, but it appeared I had nothing to worry about when I found them in the kitchen. Lafayette had set Eric up with a huge bowl next to dozens of eggs telling him to scramble them and laughed at him when he had to show Eric how to crack one open. He got the hang of it fairly quickly and Lafayette gave him a playful swat on his ass telling him "Good job!" Eric probably wouldn't have even noticed me watching it all play out if I hadn't laughed seeing Lafayette giving Eric's ass a double take afterward and then shoot me a knowing look while mouthing the words, 'Lucky bitch!'

A few more of the regular volunteers trickled in one by one and I was grateful they all treated Eric like he was just another volunteer instead of going fan girl on him and he graciously answered the occasional celebrity related question with a smile. I was busy helping cook everything, but every time I chanced a look his way he was always staring back at me with a smile making my insides all mushy. He was definitely a charmer.

When it was time to open the doors for the line that had already formed outside I told Eric he could hang out in the kitchen if he wanted, but I normally worked the food line serving people and wasn't sure he'd want to do the same.

"I'll serve too," he answered with a smile.

I hoped his presence wouldn't cause too much of a stir amongst the crowd, but it was just another unfounded worry when no one paid him too much mind. Well, at least most of the *men* didn't pay him too much mind, but Eric would attract attention from most *any* female regardless of his occupation. I could tell he'd caught the attention of one female in particular.

Her red hair and green eyes set against her ivory skin could turn most men into putty and it was obvious Eric was no different when a charismatic smile lit up his face as he leaned forward, over the counter separating us from the people we were serving, asking, "And what would *you* like to have for breakfast today beautiful?"

She just stared back at him smiling, but I already knew she wouldn't answer him when her mother spoke up next to her saying, "Jessica is deaf and hasn't learned to read lips yet."

Eric's face fell just a little and he looked at her mother asking, "How old is she?"

"Four," she replied, running her fingers through her daughter's hair.

My mouth gaped open and tears sprang to my eyes as I watched Eric set down the serving spoon he'd been holding and began signing to Jessica. It was something I'd been meaning to learn ever since they started coming for breakfast a couple of months earlier, but I hadn't had the time to yet. Both Jessica's and her mother's faces lit up with Jessica's hands flying a mile a minute, I assumed answering whatever it was Eric had asked her. I knew I'd assumed correctly when he quickly filled a plate with what I knew to be her regular order and handed it to her with a wink and a smile.

His gaze finally fell back to me standing there next to him, still catching flies as Gran would say, and he broke my stupor by giving me a small kiss to my forehead and shrugged his shoulders nonchalantly while sheepishly admitting, "I had to learn sign language for a part once. It just kind of stuck."

If it weren't for the hungry people still waiting in line I knew I would've blubbered like a baby all over him. My emotions were all over the place where he was concerned, but tears always seemed to be a factor no matter what I was feeling and this was no different. I quickly wiped them away and concentrated on serving the food, but it wasn't long after when Lafayette sidled up next to me and said, "You betta chain him to your side cuz if I gets my hands on him I ain't lettin' him go."

I didn't blame Lafayette one bit; I wasn't planning on letting him go either.

Once all of the food was gone we all started cleaning up; well all of us minus Eric. When I looked into the dining room I noticed him sitting with Jessica and whatever he was signing to her had her in stitches. I couldn't seem to take my eyes from them before I finally got back to cleaning and just hoped he was keeping it 'G' rated since I had no idea what they were talking about.

He wandered back into the kitchen when we were nearly through and helped put everything away before we could finally head out. Lafayette couldn't thank him enough and Eric promised to return which made Laf flutter around like he had to find a dress for prom night, which probably wasn't too far off the mark. Once our goodbyes were said we were finally in the car and on our way.

I wanted to keep Eric distracted from where we were going so I asked, "What were you and Jessica talking about?"

Eric smiled like *he* was the one with the secret and asked, "Wouldn't *you* like to know?"

I let out a mock exasperated sigh and said, "Duh...I wouldn't *ask* you if I didn't want to *know*." It was a phrase and tone I normally only used with my brother Jason, but it seemed fitting here. Besides, the longer I kept him talking, the less likely he would pay attention to our surroundings.

He rolled his eyes, but the smile never left his face when he finally admitted, "I was telling her a story."

When he said nothing more I had to ask, "What kind of story?" If he hadn't been so damn cute I could probably work up some sort of snippiness over his evasiveness.

"A fairy tale about Princess Sookie and the fucking bluebirds that sing from her shoulders while the baby squirrels and bunnies flock around her fucking feet," he grinned.

*I was officially snippy free.*

I couldn't contain the smile that spread across my face, but had to shake my head and say, "Please tell me you didn't sign the word 'fucking' at any point during that story."

*What would THAT sign be anyway? A pointer finger going in and out of a circle formed by your other pointer finger and thumb? I was pretty sure I hadn't seen that, but he could have done it when I'd walked away.*

"No Sookie, I kept it clean." He looked at me with a wicked gleam in his eye as he said, "But I'd be *more* than willing to give you the X-Rated version later on."

*Condoms. We needed condoms.*

I tried to keep our conversation fairly innocuous so I wouldn't pull over onto the side of the road and fuck him in the back seat; it wasn't an option since I'd left the Saran Wrap at the shelter, but as we got closer to our destination Eric seemed to catch on to where we were headed. I refused to answer any of his questions, but when we pulled over into the parking area outside of the gate and he saw who was waiting for us and what they were holding his eyes lit up to gigantic proportions. He turned to face me with a questioning look and when I nodded he screamed, "NO FUCKING WAY!"

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## Chapter 51: Chapter 50

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### Chapter 50

#### EPOV

It took every last shred of willpower I had to leave Sookie lying there in bed to go and take a shower; a *cold* shower. She had left me nothing but completely sated the night before, so I was left wondering why I felt so blue balled now.

*It had nothing to do with the cold shower, of that I was sure, but we sure as hell were stopping to pick up condoms at some point today.*

That thought put a little bounce in my step and kept a smile on my face all the way downstairs. Sookie's excitement when she spoke of my surprise and insistence we take her car to the shelter, so she could drive us to our mystery destination afterward, had me racking my brain wondering what she had planned, but I couldn't think of *anything*. If we'd only been dating, and not living together, I might have hoped she was taking me to a hotel where we could fuck each other all night long, but after my less than stellar longevity the night before she might have reason to question my stamina.

*If so, I planned on setting her straight later on.*

Once we got to the shelter and I got to meet Lafayette I understood why Sookie had been nervous about me meeting him...her, but I'd grown up in the business and had met bigger Divas in the past. Lafayette and his prancing ass was nothing but amusing to me, at least until we'd walked into the kitchen alone. His exaggerated swagger and the feminine lilt to his voice disappeared in an instant, replaced with bowed up shoulders and steely eyes staring back at me as his voice dropped three octaves and sounding like a menacing street thug he asked, "You see those eggs?" as he pointed at the counter.

"Yes?" I swallowed, wondering what happened to piss him off.

I watched as he violently crushed one in his hand over the sink without ever taking his eyes from me and said, "If you hurt my girl that'll be your balls. We straight?"

"Yes," I replied having no doubt he meant every word. Sookie had somehow bewitched not only me, but everyone she came across it seemed. At least every *male* she came across, regardless of their sexual orientation, but I couldn't fault him for wanting to protect her; I'd felt the same need since day one.

"Good," he replied. "So long as we have an understanding then we'll get along just fine." He then went on to tell me to start cracking the eggs to scramble them, but had to show me how since crushing them in my fist as he had done didn't seem to be the preferred method.

*It would be like crushing my OWN balls and I needed them for later on.*

Lafayette turned back into RuPaul's twin sister a second later and when my head turned at the sound of Sookie's laughter coming from the doorway, I thought I understood why. Watching her move around the kitchen like it was her own fascinated me to no end and I don't think the smile on my face ever left. Once we actually started serving the people their food I found I actually enjoyed it. The feeling surprised me considering I'd only tagged along for my own selfish need to be close to Sookie, but the people I briefly met as they moved through the line all seemed nice; normal. It was an odd character trait I'd only witnessed firsthand on a studio set and the dialog was scripted, but they were *real* people with no agenda; not regurgitating lines back at me.

*I really needed to get out more.*

The bouncing little redhead caught my eye before she ever made it in front of me, but when she finally did I couldn't help returning her huge smile. Maybe it was due to her young age, but she didn't look as though her life's unfortunate circumstances were weighing her down any given the happiness that practically poured out of her little body. I couldn't remember ever feeling that carefree, even at her age, but her jovial attitude was contagious.

I felt myself falter learning she was deaf and it made me even more shocked seeing her so joyful. I'd never been around kids unless they too were actors with the majority of them being tantrum throwing little shits whenever they weren't acting, but the little ray of sunshine in front of me couldn't be more different. In a way she reminded me of a little Sookie and my reaction to her was the same; I wanted to keep the smile on her face.



I was grateful the sign language I'd learned years earlier came back to me with ease and her delighted response made me just as pleased as she seemed to be. Seeing Sookie's tender expression on her shocked face, once they walked away, contented me even more and I knew then that my Sunday mornings were now spoken for.

Once the food was gone I sought out Jessica and as I made up a silly little story about Princess Sookie for her I spoke with her mother, Holly, to find out a little more about them and what brought them there. I found out Jessica had been born deaf and her father had taken off when she was just a few months old because he couldn't handle the pressure of being a parent. Holly had been a waitress and was going to school at night to get a degree in business administration, but had to quit when she became a single parent over night. As Jessica got older it became more difficult to find babysitters for her due to her hearing impairment, so Holly was forced to stay home to take care of her until they finally had to go to a shelter, no longer being able to afford their rent.

The similarity between Jessica and I wasn't lost on me and I recalled hearing one of the producers on my show was looking for a new assistant, so I called him while we sat there and by the time I hung up she had the job. It didn't pay a lot and she'd have to learn pretty quickly, but she seemed bright enough to be able to handle it. There was also a free onsite daycare for the employees and they would make accommodations for Jessica, but as Holly hugged me, thanking me for it all, I couldn't help feeling a twinge of guilt knowing I was doing it for myself as well. I may not have been homeless as a child, but I lacked the attention from a loving parent like Holly seemed to be and wanted Jessica to have every opportunity possible for my own peace of mind.

Once Sookie and I were back in the car I tried to get her to give me a clue as to where we were headed, but she refused and attempted to distract me with small talk telling me more about Sam and Terry and their rescue dogs. I'd noticed we got on Interstate 5 heading south and after a while I suggested we stop for lunch, but Sookie put it off saying we would eat after the surprise, which seemed odd but I didn't argue about it. As we neared San Diego I thought perhaps she was taking me to Sea World so we could see something other than *bird activity*, but when she took the wrong exit and I read the sign as we got onto I-805 my heart sped up.

I didn't dare hope because there was no fucking way she could've pulled off something like that, but when it became obvious where we were going by the huge gate in front of us and she pulled over into the parking area off to the side of Miramar Marine Corp Air Station, I again refused to believe why we were there until I saw Sam and Terry waiting for us. Sam was holding a pilot's helmet and Terry had a flight suit in his hands and one of their dogs at their feet.

My head shot back to look at Sookie and she nodded to my unspoken question making me yell in disbelief, "NO FUCKING WAY!" We were at Top Gun. She smiled at my ecstatic reaction and nodded silently again which begged the question, "How?"

"Terry," she replied. "He'd mentioned working with some of the military stationed here and he's training on of his rescue dogs for one of the pilots who had a bad time overseas. He became close friends with the other pilots and one of them agreed to take you out for a training flight this afternoon if you're game."

Once.

I mentioned my childhood dream *once* in barely more than a whisper only the day before and the beautiful woman in front of me, who'd declared herself a *nobody* that very same evening, had made it come true overnight.

*Maybe she was more of a Fairy Godmother than a Princess.*

I practically lunged over the center console and poured every ounce of feeling I had for her into the kiss I'd attacked her with. Her lips eagerly responded to mine before pulling away to catch her breath as she said with a smile, "I take it you're game then?"

"I'm game for more than a plane ride," I growled, moving in for another kiss, but she pushed me back with her hand on my chest.

"Even if we had any condoms I wouldn't be doing *that* with Sam and Terry watching," she laughed.

*Condoms. We needed condoms.*

Shaking the lust from my brain we got out of the car and met up with Sam and Terry before following them into the Visitor's Center to get passes to enter the base. Once inside we met up with the pilot who I'd be flying with named Tommy Mickens and I thought he looked to be around my age. I felt a twinge of jealousy that he'd been able to live out the dream I'd had as a young boy, but my excitement overrode that emotion before it had time to take root. We left our cars there and climbed into a van that drove us out to one of the many hangars near the flight line and I caught Sookie trying not to laugh at me as I bounced in the seat next to her, but it was my turn to not laugh at her when her jaw dropped seeing me come out of the room after I'd changed into the flight suit.

*Maybe they would let me keep it.*

Tommy gave us a brief overview of the base telling us it had originally belonged to the Navy, but with the military downsizing it had been turned over to the Marines. The TopGun US Navy Strike Fighter Tactics Instructor program from the movie was now taught at NAS Fallon, Nevada, with this base now home to the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing. The fighter jets they flew, the F-35B Lightning, were the newest ones on the market and replaced the F/A 18 Hornet. They were capable of short takeoffs and vertical landings so they didn't need landing hooks to land on aircraft carriers when they were out at sea.

After his informative speech Tommy gave me a quick safety lesson on what to do if something went wrong while we were in flight, but I wasn't worried in the least. Sookie was though because she piped up with a fearful edge to her voice saying, "Maybe this is a bad idea."

"It'll be *fine* Sookie," I said, pulling her into a hug. "Don't you want to go for a ride too?" I asked.

"Oh *hell no*," she replied quickly. "I have a hard enough time riding on a commercial plane. There's no way I'd get into one of them," she gestured towards the fighter jets.

Tommy chose that moment to say, "A good landing is one you can walk away from, but a great landing is when someone can use the plane again. I plan on using that plane again, so you have nothing to worry about ma'am."

Sookie didn't seem any calmer, but she stayed quiet and hugged me tighter before saying, "Good luck."

I leaned down and kissed her and as I moved to follow Tommy to the plane I said, "It seems I've had nothing *but* good luck since I've met you." Her only response was a blush and a smile, so I turned and caught up with Tommy on the tarmac.

As soon as we got up next to the plane and I read his call sign painted on the side I looked at him asking, "Really?"

It read '*Maverick*' just like Tom Cruise's character I'd idolized years earlier.

"Yes," he replied with a joking huff. "But I don't buy into that Scientology bullshit and my wife isn't young enough to be my daughter, so the comparisons stop with the name."

I laughed saying, "Well I'm not gonna be Goose because he dies in the movie and *my wife* might take exception to that." She'd definitely smack him; her hands flew faster than the fighter jet in front of us.

He thought for a moment and said, "What about Iceman?"

A Marine nicknamed Iceman? Yeah, that sounded like a character I could play. Once we had *that* not-so-important detail worked out he showed me how to climb into the cockpit seat behind his and once he'd double checked I was strapped in right, he climbed in himself and lowered the door. I looked over and saw Sookie fretting off to the side, standing next to Sam and Terry, and waved at her hoping it would help calm her nerves. It really was the best surprise she could have ever given me and it made me want to do something really special for her. I just hadn't figured out what that was yet.

Tommy's, or *Maverick's* (now that we were in the plane) voice came through my ear piece and he asked, "Are you ready?"

"Yep!" I replied with a huge fucking grin on my face.

Boy was I wrong. There was nothing to compare to the feeling of taking off that fucking fast and it felt like I'd left my balls back on the runway. Hopefully Sookie would see them rolling around and put them in her purse before Terry's dog took off with one. We continued to climb into the sky with *Maverick* telling me she (the plane) could reach speeds of 1200 miles per hour and fly at altitudes up to 60,000 feet and when he did a loop in the air I was able to see the Pacific Ocean

beneath us. The adrenaline coursing through my veins was un-fucking real and was better than any drug out there. I'd never felt so alive in my life and cursed my father for shitting all over my dream knowing *this* could be my life.

No sooner had that thought crossed my mind when I immediately dismissed it again. If I hadn't lived the life I had, I never would've met Sookie. No job was worth that to me anymore, so I just sat back (more like remained pinned in my seat from the G-force) and enjoyed the ride.

We stayed in the air for about 30 minutes with Maverick explaining some of their drills and talking about a few real life missions he'd flown before flying us back to the base. Just like he'd said earlier, the plane was able to hover over the tarmac and vertically land like a helicopter which I thought was really fucking cool. As soon as my feet were back on the ground I ran over and swept a waiting Sookie into my arms, twirling her around and shouting, "THIS IS AWESOME! THIS IS FUCKING AWESOME!"

Sookie laughed and tried to convince me to put her down saying I was making her queasy, but she could've puked all over me and it wouldn't change my opinion of her at all. She was the best!

I eventually put her down so I could go change and caught Sookie's flash of disappointment, so I made a mental note to procure a flight suit of my own at some point soon knowing it would end with me yelling out words very similar to, if not the same as, 'fucking' and 'awesome'. That was a win/win in my book.

We spent the rest of the afternoon meeting with the airmen and soldiers on the base, stopping to sign autographs and take pictures. It was tough meeting up with the pilot for whom Terry was training a dog for and hearing his voice shake just as much as his hands as he told us about his experiences overseas was a difficult thing to witness. Without any cues from Terry, his dog Dean got up from where he'd been lying at his feet and went over placing his head into the pilot's lap and I saw how immediate the effect was. The tension in his shoulders lessened and with every stroke he gave down Dean's back his trembling hands eventually trembled no more. He even smiled.

It seemed so unfair that there were men and women, like him and Terry, who'd sacrificed so much of themselves, for so very little while I got paid a fuckload of money for something as inconsequential as acting. I said so to Sookie when we were finally on our way back home a few hours later and I'd expected her to agree with me, but instead she said, "That's not true. I mean, I think our military deserves a lot more than they get considering they've voluntarily joined the service to protect and defend our country, but that doesn't mean what you do is any less important."

"Sookie, I act in a fucking sitcom. It's not like I'm looking to cure cancer."

She smiled back at me from the passenger's seat and said, "But what you do can affect millions of people. The characters you play can bring people joy for a brief time and give them a laugh when they might need it most or an excuse to cry when they've had to hold it in. Or your

character might inspire a young boy or girl to grow up and be the next Maverick," she ended with a knowing look.

Dumbfounded again I asked, "How is it you always know just what to say to make me feel better?" I *did* feel better, but I'd be making a sizeable donation to Sam and Terry's rescue organization the next day too. Also a win/win situation in my book.

Sookie gave me a coy smile and shrugged her shoulders nonchalantly saying, "I just got it like that."

She most certainly did. We stopped along the way home to get something to eat and I was glad Sookie had put off lunch because I probably would've been plastered in my own vomit during takeoff, so we were both starving and stopped at a little Mexican place for dinner. The little vixen was playing footsie with me under the table and hearing her moan while watching her eat her burrito brought to mind something else I'd learned she could swallow whole. Given her little display I was mshangao'd seeing her blush when I took her hand on our way out of the restaurant and pulled her into the pharmacy next door where I grabbed the biggest box of condoms I could find.

"Thirty-six?" she asked in a hushed voice on the way to the register. "Not the three or twelve pack. We need the jumbo box of thirty-six?"

*Apparently I DID have to set her straight.*

She was right, so I turned back and grabbed another box just in case which only made her blush deepen even more. She didn't seem to appreciate me laughing at her either, but I knew I'd get back into her good graces, and her pants, as soon as we got home.

The silent tension in the car during the remaining ten minute drive back to the house was palpable with neither one of us saying a word. There really wasn't much to be said; *it* was happening and we *both* knew it. We were approaching the gate when Sookie's cell phone rang from her purse in the backseat and when she pulled it out she said, "Uh oh...it's my brother." She smiled up at me saying, "He's probably calling to see if he can have your *little black book*."

I didn't have one of those, but my cell phone still had a bunch of fuck buddy contacts in it. I'd been ignoring the numerous text messages and phone calls I let go to voicemail every day since I'd woken up with Sookie in Vegas and made a note to pick up a new phone with a new number the next day. I had no need for any of them anymore, but I certainly didn't want her seeing one of their dirty texts or answering their calls.

"Hi Jason," she answered cheerfully into her phone. The sound of her gasp made me turn only to see the color drain from her face as she uttered, "Gran?"

## Chapter 51

### SPOV

I'd never been as nervous as when I watched Eric climb into the fighter jet with the butterflies in my stomach equally due to both my unease and the sight of Eric's ass in a flight suit.

*Laf was right; I WAS a lucky bitch.*

I hoped he'd get to keep it while hoping I wouldn't have a reason to regret arranging his surprise in the first place, but he'd been so happy to be there I refused to let my own fear of flying spoil it for him. Both Sam and Terry tried to soothe me by telling me he would be fine, but my stomach was in knots and remained that way until Eric was back on solid ground. His exuberant twirling me around in the air didn't help my stomach any, but at least he was there for me to throw up on and not lost somewhere over the Pacific, so it was fine by me.

I was getting more comfortable watching him from the sidelines as he interacted with all of the military men and women that flocked over once his flight was through, especially the *women*. I couldn't blame them; he was *hot*, but I didn't feel threatened or jealous in any way because while he smiled for the pictures he took with them and was nothing but sincere in his conversations with them, it was nothing like when he smiled and spoke with me.

It was hard to remember him as the asshole I'd woken up next to only a week earlier and thinking of him as a shallow and superficial douche bag. Seeing him interact with everyone at the shelter and again at the base was a complete contradiction to what I'd seen then, only now I knew better. He proved my new character assessment of him to be true when he lamented over his perceived inferior occupation compared to the men and women we'd just left back at the base on our way home. He was as shallow as the Pacific Ocean he'd just flown over.

I was a different kind of nervous as we drove back home after stopping for dinner and buying enough condoms to supply Amsterdam's Red Light District for a week. My mouth was dry because all of the fluids in my body were pooling in my panties, so I was thankful Eric hadn't tried to talk to me on the way knowing I'd sound like a dental patient with their mouth full of cotton. Despite his size I knew Amelia was wrong; no lube would be necessary, after the build up over the last few days, and I was surprised I hadn't shriveled up like a raisin since I was sure all of the liquids had to have left my body by then, but the moisture I felt between my thighs proved me wrong.

My mind was so focused on the things Eric and I would soon be doing to each other that if it weren't for the seatbelt strapping me down I would've jumped a mile high hearing my cell phone ring. I almost didn't answer it seeing Jason's name flash on my caller ID, but since he rarely called me I figured something must be up; like his libido itching to get his hands on Eric's list of fuck buddies, so I was stunned when he said, "*Sook, Gran's in the hospital. She had another heart attack.*"

"Gran?" She'd had a minor heart attack when I was still in high school and I was worried this one was worse.

*"Yeah. The doc said it was a mild one, whatever the fuck that means, but it didn't look so mild to me when I found her on the kitchen floor."*

"Why? What happened?" My overactive brain pictured her writhing around on the worn linoleum floor with her hands clutching at her chest.

*"I showed up expectin' the fried chicken dinner she said she was makin' me, but I found her on the floor lyin' in a pool of her own blood. She musta been gettin' ready to fry the chicken because it was sittin' on the counter, but it musta hit her as she was carryin' the skillet to the stove. I think she hit her head on it when she went down."*

"Oh my God! Is she okay? Are you at the hospital in Monroe? What did the doctors say? Does she need surgery? Is she in pain? Is she asking for me?" The questions tumbled out of my mouth as fast as my brain could form them. I didn't even realize we were parked in front of the house until I felt Eric's hand on my leg and I turned to see him looking back at me concerned. "Gran had a heart attack," I whispered.

Jason broke in at that moment saying, *"Yeah, we're at the hospital in Monroe and Gran seems fine now. She needed a couple a stitches on her head, but the docs said she didn't need any surgery and should be fine with just medication. She didn't want me to tell ya 'til after she was back home cuz she didn't wanna worry ya none."*

"That's ridiculous!" I practically shouted. "I have every right to know what's going on! She's all we have left..." My shouts ended in a sob and Eric leaned over wrapping his long arms around me as I cried into his shoulder with the phone still pressed to my ear.

*"Well I called ya didn' I?"*

"Yeah, you did. How long will she have to be there?" I asked as my mind ran through the list of things I needed to do while we'd be on the phone, like calling Mr. Brigant to arrange some time off and making airline reservations.

*"You know how ornery Gran can be. She's already fussin' at the docs to let her go now, but they said the earliest would be tomorra' afternoon."*

"Alright. I'm going to go make some calls and get the first flight into Shreveport I can. I'll call you back as soon as I know when I'll get in. Can you pick me up?"

*"Yeah, I'll come get ya, but I won't tell Gran you're comin'. Figure she won't tan my hide for tellin' ya once she sees ya face to face. That new man a yours comin' too?"*

I hadn't even considered the possibility of Eric coming with me. I'd been so used to dealing with family issues alone that the thought hadn't even occurred to me. "I'm not sure, but I'll let you know when I call you back."

*"Well if he ain't, can ya bring me his little black book?"*

"Jason Stackhouse! Now is NOT the time for you to be looking for new wet hole to stick your dick in and you better not leave Gran alone at the hospital tonight to go catin' around!"

*"Jeez Sook, calm the fuck down. You're the one that told me I should read more an' I figured that would be a book to hold my interest."*

"Good Lord Jason. I'll call you back!" I hung up before I could really light into him, knowing I'd need him to pick me up at the airport, and looked back at Eric saying, "She's okay. The doctors said she doesn't need surgery and they'll release her tomorrow afternoon, but I want to go take care of her for a few days to make sure she's alright."

"Of course," Eric replied. "Do you want me to go with you?"

I did, I really did, but I knew he had responsibilities and couldn't just take off without there being consequences he'd have to deal with. From everything Jason had told me I knew Gran wasn't in danger of dying on us and if she reacted now like she had the first time this had happened, I knew she'd be grumpy being fussed over too much and doubted she'd want to meet Eric for the first time in that state of mind. Testing the waters I asked, "What will happen with the show if you take off with no notice?"

He shrugged his shoulders saying, "I'm not sure. I've never done that before, but it would mean delaying production for however long I was gone. I don't care though; you're more important to me than some stupid job."

If my heart had been tearing in two hearing Gran was ill, his words had just pieced it back together. "I know a lot of people depend on you showing up for work and if I go by Jason's account, Gran isn't really in any danger. He's normally about as useful as a trapdoor on a canoe, but he loves her just as much as I do and wouldn't gloss over her condition if something was really wrong. This has happened once before and I'm probably overreacting by rushing out there, but I just need to see her for my own peace of mind. Me fussing over her will make *me* feel better, but will get her angrier than a mule chewing bumblebees. How about I fly out there on my own and if she's actually worse off than I think she is I'll call you to come out there with me?"

I could tell Eric was trying to fight off the smile that was threatening to come out and my 'What?' look had him explaining, "As useful as a trapdoor on a canoe? Angrier than a mule chewing bumblebees?"

"I can't help it," I smiled. "Talking to Jason automatically brings it out and makes me more country than a bowlful a grits."



He couldn't fight the smile any longer and leaned forward placing a kiss on my forehead before saying, "Are you sure you want to go alone?"

*No.* "Yes." Glancing at the clock I saw it was nearly 8pm and said, "I doubt I can get a flight out tonight, but the sooner I can get there and see with my own two eyes that she's fine, the sooner I can come back."

As it turned out I *could* get a flight out that was leaving LAX at midnight, so I rushed around packing my things while making all of the phone calls I needed to make before Eric drove me to the airport. I'd have to change planes in Houston, but I would land in Shreveport by 8:30 the following morning. I'd broken down a few times while trying to get everything done when the fear of losing Gran would hit me, but Eric was always there to calm me down with both his touch and his words. I was starting to second guess my initial decision to go alone, but there was nothing to be done for it once we were at the airport. Since he couldn't go with me beyond the security checkpoint we were left saying our goodbyes in the terminal lobby.

He wrapped his arms around me and leaned down giving me tender kiss before saying, "Call me when you get in so I know you arrived safely."

"Okay," I sniffed, clutching him tighter. I *really* didn't want to go without him anymore, but I held it in.

"I..." he paused for a moment and then said, "I'll miss you."

"I'll miss you too," I replied, silently adding '*I already do.*'

I refused to look back at him when we parted knowing I would lose it all over again and was proud of the fact I held in my tears until I reached the gate, but there was nothing holding me back from letting them fall anymore. When I was comfortably seated in my first class seat Eric had insisted on getting me, and I didn't have the strength to argue at the time, my phone buzzed in my hand and I looked down reading a text from Eric.

*I miss you already.*

A sob choked its way out from my throat and with trembling hands I texted back, '*Me too.*' The long hours of the day quickly set in and I cried myself to sleep and never felt the plane leave the ground.

By the time the plane landed in Houston I woke up discovering my phone had died during the flight since I'd never turned it off. My charger was packed in my checked luggage and my connecting flight was delayed, so by the time I landed in Shreveport at 11:30 the following morning I was anxious to find Jason so I could call Eric. Thankfully he was waiting for me near the baggage claim and from the looks of it he was chatting up a pretty flight attendant. I had no idea if he'd been waiting there since 8:30 and hadn't noticed my tardiness due to his attempts to bed every woman in the state (even if they're just passing through) or he'd actually checked and saw my flight had been delayed. If I hadn't been so eager to hear Eric's voice I probably would've

laughed hearing Jason's attempt to woo her saying, "You're finer than a frog's hair split four ways," but it only made me miss Eric even more knowing he missed out hearing it too, so I barged up to him saying, "Hey Jase, give me your phone."

My rude interruption didn't make him break his stride one bit as he reached into his pocket and handed it to me without even a 'Hello'. I couldn't call him out on it since I hadn't greeted him with more than a 'Hey', so I took the phone and wandered away dialing Eric's number. I knew it was 9:30 back in L.A. and expected he'd be on his way to work so I was hoping to catch him, but when I waited for the call to connect, I got a recorded message instead telling me his number had been changed to a new unpublished number.

*What the fuck? Why in the hell would he change his number without telling me?*

I looked down at the screen to make sure I'd dialed it correctly and I had, so I tentatively tried the home number and crossed my fingers praying it still worked. If not, I knew the assumptions we both swore off would come flying right back. It was still working, but when he didn't answer I left him a message telling him my flight had been delayed and I got in alright. I mentioned his cell phone number not working and said I'd call him again later on that night at home.

Once I had my luggage in hand I grabbed Jason and pulled him away asking, "How's Gran?"

Hearing me say her name must've jostled the hamsters in his head and the manners she'd taught him kicked in as he grabbed the suitcase from my hand and carried it for me while he said, "Aww...she's alright." He paused and his step slowed making me look over and seeing the fear in his eyes he admitted, "It shook me up pretty bad Sook. I was afraid we'd lost her when I found her like that."

The perpetual tears sprung from my eyes again as I reached over and hugged him saying, "I know Jase, but we've still got her so we should just be grateful and enjoy her for however long we have her." We both let go of each other and started walking to where he'd parked his truck and knowing Jason had a hard time keeping secrets I said, "You didn't tell Gran I was flying in did you?"

He snorted replying, "Nah, she'd a had me busier than a cat coverin' shit on a marble floor gettin' the house ready for ya."

*I should really be writing some of this stuff down for Eric.*

As we got to his truck my mouth fell open reading the bumper sticker on the back. *'If she ain't a hummin; she ain't a cummin'.*

"Jason Stackhouse! Tell me you're not driving our grandmother around with that shit on your bumper!" I pointed accusingly at it because, well, it was *Jason* so there were no guarantees he'd know what I was talking about without visual directions.

"You ain't been home five minutes and you're already yammerin' at me. NO I don't drive Gran around in my truck; her joints hurt too much to climb in an' outta it." He had the nerve to give *me* the '*Duh!*' look I normally gave *him*.

I bit my tongue and climbed in and while we were on our way to the hospital I reassured him in no uncertain terms that I did *not* have Eric's little black book in my possession and even if I *did*, I wouldn't give it to him. It would be ashes.

We finally arrived at the hospital a short while later and I choked back the sob in my throat seeing her lying in the hospital bed with tubes and wires running from her frail body. She looked like she'd aged ten years since I'd last seen her at Christmas, but I plastered a smile onto my face as I entered the room. She'd been engrossed watching one of her 'stories' on TV, but turned as I neared her bed and with a huge smile she held her arms open wide saying, "Baby girl!"

I soaked her shoulder with my tears as I held her in my arms and eventually whispered out, "Hi Gran. I've missed you so much." I didn't realize *how* much until that very moment.

"There there," she said patting my back. "Your Gran still has a few years left in her so there's no need to get all worked up now." When I finally released her and sat in the chair next to her bed she started smoothing her hair with her hands and looking around before asking, "Where's Eric?"

I smiled realizing Gran had been primping for him and replied, "He's working."

"Oh," she sighed in disappointment.

She started getting the same look she used to whenever I told her why Quinn hadn't come home with me when we'd still been together and I didn't want her to think poorly of Eric so I added, "He offered to come, but they would've had to halt production on his show since he's the star and Jason said you were okay so I told him I would come alone. But, if I called him right now and said I needed him here he'd be on the first plane out of L.A." I knew it was true, he *would* drop everything and come to me, but I'd need his new number first.

I allowed myself one inner scowl before concentrating on Gran again as she peered over my shoulder and said, "*Jason* said?"

"Aww, come on now Gran. You cain't 'spect me to keep somethin' like that from Sook. She's faster 'an you and woul' put a whoopin' on me once she foun' out." Jason did the 'aww shucks/puppy dog eyes' routine he'd mastered over the years and Gran's ire was snuffed out before it ever had a chance to start.

We all sat around playing catch up for a few hours until they finally released Gran from the hospital. Jason had run back and grabbed Gran's car so she wouldn't have to climb in and out of his truck and as we later turned onto the deeply rutted gravel driveway and the farmhouse came into view I was shocked. In all of the years I had been gone the moment I saw the farmhouse again I always had a sense of coming home, but this time was different. It was Gran's home; my childhood home, but it no longer felt like *my* home.

I didn't want to think over the 'whys' just then and instead helped Gran inside while Jason brought in our bags. I was grateful he'd taken the time to clean up the blood from the floor, so I didn't harp on him for leaving the chicken out on the counter for all of that time and just bagged it up and dumped it in the garbage can outside. As expected Gran got a little snippy when we tried to do too much, in her estimation, but she finally settled down and went to sleep a little after eight.

Jason left soon after and I'd been fighting exhaustion all day long having only slept for the short time it took to get from L.A. to Houston, but knowing it was just after 6 back in L.A. I wanted to try calling Eric again before I went to sleep. He didn't answer when I tried calling him at the house, so I went up to my room to get my charger from my bag and plug in my cell phone, but stopped short seeing Eric's face staring back at me from every wall. The posters were all from when he was much younger, but it didn't stop me from tracing his features with my finger and I ached to touch him in person. I sat on my bed and allowed myself to be comforted by at least being surrounded by his pictures since I couldn't have his arms just then like I really wanted. I never even felt myself falling asleep with my still dead cell phone in my hand.

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## Chapter 53: Chapter 52

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### Chapter 52

#### EPOV

I thought leaving Sookie in bed that morning took all of my willpower, but that was nothing compared to having to walk away from her at the airport while knowing how upset she was. While I completely understood her need to be with her grandmother, it wasn't exactly the way I'd expected our night to turn out and I felt like a complete shit for not going with her, even though it was what she'd said she wanted at the time. Another thing I wasn't expecting was what almost came out of my mouth when we were saying our goodbyes.

*I'd almost told her I loved her.*

*Almost.*

I couldn't even be certain if I did; I'd never *been* in love before, but I knew I didn't want to let her go. Ever.

I also knew that if and when I told her I loved her for the first time, I didn't want to do it when she was about to fly 1600 miles away from me. So I sat in my car in the LAX parking garage and as her midnight departure neared I sent her one final thought, one I *was* ready to admit and knew for certain, hoping she'd get my text before turning her phone off for the flight. My silent prayer was answered a moment later.

*She missed me too.*

I didn't start the car until the alert hit my phone that her plane had taken off and I noticed the change as soon as I walked into the house. It felt emptier than it ever had before. All it was missing was Sookie and a few days worth of her clothes, but I may as well have been standing in the middle of the Grand Canyon. I knew it was all psychological, so I went upstairs to take a shower before going to sleep, ignoring the bag of condoms I'd left on the nightstand next to the bed, and just kept telling myself she'd be back. It became my mantra with me silently chanting it over and over and over, all through my shower and with every tick of the clock I watched go by, but it was no use. Time practically stood still when minutes felt like hours; hours felt like days until I couldn't lie there any longer and went and checked on her flight online. I saw her plane had been delayed in Houston so I tried calling her cell phone, but it went straight to voicemail and I figured she probably would have assumed I would be asleep.

I ended up going for a run just for something to do before heading into the gym to meet up with Tray. Since I'd arrived earlier than normal, I finished up there early too. I checked Sookie's flight again on my phone and saw she wouldn't be landing in Shreveport until 11:30 her time, but seeing I also had another text message from Yvetta asking me if I was ready to '*cum back to her*', I headed to the nearest cell phone store to get a new number.

I tried calling Sookie from my new cell phone before I'd even left the store, but knowing her plane had just barely landed I wasn't surprised when it went right to voicemail again. After leaving her a message telling her I hoped she was doing okay and that I missed her, I told her to give me a call whenever she got a chance and left her my new phone number. I texted it to her just to be on the safe side and then left for the studio where I ended up running into Holly in the hallway. I could tell she was nervous, but excited, and she thanked me again for getting her the job and told me Jessica hadn't stopped talking about me since they'd left the day before, so I took a few minutes to go see her in the daycare. It was one of the few places in the building I hadn't ever had a reason to see, so I was surprised to see so many other kids there.

*Did EVERYBODY have a kid these days?*

It took me all of two seconds to spot Jessica's red head sitting by herself in the corner with a book in her lap, but she must have seen me out of the corner of her eye because she looked up and the grin she'd been missing was back in full force. Her hands flew as fast as Sookie's and I had to sign to her to slow down so I could catch it all, still being a little rusty.

The daycare workers gave me a strange look when I'd walked in, but recognizing me they didn't say anything at first. Once I'd started signing back and forth with Jessica their wary looks changed to grateful expressions and one of them approached me saying they weren't able to get an interpreter on short notice until lunchtime, so I ended up staying.

Jessica wanted me to tell her another story and when I pointed out she already had a book in her lap she'd said she was only looking at the pictures because she couldn't read yet. She also informed me that none of the other kids would play with her, I assumed because she was deaf, so I ended up sitting down next to her and asking her what she wanted to play.

*Big mistake.*

Being an actor came in handy as I was delegated to be the pupil opposite her teacher role and I found it hard to believe I was ever small enough to sit at one of those tiny fucking desks. She couldn't stop giggling at me as I tried to maneuver my way into it until I finally gave up and sat on the floor next to it. Before long all of the other kids started inching our way (it was hard to miss me; a giant in a crowd of midgets) and while the daycare worker had already told me the rest of the kids would be taught sign language by the interpreter, I ended up teaching them a few basic signs myself. By the time I left you wouldn't have known she was different from any of the other kids by the way they were all laughing and playing together.

I didn't regret spending that time helping Jessica's first day in a new place go easier for her, but I knew I was late for rehearsals and figured no one would think to look for me in the daycare rooms. I was surprised when I reached the set to see it empty of almost everyone, so I tracked down one of the producers and found out the show we were scheduled to tape that week had been postponed. Apparently Bill was still *sick* and I'd noticed he hadn't shown up to the after party on Friday; I'd been looking for him. Also, unknown to me, Dawn Green's walk on role had been expanded, but since she'd been Sookie'd she couldn't work and her part was being recast.

*I had the week off.*

*I could've gone with Sookie to Louisiana.*

*I could STILL go to Louisiana!*

I found Alcide in my dressing room, looking bored as hell, and after I told him he had the rest of the week off I sped home to pack a bag. I breezed in and out of the house in under ten minutes and honestly couldn't remember what in the hell I threw into my bag, but I knew one thing for certain; I was traveling with 72 condoms; in my carry-on. We would NOT be stopping for THAT reason ever again if I had my way. I had to turn and run back into the house, remembering to snatch the 'just in case' piece of paper Sookie had left with her Gran's address and phone number, and then fought my way through traffic heading to the airport.

The paparazzi were scattered here and there, probably waiting for *any* celebrity to cross in front of their lens, but I ignored them and went straight to the counter looking to get on the first flight to Shreveport. It was nearing three o'clock by the time I made my way to the front of the line and every flight connecting to Shreveport was full unless I wanted to wait for the redeye at midnight. I didn't. I didn't want to waste any more time than absolutely necessary so I ended up booking a flight to New Orleans and decided I would just rent a car and drive to Sookie.

*How big could Louisiana be?*

I sat at the boarding gate staring at my phone, waiting for the five o'clock departure, and wondering why I hadn't heard from Sookie yet. I didn't want to bother her if she was taking care of her Gran, but I'd hoped she would at least send me a text saying everything was okay. When I still hadn't heard from her by the time I took my seat in the airplane, I sent her another text telling her I had the week off and was on my way there and would call her when I changed planes in Houston.

That was the plan anyway.

What should have been a flight lasting just over three hours took just over four with the plane circling the Houston airport for over an hour thanks to fucking *bird activity*. The ground crew had to scare away a large flock of Canadian geese before we could land and by the time we got on the ground, and were able to disembark the plane, I had to run to catch my connecting flight. It too ended up being delayed due to those same fucking birds since there was now a line of planes waiting to takeoff, so by the time I landed in New Orleans it was close to 2am. I immediately turned on my cell phone and was a little worried when I saw there were no messages waiting for me, so I tried calling Sookie again only for it to go straight to voicemail.

*Maybe she lost her phone?*

It hadn't even occurred to me to check the messages at the house and since I'd gotten a new phone number Sookie wouldn't be able to reach me. I struggled over the idea of calling her Gran's phone number, not wanting to wake her up, and eventually decided against it knowing there would be nothing I could do to comfort Sookie over the phone if something *was* wrong. My unease was made worse once I got into my rental car and pulled up the directions to Bon Temps on my cell phone.

*Close to six fucking hours?*

Just to make myself feel worse I checked and saw if I'd flown into Dallas, I could have taken a direct flight from LAX and the drive would've only been *two* hours.

*I'd be willing to bet THEY didn't have any fucking bird activity.*

There was nothing to be done for it now, so I plugged in my iPod and got onto the interstate. I stopped for coffee not long after and again for gas as I neared Shreveport, so by the time I turned onto the piss poor driveway leading to Sookie's childhood home it was 8 o'clock in the morning. I sat there staring at it for a moment wondering what it had been like for Sookie to have grown up there. The farmhouse had seen better days, but it still looked like a home filled with nothing but good memories. All it needed was some minor repair work, a new coat of paint, and perhaps a new porch swing, but I liked it.

I got out of the car and stretched my legs before slinging my duffle bag over my shoulder and making my way up the porch steps. My hand was in the air poised to knock when my phone rang and I looked down seeing Sookie's name flash on the caller ID.

Smiling I answered, "Hello?"

*"Eric, I'm so sorry. My phone died and I fell asleep before I could charge it and when I plugged it in a minute ago I saw you're text with your new phone number. Why did you get a new number? Did you get my message yesterday at the house?"*

I felt a hundred times better hearing her rambling voice, my heart warming at the sound, and chuckled asking, "Already have your coffee did you?"

*"Oh! Good Lord, it's only six o'clock your time. Did I wake you?"*

"No, I've been up for a while." A *long* while.

I couldn't wait any longer to actually see her face and rang the doorbell right as she asked, "Why?" She quickly followed up with, "Can you hold on a sec? Somebody's ringing the damn doorbell."

I heard her footsteps going down the stairs, both on the phone and through the door, and when she pulled it open and saw me standing there, her mouth hung open in surprise while I answered her question. "Because it felt like I spent a week away from you last night."

It actually felt longer than that and seeing her again burned away the lingering chill in my body her absence had induced, but when her gaping mouth transformed into a smile as she launched herself at me, I finally felt whole again in her arms. "I missed you," she whispered into my chest. "I'm glad you came."

*Me too.*

Before either of us could say anything else the sound of feet shuffling down the hallway could be heard seconds before, "Sookie? Who's here sweetheart?"

Sookie pulled away with a half-grimace half-smile before she turned around saying, "Gran! You should be resting in bed."

"Horse puck! You kids act like I'm already in the marble pasture next door. I may have reservations there, but I'm not ready to check in just yet. I'm fit as a fiddle!"

Sookie pulled me into the house behind her, shaking her head saying, "We do not!" She caught herself before she could actually stomp her foot, making me chuckle out loud, which drew her attention back to me. I looked over and saw Sookie's Gran standing there with a small bandage over her left eye, in a flower patterned house coat that would give Pam a case of the vapors, but seemed to suit her perfectly. She smiled broadly at me as Sookie said, "Gran, I'd like you to meet my husband, Eric Northman." She didn't pause before saying 'my husband' which made me grin even wider because I no longer paused thinking of her as my wife. She was; I was; we were.

"Eric," she turned to me, "this is my Gran, Adele Stackhouse."

I stepped around Sookie and held my hand out in front of me, but she quickly batted it away (I could see where Sookie got her speedy hands from) and pulled me into a hug saying, "We're *family* and families give *hugs*, not *handshakes*."

*Family.*



*Was THAT the cause for the strange warm sensation building in my chest?*

I didn't have time to think about it because she let me go and said, "It's nice to finally meet you in person. Sookie said you had to work, so we weren't expecting you."

"I'm sorry," I said, suddenly wondering if I was intruding. "They ended up having to delay production this week so I just hopped on a plane here. I hope that's okay?"

"Of course you're welcome here," she smiled. "You're family." Before I could contemplate that word again she turned to Sookie and said, "Now why don't you show Eric up to your room so he can get freshened up and I'll get started on breakfast."

"Gran," Sookie whined, "would you *please* let me take care of you? I'll start on breakfast as soon as I show Eric where he can leave his things."

Gran huffed, mumbling under her breath, and finally said, "Fine! I'll just go change and beat back the Grim Reaper so you can get your jollies by taking care of me to death."

I laughed seeing their simultaneous eye rolls, but stopped short seeing their simultaneous glares directed at me. I still had my duffle bag slung over my shoulder so I followed Sookie halfway up the stairs with her whispering, "Just wait and see how pissed she gets when I make heart healthy oatmeal for breakfast instead of the biscuits and sausage gravy she would've made," when she suddenly stopped short. "Uhh...wait here for just a minute while I straighten up my room."

She took off before I could say anything and I stood there for a minute after hearing a door slam shut before realizing it was a silly request. I didn't care if her room was messy, so I walked up the rest of the stairs and saw there were only two rooms. One had the door opened and was clearly Jason's childhood room with the sports motif, so I opened the other door saying, "Sookie, I don't care..."

She looked like a deer caught in headlights standing there with a handful of papers she'd obviously been pulling down from the wall. Seeing my own face staring back at me from all sides brought back the interview her brother had given the morning after our wedding. "...*she's always liked him. Hell, her room back at Gran's is still covered in his posters.*"

I'd completely forgotten all about it and a shit eating grin lit up on my face as I stared back at a red-faced Sookie. I couldn't resist asking, "Sookie? Is there something you want to tell me?"

She chewed on her bottom lip as her eyes darted everywhere but back at my own before asking, "Why did they have to delay production on your show?"

I dropped my duffle bag onto the bedroom floor and took another step closer to her, still smiling like an idiot, asking, "Sookie? Were you in my fan club?" Instead of being creeped out over the thought, I actually liked the idea that Sookie had had a crush on me for so long. It evened us out since I was addicted to her.

Her blush deepened, which I took as a 'Yes', but she ignored my question asking another one of her own. "Why did you get a new phone number?"

Ignoring her question, I continued to stalk forward and snatched her up from where she stood with one arm, making her giggle, and with my other hand I snatched a piece of yellowed notebook paper that had been tacked to a corkboard above her desk. Holding it in front of her still smiling face I asked, "Practice?"

Every square inch of it was covered in her oversized teenage script with the same words repeated over and over.

*Mrs. Eric Northman.*

At least now I knew where the idea of a heart dotting the 'i' came from.

"You're such an ass," she laughed. "Couldn't you have pretended not to see it and not embarrass me?"

I dropped the paper and gripped her ass with both hands, hiking her body up my own with her legs automatically wrapping around my waist, and leaned forward saying, "But you *like* my ass." Not wanting her to lie, I stole the impending denial from her lips with a kiss. What had started off as a playful gesture on my part quickly became heated as I fed my addiction with her taste. Her hips ground against my own and Eric Junior stood at attention like Pavlov's dogs hearing a bell ring as her hands pulled my shirt up my back. I lifted her higher with my mouth trailing lower down her chest wanting to say 'Hi' to my long lost BFF's when Sookie sighed out, "Fuck."

A statement?

A question?

A suggestion?

It all sounded good to me, but as I turned and headed towards the bed she said, "Eric, Gran's waiting for us downstairs."

*Fuck.*

A realization.

Reluctantly, we peeled apart from each other and took a moment to calm ourselves before Sookie grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the door. It wasn't quite the skin on skin contact I'd been hoping for, but it would do for now. Sookie's hopes must have mirrored my own because as we hit the top landing of the stairs she looked back at me saying, "You brought the condoms."

A statement.

A question.

A suggestion.

A realization.

I nodded as a smile spread across my face; it all sounded good to me.

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## Chapter 54: Chapter 53

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### Chapter 53

#### SPOV

All of the tension I'd been carrying left my body as soon as I saw Eric standing on the front porch. I hadn't realized just how much I'd missed him until I was wrapped up in his arms again and the overwhelming need I had for him, after only having known him for such a short time, was a little scary.

Scary, but true.

My heart filled even more seeing the smile light up on Gran's face seeing him and when they hugged it nearly brought me to tears. It seemed Eric's presence caused me to leak from somewhere on my body no matter what the circumstance, but I quickly brushed the tears away before either of them could see and pulled him up the stairs towards my room.

My room where his face was my chosen wallpaper.

I'd already planned on removing all evidence of my teenage Eric Northman shrine before going back to L.A. so he wouldn't see it when we came back at Thanksgiving, but his unexpected arrival had me ditching him on the stairs and breezing through my room like the Tasmanian Devil. I should've known he wouldn't stay put; I should've locked the door, but it seemed I'd adopted the Northman trait of forgetting that minor detail. Caught red handed, I panicked.

*Would he freak out seeing it all? Would he run from the room and back to L.A., finally changing those locks, and remember to actually lock them? Would he get a restraining order? Would it help if I took off my shirt to distract him?*

Before I could drop the posters from my hands and grip the hem of my t-shirt he was already on me. I could tell at least Nessie seemed undisturbed by my choice of décor and when Eric's hands gripped my ass, with his lips attacking mine, I knew the rest of him didn't mind either. If I wasn't so turned on I would've giggled remembering I *had* joined the Eric Northman Fan Club years earlier, but I never knew it had those kinds of privileges. I needed to remember to renew my membership.

Having him there in my arms and mouth again my only thought was *I wanted him*. Oh how I wanted him, in every sense of the word, but I couldn't in all good conscience strip him naked and ride him off into the sunset knowing Gran was downstairs waiting on us. When I heard the telltale sound of her cast iron skillet being set on the stove I sighed out, "Fuck," knowing we needed to stop, now, before I lost all control and released the Kraken.

Eric seemed just as caught up in our reunion as I was, but as we made our way out of the room and I glanced at my twin size bed, I knew there was no way we'd be able to sleep together on such a small mattress without *sleeping together*. It was hard enough, pun intended, getting any rest on his giant mattress back home, but *could* I actually have sex in the same bed I used to stay up late at night fantasizing about and with the very same boy turned man? It was already a foregone conclusion we were moving onto the next level in our relationship when we'd stood side by side at the pharmacy register buying enough condoms for a brothel back in Nevada, with me the shade of one of those cherries he seemed to love and him with a predatory grin on his face, but Jason's phone call put our evening's plans on hold. Should we put it off now just because our location had changed? *Could* we put it off? Would *Eric* feel uncomfortable knowing Gran was downstairs and be too creeped out under the constant scrutiny of his teenage face peering down at him?

Did he remember to bring the condoms?

*That* was the most important question because there was no way we'd be heading to the pharmacy in town to buy any; it would be front page news in the Bon Temps' Community News Bulletin.

"You brought the condoms." I didn't know if I was asking a question or saying a prayer, but Eric's nod and smile had me thanking God. I almost pushed him back into my room wanting to see just how long it would take to get through 72 of them, but the sound of something sizzling on the stove made me put my sizzling libido on the back burner for now and I tried to morph back into the role of a sweet and caring granddaughter when what I really felt like was a sex-starved Eric Northman addict.

*I really was a bad Christian.*

We walked into the kitchen to see Gran had a skillet filled with sausage and bacon and was already rolling out the dough for biscuits making me wonder how long we'd actually been upstairs. "Gran," I protested with more whine in my tone than I'd meant to use.

"What?" she asked innocently. "You all were gone so long I figured whatever it was you two newlyweds were up to would leave you with a hearty appetite," she smiled.

"Gran!" I blushed furiously as Eric snickered next to me.

She ignored my mortification saying, "I may be an old woman now, but I was young once too. Why do you think your Grandpa added a second story to the house for your dad's and Aunt

Linda's bedrooms instead of down here?" She looked over with a sly smile divulging way too much info as she confessed, "We were *loud* and didn't want to wake them."

My jaw dropped open as I stuttered out, "Oh... My... God..." I closed my eyes trying to rid my brain of any and all knowledge of what my dear sweet old Gran had just bestowed on me while elbowing Eric's silently shaking form next to me. Not only did I have to go through the humiliation of Eric seeing the evidence of my teenage obsession with him, but now he got to witness my complete degradation learning my grandparents were screamers in the sack.

*Must be payback from God for being a bad Christian.*

When I opened my eyes I could see the amusement dancing across Gran's face, but I couldn't bring myself to look at Eric just yet and decided to pretend the last few minutes had never happened. Walking forward I took over at the skillet while Gran put the biscuits in the oven and I convinced her to sit down at the table using her getting to know Eric better as an excuse. I continued to cook and listened quietly as Gran quizzed Eric about his family. Neither of us had discussed much of anything to do with our families aside from the fact his father was a dick and my brother was an idiot, so I noticed right away when Eric's voice tensed as he admitted his mother had taken off when he was an infant. He never knew her family and his father had been an only child, like himself, so up until I'd come along he was the only family Eric ever had. Gran must have sensed his discomfort because she started asking questions about Eric's work and by the time I was setting the food on the table he was relaxed again.

"Gran," I said softly, "I hope you're not eating like this every day." I knew she wouldn't take too kindly to me trying to tell her what to do, but she'd just had her second heart attack and I was worried about her.

"I only cook like this when your brother comes 'round lookin' for something to eat. Now that I'm older, my appetite isn't what it used to be, but I couldn't have my new grandson-in-law eating a bowl of cereal as his first meal in my home."

"I like cereal," Eric replied. By the way he was cleaning his plate he liked everything in front of him too and not wanting to upset Gran by harping on her about her diet, I ate silently and plotted ridding her kitchen of all of the fatty foods and replacing them with healthy substitutes while we were there.

"So how come you never mentioned you were friends with Eric all this time?" Gran asked, looking at me. "I figured with how sweet you were on him for all those years you would a been shoutin' it from the rooftops," she smiled, adding to my embarrassment.

I made the mistake of locking eyes with Eric and seeing an arrogant grin come on his face I quickly looked away stuttering, "Uh... well, you know, there wasn't much to tell really." More specifically, there was *nothing* to tell so I quickly shoved a biscuit in my mouth before she could unknowingly ask me to lie to her more specifically.

"And what about you?" she asked, turning to face Eric. "What made you finally realize our Sookie was *the one*?"

If I'd known we would both be here I'm sure we would've had our stories straight and while I was kind of anxious waiting to hear his answer, I cursed the damn biscuit in my mouth making me unable to do or say anything to help him out. Lying to Gran was so much harder than coming up with various spice names, so while I was considering throwing myself on the floor and clutching my throat like I was choking to death I was shocked hearing him say, "It's indefinable really. There's no *one* thing about her; it's *everything* about her."

*Well thanks for clearing that up.*

I admittedly melted a little hearing his words and Gran seemed to like his answer as well, smiling broadly while looking back and forth between us before saying, "Well you can definitely tell the two of you are in love. Now when do I get some great-grandbabies?"

I don't know if it was her proclamation or her question, but I *do* know one of them caused me to inhale the last bit of biscuit that was in my mouth into my windpipe making me choke for real. Eric seemed to have stopped breathing himself with his fork frozen in midair where it had collided with Gran's words. He seemed to come to seconds later, when he realized I was dying next to him, and started pounding on my back trying to dislodge Gran's inquiry from my throat. When I could finally breathe again, I stalled answering her for a minute by drinking some orange juice before saying, "It's too soon to think about that Gran."

It was the most truthful thing I'd told her about Eric and me. It *was* too soon; love? Babies? I knew I cared about Eric a great deal and the way he made me feel was so much more than I'd ever felt before, but love? I'd thought I'd been in love with Quinn, but I had my doubts now. Our relationship was so one-sided I now thought I was probably more in love with the idea of being in love. There was an undeniable chemistry between Eric and me, but in reality we barely knew each other and besides, we'd only just decided to make the big decision to get condoms. Love was a decision for another day.

Eric's face flashed an odd mixture of relief and disappointment, but before I could analyze any of it Gran said dejectedly, "Well I'm not a spring chicken you know, so don't keep me waiting too long. I'd like to see at least *one* of my great-grandbabies before my old heart gives out."

Her Pitiful Pearl routine made me smile and seeing as how she'd given me enough to chew on, I stood up and started clearing away the breakfast dishes saying, "You can't have it both ways Gran. Either you're fit as a fiddle or on death's door. Which is it?"

"Oh my ticker's got at least another year's worth of beats in it." I turned from the sink and was heading back to the table for more dishes when I saw her reach over and poke Eric as she said, "So you better get crackin'!"

"Gran!" I exclaimed. *If she only knew; he definitely had a Kraken.*

"I'm trying!" Eric smiled.

"Eric!" I blushed furiously.

*God must be really pissed at me.*

Completely unrepentant Eric stood up from the table and helped me clear away the remaining dishes, under Gran's approving gaze, before saying, "If you ladies will excuse me, I think I'm going to take a shower."

I showed Eric where the downstairs bathroom was and he gave me a quick kiss before heading upstairs to get his things while I went back into the kitchen. Gran had thankfully remained seated so I got started on washing the dishes when she said, "I like him."

*Me too.*

I smiled saying, "I'm glad."

*I was.*

She eventually excused herself saying she was going to lie down and take a nap, which made me worry a bit since she was usually so full of energy, but figured it should be expected after her ordeal. I had to force myself to not follow along behind her to make sure she was okay when she glared at me as I turned the water off with her words, so I remained at the sink listening for any signs of distress from her. I don't know if it was because I was listening so intently or if it was his mere proximity that I knew when Eric had silently entered the room while my back was turned.

He nuzzled the side of my neck and I relaxed into him enjoying the feel of his body against mine as he asked, "Where's Gran?"

"Taking a nap," I answered, trying to mold my back to his front. I could smell the soap he'd used along with his distinct Eric crack-like aroma and the heat turned up on my back burner from earlier and I was suddenly sizzling again as I sighed, "I'm really glad you came."

His tongue traced along the edge of my ear and his hands started wandering over my body as he pressed closer to me asking, "How glad *are* you?" He ran his fingers along my waist before sliding his hands underneath the front of my shirt and cupped my breasts, with his fingertips tracing my hardened nipples through the fabric of my bra. My top half arched forward, pressing into his hands, while my lower half pushed back against his body wishing I was a few inches taller. Facing him right about now would be good too.

The soapy dishes in my hands were long forgotten as was his question momentarily before I replied, "*Very glad.*" Eric's lips and tongue continued to work their way down my neck as his left hand slid inside of my bra, rolling my nipple between his thumb and forefinger, while his right hand slid down inside the front of my shorts. In the back of my mind I knew Gran was just down

the hall and probably wasn't even asleep yet. After our little give and take on the patio the other night I had a feeling neither Eric nor I could keep it down, so to speak, if things progressed much further so I asked, "What are you doing?" while bearing down on both of his hands.

Eric's fingers slid easily through my folds, coating them in the perpetual slick arousal his presence induced, as he kissed his way along the back of my neck and said, "If you don't know what I'm doing than I have my work cut out for me. Let's begin with *this*." He punctuated the word by sliding a finger inside of me and biting the side of my neck, not hard enough to break the skin but enough to get my attention. His finger and thumb pinched my nipple at the same time and the dual sensations of pleasure and pain rocked through my body as I cried out, letting the soapy dish slip through my fingers into the sink full of dishwater, splashing the front of my shirt. "Shhh..." he whispered into my ear, reminding me of when he'd shushed me as Mr. Pillow Face, what seemed like a lifetime ago. I felt him lean over my shoulder while he added a second finger alongside the one still thrusting into me and he clucked his tongue in disapproval seeing the front of my now wet shirt saying, "It seems I've made you all wet."

*No shit.*

I figured what was good for the goose was good for the gander and taking Gran's words to heart, I set out to get the Kraken. My hands were still soapy and wet when I reached behind me and set them free to do their worst. I hadn't seen Eric when he'd come back into the kitchen, so instead of feeling the denim fabric I'd expected to find, I discovered he was wearing loose fitting tracksuit pants or shorts. Wicked and Immoral jumped for joy, twisting and diving into the elastic waistband set on their mission to capture the flagpole that was attempting to stake its claim on my lower back. Eric's fingers stalled inside of me as he gruffed out, "Fuck," against the back of my head, feeling Wicked take her prisoner.

"Shhh..." I repeated back to him as I stroked the Kraken while Immoral captured his ass. They were a very efficient team.

Eric's hands left my body long enough to spin me around and lift me onto the counter next to the sink. He quickly settled his body between my legs as one hand gripped the back of my head while his lips imprisoned mine. His other hand settled at the top of my ass, keeping my body in place, while his hips thrust against my own and I praised his genetics for making him so tall while his tongue plunged into my mouth mimicking his lower half. I could taste the lingering minty toothpaste he'd used, with my tongue hell bent on removing every trace of it while my arms and legs wrapped around his body having decided not even oxygen should come between us. Our lungs eventually decided *they* needed oxygen and our lips separated while Eric's fingers gripped my hair and pulled my head to the side baring my neck to his eager mouth.

Chewing his way back up to my ear he hoarsely whispered, "Shall we move this upstairs?"

Gran's presence just down the hall filtered back into my brain and all I could do was nod in reply. I couldn't wait any longer. I needed him more than I'd ever needed anything, feeling like I would die if we didn't finish and Eric seemed to have the same mindset when he smiled saying, "It would've killed me if you said no."



I released Eric from my grasp so I could jump down off of the counter, but his arms tightened around me in response as he growled out, "No," picking me up instead.

For once my head and limbs were in perfect sync and I hummed in approval, happily wrapping myself back around him as he made his way through the kitchen towards the hall leading to the stairs. We both froze seconds later when the backdoor opened and Jason walked in saying, "Whose car is that out front?"

Every part of me cried out in despair seeing him standing there and as I felt Nessie slowly dying between our two bodies I knew our anguish was mutual.

Jason's bumper sticker was true. I was no longer hummin', so I wasn't cummin'.

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## Chapter 55: Chapter 54

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### Chapter 54

#### **EPOV**

*So close.*

*So fucking close.*

So fucking close to fucking Sookie when her brother walked in through the unlocked backdoor and I probably would have laughed at the fact we seemed to share that particular trait if we hadn't been so close to fucking.

*Would it be bad form if I burst into tears?*

I forced away all thoughts of a naked and sweaty Sookie writhing underneath me, but the only way for me to do that was by staring at her brother with him staring back at us. In a moment straight out of a Bill Engvall comedy routine, he looked from me to Sookie, who was still wrapped around me, and asked her, "That you're husband?"

*Here's your sign.*

She was wrapped around me like a koala bear climbing a Eucalyptus tree and her lips were swollen from our kissing, with red blotches on her skin where I'd been mauling her neck, so I had to wonder just who he thought I'd be. "No," she sighed. "He's here checking the water meter, but I convinced him to take me for a ride."

I mentally conjured an amusement park sign in my head wondering what the wait time would be from here for us to actually get on that ride. 'Never' seemed to be the correct answer at that point and I again wanted to burst into tears.

"But Gran has a well," he replied even more confused. I recognized him from the television interview a week earlier, only now I was a bit confused over his chosen apparel. While he'd been shirtless on TV, now he was wearing jeans and a t-shirt with some sort of reflective vest on top.

*Maybe he gets lost in the woods a lot and it's to protect him from hunters?*

"Jason!" Sookie snapped. "What're you doing here? Shouldn't you be at work?"

"I *am* at work!" he exclaimed. "The fellas an I are fillin' some a them potholes at the end of Hummingbird Lane." He looked back studying me and I was nearly blinded by the light bulb coming on atop his head when he said, "Hey...you *are* Sookie's husband!" Before I could say anything, a second light bulb came on as he asked, "Did ya bring your little black book?"

*Maybe I impaled live kittens on pikes in a former life? That was the reason why God refused to let me impale Sookie's...*

"Jason!" she snapped again, breaking my train of thought. "Why. Are. You. Here?"

"Jeez Louise you sure are cranky in the mornin'. I just wanted to check on Gran and put up some a the stuff out in the yard. We're supposed to get a real bad storm tonight. You didn' forget about her doctor's appointment this afternoon did ya?"

I felt her loosen her limbs from my body so I had no choice but to put her down while she sighed, "No." I could tell by her tone that she *had* forgotten, but stayed quiet not wanting to draw her wrath my way.

He gave her a look like *she* was the dense one in the family and walked forward thrusting his hand out in front of him saying, "I'm Jason, Sook's brother."

I shook it replying, "Eric," mentally adding *your blue balled brother-in-law*.

"So, about that little black book," he smiled hopefully.

Before Sookie could attack him again I set him straight saying, "I never had one and the numbers I *did* have are long gone." Looking at Sookie I admitted, "It's why I got the new number. Too many...*other people* had my old one."

I wasn't too sure how she'd take my confession, but she'd already asked me about it earlier and figured I might as well tell her now. At least maybe then her brother would quit asking about it since it seemed to really piss her off. Her smile set me at ease, but her brother drew our attention again.

"Do you remember any a their numbers?" he asked patting his pockets in search of something. I didn't have any of their numbers memorized, but I was still oddly fascinated by him, hoping he'd pull out a bunch of random items like paperclips, shoestrings, and marbles as if he had a ticket to the 'Let's Make A Deal' game show. He eventually gave up and just sighed, leaning against the

counter and saying, "Never mind. I ain't got my little black book on me." His hand was resting on a notepad with a pencil lying next to it. Clearly, he had no marbles.

Sookie glanced at the clock and looked back at me apologetically saying, "I should go wake Gran. She'll want enough time to get ready before we leave and it'll take about twenty minutes to get there."

"Okay," I said before my mouth was hijacked by a huge yawn. I shook it off and told Jason I'd help him 'put up stuff' in the yard while Sookie and Gran got themselves ready. Walking around the house I could see a lot of the minor repairs it needed as well as the shitastic driveway. Not that I ever planned to drive all the way to Louisiana, but there'd be no way I'd ever be able to drive my Corvette on it without scraping up the undercarriage. Hearing Jason talk about filling potholes I asked, "Do you work for a private firm or the town?"

My question confused him for a minute, but he finally said, "I work for Renard Parish on the road crew. I'm the supervisor."

He seemed friendly enough so I wondered if he'd charmed his way into the position. Maybe he was the Rainman of potholes because I couldn't see how anyone would put him in charge of anything otherwise.

"Well do you know of any places around here that can fix the driveway?" I asked.

"Gran cain't afford that. You seen how long that driveway is?" he asked, gifting me with his 'Duh' face while he pointed at the driveway.

"But *I* can afford that and I want to get it fixed for her along with some other things for the house. It looks like it could use some paint and a new roof and shutters and I noticed some warped boards on the porch. She could trip or twist an ankle walking on them. Do you know anyone around here that can take care of all of that?"

I wondered if I'd used words too big for Jason to understand, but he eventually nodded his head saying, "Yeah. There's a guy named Calvin out in Hot Shot that does that kind a work. He's a real stand up fella too, so he'd do it right, but it'll cost a lot for all that." His eyes narrowed back at me as he asked, "Why you offerin'?"

The smile formed on my face without thought when I answered, "Because we're family."

He stared at me for a moment longer before forming his own grin and said, "I guess we are." We continued walking around the yard picking up lawn chairs and anything else that might be damaged in the impending storm while he gave me Calvin's full name and said I could find his number in the phonebook inside. Calvin would also know who to contact about getting the driveway repaired, if he couldn't do it himself, so as soon as we were done I made Jason promise to keep it between us and went back into the house while he went back to work.

I found Sookie and Gran in the kitchen and ended up yawning again before I could even say 'hello'. "Did you get any sleep last night?" Sookie asked. "You got in kind of early this morning."

Thinking back I replied truthfully, "Not really." I told them about my flights from hell, with Sookie laughing about the bird activity, and as I finished my tale of landing in New Orleans they both said in unison, "You should have flown into Dallas."

I yawned again saying, "You don't say."

It was nearing high noon and I figured I'd been awake more or less for two days straight minus a catnap on each of my flights. When that realization dawned on me I suddenly couldn't *stop* yawning and Sookie came up putting her arms around me and saying, "Why don't you stay here and get some rest? I can take Gran by myself."

Thinking I could secretly call Calvin while they were gone, I asked, "Are you sure?"

The yawn that followed it was unintentional, but helpful nonetheless when she smiled replying, "Yes. Go lie down upstairs and I'll come and get you for dinner if you're not up by then."

I gave Sookie the keys to my rental car knowing it would be a more comfortable ride for them and watched them through the front window as they left, laughing when Sookie got swatted by Gran for 'fussing' over her too much on their way to the car. As soon as I couldn't see them anymore I dug out the phonebook from where Jason said it would be and called Calvin when I found his number. He knew Adele, or rather he informed me *everyone* knew Adele, and once I rattled off the list of things I wanted done he said they could start work on Saturday. Barring any more complications with Gran's health I figured we'd be leaving no later than Friday, if we were going to make the photo shoot for GQ that weekend, but he said he'd been out to the farmhouse a couple of times fixing things here and there for her over the years and knew what needed to be done. Because of Gran's health issues I didn't want her to be bothered any longer than necessary and asked that he bring enough men to finish the job right in the least amount of time possible. He assured me he could get it done by the end of the weekend and I immediately agreed to the price he quoted me, but because he didn't take credit cards I had no way to pay him without my checkbook on me. I started flipping through the still open phonebook in front of me to see if my bank had any branches nearby, but while I was explaining it all to him he said since he knew Adele and the fact I was Sookie's new husband, I could just mail him a check when we got back.

I pulled the phone away from my ear to stare at it, more than likely resembling Jason's confused expression, and finally asked, "Are you sure?" I didn't want him to change his mind later on and not do the work because he hadn't been paid.

"Yep," was his only reply.

I silently shook my head having never had anyone take my word in lieu of my money for *anything*, but he took down my cell phone number and promised to call me if they ran into any problems before we finally hung up. Putting the phonebook back where I'd found it, I looked at the clock and figured I'd take that nap since the house was empty. I took my shirt off as I climbed

the stairs and turned on the ceiling fan in the bedroom, noting Sookie's bed was really fucking tiny when my feet hung off the end a little. Sinking down into the mattress I found it smelled just like her so I no longer minded the size of it and wrapping my arms around one of her pillows I could easily pretend it was her by the scent and soon fell asleep.

The sound of the rain hitting the tin roof above could be heard as my eyes fluttered open seeing it was already dark out, but that wasn't what woke me up. It was the feel of the little blond woman's lips currently kissing their way up my inner thigh and when they switched their attention to an already wide awake Eric Junior my hips bucked up as I repeated her question from that morning in a whisper.

"What are you doing?"

It was pitch black in the room so I had no idea what time it was, but when lightning flashed through the window I could see her mischievous grin when she repeated my words back to me.

"If you don't know what I'm doing then I have my work cut out for me. Let's start with *this*," she said, pulling the shorts down and off of my body and licking my cock from base to tip. I gasped out loud when her mouth enveloped the head, with her tongue flicking across my slit, before she proved that night by the pool was no fluke and sucked me all the way down into her throat. Her lips tightened around the base and her suction increased as she hummed her way back up. One hand gripped the quilt beneath me, while the other one worked its way into her hair, as she repeated her downward motion and I barely recognized my own voice when I hoarsely whispered, "Fuck...Sookie..."

A part of my brain wondered if Gran was waiting with dinner for us downstairs, but Sookie hummed the thought right back out of me. It seemed she'd chosen to have *me* for dinner and I was in no position to deny her. The heat of her soft wet mouth gliding up and down was quickly becoming unbearable, but I wanted *more; needed more*. I wanted to finally be inside of her, so when I heard the thunder rumbling in the distance and another flash of lightning let me see Sookie was completely naked, I made my move before it was too late.

Suddenly having my own ideas for dinner, I surprised her by grabbing the tops of her arms and pulling her body up mine. My tongue dove into her still open mouth and she kissed me back, rubbing her bare skin against mine, before pulling away and trying not to smile while pouting, "But I wasn't done."

*Neither was I.*

I flipped us over leaving a wet trail with my tongue across each of her breasts, teasing and pulling her nipples with my lips and teeth while Sookie whimpered underneath me. Continuing my descent down her body I dipped my tongue into her navel, noting her ticklish response, and moved on until I was finally hovering over her center. Too impatient to tease her any longer I dove forward parting her folds with my tongue and cleaned away the moisture I found. Everything about her was perfect, even her taste, and I doubted I would ever tire of being with her. She was *mine* and just in case she had any doubts, I copied our tattoos drawing a heart with

the tip of my tongue over the spot where I would be staking my claim and filled in the lines with our combined juices.

I'd purposely avoided her clit up until that point, wanting us to climax together the first time, but hearing her say, "Eric...please..." weakened my resolve.

*I'd just have to make her cum again.*

Plunging my tongue inside of her, I pulled the fluids out, painting her flesh with it on my way up to her small bundle of nerves. As soon as my lips latched on her hips jumped beneath me while her hands dug into my hair trying to keep me in place. The slow rhythm of my tongue on her clit steadily increased until I was keeping time with the sound of the rain battering against the tin roof above us. She cursed and begged, threatened and pleaded, but I waited until I knew she was at the point of no return before thrusting two fingers inside of her and sending her over the edge. She screamed out my name, muffled by the clap of thunder now directly over the house, as her body seized beneath me and I smiled against her skin hearing her say it.

*Mine.*

I sat up on my knees with my eyes raking over her naked form in front of me and pulled my fingers from her body, now covered in her cum. I wanted to be covered in it too so when her eyes finally met mine, she watched mesmerized while I stroked my cock in front of her painting myself with it as I had done to her and her tongue darted out licking her swollen lips before repeating, "Eric...please..."

I didn't have to ask what it was she wanted when her legs spread out in front of me and her arms reached out beckoning me forward. I leaned over and pulled a condom out of her nightstand, from where I'd stashed them earlier when I took a shower, and rolled it on while she watched my every move. I paused for a moment waiting for her brother to burst through the door; the phone to ring; a tree to fall through the roof or a pterodactyl to come flying through the window, but when none of that happened I finally settled my body on top of hers.

Her arms and legs wrapped around me as I leaned forwards tracing her lips with my tongue until she opened them welcoming my kiss. She felt so small beneath me, completely covered by my body, as if I was made to be her shelter from the storm. I knew I would always protect her from anyone and anything, whether she asked it of me or not.

*She was my family.*

When my tip settled at her entrance she pulled back from our kiss and looked into my eyes smiling softly as she asked, "Is this a dream?" I understood, having questioned it myself, since the outside world kept interfering, but I knew it was finally real.

"No, this is only the beginning," I answered, pushing my way inside of her. I buried my head against her shoulder, trying to go slow when I felt how tight she was, not wanting to hurt her. If I didn't know any better I would've thought she was a virgin, but her initial gasp of air turned into

a breathy moan as her hands and feet pushed against my ass urging me deeper inside of her. Her inner muscles contracted around my length sucking me deeper and deeper with every spasm until I was finally buried inside her to the hilt. No one from my past had ever felt as good as Sookie did surrounding me and I could feel my own pulse beating inside of her. She gasped again, biting down on my shoulder, as I slowly pulled out until just the tip was still inside of her and cried out my name again when I forcefully shoved my way back in now that I knew she could take all of me.

The thunder and lightning continued to roar outside as we set a brutal pace to keep up with the storm, with the howling wind drowning out our grunts and groans. I didn't know if God was condemning us or cheering us on, but I didn't care. We'd been waiting too long with too many obstacles for us to be gentle and sweet; that would come later. Now we had to take back what we'd been denied and prove to one another, and the world, the undeniable truth; *we* were meant to be. She was mine just as much as I was hers.

As Sookie's chanting of my name steadily increased in volume, so did the coil inside of me threatening to burst free. I put most of my weight on my left arm and reached down with my right hand circling her clit with my thumb trying to force her orgasm out of her. Just as I lost the battle to hold back a second longer her muscles clamped down around me and we both cried out with our release as the thunder and lightning outside collided above the house, rattling the windows and lighting up the room. My hips continued to pump into her, as my body shuddered above her, until I was finally empty and when our panting breaths subsided I claimed her lips in another kiss.

Everything in that moment was perfect and I didn't want to move, but I eventually pulled out and tossed the used condom into the wastebasket next to the bed before pulling her back into my arms. She kissed my chest next to where her head lay and whispered against my skin, "Finally."

*Finally.*

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## **Chapter 56: Chapter 55**

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### Chapter 55

#### **SPOV**

As I lay with my body pressed against Eric's, both feeling and hearing his heartbeat underneath my head and surrounded by posters of his teenage face, I repeated the one word my brain kept repeating.

"Finally."

It was stupid really. We'd only known each other for eleven days, but I felt like we'd been together for much longer. So much had happened in that time, with both of our lives changing so

dramatically, it hardly felt real. I remembered waking up that morning in Vegas thinking it I'd found myself in a nightmare, but now I was afraid all of it *was* a dream, *he* was a dream, and I was terrified I'd wake up and find myself in my bed back at Amelia's.

I was drawn to him, everything about him, and even after what we'd just done, I couldn't stop the blush from rising to my cheeks thinking about the way I'd molested his sleeping body. When I'd gone up to get him for dinner earlier I couldn't bring myself to wake him, knowing how tired he was, so Gran and I had a light dinner together and I'd told her I'd fix him something later on. When the power went out with the storm a little after nine Gran decided to call it a night and, after I'd made sure she'd gotten to bed okay, I'd planned on just slipping in beside Eric, but seeing him lying there, wearing nothing but a pair of shorts, made my brain short circuit. Gone was common sense and decency, replaced with Wicked and Immoral removing my damp panties. I just couldn't control myself or them.

*I wanted him; needed him and I would HAVE him.*

I knew now why he'd had so many women begging for his attention, having just begged for it myself a few moments earlier, and I didn't even know how great his bedroom skills were at the time. Just thinking about it again was getting my engines revving and I squirmed at his still silent side wondering what his bounce back time was.

*I wanted to bounce again.*

Eric's fingers trailed lightly up and down my back as he asked, "What are you thinking?"

Immoral answered for me by trailing up his inner thigh before ghosting across the Kraken and as I watched it start to come back to life I lied, saying, "Nothing."

Immoral wasn't letting me get away with it though and teased the beast by stroking it, taunting it, daring it to attack. Eric's hand settled atop Immoral, praising her honesty by gently tickling across her back and thrusting up into her downward stroke, while verbally casting doubt on my bald faced lie asking, "You call *this* nothing?"

*No, I call THAT the Kraken, Nessie, a unicorn horn, the Beast, the Titanic...*

Not wanting to overinflate his ego, but not wanting to crush it either, along with my chance for another ride on the Eric Northman merry-go-round, I remembered our informative trip to the Marine base and said, "Mmm...not nothing; maybe more like a Navy cruiser?"

*I knew of a channel he could go cruising through.*

I slid my leg over Eric's body and leaned down, circling his nipple with my tongue, and bit down lightly as he continued to thrust into my hand and hissed, "Uhh...", before gathering his thoughts and saying, "I think we can safely classify it as a submarine."

*More like an aircraft carrier.*



I leaned over to get another condom from the nightstand, but was momentarily sidetracked when Eric captured one of my breasts with his mouth. His left hand gently kneaded the other one while his right hand went straight to my clit.

*Talk about pushing my buttons; I seemed to have more than a universal remote.*

Snatching the condom from the drawer, I ripped it open and while I rolled it on his Tomahawk missile I suggested, "A destroyer?"

*He'd certainly destroyed me for all other men.*

Moving my body into position, I slowly lowered myself, enjoying the sensation of him filling me up again and looked down seeing Eric's hooded eyes staring back at me with a lustful smile on his face as he said, "You sank my battleship."

I loved how playful he was and would've laughed, remembering when I'd played that game as a child, but it seemed I'd inadvertently declared war on Eric because he fired off a barrage of torpedoes as he gripped my hips, forcefully pulling me down into every one of his upward thrusts. Falling forward, I gripped the bedding on each side of his head and released my counter measures. With my breasts dangling in his face, I attempted to take control again by rocking and swirling my hips, intentionally clamping down around his base, trying to win the war by making him cum first, but it didn't matter what direction I went; clockwise; counterclockwise; him and his heat seeking missile were ready for it.

I could feel the tide shifting and the currents swelled with my impending orgasm, but I fought it off, refusing to lose the battle just yet. However, Captain Eric had other weapons in his arsenal and, quicker than the lightning outside, he lifted me off of him and planted me face down on top of the bed. I had no time to wonder where he'd gone to because I felt his hands grip my hips from behind, pulling my ass up and back as he breached my hull yet again. I screamed out his name, grateful for the storm now that I knew screaming was a genetic Stackhouse trait, and tried to come up with a new battle plan, but it was useless. Eric out strategized me in every way and as one of his hands slid back to my clit, while his cannons battered me from behind, I had no choice but to surrender.

My orgasm exploded inside of me sending shockwaves through every part of my body with Eric's victorious war cry ringing out moments later with his own. I felt just as battered as the tin roof above us while he planted kisses along my back and neck before pulling out, but I had no energy left to move. He settled next to me in the too small bed and pulled me like a ragdoll until I was lying halfway on top of him, but I couldn't even open my eyes and heard him only chuckle before kissing the top of my head as he whispered, "Goodnight lover."

All I could manage to say was, "Nuh," and drifted off, dreaming about playing 'Clue', with Eric as Colonel Mustard and where he would use his candlestick.

The next day I woke up alone and feeling sore with the morning sun streaming through the window, but it didn't stop me from grinning thinking about the night before. I never knew my

body was capable of having multiple orgasms and since my only other sexual partner had been Quinn, I had no choice but to assume the reason had to do with him. They were incomparable as lovers with Eric far exceeding Quinn in every way, but I wondered if Eric felt the same way about me. He'd had more women than I cared to know about and I felt a tad insecure, but quickly pushed the feeling away before it could take root. After all, he'd flown all the way to Louisiana just to be with me the moment he found out he had the week off. He *wanted* to be with *me*, not any of his former lovers and he'd even changed his phone number so they couldn't contact him.

*What more did I need?*

My bladder chose that moment to signal what *it* needed, so I threw on some clothes and went downstairs. When I finished up in the bathroom I walked into the kitchen to find Gran standing at the stove cooking oatmeal and she turned to see me, smiling and said, "Good morning sunshine. I thought you were gonna sleep the day away."

"Morning Gran," I smiled and gave her a peck on the cheek as I took over at the stove. "Oatmeal smells good," I said, stirring the pot.

Gran sat down at the table and frowned, "Well I offered to make Eric a big breakfast again this morning, but he said he wanted oatmeal." I turned away from Gran so she couldn't see my smile, knowing Eric would choose a big breakfast any day over a bowl of oatmeal, but he was doing it so *she* would eat food that was good for *her*. My heart melted a bit more knowing he was doing it for *me* by proxy.

"Did you get any rest with that storm last night?" I asked.

"I slept like the dead," she chuckled, "but how about *you*? That was baby making weather, so should I be clearing my calendar for about nine months from now?"

"Gran!" I could feel the telltale blush rising up my chest and since the oatmeal was done, I turned off the stove and changed the subject asking, "Where *is* Eric? Breakfast's ready."

"Oh, he's outside checking the house to see if there's any damage from the storm."

I set a bowl of oatmeal in front of Gran and went outside to find Eric pacing in the ruts of the driveway with his cell phone to his ear. I didn't want to intrude on his conversation, so I walked out into the yard and turned back seeing the house had indeed suffered some damage. A few of the shutters and some of the wood siding had been torn off and were now stacked up against the side of the house, I assumed by Eric. Walking around to the front I could see the roof had been damaged as well and the old porch swing was dangling to one side from where the support had pulled away from the overhang up above.

Tears sprang to my eyes knowing Gran would be upset once she saw how much work needed to be done and I quickly calculated how much I had in my savings to help her, knowing she'd never be able to afford all of the repairs on her fixed income. I felt Eric's arm slide around my waist

from behind at the same time I heard Gran's voice coming from the side of the yard saying, "Oh my stars..."

When she came around to the front and saw the porch swing hanging down she shook her head and said, "Well, I guess I won't be sitting there with a good book anymore."

I walked over and put my arms around her saying, "Don't worry Gran. I have some money saved up and maybe Jason can help by putting the shutters back up and..."

Eric's voice interrupted me saying, "It's already taken care of."

I turned, confused, asking, "What?"

"The repairs for the house, the driveway, the new porch swing; it's all taken care of," he said.

"How?" He hadn't even known enough about Bon Temps, Louisiana to know to fly into Dallas instead of New Orleans, so how on earth could he have already arranged major home repairs less than an hour after waking up?

"Calvin Norris and his crew will be here in about an hour."

Still dumbfounded I asked, "How do you know Calvin Norris?"

*Was he a member of the Eric Northman Fan Club too?*

Looking a bit chagrined, Eric replied, "I got his name from Jason yesterday and called him when you left for the doctor's appointment. He was already planning on doing all of the repairs this weekend so he went out yesterday afternoon and got all of the supplies. I just got off the phone with him and he agreed to start work today; we just need to go out and buy another porch swing and he'll put it up."

*Of all the highhanded...*

"Eric!" Gran and I said in unison. Getting angrier I asked, "Why would you do something like that without saying anything? What gives you the right to go and make those kinds of decisions without asking anyone?" The words *gold digger* were flashing like a neon light in my head when I said, "I don't want your money!"

Gran tried to soften my blow saying, "It's too much Eric. Jason can do some of the work and I have some in savings. You don't have to do any of this."

My stomach clenched seeing the hurt flash across his face, but a controlled anger replaced it when he said, "I know I don't *have* to." Looking directly at me he gritted out, "I know you don't *want* my *money*. *Why* would I do it? *What* gives me the *right*?" Looking at both of us he said, "Yesterday you welcomed me into your home and called me *family*. *Families* take care of each other. They don't have to be *asked* to do it. They *want* to do it. It's their *right* to do it. I saw

something that needed to be done and I took it upon myself to get it done. I would've told you about it today since I didn't get the chance to yesterday. Would you be upset if *Jason* was the one who had the means to do all of it?" When neither Gran nor I said anything, my anger having been replaced by remorse, he asked, "So which is it? Am I a part of your family or not?"

"*Of course* you are," Gran said, moving forward and wrapping her arms around Eric. "I'm sorry for seeming so ungrateful. I guess I'm just so used to just getting by, but I *do* appreciate the help. Thank you." She eventually let go of him and gave me a look that clearly told me to get my head out of my ass before she went back inside.

I was too ashamed to move and Eric just stared back at me from where he stood until the first tear fell down my face. As soon as he took one step forward his movement seemed to unlock my legs and I ran up to him, wrapping my arms around his waist, and buried my face into his chest crying, "I'm sorry." His body eventually relaxed and his arms wrapped around me as he leaned down and kissed the top of my head. My mouth blurted out the only thing I kept thinking. "I don't deserve you."

*I didn't.*

I relaxed a little hearing him chuckle as he held me tighter saying, "I think you have that backwards. I'm the one that doesn't deserve *you*." He nuzzled the top of my head adding, "Too bad for you that I'm a greedy bastard and won't let you go."

He was the complete opposite of greedy; his actions proved that. "Why would you *want* to keep me? I'm a huge bitch."

Pulling back, Eric tilted my chin up with his finger until I finally looked into his eyes and tried to lighten my morose mood saying, "But you're *my* bitch."

It worked because a smile worked its way onto my face as I confirmed, "I am."

*I was.*

We kissed to seal the deal and went back inside hand in hand, to Gran's obvious delight when she saw us, and ate our lukewarm oatmeal. Calvin and his crew showed up not long after informing us it was a good thing Eric had already set everything up the day before because he was getting besieged with calls from people needing repairs done from the storm, which made Gran and I hug Eric again in thanks. Calvin had brought over paint samples for Gran to choose from for the house and shutters, and once she'd made her choices Eric and I went to the big home improvement store in Monroe to buy the paint and porch swing. I even kept my mouth shut when he picked the nicest, therefore the most *expensive*, one they had knowing it would look perfect on the porch and Gran would enjoy sitting on the cushioned seat while she read her romance novels.

Eric was able to walk around without drawing too much attention from the other patrons, but being six foot four and looking like a walking Adonis was bound to draw some looks no matter

what his profession was. He graciously stopped to sign autographs and pose for pictures when asked, but it was nothing like back home where people seemed to clamor for his attention. It was then I realized I no longer viewed Louisiana as my *home* anymore; *home* was with *Eric*.

Calvin had been right about the amount of people needing repairs because the store was packed and the shelves were empty, but we eventually made it through the checkout line and Eric seemed pleased when I didn't fight with him over paying for it all. The porch swing was scheduled to be delivered by the next morning and we got back to Gran's seeing they already had the old roof torn off and were in the process of putting on the new one. Calvin wasn't able to have as many men at the house, because of the short notice, so over the next two days both Eric and I pitched in helping out with the painting that needed to be done and to carry away whatever they tore down.

Some of Gran's friends stopped by to check on her once they heard about her heart attack and ended up fawning all over Eric and his thoughtfulness in getting the house repaired, which seemed to make Gran as proud as a peacock. I found out later from Eric that Maxine Fortenberry was a little *too* friendly and had grabbed his ass, which made Gran laugh, but had Eric holding me down in his lap as I struggled to get up so I could go and beat her ass. All I managed to do was make both Gran and Eric laugh harder and me angrier.

At the end of each night we'd both pass out from exhaustion, but that was probably a good thing since there weren't any more storms to cover up any hanky panky we might've done otherwise and by the time Friday morning rolled around the house had never looked better. It was picture perfect and Gran had tears in her eyes when she thanked him again saying she never thought she'd live to see the day when there was nothing left to be done to the house. She swatted him when he mentioned the next step was the interior, but I could tell by the way her eyes danced she wouldn't put up too much of a fuss if he tried.

We were scheduled to fly out of Shreveport at noon, which would give us just enough time to make it back to the house and repack our bags before the car would show up to drive us up the coast for the photo shoot the following day. I cried all over again seeing Eric brush a tear or two from his eyes while he hugged Gran goodbye and as we drove down the new level driveway he reached over and squeezed my hand in his asking, "Are you okay?"

I knew I would always miss and worry about Gran no matter what, but seeing him by my side and feeling his hand in mine, I replied truthfully, "I am."

*As long as I still had him, I was.*

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## Chapter 57: Chapter 56

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### Chapter 56

**EPOV**

I was a little surprised at the sense of longing I felt as we drove away from the farmhouse. Except for the minor blip when I'd told them about getting the house repaired, Sookie's Gran had treated me exactly like what she'd called me; family. I'd never felt more welcome or at home than I had there and while I was excited to finally have a few days with Sookie all to myself, I was already looking forward to Thanksgiving when we'd get to go back.

*I was sure as fuck buying a bigger bed for Sookie's room though.*

She didn't move much in her sleep and I admittedly slept better when I had her wrapped in or around my body, but that bed was just fucking ridiculous. I had every intention of looking for furniture stores online, when I had the time, and finding one nearby so I could set up an account for Gran to pick out whatever she wanted to replace in the house, starting with that fucking bed. I'd also made sure to tell Calvin that if Gran called him for anything else she needed to be done, I'd take care of the bill figuring she couldn't get mad now that we had an understanding.

Of course, I'd always be fond of that bed, in a way, since it was where Sookie and I had finally had sex, but I was already looking forward to breaking in the new one. Everything about her was fucking amazing and the storm provided the perfect backdrop now that I knew she was pretty vocal in between the sheets. Quinn was a fool to have cheated on her, throwing away any chance of keeping her when she was perfect both in and out of bed, but I wouldn't be making that same mistake. No one ever made me feel the way she did, either in or out of bed, and I had no desire to go back to living my life the way I had before she came along.

Sookie had been so tired each night, passing out as soon as her head hit the pillow, we didn't have the opportunity to repeat our performance from that first night, so I was already counting the ways and positions I'd be taking her once we got to wherever it was we'd be staying for the weekend. While the fast, hard, and playful fucking we'd done that night had been thoroughly satisfying, now I wanted to give slow and sensual a try. It wasn't something I'd done with anyone else; it wasn't something I'd wanted or felt the need to do, but with Sookie I both wanted and needed to, for her and for me.

I was lost in those thoughts when I heard Sookie's voice, barely louder than the radio, say, "Thank you Eric."

"For what?" I asked, knowing I'd be more likely to get a punch in the arm instead of thanks if she could read my somewhat depraved thoughts at the moment.

Her breath hitched in her throat making me look over to see those God forsaken tears in her eyes. I had no clue as to how she could possibly cry so much, but each tear she shed felt like a stab to my gut and I hated seeing them no matter what the cause was. Before I could ask her what was wrong she said, "For everything. For flying out here to be with me; for fixing up Gran's house. You have no idea how happy you've made her; how happy you've made *me* and I just want you to know how much it means to me." She looked over at me locking her gaze with mine as she said, "How much *you* mean to me."

*Uhh...*

My heart seized as my mouth dropped open and I'm pretty sure my lungs stopped working since no air was making its way into my chest. What seemed like a million thoughts and memories of Sookie and I together flooded my brain, which was odd since we'd only known each other for two weeks, but it felt like much longer as I wondered if *this* was the moment she would tell me she was in love with me. It wouldn't be the first time I heard those words directed at me, but since the previous times had been from screaming fans or fuck buddies turned psychos, it would be the first time I would actually believe them to be true. The only question was; was I in love with her?

I didn't want to lie and repeat the words back to her if I wasn't absolutely sure, but it didn't matter when I realized I took too long to say anything because in what seemed a lifetime turned into a split second later she said, "There's the exit for the airport," pointing at the roadside sign.

Nodding mutely, I took the exit wondering what, if anything, I should say to get the moment back that had already seemed to pass us by. I knew whatever it was that I felt for Sookie was strong, deeper and more meaningful than I'd ever felt for anyone else, but was it *love*? I still didn't know having nothing to compare it to, but selfishly I wanted to know how *she* felt about me. I found myself wanting to hear her tell me that she *did* love me, hoping her declaration alone would somehow make my own feelings become clearer, even if only to just me.

As we pulled into the parking lot to return the rental car, I parked and turned towards Sookie, putting my hand on hers and stopping her from exiting the car as I asked, like the clingy little bitch I'd suddenly turned into, "*How much* do I mean to you?"

Even I could hear the neediness in my voice and I regretted asking her the question when her tears made a brief reappearance, but she smiled softly as she leaned forward and kissed me gently before pulling away and saying, "A lot."

*A lot.*

It wasn't quite the same four letters I'd been hoping to hear, but considering I didn't know if I could've truthfully said the L-word in return, I decided not to dwell on it. After all, I *did* know she meant *a lot* to me too and I grabbed the back of her head pulling her mouth to back mine and tried to convey my feelings for her in a much more demanding kiss. Tasting her cherry lip gloss on her lips and feeling them soften under my assault as she allowed me to invade her mouth, would appease me for now because as our kiss continued I began to realize it didn't matter whether or not we could say those three little words yet. I knew neither one of us was going anywhere so I would bide my time and continue to woo her, hoping it was only a matter of time before I fully captured her heart and got those three little words I longed to hear from her lips.

As our kiss deepened, it was stirring a whole *other* kind of feeling within me, especially now that I knew what it was like to be buried deep inside of Sookie, and the two and a half days that had passed since I'd last visited was two and a half days too long. I mentally stored 'slow and sensual' in the backseat bringing 'hard and fast' to the forefront as one of my hands snaked up the back of her shirt while the other fumbled around looking for the lever to recline her seat. She gasped

when I found it as her body fell backwards with the upper half of mine on top of hers and my growl was her only warning of my intentions.

Giggling, she tried to push against my chest saying, "Eric Northman! We are NOT having sex in the Avis parking lot!"

Ignoring her words because I knew she actually *wouldn't* have sex in the parking lot, I buried my face in her neck with my whiskers marking her skin as I kissed my way towards her ear where I whispered, "How about on the plane?"

Expecting another rebuff from my modest southern belle, I was surprised when I felt her hand stroke me through my jeans as she said, "I think that can be arranged."

Visions of Sookie's naked body wrapped around mine as I pounded into her in one of those tiny little bathrooms swam through my head and I claimed her lips in another searing kiss before she could take the words back. Takeoff couldn't happen quickly enough and as I pulled away from her, seeing the lust in her eyes, I sent off a silent prayer that we'd hit a little turbulence at precisely the right time.

Once we got the car turned in, the shuttle took us to the terminal and we checked in for our flight. I'd made sure to grab a few condoms and put them in my pocket, since we were checking our luggage, with Sookie blushing when she saw me take them from my bag. Grinning, I pulled her body flush against mine with my hand caressing her lower back, wishing I could caress much lower on her body, and leaned down whispering, "Why are you blushing? It was *your* idea."

I felt Sookie's arms wrap around my waist with her hands sliding into my back pockets, squeezing my ass and pulling my hips towards her, as she said, "I'm just hoping you grabbed enough."

My jeans were becoming uncomfortably tight; having nothing to do with Gran's cooking, and as we went through the security checkpoint I, of course, beeped walking through the metal detector. The guy waving the wand around my body gave me a weird look as he passed it over the prominent bulge in the front of my pants, but I just grinned and flicked my eyes towards Sookie. When he looked over and saw her, he grinned in return and nodded his head chuckling, which made her blush ten times darker and I laughed out loud watching as she refused to make eye contact with the TSA agent when it was her turn to go through.

As we made our way to the first class lounge Sookie was still beet red when she whispered, "Oh. My. God. I can't believe your WMD set off the metal detector."

*Weapon of Mass Destruction?*

I liked it. It sounded much more intimidating than 'Eric Junior' and I grinned saying, "Well *you're* the one that said I had to wait until we were on the plane before I could hide it."



"Astronauts on the space station could look out the window and see that thing with the naked eye," she muttered under her breath, but I caught every word and wanted nothing more than to find a secluded spot so we could detonate together. Unfortunately, the lounge was crowded and as soon as we sat down people started coming up to me asking for autographs and pictures. Sookie smiled seeing the frustration on my face and whispered, "Be nice. It's not like we would've had the opportunity for sexy time in here either."

*Sexy time? I WANT SEXY TIME!*

It sounded so much better than 'fucking time' so when Sookie slipped away in the crowd I forced myself to smile instead of pout and signed autographs while my internal clock counted down toward sexy time. Every time I looked up my eyes automatically searched for her and I saw her standing in the far corner with her cell phone to her ear, but had no idea of who she was talking to. The group of fans didn't disperse until the announcement came over the loud speaker that our plane was boarding and I waited for her to join me before we got in line and walked onto the plane. Once I scouted out the location of the bathrooms and we were in our seats I asked, "Who were you talking to on the phone?"

She frowned replying, "The Headmaster, Mr. Brigant. I told him we were flying back today and I'd be back to work on Monday."

I laced my fingers through hers asking, "Why the frown?" Maybe she didn't want to go back to work?

"He's just a pompous passive aggressive asshole," she sighed. When I kept looking at her, waiting for more of an explanation, she continued, "I know he wasn't too happy about me taking off so soon after starting there and I can't really blame him since the school year just started, but it's not like you can *plan* on a family member having a heart attack. He was already a bit cold towards me after practically coming right out and saying he'd wanted to fire me after our little wedding video, but me taking off this week certainly won't help matters. I'm just lucky he can't do anything because of the Family Medical Leave Act."

*Fire her?* It was the first I'd heard of it and she ended up telling me the whole story of her first day at work, during the hour long flight to Houston, with sexy time temporarily put on hold. She'd omitted the part of her meeting with Brigant the first time we'd talked about her first day at work saying she wasn't comfortable telling me everything then because we were still practically strangers at the time. The only times she'd stopped talking was during the takeoff and landing, with her gripping my hand hard enough to make a teamster cry, but not me. I was too pissed off hearing how Brigant had been treating Sookie and as we made our way from one gate to the next, for our flight to L.A., I said, "Why don't you just quit?"

We'd been holding hands so I felt it when her feet stopped moving and looked back seeing the shocked look on her face as she asked, "Why would I quit?"

We only had a forty minute layover so I tugged on her hand until her feet started moving again and said, "Why not? He sounds like an asshole."

"Eric," she said exasperatedly, "do you have any idea of how long it took me to find that job? A year. And it's one of the best schools in the state. Besides, I can't *not* work; I have bills and having medical insurance is a relief too."

"Sookie, you don't *have* to work. I make more than enough for the two of us and I can add you to my insurance policy. If you *want* to work, that's fine too, but don't feel like you have to keep that job when you can just quit and find another one."

It made perfect sense to me, but feeling Sookie jerk her hand from mine and seeing the look on her face made me second guess my thoughts. "What?" I asked when she didn't say anything.

Sookie just angrily shook her head and started stomping towards the gate, with me temporarily ogling the way her jeans encased her ass, before I caught up to her. Our connecting flight was already boarding so we remained silent until we were finally in our seats and I just stared at her waiting for her to say something. Instead she just stared out the window and seemed too mad to even notice the plane taking off because her fear from earlier didn't make a reappearance which made me think sexy time was officially cancelled. I didn't see where I'd done or said anything wrong, so I just slumped back in my seat to wait her out knowing she'd have to say something eventually. She didn't push my hand away when I placed it on her knee, which I took as a good sign, and an even better sign came when the flight attendant approached us.

"Oh," she practically gushed. "I just have to tell you how much I *love* you. I mean, your work," she giggled.

God was mocking me by having a complete stranger say the words I'd wanted to hear from Sookie, especially now that Sookie seemed to not be speaking to me at all. The flight attendant was decent looking and before Sookie had come along I know I would've flirted right back, but now I only wanted one woman; the seething silent one next to me. Before I could say anything Sookie's head whipped around with her glare now affixed to the flight attendant, who was still oblivious to Sookie's presence next to me, and her hand shot out to rest dangerously high on my inner thigh as she snapped, "Yes, *my* husband's *body* of work is *impressive*, but that's the *only* part of him *you'll* get to experience, so why don't you act like you have a professional bone in your body, instead of eye fucking him, and go get us some drinks."

"Excuse me?" she sputtered, glaring back at Sookie.

"I'll have a bottled water," Sookie replied without missing a beat. Turning to smile at me, she asked, "Honey? Would you like anything to drink?"

Possessive Sookie was so much more fun than Silent Pissed Off Sookie and wanting to affirm her claim on me, I leaned over hovering just shy of her lips and said, "Just you lover, just you."

It seemed to be the correct response because she smiled and closed the remaining distance, giving me a kiss that made me think sexy time was back was back on the schedule. I hadn't even noticed the flight attendant's departure until Sookie pulled back and glanced at the now empty aisle next us saying, "I can't believe the *nerve* of her! *I'm sitting right next to you with one of*

*your hands on my knee and the other wearing a wedding band! What in the hell was she thinking?"*

I was still wondering what Sookie had been thinking that made her so mad, but my only response was, "Who?" before pulling her back for another kiss. I felt her lips form into a smile before giving into the kiss and my internal countdown clock toward sexy time restarted.

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## Chapter 58: Chapter 57

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### Chapter 57

#### SPOV

*Quit!*

He suggested it as though it was an easy fix to a minor dilemma.

*There's no Heinz ketchup on the shelf? Then just get Hunt's.*

No! *Heinz* ketchup is the *best* and *The Brigant Academy* was the *best* school in the state; nothing else was as good as either one, so, befitting one of my five year old pupils, I stomped away from him in a snit. Eric seemed unfazed by my antics by now, which was probably a good thing, and I was almost certain I just had an early bout of PMS. That, combined with the stress of the last two weeks, explained (but didn't really excuse) why my emotions were flip flopping all over the place lately. I knew, deep down, that Eric didn't view me as a gold digger and after the guilt I'd felt hearing his 'Am I family or not?' question a few days earlier, I knew better than to open my mouth now.

I was just so used to fending for myself, the sudden luxury of not having to worry about money, or work, or health insurance was a shock to my system. It didn't feel right accepting so much from Eric when I had nothing of value to offer him in return, but it was still nice knowing he'd given me the option. I wouldn't be taking him up on his offer any time soon though, wanting to give my new job a chance. Besides that, I'd feel like I would be taking advantage of him since we'd only known each other for two weeks.

*Two weeks!*

Two weeks that felt like a blink of an eye and a lifetime all rolled into one. It would be different if we'd had a normal relationship that had naturally progressed into marriage, but we just had one hell of a good time with Jose Cuervo and his good friend Dom Perignon. Coupled with Eric's magical panty vanishing skills, it was no wonder I woke up naked and crusty. Now we were left dealing with the consequences of our actions from that night and taking into consideration how it all began, it was an even bigger shock to my system realizing, all the way down to my bones, I was falling in love with Eric, my fucktarded douche bag turned Prince Charming. He'd even

almost gotten me to admit to it in the Avis parking lot, which would've been almost fitting with our trashy drunken wedding, but I was afraid it would scare him away hearing the words so soon. Hell, *I* was scared just *feeling* that way so soon.

I started feeling bad knowing Eric was thinking I was giving him the silent treatment, which I sort of still was, and was mentally berating myself for being such a bitch to him when he surprised me by placing his hand on my knee.

*I was HIS bitch.*

A small smile formed on my lips at the thought and as I was trying to form a sincere apology that would encompass my won't-be-a-kept-woman-but-thanks-for-offering-I-need-chocolate-and-by-the-way-I'm-in-love-with-you feelings, I heard another woman coming onto him. The coming onto him part wasn't surprising, who wouldn't when he was clearly the stuff wet dreams were made of, but she was doing it with me right there.

With. Me. Right. There.

My head whipped around like a possessed Linda Blair to see a perky bottle blond flight attendant, with one too many buttons undone on her shirt, bent over in front of Eric and giving him an eyeful of her less than impressive cleavage. I suddenly wished I'd had pea soup for lunch so I could cover her in it and fill in the rest of her B-cups since God hadn't bothered, but Wicked was a step ahead of my brain latching onto Eric's upper thigh and brushing against the aspergillum hidden inside of his jeans that would only be blessing *me* with his holy water if *I* had anything to say about it.

It turned out I had *plenty* to say about it and even while my brain cringed, as my ears heard the words my rude mouth was saying, the rest of me was cheering inside wanting that hussy put back in her place. The cheers suspiciously sounded like '*Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!*' and a part of me now understood how the dregs of society could humiliate themselves by fighting someone over another person, in front of an audience, because if that bitch didn't step down I was about to step up and snatch the bleach right out of her hair, giving the other first class passengers a show they wouldn't soon forget.

Thankfully, Eric was able to soothe my inner Satanic Sookie by giving me his undivided attention and kissed the fight right out of me. Even as I started to get worked up again, commiserating to him over her blatant disregard of the fact Eric and I were together, his blatant disregard of her entire existence and second kiss doused my ire completely while simultaneously fanning the flames of desire between us. I was quickly getting lost in the Eric Northman Experience when the irritating sound of someone clearing their throat from the aisle got my attention. Knowing it would be Eric's wanna be floozy I ignored her attempt to get our attention for another minute before sucking his lower lip in between my teeth and gently biting down, pulling it away with me for a brief moment as I ended our kiss.

When I looked up at her everything in my smile said he was *mine* while everything in her smile said I was a *bitch*, but that was okay.

*I was HIS bitch and he was MINE.*

"Your water," she snipped, thrusting it at me. Her glare at me ceased when her eye fuck at Eric returned as she asked him, "Are you sure you wouldn't like something? *Anything at all?*"

*What the fuck? Was she Paprika's sister?*

As Eric began to speak, I looked over seeing his panty vanishing smile at her and was temporarily stunned when he asked her in a voice as smooth as silk, "What's your name?"

She perked right up seeing she now had his attention as she replied, "Kate."

*I hate Kate.*

For some reason my inner thoughts were in Amelia's voice, but I had no time to analyze why because I was too busy recalling any and all Jason Bourne movies I'd ever seen, trying to figure out the best way to take them both out with the water bottle now buckling in my clenched fingers.

"Well Kate, there's only *one* thing I *want*," Eric purred before his expression changed from flirty to stone cold. "I want you to quit disrespecting *my wife* by shamelessly flirting with me in front of her. Even if you didn't know who she was, the fact that I'm wearing a *wedding band* should tell you I already belong to another and the fact that she's right here next to me as you brazenly try to get my attention is reprehensible. Even if I wasn't married I'd be turned off by the desperation wafting out of you and as you can see," he gave me a softened but pointed look before glaring back at her, "I prefer the company of a *lady*. I'll be sure to report your behavior once we land since it appears you'd be better suited as a waitress at a truck stop diner where your clientele might not be as discerning."

My eyes were huge at Eric's impromptu speech, while I made a mental note to play Scrabble with him at some point now knowing he had a big vocabulary, but her gaping mouth was even bigger than my eyes before she scampered away down the aisle. I wanted to swat him for dissing diner waitresses, since I *was* one before getting my position at the school, but it was overridden by my desire to fuck his brains out in thanks for giving her a well deserved what for.

*'Eric! Eric! Eric!' my panties chanted.*

He looked over at me, his stone cold demeanor long gone, and smiled asking, "Better?"

A goofy grin plastered its way onto my face as I pounced on him saying, "The best."

*He really was.*

And I *really* wanted to show him just how much I appreciated his words by bringing sexy back in the bathroom, but having never been inside of one on an airplane before I didn't realize how small those things were. Even Justin Timberlake couldn't have fit the whole song in there much

less both Eric and I, so instead we had to settle for strategic groping of each other in our seats, with alternating giggles and sighs from each of us over our wandering hands and the lack of privacy. The floozy flight attendant wisely stayed away from us and when we both called a temporary truce on our sexual assault of one another, so we could calm down, Eric asked, "So why were you so mad before?"

A part of me had been waiting for him to bring up our earlier non-fight, so I answered him truthfully saying, "I'm sorry. I guess it was just a knee jerk reaction to hearing you suggest I quit my job." I could see him about to interject, but I silenced him by raising my hand up and continued saying, "I know you had nothing but the best of intentions and I appreciate it, I really do, but I just can't accept your offer."

"Why?" he asked. "What's wrong with leaving a job where you're obviously not appreciated and finding another one where you are?"

He made it sound so simple, but I plowed ahead anyway replying, "I haven't been there long enough to give them a reason to appreciate me. Besides," I lowered my voice so only Eric would hear my next words, "we've only been together for *two weeks*. I wouldn't accept such a generous offer if we were just dating and I doubt you would've made it if that were the case."

His hand rose up to gently stroke my cheek with his fingers while he said, "But we're not *just dating*. We're *married*. I know we've done everything ass backwards, but the fact remains that we *are* so why not accept it?" His eyes fell to his lap as he asked, "Or is this really because you're still unsure about us?"

*Duh...of COURSE I'm unsure. It's been TWO WEEKS! Remember?*

As if Eric had the power of telepathy, which I *really* hoped wasn't the case, he said, "Never mind, that was an unfair question. We *have* only been together for two weeks, so I can see why you're hesitant, especially knowing your thoughts on being viewed as a gold digger, but I hope you know I don't think of you that way and know that the offer still stands."

The sincerity of his grown up response in light of my initial temper tantrum made me recalculate the dimensions of the bathroom, but the pilot's voice on the loud speaker announcing our impending arrival at LAX put the kibosh on those thoughts. Instead I just smiled and leaned forward saying, "I know and thank you," before kissing him again. I kissed him right through touchdown onto the tarmac, so I didn't even have the chance to get nervous over it and once we were back inside of the terminal I was surprised when Eric went up to the airline personnel at the gate demanding to speak to a supervisor. I'd honestly forgotten all about the tart in first class, but Eric hadn't and he let them know all about his displeasure which only made my pleasure soar.

I regretted checking our bags when the paparazzi descended on us like buzzards on road kill, but we eventually made our way to Eric's car giving us just enough time to get home and switch out our clothes before the car would arrive to take us up the coast. Eric wasn't sure where we were headed, but suggested I bring a sweater knowing the temperatures farther north were chillier than what we normally experienced in L.A. I again wondered if Eric would bring up moving my

things into his bedroom as I tore apart my closet looking for things to pack. It seemed logical to me, but I still didn't want to be the one to bring it up just in case he wasn't ready for that yet; like he wasn't ready to hear me tell him that I loved him which was good since I wasn't ready to tell him just yet.

Once my bag was unpacked and repacked I hauled it downstairs and left it in the foyer before going back into the kitchen. I went into the refrigerator in search of a bottle of water and nearly gagged at what I found. All of the leftovers from before we'd gone to Bon Temps were still sitting in there and while they didn't look *that* nasty, the pungent smell hit me like a freight train. I grabbed a trash bag and emptied out everything that looked iffy, which turned out to be anything that wasn't prepackaged, and was just closing it up when Eric made his way into the room.

"What's wrong?" he asked, seeing the grimace on my face.

"That," I said, holding the bag out towards him. "Can't you *smell* that?" It was like old greasy fried chicken had been wedged inside of my nasal passages.

He took the bag from me and held it up to his face, like the brave man he was, and inhaled deeply before looking back at me and saying, "It smells mostly like a plastic bag with a hint of fried chicken."

"No," I refuted, "it smells like a condemned Kentucky Fried Chicken franchise. Can you take it outside to the garbage can please?"

Eric rolled his eyes chuckling out, "You'd never know who the actor was in this family with all of the dramatics going on in here," as he took the offending bag out to the garage.

What. Ever. It wasn't my fault he had a poor sense of smell and I was just happy it was gone while I sprayed down the countertops with a lemon scented cleaner, cleansing my nasal cavities at the same time I cleaned the counters. Eric had just come back into the kitchen and wrapped his arms around me from behind when the doorbell rang, cutting short whatever he'd had planned, which I guessed involved some sort of foreplay given the frustrated sigh he let out when he let go of me.

"The car is here," he said as he returned to the room.

"Okay," I replied, throwing away the paper towels I'd been using. I threw some snacks and bottles of water into a bag, since we hadn't eaten anything since that morning, and followed Eric out to the waiting limousine. Sliding inside, with Eric coming in right behind me, I turned to face him with a grin saying, "Fancy shmancy."

Eric laughed, a sound I doubted I'd ever tire of, and agreed, "I guess."

The only times I'd ever been in a limo had occurred with Eric, so to me it was still a new experience, but I could see how he might be jaded to it all by now. It only made the differences

in us that much more apparent, but he distracted me by sliding closer to me and saying, "I normally enjoy driving, but now that I have *you* I think I'll enjoy having my hands free even more."

My poor soaked panties bore the brunt of his words and seeing his eyes darken with lust made my insides jump in anticipation. We'd both changed when we'd gotten home and I'd traded out my t-shirt and jeans for a sundress, which Eric seemed to approve of since his hands were currently sliding their way up my bare legs. My legs approved of his proposed travel route as well by opening up further and giving him clearance for liftoff, as I glanced over making sure the partition separating us from the driver was up.

It was.

Eric's mouth was suddenly on mine and I slid down the leather seat until I was lying flat on my back with him on top of me. Wicked and Immoral did what they did best and launched a counter assault on Eric's body, groping anything they could reach until they stilled with my involuntary gasp as Eric's fingers maneuvered their way inside of my panties. "You're always so *wet* for me lover," he growled against my lips before plunging both his tongue and his fingers inside of me. My hips and my embarrassment ratcheted up with his movements and words, but it wasn't like I could deny it. I leaked enough in both my northern and southern hemispheres around him that had it been water, I could turn the Sahara into a tropical rainforest.

My hands decided they wanted to claim Eric's shirt as the spoils of war which he willingly surrendered by sitting up and letting them pull it off of him. His chest, my third favorite of his body parts, could still render me stupid and I silently traced each and every muscle displayed in front of me like I was reading Braille and his chest held the secrets of Creation. For all I knew, it did. I was willing to bet my chest was also in Eric's top three favorites when he hid my scripture from view by leaning down and kissing his way along my collarbone before moving down my body, with his fingers still moving in a steady rhythm inside of me. My white dress had buttons running down the length of the front which he deftly flicked open one by one with his teeth until I was left in front of him wearing nothing more than my white lace panties which covered nothing thanks to his fingers.

"You're perfect," he whispered, trailing one finger down my body from my neck, through the valley in between my breasts, and all the way down to meet up with his other hand still thrusting inside of me.

Seeing the reverent look in his eyes and being so exposed in front of him was so much of a turn on that my orgasm snuck up on me and I fell apart in his hands, literally. When my vision cleared I could see Eric hadn't moved and was still watching me from above as he said, "You have no idea of how beautiful you are when you cum for me," before sucking each of his fingers clean adding, "only made sweeter by your taste."

*You have no idea how hot you make me saying 'cum' and then moaning over its taste.*



It was true. The only vocal appreciation I ever heard from Quinn was a loud grunt when he came and more often than not, it was before me and signaled the start of my headache from not getting my own happy moment after being so worked up. Quinn also preferred receiving oral sex over giving back and his lack of enthusiasm whenever he did give it a try was just another lesson in frustration for me.

I was quickly learning however, with Eric, that he was more turned on seeing me being so turned on and it made my desire outweigh my embarrassment. Knowing men are visually stimulated, I trailed my fingertips up my sides and through my hair before suggestively sucking the tips of each of my pointer fingers into my mouth, all the while staring straight into Eric's eyes. He watched each of my movements with rapt attention as my fingers traveled down to my breasts, tweaking my already hardened nipples with them pebbling even more as the cool air hit the skin, now moistened by my fingertips.

Keeping Wicked occupied with my breasts, Immoral snaked down my front and dove into the slick folds between my thighs as Eric grunted his approval. My knees were spread apart giving Eric a view normally only reserved for my gynecologist, but this was so much more fun than my annual pap smear and Eric was a much better sight than Dr. Ludwig. Since Wicked and Immoral were currently busy they deputized my foot as a UN inspector giving it orders to seek out any weapons of mass destruction in the country of Northman. I knew firsthand our Intel was solid; no grainy satellite images were needed, and hit pay dirt when my foot slid up Eric's silo through his jeans.

I was thoroughly enjoying the shift in power I had assumed had taken place between us, but I should've known better than to have *assumed* anything because Eric grabbed my newly deputized foot, The Inspector, and thrust his hips forward against it, brandishing his weapon with no fear of being sanctioned like the BAMF he was, as he asked in a hoarse voice, "Do you feel that?"

*If he jumped out of the car and did a push up on the side of the road, little kids in China would bounce in their seats feeling THAT.*

"*That,*" he continued, "is what happens whenever you're near me. The very *thought* of you makes me *ache*, but *seeing* you like *this,*" he paused to run his hands up my thighs, "spread out in front of me like a sensual buffet is sheer *torture.*" Eric swooped down and replaced my fingers with his tongue in between my legs, stopping long enough to sigh blissfully and say, "You've converted me lover. I know there's a God because Heaven and Hell exists right *here,*" punctuating the word with another swipe of his tongue.

My fingers wove into his hair as a chorus of '*Hallelujahs*' and '*Amen's*' sang in my head, but all Eric would hear was the repetitive, "Oh God, Eric!" chant my voice was able to form. With my body still shuddering with the aftershocks of my second orgasm, *thank you very much Mr. Northman,* I was already aching for my third and pulled at Eric's jeans, needing his holy water to douse the flames still burning inside of me.

As soon as I had his holy hose in hand, my insides jumped hearing a hoarse, "Fuck," come from his throat.

*Yes. Fucking sounded very good right about now.*

Eric was still sitting up on his knees, so I pushed him until he was seated and straddled his lap while I tore through the pockets of his pants looking for a condom, but finding none.

*None!*

"Eric?" I asked, pleading more than questioning. "Condom?"

*Yeah, my brain was only functioning on auxiliary power at the moment and couldn't form more than one word at a time.*

He released my waist to bury his face in his hands and replied, "They're in my suitcase. In the trunk."

"Fuck," I repeated, still only forming single words.

"I want to," he replied and pulled me forward for another kiss. Releasing my mouth he said, "I can have the driver pull over for a minute and get them out."

I turned beet red at the thought and instead took matters into my own hand, literally, and said, "I can wait," as my mouth slid down his naked body finding other things to do to occupy our time.

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## **Chapter 59: Chapter 58**

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### Chapter 58

#### **EPOV**

I sat with my back resting against the corner, where the backseat met the door, with my legs sprawled along the length of the seat and watched Sookie as she slept on top of me, while thinking about a little bit of everything as we made our way to our destination. When I'd met our driver he'd told me the trip would take nearly five hours saying we were headed to a small coastal town called San Gregorio, located just south of San Francisco, so after wearing each other out for nearly two hours, I'd convinced Sookie to give in to her obvious need for a nap when her near constant yawns were making her eyes water. She was going to need that nap if I had my way later on.

My fingers never stopped moving through her long blonde hair while she slept and hearing a soft sigh escape from her still swollen lips made my dick twitch yet again. She'd given me a spectacular blowjob, after I realized our latex of necessity was locked away in the trunk, leaving

me happily sated, but it seemed she wasn't satisfied with just one. Her hands and lips never left my body as she worked her magic and when she began stroking me just minutes after my orgasm ended, I stupidly asked, "What are you doing?" when it was quite apparent what she was doing.

"I'm bringing *sexy back*," she grinned with a challenging look in her eye. I'm pretty sure she spouted off some nonsense about 'relationship equality' and 'jars filled with orgasms', but I was too lost in the sensation of her tongue tracing along every muscle of my chest and abs, making me glad for all of the hours I put in at the gym. She had a lot of ground to cover, but I was completely done for when she dropped to her knees onto the floorboard, naked as the day she was born, and stared back up at me purring out, "Watch me lover." Looking into her baby blues while she swallowed me whole made it impossible to look anywhere else and when she started humming the tune to the Justin Timberlake song she'd just quoted, she had definitely succeeded in bringing sexy back. With my hands fisted into the same blonde hair I was now gently caressing, I came harder than I'd expected and after lovingly cleaning me of every last drop with her tongue, she sat like a proper, but naked, young lady next to my still dizzy self and said, "For our encore later on we'll do his 'Dick in a Box' song," pointing her finger at my dick and then back to the Nirvana between her crossed legs.

I laughed out loud at the time and just the thought of it brought another smile to my lips as I pondered over the complex woman in my arms. Sookie was like no other woman I'd ever met, *and I'd met a lot of them*, but she almost seemed too good to be true. Even on that very first day when she'd been able to get under my skin, making me mad enough to want to destroy everything in my path, I'd felt drawn to her. Her personality was so diverse, running the gamut from fiery to funny and everything in between, I didn't think I could ever be bored with her. At times she was a proper lady, a hellcat, a foul-mouthed sailor, a chef, a fairy godmother, a goddess and a siren, having more sides than that condemned Kentucky Fried Chicken store she'd been complaining about earlier, and I wanted to learn all there was to know about every one of them. Staring down at her now I couldn't help but wonder where she'd been my entire life.

*Would I have known how unique and special she was had I met her years earlier?*

I'd like to think so, but there was no way for me to really know. I'd been so jaded my whole life, had it not been for the fact we'd initially been forced to stay together, I doubted I would've given her the chance to show me who she really was and knowing her as I did *now* it would've been the biggest mistake of my life. The last two weeks had shown me I was merely *existing* before, but Sookie had given me a *home* where a *house* stood previously; a *family* where I'd only had *relatives*; she'd given me an actual *life*. I understood why she felt uncomfortable relying on me financially, but no amount of money could ever repay her for what she'd already given me.

Pulling my phone from the pocket of my jeans that had hastily been discarded on the floor, I slipped my wedding band off and rested my hand against her bare back while I took a picture of a still sleeping Sookie, adding to the collection of pictures I'd already amassed since I'd arrived in Bon Temps. There were plenty of posed pictures of us with Gran, or the transformation of the farmhouse, but most of them were candid shots of Sookie that she had no idea I'd taken. Even when she'd been dirty and sweaty, hauling debris away, or covered in paint, she'd been beautiful to me and I didn't want to forget a single moment of it.

I couldn't help the wide grin that spread across my face when I looked down at my latest picture. She'd be mortified if she saw it, but to me it was a masterpiece. Her golden skin practically glowed, accentuated by her minimal tan lines on her naked form, and from the angle of the camera the picture only gave a hint of the curve of her breast and the roundness of her perfect ass. Her face was angelic in sleep with the barest hint of a smile on her lips and the caption that would be placed underneath the picture, had it hung in a museum, stood out against her skin; my hand resting possessively on her back claiming her as mine, but the actual truth of the matter spelled out on my tattooed finger marking me as hers.

*Sookie's.*

I'd hated it when I first woke up that day, asinine hearts and all, but now that it was no longer covered by the wedding band I wore, I found I actually liked it. What had started out as an agreed upon showmance had become the real deal. I *was* Sookie's and where I'd been willing to carve the ink from my skin that morning just to be rid of it, now I'd be willing to carve her name into any part of my body she wanted if that was what it would take to keep her.

*Maudlin bordering on psychotic, but true.*

The sound of the driver's voice over the intercom, announcing we were five minutes from our destination, put an end to my internal musings and an end to Sookie's nap as she began to stir on top of me. I slipped both my phone and my wedding band back into my pants pocket and dropped them back onto the floorboard so I could run my hands along her naked skin one last time before we had to get dressed and she lifted her head to look up at me with a smile asking, "What time is it?"

I only knew from having glanced at the clock on my phone when I'd pulled it out earlier and answered, "Almost nine. Did you get enough sleep?" I asked, unable to keep my fingers from running through her hair again.

Her eyes dropped down to my naked chest and my cock stirred seeing her tongue dart out to lick her lips as she said, "Enough sleep? Yes. Enough of you? No."

Every part of me cheered that Sleepy Sookie was gone and Horny Sookie was back, but knowing we were nearly there I said, "Unless you want to give our driver a show, we should probably get dressed." Her lip pouted out begging to be licked, so that's what I did before pulling back and my voice dropped an octave saying, "But don't plan on wearing anything for very long."

Her eyes danced as her pout was replaced with a smile and we quickly pulled our clothes back on as the car slowed before coming to a stop. We'd been so busy with each other that neither one of us had bothered looking out the window, so we were both surprised when the driver opened our door and we stepped out seeing a huge beachfront mansion in front of us. Sookie looked up at me questioningly, but all I could do was shrug my shoulders in response. Pam hadn't said where we'd be staying, so I'd assumed it would be at a hotel, but it was clearly a house. We both looked over seeing the front door open and out walked an older African American man followed by a younger brunette behind him.

"Mr. and Mrs. Northman," he said, "my name is Alfred Cumberland and this is my assistant, Maria Starr Cooper. I'll be photographing you tomorrow for the GQ spread," he finished with a smile and holding out his hand.

I shook it saying, "Nice to meet you."

While the driver got our bags from the trunk we followed them into the house as Alfred explained, "Originally we were just going to do shots of you on the beach, but when we were scouting locations we came across this rental house and I couldn't decide which I liked better so I thought why not do both?"

"Will it just be the two of you?" Sookie asked nervously. Since learning of it, she hadn't mentioned the photo shoot without showing any amount of anxiety and now was no different.

Sensing her discomfort he smiled warmly and said, "Yes. I find having a large entourage on shoots takes away from the intimacy I'm trying to capture on film, so it will just be Maria Starr and myself present tomorrow." Seeing her relaxed smile, he continued, "Miss Ravenscroft provided me with both of your sizes for the clothing you'll be wearing tomorrow and the kitchen is fully stocked for your stay. There's a rental car at your disposal parked in the garage, but there's not much to see and do here in town. There're only about 150 residents and one stop sign, so you'll have to drive a bit if you want to get to a larger city."

"No," I interjected, "it's perfect." I'd become accustomed to Bon Temps' small town atmosphere and had no desire to return to city life just yet. Even better, I'd have Sookie all to myself.

"Wonderful," he replied. "Well, I'm sure you're both tired from your long drive, so we'll be leaving you now. There's a welcome packet on the breakfast bar describing the features of the house and the town and I left my phone number as well. Maria Starr and I will return tomorrow morning at nine to get started."

They both departed after saying their goodbyes and I carried our bags upstairs, making sure to grab a couple of condoms which I shoved into my pocket, while Sookie explored the kitchen. When I came back down I found her standing at the back wall, comprised of floor to ceiling windows, with the doors open leading to the balcony overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Her hair was blowing in the slight breeze and the full moon was shining down from above making her blond hair and white dress stand out against the dark backdrop and I heard her whisper, "Wow."

I couldn't bring myself to tear my eyes away from her face to see what had her so captivated. I was captivated myself and admitted as much saying, "Wow indeed."

She smiled without turning as I walked up and wrapped my arms around her from behind, burying my head against her neck and inhaling my drug of choice. She'd definitely become an addiction for me, but I had no desire to seek a cure and briefly wondered what would happen when we had to return to our normal routine on Monday. I'd gotten used to having Sookie with me 24/7 over the last week and was already beginning to mourn our inevitable time apart when the real world intruded into what had become our own little fairy tale. The thought alone was

quickly darkening my mood until it matched the night's sky, but Sookie's inner light broke through the darkness when I felt her fingers lace into mine at her waist as she pressed her back against my body sighing out, "It's really beautiful, isn't it?"

"*You're* really beautiful," I countered, whispering into her ear. Her whole body shivered as goose bumps rose up on her skin and I savored their taste and texture licking a path from her ear, down her neck to her shoulder and back.

Her hands gripped mine tighter and my get-Sookie-naked-now train of thought was broken when she bent her head forward as she ran her fingers along my left hand ring finger asking, "Where's your ring?"

Straightening my arm, I held my hand out in front of us with the tattooed script on display admitting, "I think I like this one better."

"Why is that?" she asked. Even though I couldn't see it, I could hear the smile she was wearing in her voice.

I shrugged more than just my shoulders, with the bulge of my jeans gliding up and down her lower back, distracting us both for a moment before admitting, "I just do." Spinning her in my arms so she was facing me, I bent down and licked along her lower lip before she opened up and let me in. One hand automatically ran down her back until it was gripping her ass and pulling her forward against me while the other held her head in place as we kissed. Neither one of us seemed to be in a hurry to move things along now that we had the time to actually enjoy one another without the threat of anyone or anything cockblocking us.

Her hands snuck inside the back of my shirt tracing up my spine and along my shoulder blades, causing a shiver of my own to work its way through my body, before raking their way back down and slipping inside of my back pockets, mimicking my grip on her ass, and finding the condoms I'd stashed inside minutes earlier. Her lips formed a smile, pulling away from my own as she held them up in front of me with a sly grin and asked, "Do you even think you'll need these?" I wasn't sure what she was getting at, since I had every intention of needing them, until her free hand snaked in between us and cupped my balls, lightly running her fingertips teasingly across them, as she said, "I doubt there's much left in there after those two rounds in the limo."

My eyebrow rose up as I asked, "Is that a *challenge* lover?" quickly scooping her up into my arms, earning me a high pitched squeal, as I walked over and lay her down on a large cushioned ottoman of sorts on the balcony before caging her body with my own. My lips automatically sought out hers once more as her arms and legs wrapped around me, molding her body to mine, with her hips grinding against me looking for the friction I had yet to give her. Only the promise of getting her naked could make me tear my lips from hers as I again removed her dress, button by button, and was pleasantly surprised to find she hadn't put her panties back on.

I was lost in the sight of her watching the way the moonlight glinted off of her bare skin where my tongue had left a wet trail shimmering with every breath she took. She really did look like an angel lying in front of me and I wondered what on earth I had done right in my life to have her

here with me now. I couldn't think of a single thing and knew there was no way I deserved someone like her, but I also knew I would fight to keep her.

Neither one of us had said a word, each silently appraising the other, so we both heard it at the same time and turned our heads towards the water at the unmistakable sound of a whale's song in the distance. Sookie was the only person I'd ever told about the significance they held for me and when my eyes finally traveled back to hers I knew then *she* was the one I'd left those flowers for as a young boy. She filled the holes inside of me that no amount of drugs, alcohol, or loose women ever could and I finally knew without a doubt;

*I was in love with her.*

The realization hit me with the force of tsunami and a gentle caress to my soul, but her soft tug at my shirt brought me back to the moment and I quickly removed my clothes suddenly needing to be as close to her as physically possible. Sookie seemed to be needing the same thing because she had a condom in hand as soon as I'd kicked my jeans off and rolled it on me herself before pulling me down on top of her, maneuvering her hips until I was at her entrance. I wanted to tell her right then and there of my newfound insight, but held back worrying she might question whether or not I'd said it in the heat of the moment. I'd tell her after, but until then I'd just have to show her.

It had only been a few days since we'd last been together, but sliding back inside of her made me question why I'd ever left the warmth of her body to begin with. She fit me like a glove and the soft moans that left her lips were like music to my ears. I was left with a conundrum both wanting to hear her passionate cries and swallow them whole, so I had to spread out my kisses between her lips and neck so I could have the best of both worlds. Our leisurely rhythm began to pick up in pace with every thrust of our hips becoming more forceful than the last and her legs gripped me tighter while her nails dug into my back, urging me on as the sound of our flesh slapping against one another competed with the waves lapping at the shore. When her muscles clamped down around me as she shouted my name to the heavens above with her climax, it was the words that followed my name that stopped my heart for a split second and caused me to lose all control.

*"I love you..."*

I questioned, for a moment, whether or not I'd imagined it all, but my body didn't care and pounded into her one final time before I let go and fell over Mt. Orgasm with her. We lay there, still joined together, trying to catch our breath and I welcomed the breeze blowing off the ocean, cooling our overheated bodies while wondering again whether or not I'd imagined hearing those three little words. Sookie's expression gave me no clues, other than she was happy, and rather than ask her, I decided to just tell her.

Looking down into her eyes I softly admitted, "I love you Sookie."

I felt equally relieved and terrified after confessing my newest secret to my only secret keeper, but my fear was short lived when a smile adorned her face as she answered my unasked question saying, "Just remember...I said it first."

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## Chapter 60: Chapter 59

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### Chapter 59

#### SPOV

*He loves me!*

I had a giant 'Oh shit moment' as soon as the words left my lips; not because I didn't mean them, but because I was afraid I'd scare Eric away and hoped maybe he'd been too caught up in having his own happy ending to have heard me. I made sure to keep the worry off of my face and instead concentrated on how happy he made me while wishing I could read his mind so I'd have some sort of clue about what he was thinking. He didn't leap up and off of me before throwing himself over the balcony's ledge, so I took *that* as a good sign, but hearing him utter those same three words in return left me wanting to sprout wings and fly through the air like Tinkerbell while pixie dust rained down on us.

Instead we smiled and kissed, making out like two teenagers while repeating those three little words over and over to one another, leaving no doubt on where either one of us stood on the subject and his stamina surprised me yet again when, as it turned out, we ended up needing that second condom.

Exhausted and starving we finally made our way back into the house with me wearing his t-shirt and him in nothing more than his jeans. Even after all of the sexin' we'd been able to do that day, seeing him walking around barefoot with the fly of his jeans halfway undone stirred something primal inside of me and if it wasn't for the fact my stomach was attempting to eat my other internal organs for sustenance, I would've jumped him again. It reminded me that I needed to make an appointment to see Dr. Ludwig, so we wouldn't have to worry about condoms anymore, and while the water was boiling for some pasta I went ahead and grabbed my phone to put it in my calendar to remind me to call on Monday. Eric watched my every move with the small smile never once leaving his face, but it got a whole lot bigger when he followed me from room to room as I placed condoms in strategic locations. If that didn't work out I'd make a 'Lay Me Lei' and wear the damn things as a necklace everywhere we went because now that we were officially in love, if the carnal mood struck us, I wanted to be able to act on it.

Dinner was a mostly silent affair with each of us stealing glances at the other in between bites of food, but more than once we'd smile and lean over, giving each other a soft kiss before going back to our meal. The love and happiness flowing through us was practically a third party at the table and they were more than welcome to stay.



As we washed up the dishes Eric hesitantly spoke up saying, "You know we're going to have to be interviewed at some point for the GQ article, right?"

I didn't feel as panicked over the thought, like I had been with the photo shoot and I also felt like we wouldn't be perpetuating a massive fraud now that we'd admitted our feelings to one another, so I smiled saying, "That's fine. Just make sure it's scheduled for in the evening or on the weekend since I have to go back to work on Monday and I know Mr. Brigant's head would explode if I asked for any more time off."

He frowned hearing my request having already made his feelings known on the subject of my employment, but thankfully he didn't bring them up again. I'd worked too hard to get that job and had no desire to give it up now that I'd finally been hired. While it would've been nice to feel welcomed by the headmaster, I wasn't there to win a popularity contest and hoped my dedication to my job and my students would eventually win him over.

It was close to midnight by the time Eric and I made our way upstairs and now that my belly was full, I could barely keep my eyes open when that was combined with our sex-a-thon. I wanted nothing more than to crawl into the oversized bed and fall asleep, but knowing I needed a shower first made me wonder how big the hot water tank was because I was worried I'd fall asleep underneath the spray. Eric, being the walking talking six foot four perfection that he was, took care of it for me by climbing into the shower with me and lovingly washing me clean. He chuckled when I yawned while making him promise to give me a much dirtier shower the following day, but he still willingly agreed and after one last whispered, "I love you," from each of us, I went to sleep with Eric wrapped around me and a smile on my face because I knew he *always* kept his promises.

I'd expected to be woken up by the alarm clock the following morning, but what actually woke me up was much better. So much better that at first I thought I was still dreaming, but the feel of Eric's lips on my neck, the rumble of his chest pressed up against my back and his insistent fingers stroking in between my thighs told me otherwise. How he'd managed to work my body into a frenzy while my brain continued to sleep was a testament to his skills and I was already so close to tumbling over the edge that when he lifted my leg and slid into my love shack from behind I was a goner.

*His Chrysler was definitely as big as a whale and my whole shack shimmied in response.*

I cried out his name and gripped his ass behind me as I met him thrust for thrust, as much as I was able to, while his fingers worked my clit in a staccato melody. He continued playing my body like a maestro wielding his baton and the crescendo of our morning symphony built up once more inside of me, so when I heard him breathlessly whisper, "Cum for me," into my ear I obeyed with a deafening scream with Eric cumming right behind me.

*Literally and figuratively.*

As soon as I could catch my breath, I turned my head towards Eric and his mouth was instantly on mine, giving me a lazy unhurried kiss, before pulling away and smiling as he said, "Good morning."

"I'll say," I smiled.

At least one of us was thinking clearly because I hadn't even thought about birth control until Eric slid out of me and went to the bathroom to throw away the condom I didn't know he'd been wearing. My mind, however, was still in a fog and seeing his naked body standing in the bathroom doorway with a toothbrush sticking out of one side of his mouth and a smirk on the other side didn't help clear away the haze. Knowing my mouth was hanging open at the sight of him, I promptly closed it and would've called him cocky, but the statement was too true, of both his physical and personality traits, and I figured his ego was big enough.

*Just like his cock.*

Seeing it was already after 8am I pushed away all cock thoughts, knowing where that road would lead, and waited until I heard the shower running before climbing out of bed and throwing on Eric's t-shirt again so I could go downstairs and make us breakfast. Eric came down not long after, with his hair still wet and a pout on his face, as I was setting the plates down onto the table making me ask, "What? Did you not want eggs for breakfast?"

"No," he replied with a stern look on his face. I stood there with a '*what the fuck?*' look on my face before his pouty lip returned as he whined, "I wanted shower sex for breakfast."

"Good Lord," I laughed. "The three times in the last twelve hours wasn't enough of me to tide you over for now?"

I was about to sit down, but Eric and his cobra-like reflexes darted underneath me, so I ended up sitting on his lap, and from what I could feel pressed against my ass, his cobra was bowed up preparing to strike. His arms coiled around me as he growled into my ear, "I'll never have *enough* of *you*," making me shiver in response.

*It wasn't from the air conditioning either.*

My ass decided it was a good idea to tease the cobra, daring it to strike, by grinding along its length and trying to smother it to death, but my brain recognized the danger and forced my mouth to soothe the deadly beast promising, "We can always have shower sex for dinner. Besides, if we don't pace ourselves we're going to run out of condoms and from the sounds of it we'll have to travel a ways to get more." By my count we'd only used 5 out of the 72 we'd bought and had it been anyone else, I would've thought that amount would last a year. But, he'd already *firmly* established, Eric *wasn't* like anyone else.

*Don't think about his firmness!*

"So," was his only response.

We definitely needed an alternate form of birth control because I doubted we'd be able to keep each other at bay for very long if we actually *did* run out and I could already see us playing baby roulette, stupidly crossing our fingers with every shot fired. With our luck we'd roll baby blue snake eyes on the first try and when my own blue eyes started wandering over to where I'd left a couple of condoms on the breakfast bar, which I guessed to be the perfect height to align me with his hips if I was sitting on it, I knew we were in trouble. It seemed I was just as sex starved as Eric, but I also knew we didn't have much time until Alfred and Maria Starr arrived so I pulled both plates in front of us and just stayed in his lap as we silently ate our breakfast.

*It didn't taste nearly as good as I knew Eric did.*

When we were done he offered to do the dishes so I could take a quick shower and when I came back downstairs both Alfred and Maria Starr had already arrived. There was a rolling cart full of garment bags sitting off to the side of the room and Maria Starr was applying Eric's makeup while Alfred set up his equipment in the living room saying he wanted to get some shots of us together, with the bank of windows along the back wall as the backdrop. When Eric was done he disappeared upstairs with a garment bag to change while Maria Starr did my hair and makeup. I heard him reenter the room, but my eyes were closed while she applied eye shadow to my lids and, with her face right in front of mine, she obscured my view when I got to open them as she put mascara on my lashes. When she finally deemed me ready, Eric had disappeared with Alfred, so I went upstairs and changed into the first of many outfits that cost more than my car. Maria Starr came in a few minutes later and put in strategically placed hidden pins until the silvery blue dress fit my curves perfectly and when I looked into the mirror I barely recognized myself. The woman staring back at me looked like she actually *belonged* on the arm of Eric Northman and I carried a newfound confidence as I teetered back downstairs in shoes that belonged more on Pam's feet than mine.

I was still staring ahead of me watching where I was walking, lest I fall over which was apt to happen whenever I wore very high heels, so I didn't look up until I heard a faint gasp. Eric stood in front of me with an awed expression on his face which I returned once my eyes traveled down his body. I loved his normal laid back style, but seeing him in the three piece light gray suit he wore over a white shirt with the top two buttons undone made my ovaries explode and my kitty clench. He hadn't shaved once since he'd flown out to Bon Temps, which I hadn't minded one bit, but seeing him dressed up now with his hair professionally styled made him look like he'd, well...stepped out of the pages of a GQ magazine. Even though I'd just licked him from head to toe the night before my mouth salivated wanting to do it all over again, starting with chewing the scruff off of his face with my teeth.

"Sookie, you're stunning," he said, his hoarse voice pulling me back from my internal Austin Powers Fat Bastard impersonation mentally chanting '*Get in my belly.*'

I still wanted to eat him whole, but since we weren't alone I merely smiled and said, "You're pretty hubba hubba yourself."

*Hubba hubba wanna fucka...*

I noticed there was music playing softly in the background and as I looked around I saw some of the furniture had been moved off to the side leaving a larger open area where the back windows were located. As Eric took my hand in his I looked over at Alfred who said, "Mr. Northman told me this is your first time being photographed so I thought perhaps we could start off with having the two of you dancing together here." His hand swept toward the open floor space as he continued, "I think you might find it will help with you become a little more comfortable and then we can move on to the posed shots." When I looked over at Maria Starr I noticed she had a video camera in her hand and had apparently been recording since I'd first walked down the stairs.

*I hoped they didn't hear Fat Bastard.*

I loved dancing and since Eric and I hadn't yet had the opportunity to dance together I wasn't as nervous as I'd expected I would be. Eric held me close as we swayed back and forth with the music while he whispered words of encouragement to me and even though I knew we were there to be photographed I was still caught off guard hearing the click of the camera and automatically looked over at Alfred. After my one faux pas my eyes were only for Eric as he rocked and twirled me across the floor. The soft jazz we'd started off dancing to, changed to an assortment of love songs, both old and new, and Eric's whispered words of encouragement changed to a list of things he wanted to do to me once we were alone. The heat between us was palpable and I soon forgot anyone else was in the room with us with Eric either forgetting as well or just not caring because after one of the steamier songs ended he leaned down and kissed me, leaving me breathless, while he whispered our new favorite phrase, "I love you," into my ear.

As the song ended the sound of Alfred's voice broke the magical spell surrounding us when he asked, "Do you feel sufficiently loosened up yet?"

*Can't you see it running down my thighs?*

When I realized the three of them were staring at me (not my thighs) I finally answered, "Umm...sure?" All I could think was the quicker we could get this done and over with then I could have Naked Eric all to myself. Alfred posed us here and there on the couch; against the window; on the balcony; together and separate until I felt like a blond Gumby. I'd changed into two more dresses while all Eric had to do was remove his jacket and later his vest. It wasn't fair that he only looked better with every piece of clothing he took off, but I couldn't complain since I was too busy ogling him.

A couple of hours later I got to change into my regular clothes while Eric had to do some of the beach shots and I got to watch him sprawl out on a hammock wearing black slacks and a wife beater. On anyone else it would look like they were half dressed, but Eric made it look he was merely resting before resuming his trek across the Sahara looking for the Holy Grail.

*Indiana Jones style, not Monty Python.*

I heard Alfred tell Maria Starr he wished they had a book for Eric to hold in the shot and watched as she trotted towards me and dug in her bag pulling out a worn paperback with a smile. I was

always looking for something new to read so when she later came back towards me with the book I asked, "Is that any good?"

"Yes," she smiled. "It's one of a series based on a telepathic barmaid and a Viking vampire Sheriff."

*That sounds stupid.*

"That sounds interesting," I lied, returning her smile, although the thought of Eric dressed as a Viking had my kitty purring as I imagined him pillaging me.

Maria Starr returned to Alfred and Eric and I wished I'd brought a book of my own to read. I'd thrown on a bikini underneath my t-shirt and shorts and since the sun was bright I decided I could at least work on my tan while watching Eric's shoot. He'd had to change clothes a few times inside of a tent they also used as a photo prop, so while he was out of my sight I allowed my eyes to take in the surrounding area. The beach was mostly secluded, but there were a few guys on surfboards not too far away. They all looked like they were still in college, but with nothing else to do I watched them trying to catch any wave they could.

When I caught movement out of the corner of my eye I looked over and saw Alfred and Maria Starr going to join Eric in the tent, and from the sounds of it they had moved onto taking their shots in there, so instead of disturbing them I remained sitting on my towel watching the surfers before lying down on my back and closing my eyes while soaking up the sun.

I hadn't noticed they were watching me too, but I heard them talking about me as they came out of the water with one of them flopping down into the sand next to me saying, "I haven't seen you around here before."

He had an Australian accent, which was my favorite one of the bunch, and when I opened my eyes I saw he and his friends were younger than I'd thought. The one next to me actually reminded me a little of Jason which would've grossed me out anyway, even if I hadn't been with Eric and he hadn't been in his teens. Seeing he was still waiting on a reply I sat up and smiled saying, "That's because I'm not from around here."

"Oh," he smiled. "Well we're having a party down here later on tonight if you'd like to stop by. I'm Ryan by the way."

"Sookie," I replied, "and I already have plans this evening so I'm going to have to decline." They probably wanted me to bring the beer since none of them looked old enough to buy it on their own. Besides, I had a whole Eric to eat tonight and I planned on savoring every bite.

Speak of the devil and the devil shall appear, his back was to Eric, who I could already see was stomping his way through the sand towards us, and Ryan must have taken the smile on my face meant for Eric the wrong way because he moved a little closer to me saying, "Change them. You can be my *date*."

"She already *has a date*," Eric growled behind him, kicking a little bit of sand on him like he was a cat burying shit and making Ryan jump at his unexpected arrival. His six foot four frame towered over us and when my mind flashed back to him dressed as a Viking my kitty wanted claw at his broadsword.

Ryan didn't seem to be as intimidated as she should have been, probably because he had two friends nearby to back him up, and looked back and forth between us saying, "A lady has the right to change her mind," before giving me a wink.

I could already see the headlines.

*Eric Northman arrested for shoving surfboard up boy's ass.*

"I'm not changing my mind," I said quickly trying diffuse the situation, before smiling up at Eric and holding up my left hand, waving my wedding ring. "I chose him until death do we part."

*Well Jose Cuervo and Dom Perignon chose him, but I was on board now too.*

Looking a little chagrined he smiled sheepishly saying, "All the good ones are taken," before brushing the sand off of himself and walking away.

Eric still looked like he was in a snit, but I pretended to not notice and asked, "All done?"

He was wearing skinny jeans and a tight dark blue button up shirt with short sleeves showing off his arm porn, aka *appetizers*, and I had to swallow the drool forming in my mouth. Instead of saying anything Eric dropped to his knees in the sand and crawled on top of me until he was hovering over my body making an Eric tent that blocked me from everything around us. His eyes were intense as they stared back into mine before admitting, "I didn't like watching you getting hit on."

"Welcome to *my world*," I laughed. Maxine Fortenberry grabbed his ass for Christ's sake! "Besides, you have nothing to worry about. I only want you."

His eyebrow rose up as he questioned, "Are you sure about that? You seemed to be enjoying your conversation with the little peckerhead."

"Well..." I let the word hang there for a moment before smiling coyly and admitting, "I *did* like his accent, but you can't fault an American girl for that. We all *like* Australian accents, but I *love* you."

I was having a difficult time forming words because my eyes had zeroed in on his lower lip which was begging to be sucked, but since I was so focused on it I knew to pay attention when I saw it move as he spoke. "You don't say," he said taking on a predatory look. "So if I told you how hard you make me seeing you lying here in the sun with nothing more than scraps covering the parts of your body my mouth is dying to taste, you'd be okay with that?"

He'd adopted an Australian accent with his last sentence.

My ovaries exploded.

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## Chapter 61: Chapter 60

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### Chapter 60

#### EPOV

I was having a fuck awful time trying to look sophisticatedly detached for the shots Alfred was trying to take when all I could think about was the fact Sookie was lying on the beach without me right at that very fucking moment with her golden skin begging to be touched. The photo shoot that had taken place inside the house was only bearable because Sookie had been in the shots with me, but now that I was on my own I remembered just how boring they could be. I even tried to pass the time reading a page or two of the paperback book I'd had to hold as a prop, but seeing it had to do with vampires my eyes glazed over before they could actually sparkle.

At least Alfred and Maria Starr seemed nice enough and we talked a little bit about their jobs and mine. They had stayed the night at a bed and breakfast down the road and told me about a great little seafood restaurant they'd gone to for dinner, so I figured I would take Sookie there later on that evening so she wouldn't have to cook. It didn't seem fair since this was sort of a mini-vacation for both of us and I wanted her to relax and enjoy herself and since I hadn't come across any Pop Tarts in the kitchen, I wouldn't be able to cook for her anyway.

I could've jumped for joy when they told me to change into the final outfit for the day, so they could get some shots of me standing next to the tent, and hurriedly pulled on the jeans and shirt finally seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. All I wanted to do was get back to Sookie's side, especially after I walked back out of the tent and saw she'd removed her t-shirt and shorts and was lying on her towel in one of her skimpy bikinis. It was when I'd been standing next to the tent, as Alfred took shot after shot with the ocean behind me, that I saw some fuckwad walk over and plop down next to her that the longing I felt to be near her changed into a possessive fury. Before that I'd merely viewed her bikini as a treat for my eyes, but now that another man was quite literally between her and I, all I wanted to do was rip his eyes from their sockets.

*That sight was only for MY eyes.*

Her polite smile towards him and idle chit chat only served to fan the flames already threatening to engulf me and I barely heard Alfred say, "I think that's the one. Thank you Eric..." before my feet were already marching towards them with my hands clenched at my sides.

As I got closer I heard the little Aussie prick say, "You can be *my* date," to her and the red haze in front of my eyes changed into a blinding white hot flame.

*I was going to throw this little shrimp on the barbie.*

Sookie managed to once again soothe the savage beast in me and once the little twat was gone I instinctively climbed on top of her attempting to shield her from prying eyes. Hearing her say she liked Australian accents had me pulling out my best Crocodile Dundee impersonation, telling her what I'd been wanting to do to her all day long. By the look on her face it seemed to fan a different kind of flame between us as she managed to swallow hard and ask, "Where did you learn to talk like that?"

"Crocodile Dundee," I admitted, not caring how ridiculous the truth sounded since I was reaping the benefits now. I'd loved that movie as a child and watched it more times than I cared to admit.

She giggled and lifted her hips, brushing against the growing bulge that couldn't be hidden very well in the tight jeans I was wearing, before saying, "Legend has it a crocodile took half of your leg off."

*She was really fucking perfect if she could quote lines from Crocodile Dundee off the top of her head.*

My hips did a little pushing back of their own while I buried my face against the side of her neck, keeping up with the Australian accent and saying, "More like a love bite really. Here ya are, enough about me leg. Let me tell you about the rest of me. Up North in the Never-Never, where the land is harsh and bare, lives a mighty hunter named Mick Dundee." I lifted up high enough to look her in the eyes and returned the smile I saw on her face, finishing with, "who can dance like Fred Astaire."

"I'll say," she whispered before pulling me back down for a kiss.

Her hands traveled up my arms, squeezing my biceps, before burying themselves in my hair and I quickly forgot we weren't alone until I heard one of the peckerhead's friends yell out, "Get a room!"

Sookie's body froze, apparently just as caught up in the moment as I was since her hands had moved down to work on the button of my jeans, and I wanted to beat his ass for ruining the moment when she pulled away giggling, "Oops."

'Oops' sounded like a perfect defense for justifiable homicide to me, but I was brought back from my premeditation by Sookie's hands, which had moved back up to my chest and were pushing against me as she said, "Come on big boy...up."

"Boy?" I asked with a small grin and mock offense. However, I liked the 'big' part of that sentence and ground my hips back down against hers making her gasp as I said, "I'm already *up*. Can't you tell?"

My plan to leave her flustered backfired when she wrapped her legs around me, reminding me of just how close she was to being naked as she slid her body against mine, while saying, "Of



course I can tell and if you had your way right now, Northern California would be registering a 5.0 earthquake on the Richter scale."

I could feel the heat radiating off of every bit of her skin that touched my own, but before I could be momentarily distracted by it I replied, "5.0? Lover, you severely underestimate me." All thoughts of propriety disappeared as I swooped down taking her lips in another kiss, but when my lips started to wander down her neck, intent on exploring her Bermuda Triangle, her next question put my quest on hold.

"Do you want to have a baby nine months from now?"

*NO!*

"Huh?" I asked, my mouth filtering my brain. After the childhood I'd had, I'd never really wanted to have kids of my own, afraid of repeating the cycle of dysfunction that made up my family. I'd never made a firm decision on it one way or the other, but I'd also never been in a relationship until Sookie came along and I was suddenly terrified it might be a deal breaker between us if I decided I didn't want to be a parent. She was a fucking *teacher* so it stood to reason that she liked kids enough to want one of her own.

The sound of her voice brought me back into the moment when she said, "Your jeans are tight enough that if you had a condom in your pocket I'd be able to tell, so unless you're already wearing one, we need to stop."

For the first time since she'd come into my life, 'stopping' sounded like a good idea, but I regretted jumping up to my feet so quickly when she gave me a strange look colored with a bit of disappointment. I tried to smile like I wasn't internally freaking the fuck out and held my hand out to her to help her up as I said, "I should help them pack up their gear," motioning toward Alfred and Maria Starr who were tearing down the tent and added, "and then we need to get cleaned up so I can take you out to dinner."

I guessed my distraction ploy worked because Sookie smiled and took my offered hand as she stood up asking, "You're taking me out to dinner? Like a date?"

I suddenly felt like shit realizing we'd already professed our love to each other, but I'd never actually taken her out on a proper date. Granted, we'd only been together for two weeks and they'd been a *busy* two weeks, but I still felt like I'd shirked my duties. I'd promised to *woo* her and hadn't followed through, so pushing away all hypothetical baby thoughts I relaxed a little and smiled responding, "Yes, I'm taking you out to dinner. After all, I already told your little Aussie ass that your evening was spoken for and I don't want to be made a liar."

Sookie smiled wider before leaning up and placing a soft kiss on my lips as she said, "More than just my evening is spoken for."

I had a feeling if I decided I didn't want any kids of my own one day her declaration would no longer be true and knew I needed to figure out how I really felt about it one way or the other

before the subject inevitably came up. I acted on autopilot as I helped carry everything to their vans and got directions to the seafood restaurant from Alfred before they left. He told us he'd have copies of the proofs sent to Pam by the end of the week and even went so far as to offer us a couple of shots for our own that would be kept out of the magazine which made Sookie hug him like a long lost relative and I was again left dumbfounded by the innate ability she seemed to have when it came to making friends. We took separate showers with me using dinner as an excuse knowing if we took one together we'd never leave the house, but in reality I was still distracted by thoughts of having kids.

*Could I even be a good parent?*

It wasn't like I could use my own parents as role models and I'd never spent any time with anyone else's parents while growing up to use as a surrogate. I had no idea how long I was lost in my thoughts underneath the shower spray until Sookie poked her head into the bathroom asking, "Are you okay? You've been in there for thirty minutes."

*Shit.*

"Yeah, I'll be out in a minute," I called out to her. I quickly toweled off and got dressed while trying to tell myself that I had no reason to panic yet. Sookie hadn't said anything about wanting kids and I wasn't sure what I wanted anyway so we could cross that bridge when we got to it.

It didn't take long to get to the restaurant and I could feel Sookie's eyes on me the whole way there. The silence between us wasn't uncomfortable, but was as loud as a freight train and I knew it was only a matter of time before she asked me what was wrong, so I attempted to divert attention away from my thoughts by becoming engrossed in the menu when our waiter approached our table asking, "Are you ready or do you need some more time?"

"I need more time," I answered automatically. I knew he was talking about our dinner order, but of course my mind flashed back to hypothetical kids and my answer was true for both questions. I didn't know why I was freaking out so much about it other than the fact I had a bad feeling my entire relationship with Sookie hung in the balance. With her sweet and caring nature she was tailor made to be a mom and I had no doubts she'd be a fantastic one, so my doubts lay squarely with me. If she posed the question and I answered wrong, I risked losing her, but would it be right to agree to something as big as bringing another life into the world when I wasn't sure I wanted to? I didn't want to end up resenting my own child like my own father had resented me, but the thought of having to lose Sookie in the process wasn't easy to stomach either.

"Do you know what you want?" I asked her when he walked away.

*Shrimp? Scallops? 2.5 kids and a picket fence? Could we just get a dog from Terry and call it a day?*

After our little make-out session on the beach, I shouldn't have been surprised when I felt her bare foot sliding up my leg and coming to rest in between my thighs underneath the table, but it was a welcome diversion from my thoughts. I allowed myself to fully enjoy the feel of her foot

leisurely stroking up and down my growing erection, our cock play hidden by the tablecloth, and when I finally looked up from my menu and into her eyes she smiled softly saying, "There you are."

*Were we playing hide and seek unbeknownst to me?*

At my quizzical look she elaborated, "You've been somewhere else since we left the beach. Care to share?"

*I don't want to lose you.*

What the fuck was wrong with me? It wasn't like she'd started talking about wanting kids so why in the hell was I dwelling on it so much? Even if I decided I *didn't* want to have kids maybe Sookie would decide that *I* would be enough for her.

*Or me and one of Terry's dogs.*

"Terry and his dogs," I answered when she cocked her eyebrow at me still waiting for a response.

*It wasn't a lie. It was chicken shit, but it wasn't a lie.*

God and I seemed to have different opinions on what constituted a lie because as Sookie asked, "What about them?" a little girl barely old enough to walk tottered up to me out of nowhere and latched her drool covered hands onto my leg yelling, "Da da da da."

*Not funny God. Not funny at all.*

Sookie laughed while I stared down at the slobber monkey attached to my leg and a man rushed over swooping her up into his arms apologizing, "Sorry about that. She's getting quicker with every passing day."

I tried to smile while thinking '*Go the fuck away*', but it seemed God was still in a jovial mood because Sookie spoke up asking, "How old is she?"

His face positively beamed as he looked down at the little girl chewing on his shirt collar while she smacked the side of his face with her chubby hand and answered, "Thirteen months." While they talked I tried to imagine being in his shoes and wondered if I'd beam just as brightly as him while being covered in baby spit. My mind conjured a baby Sookie in my arms, made easier since I'd seen pictures of Sookie as a baby while at Gran's house, with her bright blue eyes shining back up at me from where she was perched in my arms in my mind's eye and felt the smile form on my face. It disappeared just as quickly when I tuned back into their conversation and heard him say, "My wife died while giving birth to her, but having Isabella has given me a reason to go on."

"I'm so sorry," Sookie offered, clearly upset. All I could think was at least the baby wouldn't have to grow up knowing her mother had chosen to leave her and couldn't come back and fuck

up her life when she was older. The thought of having to raise imaginary Baby Sookie on my own didn't appeal to me at all, especially if having Baby Sookie was the reason for losing Adult Sookie and just like that my mood was shot to shit all over again.

Thankfully our waiter returned and father and daughter excused themselves after apologizing once more. I didn't even know what I'd ordered until he returned with our entrees, nor did I realize we'd sat there in utter silence the entire time until I looked up seeing Sookie's worried face staring back at me. She tried to smile as she asked, "Terry and his dogs again?"

"I'm sorry," I sighed. "I'm doing a real shitty job of wooing you on our first date, huh?" With my luck she was probably second guessing turning down the Aussie prick from earlier. At least he had his accent working for him when I couldn't even manage to maintain a conversation with her, accent or no accent.

"You've already wooed me," she smiled. "Do you want to talk about whatever's bothering you?"

Did I? I wasn't about to bring up any of my thoughts on having Baby Sookies, but thought maybe if she knew a little more about my demons she might understand where I was coming from, even if I didn't know where we were headed. I already knew the story of her own parents' deaths and how she and Jason came to live with Gran from when we'd visited, but over the next couple of hours I told her about my own mother's reappearance in my life and the havoc it caused. She let me spill my guts without ever interrupting and, not surprisingly, didn't judge me when I admitted to my subsequent cocaine addiction. We'd barely touched our food and ended up taking it with us as I continued my story back at the house. By the time I reached the end of it all she was in tears and shocked when I admitted that she was the only one I'd ever shared that particular story with.

I didn't know why she was shocked; after all, she was my secret keeper.

My own tears snuck up on me when she got up and crawled into my lap when it was all said and done, wrapping her arms around me. It stung having to relive it all, but now that it was out in the open I actually felt better and as Sookie and I made love that night, with every touch or kiss from her, bit by bit I felt a little more of myself being healed. Sated and tired, she curled up next to me and I watched her as she slept trying to picture what my future would be like without her in it. It was a bleak prospect and one I had no interest in exploring knowing I loved her more than anything. It was then that I realized I'd been asking myself the wrong questions.

*Would having kids be a deal breaker for ME?*

My left hand moved up to brush the hair out of her face, as I spooned her from behind, and as I caught sight of my tattoo again the answer that rang out in my head was an unequivocal 'no'. I was still terrified at the thought of one day becoming a parent, but figured I had a few years to get used to the idea if that was what she really wanted and I fell asleep knowing no matter what our future held, kids or no kids, as long as I had Sookie by my side, I knew everything would be okay.

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### Chapter 61

#### SPOV

I woke up trapped in Eric's embrace and feeling the rise and fall of his chest at my back as he slept soundly behind me. While I wanted to remain there enjoying the comfort only he could give me, unfortunately I could also feel my very angry bladder and it had other ideas on where we needed to be at the moment, so I pulled myself from his grip and headed into the bathroom already having an idea of which one of us would win that pissing contest. Once I was friends with all of my internal organs again I brushed my teeth and couldn't help but think over everything Eric had told me the night before. I'd never seen him more vulnerable than he had been while telling me his darkest secret and my heart ached for him knowing he'd gone through it all alone. His parents must have had their own demons to have treated him the way they did, but it still didn't excuse it and I was glad we wouldn't be seeing his father again any time soon. From what Eric told me about his mother, she could be dead or alive and while I wouldn't wish death on my worst enemy, I still hoped she never came back into his life.

For the umpteenth time I wondered how Eric had turned out relatively normal and I now saw his earlier assbattery I'd been subjected to when we first met in a whole new light. He'd been used and emotionally abused his entire life and I could only be thankful he saw something in me that let me in. I wished we'd met sooner so I could've been there for him when he was bearing the brunt of it all, but all I could do was be there for him now and I made a vow to him that night I would stand by him in the future no matter what.

*Unlike our marriage vows and with the absence of Jose Cuervo, it was a promise I wouldn't forget.*

Since I was already up I decided to jump into the shower, having no idea what time the car would be there to take us back home, and had my eyes closed as I began lathering the shampoo into my hair when I felt an extra set of hands massaging my scalp. It wouldn't have shocked me if Wicked and Immoral had managed to spawn doppelgangers since there was more T-Eric-tory to cover than they could handle by themselves, but the feel of another body part pressed against my back for which I had no matching twin of my own let me know *someone* else was up besides me.

Or should I say *something else* was up, alive and well...

My feet automatically took one step back with my hands dropping from my hair, having decided Eric's ass needed to be massaged more than my scalp, and landed on it with a wet slap. I felt the chuckle rumble through his chest against my back, but his hands never stopped working the shampoo through my hair. When we'd made love the night before, it had been an intense experience with us connecting on a deeper emotional level that literally brought tears to my eyes.

It was something we'd both needed at the time, but now I had *other* needs and from what his body was telling me, he had those same needs as well.

The night before had been emotionally heavy for both of us, but I wanted to bring back Eric's playful side and in an unnecessary effort to get a rise out of him (if it rose any higher I'd have something else besides his hands massaging my scalp) I wiggled my ass against him saying in my best Bella Lugosi impersonation, "It's aliiiiive..."

Not understanding his part in playing along with my morning insanity, Eric turned our bodies to rinse the shampoo from my hair as he again poked my lower back with his monster and asked, "Hmm?" while working the shampoo from my hair.

The suds slid down my back between our bodies making them all the more slippery and Wicked reinforced her stronghold on his ass while Immoral moved like an unseen ninja grabbing onto the enemy's sword, firmly stroking up and down, making Eric groan. I renamed her prisoner out loud declaring it, "Frankencock."

Eric barked out a half laugh half moan as his hands moved down from my hair to my shoulders, massaging them as Wicked and Immoral massaged two different parts of him. He moved our bodies again to the middle of the shower so the spray of water was directed at our bodies and buried his face against my neck asking, "Frankencock?" His hands traveled to my breasts gently kneading the flesh that filled his hands while his hips thrust behind me and said, "Sounds like a cockamamie story to me."

I clucked my tongue in fake disapproval of his words, but one of his hands wandered down my front and slid in between legs making me momentarily lose my train of thought. His longer arm span made up for the differences in our height with his fingers dancing lightly along my folds before sliding one inside of me, making my head fall back against his chest as my hips bore down on his hand. I somehow managed to keep some semblance of higher brain function saying, "I never run off at the mouth half-cocked. This," Immoral squeezed gently, "is a monster."

Our breathing was becoming more labored and the pace of my strokes increased, keeping time with Eric's thrusting finger, while his lips and teeth chewed a path from my neck to my shoulder and back again. I whimpered out loud in protest when both of his hands disappeared from my body and he grabbed my hands removing them from their preferred perch and placed them on the tiled wall in front of me. My body was bent over in front of him and my insides became giddy hearing the sound of a foil packet being ripped open. Seconds later I felt Eric's hands grip each side of my hips while Frankencock slid along my folds with the tip teasing against my clit. He continued to slide against me in a tortuously slow rhythm until I was desperate to have him inside of me when he finally asked, "Are you sure about that? It still sounds like a cock and bull story to me."

In. I *needed* to have him inside of me and all of the cock talk was only adding fuel to my fire, but no amount of wiggling against him could get him to slide home. Frustrated passed the point of return I turned my head to look up at him over my shoulder and growled out, "I'm cock-sure. Now fuck me!"

Anyone else might have been frightened seeing Eric's eyes darken like a mad scientist with his pupils dilating until they were nearly black with lust, but it only made me want to high five myself. Thank God I didn't because if my hands hadn't been firmly planted on the wall in front of me I would've face planted against the tile when Eric powerfully thrust inside of me to the hilt a second later, making me cry out in victorious relief.

"You... Will... Be... The... Death... Of... Me..." he grunted out, punctuating each word with a thrust of his hips.

"Then I'll bring you back to life and do it all over again," I sputtered out, barely gasping enough breath to form the words of my dastardly plan. I would too, already imagining the wires and probes attached to Frankencock while strumming my fingers together in evil anticipation while waiting for lightning to strike and bringing it back to life, like an X-rated remake of the movie 'Weird Science'.

His one hand stayed on my hip while the other wound its way in front of me, working circles over my clit at a furious pace and rubbing the pornified 80's movie classic right out of my brain, with the sound of our wet flesh slapping together echoing around us. I was close, so close that the tiled wall in front of me was blurred out by the sparks of light inside of my eyeballs (porn lightning!) and when he yanked my body up by my hair and pinched my clit, while delivering a forceful thrust from behind me I nearly blacked out as I climaxed from the dual sensations of pleasure and pain. The echoes of my shrill scream could still be heard as consciousness slowly returned, but my vision had not, so I shrieked again when I felt my body flying through the air. Cold tiles were suddenly pressed against my back as Eric held me up against the wall and shoved his way back inside of me.

*Frankencock was alive and well.*

His mouth found my breasts as he continued to pound me into the wall leaving me no choice but to hold on for dear life, with my legs wrapped around his waist and my fingers wound into his hair. I wasn't waif-like by any means, but Eric seemed to have no problems holding me up and I briefly contemplated sending Tray a gift basket in thanks for making Eric so strong. When that now all too familiar coil began winding tighter down below all thoughts were replaced by nothing more than feelings. The way I felt safe in his arms. The way I felt complete when he was inside of me. The way my heart felt tied to his.

Eric's mouth enveloped my own and he shifted our bodies so that he was grinding against my clit with every thrust. I whimpered, moaned, and cried into our kiss with every stroke and when he pulled back far enough to look into my eyes, the love and lust clearly shown through and with his forehead pressed against my own he commanded, "Cum for me. Now!" I did as I was ordered.

Explosive is too tame of a word to describe what rocked through our bodies, but it was close enough. We ended up in a tangle of limbs on the shower floor trying to catch our breath while being pelted with water from above. Our wet hair was plastered haphazardly to our heads and

Eric had to move a large clump of it from my eyes in order for me to see him as he asked, "That better?" with a sated grin on his lips.

I didn't know if he was talking about my sight returning or fulfilling his promise of shower sexcapades, but since I could still barely see straight thanks to the lack of oxygen in my brain, I chose to answer the former as I crawled over to him and planted a sloppy kiss, similar to our drunk wedding video, on his lips before admitting truthfully, "Not really." His perplexed look had me elaborating as seriously as I could, given the circumstances, "Frankencock left me cock-eyed."

When he *cocked* his eyebrow at me I lost it and exploded in a fit of giggles, with him laughing just as hard as he wrapped me in his arms until our shared euphoria died down. We eventually got up and cleaned each other under the now tepid water before finally getting ready to leave. The car arrived shortly thereafter and I wandered around the house making sure we hadn't forgotten anything while Eric brought our bags downstairs. He found me on the balcony and wrapped his arms around my waist from behind as we silently looked out towards the ocean together. I didn't realize I'd been crying until Eric turned me to face him and wiped the tears from my cheeks looking horrified as he asked, "What's wrong?"

"Nothing's wrong," I whispered, trying to smile. It was true, there really was nothing wrong and I attributed my sudden case of melancholy to Aunt Flo's impending arrival.

"Then why are you crying?" he asked.

How could I explain it so he would understand? I wanted to stay there where it was just him and I wrapped up in our own little world with no outside intrusions. I wanted to stay in the place where we'd both finally admitted our love for one another, but at the same time I wanted to go back and live in our new reality where we were really a couple, with each of us going about our normal days but safe in the knowledge that we'd come home to each other. I decided to give him the cliff notes version and just said, "They're happy tears."

He didn't appear to like that answer and stared at them as if he was trying to will them back up into my tear ducts with the force of his gaze alone. When his supernatural powers failed him he resorted to manually wiping them away and gruffed out, "I don't like seeing you cry, happy or not." I couldn't stop the giggle before it left my lips making him frown and pout out a, "What? It's true."

I snorted saying, "You look like you've just been told you're having dinner with Hannibal Lecter with liver, fava beans and a nice chianti on the menu."

Eric seemed to relax a little hearing me laugh and smirked in return saying, "I'd rather eat *you* for dinner," before swooping down for a searing kiss.

He was quickly turning me into a sex addict with my libido hopping like a jackrabbit on speed, but the thought of the limo driver already waiting for us was enough to make me pull away and say, "We'd better get going." The return of his pout made me smile and promise, "Later big fella."



It's nowhere near dinner time." His responding growl and grope didn't help calm either one of us, but we somehow managed to make our way to the limo and the only reason we didn't end up continuing our shesexigans was Gran calling my cell phone to see how the photo shoot went having known how nervous I'd been. By the time I'd gotten off of the phone, Eric was busy talking to Pam on his phone and from the sounds of it he was going to have a busy week. From what I could gather from Eric's side of the conversation they were going to try and double up filming this week since they hadn't been able to film the week before. I ended up falling asleep curled up against his side, while he and Pam worked on his schedule, and did my best to fill myself with as much of Eric's presence while I still could.

I woke up to the sound of Eric moaning beside me and a grin instantly formed on my face before my eyes even opened, with Wicked and Immoral taking off towards their treat like Pavlov's dogs hearing a bell ring. Their path was halted by Eric's hands clamping down on my wrists and I sat up opening my eyes to see his pained face. His skin was clammy with his hair stuck to his forehead and all of the color had disappeared from his face leaving him looking pale and sickly. My earlier naming of his Frankencock had seemingly backfired on me making his entire body appear almost green and had me repeating his earlier question asking, "What's wrong?"

He pointed at an empty Styrofoam container lying next to him on the seat that I recognized from the restaurant we'd gone to the night before and said, "I'm thinking that wasn't any good."

I didn't even realize he'd brought them along, nor did I see the logic in eating seafood that had been left sitting out for God only knows how long in the car, but there was nothing to be done for it now. Seeing as how it was empty all I could do was say, "Poor honey," and pat his arm. He looked awful and I glanced out the window, wondering how long we had until we'd be home, and was surprised to see we were already in Eric's neighborhood. As soon as the limo pulled up in front of the house Eric bolted from the car with his keys in hand and ran into the house. The driver got out looking as alarmed as I felt, but I muttered a quick, "He doesn't feel well," before taking off after him.

Eric had made it as far as the small bathroom off of the kitchen and from the sounds of it his meal was making a reappearance, so I left him alone long enough to thank the driver for bringing our bags into the house. He refused any tip, saying it had already been taken care of, so once he was gone I returned to the kitchen, taking out some crackers and Gatorade for Eric and found him lying on the floor next to the toilet when I opened the bathroom door. After wiping him down with a wet washcloth, I coaxed him up onto his feet and walked him to the bedroom where I stripped him down and made him get into bed before lying down beside him, holding his hand, and watching him until he finally fell asleep.

I spent the rest of the day doing laundry and cleaning the house while running back and forth to keep an eye on Eric. He'd made several trips to the bathroom with what I hoped was only an undiagnosed case of minor food poisoning and stood around feeling helpless knowing there was nothing more I could do for him than to offer him some sips of Gatorade and my sympathy while he rested. I'd never been one to have a weak stomach, but by the end of the night even I was feeling queasy and wondered if maybe it was a stomach bug Eric had instead of food poisoning. The toddler from the restaurant had slobbered all over him and I knew kids were pretty germey, so

it stood to reason he might have caught something from her. The last thing I needed was to get sick and have to call out of work *again*, so as I laid next to Eric in bed that night I fell asleep praying I'd be spared from making my own offering to the porcelain god.

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## Chapter 63: Chapter 62

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### Chapter 62

#### EPOV

I woke up Monday morning feeling like I'd been hit by a train and swore to myself that I'd never eat seafood again. Ever. The amount that came out of me far exceeded the portion I'd eaten and the only comfort I'd felt was whenever I woke up, Sookie was always right there by my side. She'd checked on me one final time that morning, waking me before she left for work, and hesitated leaving me there alone while saying she'd likely be fired if she called out again today. I didn't want her to get fired; I wanted her to *quit*, but when I sleepily mentioned it again and it appeared I was about to be Sookie'd, I quickly backed down not having the strength to argue with her.

I quickly fell back to sleep after promising to text her and let her know how I was doing, but waking up later on without her in the house was a shock to my system. I took a few minutes to fully wake up as I grabbed my phone and I slowly realized I'd gotten so used to having her nearby that now that I knew it would be hours until I would see her again, a lot of fucking hours since we had to film two shows this week, it left me in a pissy mood until I turned on my phone and saw I already had a text message from Sookie.

*I called Tray and cancelled your session for this morning. I hope you're feeling better. I love you. – S*

And just like that my bad mood vanished and I was grinning like a fool. We'd said the words to each other a bunch of times by then, and I'd meant them every fucking time, but seeing it in black and white made me all sorts of happy so I quickly typed back a reply.

*I'm not sure if I'm still sick. I need you here to take my temperature. Orally. ;) I love you too. – E*

I figured she'd laugh at my tongue in cheek message and know that I really was feeling better, but thoughts of what else could be in her cheek was becoming problematic since she wasn't there. I'd never been so fixated on someone before and while I was still shocked by the emotional connection we'd been building together, I was *more* shocked by the physical connection we had together. I simply couldn't get my fill of her and at that point doubted I ever could. It was a concept even more foreign to me than actually falling in love with her because at least with sex I had something to compare it to. A lot of 'somethings' actually and while there'd been a few inconsequential women I'd recycled over the years, none of them compared to the way I was

drawn to Sookie. It was like an actual physical *need*; a gravitational pull to be near her. I *needed* to touch her, either affectionately or passionately, but I could literally feel the strain in my chest knowing she wasn't nearby. And especially now that we'd finally become intimate, I *needed* to be inside of her on a regular basis which was hard to do when she wasn't even in the same room as me much less the same fucking house.

*And...FUCK! Now I was hard.*

It was already nearing 9 o'clock so I knew she'd be in class right now and doubted I'd hear back from her anytime soon. Instead of lying around lamenting over her not being there I headed into the bathroom to get cleaned up and tried to push away all thoughts of my *needs* and *fucking* while ignoring how hard I was. Once I was showered and dressed I did feel a hell of a lot better than I had the day before, if not still a little weak, but I still planned on heading into work. The last fucking thing we needed was another delay because I was home sick. While we already had a few shows banked, I didn't want to fall behind in case I ended up getting the movie role opposite Sophie-Anne that I'd be reading for on Friday afternoon. I already knew work on the film would start right when the filming for the sitcom ended in early February and didn't want to potentially fuck up any of the scheduling and lose the part due to the show's delays. Pam had already assured me she'd spoken to the TV producers and director about me not being able to work passed 3 o'clock on Friday, since our meeting was at 4, but they planned on having everything wrapped up around lunchtime anyway so it wasn't going to be a problem.

Pam and Alcide were both already waiting in my dressing room when I arrived which coincided with me getting another text message from Sookie.

***Someone appears to be feeling better, but I'll take your temp later on tonight just to be sure. ;) –S***

Fuck...now I was going to be hard all day long just thinking about it. I began typing my response when Pam's voice broke the lustful spell I'd been under, effectively killing my hard-on as she said, "How is it you look like shit and yet thoroughly fucked?"

"Fuck off Pam," I snapped back while Alcide chortled next to her. "I was sick most of the day yesterday."

I managed to type back a quick response before she could lay into me again.

***Tonight is too far away. YOU'RE too far away. I might die before then. – E***

"You're grinning like a prepubescent boy that just found his father's porn stash. Are you sexting wifey poo?" she snarked.

I looked up and fixed my glare on her saying, "Yes, I am *texting* Sookie so quit talking. You're killing the mood." My phone beeped again alerting me to a new text message drawing my eyes back to my hand.

***I'd accuse you of being overdramatic, but you ARE an actor so I guess it's to be expected. Maybe this will tide you over? – S***

I thought she'd meant a round of dirty texting, but my phone beeped again and I saw Sookie had sent me a picture.

Of her lips.

Just her lips.

Perfect. Soft. Pink. Hot. Warm. Wet. Kissable. Bitable. Fuckable lips.

*I had no doubt they tasted like cherries.*

"God Dammit!" I yelled, vaguely noticing Pam and Alcide jump in my peripheral vision as I typed my response while they studiously ignored me.

***You're playing with fire little girl. – E***

***Good thing I know where you keep your hose and how to use it. – S***

***I don't know. This could be one of your cock and bull stories. – E***

***Would you like me to tell you a cock story? Do you have time? It has quite the climactic ending. It's an original non-fiction piece by yours truly. – S***

I nearly snapped my phone in half picturing her doing just that which gave me an idea for something else we could do later on that night. Seeing I had Pam and Alcide's attention once more I sent a final text saying,

***You win. Pam's presence is killing the mood. I'll see you tonight. I love you. – E***

***You'll win later on tonight. ;) I love you too. – S***

I slipped my phone into my pocket to try and avoid temptation while shooting them both looks that told them I wasn't in the mood for their prying. Pam went over my schedule for the week again after I sent Alcide off to take care of the things I wouldn't have time to do on my own, like finding a furniture store near Bon Temps and setting up an account for Gran, making a donation to Terry for the service dogs he was training, and letting Tray know I wouldn't make it in this week with our poker game being cancelled too. The rest of the day was filled with multiple rehearsals for both shows we'd be taping this week which was where I saw Bill for the first time since the premier party.

I hadn't forgotten what had happened at the house between him and Sookie and just seeing him again brought that rage back, but I managed to rein in my emotions and he only remained in my presence when absolutely necessary which was a relief. Another relief was meeting the actress

who'd been hired to replace Dawn. Not because she was a big star, but because I was sure I'd never even met her before, so there wouldn't be a repeat of what happened before if Sookie came to visit me on the set again.

It wasn't lost on me that even though my day had been abnormally busy Sookie was never far from my thoughts. There was always something that would remind me of her whether it was a color I'd seen her wear before or just a glance down at my tattooed finger since I'd decided to no longer wear a ring. In my mind the ring had been part of a costume I had to wear to play the role of her husband, but the tattoo was *real*. It represented the commitment I'd made to her, albeit drunkenly at the time, but it was a very genuine promise now.

The only highlights of my day had been the sporadic texts I'd received from Sookie, one of which had me in *very* high spirits. She'd apparently made an appointment to see her doctor on Friday afternoon to get put back on birth control and the thought of being able to just slide right into her with absolutely *nothing* in between us left me a little lightheaded, probably because all of the blood had rushed from my brain to my dick. To make matters worse she'd included a picture she'd drawn during 'Arts and Crafts' time. A *very* naughty picture, the Crayola medium notwithstanding, and had labeled it 'Bareback Sexcapades'.

*She really would be the death of me.*

I knew we hadn't used a rubber on the night we'd gotten married and, now that I knew how insatiable we were together, God only knows how many times we'd had sex that night, but since I couldn't remember it I considered the next time it would happen to be a first for me. I hadn't been lying when I told her I never had sex without one, having never trusted my partners, so I looked forward to being able to experience that for the *first* time with Sookie.

Those thoughts made the day seem even longer and by the time we wrapped up for the night I all but flew home. It was almost eleven o'clock by the time I walked into the house, the first of four long days ahead of me, and I tried not to be disappointed when I found Sookie asleep in bed. She'd gotten up early for work that day so instead of waking her up I slipped into the bathroom and took a quick shower before climbing into bed. Even in the darkness of the room, as soon as I lifted the sheet I could see she was naked which tested my resolve to not wake her. Instead I did the honorable thing and slid in beside her, keeping my hands and my dick to myself, but it only took seconds before she seemed to sense my presence because her body shifted until she was wrapped around me and a soft sigh left her lips. When she gave me no indication she'd woken up, I merely wrapped my arms around her and kissed the top of her head before letting sleep take me.

My eyes opened the next morning with one part of my body more awake than the others. The top of Sookie's blond head was all I could see and her warm wet mouth sliding down my morning wood was all I could feel. I struggled to find something to say to her, "Good morning," or "I missed you," but all I could managed was a strangled, "*Fuck...*" as my fingers wove into her hair. The suction of her mouth faltered when she smiled around my cock, but quickly returned as she resumed her task of blowing my mind.

*My cock too.*

It didn't take long before I she literally sucked me dry and I was too dazed and sated to be embarrassed about my lack of stamina, but when I attempted to get her underneath me to reciprocate she wouldn't let me saying she was already running late. I was really starting to hate the fact she was working, there was no reason for it as far as I was concerned, but I didn't want to fight with her so I kept my thoughts to myself and resolved to bring it up again over the weekend. Even after my spectacular wakeup call, I was in a foul mood when I arrived at the studio and Pam picked up on it immediately.

"What the fuck is wrong with you?" she asked in her oh-so-diplomatic way.

"Nothing's the fuck wrong with me."

She cocked her eyebrow at me saying, "You might be able to bluff those dumbasses you play poker with, but you can't fool me." When I didn't respond she gave me a death glare asking, "Did you do something to fuck up with Sookie?"

"No!" The thought alone made me queasy and I'd had enough of that shit already. "I..."

I didn't know how to finish that sentence. *I'm a selfish bastard and want Sookie to quit her job and be with me all day every day?* Actually...yeah, so I repeated that exact phrase to Pam. She was a conniving bitch, so maybe she had tips on how I could get Sookie to quit.

Instead she laughed out, "I *knew* it! You're in *loooove*!"

"Well...yeah," I replied.

That brought her up short and her eyebrows shot into her hairline as she asked, "What? When? Does she know? Does she feel the same?"

"What? Are we fucking girlfriends now?" I asked.

I flinched when her gaze narrowed at me and I could almost see the laser's red dot right in between my eyes pinpointing where her stiletto heel was moments away from striking. So that was how I ended up spilling my guts to Pam about my relationship with Sookie, omitting the parts about my childhood and meeting my mom. Those parts I would only trust with Sookie. I'd expected her to mock me, but when I was done I nearly shit myself when she hugged me saying, "I'm happy for you." I started to suspect I'd been speaking to a Pam clone for the last 30 minutes until she set my mind at ease when she pulled away and punched me in the shoulder, hard I might add, saying, "She's good for you so don't you fuck it up Northman."

I resisted the urge to rub the spot she'd punched and instead asked, "So how do I get her to quit working?"

"Pfft..." she waved her hand in my face adding, "you can't. She's a stubborn one, so you're just going to have to accept the fact that she wants to work. If you try to get her fired or guilt her into quitting, a part of her will always resent you for it, even if she forgives you."

I hated to admit it, even to myself, but Pam was right. I knew Sookie well enough by then to have seen her stubborn streak more than once and the last thing I needed or wanted was for her to resent me.

The rest of the week went by in a blur where I barely saw Sookie except for when we were in bed. I missed her like crazy, but I knew after that week things would calm down and we'd get to spend more time together. It was the only thing keeping me sane most days and by the time we wrapped up on Friday afternoon I felt like a kid on the last day of school waiting for the final bell to ring. Once the meeting with the movie director was over, I was free and I planned on making up for all of the time I'd lost out on spending with Sookie. We'd kept tabs on each other mostly via text messages throughout the week because we always spent what little time we *did* have together in a lust-filled orgasmic haze.

My meeting was at four o'clock, as was Sookie's doctor's appointment, and we'd traded some downright pornographic texts earlier that day so I couldn't wait to get home. My knee was bouncing in anticipation to the point where Pam told me to knock it the fuck off when we were waiting to be led into the director's office. The door finally opened revealing Sophie-Anne's skanky ass already inside along with her thrall, the director, Victor Madden, or as Pam called him, Vic the Non-Existent-Dick.

"Eric, Pam, it's good to see you both," Victor greeted. "I believe you both know Sophie-Anne."

I just nodded while Pam turned on the charm saying, "Of course, it's so nice to see you both." Sometimes I thought she'd missed her calling because she could've been one hell of an actress. If you didn't know her any better, to the outside observer she seemed genuinely sincere and hadn't just spent the last fifteen minutes berating the two people in the room with us. One for being dickless (according to the rumor mill, Pam claimed her own dick was bigger than his) and the other as an infected cunt (more of a fact than a rumor).

We talked a little bit about the filming schedule and I was happy to learn they expected it to wrap up at the end of June which would leave me with at least six weeks of free time over the summer. Since Sookie wouldn't have to work, I started making mental plans of what we could do thinking maybe we could visit Gran again before I'd take her on vacation somewhere.

*After her little confession the previous weekend about her affinity towards accents, we sure as shit weren't going to Australia.*

We'd all been talking for about 30 minutes when I felt my phone vibrate in my pants pocket and figured it was Sookie telling me she was on her way home, so I ignored it wanting to just get this done and over with so I could go home. Pam's phone vibrated on the table a couple of minutes later and I saw her eyebrows furrow at the caller ID, but she just let it go to voicemail and we kept talking about the film.

Victor came across as though it was basically a done deal with me getting the part, but he wanted to see Sophie-Anne and I read together to see what kind of chemistry we had between us. I already knew the answer; none at all, not as far as I was concerned, but I was an actor so I would *act* like we did.

Sophie-Anne looked at me like she was eyeing her dinner for the night as she handed me a copy of the script and Victor's eyes narrowed in suspicion at me. I wanted nothing to do with her so he had no reason to worry. There was only one person I wanted and if I was lucky, I'd be getting *lucky* with *her* as soon as I could get the fuck out of there.

I'd already memorized the lines for the bit we were supposed to read together so when I waved her off, telling her that, she said, "Oh, there's been a change. We're reading a different scene."

I took the script and glanced down at the highlighted portions, gritting my teeth when I saw it was a love scene. There were only a couple of them in the movie, but this one called for us to kiss which just made me want to vomit. I didn't want to taint my mouth with hers when I was less than an hour away from cherry lip glossed nirvana, but I bit my tongue and forced a smile saying, "Okay."

Sophie-Anne and I stood next to one another while I said the lines I was supposed to, telling her how beautiful she was while trying to pretend she was Sookie. Sophie-Anne was practically salivating as my hand rose up to brush a lock of the wrong colored hair behind the ear attached to the wrong head while I stared into the wrong eyes and as my head bent down with my lips about to declare my love for the wrong woman, in prelude to a kiss, our attention was drawn to the sound of a commotion outside of the closed office door. A woman's voice could clearly be heard saying, "You can't go in there!" just seconds before it crashed open to reveal a panting Alcide.

The look on his face made my stomach drop, but that was nothing compared to how his words affected me.

"Sookie's at the Cedars-Sinai ER. She got clipped from behind by one of the paparazzi following her from the school and she crashed head-on into a guardrail," he blew out.

My entire body froze and my knees nearly buckled as Pam asked, "Is she alright?"

"I don't know. All they told me was that she was unresponsive and they needed to get a hold of Eric."

*Car crash?*

*Unresponsive?*

Every memory of our past flew through my brain along with every hope and wish I had for our future. It was enough to effectively thaw my body and without saying a word to anyone I sprinted from the office to the parking lot towards my car. The pull in my chest to be with her, which never really went away, was almost debilitating now and forced my feet to carry me



faster. It forced the gas pedal down onto the floorboard with my only thought being I had to get to Sookie.

*I just couldn't lose her.*

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## Chapter 64: Chapter 63

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### Chapter 63

#### SPOV

I couldn't wait to get done with work on Friday. I'd been missing Eric all week long and we were finally going to have a few days to spend together, but first I needed to go to my OB/GYN appointment. While I didn't normally enjoy getting my business all poked and prodded with a spotlight shining down on it, I was looking forward to not having to stop our sextivities in order to rip open a condom just when it was getting good. My period was due to start any minute and I was happy it hadn't shown up yet so I wouldn't have to cancel my appointment, but my good mood was dampened considerably when I ran into Headmaster Brigant on my way out where he leveled me with a snide glare as he said, "Well it was nice to actually have you with us for an entire week Mrs. Northman. Let's see if we can make it two in a row, shall we?"

*Asshole.*

He was sure to let me know on the previous Monday morning that I actually wasn't protected by the Family Medical Leave Act since I hadn't been employed for a full year yet, but considering the circumstances with Gran's heart attack, they'd decided to go ahead and let me have the time off. He was also sure to let me know it would be in my best interests to not miss any more work.

*Asshole.*

His poor assistant, a timid man by the name of Preston Pardloe, bore the brunt of the Headmaster's nastiness and constantly trailed after him like a whipped servant. Sam clued me in that it occurred on a regular basis and we both agreed that neither one of us would ever want his job. When I saw Poor Preston, or P-squared as Sam and I had started calling him, getting reamed in the hallway one afternoon for Christ only knows what this time, the entire setting reminded me of a scene straight out of Harry Potter and I damn near took off one of my socks to throw at him and yell, "Dobby you're free!" The whole school gave me a Hogwarts vibe, only more like during the evil seventh year when the Deathaters had taken over. On more than one occasion I'd stare at the fireplace in the Headmaster's office during a staff meeting and had to restrain myself from standing in front of it and yelling, "Diagon Alley!" I doubted the Headmaster would have appreciated the humor though because like I said...

*Asshole.*

The more nastiness I witnessed, the less inclined I felt about staying there. Sure, it was a prestigious school, but it was full of pretentious and precocious kids and adults. Sam seemed to be the only normal one there and even he admitted he only remained there for the salary and benefits. Without them he and Terry would be in financial straits, but my stubborn streak kept rearing its ugly head so I wouldn't quit, even though I knew that was *exactly* what Eric wanted me to do. But in my mind that meant Lord Voldemort would win and Harry would lose because I would most certainly have been sorted into the House of Gryffindor if I'd received my acceptance letter when I turned eleven. After all, I was brave, loyal, and true, so I had to be brave and go off to work each day; be loyal and keep setting off to work each day, and be true by carting my ass to work each and every fucking day where I wasn't appreciated. It was a fact that was only reiterated when I had to correct the behavior of one of my five year old pupils and he informed me, quite smugly, that I was nothing more than a servant.

*I wanted to serve him one of my shoes up his tiny little ass and hoped he choked on the silver spoon in his mouth.*

After hearing Brigant's remarks to me as I left that day I resolved to speak to Eric about it over the weekend. We hadn't really had much time at all to talk over the last week, which was something I'd really missed, but I didn't want to ruin what little time we *did* have together by bringing up a sore subject, especially when there were many other fun things we could do that involved more nakedness and less talking. Where I would've just been venting at the time, I had a feeling Eric would have taken it as just more proof that I should quit. It would have caused a fight between us then, but now I wasn't so sure anymore. I still wanted to work, but maybe taking the time to find a job I would actually enjoy wouldn't be such a bad idea. I know Eric had said I wouldn't have to worry about money, but I still didn't feel right about depending on him financially. Our relationship was still too new, married or not, for me to be comfortable relying on him in that way. He'd already done so much for me, for Gran...how could I ever repay him?

My head was filled with thoughts of 'should I stay or should I go' with The Clash singing in my mental background as I made my way onto the freeway headed for Dr. Ludwig's office. Perhaps if I'd been paying more attention to my surroundings, instead of my inner musings, I would've noticed the car dangerously close to my rear, but I didn't. Not until it was too late and the last thought (probably the last words too) I had was 'Oh shit,' as the car spun out of my control, headed for the guardrail.

I woke up in the emergency room wearing a neck collar and my whole body strapped down. The sounds of strange voices started to filter into my awareness and panic started setting in until I recalled the final moments before I blacked out. When I opened my eyes there was already someone standing over me with their annoying penlight blinding me as she said, "I'm Doctor Crane and you're at Cedar-Sinai Medical Center. Are you in any pain?"

My only thought came tumbling out of my mouth as I whispered out hoarsely, "I was in a car accident." My throat was dry and scratchy, but she would only let me have enough water to wet my mouth before I asked, "How long have I been here?"

"You were brought in a few minutes ago. Do you feel pain anywhere?" she asked again while she proceeded to poke and prod me everywhere. Nothing really hurt and I was sore more than anything, so they drew some blood before I was whisked off for CT Scans and x-rays. The nurse that accompanied me told me they had already retrieved my cell phone and someone would contact Eric, but when I was wheeled back into the ER a short time later he was nowhere to be seen. I knew he was auditioning for the movie role and figured I'd just have to wait for it to be over so he would check his messages, while worrying over the fact I'd crashed his car. I hoped he wouldn't be too mad.

I was grateful to be out of the restraints, with the exception of the neck brace, when the nurse left me saying Dr. Crane would be back soon with my test results, but I wasn't all that worried about it knowing I felt pretty much okay. I'd already felt the small cuts and bruises on my face from where I hit the airbag and a quick peek underneath my shirt showed a bruise already forming where my seatbelt had been strapped across my body, but it could've been worse. It could've happened before the photo shoot.

*That would've sucked.*

Dr. Crane whooshed through the curtain surrounding my bed not long afterward, putting up film after film of my insides on the nearby lightbox hanging next to the bed, and declared nothing was broken. I could've told her that, but stayed quiet while thanking my lucky stars I now had health insurance. I could only imagine what they were going to charge for this; it was probably somewhere close to what Alfred was charging GQ. I assumed she would give me the spiel on resting and relaxing for a few days, perhaps pop a Tylenol or two and I'd be right as rain. It was because of those assumptions I was blindsided.

After flipping through pages on my chart she took a quick glance at me once more from head to toe before taking my hand and looking down into my eyes as she asked, "Were you aware that you're pregnant?"

Everything stopped.

Time stood still.

No. Fucking. Way.

I guess she could tell by my look that *no, I wasn't fucking aware*, and I choked down the urge to say "Whatchu talkin' about Willis?" when she asked me another question without waiting for me to reply to her first one. "When was your last period?"

"That's impossible!" I half shouted, finally answering her first question.

She patted my arm saying, "Your blood says otherwise, but we need to figure out how far along you might be to see if we can run some additional tests to make sure the baby is okay."

She looked at me expectantly waiting for my answer, but too bad for her my brain stopped working after hearing her say the word 'baby'. The hand she wasn't holding automatically moved over my stomach where, according to my blood, a baby currently resided.

A baby.

My baby.

Mine and Eric's baby.

My head jerked back and my eyes shot open to see Dr. Crane once again hovering over me, only she'd replaced the penlight with smelling salts and they were even more annoying than the light.

"What happened," I asked.

She looked down at me sympathetically saying, "You passed out. You're having quite the day, huh?"

*No shit.*

What the fuck was I going to do? How would I tell Eric? Yes, we were together. Yes, we'd fallen in love, but it *just* happened. Just. I guess the baby just happened too, but...

Dr. Crane tapped my arm, again asking, "When was your last period?"

I knew. Of course I knew because I'd been counting down the days worried it would get there before my OB/GYN appointment. Irony...oh how I hate thee.

"Four weeks. My last period started approximately four weeks ago. I thought I'd be starting any minute and was on my way to my OB/GYN appointment when I ended up here," I sighed out.

"Was it for a regular check-up or were you experiencing any problems or symptoms?" she asked.

"A check-up," I paused before adding, "And to be put on birth control."

Her lips pursed for a moment before saying, "I see. Well," she paused while motioning for me to lie back and pushed down on my abdomen, "are you feeling any discomfort or pain?" When I shook my head no she continued, "If you're less than 4 weeks pregnant then it's too early to see anything if we do a transvaginal ultrasound, so I want you to make another appointment with your OB/GYN as soon as you can and if you experience any pain or bleeding in the meantime I want you to come back here, okay?"

All I could do was nod even though it felt like I was in a dream. Good or bad, I wasn't sure, but it didn't seem real. I guess it was dumb of me to think I couldn't have gotten pregnant just days after my period ended, but Jesus Fucking Christ...

*Where was that mystery Vegas odds maker? He could've made millions off of this shit.*

The nurse brought me back my things and said they'd been able to contact Alcide to get a message to Eric, since he didn't answer their call, but I'd lost all concept of time and had no idea how long I'd actually been there by that point. Thoughts of unplanned babies were swirling in my head (and apparently at least one had implanted in my uterus), but I had no idea of how I was going to break the news to Eric. I was certainly flipping out on the inside, so it stood to reason that he would too. We'd never even talked about kids because it was too fucking soon to have that conversation. I knew I wanted them eventually, but what if he didn't feel the same? A day late and a dollar short and all of that happy horseshit, but holy hell.

*Now what?*

If it weren't for the fact I was numb from shock, I probably would've laughed over the times we'd stopped to rip open a condom when, as it turned out, there was no need.

*I didn't feel like laughing, but I still hated irony.*

I was still sitting there waiting to be discharged and for Eric to show up when I heard the telltale 'click clack' coming towards me down the corridor. It was a sound I'd come to associate with Pam and sure enough she whooshed through the curtain seconds later.

"Are you okay?" she asked, taking my hand with a worried look on her face. If I didn't know any better, I might have even thought there were dried tear tracks on her cheeks.

I don't know if it was the hormones or not, but my eyes welled up with tears over how touched I was thinking she was worried enough about me to have gotten so upset, so I told her the truth. "I'm fine." I mentally added '*and pregnant too*', but thought Eric should be the first to know as I peered over her shoulder asking, "Where's Eric?"

Her grip on my hand tightened as she stammered out, "Sookie..."

Pam stammered. From what I knew, Pam didn't stammer, she hammered, and it was starting to frighten me. "Just spit it out Pam, you're scaring me."

She took a deep breath and finally said, "When Eric heard you'd been in an accident he took off to come here. Alcide and I were only a few minutes behind him, but according to the witnesses at the scene Eric was speeding when a car pulled out in front of him. He swerved to miss it and went straight into a telephone poll. " Tears starting falling down her face as she started to ramble, "We almost didn't realize it was his car. I'd forgotten he'd traded in his black corvette for a red one. There were hardly any skid marks on the blacktop and God only knows how fast he was driving. They had to use the Jaws of Life to get him out."

Once again, everything stopped.

Time.

My heart.

My breathing.

"Where is he Pam?" I whispered, both needing to know and afraid to find out.

She barely managed to say, "They're working on him down the hall," before my feet hit the floor and I took off running yelling out, "ERIC!" I was in the middle of shouting his name a second time when Alcide came into view, so I ran towards him yelling, "WHERE'S ERIC?"

His hands went up on top of his head, pulling his hair in frustration, as he said, "They took him for x-rays and shit, but the doctor said she'd come find you once she got a chance. She said she worked on you too."

"Is he okay? Did he ask for me?" I was never good at sitting still, but now it was downright painful, if not impossible. I wanted to tear through the hospital until I found him. I wanted to kiss away every hurt on his body to make it better. I wanted to curl up in his arms and breathe in his scent for my own comfort.

I needed him.

More than sunlight.

More than water.

More than air.

More than anything.

My earlier unexpected news suddenly kicked into my consciousness again and it occurred to me that I wasn't the only one; our baby would need him too.

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## Chapter 65: Chapter 64

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### Chapter 64

#### **EPOV**

*Fog.*

It surrounded me as my mind swam towards consciousness. I tried and tried to see anything except for the darkness surrounding me, but if my eyes were in fact open, uncertainty clouded my judgment like a blindfold.

### *Tired.*

My body wouldn't move, ignoring my mental commands, with my mind using up every bit of energy I possessed swimming through an unrelenting riptide with me caught in the undertow. I struggled with everything I had until I finally succumbed and just when I allowed it to pull me back under I could've sworn I heard the sounds of a whale's song.

### *Floating.*

It was a dark and murky abyss, but I'd already learned struggling would get me nowhere so I allowed myself to just float freely through it. The whale was still there singing a melodic tune nearby and I floated on a cloud of fog hoping it would swim by and help me out of the riptide that still held me within its grasp. We stayed there awhile, my whale friend and I, until eventually his songs lulled me back to sleep.

### *Scent.*

I was floating again, with my ever present whale friend, only now there was an aroma of something sweet floating through the fog with us, a floral bouquet wafting through the void, an unlikely presence just like the whale and I. I would think it was strange for this fog to smell so heavenly, but if the whale didn't mind, I wouldn't either. It enveloped us, blanketing us in a gentle embrace, and as I drifted back to sleep I thought I really could feel it; tangible arms holding me close. I wondered if the whale could feel it too.

### *Heaven.*

It must have been because I could clearly hear the voice of an angel. Her whispered words of love would've left basking in the glow of her adoration if it weren't for the sadness I could hear marring her proclamation. When she asked me to fight, pleaded with me to come back to her, I couldn't ignore the pull I felt straight to my core to obey her command. I struggled, wrestling against the riptide, no longer content to float with my whale friend when there was an angel waiting on me. I ripped and pulled, clawing my way through the abyss only to have it collapse back down on me with every fissure I managed to cleave open filling back up with the nothingness that surrounded me. Undaunted at first, I attacked it with everything I had, engaging in battle with an invisible foe until my energy waned and I could no longer fight. *'I'm sorry my angel,'* I called out into the abyss as the riptide pulled me back down. I would rest and then I would wage war again, but as I drifted back into oblivion, worried I'd disappointed my angel, I knew I would rest easily having heard her affirmation as clearly as I heard my whale friend; she loved me.

### *Savory.*

The flavor of cherries exploded inside of me with an ice cold sensation literally on the tip of my tongue. I could feel it trickle down inside of my lips, just enough to slide across my taste buds and linger long enough to make a memory dance just out of reach, but it wouldn't take form. It reminded me of sunshine and made me feel warm, despite the icy numbness on my lips; it

comforted me in the chasm I couldn't break free from and when it disappeared I wanted to cry out 'No!' because I wanted it back. I wanted the warmth and comfort to stay there with me, but when it was replaced with something else, something petal soft, the warmth flickered into a fire. Not the kind of burning hot that would scorch my skin, the kind I would pull away from if I could, but an inferno flaming white hot along the thread my angel had pulled from deep inside of me and I grabbed onto it, holding on for dear life, hoping she would pull me free. I was puzzled as I sank back into the blackness of the abyss feeling the drops of moisture on my face, wondering how it could be raining in the wake of the warmth of my sunshine.

*Pain.*

A dull throbbing sensation pulsed along my lower body. My whale friend was gone having been replaced by an annoying beep reverberating next to my head. A rushing static in my ears cleared the way for the voices nearby to break through the fog when an unexpected jabbing swipe had my reflexes pulling my leg away in surprise and as the darkness gave way to light with my opening eyes, a familiar voice spoke up bringing me out of my perpetual dream state where whales and angels no longer existed.

"Eric?"

It took a moment for my eyes to adjust to the brightness of the room and I slowly turned my head towards her, looking passed the man in the white lab coat standing at the foot of my bed, shocked at the surprise and fear on her face as I acknowledged, "Pam."

My shock increased as she launched herself at me saying, "Oh my God! You're awake!" and wrapped her arms around me. It wasn't until she pulled away that I noticed the wires attached to my body and I looked down seeing I was in some sort of hospital bed. The room was filled flowers; lilies and an iPod docking station sat next to the bed.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"You're in the hospital Mr. Northman. I'm Dr. Maxwell Lee, your attending physician," the man in the white lab coat spoke up, but I could barely hear him over Pam practically shouting into her cell phone, "He's awake!"

"Why?" I asked, looking down my body and seeing my right leg was surrounded in a cast and elevated by some sort of pulley hanging above the bed. "What happened?"

"You were in a car accident. Your leg was broken along with two of your ribs and you had some bleeding in your brain. We had to drill into your skull to relieve the pressure," he answered.

"I don't remember," I admitted, my hand reach up and feeling the bandages along my head while noticing Pam had gone to stand by the door with her head looking down the hallway.

"That can happen sometimes when the brain experiences a trauma like yours did. You've been out for two weeks," he explained while he shined his penlight into my eyes. He had me perform



a series of physical tests, wiggling fingers and toes, and moving various body parts while he examined every motion I made. I answered asinine questions about who I was, who the president was, and seemingly satisfied by my progress he said, "We'll probably keep you here for another couple of days to keep an eye on you and then you'll be released. You'll have to wear the cast for another six weeks and take it easy for a while to give your ribs a chance to heal, so make sure you make a follow up appointment with your primary doctor. I'll be back in a little while to see how you're fairing," he said before he left the room.

I was out for two weeks? I'd be wearing this cast for another six weeks? What the fuck was I going to do about the show? I supposed they would have to write it into the storyline somehow and I turned towards Pam, about to ask her what was going on, when I watched her step aside as the doorway was filled with a beautiful blond woman. I barely had the chance to register the dark circles under her red rimmed eyes when a smile lit up on her face seeing me, as tears began to flow freely from them, when she too launched herself at me, kissing me all over my face and saying, "You had me so worried. I'm so glad you're awake. I knew you'd come back to me."

When she finally pulled away far enough to look down into my eyes, I could see the fading bruises on her face and along her chest, peeking out where her tank top didn't cover her skin, and I said the first thing that came to mind. "I'm sorry," but before I could say anything else she put her red stained lips back to mine.

They were gentle, petal soft and tasted of cherries when my tongue darted out against them, and a memory was stirred, but I couldn't place it. I almost pulled her back when she pulled away again as she said, "No, I'm sorry. It's all my fault that you're here."

Her tears continued to flow and I found I didn't like seeing them, so I brushed them away with my hand while asking the only logical question I could think of. "Why? Are you the one that hit me?"

"No, but it's still my fault," she sobbed out, laying her head on my chest as she continued to cry. I automatically ran my hand through her ponytail and rubbed my other hand down her back while feeling confused; both at my actions and her confession.

I raised my left hand to give her ponytail a slight tug so she'd sit up and I could ask her the question I was dying to know, but I stopped short seeing the ink on my finger and held it up in front of my face, examining it from all sides, before it made me ask a different question instead.

"What the fuck is a Sookie?"

She snorted against my chest before lifting her head and playfully smacking my shoulder saying, "Ha ha, very funny."

I rubbed my thumb across my finger, but it wasn't rubbing off and I could feel the slight ridges of the ink underneath my skin. I started getting angry wondering why the fuck they would tattoo something on my hand when I was out of it. Looking to Pam for answers, and noticing for the first time Alcide was by her side, I asked them, "What the fuck *is* this? Some kind of *joke*?"

Their jaws dropped open simultaneously, perfectly played as if they'd rehearsed the move, and I heard a gasp above me drawing my eyes back to hers. "Stop it Eric," she whispered. "It's not funny anymore."

"It's not fucking funny," I barked, my anger getting the better of me. Turning back to Pam and Alcide, I bellowed, "Why the fuck would you let someone tattoo fucking hearts on my hand when I was unconscious? Pranks are one thing, but this is going too fucking far!"

Pam looked at Alcide saying, "Go get Dr. Lee," and looked back at me, staring me down, as he rushed out the door. Her eyes narrowed in suspicion, suspicious of God knows what, and asked, "What's the last thing you remember?"

What the fuck *was* the last thing I remembered? I thought about it for a minute before saying, "I was in the car." She looked relieved until I continued, "Alcide and I were just entering the strip in Las Vegas. Are we in Vegas or did you have me taken back to LA?" I asked, looking around as if the room would give me a hint.

The sound of another sob above me had me looking back to the beautiful blonde and I wondered what her problem was. Admittedly, I didn't like seeing her tears, but I didn't know why, nor did I know her, so I wondered why she was so upset. The sound of Pam's voice brought my attention back to her.

"That was five weeks ago Eric."

"Five weeks? The doctor said I was only out for two weeks!" If this was some sort of joke I was going to burn her entire collection of Chanel as payback.

"You *were* only out for two weeks, but you went to Vegas *five* weeks ago. It's where you met Sookie," she motioned at the crying blonde next to me.

Hearing her name and realizing it was the same as the monstrosity adorning my skin had my anger rearing up again as I spat out, "Are *YOU* the one that had this shit tattooed on my hand?" I waved the evidence in her face and she shrank back from me, sliding off of the bed from where she sat. She buried her face into her hands sobbing and my anger ebbed seeing her so distraught while Pam, surprisingly, ran over and wrapped her arms around her trying to comfort her.

*Pam's not a comforter.*

She turned her steely gaze back to me and said, "Just keep your fucking mouth shut! We'll find out what's going on when the doctor gets here and then I'll explain everything."

Before I could protest, the doctor strode through the door with Alcide behind him and asked, "Is there a problem?"

*Yeah. There's a fucking problem, but I couldn't figure out which one needed to be said first.*

Pam spoke up before I did saying, "His last memory took place five weeks ago. He doesn't remember anything after that."

We listened as the doctor explained something called retrograde amnesia. It sometimes occurs after a traumatic brain injury where the victim loses some of their memories prior to the event. In some patients they might lose just a few minutes or even hours, like what happened right before the accident, but with others, they might lose more. It depended on the level of trauma. He had one patient lose an entire year of his life and apparently there was no treatment or cure. He said for most, memories would return in random pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle, but ultimately there was no way of knowing if I'd ever get them back. Some people did, some didn't, but all I could do was wait and see.

Once he left the blonde still wrapped in Pam's arms had stopped crying, but her breaths were still hitched in her throat as she breathed in. Seeing her that way hit me in my chest, but I was still too angry and confused over why to hide my irritation as I said, "Explain."

Pam motioned for Alcide to shut my door as Pam told me the most outrageous story I'd ever heard. I may have been knocked around hard enough to put me in the hospital, but there was no way I'd be willing to believe I'd met this Sookie woman and married her that very night, no matter how drunk I was at the time. It was because of that staunch belief that made my mouth gape open when Alcide produced a laptop and I got to see the video of it. When the train wreck was done playing out on the screen, I looked up at them asking, "Why didn't we get it annulled?"

Sookie's mouth opened, but when she didn't say anything Pam spoke instead explaining, "At first it was so you wouldn't look like the asshole you're acting like right now and so Sookie wouldn't lose her job teaching."

"Why?" I spat out. "Did she need more time to get me drunk enough to agree to supporting her?"

Pam's eyes flashed in anger, but before she could unleash whatever fury awaited me Sookie put her hand on Pam's arm halting her and said, "It's alright Pam. He doesn't remember. He doesn't know."

"But Sookie," she started to say as Sookie shook her head and took a deep breath while placing her hands on her stomach.

"We'll figure it out," she told her before turning her eyes towards mine and locking me in her gaze. "He'll remember..." she trailed off in a whisper. She closed her eyes for a long minute before looking back at Pam and asking, "Would you please stay with him and try to explain it all?" Her voice broke again while she tried to hold her emotions in check as she admitted, "It's just too much for me right now. I can't...I just..." Looking at Alcide she asked, "Would you please take me home now?"

He nodded in response and I was surprised seeing Pam hug Sookie tightly while whispering something in her ear before releasing her grasp. As she walked by me on her way out the door,

Sookie reached down and patted my good leg saying, "I'll answer your questions when you're ready," and walked out of my room with Alcide behind her.

My heart ached seeing her go, but I didn't know why.

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## Chapter 66: Chapter 65

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### Chapter 65

#### PPOV

I couldn't believe how fucked up the universe was as I hugged Sookie goodbye and whispered into her ear, "Don't worry, I'll kick his ass after you leave and since his head is so firmly ensconced in it, it might jar his memories loose."

I knew her well enough by then to know she was moments away from losing it and she barely whispered, "Thanks Pam," before walking dejectedly out the door.

The sound of the TMZ video being replayed from the laptop in front of Eric drew my eyes back to him. He still looked pitiful, with tufts of his hair sticking out from underneath the bandage it was still wrapped in, and his lips were stained red from the cherry popsicle Sookie had insisted on swiping across his lips earlier that day before Alcide had to practically drag her from the room, with both of us insisting she get something to eat from the cafeteria. She hadn't left the hospital once since she was first brought in by ambulance and because this was a fucking breeding ground for germs, she'd picked up some sort of stomach bug, but the only thing she could seem to keep down were those cherry popsicles. Alcide had stocked the freezer in the nurses' lounge with them and they seemed to be the only thing that kept her going. She barely slept, hardly ate, and rarely left Eric's side.

*And this was the fucking thanks she got for it.*

I'd had a good feeling about her from that very first day we'd met, but after seeing her devotion to Eric on a daily basis for the last two weeks, I had no doubts whatsoever that she truly loved him and God knows I'd heard enough fucking dribble from Eric before the accident to know that he loved her.

"Tell me everything Pam," Eric snapped.

"You're an asshole. Oh, but wait, you already *knew* that."

"What is your fucking problem? Why the fuck are mad at *me* when I'm the one that has no fucking clue what in the hell is going on?"

He was right, I knew I shouldn't be mad at him, but seeing him treat Sookie like shit, after everything she'd been through, pissed me off. Normally I'd be the first one to not give two shits about anyone, but I'd grown fond of her, almost as fond as I was of Eric. I had other clients, but he and I clicked from day one and was more than a client to me; I considered him my friend and now, by extension, Sookie was as well. He was like the annoying brother I'd never wanted, but loved just the same, and if I didn't know any better, I'd think we had the same blood running through our veins. However, thoughts of being related to his asswipe father and the resulting vomit that would spew from my mouth, potentially on my new Louboutins, pushed those thoughts away as I said, "I know you don't remember, but you love her and you're treating her like shit."

"Bullshit!" he laughed angrily. "It's *me* Pam. I'm like you; I fuck'em and leave'em. I don't *love* them and while I wouldn't mind  *fucking* her, I certainly don't *love* her."

I shook my head and took a seat next to his bed, Sookie's seat since she'd practically lived in it for two solid weeks, and said, "You do, so much that you were a bitch to be around the week of the accident because you had to film two episodes and barely saw her. '*Sookie this*' and '*Sookie that*'. If I didn't know any better I'd think you only existed by living from her teat. You were a walking chick flick for Christ's sake!"

I could tell he didn't believe me before the words were even out of his mouth. "I don't believe you. What did I *supposedly* say?"

"What *didn't* you say? You told me you'd fallen in love with her and you were a moody little bitch because you wanted her to quit her job so she could be up your ass 24/7, but she wouldn't do it."

He interrupted me asking, "Why?"

"Why what?" I asked.

"Why wouldn't she quit her job? Why would I *want* her to? Why would I want her '*up my ass*'? Nothing makes sense," he sighed.

His anger was gone, having been replaced with confusion which unruffled my feathers as well, and I answered calmly, "Initially she wouldn't quit because she *wanted* to work, but even more so, she didn't want to depend on you financially."

He scoffed at that saying, "Yeah right," and just like that my feathers were all ruffled up again.

I stood up so I could glare down at him and said, "Yeah. Right. Do you want to know how you ended up here? We were in a meeting with Victor Madden and Sophie-Anne Leclerq when Alcide busted through the door telling us Sookie had been in a car accident. She was unconscious and they'd taken her by ambulance *here*, her new home away from home. You took off like a bat out of hell and if you could have, you would've flown through the skies like a bullet to get to her. Instead you flew in that fucking car of yours and ended up swerving into a

telephone pole to avoid hitting another car on your way here. Until *now*," I glared at him since he was the reason she'd left, "she hasn't left the hospital *once* since she got here two weeks ago. She hasn't slept, she's caught some fucking bug from being here all the fucking time and can't keep anything down except for the cherry popsicles she shared with your dumb ass. The only reason she wasn't in the room when you came to is because we *forced* her to go to the cafeteria to get something to eat when she swayed as she stood up from the chair she's lived in for the last two fucking weeks, about to pass the fuck out. She was like a woman possessed. She wouldn't leave your side and now that you're finally awake, how do you repay her? You treat her like a piece of shit."

Eric was an asshole to most, but he and I worked out those kinks years earlier and I could tell when something upset him. He may be good at bluffing his poker buddies, but I could see straight through the façade to the real him. It was how I knew he'd told me the truth when he said he'd fallen in love with Sookie and it was how I knew at that very moment he was upset over his treatment of her after hearing everything she'd done for him. It made me hope for some small miracle and ask, "Does she not seem familiar to you at all?"

I was glad when he didn't answer right away. It meant he was really thinking it over and after a while he said, "Maybe, but not really. I didn't like seeing her cry, which confused me, and when I watched her walk out the door I felt...*something*." At my raised eyebrow he elaborated, "It was almost like I didn't want her to leave, or I didn't like seeing her go, only it was *more* than that, but it didn't make sense to me. It still doesn't."

I couldn't help smiling as I said, "Of course it makes sense. You remember her *here*," I said, as I lightly punched his chest over his heart before continuing, "even if you don't remember her *here*," and smacked him in the forehead.

"Oww," he complained, rubbing his forehead.

"Pussy," I mocked.

"Bitch," he smirked. I watched his eyes land on his tattoo again before he held it up to me asking, "And *why* haven't I gotten this fucking thing removed yet?"

I smirked back at him saying, "Because you *lurrrve* her." My factual statement was met with his cocked eyebrow so I explained, "You *were* wearing a wedding band to cover it up, but when you two came back from your mini-vacation you'd stopped wearing it. When I asked why, you told me it was because the ring was like a prop for a part you were acting in, which you *were* in the beginning, but since you two had fallen in love *this*," I tapped the God-awful hearts, "meant more to you. Make believe became reality."

"I suppose she had me run out and buy her a big diamond ring?" he huffed. "OWW!" he added when I hit him a lot harder on his forehead hoping to jog those memories.

"No dickface. She refused from the very beginning, even after I brought over your weight in diamond rings to let her choose one. She's been wearing her dead mother's plain gold wedding band."

"Why did you hit me?" he asked, still rubbing his hand over where the red mark was starting to form on his forehead.

"I'm trying to force your brain to remember her. She doesn't deserve the venom you're spewing right now and if you do it to her face, and force her to leave for her own sanity, if and when your memories return you'll be devastated that she's gone and you'll never forgive yourself. I'm just trying to save myself the headache and cut out the angsty middle part of your happily ever after." I had a baseball bat I kept in my car, just in case, and I'd be willing to use it on him if he didn't straighten the fuck up.

He shot me an incredulous look at my 'happily ever after' claim, but flinched when I raised my hand to deliver another blow to his forehead. It made me smile as he glared back at me and asked, "What do you mean *leave*? As in leave *me* or my *house*? Do we *live* together?"

*Was he always this dense?*

"Yes dipshit. You're *married*, so leaving *you* and/or your *house* would be one and the same. Why wouldn't you *live* together?" I swear it was reasons like *this* that I preferred carpet to hardwood.

When he closed his eyes and sighed I knew he was reaching the point of overload, so I sat back down and waited for the next asinine thing to come out of his mouth. I was surprised at the topic he chose, but happy nonetheless because the curiosity had been eating away at me for the last two weeks.

"What's with all of the flowers? Why are they all lilies?"

I smirked, saying, "I was hoping *you* could tell *me*. Sookie had all of the flowers and whatnot other people sent you delivered to some place she used to volunteer at where old people go to die and instead insisted your room be filled with lilies. She even insisted on playing *that*," I motioned to the iPod and continued, "all day every day."

He reached over and hit the play button so the sounds of a dying cow, or whatever the fuck Sookie said it was, filled the air like a morbid concerto, but Eric's eyes grew big and his face paled making me ask, "What's wrong? Do you find it as horrid as the rest of us do?"

He ignored my question asking one of his own. "Did she say *why* she chose lilies and to play whales' songs?"

Whales' songs, dinosaurs fucking, I was sure they sounded the same and it didn't interest me at all, but I answered, "No. She wouldn't tell me, but she said you would know and it would bring you back to her." When he didn't say anything, I asked, "So what does it mean?"

His lips pursed and he looked like he'd just seen a ghost, but after a moment he said, "I'm not sure, but I heard them...when I was unconscious. I thought it was a dream..."

I got the feeling he wasn't telling me everything, but I didn't want to press the issue. I needed to save the big guns for the important things, like playing nice with Sookie until he could remember her. That line of thought had me saying, "You need to apologize to her the next time you see her and you need to be *nice* so she doesn't kick your ass to the curb until your memory comes back."

His eyes closed as he sighed again and asked, "But what if it *doesn't* come back? What if I *never* remember her?"

He looked so lost, I ended up putting my hand on top of his and said, "Then you're just going to have to fall in love with her all over again."

He scoffed and flinched a second later, expecting another smack which was good. It meant he was learning quickly and once he spent any amount of time with Sookie, if he didn't act like an ass, he'd learn pretty quickly that she *did* love him and he'd fall right back in love with her. After all, it didn't take very long to happen the first time. I decided it was time for the big guns and dug into my Birken bag for the package I'd been carrying around for over a week. Sookie didn't want anything to do with them while Eric was in a coma, saying it would be too difficult for her to see any reminders of that time they'd spent together. She said they were the happiest times of her life and didn't want to see the pictures for the first time during the worst time in her life. She didn't want to ruin her memory of it and wanted to wait to see them when Eric woke up and could see them with her. I'd gone through them already and figured she wouldn't mind me showing them to him now, since I thought they'd give Eric some insight on what he couldn't remember.

I placed the package on the tray in front of Eric and stood alongside his bed as I said, "Here, take a look at those and tell me what you see."

I watched him open up the envelope and set the DVD aside to go through the GQ photo shoot pictures first. They'd come out very well done, especially the ones of Eric and Sookie together. I knew they'd finally confessed they were in love with one another while they were there and it was so clear to the naked eye in the photos, they might as well have been wearing signs stuck to their foreheads declaring it to the world. My eyes went back and forth from the pictures to watch Eric's face as he stared at each one with his expression never changing. '*Shocked*' would be the appropriate description for what I was seeing which made sense. It must've been weird for him to see recent pictures of himself, pictures of him clearly in *love*, and have no memory of them being taken.

"Well?" I asked when he finally put the last one down.

"Well what?" he asked. "She's pretty, but so are a lot of the other women I've fucked in the past and those pictures are posed, so they're meant to look that way." I couldn't even find the will to smile a second later when he yelled, "Oww! Quit hitting me!"



"Quit being a douchebag!" I said, jerking the laptop towards me as I loaded the DVD into it. If he kept this shit up he'd be the new Tootsie Roll lollipop, only instead of how many licks to get to the chewy center, it'd be how many hits to the forehead before his memory came back. Apparently it was going to take more than three licks and this shit was already getting old; fast.

I clicked on the touchpad to start the video as he asked, "What're we watching?"

"You'll see," I snapped.

It was the raw uncut footage they'd filmed when the photo shoot was taking place. It began with Eric adjusting his suit until the sound of heels coming down the stairs had Eric looking up and behind the camera. The awe on his face was very *real* and when the camera turned, Sookie came into view as she reached the bottom of the stairs. Her face lit up as Eric came into view and stood in front of her, but whatever he'd said to her was too low to hear. She really was a knockout and I still found it a shame she didn't bat for my team, but *c'est la vie*. If it were anyone other than Eric, that little fact wouldn't have stopped me from pursuing her.

The music came on in the background, as the photographer told them to just start dancing, and after a while you could see Sookie loosen up. They danced as though they were the only two people in the room. They only had eyes for each other and it was glaringly obvious they were in love. The video played for well over an hour and I watched it with him having just skimmed through it when I first received it. I knew it would be edited, with music added into the background later on, and released by the magazine, but this was everything they'd filmed and the end of it surprised me just as much as Eric. He was standing next to a tent, with a glare on his face as he looked off to the side, and as soon as the photographer said he was done, Eric stomped off through the sand. The video camera stayed on him as he kicked his way over to where Sookie was lying on the beach and as soon as he scared the little punk that had been next to her away, he crawled on top of her like a blanket. It was almost *cute* the way he was trying to cover her from prying eyes, but *cute* soon morphed into *obscene* as they got lost in kissing each other as though they were all alone.

*If I was lucky, he'd peel off her bikini top and I'd get to see the goods.*

Sadly, the video stopped there. I supposed whoever was filming thought it was going to get a little too graphic for what GQ was looking for.

*Too bad.*

"Are you still in Egypt?" I asked Eric, as he shut the laptop.

"Huh?"

"You know, floating down the river of denial?" His eyes narrowed back at me, but like I said, this shit was already getting old. "I've known you for years and I admit you're a good actor. Great even, but this," I pointed at the DVD, "wasn't acting. You. Fell. In. Love. With. Her. And you're

lucky enough that she fell in love with you because in case you didn't get the memo, you can be an asshole. It comes from your paternal DNA."

I thought I might be getting through to him when he didn't contradict anything I said and he started flipping through the photos again, slowly, with his eyes flickering back and forth from the photo in his hand to the tattoo on his finger. Finally he asked, "Where *is* my father? I'm sure he's busy getting his cock seasoned, but did anyone call him to at least let him know I was awake?"

*Fuck.*

"Uhh..yeah, about that," I paused. It took for-fucking-ever for him to get rid of that leech and I hoped he wouldn't go calling him now. If it looked like he might, I'd go get my bat and knock that idea right back out of his head. "You fired him three weeks ago. I'm *officially* your manager now even though I was doing the job all along."

His eyes narrowed at me apprehensively as he asked, "Are you shitting me? Because I wouldn't put it passed you to make shit up, since I have no way of refuting it and you were always after me to get rid of him."

"No!" I exclaimed, completely offended before adding, "You gave me a raise too, for the added work." I was sure he was going to; he just hadn't gotten around to it yet.

"Why did I fire him?" he asked.

"I wasn't there, but according to *you* he was disrespectful to Sookie and you were fed up. It's a shame you don't remember their initial meeting. She called the cocksucker 'Paprika'. It was brilliant!" It really was. I got a hint of her personality in the limo on the way back to LA, but when she didn't back down in the face of The Sperminator and his sidekick, She Who Shall Not Be Named, I knew then she was made for Eric. He needed a strong woman at his side instead of the starry eyed gold-digging cock catchers he tended to hook up with before Sookie. God knows *I* wasn't going to be that woman.

"Really?" he asked.

"Really." Maybe he needed another smack since the redness on his forehead was barely visible now.

He leaned back and closed his eyes as he said, "How could my life have changed so much in the span of three weeks?"

"From what I was told, Jose Cuervo and Dom Perignon got the ball rolling and you two took it from there."

*Lightweights couldn't hold their liquor.*

His eyes opened, again filled with suspicion, as he asked, "And *Sookie*..." he paused, as if trying out her name on his tongue. I was sure that tongue had tried out a lot more of her than her name, but he eventually continued, "doesn't remember anything from that night either?"

"Perhaps you couldn't understand her earlier, through the sobbing you caused her to do, but when your *lovely* wedding video was playing she told you just that. Neither one of you remembered jack shit the next morning. You just woke up in bed together and naked, you lucky bastard." I was still allowed to be a little bitter.

"And you believed her?" he asked.

"Why wouldn't I? You couldn't remember anything either and she was just as horrified learning the truth."

"You'd said it was a showmance at first, before..." he paused, while I mentally filled in '*before you fell in lurrve*', "so why did she agree to it? If it wasn't for my money, what did she get out of it? Oww!"

Well the redness was back, but four wasn't the lucky number either. "She'd just been hired as a kindergarten teacher for some overpriced private school and had a one year probationary period. She was afraid of being fired after the video of your wedding hit the news."

Eric didn't say anything at first until he eventually asked, "Had?"

"What?" I asked, confused.

"You said she *had* a one year probationary period, past tense."

I cocked my hand in the air, in preparation to deliver blow number five, as I said, "She quit when you got into the accident and before you start in on her gold digging ways, I'll have you know you pestered me for a week straight after you two got back from the GQ photo shoot, trying to come up with a way for her to do just that. You *wanted* her to quit, but she was too stubborn and too proud to live off of your money. She worked hard her whole life so she could get a scholarship to go to college, but she gave up her dream of being a teacher in order to be here with *you* when *you* needed her the most. She hadn't worked there long enough for them to give her the time off from work, so she had to choose between her life's ambition and you. She chose *you* and gave you exactly what you wanted, whether you can remember it or not."

If he'd planned on saying something nasty about her, he kept it to himself and eventually stared at me asking, "What's with you? You've *never* had such a hard-on for someone before. Why do you care so much about her?"

*Her tits are spectacular?*

I hadn't really thought about it. Sookie just fit; with Eric and with me. It wasn't an easy spot to fill, between the two of us, but she did it effortlessly; seamlessly. Instead of answering his

question, I merely said, "When you spend some time with her, *not* being a dick, you'll see for yourself." I dug back into my Birken and pulled out his cell phone, handing it to him and saying, "In case you want to call her later, but *don't* be a dick!"

He looked at it before trying to hand it back to me saying, "This isn't mine."

I'd already scrolled through his texts and pictures, so I knew what he'd find there, when he did it too, once I left. "Trust me, it's yours. I'm going to head out, but I'll check on you later."

I walked out of his room so I could call and check on Sookie, with the echo of his "OWW!" following me out the door.

*I smiled, striding down the corridor, even though five wasn't the magic number either.*

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## Chapter 67: Chapter 66

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### Chapter 66

#### SPOV

As we left Eric's room, I lost all semblance of control over my emotions and was crying so hard, Alcide had to practically carry me to his truck, but I knew I needed to get a hold of myself. I had to be strong; strong for Eric; strong for me; strong for my baby.

*Our baby.*

I hadn't left the hospital since I arrived by ambulance, what seemed like a lifetime ago, but I'd called Dr. Ludwig's office once Eric had been moved to a private room. After I explained our situation, she was nice enough to see me in the hospital when she was there seeing her patients, although the pregnancy still didn't seem real to me at that point, nor did the June 8th due date she'd calculated based on the start date of my last period. It wasn't until my queasiness turned into full blown morning sickness (more like all day sickness) and I had an overwhelming craving for cherries, that I was able to wrap my head around the fact there was a little person growing inside of me.

*A little person who apparently took after their father and his love of cherries.*

Popsicles were the only thing I could manage to keep down and my lips were permanently stained red because of them. Thanks to Eric's sickness after we'd come back from San Gregorio, and Pam's distaste for hospitals teeming with 'vermin', no one questioned my 'illness'. Dr. Ludwig warned me that I needed to try and relax for the sake of the baby, but that was easier said than done. I was in a perpetual state of fog and felt like I was drowning in it, not knowing if, or when, Eric would come back to me. I didn't want to be without him; couldn't stand not being near him for longer than it took me to throw up, pee, or go get another popsicle from the nurse's

lounge; all three of which seemed to take up a good portion of my day and night. I couldn't even think on the possibility of trying to have, and then raise, our baby alone.

*I just couldn't.*

I also just couldn't look at the photos Alfred had taken of us when Pam had brought them with her to the hospital one day last week. I didn't want to see the happiness I knew would be there and knew it would only take one look at them for me to lose what little self-control I had left over my emotions. No one besides Dr.'s Crane and Ludwig knew I was pregnant and I'd wanted to keep it that way. I wanted Eric to be the first person to learn of it. I wanted him to tell me it would be okay and we would figure it out together. We would take care of it together. Even though we hadn't planned it, we would love it, and each other, together.

*Now I wasn't so sure we'd even stay together, much less when or how I would go about telling him.*

I just couldn't think about that right now and thankfully, Alcide remained silent on the way back to the house. When we had to stop several times behind a school bus, depositing kids at their various bus stops to awaiting parents, I couldn't help but think of the possibility of that one day being me waiting there for a little Northman. Would it be a boy or a girl? Would it look like Eric, or me, or a blend of the two of us? Would I be doing it alone or would Eric be by my side?

It felt like God was trying to force me to think about everything that would shatter my control; everything I wanted to put off thinking about for another day because it would shatter my heart. My greatest fear had been the thought Eric wouldn't wake up and I'd be resigned to raising our baby without him; a baby we hadn't planned, but I'd come to love and cherish just the same, no matter how unprepared we were. Now I was terrified of doing it all alone while Eric went about living his life as though we'd never existed; as though *I* never existed.

I hadn't noticed Eric's confused state when I first walked into his room, too overwhelmed by the happiness I felt seeing his eyes open for the first time since the accident, and I ran to him without thought. He'd come back to me; the children's fable he'd told me was true. The lilies and whales' songs brought him back to me.

*But they brought back the wrong Eric.*

The Eric I knew, the one that loved me, had been erased with a past version of him left in his place. The Asshole Eric I'd met on that fateful morning in Las Vegas was lying in the same spot I'd left My Eric in, but they looked so similar to one another, I couldn't be mad. Every feature was identical between them with the exception of his eyes. Where I'd once saw the love he had for me, it was no longer there. Anger, confusion, and suspicion had replaced it, but I wasn't strong enough to deal with *that Eric* right now, nor did I believe he was ready to deal with *me*. I was too tired, both physically and emotionally, to put up with whatever assbattery he was going to vent and I kept telling myself that I wasn't running away from him, because I wouldn't. I'd promised him I would always stay by his side no matter what life threw at us and I would keep that promise until he forced me away. I was just taking a timeout for now and hopefully, once

Pam had the opportunity to explain everything to him, he'd be willing to curb his default douchebag setting the next time we saw each other. I knew him well enough now to know it was his defense mechanism; a wall he'd had to erect after having spent a lifetime of being used and I didn't hold it against him; wouldn't hold it against him. I just needed to have faith.

*He'll remember... me... us...*

"He'll remember you Sookie." Alcide's voice broke through my inner thoughts and I looked up noticing for the first time we were parked in front of the house. It felt like years since I'd last been there and while I wanted to start crying all over again, I forced a smile onto my face, looked up at Alcide, and nodded once before getting out of his truck and going into the house. Once I assured him I'd be fine on my own, he told me to just let him know if I needed a ride anywhere, now that both of Eric's cars had been totaled, and he'd take me anywhere I wanted to go, before leaving to head back to the hospital.

I was glad I was alone. I needed to be right now.

I was glad Eric wasn't alone. He didn't need to be right now.

I'd forgotten the overnight bag I'd been living out of at the hospital, so instead of throwing any laundry into the washing machine, I just went upstairs and took a shower, hoping to wash away more than just the grime I felt on my skin and I stayed in it until my tears finally ran dry. My eyes were puffy and red when I looked into the mirror, but my heart did feel lighter having finally let go after holding everything in for the last two weeks. I'd even managed to find the bright side while standing underneath the spray; Eric was awake, and relatively healthy, and that was the important thing. It was the only thing I'd been praying for, so I said a quick thank you to God and made a mental note to be more specific with my prayers from then on.

I felt better once I was clean and threw on a pair of pajamas, having no plans to go anywhere for the rest of the night, and went downstairs to find something to keep my mind occupied. It turned out my idea to clean out the refrigerator of the spoiled food was a bad idea because as I emptied the spoiled milk into the sink, the smell had me running to the bathroom to dry heave into the toilet. Afterward, I was so tired I couldn't think straight and even though it was barely six o'clock, I went upstairs and crawled into bed, falling asleep before my head could even hit the pillow.

The sound of my cell phone ringing woke me up a short time later, but I couldn't untangle myself from the sheets before it went to voicemail. I'd plugged it into the charger, next to the bed, out of habit when I got home and just as I pulled myself free, it began ringing again. I didn't know if I hoped it would be Eric calling or not, but I was disappointed just the same seeing Pam's name flash on my caller id.

"Hi Pam."

*"Why didn't you answer when I called a minute ago? Are you okay?"*

"I'm fine Pam. I was sleeping." Who knew Pam could be so...human? Before the accident, she'd always been nice to me, well, nice for *Pam*, but we'd really grown close over the last couple of weeks. It was nice having someone there with me, in the hospital, who cared about Eric just as much as I did.

"How's Eric?" I asked. It was a question we asked each other whenever one of us would walk into his hospital room after having been gone for longer than five minutes.

*"He's Eric. Hardheaded, but I think I've smacked some sense into him."*

"What do you mean?" I tried to keep myself from hoping his memories came back to him already.

*"He's not in as much denial about your relationship, but I had to smack him around a bit before he came around to my way of thinking."*

"Uhh... that's good," with my reply sounding more like a question.

*"Yes, but I'm sure I'll have to hit him a few more times until he's back to normal. Five wasn't enough."*

"Pam!" I chastised. "I was talking about it was good he wasn't in denial anymore. You *hit* him five times?" He just came out of a coma for Christ's sake!

*"Just a few smacks to his forehead for being twat."*

You'd think she wasn't there for the whole brain trauma/coma thing. "Well, don't hit him anymore. He just came out of a coma," I paused, and then feeling like a teenager, I asked, "Did he ask about me?"

*"Your name may have come up once or twice,"* she played along before adding, *"Or maybe you were the bulk of the entire fucking conversation."*

"Well, what did you say?" I asked. I'd have been more worried if it wasn't for the fact we'd grown close over the last two weeks or else I would've wondered if she told him I was into bizarre sex acts that involved farm animals. This was Pam. My fears would've been warranted.

*"That you bark like a dog when you cum."* Huh, I was close. Animals were involved. She went on to tell me how she'd filled in whatever blanks she could for him of what she knew of our time together and what she'd seen herself. While I'd known Eric had wanted me to quit my job, it wasn't until I spent time with Pam that I learned just how strongly he'd felt about it.

When I'd called Mr. Brigant from the hospital, the day after the accident, his first comment was to sneer, "Mrs. Northman. To what do I owe the pleasure of your call on a Saturday? If you're calling for time off, you may as well quit."

"I quit," I spat back and hung up. If I were at Staples, I would've hit the red button to hear '*That was easy.*' A part of me hadn't wanted to, a very small part, but I wouldn't have been able to go to work knowing Eric was lying in the hospital in a coma. I could barely leave him long enough to shower and my decision was only reinforced when Baby Northman decided they didn't like food and instead preferred a red, cherry flavored, liquid diet.

When I told Pam about my newly unemployed status, she was nothing but supportive and told me Eric had already added me to his health insurance policy, so it was one less worry on my mind, before she stalked off mumbling something about batting practice. You just never knew with Pam.

When we got off the phone, I couldn't fall back to sleep right away. I'd wanted to call Gran and tell her the good news about Eric finally waking up, but she was away for a few days with her group, The Descendents of the Glorious Dead, traveling around to various Civil War battlefields and didn't own a cell phone. It was probably for the best anyway, knowing I probably would've burst into tears and told her the whole truth about Eric's and my relationship. Amelia had gone to Europe for a month with her father, and while I could've called her, I didn't want to ruin her vacation with my problems. She'd offered to fly home right after the accident, but I told her to stay and enjoy herself, knowing there really wasn't anything she could do besides hold my hand.

*There was only one hand I wanted to hold right now.*

Eric was the only one who could make me feel better and since that wasn't an option, I got up and dug out one of his t-shirts from his hamper, putting it on in place of my pajamas, before climbing back into bed. If I closed my eyes and tried really hard, I could almost imagine he was there and I eventually fell back to sleep pretending it was him surrounding me instead of the cotton imposter.

The sound of my cell phone ringing had me waking up trapped in another tangle of sheets. It was completely dark out and I had no idea what time it was, but since I'd left the phone next to me after talking to Pam, I didn't have far to reach.

Without looking at the caller id, I flipped it open and said, "Hello?" my voice a hoarse whisper. I rubbed my eyes and sat up, but when I got no response, I repeated in a clearer voice, "Hello?"

*"Sookie?"*

*Eric.*

"Eric? Are you okay? Is something wrong?" I asked, while biting back the question I'd really wanted to ask. '*Do you remember me now?*'

*"I'm... okay."*

The following lull in conversation allowed me to hear his iPod playing the whales' songs in the background and I lay back down in bed, finding a small measure of comfort hearing them



combined with his breathing. If my head were on his chest, so I could hear his heartbeat too, it would've been perfect.

*"Did I interrupt something? Do you have time to talk?"* he asked, with my heart breaking all over again hearing how lost he sounded.

"I was just sleeping, but I'm awake now. What did you want to talk about?"

*"I'm sorry. I didn't even look to see what time it was. Pam said you didn't get much sleep while you were... you know... here. Do you want me to let you go and..."*

"No!" I interrupted. I didn't want him to ever let me go, in every sense of the word. "We can talk now, about whatever you want." I waited in silence for him to say something else, but when he didn't, I figured I'd get the ball rolling by asking the question blaring in my head. "Do you remember... anything... yet?" Me?

I heard him inhale deeply before sighing out, *"No."*

"Oh."

*"But... I did have dreams, you know, while I was... there was a whale in my dreams. I must've heard the whales' songs. Pam said that was your idea?"*

My heart clenched, remembering our 'date' and the childhood memory he'd shared with me, as I answered, "Well, yeah. I knew you liked them."

Eric was silent for a long moment before asking, *"How did you know?"*

I swallowed the sob threatening to spill out and once I thought I could speak without giving my emotional state away, I answered, "You took me on a date to go whale watching. We didn't see any, but you told me about how special they were to you."

*"Oh..."* he paused again and then added, *"Pam also said you insisted on the lilies in my room. Why lilies?"*

I knew it was a difficult memory for Eric, but I wasn't about to start lying to him now. In for a penny, in for a pound, as Gran liked to say. "Because that was the name of the girl in the book you read as a child. You never told me what kind of flowers you picked from your neighbor's garden to leave on your windowsill at night, so I thought lilies would be a good choice."

I could hear the slight intake of his breath on the other end of the line and I remained quiet, when he eventually said, *"I never told anyone."*

The dam I had on my tears broke open then, but he couldn't see them, so I let them flow freely as I whispered, "Until me."

"Until you," he eventually repeated. Neither one of us said anything for the longest time until Eric, frustrated, sighed out, "*I don't remember.*"

No, he didn't, but I remembered for us both. I thought it was a good time to share a little bit of the faith I was desperately clutching and said, "No, but you will." He had to.

"*How can you be so sure?*" he asked.

I smiled, hoping it would come through in my voice, as I said, "Well, you don't *remember*, but I'm a very stubborn southern woman and once I set my mind to something, I won't give up until I've achieved it. Pit bull; that's me."

I could hear the smile in his voice, along with what sounded like a bit of relief, when he replied, "*So you won't give up on me?*"

Never. "Never."

"*Good,*" he responded and for the first time, in a long time, I felt like, just maybe, everything would be okay. My whole body relaxed back into the bed and a smile sat on my face, until I flushed scarlet with his next statement. "*I saw on my phone that we like to text each other. A lot,*" he purred, in a tone I knew all too well.

It was one thing to send dirty text messages back and forth to your husband/boyfriend, but with Eric's memories gone, it felt like we were starting back at square one. He wasn't acting like Asshole Eric, at the moment, but he was a far cry from My Eric and square one didn't include written confirmation of all of depraved things I'd wanted to do to him. Completely mortified, I gasped saying, "I can't believe you didn't erase those!"

"*I'm sorry. Was I supposed to? I don't remember,*" he chuckled. Oh, how I missed that laugh, but it didn't help quell my embarrassment. I was relieved when he'd seemed to change the subject by asking, "*So, if I've lost the last five weeks, that means it's now, what... the middle of October? Did we have plans for Halloween or is that one of your favorite holidays or something?*"

"Yes, it's the middle of October, but honestly, I don't even know what day it is. My mind's been elsewhere. And no, we didn't have plans for Halloween. I'm more of a Christmas gal. Why?" I asked. His question seemed to come out of left field.

"*In your texts you made mention of my Frankencock. I didn't want to 'stand you up' if we had a date on Halloween, but I'd be more than willing to 'stand you up' on our date if that's what you wanted. We'll have to get creative with my leg in a cast, but I'm willing to give it a shot.*"

"Eric Northman!" I shouted, with my face now buried into the pillow.

"*And something about you taking my temperature. Orally. Now that I'm in the hospital, I must be really bad off, so shouldn't you be here tending to me? Nursing me?*"

"Eric!"

*"Not like that; moan it."*

"Eric."

*"You're in bed, right? I'm in bed too. What're you wearing?"*

"Ugh... you're impossible. At least we know you your dirty mind is intact."

*"You sent me pictures too. Of your lips. After you kissed me earlier, I already know how soft they are on my mouth, so I can only imagine what they would feel like on my..."*

"I'm hanging up now Eric." I was so not gonna go there. Not yet anyway.

*"Spoil sport. Will you come and see me tomorrow?"* he asked, his sexified tone changing to uncertainty.

"Yes, if you want me to," I answered.

*"I want."*

Me too. "Then I will." Another long pause passed between us, but it was so much warmer than the cold distance I'd felt when he'd first called. I finally broke it, softly saying, "Goodnight Eric."

*"Goodnight Sookie. Sweet dreams."*

And they were.

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## **Chapter 68: Bonus Chapter The Sex Tape**

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### Bonus Chapter - The Sex Tape

(Takes place the week after they get back from the photo shoot, prior to the accident.)

#### **EPOV**

I was tired as fuck driving home after taping the first of two episodes on Wednesday night. With the cluster fuck of the week before, the normal taping on Tuesday got pushed a day to prepare, which meant working for thirteen hours that day. It didn't help that I missed Sookie more than I thought could be possible. I knew it was selfish of me to want her to quit her job, but really, I was a selfish person by nature. She didn't *have* to work and from what little she'd told me about her workday over the last couple of days, she wasn't really enjoying it. I didn't get most of her Harry Potter references, but I was very clear on the fact she wanted to kick some little shit's ass.

*If he was as smart as he was a smart ass, he wouldn't be caught alone with her.*

My bout of food poisoning had ended, thank God, but with the long hours I'd had to put in, Sookie was normally asleep when I got home. She'd gifted me with a good morning blow job the day before, but I'd gotten so spoiled over our multiple orgasm weekend, I'd been walking around with perpetual blue balls, in part, thanks to her dirty texts. I wanted her all day, every day, in every position possible. I needed her, to have every part of her wrapped around me, but real life was a cock blocking son of a bitch.

She'd called me overdramatic; claimed I wasn't as near death as I professed myself to be and declared it a side effect of having spent my life in front of a camera. Perhaps she was right, but tonight, she too, would learn what it was to be in front of a camera because if a picture was worth a thousand words, then a video would be worth a million. It would be another 'first' I could share with Sookie, having never done that sort of thing before and I highly doubted (at least I really fucking hoped) she'd ever filmed herself having sex with her douche bag ex.

The house was dark when I got home, but Sookie's car was in the garage when I pulled in, so I knew she was there and I headed straight to where I kept my video camera, inside my entertainment center. I'd seen it in there a couple of weeks earlier, when I'd pulled out the 'Pirates of the Caribbean' movie, but it was nowhere to be found now, even after emptying the contents from the cabinet. I searched in every conceivable spot it could be, but after an hour I eventually gave up and made a mental note to have Alcide pick me up another one the next day.

Disappointed, I trudged upstairs and saw the soft light flickering underneath the bedroom door as I walked down the hallway. As I got closer, I could hear music playing inside and figured Sookie had fallen asleep watching TV, so I was surprised when I opened the door and found her sitting up in the middle of the bed, with lit candles covering every surface of the room.

"It took you long enough to get up here," she smiled.

"I..." That was as far as my brain could go because all of the blood rushed from my head to my dick seeing she was wearing the skimpiest of negligees that hid nothing and everything all at once. The red silk and lace draped across her breasts, encasing them like large ripe fruit. Since she always smelled and tasted of cherries, they were the first one I thought of, but given how blessed she was in that area, there was no equally sized fruit my brain could come up with. It didn't matter though because all I could think about was how much I wanted to peel it off of her to expose the sweet flesh underneath.

My disappointment from moments ago was completely forgotten, as my feet carried me forward, with me shedding my clothes on primal instinct alone and my only thought was I was a lucky bastard, but my progress was halted by her raised hand, as I reached the end of the bed, and she said, "Before we get started, I wanted to ask you something."

Whatever it was, I would give her anything, so I answered her unasked question without waiting to hear it. "Yes." She could ask me to escort her to an orgy wearing head to toe pink lycra and I would've said 'yes'.

"Eric," she giggled. "I didn't even ask you yet."

It didn't matter. The answer would be 'yes', but I really wanted us to get passed the whole talky part of the night so we could move onto the fucky part, so I humored her and said, "Fine. Ask me."

My interest in the talky part she was forcing me to bear was piqued when a blush bloomed onto her skin and she needed to take a deep breath before finally saying, "Well, since we haven't had a lot of time together lately and you've been hovering *near death* because of it," she cocked her eyebrow at what she *thought* was exaggeration on my part, but until she was walking around with a set of blue balls in between her legs, she couldn't judge. I just cocked my eyebrow in silent response, so she continued, "I thought maybe we could... you know... tape ourselves."

*Dead.*

At that moment a feather could've knocked me over and I had to wonder if maybe she really could read my mind. When I'd gotten the idea earlier, I figured I would have to spend at least an hour trying to convince her before finally giving up on the whole idea, so we could progress from talky to fucky, but I didn't have to. She *wanted* to. It was *her* idea. Or maybe I imagined it? Maybe she'd really asked about something to do with the house or work, but my cock and brain heard '*sex tape*'? My cock definitely heard it because it was standing up wanting to hear it again.

I must have taken too long pondering whether or not her offer was fantasy or reality because her blush deepened as she said, "We don't have to. I just figured it would give you something to... you know... never mind."

She flopped backwards onto the bed in embarrassment and covered her face with a pillow, but I was on top of her a second later, pulling it from her face and asking in a hoarse growl, "Lover, did you just offer to allow me to film us making love? Giving me the gift of seeing me pleasure you, whenever my need for you can't be sated by your warm flesh in person? Watching you writhe with desire while I fuck you on the screen and stroke my cock pretending it's your hand, your mouth, your pussy, surrounding me, squeezing me until I can't take it anymore and cum shoots out of me, all the while imagining I'm shooting it into you?"

Her hooded eyes told me the blush on her skin was no longer from embarrassment, but from desire as her breaths and heart rate picked up speed, with every dirty word I said, and she chewed on her bottom lip, merely nodding her reply which made it all the more tempting, but heartbreaking, as I said, "While I would love to take you up on your offer, I'm afraid I'm going to have to ask you for a rain check." I leaned down brushing my lips across hers and stealing a quick taste of the cherry flavored lip gloss I knew would be there before moving along her jaw and inhaling deeply. Her taste and scent both calmed and excited me like nothing else ever had and I eventually made my way to her ear, saying, "You see, I had the same idea for tonight, but I couldn't find the video camera. That's why it took so long for me to come upstairs."

She wrapped her arms and legs around me, arching her body against mine and half-giggled half-moaned out, "That's because it's right there." One of her arms came loose and my eyes followed

the path it was pointed towards where I saw the video camera sitting on top of my dresser, pointing at the bed.

Seeing it and the red light on top of the lens, indicating it had been recording the entire time we'd been talking, made my cock throb with anticipation. I doubted I would ever stop questioning how in the fuck I'd gotten lucky enough to find someone like her; someone who on paper would seem like we'd never match, but in reality was the epitome of perfection for me and I gave voice to that thought, saying, "You're perfect."

She leaned up, tugging my bottom lip with her teeth and released it again say, "Far from, but time's a wasting. That thing will shut off eventually."

Instead of wasting time verbally arguing that she was, in fact, perfect, I chose to argue with my tongue thrusting into her mouth, attempting to swipe away every doubtful word as yet unspoken by her. She silently argued back, but I would expect nothing less from her and upped the ante by grinding my still denim clad erection against her silky smooth center. Her ankles locked behind me as she gave back just as good as she got and a small part of my brain berated myself for not stripping completely before climbing on top of her.

My hands were everywhere, unable to decide where to start unwrapping my gift wrap covered Sookie, until her hardened nipples scraped down my bare chest, drawing my hands up her body and peeling away the layer separating me from my first course. I took my time, licking and kissing my way towards my destination, and tasted every inch of each of her breasts, except for the parts we both wanted the most. Pushing them together with my hands, they looked like the world's best Sookie sundae, with two cherries on top, and when she squirmed underneath me, but trapped by my body weight, she sighed out a whispered, "Please..." I couldn't deny her or myself any longer. Tracing along the ridges I'd already memorized with my tongue, I lapped at them as though they were covered in whipped cream and made a mental note to add it to the shopping list tacked onto the refrigerator door. Her legs dropped from my waist and she planted her feet onto the bed, giving her the leverage she needed to crush her hips against mine while I rewarded her with a thrust of my own, making us both moan in pleasure.

I licked and sucked, chewed and bit, each one in turn and unable to decide which one was my favorite before finally calling it a tie and moving onto the next course of my Sookie supper. Her body was tone but soft, as a woman should be, and I delighted in peeling away her negligee as I went, nipping at the skin just underneath her belly button and making a soft giggle come from her lips. I loved the responses I was able to elicit from her body and when I pulled the red material free of her body, she brought her feet up next to my head and let her knees fall by the wayside, giving me a full view of her panty-less state and I couldn't contain the low growl from leaving my chest.

"Perfect," I whispered again and before she could try to argue the point with me, I dove forward and took whatever words she may have said away with my tongue passing through her slick folds. Her fingers wove through my hair while her body once again arched, bringing her hips up towards my face, so I wrapped my arm across her hips to keep her still.

*She should know I was nowhere near done.*

"Eric..." she cried, as I avoided her most sensitive spots, teasing my tongue along the edge just enough to build up her expectations before moving away again. It was a game, an adult version of the childhood pastime 'I'm not touching you', almost cruel in nature, and much more annoying if I took Sookie's frustrated grunts into account. So tiny beneath me, her small frame fought against my grasp, trying to move her body into a position to get some much needed relief, but she had to learn; this was what blue balls felt like.

It was mean of me to deny her when her being here with me, like this, was making yet another one of my dreams come true, so when she finally whined out, "You're killing me," I chuckled against her skin, nipping her inner thigh with my teeth, and said, "Now you know what it feels like."

Her sharp intake of breath above me clued me in that I was about to get Sookie'd, so I made a preemptive strike and thrust my tongue inside of her, cleaning away every drop of her slick juices I found, fucking her with one muscle while the other impatiently waited for its turn and effectively silenced her protest. The talky part of the night was over as far as I was concerned and I moved my lips up and captured her swollen clit between them, rolling my tongue around her sensitive flesh and suckling at it like a newborn. I filled her with two of my fingers while my tongue flicked across her clit in time with my thrusts and when her inner walls started to spasm around my hand, I pressed down on that hidden spot inside of her with pinpoint accuracy making her scream out my name as she came.

I licked my fingers clean while she came down from her high, with both of us smiling at each other, and I thought she was still somewhat out of it until she surprised me by pouncing on me and pushing my chest until I was flat on my back with her on top of me. "My turn," she purred against my lips before stealing my breath away with another kiss. I'd never get enough of her; heart, body and soul, she was mine as much as I was hers and the overwhelming feeling I had to claim her, possess every part of her, screamed from every fiber of my being.

*Did she know?*

*Had I told her?*

I'd already told her many things I never thought I would share with another person and *this* would be no different, but she *had* to know. Just the thought of her being with anyone else like this shot fire through my veins, so when her lips moved down to my chest, my fingers fisted into her hair, pulling just enough for her to look into my eyes, as I practically snarled through my teeth, "You're mine Sookie. Now that I have you, now that I know what it is to love someone, to be loved in return, I'll never let you go."

I meant every word.

Completely unafraid of my outburst, she lightly bit my chest with her tongue flicking across my nipple and drawing a hiss from my lips before saying, "You're mine too so don't you forget it."

"I am," I admitted.

*As if I would ever forget that.*

She smiled softly and her eyes danced, as she said, "Now if you don't mind, I must be on my way. I'm headed south to the *Northman Pole*," she winked. My cock must have heard her itinerary because it bobbed through my now open jeans, smacking against her stomach to remind her where he was, just in case she forgot. I loosened my grip on her hair, bidding her a silent *Bon Voyage*, as she followed the same path down my body as I had traveled down hers.

Proving she was a better person than me, she didn't tease me for very long, and as soon as she pulled my jeans from my body, her lips were sliding down my cock. She'd blown me quite a few times by then, but I still marveled over her ability to take in all of me. Her tongue curled around the underside of my shaft and when I hit the back of her throat, I felt her relax her mouth and swallow, allowing me to slide in further, until her lips were clamped down around the base. I was afraid to ask her where she learned that trick and figured I was better off not knowing, or even thinking about it at all, and just enjoyed her skill knowing I would be the only one benefiting from it from here on.

She slowly eased her way back up before taking another tortuously slow path back down, repeating it several times, until I realized this was my payback for what I'd done to her earlier. Her rhythm was just enough to get me going, but nowhere near fast enough for me to do anything with it and I wondered if it was the first time in history somebody could be blue balled while getting their dick sucked.

"Sookie..." I whined.

*I wasn't above begging.*

"Hmmm..." she questioned, with her lips firmly clasped around my base. The vibration of it made me even harder and my balls were begging for release.

*They weren't too proud to beg either.*

"I'm sorry for teasing you," I apologetically pleaded.

She made another pass up and down my length before mumbling, "Mm hmm..." to my poor cock, in a tone that said she didn't believe me. It wasn't *his* fault I'd teased her. Why punish *him*?

I was just about to pull her off of me, so I could fuck her through the mattress, when her speed started increasing and her mumbled "Mm hmm's" went from agonizing to tantalizing. For the first time that night, every part of my body was happy, but I wanted to cum inside of her (or inside of a condom inside of her), so I went back to my earlier plan and pulled her off of me while moving my body on top of hers.



"I can't believe you interrupted my adventure down under," she laughed through her mock indignation. "You know how much I like those accents."

I ripped open a condom and thanked God she had an appointment on Friday to get put on birth control. Just the thought of being able to slide into her, at any given moment, whenever the mood and opportunity struck, was nearly enough to make me cum, but as I rolled it on her teasing words ignited a fire back into my very core. I knew she was joking and had no doubts about her being faithful to me, but the possessive beast in me wanted to fuck that ridiculous affinity for foreign accents right out of her. As I lined myself up at her entrance, I almost apologized for what I was about to do, but where was the fun in that?

Instead I plunged into her all the way to the hilt, with a silent 'take *that*' directed at her, and a soft whoosh of breath expelled from her lungs at my sudden entry. I loved the feeling of being encased within her, her heat surrounding me on all sides, and how no matter how many times I'd already had her, she still felt just as tight as she had that first time. I knew I hadn't hurt her, but I remained still anyway to allow her to adjust to my size and stayed that way even after she tried wiggling her hips in an effort to make me start moving.

"Eric..." she whined for the second time that night.

"Yes my love?" I asked, while licking the outer edge of her ear.

Her heels were dug into my ass while her fingernails scraped up and down my back, but instead of arguing or attempting to get me to move, she simply wrapped her arms around me, hugging her body to mine, and said, "I love you."

It was all I needed to hear for my plans on fucking her through the mattress in an attempt to physically claim her, to change in an instant. She loved me, another first I got to share with Sookie, and she deserved to be made love to in return. So I showed her with my body how much I loved her by moving reverently inside of her; reading each of her unspoken cues so I knew when to speed up or slow down, where to touch her with my hands and lips while never losing my stride and when her desire increased, so did my tempo. The expression on her face, the look in her eyes, and the sounds she was making were about to do me in, so I sat up on my heels, pulling her hips up with me, and changed the angle to where I was hitting her g-spot and her clit with each thrust of my hips. It was enough to violently throw her over the edge and seeing her cum undone in front of me, while feeling her muscles contract around me had me almost seizing on top of her, cumming harder than I ever had before.

Completely spent, I made sure to fall to the side of her, so I wouldn't crush her, and tossed the used condom into the wastebasket now kept next to the bed. Her cheeks were flushed and a light sheen of sweat covered every inch of her, as she tried to catch her breath. She never looked more beautiful to me and I reached over, tucking a strand of hair behind her ear, and said, "I love you Sookie."

*Did she know?*

*Had I told her?*

I knew I'd told her I loved her many times by then, but fearing she might not know how much she meant to me had me spilling my guts once more as I said, "I may not remember what first drew me to you, but whatever it was, I thank my lucky stars every day that it happened. I can hardly remember what my life was like before you and I want no part of knowing what my future would be like without you. Promise me, no matter what happens, we'll always work through our problems. Promise you won't ever leave me."

The thought of losing her terrified me and what had started as a playful romp together, ended with me feeling helpless and exposed.

*Pam was right; I was a walking chick flick.*

Seeing my vulnerable state, Sookie's eyes softened and she climbed on top of me, hugging me tight and saying, "I love you too and I'm not going anywhere." I believed her, but my mood improved when she smiled, while playfully adding, "As a matter of fact, even as big as you are, I don't think you could get rid of me if you tried. I'm tenacious and now that I have my teeth in you," she playfully nipped my lower lip, "I'm not letting go. Think of me like a dog with a bone. A pit bull," she ended up yawning out.

I smirked, saying, "You think I'm *big*, huh?" She was too tired to put up much of a fuss and lightly tapped my chest before I continued, "Well I know how much you like my *bone*," as I thrust my hips against hers, "but I think it's time for my ferocious pit bull to go to sleep." Except 'ferocious' meant 'sexy' and 'pit bull' meant 'love of my life', but 'bone' meant 'boner'.

*Hopefully she meant 'big' when she said 'big'.*

She pretended to growl, but settled down against my side and I watched her breathing slow and her mouth form into a small 'O', with her falling asleep within minutes. It was just one more thing I doubted I would ever tire of; watching her sleep, but I eventually got up and turned off the video camera before blowing out all of the candles. I set the camera next to my iPod so I'd remember to download it in the morning. After all, if I couldn't have Sookie with me 24/7, at least I could have *that* to keep me company in the meantime and I smiled climbing back into bed when she immediately curled up against my side.

*I really was a lucky bastard.*

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**Chapter 69: Chapter 67**

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Chapter 67

**EPOV**

The small smile that had played on my lips towards the end of our conversation disappeared as soon as Sookie and I ended our call. It all seemed so surreal; everything Pam had told me; everything I'd seen with my own two eyes in the pictures and video, but most of all, the fact Sookie knew about the significance of the whales and their relevance to my childhood. It was a story I'd never shared with anyone, not even my counselor in rehab, but somehow, at some point, within the span of knowing her for a mere three weeks, I'd chosen to share it with her.

*Who was she?*

Alcide had shown up a short while after Pam left, just long enough to see if I needed anything (no) and then called me a dick for treating Sookie the way I had before he left again. After that, except for the occasional doctor or nurse coming in to check on me, I had nothing but time on my hands, so I did something I'd never done before.

I googled myself.

I read every story I could find that took place during my missing chunk of time, regardless if it were a reputable news source or celebrity gossip site. I clicked on image after image of Sookie and I together; at the premier party; grocery shopping together. I read where she'd been hit from behind by a car driven by the paparazzi and even found a picture of her being taken away on a stretcher. As the night wore on, I continued to search and was shocked when I found an article from a Miramar newspaper showing a picture of me, in a flight suit, posing with a bunch of military men and women. According to the article, 'my wife' had surprised me by arranging for my childhood dream of flying in a fighter jet to come true.

What. The. Fuck?

If our initial meeting happened as everyone said it had (and I didn't doubt it thanks to the online video of the whole fucking thing); if our 'marriage' was nothing more than a showmance for our careers, then how did I end up spilling my guts to her *at all*, never mind the fact that I seemed to tell her the things I'd spent a lifetime guarding from everyone, and it all happened in three weeks? I slammed the laptop shut and shoved it away from me not wanting to believe any of it because there was no way what Pam said could be true.

*Me? In love?*

Not only was it unlikely, but more like impossible. 'Love' was a word I didn't understand and it would've been easy to convince myself that I'd only *acted* like I was in love with her, more than likely to get in her pants, if it weren't for the GQ video. Pam was right; I wasn't that good of an actor. It was odd watching myself on video doing something I couldn't remember, but it was hard to miss the chemistry between us. Over the years, I'd had chemistry with *a lot* of women and would've written it off to the fact we were fucking each other, but it was *more* than just chemistry visible on the screen. There was a sense of intimacy, affection, and adoration shared between us and it felt strange seeing the proof of it when I couldn't remember the sensation of it. There was practically a live wire connecting the two of us together as we danced and it was

seeing that with my own two eyes that made the possibility of there being an 'us' to sink in just a little.

And then I looked at 'my' cell phone. The text messages sent back and forth between Sookie and I were racy, but aside from the '*I love you's*' attached to most of them, it wasn't anything I hadn't done before, if on a lesser scale, with other women. I didn't question too much why I'd gotten a new phone since I'd always craved the next new thing to come out onto the market. What I *did* question was my shortened list of contacts and it took me a minute to realize the phone numbers for every one of the women I'd been willing to fuck more than once were gone and it pissed me off. We'd only been 'together' for three fucking weeks!

*Did she erase them while I was lying here in a coma?*

Not only was five weeks of my life erased, but years' worth of contacts I'd painstakingly cultivated were gone too. Even if I was fucking Sookie, I didn't believe for one second I would've voluntarily given up the possibility of ever fucking any of the others again and I was in enough of a rage that she would have the audacity to erase them, that I scrolled to her name and hit the 'send' button, fully prepared to tell her to get the fuck out of my house, consequences be damned. So what if we had *something*. I couldn't remember it, so it wasn't like I was going to miss it, but the minute I heard her sleepy voice the fury I felt was snuffed out in an instant. It was so familiar and yet not, but that unfamiliar sensation I'd felt watching her walk out the door was back again. It felt more like a dream than a memory, but whatever it was, it made me bite back the words I'd been seconds away from saying. I was glad for it later when she confirmed my suspicion that I'd actually told her one of my darkest memories; the whales' songs and the flowers.

It was too much. Too much was unknown, too much had been shared and without my memories of it happening, I felt naked and raw. Exposed. So I did what felt comfortable, what was easy; I flirted with her. It was something I'd done thousands of times, with just as many women, and took no thought on my part. It was safe and meaningless and my vulnerability was shielded by my sexually charged repartee. Unlike 'love', 'sex' was a word I *did* understand. It took no effort to maintain our easy banter, especially when she seemed embarrassed by it all, and it made me feel better; a little bit more like *me*. I wanted to remember, if only so I'd know the truth of my feelings for her during that missing time, but I had to keep her at arm's length until then. I'd spoken to her for all of five minutes total (that I could remember anyway) and she was already making me *feel* things I didn't want to. I wanted no part of *feeling* anything that didn't involve fucking and I asked her to stop by the next day, hoping when I saw her something she would do or say would trigger my memories for me, but, at the same time, I was afraid of that actually happening as well.

*What if I felt something?*

I didn't sleep well that night with weird fucking dreams making me toss and turn, as much as I could with my leg elevated, all night long. One of them had me wondering if it was a memory, given how oddly normal it was, but it only made me angrier when I woke up. It felt so unfair that *she* held all of the cards; *she* knew about parts of my life that *I* didn't.

*A complete stranger.*

I was already wary of her thanks to the unlikely scenario of our 'drunken' wedding, video or not, and planned to try and get to the bottom of it all. Sure, I appeared drunk off my ass on the video, but I was no lightweight when it came to holding my alcohol and I'd never been so drunk that I didn't remember *anything*.

*Maybe she drugged me?*

She wouldn't be the first psychotic bitch after me for my money and fame, but I would have to play nice in the meantime. Regardless of how we met, I *saw* my reaction to her during the photo shoot and I needed to hear the *whole* story from her before I sent her packing.

*Of course I wouldn't take her at her word that everything she told me was true.*

The more I thought about everything, the more I festered inside. The imbalanced scales were tipping towards her in our *relationship* and it pissed me off. By the time lunchtime had come and gone, and I still hadn't seen her, it only cemented the fact she didn't *love* me. If she had, wouldn't she have shown up by now?

I was in a rotten mood by the time Sookie deigned me with her presence, so as soon as she walked into my room, I snapped, "It took you fucking long enough."

Seeing the hurt in her eyes made feel sick which pissed me off even more. It seemed to be my perpetual state of being by then, but I swallowed what anger I could and said, "I'm sorry. I just thought you would've been by earlier."

She discreetly wiped the tears from her eyes while saying, "I'm sorry. I would've been here sooner, but my car wouldn't start and I had to call Alcide to come get me. Since no one's been home for a couple of weeks, I had to throw away most of the food in the refrigerator and he offered to stop at the grocery store on the way so I wouldn't have to do it later."

I felt like the biggest asshole on the planet, especially when her breath hitched in her throat as she tried to contain a sob, and my hand reached out for her, without my permission, as I repeated, "I'm sorry."

I wouldn't have blamed her for calling me a dick and storming out of the room, taking my missing three weeks with her, so I was surprised when she took a step forward, and then another one, until her hand was finally in mine. A part of me had held out hope that seeing her, touching her, would bring it all back since my memories seemed to be centered around her, but she was just as much of a stranger to me as she had been a day earlier. A blonde haired, blue eyed, sexy stranger, but a stranger nonetheless. I normally didn't have a 'type', but if I did, she would be it. Her skin was golden and she had curves in all the right places. She practically fucking glowed, but it was probably just my eyes, or a trick of the fluorescent light.

*Maybe a hug would help move things along?*

I suddenly felt nervous, another foreign sensation when applied towards a woman, but made sure to keep my tone soft as I looked at her and asked, "Would you mind giving me a hug?" I sounded fucking pathetic, even to my own ears, and quickly followed up with, "You don't have to, if you don't want to. I was just thinking it might help jog my memory by touching you."

Her responding sad smile left another tug in my gut as she said, "Of course I'll hug you Eric," and she perched herself on the side of my bed, leaning down, and embracing me in her arms.

Pieces of my dream state from when I was in the coma flitted through my mind, but were gone too quickly for me to grasp onto anything, so instead I closed my eyes and concentrated on her. She smelled just like cherries and I inhaled deeply, enjoying it while I had her in my arms, while thinking it was at least *one thing* we had in common when I remembered Pam saying she'd been 'feeding' me cherry popsicles. When I tentatively wrapped my own arms around her I felt at peace for the first time since I'd woken up.

*Maybe, just maybe, there was something to it? Maybe I really did have feelings for Sookie?*

I pretended to not notice, at first, she was attempting to pull away until I had no choice but to let her go. The sense of calm she'd been able to elicit within me, with nothing more than her embrace, was like nothing I'd ever felt before and I didn't want to be without it just yet, so I placed my hand on her knee hoping it would be enough to maintain our connection and was grateful when she didn't move away from my touch.

"Anything?" she asked hopefully.

I wanted to answer her truthfully, hoping it would be returned to me by her, so I said, "Sort of? I mean, I don't remember anything, but touching you seems familiar, if that makes any sense."

She tried to smile, but it didn't reach her eyes as she said, "Well, it's a start at least."

I just nodded, not knowing what to say to her. Normally I wasn't one to make small talk with strangers, but there was something about her that made me want her there, beyond the fact she was the only one who could tell me about what happened during my missing time. I wasn't ready to explore the reasons *why* I felt that way though, so I tried to think of something fairly safe to talk about and ended up asking, "So, you said your car wouldn't start? Is it still drivable after the accident you were in?" She looked flummoxed, I guessed as to how I knew she'd been in an accident, so I followed up with, "Pam told me I was headed here on the day of my accident because you'd been in one and then I read about it online last night."

"Oh," she hesitated. "Um, I wasn't driving my car that day. You didn't think it was safe, so you'd bullied me into using your Audi."

I wanted to call her a liar; that I would *never* just voluntarily offer up my \$100K sedan for someone else to use, much less bully them into doing it, but I didn't know. Maybe I had considering even now, she was causing reactions in me that were foreign as well. Seeing her hesitate and then cringe, as she told me what happened, had me wanting to soothe her, so I gently

squeezed her knee and said, "It's just a car. I'm glad you weren't hurt too badly." Seeing the almost healed bruises on her skin made me ask, "You weren't, were you?"

*The more important question was why did I care?*

*Did I even want to admit to myself that I did?*

No.

"No," she repeated my silent denial and added, "just some bruises."

The way she said it made me think there was more to it than that, but since she lacked any other physical signs of injury I had no way of bringing it up other than to ask, "Are you sure?"

She hesitated again before finally nodding her reply and I found I couldn't stop looking at her. She was beautiful, but I'd been with plenty of beautiful women in the past. However, there was something different about her, but I couldn't tell if I was just imagining it all because of all of the pictures and video I'd seen of her and I together. Maybe I was seeing something there that wasn't, but that would have to mean I *wanted* to see something there.

*Did I want that?*

When she'd spoken earlier, I'd noticed her tongue was stained red and remembered Pam saying she'd been sick, so I asked, "Are you feeling any better? Pam said you got sick staying here and could only eat popsicles."

Again, she hesitated, and I suddenly wished I could read her mind. She was the key to my missing memories and I would give anything to know the truth, to have them back, if only so I wouldn't go insane from not knowing.

"I'm feeling a little better. I'm sure it'll pass soon." She blushed and I wondered if she felt embarrassed talking about her illness with a complete stranger until I remembered, *I wasn't a stranger to her.*

*Fucking imbalanced scales.*

When I didn't say anything she got the conversational ball rolling by asking, "So, um... do you have any questions you'd like to ask? About, you know... us?"

*Only about a million.*

My mind automatically went to the naked things we had done, but I thought I should start out asking something less likely to get me slapped. Remembering a part of my dream from the night before that seemed odd, but wasn't indecent made me ask, "Did we ever play Battleship together during a thunderstorm?"

The blush that rose up from her chest to her neck and then cheeks had me wondering just how far it went down and my eyes may have locked onto her breasts for a second too long when she cleared her throat, drawing my eyes back up to hers. "Umm... not really. Why do you ask?"

"I dreamt last night that we did." I was somewhat disappointed it was just a dream and not an actual memory until my brain dissected her response. "What did you mean by 'not really'?"

*We started to play? There wasn't a storm? We played until a thunderstorm knocked out the power and then we fucked like rabbits instead?*

Her blush didn't make sense considering the nature of my question and only served to make me all the more curious, not only about her response, but just her.

Her blush only deepened and she looked away from me before standing up and putting a bit of distance between us. The comfort I'd felt with her touch was gone and a little bit of the ache in my chest was back. I didn't understand it. I didn't like it. I wanted to grab onto her and keep her there next to me, if only so I'd feel better.

*That didn't make sense either.*

By the time she was back to standing next to my bed, close enough that I could reach out and touch her again, the ache was practically gone. I pushed those thoughts away and focused on the fact she hadn't answered my question which drew my attention to the fact she was chewing on her lower lip. The same one that I remembered was petal soft.

*It was distracting.*

"I don't want to tell you," she finally whispered.

"Why?" I asked, a little louder than I'd meant to and left her startled. "Sorry... it's just frustrating, not being able to remember anything."

*It's frustrating not knowing why you affect me the way that you do.*

Looking straight into her eyes, I reminded her, "You said you'd answer my questions."

Her eyes traveled all over my face and body, as though she was checking for any injuries or physical changes and I could see it when she caught herself from reaching out for my hand. Wondering if she had the same craving for physical contact with me, as I seemed to have for her, I lifted my hand once more and held it out to her.

*Maybe I imagined it last time and this time I wouldn't feel any better touching her.*

I wasn't sure which way I'd hoped to feel, but it didn't matter because as soon as her hand was in mine the ache was gone.



*Fuck me.*

Maybe *that* was what needed to happen. Maybe if we fucked then I would remember and if not, it wouldn't be like either one of us would be losing out. A win/win if you ask me.

I was trying to come up with a way to suggest it when she finally started answering the question I'd already forgotten I'd asked and said, "I know you're frustrated and I guess angry too given the way you greeted me when I first walked into your room." The guilt I felt hit me out of nowhere and made me drop my eyes from hers, but she reached out with her free hand and tilted my chin up until I was looking at her again, before saying, "It's okay. I'm not in your shoes and, while neither one of us could remember the night of our wedding, I can't possibly understand what it's like to lose so many memories, especially considering how much of your life changed during that time. But *you* have to understand, *you're* not the only one here that lost anything. It's hard for me too because I lost *you*."

She was in tears by the time she was done speaking and I reacted on instinct alone, pulling her down towards me until she was halfway lying on top of me with her face buried into my shoulder. My hands rubbed up and down her back while I quietly shushed her, trying to comfort her in any way I could, and it wasn't until I realized I was doing it that I stopped to wonder, why?

It hadn't occurred to me how Sookie felt in all of this and I felt like a selfish bastard for not considering it at all. The idea we had actually fallen in love was so farfetched, I hadn't given any thought to the possibility it had been *real*, but seeing her cry because she felt like she'd lost *me* made me sick.

*Did she really care about me that much?*

*Did she really love me?*

"I'm sorry Sookie," I whispered. "I want to remember, I really do, if only so you'll stop crying."

She snorted against my shoulder and I wondered what was so funny about my apology or wanting to get my memories back until she pulled away and said, "You hate it when I cry, even happy tears. It freaks you out and you always try to get me to stop." I couldn't stop myself from wiping her tears away and she smiled softly and said, "At least that hasn't changed."

*That* smile actually reached her eyes and made me smile in return as I asked, "So you cry a lot, huh?"

*Christ, I hope not.*

"Afraid so," she smiled.

When she didn't say anything more I was left wondering what it was about my initial question that caused such a reaction in her. I didn't want to push the issue, but I really wanted to know, so I asked, "So what was it about my question with the game and thunderstorm? Why did you get so

upset? Was it because it was only a dream or because something happened? Did I make you cry then too?"

The possibilities were endless, but I never would've guessed the one she ended up telling me when she took a deep breath and said, "It was the first time we made love."

*Well, well, well... now we're getting somewhere.*

The thought of having her naked and being inside of her had every part of me tingling, some more than others, and my voice dropped an octave as I looked into her eyes and said, "Tell me."

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## Chapter 70: Chapter 68

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### Chapter 68

#### SPOV

*Why did he have to use his sexy voice?*

*Why did he have to look like My Eric when it was clear it was mostly Asshole Eric that still held the reins?*

I tried not to be upset with his assholery remembering how pissy we'd been with each other, after waking up together, the day after we'd gotten married. I'd been a complete and utter bitch to him then, so I knew a little of what I should expect from him before ever walking through the door. As I'd walked down the corridor towards his room I kept chanting in my head, 'He doesn't know you,' over and over trying to prepare myself.

*I wasn't prepared.*

I'd fooled myself into believing I'd easily be able to separate the two Eric's in my head; mine and the one I'd met for the first time five weeks earlier, but it was nearly impossible. Just the sight of him made my heart flutter and I longed to wrap myself around him, finding the comfort only he could give me, so hearing him snap at me so harshly hurt more than I was prepared for. My hormones were already all over the place thanks to the pregnancy and the tears I seemed to perpetually shed lately made an instant appearance. My only saving grace was when he appeared contrite for causing them.

*Maybe it wouldn't be so bad.*

He'd never liked to see my tears, even from day one when we could barely tolerate each other, so it stood to reason he wouldn't be too much of an asshole if he knew I would cry. Inside I giggled picturing Asshole Eric as the evil comic book villain with me as the heroine and my Super Sookie tears being his kryptonite.

*His ass would look great in spandex.*

*Focus Sookie!*

"Sookie," he growled, bringing my attention back to his face instead of his ass, which I'd already committed to memory. It also brought to my attention the fact my panties had dampened hearing him say my name that way.

*Moan it.*

*Focus Sookie!*

"What were we talking about?" I asked. I'd heard of 'pregnancy brain' where your attention span was slightly hampered and wondered if that was the cause or if it was the fact my hormones were now practically screaming at me to fuck him six ways from Sunday. Whatever it was I couldn't afford to lose my focus now. I had to focus on helping Eric get his memories back before I could focus on any of my own desires.

His eyes were hooded, staring back into my own and I'd seen that look on his face plenty of times, but today it seemed just a little different. Something in his gaze was different; detached almost and it was all I needed to see to cool my jets and remember that it wasn't My Eric in front of me, but Manwhore Eric who'd wanted into my pants from the get go.

"You were about to tell me about the first time we had sex," he reminded me.

I chewed on my lip wondering if I would be able to become detached enough myself to be able to tell him the story, so while I worked up the courage to do just that, I stalled by saying, "Actually, the *first* time we had sex was in Las Vegas, but neither one of us remembered it."

"Then it doesn't count," he offered. "Tell me about the first time you *do* remember."

*Oh, it counted. You'll see how much in roughly thirty-five weeks.*

"Um...well, we were at my Gran's house," I started, but he interrupted me.

"Where's that?"

"In Louisiana. Bon Temps to be specific." My mind wandered back to that time and how happy I'd been to see him the morning he'd arrived. I hadn't realized just how much I'd missed him until I opened the front door and saw him standing there. It was ironic considering I missed him even more now, but he was right in front of me.

"Why were we there?" he asked.

All of his questions were putting off the inevitable 'sex' talk, so I gladly answered, "She had a heart attack. I'd gone home to help take care of her and when you found out you didn't have to

work that week, you took the first flight you could to come and be with me." His eyes narrowed, as though he couldn't believe he'd do something like that, so I quickly added, "It was very sweet of you. We'd only been apart for a little over a day, but I missed you more than I would've thought possible."

I could see his mind wrestling over my words, so I waited patiently to see if my admission would bring Asshole Eric to the forefront and was relieved when he asked, "How long ago?"

"When we were there?" I clarified. When he nodded his head I thought about it for a minute and said, "About a month ago. It was around two weeks before the accident."

He sat in silence for another minute with me wishing I could read his mind. Then again, maybe it was for the best that I couldn't. Finally he asked, "And we had sex for the first time while we were there? Why did we wait for so long?"

The concept seemed so foreign to him I almost laughed at his expression, but kept myself in check as I said, "So long? By then, we'd only known each other for like a week and a half. You're lucky I didn't make you wait longer," I teased, playfully smacking his arm.

*Yeah right. I was just lucky I didn't pounce on him on Gran's front porch with her as a witness to our... marital relations.*

"I don't believe you," he said, shocking me back into the present. At my confused expression, he said, "I wouldn't have entertained you for that long without having sex. I don't do *relationships* and if our whole *marriage* was completely for show, then why would I have been willing to wait for that long?"

*Entertained me?*

With great effort, I swallowed my desire to beat the ever loving shit out of him (I'd leave that task to Pam) and said, "Because *we* decided to give our *relationship* a chance. *We* had feelings for one another from that very first day that neither one of us could explain. Before you, I'd only ever been with one other man and we were together for three years. We even got engaged, but he cheated on me so I ended it." I took a much needed deep breath before adding, "I'm not the type of girl that sleeps around which was why I couldn't believe we'd actually gotten married after knowing each other for a couple of hours, but, eventually, we *did* fall in love. We promised each other we'd always work out our problems, and this one is a doozy, but I'm not going anywhere. You made me promise you I'd never leave you and I have every intention of keeping that promise, but Eric," I looked into his eyes so he'd feel the weight of my words, "even I have limits. I know you don't remember, but you *do* love me and I love you. But, if you decide to run off and fuck the next wet hole that comes your way, I won't overlook it; I won't forgive it, memories or no memories. It'll be a deal breaker and I'll be gone from your life forever."

I tried to hold onto my anger over just the thought of him having sex with someone else, if only so I wouldn't cry again, but he had to know where my line in the sand was drawn.

That line was his waistband.

I wasn't sure what to expect from him; from *this Eric*. Anger was near the top of my list, but he gave me no clue from his blank expression. Mentally, I started packing my belongings and was thankful I still had my key to Amelia's condo. The Eric in front of me wasn't mine; this one was at square one and I remembered all too well his freak out over my demand for his fidelity on that first day, so it stood to reason *this Eric* would tell me to hit the road.

*I wouldn't go back to Hogwarts, even if I could, but maybe I could get my job back waitressing at the diner?*

*Maybe I'd move back home and live with Gran?*

*Maybe I could stay on his health insurance plan until after the baby was born?*

*We'd probably have to postpone the divorce until then.*

*Divorce.*

The more time I sat staring into *this Eric's* eyes, the easier it became for me to separate him from My Eric. My pragmatic side was kicking in so my emotional side could cower and hide. Maybe, if I tried really hard, I could almost pretend he'd been nothing but a dream, at least until I felt the first kick in my abdomen anyway.

I could do it alone if I had to; raise our baby by myself; women around the world did it every day. I just hoped I wouldn't be forced to.

"I saw the pictures," he said quietly.

Confused, I asked, "What pictures? The paparazzi ones online?" I avoided them at all costs after seeing that first one on the cover of the magazine, in the checkout line, with Eric carrying me out of the casino on the morning after our wedding.

"No, the ones taken by the photographer for GQ," he answered.

"Oh." I hadn't seen them yet and I didn't think I was ready to now, especially not knowing where *this Eric* and I stood. He definitely wasn't ready to hear about the baby and I wasn't ready to tell him. If he chose to not even try to recapture what we'd had together, I doubted I would ever tell him.

"There was something... there, something between us that could be seen through the lens."

He didn't sound angry, which I took as a good sign, but I was still cautious, throwing up every shield I could form around my heart, as I admitted, "We'd finally just admitted we were in love with one another the night before those pictures were taken."

I physically cringed after saying the words, with my eyes slamming shut and my hands balling into fists, waiting for his denial; waiting for Asshole Eric to lash out and ruin my fondest memories, but it never came. Instead I felt his hand pry one of my fists open and his finger traced my now open palm. When I felt him twist my wedding ring, raising it higher up my finger a little, I opened my eyes to see him staring down at my tattoo. He traced that as well before his eyes shot back to his own tattoo and then finally rose up to meet my own as he said, "It showed."

I didn't know what to say to that having already began trying to mentally prepare myself to move out of his house; out of his life. I didn't want to get my hopes up thinking he'd be willing to give us another shot when he might rip my heart out instead, so I just silently waited to hear the verdict and shored up my shields.

"I..." he hesitated, as though English was a second language for him and he couldn't find the words he wanted to say. Finally he admitted, "I want to remember. I want to know why it is I feel the way I do whenever you're around."

"How do I make you feel?" I asked, almost afraid to know the answer.

His gaze dropped back to our still connected hands, *Eric's* and *Sookie's* each prominently displayed, before looking back at me and saying, "Better."

Eric's free hand rose up and wiped away the tears I didn't know were falling down my cheeks, almost whining as he pleaded, "Stoooppp."

It was enough to make me smile and I felt a small piece of the shield around my heart chip away when I admitted, "You make me feel better too." It wasn't a lie; just being in his presence was soothing, but it also seemed to tame my morning sickness since I hadn't felt queasy once after walking through his door.

Eric smiled in return and said, "I want to try. *Us*," he muttered like it was another foreign word. "I promise I won't cheat on you in the meantime."

I almost gloated that he wouldn't be able to anyway, with his leg in a cast and no car to go anywhere, but then I reminded myself who was lying in front of me. Eric Northman. He could probably charm one of his nurses into more than just a sponge bath, but before that green-eyed monster had the chance to rear its ugly head, I squashed it back down. He'd made a similar promise to me once before and had kept it, so I'd have to give him the benefit of the doubt now, if only for my own sanity.

"Okay," I smiled back.

His smile turned lustful, as he said, "Now... tell me about the second first time we fu... *made love*."

*Quit choking on the concept! It wasn't 'fucking'!*

*Was it?*

*No. Definitely not.*

"Well..." I steeled my resolve, trying to come up with the most clinical terms I could think of, like 'fornicating' and 'copulation', when I was saved by Dr. Lee walking into the room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Northman. How's the patient feeling today?" he asked.

I saw Eric's look of unease hearing the term 'Mrs. Northman' and to be honest; I still wasn't used to hearing it either, so I didn't get upset at him. Eric just responded, "Fine."

Dr. Lee flipped through his charts and performed a brief exam on Eric before saying, "Well, everything seems to be in order physically. Have any of your memories returned?"

Eric looked at me before looking back at Dr. Lee and saying, "Maybe. I had a dream last night that... *my wife* thinks might be part of a memory."

Dr. Lee's smile brightened as he said, "That's good. It'll most likely come back to you in pieces, like a jigsaw puzzle, but in random order. It'll be up to you to put them into sequence with the help of your family and friends." He glanced back down at the chart as he said, "I don't think there's much more we can do for you here other than to charge you for another day, so how would you like to get released this afternoon?"

I smiled thinking there'd be no slutty nurse sponge bath for him tonight and Eric immediately replied, "That sounds great."

"Okay, well I'll go get started on the paperwork and you should be out of here in a couple of hours," he responded before walking out the door.

Eric looked at me with a small smile saying, "Well, I guess I'm coming home."

He almost looked like My Eric and I couldn't help smiling in return saying, "I guess you are." When neither one of us said anything else, I called Alcide to tell him we'd be needing a ride soon and began packing up all of Eric's things into the duffle bag I'd left in his room. I'd spoken to Pam earlier that day, so she knew I would be coming to visit Eric and when she called me to see how it was going, I could tell it irked Eric that she was checking on me instead of him.

*'That's right,'* I wanted to say. *'She's Team Sookie!'* but I kept my thoughts to myself.

I'd already made sure Pam had brought a change of clothes for Eric to wear home from the hospital when she'd stopped by the house two weeks earlier to get clothes for me and after some awkwardness (on my part because any and every side of Eric had no problem with nudity) I helped him change into a pair of basketball shorts and a t-shirt. I even almost made myself believe he wasn't going commando under those shorts.

Almost.

Alcide arrived just as I finished packing the last of his things and took the bag down to his truck while we waited for an orderly to bring a wheelchair for Eric. They must've figured he would be grumpy about it because the man they sent would've towered over Eric even if he could stand on his own, so he only grumbled a little over the '*retarded hospital policy*' on the way to the underground parking garage. There was a private entrance/exit at the hospital so we didn't have to worry about cameras being shoved into our faces coming and going, and, according to Alcide, someone had already leaked to the press Eric was being released the following day so no one expected us to be leaving. Alcide's windows were tinted dark and we made it home shortly thereafter without any fanfare.

I could tell Eric was tired and not long after Alcide deposited him on the couch in the family room, he was sound asleep. Alcide found a pair of crutches in Eric's garage that I left leaning up against the couch and after I assured him I could take care of everything else, Alcide left to go get another Audi, per Eric's orders on the way home. He wouldn't be able to drive anytime soon so he was holding off on replacing his corvette for the time being. I made myself busy doing laundry and since I hadn't felt nauseous at all, I thought I'd tempt fate and try cooking dinner for us. I resorted to making the same dinner I'd made for him the first time, fried chicken and home fries, hoping it might trigger another memory while hoping I wouldn't get sick from the smell. The only thing I did differently was, instead of making another apple pie; I made a cherry pie per orders from Baby Northman.

They were both very demanding.

It felt good, doing something so normal, and I was happy knowing Eric was home, no matter what version he was. It was the first time, in what felt like a long time, that my world seemed right again. I was just pulling the last of the fried chicken from the pan when Eric hobbled into the kitchen on his crutches asking, "What smells so good?"

"Dinner," I said, turning and smiling at him as I carried the dish to the table. "Are you hungry?" I asked. Seeing him struggle to make his way to the table, I hurried over to him, but was unsure of how I could help him. "Are you okay? Maybe you should've stayed on the couch."

He eventually plopped down into a chair, letting out a large sigh, and said, "I'm fine. Just weak I guess, but I couldn't not follow the smell wafting out of the kitchen." His eyes glazed over seeing all of the food on the table and asked, "You cooked this?"

I smirked feeling at ease seeing that we were back to reliving what were now 'the good ole days' with him asking the obvious. "Yes Eric, I cooked this. As a matter of fact, *this* is the same meal I made when I cooked for you the first time."

"Really?" he asked with a mouth full of chicken.

*He was so lucky I already loved him.*



I just rolled my eyes at him so I wouldn't have to see the food he was chewing and sat down, filling my own plate and affirming, "Yes, really."

I couldn't help moaning in delight as soon as my tongue tasted the first bite of chicken I put into my mouth. It had been forever since I'd wanted anything solid to eat, much less take any pleasure in it, so I set aside all of my fears of it possibly reappearing later on and enjoyed the feeling while it lasted. It wasn't until I was licking a trail of honey that dripped from the biscuit in my hand, down my arm, that I noticed Eric had stopped eating to watch me. I had probably looked like a pig scarfing down everything on my plate and suddenly feeling self-conscious, I asked, "What's wrong?"

He swallowed, even though there was nothing in his mouth, and said, "Nothing's wrong." His tongue darted out and licked his lips as his eyes narrowed when he said, "I'm just wondering what *other* noises you make."

*Oh boy.*

My libido hopped up and down in time with my now staccato heartbeat, but I tamped it down saying, "We're not going there Eric."

*We weren't.*

*Do you hear me Wicked and Immoral?*

*Not. Going. There.*

"*Going where Sookie?*" he purred, while he eyefucked the Wonder Twins.

*He's not My Eric. He's not My Eric.*

"Down the Northman Happy Trail," I answered. "By the way, my eyes are up *here*," I said, pointing at me face. "Not down here," I said, pointing back and forth between the girls.

"But they're staring at me," he replied. "I think they've missed me," he said, gesturing with his eyes towards my breasts.

Looking down, I could tell my bra did nothing to hide the fact that my nipples were hard, but they couldn't be held responsible. They *did* miss him, but they weren't in charge. Not yet anyway. "Eric," I huffed. "Of course I'm attracted to you," I admitted, feeling the blush rise up on my cheeks. "But I'm not going to have sex with you."

"Why not?" he asked. "You've already admitted that you love me; that we've been intimate. Why stop now?"

"Because you've already admitted I only make you feel *better*. It's a good start, but it's not enough. I need to know you feel *more* than that for me to be able to be with you like that again."

*God, I hoped he felt it soon.*

"But why? *Maybe* if we have sex, it'll make me remember."

"Because Eric," I huffed angrily as I stood and started clearing away the dinner dishes. I stopped and leaned against the counter with my back facing him and whispered so low I wasn't sure he'd hear me, "Because I *do* love you. Because it would mean everything to me and I couldn't stand it if it meant nothing more than a good time to you when it was all over."

I took a deep breath and wiped away the stray tear or two that had leaked from my eyes before breaking the ever growing silence between us by asking, "Dessert?"

I made myself load the dishwasher while he remained silently seated at the table until there was nothing left for me to do and I had no choice but to turn and face him. He opened and closed his mouth several times, swallowing whatever he was trying to say, before finally answering, "Yes. Dessert sounds great."

I released the breath I didn't know I'd been holding and carved out two slices of cherry pie before carrying the plates over to the table. Rather than address the white elephant, which was not only standing in the room, but was practically shitting at the table and shouting 'Look at me!' I shoved a forkful of pie into my mouth. I figured if I couldn't make Daddy Northman happy, I could at least make Baby Northman happy and it was *very* happy as soon as the pie hit my taste buds. It was still so odd to be salivating over something I couldn't stand the taste of until just a couple of weeks earlier, but my hands couldn't shovel the pie into my mouth fast enough. I finished eating before Eric and stood up to rinse my plate off as he stated, "I guess we have *that* in common."

*Ignoring table shitting white elephants?*

With my raised eyebrow he elaborated, "Cherries. They're my favorite fruit."

*Your baby's too.*

"Yeah, I guess we do," I answered evasively, mentally adding '*now*'. When he released a giant yawn that brought tears to his eyes I suggested, "Why don't you go and lie down on the couch for a bit?"

He thought about it for a second before saying, "I'd rather take a shower first, but..." he gestured towards his leg cast. His eyes found mine again before dropping to the table in front of him as he asked, "Would you... help me?"

I could tell it cost him some of his pride to ask me for help, so I swallowed my own and said, "Of course I'll help you Eric." When his now flirty eyes found my own again, I sent another stern warning to Wicked and Immoral while wondering, who was going to help *me*?

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## Chapter 69

### EPOV

When I woke up on the couch, I lay there for a few minutes thinking over everything that had happened that day. Hearing Sookie tell me things about myself, that I had no memory of, left me frustrated and angry. Nothing she described sounded familiar at all and even more annoying was the fact that my actions were out of character for me. I didn't want to believe I would've voluntarily flown all the way to Louisiana for her if we hadn't already been fucking (and fucking *well* for me to make the effort), but I couldn't come up with any denials, other than my disbelief, since I had no memory of it. But, to hear her say with conviction that I loved her and she loved me; that she would *leave* me if I cheated on her made my heart lurch.

*Why did I care?*

*Shouldn't I want for her to leave?*

I'd never spent more than a long weekend with the same woman before getting bored and sending them on their way, but I'd apparently been with Sookie for three weeks, prior to the accident, and according to Pam I still couldn't get enough of her. When she demanded my fidelity my first instinct was to scoff, but just looking at her made me hold back. Other than when I'd first discovered my booty-call contacts had been erased, I hadn't thought about another woman *once*. I'd even ignored the flirtatious smiles given by the nurses (one even offered me a sponge bath) and other hospital workers who'd been in my room earlier that day because my every thought was consumed by Sookie.

*What was she doing?*

*Did she really love me?*

*Did I really love her?*

*Was the rest of her body just as soft as her lips?*

I wanted to find out the answers to all of those questions and made a promise to her I'd never thought I'd make to anyone; I would remain faithful. Before I even spoke the words I tried to conjure up the women from my past to see if, even now, I'd be interested in meeting up with them and found that I wasn't. I couldn't deny that I felt drawn to Sookie and, for the moment at least, no one else held any appeal for me.

Hell, even Pam, who I considered my closest friend (which was really sad if I thought about it), seemed more concerned about *her* than *me*, and knowing Pam was loyal to a fault brought home the idea that perhaps Sookie really was different. Alcide seemed just as affected and when I

bitched about the missing posters and the poker table now being in the den, as he dropped me onto the couch, he was quick to tell me to shut the fuck up and not upset Sookie.

I felt like I was in an alternate reality, dropped into my life at a point in the future, and left to make sense of everything, but a part of me hoped I wouldn't be left to do it on my own and I couldn't shake the feeling that Sookie was the key to it all.

The smells wafting out of the kitchen drew me like a moth to a flame and I was halfway there before I'd even realized I'd gotten up. Seeing her standing at the stove, with her hips swaying to a song only she could hear, brought back that unfamiliar tug in my chest. My first thought was she belonged there, but thoughts of her barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen made my rational side squelch my inner caveman and speak up before she realized I was watching her. I was left dazzled by her responding smile, so I played it off and hobbled to the unfamiliar table sitting where my poker table had once resided. I couldn't even muster up any anger over it seeing it was filled with food that *she* apparently cooked.

*Good food.*

My eyes were drawn to her, secretly watching her every movement as she ate her dinner, and I wondered how someone so beautiful (and that could cook) was unattached. Or at least *had* been unattached until I came along. There had to be a bad side to her that I just hadn't seen yet, but hearing her moan in delight as she ate had me wanting to see her *bad* side; specifically, her *naughty* side. When her tongue darted out to lick away the honey trailing down her arm all I wanted to do was pull her into my lap and fuck her until dawn, but knowing that she had to be on board for that to happen I decided to test the waters.

When I mentioned wanting to know what others noises she made, with the sexual undertone of my statement prevalent, the flush of her skin and her increased breathing made me think I would get my wish, so when she denied me saying, "We're not going there Eric," I was left confused.

*She'd said she loved me.*

*She'd admitted we'd been intimate.*

*Her breasts were clearly reaching for me.*

*What was the problem?*

Apparently the problem was *because* she loved me, which didn't make any sense until she whispered her confession that she wouldn't be able to stand it if didn't feel anything for *her* when it was over. I had no way of knowing *how* I would feel about her, but knowing how I'd felt in the past after fucking someone (you can leave now) I found I didn't want to lie to her. She held the key to my past, my missing memories, and for whatever reason I didn't want to hurt her.

*Maybe it was because of everything Pam had told me.*

*Maybe it was because of what I'd seen in the pictures and video.*

*Maybe it was just her.*

I could tell she was wiping away the tears I didn't want to see and even though I was almost certain my memories would return if we had sex, I didn't want to push the issue.

*Not yet anyway.*

So when she decided to change the subject, I let it go for now. I knew she wanted me and I most certainly wanted her, so it was just a matter of time until I'd get my way. That didn't mean I wouldn't try and speed up the process though, so when she agreed to help me shower I hoped it would be one step forward in Operation Seduce Sookie.

I could tell she was flustered over the idea of helping me shower and was just thankful that she seemed to care enough about me to not turn me down when I'd asked, but as I slowly made my way upstairs I could feel my energy draining from me with every step I climbed. Sookie hovered behind me and I was suddenly more concerned for her safety, than fucking her, if I should happen to fall backwards knowing I'd hurt her on my way down. Stopping halfway up the stairs, I turned to her and said, "Why don't you go up ahead of me."

"No! What if you fall?" she asked.

"That's why I want you to go ahead of me. I'm already banged up, so it won't make a difference."

The stern set of her jaw gave away her stance on the matter before she ever opened her mouth. "Don't be ridiculous, now get marching," she ordered with her finger pointing up the stairs. When I didn't budge she crossed her arms, unknowingly hoisting her breasts up and making me lose focus for a moment, before saying, "I can stand here all night. How about you?"

Considering the wall was holding me up more than my own physical strength at the moment I gave in and painstakingly inched my way further up the stairs until I finally reached the top landing. After seeing the small changes downstairs, I wasn't sure what to expect walking into my bedroom, but from what I could tell, it looked exactly as I'd remembered it.

*I wasn't expecting it.*

I'd thought there'd be some hint of Sookie's presence within those four walls, but when she ran back downstairs to get the waterproof cover for my cast we'd been given at the hospital, I took the opportunity to look around and found nothing of hers. My closet held only my clothes and when I peeked into the bathroom, only my things were there. I suddenly felt guilty thinking she must have moved all of her things out of our room, after I'd snapped at her the day before when I'd woken up, thinking I wouldn't want her there.

*Did I want her there?*

I'd never shared *my* bed with anyone else and while I normally wasn't the touchy feely type, unless fucking was involved, I couldn't deny the sense of calm I felt whenever I touched *her*. As soon as she walked back into the room, the cast cover in hand, I said, "I'm sorry for snapping at you yesterday. Is that why you moved your things out of our room?"

*Our room?*

I wasn't sure if her 'deer in the headlights' look was due to the fact I apologized or if it was because I may have sounded a bit pathetic asking why we weren't sharing closet space, but I was only left more confused when she said, "Actually, I never moved my things in here."

"Why?" It didn't make sense if everything she'd told me was true.

She blushed while staring at her feet before finally saying, "Well, we weren't *together* together when I first moved in, so I used the spare room across the hall. After things changed with us, between the trip to Louisiana, the photo shoot, and the busy week we had after that, I guess we just never got around to discussing it."

"So we never shared a bed?"

*Why was I so disappointed?*

"No, we did. I just never moved my things in here is all." She paused for a moment before adding, "But don't worry, I'll go back to sleeping in the spare room."

*Why was I so disappointed?*

I wanted to tell her 'no', that I *wanted* her to share my bed if only so I could test my theory and see if there really was something different about her; something different between *us*, but I didn't. Something just didn't sit right with me, after hearing how *in love* we were, it didn't make sense that we weren't sharing the bedroom.

Maybe it was all an act. She didn't know I'd be coming home tonight, so maybe if she had she would've moved her things in here and I would've been none the wiser. I realized I had actually started to let myself believe all of her stories, but now I wasn't so sure.

I felt myself moments away from snapping at her again, wanting to call her a liar, until I remembered she'd known about the Whales' Song book from my childhood. If I had been willing to share *that* with her, surely I would've been willing to share my bed?

*Stupid fucking emotional roller coaster.*

When all I did was sigh, Sookie took that as my cue to move on from what could've been a potentially emotional exchange by saying, "I'll go get the shower started," and walked into the bathroom. I heard the shower turn on seconds later and she reappeared in the doorway asking, "Um... do you need help? Undressing?"

I let myself get lost in the blush that rose up on her skin and even though I felt like I had the energy to undress by myself, I let my body sag against the wall as I said, "Would you mind? I feel drained."

*Feel free to drain other parts of my body as well.*

"Of course," she smiled and hesitantly walked over to me. I could tell she was feeling a little uncomfortable as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath before grabbing onto the hem of my shirt and slowly lifting it up my chest. My eyes stayed on hers as she lifted it higher and I could've sworn they glazed over a bit when she took in my chest in front of her, but I said nothing and slouched further down the wall so she could pull the shirt over my head. I'd temporarily forgotten my torso was wrapped tightly in an Ace bandage until her fingers slid along the edge and she slowly unwound it from around my body until I was left in nothing more than my cast and my shorts.

I had never been uncomfortable with nudity and been undressed by more women than I could count, but there was something different about the way Sookie undressed me. There was a longing in her eyes, but her movements were almost timid, so I stayed silent, afraid one word from me would have her bolting from the room. But it wasn't just that; there was something else about the way she looked at me, the way she touched me that left me feeling... something. Something I couldn't describe.

We seemed to be at an impasse of sorts when she finally took a step back and said, "Come into the bathroom and I'll wrap up your leg, so you can get into the shower." I hoped she didn't expect that I would keep my shorts on, but I said nothing and just nodded before heading into the bathroom. She motioned for me to lean up against the vanity as she squatted down in front of me and started rolling the blue latex cover up my leg like a giant sock. The sole appeared to be nonskid and I was confused by the whole thing, but Sookie seemed to know what she was doing. The cast ended at the middle of my thigh and she pulled the leg of my shorts up higher on my thigh so the top cuff was a couple of inches above my cast, before taking a small plastic squeeze pump and putting it into the open valve attached to the cover. She pumped it several times with the air being sucked out with every squeeze until it was vacuum sealed, effectively blocking my cast from any water sliding in.

"Does that feel alright? Is it too tight?" she asked with her eyes darting from her handiwork to my face.

"No, it feels fine," I said. The longer I remained upright, the weaker I felt, but with Operation Seduce Sookie still in effect I added, "It's certainly a lot more latex than I'm used to wearing," and was rewarded with another blush rising up her cheeks as she mumbled something under her breath that I didn't catch.

"What was that?" I asked.

Her blush only deepened as she said, "Nothing." She refused to meet my eyes with hers trained on my shorts, but without any looks or unnecessary touches, she reached forward and slid them

down my legs, keeping her eyes on my feet as I stepped out of them. My shower had a bench seat inside and she stayed at my side until I was finally able to sit down. All of the moving around after being sedentary for so long was really starting to wear me out and it must have shown because before she shut the shower door all of the way her eyes finally met mine as she asked, "Do you want me to come in there with you to help?"

"Yes." Every part of me wanted her in there with me and Eric Junior stirred just hearing her offer.

She chewed on her bottom lip for a moment before saying, "Okay. I'll be right back," and then she darted out of the room. I couldn't decide whether or not I should be embarrassed about the wood I was sporting knowing I was about to see her naked, but when she slipped into the shower with me, I know my mouth was gaping open seeing her.

*She wasn't naked!*

She'd pulled her hair up on top of her head, so I could see her swimsuit tie sticking out on the back of her neck, poking through the top of the large t-shirt that covered her all the way to the middle of her thighs.

"That's not fair!" I whined out, speaking without thinking.

She eyed my wood for a split second before smirking back at me saying, "Haven't you heard? Life's not fair Eric," as she pulled down one of the showerheads and tilted my chin up to wet my hair.

The feel of her fingers lathering the shampoo in my hair and massaging my scalp felt like a little bit of heaven and I mumbled out, "Haven't *you* heard?" When she didn't say anything I opened one eye to see if she was listening and said, "The bird is the word."

"Argh!" she huffed. "Jason used to do that shit to me all the time! Now I'm gonna be hearing Peter Griffin singing '*The bird bird bird, the bird is the word,*' all freakin' night!"

I loved Family Guy and couldn't stop the laughter from erupting from my chest before I zeroed in on what she'd said. Jason.

*Was that her ex?*

*The 'only other guy' she'd been with and, more than likely, he could still remember it?*

That thought killed both my wood and laughter and I tried to sound like I didn't want to kill someone as I asked, "Uh, is that your ex?"

Sookie had been in the process of rinsing the shampoo from my hair, so my eyes were closed and I was unprepared for the loud laughter she'd let out, as well as the showerhead bouncing off the top of my head when she'd let it go.



"Ow!" I said as I automatically sat forward. With my eyes still closed I didn't realize I would come face to breasts, but that's what happened. My hands which had been rising up to rub the sore spot on top of my head decided to snake around her waist instead and I opened my eyes seeing her wet t-shirt now clung to her every curve.

*She had a lot of them.*

*I liked them all.*

"Fuck!" I hissed, as the shampoo ran into my open eyes, making them automatically close with my arms releasing Sookie in order to grope for the showerhead to rinse my eyes.

"Hold still," she laughed and I felt the water hit my face as I rubbed the soap from my eyes.

She was still giggling when I could finally see again and I wondered if she'd been able to tell I didn't particularly care for the fact I'd reminded her of her ex. I had no idea *why* I felt that way, but I did. "What's so funny," I asked, wanting confirmation of my...*enemy? Rival? Something?*

He was definitely *something*.

"You ya nut. *Jason* is my *brother*," she laughed again. "You've met him."

"Oh," I said with my muscles relaxing. "I thought he was your ex."

"You've met him too," she said matter-of-factly as she poured some shower gel onto a wash cloth and started washing down my body.

I hated the fact I couldn't enjoy her hands moving across my body because all I could think of was I'd met her fucking ex and now I couldn't remember him.

*Was he better looking than me?*

*Did he have more money?*

*Was he... bigger than me?*

The odds were, at some point, I knew at least two answers out of those three questions, but I wasn't sure how I'd bring it up now. I didn't want her to know it bothered me, especially considering she only had *one* person in her past and I had... *many more*.

It turned out I didn't have to ask because Sookie offered, "You know him from the gym. He's a trainer there."

*Tray?* Just the thought of him knowing Sookie in the biblical sense, especially when she was now denying me, had me wanting to personally neuter him the next time I saw him, but when the

red haze cleared I realized it couldn't have been Tray. He'd never been engaged, but I knew of *another* trainer who had been.

"Quinn?" I asked, while inside I was screaming '*No!*' The thought of *that* douche bag's paws all over her was a hundred times worse and I wondered if I hit my head against the tile wall hard enough, whether or not it would knock *that* memory right back out again.

"Yes," she huffed. "Quinn. You already told me about you all's little competition with women. Congratulations on your win," she ended sarcastically.

"Sookie," I said, grabbing her hand. I waited for her to look into my eyes and could see she was upset, but whether or not it was over me or him, I didn't know. I found it didn't matter at the moment and said sincerely, "I'm sorry."

"For what Eric?" she asked.

Good question. "For upsetting you?"

My unplanned apology seemed to help because she smiled saying, "I'm fine," as her hands got busy cleaning me once again. She was very thorough with the exception of *one* area in particular and I wasn't surprised when she placed the wash cloth into my hand saying, "You take care of cleaning *that*," before slipping out the shower door.

By the time I'd finished cleaning *that* and rinsing off, I turned the water off and slid the shower door open seeing Sookie had already taken off her wet t-shirt and had wrapped her body in a towel, as she stood there with another one waiting in her hands. She climbed back into the shower and dried me as I sat there on the bench before handing me one of my crutches to lean on as she wrapped the towel around my waist. "Why are you bothering Sookie? You've already seen *all* of me." She blushed again, so I added, "And it's completely unfair that I didn't get to see you naked. I thought marriage was supposed to be about equality."

It wasn't my *best* argument, but I was tired.

"Fine," she said with my hopes rising up thinking that was a lot easier than I'd expected. Only instead of stripping herself, Sookie snatched the towel from around my waist as she asked, "Better? I know you prefer to sleep naked."

I reached for her towel, but she was faster than me at the moment, so I just huffed my way to the bed and sat down on the edge. Sookie walked over and opened the valve on the side of the cast cover while running her fingers along the top cuff and allowing air back in so she could pull it off. After she rewrapped my ribs with the Ace bandage, she disappeared into the bathroom and after I inched my way onto the bed, I looked up and saw her walking out of my room with that unfamiliar feeling in my chest coming back.

*Was she coming back?*

*Was she even going to say goodnight?*

*Did she want to sleep in here with me?*

*Did I want her too?*

My earlier question of whether or not she'd shared my bed previously was answered as soon as I grabbed the pillow next to my own. It was covered in her scent and I buried my face into it, inhaling deeply, when I heard a noise on the other side of the bed. Removing the pillow from my face, I saw Sookie crouched down and when she stood I saw she had put on a nightgown and now had a phone charger in her hand.

"Sorry, I just wanted to charge my phone."

*Was that her side of the bed?*

She stood there for another moment in silence, but when I didn't say anything her eyes dropped from mine and she walked to the doorway before turning to face me again. "I'll just leave our doors open so if you need anything, just yell for me and I'll come."

If she hadn't looked so sad I would've made a joke about whether or not she yelled when she came.

If I hadn't felt so sad seeing her walk away I might've managed to thank her for everything she'd done for me.

Feeling the ache in my chest build, I buried my face into her pillow so I wouldn't yell out for her instead.

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## **Chapter 72: Chapter 70**

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### Chapter 70

#### **SPOV**

I lingered in the hallway, after leaving Eric's room, hoping to hear him call out my name and ask me to come back. I wanted him to ask me to stay and talk, or even just lie there next to him silently staring at one another, but when he didn't I had no choice but to go to the spare room.

*My room.*

Climbing into bed, a bed I couldn't remember the last time I'd slept in, I tried to convince myself it was for the best anyway. Lord knows I had a hard enough time trying to wash his naked body in the shower and if he hadn't made the joke about the bird being the word, I might've ended up

washing his hair another ten times, afraid to allow Wicked and Immoral any lower on his body. Him confusing Jason for my ex sealed the deal and it was those thoughts, along with remembering Eric's and Quinn's pick-up games had nothing to do with basketball, that allowed me to finish the job. Mostly anyway.

*There was no way Wicked or Immoral were going to reacquaint themselves with the Kraken.*

*Not yet anyway.*

I don't know how long I lay there, tossing and turning, with my eyes watering because I was so desperately tired. Dr. Ludwig had told me what I should expect over the next few weeks and she wasn't kidding when she'd said I'd feel like the Sandman was stalking me, but I just couldn't settle my mind or my body long enough to go to sleep. Opening my eyes I spied the laundry basket I'd dropped just inside the doorway and, with my ears peeled for the slightest sound and my eyes darting to the open door like I was on my own mission impossible, I climbed out of bed.

Pulling Eric's shirt from the pile, the one I hoped he didn't notice me taking from his room earlier after his shower, I removed my nightgown and pulled it on. I'd kept it like a closet smoker keeping a hidden pack of cigarettes; a 'break open in case of emergency' pack and took a long drag of Eric's scent into my lungs. Even as I did it, I berated myself for being so weak. I couldn't keep fooling myself knowing things might not work out between us, but I was desperate. As I lay back in bed my desperate mind clutched at straws wondering what it would take to get My Eric back. I wished I was Mr. Spock because then we could perform a Vulcan mind meld and he would see it all; he would know that he loved me and I loved him back. Of course he might not find me as attractive if I looked like Leonard Nimoy, but as I finally drifted off to sleep a part of me thought he probably wouldn't mind it if I had dainty pointed ears.

I woke up the next morning feeling surprisingly well rested and thought, just maybe, I would be able to manage getting a good night's sleep even though Eric wasn't at my side, but I wasn't ready to tempt fate and try to get through the night without my emergency Eric shirt. However, my internal kudos over my tiny accomplishment were halted as soon as I realized I wasn't alone in the bed. I could feel his breaths at the back of my neck, the heat of his body along my back, and when I shifted slightly, his arm tightened around my waist as he mumbled, "Morning."

I wondered what made him seek me out in the middle of the night.

*Had he called out for me and I didn't hear him?*

*Why didn't he wake me up?*

*Should I be mad at him for getting into the bed uninvited?*

*Oh God...was he NAKED?*

*Should I be mad if he was?*

*Should I be mad if he wasn't?*

Wicked was clearly happy he was there and showed her affection by lacing my fingers with his own, as my traitorous body inched ever so closer to his, while I said, "Morning?" It took a minute for my mouth to catch up with my brain when I finally asked, "Eric? Is something wrong? Why are you in bed with me?"

I couldn't even bring myself to say 'my bed' because it didn't feel like it was, but I was left utterly confused when he ignored my questions and asked his own. "Who's Scotty?"

"What?" I didn't know anyone named Scotty.

"Scotty. You were talking in your sleep and said something about Scotty and power and when I came in here to see what was wrong, it looked like you were having a cage match with your sheets." He took a deep breath and yawned out, "Your sheets were winning."

I vaguely recalled pieces of my dream and figured my Vulcan mind meld thoughts right before falling asleep explained the Star Trek overtones in my dreams from the night before, but unwilling to share that little tidbit I asked, "But what are you doing in bed with me?"

His arm tightened around me once more and I felt his lips smile against my neck as he said, "I'm saving you from your sheets."

*Dammit all to hell.*

I couldn't help smiling in return and hoped like hell he *wasn't* naked because it was hard enough resisting him when he wasn't being so sweet.

*Speaking of hard...*

The beast was clearly stirring behind me and I wanted to simultaneously bolt from the bed and ride him like a bucking bronco, but I refrained from doing either and hesitantly asked, "Um... you're not naked are you?" while not really knowing which way I wanted him to answer that question.

I could feel his lips change from a smile to a smirk at my neck as he said, "Well, when I walked in here I noticed my shorts were in the laundry basket and I slipped them on before coming to your rescue." I sighed, a mixture of relief and disappointment, until he continued, "I would've put on my shirt, but I couldn't find it. That is until I saved you from your sheet and saw you were wearing it."

Heat flooded my cheeks and I buried my face into my pillow, thankful he was behind me, and was completely mortified at having my Eric Northman addiction outed by the man himself. My hopes that he would let the issue drop were dashed as he asked, "Why are you wearing my shirt Sookie?"

*Scotty? Feel free to beam me up! Right fucking now would be great!*

My mind was once again grasping at straws looking for a way out of the predicament I was in. I knew the power the Wonder Twins held over him and half thought about whipping his shirt off and handing it back to him, but that would only lead to that rodeo ride I was trying to avoid, so instead I blanketed myself in my cowardice and ignored his question completely.

"Do you want me to make you breakfast?" I asked.

*Food is a good distraction, right? He likes food.*

"Are you going to answer my question?"

*Clutch...grasp...clutch...grasp...*

"Do you want eggs? Or I could make pancakes. I think there're some fresh blueberries in the refrigerator. Do you want blueberry pancakes?"

"Sookie..."

*My clutching and grasping found nothing but air...*

Undeterred and slightly unhinged, I asked, "Bacon or sausage?" I scooted from the bed and ran into the bathroom saying, "Never mind, I'll just make both," before shutting the door behind me. I took my time washing my hands, going pee, washing my hands again, brushing my teeth, brushing my hair, washing my hairbrush, and picking lint from the towel before I finally took a chance and opened the door just enough that I could peer through the crack.

*I needed a peephole installed on my bathroom door because he was still lying there.*

Picking right back up where our dual conversations had left off, like I hadn't been hiding in the bathroom for thirty minutes, he asked, "So are you going to tell me why you're wearing my shirt?"

I refused to give in and crossed my arms in front of me as I huffed, "If you don't want blueberry pancakes, I could make chocolate chip ones instead."

His raised eyebrow was either appraising me or mocking me, I couldn't be sure, but he eventually said, "If I pick one will you answer *my* question?"

"I doubt it," I smirked back. "You see, you'll either eat whatever I cook or you won't, but there're some cherry PopTarts downstairs so you won't starve to death in the meantime."

"Stubborn..." he mock glared at me.

"Is spelled S-O-O-K-I-E," I mock glared back. "If you forget how to spell it, just look down at your left hand." Another piece of my newly formed shield around my heart fell away as I saw him fighting uselessly against the grin that eventually took over his face.

*I missed that grin and his adorkable overbite.*

When he started to sit up on the bed, I held his crutches out in front of him so he could pull himself up and we slowly made our way downstairs. As soon as we reached the kitchen he said, "Blueberry."

"Blueberry it is," I smiled back at him.

I started gathering the ingredients together when he mumbled through another yawn, "I could really go for some coffee."

"Oh!" I'd begrudgingly given up coffee since caffeine was a no-no item on my Do's and Don'ts pregnancy list, but offered, "I'll put a pot on for you."

"Thanks. Do you not drink coffee?" he asked, a little surprised.

*Not anymore.*

*Was shrugging my shoulders considered telling a lie?*

I shrugged my shoulders and started the coffeemaker before pulling out the bacon and sausage from the refrigerator. Initially, the only sounds in the kitchen were of the food cooking and the coffee brewing, until I fixed him a cup and brought it over to him where he sat at the kitchen table. Taking it from my hand, he glanced into the mug studying the contents before looking back at me and said, "Thanks."

"You're welcome?" He had a funny look on his face that made me ask, "Everything okay?"

"Yeah...it's just, you know...weird? You knew how I liked my coffee without having to ask me."

*That's not the ONLY thing I know how to do that you LIKE.*

"Sookie?" Hearing him say my name, I snapped out of my porn haze and saw Eric was waving his free hand up and down in front of me. "Why are you blushing?" he asked.

Flushed was the more appropriate term, but when coupled with 'awkward' and 'dirty mind' it was no wonder I knocked down his crutches from where they'd been leaning against the table as I tried to escape back to the safety of the stove. I bent over and quickly set them to rights again before heading back over to the frying pan to turn the meat where I was much safer with the splattering grease than I was anywhere near him.

"Sookie? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine. Just hot I guess." I thought about how that might've sounded, given my bow-chicka-wow-wow thoughts, and quickly added, "You know... from the stove and cooking, where there's heat... and grease... and stuff." I threw in another shrug because shrugs equaled 'not lying'.

*Damn the Northman sexified genes already wreaking havoc with my hormones.*

He thankfully let the topic go and, aside from him accidentally knocking his crutches over a few times and making me stop whatever I was doing so I could pick them up again (which seemed to amuse him to no end), I was able to cook in peace and quiet. My appetite was returning with a vengeance and I hadn't felt sick at all since I'd gone to visit Eric at the hospital the day before, so I took advantage of the let-up from my upchuck by clearing my plate and going back for seconds.

*Baby Northman had officially given their seal of approval where blueberry pancakes were concerned.*

My fork, dripping with pancakes and syrup, paused halfway to my mouth when Eric broke the silence saying, "You sure eat a lot."

Echoes of Quinn floated through my brain as I looked back at him and slowly set my fork back down on my plate. I can only imagine what my face looked like, probably a mixture of hurt and angry humiliation based on what I was feeling, when Eric's face turned into one of horror saying, "No! Fuck! I didn't mean it like *that*."

Unfortunately, my brain stopped listening after hearing, '*You're a big fat pig!*', no matter what words he'd actually used, and knowing I would only be getting bigger over the next eight months didn't help prevent my tears from falling. It seemed Eric's strength had returned because the next thing I knew he had leaned over, lifted me from my chair, and deposited me in his lap as he said, "Really! Please stop crying." My face buried itself into his shoulder, without asking me where it should be, and his hands rubbed up and down my back while I tried to control my rasping sobs.

*Stupid fucking hormones.*

*Stupid amnesiac man with stupid big fat mouth and super sperm.*

"Sookie," he pleaded. "All I meant was that I *liked* seeing you eat."

The sound I made resembled, "Pfff..." which was 'Sookie-speak' for, "Bitch, please..."

*Maybe I should call Lafayette to translate.*

Eric must've learned to speak Sookie when he'd learned Swahili because he answered, "I swear Sookie. All I meant was I like that you're not trying to pretend to be someone else, or eat nothing



but a raisin and celery stick as a meal. I never understood why women do that, but I like that you don't try to hide who you are around me."

*You haven't seen Jason's old football jersey I plan on wearing to hide my baby bump.*

The fear of hiding my pregnancy from him, no matter how long I could do it, was enough to scare my tears back into hiding. I knew I would have to tell him one day soon, but I quickly decided *that* day was not *today*. I pulled back to face him and could tell he didn't like seeing me so distraught, but, while my tears had stopped, I was still angry and didn't quite believe what he was saying. My old insecurities flooded through me as I tried to squirm from his lap, giving him the universal female 'fuck off' sign, saying, "Whatever."

Eric's arms only tightened their hold around me saying, "I'm not letting you up until you believe me."

"Are you sure about that? My fat ass might break your other leg soon if you don't let me go," I bit back.

"Sookie..." he sighed. He strengthened his grip and said, "Your ass isn't *fat*. It's perfect actually."

My mouth was already on a roll, so I ignored him and said, "And then you won't be able to get into the shower because your wheelchair won't fit, so I'll have to take you out back and hose you off like a dog, unless you *really* piss me off and I just push you into the pool." The images my mouth were creating were starting to amuse me, but I looked at him seriously as I said, "I doubt they make water wings for leg casts."

Undeterred by my rant, Eric just leered back at me saying, "Then it's a good thing *other* parts of me are *inflatable*." He moved my body on top of his lap and I could feel the Kraken stirring beneath me.

I was equal parts pissed and flattered, but since we weren't going *there*, pissed won out as I said, "How are you getting aroused over my fat ass?"

His eyes flashed with anger, at me or my fat ass I wasn't sure, but his lips turned into a smug grin as his leg darted out from underneath the table knocking over his crutches. They clattered to the floor while I looked back at him incredulously as I said, "I hope you're not expecting *me* to pick those up again."

*He could fucking crawl; hobble. I didn't care at that point. I'd roll an apple across the floor to him later on if he was hungry.*

His hands slid up my bare legs, but I pushed them back down as he asked, "What are you wearing Sookie?"

*This again?*

"Fine Eric! I'm wearing *your* shirt! I like wearing *your* shirt because *your* scent makes me *feel* better, but right now *your* attitude is making me *feel* like giving you a dick punch! Are you happy now?"

His eyes softened again and when I took a moment to run over everything I'd just said, I figured it wasn't over my threatened dick punch. I wasn't in any shape to have any deep and meaningful discussions over how I felt about him right now, so I was thankful, but confused, when all he said was, "That's *all* you're wearing."

*What?*

Thank God he hadn't said many words because I picked apart every one of them and my brain was kind of scattered.

*That's. All. You're. Wearing.*

*Sweet ten pound baby Jesus...*

"Eric Northman!" I shouted and when I realized just how high his hands had crept back up my thighs, I bolted off of his lap while pulling his shirt down lower on my body. The shirt which was the *only* thing I was wearing. I'd been in a hurry when I'd changed the night before and hadn't bothered with underwear when I put on my nightgown. Both it and Eric's shirt covered my body down to the middle of my thighs...when I was *standing*.

*Stupid pregnancy brain.*

His laughter echoed throughout the kitchen when I realized he'd been knocking over his crutches on purpose because I would bend over, in front of him, to pick them back up and I pointed at them while glaring back at him accusing, "You did that on purpose!"

*Duh!*

His expression had already given me my answer as he confirmed, "Yep! Worked like a charm too." His face positively beamed and I couldn't muster up enough indignant anger to really let him have it seeing him so happy, so all I did was try to keep my glare in place. When I said nothing about his pervy ways, his eyes warmed even more, as he continued, "If I didn't like your ass, I wouldn't have kept trying to get a good look at it."

I'd known from day one he'd liked my ass; he'd groped it and told Paprika it was spectacular, so I wasn't really mad at him and tried not to smile as I admonished him. "Pervert."

His face took on an instant innocent look, giving testament to his acting abilities, as he asked, "Who? Me?"

"Yes you," I shot back. "You're not fooling me with your innocent act."

"Your tan lines look...*edible*," he said with a low growl.

I flopped back down in my chair, careful to pull my shirt down with a napkin placed in my lap like it was an anti-Eric hoohah device, and picked up my fork while pointing at his plate and said, "*That's* the only thing you're eating in here."

I nearly choked on my pancakes when he asked, "So if we go back upstairs I can eat you?"

*Yes.*

"No!"

*Thank. Fucking. God my mouth and brain held hands at that precise moment.*

"In another room? The den perhaps?"

I didn't trust my brain and mouth to remain handholding friends for long, so I figured I'd better try and change the subject by asking, "Was there anything you wanted to do today?" His cocked eyebrow told me *exactly* what he wanted to do today and it had to do with edible tan lines on my naked ass, so I added, "Pam said she was going to stop by sometime today to see how you're doing and fill you in on what's been going on."

My attempts proved successful when his brow furrowed while he chewed on my words and a piece of bacon at the same time. Once he swallowed, he asked, "Did you and Pam know each other, you know...before Vegas?"

I was sure my look said it all, but I voiced my answer out loud replying, "No. Why?"

When he shrugged I wasn't sure if he was about to lie since shrugs were on the fine line of truth and paid close attention when he responded, "You two just seem *close*."

'Close' sounded like a bad word so I explained, "I guess we are, sort of. She helped me out a lot when you were in a coma. If it wasn't for her, I probably would've been a basket case." I really did owe her a lot, but short of setting her up with Angelina Jolie (she'd told me she was going through a brunette phase) there wasn't much I could offer her.

My answer seemed to satisfy Eric and as I started clearing the dishes away he said, "I guess I should go through my emails and see what's been going on until she gets here."

"Okay," I replied while scraping the plates over the trash can.

"Uh...Sookie?" he asked. When I looked over at him, he chewed on the side of his mouth while fighting off a grin and asked, "Would you mind?" His arm extended with his finger pointing at his crutches, sprawled across the floor from where he sat, too far away for him to reach.

I eyed him like he was the devil and walked into the laundry room where I pulled on a pair of clean underwear *and* shorts before going back into the kitchen, only instead of bending over to pick up his crutches, I slid them next to his chair, where he could reach them, with my feet.

"Gee...thanks," he said unenthusiastically.

"You're welcome," I replied just as unenthusiastically.

I pretended to ignore him while I put the dishes into the sink, but I kept sight of him in my peripheral just in case he really did need my help. Once he was finally on his feet he huffed out, "I don't know what the problem is. *You* got to see *me* naked. It was just quid pro quo and I haven't even gotten to see *all* of you naked."

I waited until he was almost through the door before saying, "Oh Eric?" When he turned to face me, I gave him my most sultry look and said, "Trust me. You've seen *all* of me naked and when you remember it you can see *all* of me again."

His eyes searched mine before rolling up into his head and I panicked when his body slumped against the doorframe as he said, "Sookie! I remember!" I was halfway across the distance between us making sure he was okay when he smiled and held out his arms to me saying, "Now take those clothes off."

I hadn't really believed he'd remembered anything, but he'd still made me worried when he'd slumped over, so I threw the soapy wet sponge I'd been holding at him saying, "You asshole!"

He batted the sponge away laughing as he said, "Not yet, but if I need you for that I'll give you a yell."

I couldn't help laughing in return as I turned back towards the sink saying, "Bring a magazine because you'll be waiting for a *long* time. Got a Kindle? You might need to download new material while you're waiting on half-past never."

*I'd have plenty of Northman ass to wipe soon enough.*

Eric chuckled and disappeared into his office while I went about washing the dishes. It took me a while to get the kitchen back into shape and I ran upstairs and took another shower, making sure to put on a pair of underwear as I got dressed and brought a load of laundry down with me. Once the machine was running I poked my head into Eric's office to check on him and smiled asking, "How are you doing? Do you want a drink or anything?"

His eyes were cold staring back at me and seeing it wiped the smile from my face as he said, "No. I just want to be left alone until Pam gets here." He looked back down at his desk, covered in papers spread out in front of him, and I shut his door without another word wondering what in the hell happened.

*Were pregnancy hormones contagious?*

Chapter 71

**EPOV**

I heard the soft click of the office door shutting and it took everything I had to remain silent, not knowing if I'd be angry or apologetic if I called Sookie back into the room. Ever since I'd first laid eyes on her, the emotions she brought out in me were like nothing I'd ever felt before and the intensity of them, both good and bad, scared me. I'd lied to her earlier that morning when she'd asked why I'd sought her out in the middle of the night. She *had* been talking in her sleep, but I wasn't able to hear that from my room. It wasn't until I'd crept up to her doorway, unable to sleep and drawn to her by some unseen force, that I was able to hear her voice. I stood silently at her door watching her toss and turn in her sleep for a while and I'd almost turned back towards my room, feeling like a giant pussy for missing her, when I barely knew her, and she was only twenty-five feet away, until I heard her whimper out, "Eric..." in her slumber.

*She missed me too.*

I quickly pulled on my shorts, which I'd seen lying in the basket next to her door, so I wouldn't seem like a complete pervert and questioned myself as I neared her bed wondering if climbing into the bed with her was the right thing to do. There was no question it was where I wanted to be, but when she flipped over on the bed, landing onto a patch of moonlight, and I saw she was wearing my shirt, I crawled in beside her without a second thought.

*She'd wanted to be close to me too.*

From the moment she woke she had me completely enthralled, just as she had the day before. I soaked up every word from her lips, every tell from her body and wanted more. I thought by studying her I would be able to figure out what it was that held me so captivated, if only so I could process it and move on. I didn't like feeling so needy for her, or for anyone, and hoped if I could decipher the clues, solve the riddle, I'd be able to go back to my old life; the one I *could* remember.

*I still wanted to fuck her though.*

I'd been thankful she'd been facing away from me the first time she'd bent over to pick up my crutches, both for the view and because she hadn't been able to see my mouth gaping open at the sight of her naked ass and the hint of what else lay between her legs.

*Sookie was a natural blond.*

I'd suspected as much and the table hid my *other* physical reaction to seeing her, but my brain temporarily stopped trying to solve the Sookie puzzle and focused instead on how I could get my

hands, and every other part of me, on her naked body. Like a misbehaving schoolboy, I knocked my crutches over time and again just to get a peek at the place I most wanted to be, but I knew it wouldn't be easy. *She* wouldn't be easy and I'd have to play my cards just right if I wanted her to give into the physical attraction we obviously had for one another.

*Besides, it was so much easier to try and solve my physical need for her than my emotional one.*

But, the more I watched her moving throughout the kitchen making breakfast, the more my lust subsided giving way to something else. I still desired her sexually, but there was also that same nagging sensation that I couldn't identify, couldn't give a name to, that left me stumped. It was even more prevalent when I tried to soothe away those awful fucking tears she kept hitting me with and I surprised even myself when I admitted to the part I played in her earlier unknown peep show, preferring to deal with her possible anger than her hurt; the hurt I'd inadvertently caused with my words. In my moment of panic I realized I'd do or say anything just to make her feel better and it only left me more confused as to how she was able to manipulate me in that way. No one else had ever affected me like she did and I wasn't even sure if it was something I had consciously allowed her to do; I seemed to be powerless to resist her, with or without my memories of her.

*'Stubborn' might be spelled S-O-O-K-I-E, but the same could be said for 'conundrum'.*

I could still feel the smile on my lips as I left the kitchen after having experienced the most *normal*, by society's standards, morning of my life. No matter how much my brain hesitated over the label, *my wife* had just made me breakfast and now I was going to do a bit of work in my office. I sat down at my desk and started going through the stack of mail, while two week's worth of emails loaded onto my laptop, when one envelope in particular caught my eye. It was from my bank and only stuck out because I received all of my statements online and when I felt it, the weight and lack of give of the contents within had me opening it to see there was a credit card inside in the name of Sookie Northman.

I'd heard the words *married* and *wife* in the explanations given to me by both Sookie and Pam; I'd even seen the humiliating video graphic evidence of it, but actually *seeing* her name followed by mine made it *real* for the very first time and an odd mixture of terror and pride swept through me. Even as the doubt started creeping into me, I knew it wasn't something she could've ordered on her own, but I logged onto my account anyway to see what else I would find. Thousands of dollars had been spent in the missing weeks of my life that I had no clue about, but with the exception of a ten thousand dollar donation to some dog rescue organization here in L.A. and another hefty sum to my preferred auto dealer (did I get a new car?), the expense that stuck out the most had been a single check. When I clicked on the check in question I saw who I'd written it out to and knew of no Calvin Norris, so when I clicked back over to my email, his name stuck out amongst the numerous new emails waiting for my attention. It was confirmation that he'd received payment on an Adele Stackhouse's renovations in Bon Temps.

*Bon Temps was where Sookie had said she was from.*

By my calculations we'd been '*married*' a little over a week and she already had me spending thousands of dollars on her family, on her by proxy, and it brought back the feelings of stupidity and regret I'd always had in the past whenever I'd sobered up enough to realize I'd been used once again for my money. The money spent was a pittance compared to what I had, but that wasn't the point.

*The point was I once again felt duped; used.*

Of course Sookie took that moment to peek her head into my office and the feeling of anger I could understand, but it was the hurt I felt that I couldn't explain even to myself, so I told her I just wanted to be left alone until Pam arrived and hoped *she* could tell me what in the hell was going on. Pam was always the first one to sniff out a gold digger, but all of her Sookie-praise had led me to believe otherwise. Maybe Pam hadn't known about my own personal Louisiana Purchase and once she found out she'd be more inclined to question Sookie's motives like I found I was now doing.

I quickly scrolled through the rest of my emails and found one from my accountant saying the account *I'd* requested had been set up at a furniture store in Monroe, Louisiana with Adele Stackhouse's name as an authorized account user. Reading it only added to the storm of emotions swirling inside of me and caused me to once again run through everything I *knew* about *my wife* which wasn't much at all. It brought back one of my first thoughts over the circumstances surrounding our marriage to begin with and I quickly shot off an email to the private investigator I'd used to try and locate my mother when she'd disappeared from my life the second time. He hadn't had any luck then, but hopefully he'd find something out about Sookie and what really happened on that fateful night in Vegas, supposedly forgotten by both of us, that changed the only life I could remember.

I was so lost in my thoughts I hadn't heard anyone enter the room until I felt a sharp smack to the back of my head and leaned forward from the blow as I heard Pam's voice behind me asking, "What in the fuck did you do?"

"Ow! What the fuck?"

"*That* was for whatever in the fuck you did that made Sookie call and tell me to get my ass over here because Prick-ric had made an appearance."

"Prick-ric?" I asked confused.

"Yes," she smiled. "She's apparently dubbed your alter ego 'Prick-ric' since the accident. You know, Prick Eric. I like it. I think it should be your stage name if you ever hit rock bottom and go into porn. Now, what's your problem? I'm missing a sale over at Marc Jacob's on Rodeo Drive thanks to you," she huffed as she sat down in a chair on the other side of my desk.

I only got angrier over Sookie's audacity at faulting me for being upset. "What?" I snapped, with my emotions getting the best of me. "Did she call you to fucking tattletale on me for being mean

to *Poor Innocent Sookie*? At least I'm not *hiding* how I feel when *she's* the one that's up to something!"

Pam's face told me she hadn't believed a word I'd said before she even opened her mouth saying, "To repeat something an unwise dipshit said to me just moments ago; what the fuck?"

"*This* the fuck!" I exclaimed, handing her copies of my bank statements and emails from that Norris guy and my accountant.

I waited silently for the vindication I was sure I'd receive, but she just casually read through them, minus the shock and horror I'd expected to see on her face, and tossed them back onto my desk saying, "So."

"So?" I asked, surprised. "What do you mean *so*? You're always the first one to point out the money grubbers latching onto me and you're *not* concerned by *this*?"

"Why would I be?" she asked, seemingly genuinely confused.

"Because I thought you *gave a shit*!" I answered, with my anger only growing now that Sookie had seemed to somehow turn Pam against me too.

"I *do* give a shit you giant pussy and we can giggle over the cute guy in class while braiding each other's hair later on, but *why* would I care about you taking care of Sookie's Gran?"

"Why would *I* care about *Sookie's Gran* to have spent close to twenty thousand dollars on her after being married for ten fucking days? There's *something* going on here. She may have somehow fooled me *once*, but she's not fucking fooling me *twice*." Maybe she was some sort of Voodoo priestess sacrificing chickens and goats in the backyard or some shit.

"No asshole," Pam chided, "you're just being a fool *now*." She leaned over and snatched my cell phone from the desk asking, "Have you bothered looking at the pictures you have stored on here?" as she tapped away at the touch screen.

"No, why would I?" I don't *store* pictures on my cell phone; I don't *take* pictures with my cell phone because you never know where they might end up.

Pam smirked at whatever she'd found and the leer in her eyes made me anxious to see what she was looking at, so I held out my hand, but Pam pulled it back closer to her body as she asked, "Do you know what I found Sookie doing when I walked in a few minutes ago?"

"Going through my wallet?" I asked, before quickly dodging the stapler Pam threw at my head. "What?" I asked, unsure if I was asking to see if I was in trouble for my wallet comment or why she'd thrown the stapler at all. I had a sneaking suspicion they were one and the same.



"She's out there cleaning the house. I had to walk through a lemon scented cloud just to come in here," she huffed while trying to brush away the invisible lemon scent from her clothes with her hands.

"So," I answered. It wasn't like there'd be much for her to do thanks to the cleaning service I had.

"So, she's keeping up with *her* end of the bargain you both struck when she first moved in here. She didn't like living here for free, so she offered to clean the house and buy the groceries in exchange. She even had to threaten to move out if you didn't comply. Does *that* sound like a *gold digger*? Because I can't think of *one* girl you've fucked in the past that would be willing to scrub your toilets, no matter how much money or dick you threw at them."

"So what?" I replied, completely un-swayed. "The cleaning service comes in every week, so there wouldn't be much scrubbing for her to do. As a matter of fact, since it already looks like I've been throwing *both* money and dick *at her* it sounds like a pretty sweet fucking deal *for her*."

Pam's eyes rolled back into her head as she mimicked, "*As a matter of fact* dickwad, you *cancelled* the cleaning service." When her eyes met mine again she added, "Another Sookie ultimatum. Since you're so anxious to catch up on your banking, go ahead and see if you've paid them in the last five weeks."

I clicked back over to my bank statements and even went through the ones I'd printed out thinking I'd somehow missed it, but Pam was right; I hadn't paid for their weekly service in over five weeks. My eyes were still staring down at the papers on my desk when Pam placed my phone into my line of sight on top of them. On the screen was a picture of Sookie and me with an older woman, standing on the front porch of an older house, with all three of us smiling. I was standing in the middle with my arms around both of them and my hand automatically picked up the phone from the desk, as Pam came around to stand next to me saying, "*That* is a matter of *fact*."

I slowly scrolled through picture after picture, taking them all in for the first time. There were a few posed pictures, like the first one I'd seen, but the majority of them were candid shots of Sookie. She was always busy doing something, but no matter how dirty she was I couldn't deny she was still simply beautiful. My breath caught in my lungs, as I temporarily stopped breathing, when I came to the last photo.

I could see clearly it was Sookie, asleep and naked, and from the angle of the shot, she'd been asleep and naked on top of, a more than likely naked, me. It wasn't crude or pornographic, far from actually, with just a hint of the curve of her bare breast and the shape of her perfect ass, edible tan lines and all. 'Beautiful' didn't even come close to describing her and I couldn't even deny that I had been the one who'd taken the picture thanks to my tattooed hand resting possessively on her back. Any anger I'd felt was gone and replaced with only one emotion.

*Stunned.*

How on earth had I become so enamored by her that I changed so much in such a short amount of time, if we'd only gotten married thanks to our blood alcohol content? 'Love' wasn't the only word I didn't understand; 'trust' was practically a synonym in that respect. I *trusted* very few people and, even then, only to a certain extent, but for Sookie to know the things she did about my past and to have so much photographic proof shoved at me, literally by my own hand, it became harder and harder to refute. I couldn't contradict the unexplainable pull I felt toward her, especially after crawling into her bed the night before based on my *need* to be close to her, but it was so hard to let go of my doubt. My cynical nature was what kept me safe from harm; I should've been cynical upon meeting my mother, but I was too pathetic just wanting her to *want me*. That mistake nearly got me killed and a trip into rehab.

*If I explored whatever it was about Sookie that kept drawing me in, what would it cost me in the end?*

Another smack to the back of my head from Pam had me questioning whether or not I'd actually start hitting back when she asked, "So?"

"So," I growled, "I think you need to quit fucking hitting me unless you're prepared for me to hit back!"

"I'll quit hitting you when you stop being Prick-ric." She waited for me to look up at her before continuing, "I know it's in your nature to not trust anyone; it's one of your smarter moves, but not where Sookie's concerned."

It was like Pam's body had been taken over by an alien life form because everything coming out of her mouth, aside from the earlier dipshit comments, was foreign. She had always been the one pointing out who was out to use me for whatever they could gain, but here she was pushing and shoving me towards Sookie like she was the second coming of Christ himself. It left me with only one question left to ask. "Why?"

"Have I ever steered you wrong?" she asked with a smile.

"There's a first time for everything and you didn't answer my question," I countered.

"Ugh," she sighed. "This would be so much easier if I could just smack your brain back into shape!" When she looked as though she might give that another try, I lifted up one of my crutches prepared to beat her to death if she got close enough, but she just shook her head instead saying, "Just trust me when I say she's not using you and give her a chance Eric. Now, give me your phone so I can forward that naked picture of Sookie to my phone. I want to use it as my wallpaper."

I snatched it from the desk before Pam could reach it, with a blind possessive fury ripping through me, as I yelled, "No!"

"Touchy touchy," she smirked. "Careful now or someone might think you actually *care*."

So what if I *cares*; I didn't *care* care, so it didn't count. Right?

"Did you have any other purpose for being here today Pam?" I asked, suddenly feeling drained of any and all energy.

I yawned and rubbed my eyes as she started going over my proposed return to work date, given my doctor cleared me to return, and she suggested telling them the truth of my lost 3 weeks if my memory hadn't returned by then. It made sense since I didn't want to end up looking like a fool if someone said or did something that I had no clue about, but should have. After another thirty minutes of me fighting to stay awake, she finally left saying she'd be back later on in the week to check in with me.

The door had barely shut behind her when I immediately grabbed my phone again and started looking through all of the pictures once more. I wanted to remember it all, to know what I'd been thinking when I'd taken the pictures, but especially for the one of Sookie lying on top of me and it was *that* thought that made me finally stand and slowly seek her out. I'd tucked my phone into my pocket thinking I'd ask Sookie about the pictures when I found her. I was hoping maybe I'd told her what some of my thoughts were when I showed her the photos the first time and while it was still difficult to believe everything I'd been told up until that point, I'd do my best to at least *try* to believe whatever she had to say.

Pam was right, the entire downstairs smelled like lemons and every surface I walked by gleamed. Even though I knew she'd quit her job to take care of me, I felt a little bad knowing Sookie was doing so much housework and decided to bring up hiring the cleaning service again. When I couldn't find her downstairs I thought she might have gone upstairs and was halfway up to the second floor, thinking the house was just too big for one person to take care of alone, when it hit me.

*I did CARE care.*

*Fuck; at least Pam wasn't there to see it.*

I'd almost called out Sookie's name as soon as I hobbled onto the top landing, but I was glad I hadn't when I poked my head into her open bedroom doorway and found her. She was napping, tangled up in her sheets again, and an unbidden smile formed on my lips as I quietly limped forward to free her. It wasn't until I got close enough to touch her that I could see the dried tear tracks on her cheeks, thanks to the late afternoon sun streaming through the window, and my stomach dropped knowing I was responsible for them.

*Her tears would be the death of me.*

Just as I had the night before, I gently pulled the sheet free from her body and curled up behind her on the bed. Just as she had the night before, her body slid across the mattress, somehow detecting my presence even though she was sleeping, and as soon as we touched her fitful movements stilled into peacefulness without waking. My arm snaked around her waist and I gently burrowed my face into her neck, breathing in her calming scent. I'd later repeat my

apology when she was awake, but my need to somehow make things right between us, right now whether she could hear me or not, had me pressing my lips against her neck in silent regret before I whispered into her ear, "I'm sorry."

*For snapping at you.*

*For believing you were using me.*

*For not remembering you.*

When she sighed and her arm moved to lie across my own, her hand gripping my wrist as she pressed her back against my front, and cocooned herself even deeper within my embrace, I'd wondered if maybe she had awoken, but her breathing remained slow and even. I just enjoyed the feel of her body tucked into mine, feeling the cadence of my own heart beating against her back as it joined in with the harmony of her soft inhales and exhales. Separately we were like a skipping record, always repeating the same monotonous rhythm, but together we seemed to have created our own lullaby and I soon drifted off to sleep wondering if we'd meet up in our dreams.

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## **Chapter 74: Chapter 72**

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### Chapter 72

#### **SPOV**

As soon as I hung up the phone, after telling Pam she needed to get her ass here pronto, I went on a cleaning spree. In part because the house really needed it, but mostly to burn off my nervous energy wondering what in the hell happened to make Prick-ric show up. He was like Sybil lately with his multiple personalities and short of wandering back into his office naked, I didn't know how to turn him back into the sweet and flirty Eric I'd had breakfast with. While my dust rag flew across every surface I could reach, my mind had run rampant with different scenarios as to what had upset him so much.

*Did something happen with his spot on the TV show? The movie he'd read for?*

*Did his father or, God forbid, his mother contact him?*

Wondering who else might have tried contacting him, I was in the middle of imagining Eric reading hundreds of emails, all of them identical in their request to bed him except for the name...*Ginger, Paprika, Cumin, Bambi Big Hole the Grand Canyon of...* when Pam breezed through the foyer I was cleaning and breaking my booty call email concentration.

"So what's his problem?" she asked while fanning away the residual cloud of furniture polish I'd just sprayed onto the hall table. Having no idea, all I could do was shrug in response and kept

angrily wiping away at the table before I ended up storming back into his office and wiping Eric's email account by repeatedly hitting the delete button.

Maybe Eric and I were tied together more closely than I'd thought, Baby Northman notwithstanding, since we seemed to channel each other's emotions and Pam took that as her cue to go and find him before I started cleaning the makeup off of her face. I made sure to steer clear of his office and saw the car coming up the driveway through the living room window in time to meet them in the front of the house. It was the new Audi Eric had told Alcide to get being delivered and I signed for it before parking it in the garage and heading back into the house.

I had just finished up the downstairs (minus Eric's office) and was about to start on the upper level when my phone rang. I was still in a pissy mood, at both Eric and the world in general, until I saw the caller ID.

*Gran.*

The tears came as soon as I answered saying, "Hi Gran."

*"Baby girl, is it true? Is Eric awake?"* she asked.

The last time I'd heard her so excited was when I'd gotten my college acceptance letters and it made me smile despite my tears as I answered, "Yes Gran, it's true." My anger evaporated just as quickly because her question brought back the fact that Eric waking up from his coma was what truly mattered to me. His memory loss, while difficult, was just a drop in the bucket compared to the anguish I would've felt had I lost him forever.

*"Thank the Lord! I didn't know what to believe when I heard it on the news, but our prayers have been answered. So how is he? They said on TV he should be released from the hospital today. Is he excited to be going home?"*

I hadn't realized my feet had carried me upstairs until I found myself in the doorway staring at our bed; *his* bed and I swallowed the sob in my throat as I turned towards *my* room saying, "Actually he's already been released. We came home yesterday." I climbed into bed suddenly feeling the weight of the world and buried my face into the pillow Eric had used the night before with the phone still at my ear.

*"Sookie? Why do you sound so sad? Is something wrong?"*

We hadn't discussed what we were telling anyone where Eric's amnesia was concerned, but hearing the concern in Gran's voice broke the already faulty dam on my tears and I cried, "Oh Gran...he doesn't remember..." I caught myself just in time before I said 'me' and replaced it with, "He doesn't remember the last three weeks before the accident. He doesn't remember us getting married." *That's twice now.*

*"Oh my stars. Well what did the doctor say?"*

"He said that Eric's memories *might* return, but there's really no way to know."

*"Oh sweetie, I know you're upset, but at least you still have him back and that's the important thing. He loved you enough to want to get married the first time, so I'm sure once the shock wears off he'll be right as rain."*

Hearing her talk so sincerely about the lies we'd concocted surrounding our marriage was enough to do me in and I just cried harder into his pillow thinking God could be a cruel bastard when he wanted to be by throwing it in my face at a time like this. After all, I was telling the biggest lie of omission at that very moment by not revealing my pregnancy, even to him.

*"Sweetheart, now I know you're upset, but crying over something that can't be changed isn't going to do you or Eric any good. Even if he never gets his memories back, he still loves you and you can make new memories together."*

My mind was screaming back that he *doesn't* love me because he can't remember me, but there was a little voice inside of me saying he *did* still love me with or without his memories. He'd crept into bed with me in the middle of the night (and I had a sneaking suspicion it had nothing to do with saving me from the bed sheet) and he still couldn't stand to see me cry, so he wasn't completely unaffected by me. I wanted his memories to return, if only so it would make it easier for me to tell him we were going to have a baby, but we could still make new memories in the meantime.

"You're right Gran," I sniffed. "I'll be okay. *We'll* be okay."

*"That's my girl."*

Wanting to change the subject before I could over think everything, or blurt out her pending membership into the great-grandmother's club, I asked, "So how was your trip? I thought you wouldn't be home for another couple of days or else I would've called you."

*"Oh it was fine, but the weather's calling for severe thunderstorms for the next few days so we cut it short. At least I don't have to worry about the house flying away now that it's as good as new thanks to my grandson-in-law. Speaking of which, I guess he won't remember that so you make sure to thank him again for me. And thank him for setting up the account at the furniture store in Monroe for me. There was a letter from his accountant waiting on me when I got home, but with everything you've told me, I don't really feel right using it now."*

"Oh...he didn't tell me he did that." Since he didn't remember Gran he couldn't use his 'Am I family or not' guilt trip, but I didn't feel right about her using that account now either. I still had some money in my savings account though and figured once Eric was a little more mobile I could get another job so I said, "Gran, if there's something you need or want for the house, I'll pay for it. You don't have to use Eric's account."

*"There's not a single thing I need or want sweetheart. It's just me in this old house and I get along fine with what I've got."*

I only half believed her. Gran would let the walls fall in around her before she asked for anything from anyone, but I remembered how worn her mattress was when we'd visited and I'd put fresh sheets on her bed, so I made a mental note to buy a new mattress set online for her and have it delivered without telling her beforehand. She couldn't reach me with her wooden spoon all the way in California. A new refrigerator wouldn't hurt either, but it would hurt my bank balance so I put it on my list of future purchases once I could get another job. After we said our goodbyes I didn't have the energy to get out of bed and get started on cleaning the upper floor, so I lay there thinking about Eric until I eventually gave into the Sandman's demands and drifted off to sleep.

When I woke up, the room was washed in shades of gray and I wondered how long I'd slept seeing the sun was close to setting through my window. I could sense his presence behind me before I even registered his arm around my waist and smiled hearing my inner voice saying, '*I told you so.*' Whatever had caused Prick-ric to come out and play must've been resolved, so I allowed myself to snuggle in closer to him and just enjoy being in *This* Eric's arms before something else happened to ruin it all. As I lay there listening to him breathe, I remembered Gran's words about making new memories together. I wanted *My* Eric back, but there were no guarantees that would ever happen and just because he'd lost his memories didn't mean I didn't still love him. I knew how much of an asshole he could be, but I also knew what he was *really* like deep down inside and knew without a doubt it would be worth the effort if I had to work my way back into his heart.

With that thought in mind I slowly inched my body, turning around so I could face him, and just watched him while he slept. It was something I'd spent two weeks doing, only instead of being filled with worry my heart was only filled with love seeing him so peaceful. The mask of doubt and skepticism were gone leaving behind the face I'd fallen in love with, had memorized every detail of at the age of ten, the only difference now was it was covered in whiskers. His jaw line was more chiseled and his cheekbones were more prominent with his boyish good looks having changed into the beautifully handsome man he'd become, but his lips were still the same.

*Perfectly kissable.*

His face got closer as mine inched forward until my lips were a hair's breadth away from his, wanting to steal a kiss from man I loved before the man who couldn't remember me awoke, but before our lips could touch his eyes fluttered open and my kissing bandit burglary was bungled. At least Wicked and Immoral couldn't be charged with breaking and entering since they'd stalled on his waistband.

*Sneaky bitches.*

I was caught in a spotlight of blue staring back at me, completely frozen by his gaze and unable to move, wondering how I could explain away my lame attempt at kissing my husband before this virtual stranger woke up in his place, but I didn't have to. Where I was an unmoving statue, his mobility was unaffected and I watched him move closer in slow motion, a second in time taking an eternity to pass, until his lips were finally on mine. Our kiss was hesitant, both familiar and brand new at the same time, and a small part of me wondered if this was a good idea, but when his tongue sought entrance at my lips I couldn't deny him or myself. It was everything I'd

longed for; everything I remembered it could be; everything he couldn't remember it was and I lost myself to it hoping my memories would spill out of me and into him, forcing every moment we'd shared between us back into his mind with every thrust of my tongue.

His hands buried themselves in my hair, holding me in place, while Wicked clutched at his shirt from the front and Immoral snaked around to hold onto his back. I could feel the Kraken stirring down below and knew we had to stop before things went too far, but my brain and body were disconnected with my leg looping over his hip and my hoo-hah issuing him an invitation to join the party in my panties. Eric silently RSVP'd he'd love to cum by grinding against me and his hands left my hair to grab onto my hips as he rolled onto his back taking me with him. The hiss of pain from his lips that broke our kiss was enough to break the spell and I jumped off of him, landing at his side, asking, "Are you okay?"

His hands were still attached to my hips and he tried to pull me back on top of him saying, "No."

"What's wrong?" I asked with my eyes roaming all over his body. One part of him in particular was waving frantically, needing attention, but I was ignoring it. For now.

"You're all the way over *there*," he whined, tugging on my shorts.

"Well *something* hurt you when I was *all the way over THERE*, so what was it?" I asked while trying to pry his kung fu grip from my shorts.

"It was nothing," he lied. When I glared my silent 'bullshit' call, he admitted, "It was just my ribs, but I'm fine."

He tried to tug me back on top of him, but I refused saying, "No, it's *not* fine. What if it punctures your lung or spleen?"

He grinned back at me saying, "I don't need my spleen and there's *another* part of me that wants to puncture *you*."

It was a good thing I was wearing both panties and shorts, so they could contain the cumfetti that just flew out of party central while I said, "*That's* not going to happen," mentally adding 'right now'.

"But..." his eyes became like a lost puppy as he continued, "I'm in *pain*."

"Exactly!"

The puppy I'd been staring at changed into one of the hounds of hell as he leered, "I'm not talking about my *ribs*."

His eyes darted over to the tent in his shorts letting me know where his *pain* was coming from and I snickered, "I'm pretty sure you won't die from a case of blue balls." It was an argument we'd already had; he just couldn't remember it.



His hands left my hips to grasp onto his waistband and pulled them up as he peered down inside and gasped, "Are they blue? You should check, maybe warm them up with some friction."

I let my head fall back down onto the pillow beside him laughing, "You're such a perv!" while swallowing the drool in my mouth wondering if it would be cheating on My Eric if I gave This Eric a blowjob.

*Definitely cheating.*

*Maybe.*

*Definitely cheating maybe.*

"You're a *cruel* woman..." he smiled.

"That's me; the wicked bitch of the west," I grinned back.

I watched his eyes mapping my face as we lay there silently until his hand came up and brushed a strand of hair behind my ears as he said, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" I asked. Both My Eric and This Eric were perverts. I enjoyed the consistency.

His thumb brushed across my cheek as he hesitated before admitting, "For making you cry."

Confused, thinking he was talking about earlier over breakfast, I replied, "You already apologized for that. I *know* you like my ass. You've made it *abundantly* clear," I added with my eyes darting towards his mast.

His eyebrows furrowed when he responded, "But I snapped at you earlier in my office and you cried yourself to sleep."

Oh. "Oh. Well, I didn't know what made you so pissy, but I got a little emotional when Gran called to check on you, that's all." Remembering everything we'd said I added, "I know we didn't talk about it, but I kinda let it slip that you didn't remember anything from the time we got married until now and she wanted me to thank you again for fixing up her house. It was really sweet of you even if you can't remember it."

"I saw the pictures on my phone," he admitted.

I'd forgotten about those, but quickly set aside any weepy feelings and pressed on saying, "And, you big sneak, she said to thank you for the account you'd set up for her at the furniture store in Monroe. She got a letter in the mail from your accountant telling her about it, but she won't be using it."

"Why not?" he asked, adding, "And why am I a 'big sneak'?"

"Because you didn't tell me you did it and Gran doesn't feel right using it now that you don't remember her. Besides, she's not the materialistic type. She'd rather just make do. You had to practically *force* us to let you do the house repairs."

"Force you? How did I *force* you and why would I *need* to?"

"Because Gran's not the type to take handouts and I wasn't raised to either. You and your sneaky ways had already set up to have repairs done when you first got there, but then the storm hit and did some damage to the house so it *really* needed it then. When you told us what you'd done we tried to refuse, but you pulled the guilt card saying we were your *family* and *family* takes care of each other."

Tears welled in my eyes remembering it all and he quickly brushed them away saying, "Then I'm glad I could help." He paused again, still staring at me, before adding, "You should call her back and tell her that I still want her to use the account."

"No Eric, it's fine. She probably wouldn't have used it anyway, unless you brow beat her into it, and the only thing she really needs is a new mattress. I'm going to order one online and have it delivered to her house."

He just stared back at me blankly making me wish, once more, that I could read his mind. Eventually he said, "Well then, use your new credit card when you buy it."

"What new credit card?" I asked. I had *one* credit card that I habitually paid off whenever I charged something, not wanting to get myself into debt.

"The one I ordered and is sitting on my desk?"

It sounded as though he was asking me whether or not it was true, but like I said, he was *sneaky*. "Eric Northman!" I huffed, sitting up. "Why did you order me a credit card?"

His expression mirrored the one I normally reserved for Jason as he blandly said, "I don't remember."

I tried to chew the grin off of my face realizing what a dumbass question I'd asked and said, "Yeah, well...you're lucky you *don't* remember or else I'd kick your ass right now. *I'll* pay for Gran's new mattress with my *own* money, but thanks anyway."

"But I thought Pam said you quit your job."

"I did, but I still have money in savings. I'll get another job once you can move around better on your own." Hopefully they'll have onsite daycare.

"Don't be stupid. Just use the card," he huffed.

*Oh. No. He. Didn't.*

"I don't *want* your money *Eric*," I gritted through my teeth.

"But I *want* you to *use* it *Sookie*," he gritted back, pulling himself upright in the bed.

I wanted to push him back down, using his broken ribs as my handhold, and *not* because I wanted to get tangled in the sheets with him in a naked kind of way. "No. Thanks." I crossed my arms in front of him to show him I was serious and to keep them from snapping anymore of his ribs.

"Why. Not?" He tried to cross his arms, but winced in pain and gave up quickly. It took *extreme* effort on my part to not stick out my tongue at him with an added 'nanny-nanny-boo-boo' while simultaneously wanting to fret over him like a mother hen.

*Stupid hormones.*

"We've already had this argument," I informed him knowing damn well he couldn't remember it, but feeling like a bitch anyway.

Eric matched me glare for glare (I really *did* love that he never backed down from my bitchface) and said, "You don't say. And what, pray tell, did *we* decide when it was over?"

I wanted to lie and tell him that he'd agreed with me, but I couldn't. "Actually..." I drew it out for a moment and lost some of my steam before admitting, "I don't think we actually resolved anything." He seemed shocked at my answer, and I was already tired of fighting with him so I smiled and quickly added, "You probably got distracted by my boobs."

It appeared my boob peace offering worked when his eyes locked onto the Wonder Twins, which were on display thanks to my crossed arms, and he unsuccessfully fought off a smile of his own admitting, "They *are* distracting."

*Just wait until milk shoots out of them if you try to cop a feel.*

"I don't want to fight with you Eric," I sighed.

His eyes finally met mine again with all of the anger gone from them as he said sweetly, "Good," and then added, "So distract me. Take off your shirt," waggling his eyebrows. His eyes got as big as dinner plates and his jaw hung open when I reached down and grabbed onto the hem of my t-shirt. He subconsciously licked his lips when I inched it higher up my waist and I laughed out loud at the disappointed look on his face after I'd whipped it over my head revealing the tank top I was wearing underneath. He shook his head at me repeating, "You're a cruel woman."

*My libido agrees...*

Eric stared at my tank top like he had x-ray vision and I fully expected him to try and talk me into taking it off, so I was surprised when he looked back at me saying, "Thank you."

"For what, wearing two shirts?" Maybe the Wonder Twins had lost their powers.

"For being honest with me. You could've told me anything about when we argued before over money and I would've had no choice but to believe you."

I shrugged, it being the fine line of truth and all, saying, "I'll always answer your questions honestly Eric."

*So please don't ask me if I'm pregnant.*

Wondering if that street ran both ways, I asked, "Do you mind telling me what made you so upset earlier when you were in your office?"

When he shrugged my senses went on hyper alert and I scrutinized every word of his answer as he replied, "I...I just...I guess I just get frustrated not remembering everything."

*Me too...*

I could tell he was uncomfortable and decided not to push the issue, so I changed the subject by saying, "Your new car got delivered earlier. I parked it in the garage."

His eyes traveled down to the cast on his right leg as he knocked on it with his fist and said, "I guess I won't be driving until this thing gets taken off."

He seemed so forlorn over the idea of being dependent on anyone, so I smiled saying, "That's okay. I'll be your chauffeur. You can even sit in the backseat and I'll wear a hat and call you Miss Daisy."

It seemed to do the trick because Pervy Eric was back as his eyes leered back at mine when he said, "If that's *all* you'll be wearing then you have yourself a deal."

More cumfetti leaked out letting me know the party was still going on, but I shifted slightly, silently telling them to keep it down before the cops got called, and meant to say, '*Pfft...call Alcide then.*' What I *actually* said was, "The windows are tinted dark enough."

*What the fuck? Does Kum Bay Yah need to be playing in the background for my brain and mouth to hold hands?*

*They must've been humming Cum By Hoo-Hah instead.*

My only warning was the low growl working its way out of Eric's chest before his lips were suddenly on mine again, with his hands holding my head to his, and I could feel the beat of the music, making the walls shake, in the party down below.

*I hoped the cops got there quick.*

Chapter 73

**EPOV**

I couldn't control myself as I pounced on Sookie again with my mind flashing on her naked body sprawled across the hood of my car wearing nothing more than a chauffeur's hat and a smile. It was all primal instinct; I was the predator and she was my prey. Now that I knew what it was to kiss her I wanted, *needed*, more and didn't think twice before attacking her. I'm pretty sure I even fucking growled before doing it and had she fought me off in the least little bit, I would've backed off. The tears shed afterward would've been mine, but I would've done it.

*But she didn't.*

She matched me in every metaphorical blow for blow. Where I licked, she sucked. The scrape of my teeth was answered with the bite of hers and all I could think about was consuming every part of her like she had already consumed my every thought since I'd first woken up from the coma. Everything about her seemed so familiar yet new. Her scent, taste and touch; the feel of her in my arms was like a hazy dream on the fringes of my mind, brushing against the tips of my fingers but too far away for me to actually grab onto. I wanted more than anything to remember everything I'd lost just so I would know why it all felt so right; why *she* felt so right in my arms.

The doubt I felt where she was concerned was slowly diminishing, but still there nonetheless. I'd been burned too many times and trust didn't come easily to me, but it was getting easier to at least entertain the idea that Sookie wasn't like anyone else I'd ever met. Her sincerity didn't seem like an act, but there were still too many unknowns for me to blindly trust everything I'd been told.

*If only I could remember.*

I didn't realize Sookie was straddling my lap until I felt her hips grind against mine and my hands moved down to her waist encouraging her to do it again. She felt so small pressed against my body and I could feel her heat through the fabric of our clothes and wanted nothing more than to sink down inside of her hoping an orgasm or ten would unlock my memories. The doctor had said they might come back to me like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle and I knew just where once piece would fit perfectly.

*It was worth a shot.*

My hands moved of their own volition to the button of her shorts and had just pulled them open when Sookie shot off of my lap like a cannon and ran into the adjoining bathroom, slamming the door behind her. I barely registered she was gone, wondering what in the fuck had happened, when I heard her getting sick through the closed door and suddenly felt like an ass remembering

she hadn't been feeling well. She'd seemed alright in the last couple of days, but I hadn't given it much thought having been too caught up in my own worries and, like a self-centered asshole, there I was shoving my tongue down her throat. Twice.

I sat there dumbfounded over what I should do. On one hand, she was my wife, which probably meant I should go in there and see if she was okay, but on the other hand... she was more like an acquaintance. If I thought of her as nothing more than what I'd thought of the other countless women I'd fucked in the past, I wouldn't bother caring whether or not she was okay and I couldn't even *remember* fucking her. There was no doubt I wanted to get *acquainted* with her in every carnal sense of the word, but hearing her retch behind the door made me realize I *did* care about her. I *wanted* her to be okay, even if I couldn't remember a goddamned thing about her, and I *wanted* her to know at least that much, so I grabbed my crutches and slid off the bed to stand up. By the time I got to the door I could hear the toilet flush and the water running in the sink, so I knocked before asking, "Sookie? Are you okay?" When she didn't answer after a long minute, I knocked again, only harder, worried there was something wrong and opened the door repeating, "Sookie?"

She was hunched over the sink with her eyes closed and a toothbrush in her mouth, so I hobbled over and wet a washcloth before gathering her hair in my hand and pressing the cloth on the back of her neck asking, "Are you okay?"

She nodded weakly and spit the toothpaste out of her mouth replying, "Yeah...I thought it had passed."

"Maybe you should see a doctor." If what Pam said was true, she'd been getting sick for a couple of weeks now so maybe there was more to it than just a passing stomach bug.

Her face flushed even more and she shoved the toothbrush back into her mouth before finally rinsing with water, and then mouthwash, and taking the washcloth to wipe off her face. When she didn't say anything more I repeated, "Doctor? You should make an appointment." Knowing she'd quit her job and wondering if insurance was an issue I said, "I'll pay for it."

That seemed to snap her out of it because she shook her head and I prepared myself for another argument over money when she said, "No, you already added me to your policy."

I felt an odd sense of pride for having already taken care of that for her, even if I couldn't remember it, and said, "Then let's go make an appointment. Pam said you'd been sick the entire time I was in the hospital, so you should get checked out."

She shook her head again saying, "I already saw a doctor when you were in the hospital." Her eyes darted to the wall behind me as she said, "I'm fine. She assured me it would pass."

There was something about the way she'd answered me that struck me as being off, but before I could say anything more she said, "I'm sorry about that," with her hand gesturing towards the bed on the other side of the open door.

I brushed the hair away from her still flushed face and replied without thought saying, "You don't have to apologize for that. I'm just worried about you."

Her eyes met mine again, still teary from her ordeal, but she smiled softly through them asking, "Really? You're worried about me?"

*More than I'm willing to admit out loud.*

I still wasn't sure what it was exactly that I felt for her other than huge amounts of lust and sexual desire, the likes of which I'd never experienced on such a massive scale, but underneath all of that I knew there was more to it. More what, I wasn't sure. Seeing she was still waiting on an answer, and feeling uncomfortable with my inner thoughts, I tried to joke my way out of it saying, "Sure. Who else is going to take care of me?"

I regretted it immediately seeing the hurt flash through her eyes and her smile disappeared before she forced a fake one in its place saying, "Of course." She took a deep breath and asked, "Dinner?" as she brushed passed me and out of the bathroom.

I tried to reach for her before she could get away calling out, "Sookie..." She kept walking, ignoring me completely, and went out the bedroom door, but not before I saw her wipe the tears from her eyes. Her name tattooed on my outstretched hand mocked me while that fucking ache in my chest was back in full force and I moved as fast as I could with the crutches, but by the time I reached the hallway she had already disappeared. I thought about chucking the fucking crutches and throwing myself down the stairs just to reach her faster, but figured after my fuck up she'd probably leave me there.

*I would deserve it.*

As I hobbled down the stairs as fast as I could, I berated myself for being the selfish prick that I was. Even if I *didn't* know what it was I felt for Sookie, she'd already come out and told me that *she* loved *me*. I kept trying to figure out what it was that I couldn't remember without thinking about how my memory loss must be affecting her and my chest seized again remembering her crying on the side of my hospital bed when she told me *she'd lost me*. I suddenly felt panicked when I realized that I physically couldn't go after her if she decided to leave.

*Would she leave me?*

I knew absolutely *nothing* about her other than she was from Louisiana. I wouldn't know the first place to go to looking for her if she took off and it was as I was making a mental list of who I would call to help me find her that I realized I truly wanted her to stay. My breathing was labored and every part of me ached when I finally rushed into the kitchen and found her. Her back was facing me as she stood staring into the open refrigerator in front of her and I sagged against the crutches underneath my arms in relief.

The racket I made as I crossed the kitchen floor had to have alerted her to my presence, but she didn't acknowledge my arrival at all. As I made my way towards her I heard her sniffle while she

wiped her eyes and when I was close enough to touch her, I let both crutches fall to the floor and circled my arms around her waist from behind.

Her whole body stiffened in response, the complete opposite of when she'd melted against me earlier, and I hated every fucking second of it. I wanted her to melt against me; to welcome my touch and all I could do was kiss the top of her head and say, "I'm sorry Sookie."

Her body remained rigid with no part of her moving other than her lips as she said, "There's leftover fried chicken from last night, or if you want I can cook you something else."

"I didn't mean it Sookie. I was joking."

*Nothing.*

Neither one of us moved a muscle with the cold air making its way out of the refrigerator and making our connection to one another even colder. Finally Sookie broke the silence asking, "What do you want Eric?"

*You.*

It was true. My near anxiety attack between her bathroom and the kitchen proved that much, but I was suddenly nervous over how I would tell her. How could I tell her I just wanted her when I couldn't even explain why? Hoping I'd somehow find the words once I got started, I admitted, "You."

"I'm aware," she replied with no inflection in her voice; completely cold and detached. All of the playfulness from earlier disappeared; the warmth in her voice was gone. Even the heat of her body had turned cold thanks to the refrigerator and I fucking hated it. I'd rather be the focus of her anger than the harsh nothing she gave me now, but before I could say another word she said, "I'm not going to *fuck* you Eric. I meant, what do you want for dinner."

Her tone was as empty as I felt and I panicked again, spinning her around and saying, "I don't want to *fuck* you; well I *do*, but that's not what I meant. I don't want fucking dinner. I want..."

I paused my endless stream of verbal diarrhea, seeing the startled look on her face, and every thought in my head disappeared. I hated seeing her look so hurt and unsure. I hated seeing the light gone from her eyes. I hated being the cause of it all. For whatever fucking reason, I wanted to be the one that made her smile, the one who made her eyes sparkle, so when she whispered, "What Eric? What is it you want?" I told her the truth.

"You Sookie. I want you. Not because I want you to take care of me. Not because I want you naked underneath me. Not because I want you to make me dinner. I just want *you*. I want to remember you and, honestly, it pisses me off that I have no fucking idea why I feel so attached to you, but I *do*. You don't know what my life has been like. Well, maybe you *do* since you knew about the whales, but I can't fucking remember telling you, so I'm tell you now that trust doesn't come easy for me. Nothing I've seen or heard about what we were like together makes any



fucking sense to me. Pictures, video, text messages...they're *me*, but they're *not*. But the truth is, just the thought of you running out the door and never coming back makes me want to bury myself in a fucking hole in the ground. *NOTHING MAKES SENSE ANYMORE!*"

My voice had risen with every word I'd said until I was practically shouting at her at the end, so I was sure I'd blown my one and only shot to get her to understand, but she surprised me by smiling at me instead (a genuine one, albeit with more tears) and wrapped her arms around my waist with her face pressed against my chest. Her body melted against my own as I wrapped my arms around her and the warmth between us grew, but I froze again when she pulled back to look into my eyes and said, "I love you Eric." A mixture of elation and anxiety ran through me and I opened my mouth even though I had no idea of what to say back to her. I didn't want to lie to her and repeat the words back not knowing what in the fuck it *was* that I felt for her, but she placed a finger over my lips to silence me and said, "You don't have to say anything. I just wanted *you* to know how *I* feel about *you*."

I had to admit that I'd liked hearing her say she loved me, even if I couldn't return the sentiment back to her, and we stood there silently staring at one another, with awkward slowly joining our party of two, when Sookie's eyes suddenly danced once again as she added with a mischievous grin, "But I'm still not going to fuck you."

Just like that the atmosphere between us was playful again and I pulled her body tighter against my own whining, "But whhhhhyyy?" I wasn't above begging (another first for me that made no sense) and blatantly rubbed myself against her while voicing my earlier thoughts adding, "Maybe an orgasm will jar those missing memories loose."

Sookie 's eyes glazed over for a moment as she mumbled something under her breath that I didn't quite catch making me ask, "What?"

Her face flushed again and she gulped answering, "Uh...it could jar more of my breakfast loose."

*Shit.*

"Right. Sorry. I forgot," I admitted and let go of her wondering how I thought I'd heard her mumble something about a '*jar of orgasms*'. It was probably just wishful thinking.

She bent over to pick up my crutches, the view was *almost* as good as it was that morning, and since I didn't try to hide the fact I was watching her ass, she mockingly glared at me as she handed them to me while asking, "So, are you hungry?"

My growling stomach answered her for me, but knowing she was sick I said, "Don't worry about it. I'll find something to eat." After standing in front of the open refrigerator for so long I couldn't help but notice it was full and added another *first* to my ever growing list.

Sookie ignored me and pointed at the kitchen table ordering, "Sit," while she turned back and started getting covered dishes out of the refrigerator. Once I was seated I watched her warm up leftovers from the night before and was again struck with how much I enjoyed watching her

move around the kitchen like she'd always been there; like she *belonged* there. She placed a plate full of food in front of me before going back to the refrigerator and I dug in thanks to the smell that had been wafting around the kitchen when she'd been warming it up. She was a fantastic cook and I figured I could at least have a *food orgasm* since the other kind appeared to be off the table for now. I saw her set a bottled water next to my plate, but my mouth was too full to thank her just yet and when I raised my head to acknowledge her my chewing stopped.

She had sat down at the table next to me only she wasn't having leftover chicken for dinner.

She was having a cherry popsicle.

Her lips curled around it.

Her cheeks were slightly sunken in from sucking on it.

The slurping noises coming from her had *me* close to cumming.

*Maybe I'd be getting that other kind of orgasm after all and she wouldn't even need to touch me.*

My eyes were glued to her mouth and when she deep throated it until there was nothing left but the small wooden stick sticking out of her lips, and then slowly pulled it back out, I wondered if she had any other *talents* that involved no gag reflex. I'm pretty sure I moaned. It might have even been a whimper and since my eyes were staring right at her now red stained lips I saw, and then heard them say, "Eric. Food is falling out of your mouth."

"Huh?" At least that's what I meant to say and when I felt a piece of half chewed food tumble out of my lips I finally closed them and started chewing again so I wouldn't choke to death. It would be a shame for Sookie to have to stop sucking on that popsicle to give me mouth to mouth.

*Maybe I could convince her Eric Junior was in desperate need of CPR?*

*He was definitely dying.*

When I could finally swallow, and wondering if *she* swallowed, I couldn't think of anything to say that didn't involve the words 'suck' or 'fuck', so I just stared at her doing my best eunuch impression so I wouldn't scare her away.

Sookie stared back at me, innocently continuing to whittle down the popsicle I was now insanely jealous of, until she finally smirked asking, "Cat got your tongue?"

*No, but your pussy can have it.*

She knew. She knew *exactly* what she was doing to me and wanting to pretend I had any sort of control over my dick that was now knocking out an S.O.S distress signal in Morse code on the underside of the table I asked, "Enjoying your dinner?" when what I really wanted to ask was, 'Straddle me?'

Her eyes continued to sparkle like an angsty teenage vampire left out in the sun as she slid her dinner all the way into her mouth before pulling it back again, fucking humming while hollowing out her cheeks because she was sucking on it so hard, and smiled, "It's *mouth watering delicious*."

*Do you find pre-cum delicious? There's plenty...*

"And you?" she asked.

"Yes. I'm enjoying *your* dinner *very* much." There was no way to deny it since my hands were now white-knuckling the edge of the table, either to hold on for dear life or so I could throw it out of the way since it was separating me from her, I couldn't be sure which.

I watched her eyes flick over the forgotten dinner plate in front of me as she said, "Since it looks like you've given up on *your* dinner, would you like one?" She held up the popsicle in her hand and when I nodded she got up, intent on walking over to the refrigerator, but I grabbed her hand as she passed by and pulled her close. My other arm snaked around her waist and pulled her down into my lap, with Eric Junior immediately knocking on anywhere he could reach on her begging to be let in, and I held up her hand with the popsicle in it in front of us.

We silently watched the red liquid as it melted, sliding down the stick and in between her fingers. Just as a drop threatened to fall from her hand I brought it to my mouth and licked it away before sliding my tongue across the red path it had left in its wake. Our eyes were locked on each other's as I pried the popsicle from her hand and sucked each of her fingers into my mouth, licking away every trace of the sweet sticky substance from her skin. Her eyes rolled into the back of her head and her breaths became heavier as they left her body, so when I finished my task with her pinky I pulled her head to mine and began cleaning her red taunting lips. I didn't get very far before Sookie grabbed onto the sides of my head, moaning into my mouth as she demanded a kiss which I gladly returned. Her tongue was still cold from her frozen treat and the cherry flavor overwhelmed my senses, bringing with it another hazy piece of the puzzle. I didn't know why, but I *knew* cherries reminded me of Sookie and in my excitement I broke our kiss to tell her, "You remind me of cherries!"

Her eyes were dazed as she stared back at me saying, "Huh?" At least there wasn't any food falling out of her mouth.

"I remembered something! Sort of. You remind me of cherries. Or, cherries remind me of you. Something like that." I knew I sounded like an idiot, but I was too excited having remembered something that had to do with her to care.

Sookie smiled back at me wistfully and said, "You never told me that, but I guess it makes sense. You thought it was funny that I always smelled and tasted like cherries even though I..."

She hesitated and started chewing on her bottom lip making me ask, "Even though you what?"

Her eyes darted around the room before meeting mine again as she answered, "Even though I hadn't eaten any."

She was right; I'd noticed she smelled like cherries the very first time she'd hugged me when I'd just woken up from the coma, but I didn't think anything about it at the time. Even now I would've probably attributed it to her pornsicle, but just to be sure I pulled her forward and buried my face in her neck, inhaling deeply. Her skin and hair both carried a cherry scent and if my eyes had been open they probably would've fluttered. Wondering if her skin tasted just as sweet my tongue darted out and licked the patch of skin in front of my mouth making her gasp which made me grin. I slowly worked my way up to her ear, tracing the outer edge with my tongue and whispered, "I wonder if you taste just as sweet *everywhere*."

Her whole body shivered on top of me, only adding to Eric Junior's torture, but I wasn't expecting it when she screeched and jumped off of my lap. "What's wrong?" I asked. Things were just starting to heat up again.

My eyes followed hers to where she was staring at the red liquid evidence on her inner thigh that caught us both off guard and I glanced back at my hand seeing I was still holding the dripping pornsicle. "Did I do that?" I asked, sounding a lot more like Barry White than Steve Urkel, with my voice deeper than normal.

"Yes," she replied.

As she reached for a napkin from the table I grabbed her hand and pulled her back towards me saying, "It's my fault. Let me get that for you."

I leaned forward intending to clean her up with my tongue, intending to go further up her thigh than necessary, but she spun away from me snickering, "Oh no you don't."

"But whhhhyyy..." I whined for the second time that night.

Her eyebrow cocked high on her forehead as she backed away to grab a paper towel from the countertop and said, "You know why..."

Watching her wipe away my dessert was more disappointing than watching my favorite book series turned cable TV show where the director completely fucked with the characters and the entire foundation of the plot. Asshole; I'd never agree to work with him.

Hoping I'd be able to salvage something I said, "But you promised me a popsicle. You didn't say I couldn't eat it from your thighs."

*Or anywhere else on your body.*

She smirked, saying, "And I didn't say you *could* eat it from my thighs."

Seeing an opening I asked, "Can I eat it from your thighs?" It may have sounded more like a plea than a question, but like I said, I wasn't above begging where she was concerned.

*Please say yes. Please say yes. Please say yes.*

I fully expected a 'No' so when she finally answered, "Not tonight," more than just my hopes were raised.

"Tomorrow?" I asked, wanting to know when and then hoping I'd fall back into a coma so the time would speed by.

Sookie chuckled and started clearing off the table as she replied, "I don't know when, but I know it won't be tonight."

I continued to watch her move throughout the kitchen and realized I'd never felt more at home than I did at the moment. 'Life' was practically radiating from her and filled the house making it feel like an actual home. As she stood at the sink washing up the dishes my eyes darted around the room taking in the differences I was only now noticing. The coffee pot and toaster sitting on the countertop were new, as was the bowl full of fruit on the breakfast bar. Even the table I was sitting at was something that hadn't been there before, but it was more than just the material things that made the house more like a home.

*It was Sookie.*

When she was done she turned to me and asked, "So what do you want to do?" My raised eyebrow in her direction let her know exactly what I wanted to do and she smiled saying, "Besides that."

I didn't really care as long as she was with me, but since I couldn't take her out dancing at the moment I thought of another way to try and get her close to me suggesting, "How about we watch a movie?"

"Sure," she smiled. As we made our way into the den she headed towards the entertainment center and asked, "What do you want to watch?"

I shrugged, even though she couldn't see me with her back turned to me, and said, "How about Pirates of the Caribbean?"

Her head jerked and smacked into the top of the cabinet she'd been peering into making me ask, "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine," she grumbled while rubbing the top of her head. She pulled out a disc and put it into the DVD player before heading towards the couch. I patted the spot next to me and did an internal fist pump when she sat in it. My arm automatically went around her with her body automatically leaning into me and everything felt *right*.

I grabbed the remote from the side table and when the menu screen came up I saw she'd popped in the first of the series. It was okay, but I liked the second one better since it had more action and said, "How about we watch the second one instead?"

"No!" she practically shouted. "There'll be no Krakens being released tonight."

The oddity of her declaration made me ask, "Do you have something against the Kraken?"

She snickered and grabbed the remote from my hand to start the movie before leaning into me again and saying, "Not at all. We just need to build up to it first."

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## Chapter 76: Chapter 74

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### Chapter 74

#### SPOV

I woke up, disoriented for a minute, before realizing Eric and I had fallen asleep on the couch the night before. It was almost an exact replica of what we'd done weeks earlier, except this time we'd fallen asleep sitting up because of Eric's injuries. I moved slowly thanks to my stiff neck, but eventually turned enough to see Eric slumped over into the corner of the couch with his head lying to the side. His hair was pushed up at odd angles and a small trail of drool was coming out of the side of his mouth, but he was still the most handsome man in the world to me.

*I loved him.*

And deep down inside I knew he loved me too, even if he couldn't remember. His rant from the day before solidified that fact to me, but knowing what I did of his past, I knew he wouldn't recognize his feelings. Without his memories of me or our time together it was understandable that he felt confused. I was just happy he *felt anything* for me other than lust. We shared that feeling for one another in spades from day one and even though I shamelessly teased him the night before with my popsicle, I knew it was too soon for us to go any farther. Fucking him was a spectacular experience, but I *needed* him to make love to me first and I knew he didn't feel the same just yet.

His arms were still around me with his fingers loosely laced together around my waist and I wondered how much longer we'd have before that became more difficult. I couldn't stall for too long because my body would be giving away my secret even more so in the days to come, but I was afraid of his reaction. The guilt I felt keeping it from him was eating me up inside, but I hadn't yet mentally prepared myself to face whatever his reaction was going to be.

*I didn't think it would be good.*

But how long could I possibly put off the inevitable? I kept hoping something would trigger his memories, but it wasn't like I had an eternity to wait until the great reveal. My pregnancy symptoms were already evident and if I was lucky my morning sickness would go away or at least wait until I wasn't dry humping him before making itself known. God knows I probably wouldn't have stopped otherwise. It had only been just under three weeks since the last time we'd had sex, which in the grand scheme of things wasn't that long considering it had been a year for me before I'd met Eric, but my body had become accustomed to frequent multiple orgasms and it was demanding we make up for lost time.

*With compound interest.*

*Emphasis on the 'pound'.*

I didn't know whether or not my libido had kicked into overdrive because of the lost time or the pregnancy, but I was having a hard time not giving into my desires. While I knew it was too soon, I also didn't want to be intimate with Eric again without him knowing about the pregnancy. It felt wrong to keep that from him on many different levels, but I definitely didn't want to have that secret between us when we made love again for the third first time. It would feel like I was lying to him.

*Because I was.*

I had a week and a half until my next appointment with Dr. Ludwig so I decided that would be my mental deadline to tell him, with or without his memories returning. While I expected him to freak out over the news, I didn't want him to find out because the paparazzi had followed me there. Besides, this was his baby too and I wanted him to share it all with me.

Needing to stretch my legs, I slowly peeled myself away from Eric and stood up, heading into the kitchen to put on a pot of coffee for him. I missed my morning shot of caffeine, but since it was on my 'Don'ts' list I didn't want go against the doctor's advice. As I watched the pot fill, trying to get my fix from the aroma alone, my hand settled on my abdomen and I wondered about the little person inside. Would it be a boy or a girl? How long did it take before those parts formed? When would I feel the first kick? How soon until I could hear their heartbeat? They were questions I wanted answers to, but hadn't had the time to research and while I still dreaded Eric's reaction to the news, I hoped when he calmed down he would be as excited and happy as I had come to be. We hadn't planned on having a baby; hell, we hadn't even discussed having children period, but I wanted it now that I knew it was there.

*And I wanted him to want it too.*

Once I had Eric's cup of coffee ready I went back into the family room and saw he was already starting to stir back to life. His eyes fluttered open as he stretched out and when he saw me standing there with his coffee in hand he frowned, reaching towards me with both hands, and said, "You're supposed to be next to me when I wake up."

I was secretly thrilled inside, but rolled my eyes in mock exasperation before carefully sitting down next to him and handing him his coffee, as I said, "And you're a demanding Mr. Bossy Pants when you wake up."

Eric set the coffee down on the table untouched and pulled me closer, nibbling on my neck and making goose bumps spread across my skin, saying, "Guess what my pants are demanding right now."

I had eyes and there was no missing the morning wood he was sporting, but knowing now wasn't the time for me to turn into a slutty lumberjack, I tried to diffuse the potential morning romp by asking, "Umm...Are they demanding to know what in the hell the writers of 'Lost' were thinking with that last episode?"

*Really, what in the hell were they thinking?*

Completely undeterred from his morning seduction he ignored me in favor of nibbling just underneath my ear, so I tried to shake off the urge to just give in to him already by asking, "Are they demanding J.K. Rowling write a continuation of the Harry Potter series?"

*Really, that would be a brilliant move on her part and I'd be first in line to buy it.*

I felt him shake his head 'no' as he moved on to kiss a path down my shoulder and clenched Wicked and Immoral into fists, lest they rebel against me, and dug deep into the recesses of my brain trying to find a way out of the sextuation we were in. Remembering what I'd seen the last time I bothered watching the news or glancing at a magazine cover, I asked, "Are they demanding the entire Kardashian family to just go away already?"

*Really, just go away.*

That seemed to do the trick and I watched the outline of the Kraken begin to settle back down into the depths of Eric's shorts as he sighed, "Ugh..." against my skin, asking, "Are you *trying* to spoil the mood?"

*For now.*

"Yes. Is it working?" I tried to shift away from him and inadvertently pressed against his side harder than I'd meant to making him hiss in pain which made me squeak out, "Sorry...sorry..." and patting his chest like that would make the hurt magically disappear. "Do you want one of your pain pills?" I asked. He hadn't asked for or taken any since we'd gotten home from the hospital.

I could see the hesitation written across his face and thought it probably had to do with his stint in rehab, but since he didn't remember telling me about it I didn't want to say anything and make him uncomfortable. I waited silently for his answer until he finally said, "Actually, my side felt better when you were leaning against me last night," while he tried to pull me close again.



At first I thought it was yet another ploy to get me naked, but then I remembered the doctor saying heat would help and figured that was the cause. As much as the idea appealed to me, I couldn't stay pressed against him all day long (my willpower to resist him wasn't that strong), so I asked, "Do you have a heating pad?"

He furrowed his eyebrows at me like I'd asked him if he had any maxi-pads and I internally snickered at my own little joke knowing neither one of us needed them, not yet anyway, as he replied, "No."

I quickly stood up before Eric could try and convince me to stay there on the couch with him, saying, "I'll run to the drugstore around the corner and pick one up for you." Maybe I'd pick up some over the counter pain medication too since he seemed a little leery of taking the prescription medicine.

"What? Now?" he asked.

"Yes, now." I needed to get out of there before I ended up giving him a tongue bath or worse. Or better? One of those.

"Just call Alcide and tell him to go get one. That's what my father is paying him for," he offered.

*Didn't Pam tell him?*

"Uh...Eric. You fired your father. Alcide actually works for you now." He'd told me the whole story on the airplane on our way back to L.A. and I was glad he'd decided to keep Alcide employed. He was a really nice guy and I could tell he seemed to have Eric's back from the first time we'd met and now that I knew him better I knew it was because he considered Eric a friend, not just his employer.

"Oh yeah," he frowned, rubbing his face. I was worried he would get frustrated again over losing his memories, but he surprised me instead by smiling at me and saying, "Then call him since that's what *I'm* paying him for."

His hands came to rest absentmindedly on his abs, which were peeking out from underneath his shirt that had ridden up, and I knew I'd be a goner if I hung around them, *him*, for much longer. A little bit of fresh air would do me some good. Panty liners would do me some good too.

*I mentally added them to my shopping list.*

"Don't be silly," I replied, while stepping further away from the abs that were calling my name. "It'll only take me a few minutes to run to the store and back again. I'll bet you won't even notice I'm gone."

*But the trail of clitty litter leading out to the garage will give you a clue as to the direction I've headed.*

Seeming to sense I wasn't going to back down, just like my libido, he sighed out, "Fine."

Before he could change his mind, or take off his shirt, I practically ran from the room saying, "I'll be right back!" I ran up to my room and threw a hoodie over my tank top and took the time to brush my teeth and pull my hair into a ponytail before grabbing my purse and slipping back out to the garage. The new car was identical to the old one and I was fine until I drove through the gate and turned onto the main road. It was the first time I'd driven since the accident and when I noticed the trail of paparazzi behind me I suddenly wished I'd just listened to Eric and called Alcide.

I was practically hyperventilating by the time I made the short drive to the pharmacy and I wouldn't be surprised if I had added to my bruises when I tried to jump out of the car without unlatching my seatbelt. A couple of them had managed to shout some questions at me, but I ignored them and headed into the store, knowing they wouldn't follow me in, and practically ran over the customer standing just inside.

"I'm so sorry," I said, with my hands automatically grabbing onto their arms to steady us both.

"Sookie?"

I recognized the voice immediately and looked up to see the elderly woman I'd come to look at like a second grandmother. "Mrs. Beck?" I smiled. We'd met at the Senior Citizens Center when I'd been volunteering there and had gotten along instantly. She was a retired school teacher and loved to tell me stories about her former students.

Her arms wrapped around me as she said, "Oh, how I've missed you! How are you doing?"

"Better," I admitted.

We moved over into a corner of the store and quickly caught up with each other's lives and once we were done she smiled at me saying, "Well married life obviously agrees with you. You're practically glowing."

*Shit. Was I?*

Wondering if that whole 'pregnancy glow' was real or not I tried to place the blame squarely on Eric, which was true since he was the one that got me pregnant, and said, "It's good. He's a good man." He was a good man. I good *fertile* man.

"I'm glad to hear it," she smiled back. "I'm sorry to hear that your teaching job didn't work out, but if you're looking for another one, my Alcee has a spot that needs to be filled at his school."

Her son Alcee was the principal at a high school, but that was all I knew about him or the school. The thought of teaching high school aged kids made me nervous, but I did need a job and really wanted it to be in my chosen career field, so I asked, "Really? Do you know what subject I'd be teaching?"

I'd told her previously about being apprehensive to teach older kids, so when she shrugged with her eyes darting to the wall behind me as she said, "English," I was wary.

"English?" I asked, like she hadn't just spoken English.

She started digging in her purse and pulled out a slip of paper, writing on it and handing it to me, as she said, "Here's Alcee's phone number. I'll tell him to expect your call."

"Mrs. Beck...I don't know..." I stuttered.

"Sookie," she said almost sternly before her eyes softened and she continued, "you'll do fine. I knew from the very first day I met you that you were special. You have a lot to offer and you'll do those kids a world of good. You just need to believe in yourself and then teach your students to do the same."

She ended her pep talk with a wink and a smile before telling me to keep in touch and excusing herself and I was left standing there all alone with a potential job in the palm of my hand. But could I summon up the courage to deal with mouthy teenagers all day every day? I could barely tolerate the snotty kindergartners at The Brigant Academy, but I knew Mrs. Beck's son worked at a public school, so maybe it wouldn't be so bad? I'd had such high hopes when I first decided to be a teacher and when my first job wasn't all it was cracked up to be I was admittedly defeated, but I didn't want to throw away everything I'd worked so hard to accomplish either, so I shoved the slip of paper into my pocket and decided I'd give him a call when I got home.

Speaking of home, I glanced at the clock on my phone and saw that I'd been gone much longer than I'd planned to, so I went in search of a heating pad and grabbed some ibuprofen before heading to the checkout counter. While I was waiting in line I studiously ignored the gossip magazines and noticed the small display of Halloween candy. Time was just flying by lately and I realized the holiday was just around the corner. I grabbed a couple of bags of candy, not knowing if Eric's neighborhood had trick-or-treaters and chuckled softly when I spotted a display of lollipops. The sticks were attached to a small handheld device that spun the lollipop when you pressed the button and I added two of them to my basket; a Frankencock, I mean Frankenstein, for him and a Disney Princess one for me.

By the time I made it back outside, even more of the paparazzi had gathered and I quickly dashed through the crowd before locking myself inside of the car. I had to back out slowly so I wouldn't hit any of the ones standing there, but I noticed several of them jumping into waiting cars and it only added to my nervousness over driving. If I wouldn't have to wait so long for him to arrive, I'd call Alcide to come and get me, but knowing I could make it back to the house before he could get there I pulled back onto the main road and kept one hand over my abdomen praying none of them would get close enough to cause another accident. I had the baby's wellbeing to worry about now and its secret existence would definitely get spilled if I had to make another trip to the ER.

I was still shaking from the drive home when I walked into the house, barely acknowledging the car I didn't recognize in the driveway, when I called out, "Eric?"

Needing the comfort of his arms, I automatically headed towards the sound of his voice when I heard him say, "We're in the living room."

I breathed a sigh of relief as soon as my eyes landed on him and immediately noticed he must've taken a shower while I was gone since his hair was still wet and I frowned seeing the sad look on his face, but instead asked, "You took a shower without me here? What if you fell?"

"Out shopping? Why am I not surprised?" My eyes had only been for Eric so I hadn't noticed his company until I heard the sneer of his father's voice and looked over seeing him on the couch with his unfaithful cocksucker at his side.

My feet had carried me towards Eric without thought and I dropped the shopping bags onto the coffee table as an added buffer between us before looking down at Eric. His expression was a mixture of sadness and worry, so I reached out intending to gently cup his face, but before I could his eyes locked onto my shaky hand and he grabbed onto it, pulling me down into his lap with his arms wrapping around me, and nuzzled his face into my neck, asking, "Why are you shaking?"

I turned my body into his, feeling calmer as each second passed with his arms around me, and whispered, "The paparazzi. They were everywhere and I got nervous when they were following me because of what happened the last time."

His hold on me tightened, but he said nothing at first until finally sighing out, "Next time call Alcide."

Even though I had been thinking the very same thing earlier, I wasn't going to be a prisoner in my own house, or his own house, but not wanting to fight in front of our *guests* I just shrugged my response. One of these days he'd figure out what shrugs meant and I'd be screwed.

Before I could offer them a drink, or a swift kick in the ass on their way out, his father spoke up as though I wasn't in the room and said to Eric, "*This* is what I was talking about," pointing to the shopping bags I'd left on the table. "The ink was barely dry on your marriage license and she went and quit her job and now she's leaving you here all alone to go out *shopping* when you can barely walk!"

"I'll have you know I have another job lined up and those things are for Eric!" I lashed back, unable to sit quietly like I had the first time we'd sat down together.

He leaned over and rudely started pulling items out of the bag, frowning at the contents he found, but Alfalfa looked at the bags of candy and spoke up saying, "Well I can see why you've fattened up."

*That bitch!*

While I wasn't showing yet, I'd noticed the waistband of my shorts getting a little tighter and if I pushed down on my abdomen I could feel my hardened uterus inside, but since I couldn't throw

the secret baby in her face there was nothing I could say. Fortunately, I didn't have to since Eric joined into the fray and added his own two outraged cents saying, "Fuck off Fennel. Sookie isn't *fat*, she's *perfect* while you're just an infected cunt."

An unbidden image of her girly parts oozing out pus, and giving a whole new meaning to the word *pussy*, had me wondering if I could actually giggle while barfing, but instead I just saw red when she eyefucked Eric saying, "My name is Ginger."

I tried to center myself and infuse some calm into my body, knowing the added stress wasn't doing the baby any good, and thought, '*What would Jesus do?*' Seeing her undress Eric with her eyes I knew exactly what he would do.

*He'd smite the bitch.*

Since I couldn't make balls of lightning shoot out of the palms of my hands I was left just shooting daggers at her out of my eyes when Eric spoke up again saying, "I think you both should leave now."

That sounded like a great idea to me and I made no move to stand up, but neither did they, with Eric's father trying to look apologetic (from the unrealistic expression it was no wonder his acting career never took off), and said, "But we only just got here. I wanted to spend some time with my *son* since *I* wasn't *allowed* to visit you in the hospital."

That was news to me, but had Pam written all over it. I was thankful for it since I wouldn't have been up to dealing with the two of them while Eric was lying there in a coma. Eric didn't hesitate, saying, "It wouldn't have done you any good anyway. I was in a coma, so I wouldn't have been able to deny your request for money like I am now." His voice deepened to a scary level when he added, "Leave."

I watched his father's face redden and his hands formed into fists. Eric was in no shape to physically fight his father, nor had he ever told me whether or not they had come to blows in the past, but I reached out and grabbed onto one of Eric's crutches, pulling myself free from his grasp so I could stand up, and prepared to swing for the fences if he took one step towards us. There was no way I'd let him hurt Eric.

Thankfully all he did was stand up and growl out, "Come on," to Pus-sy as he stomped out of the room. She gave Eric one last lustful look before sashaying her skinny ass out of the room and I followed behind them to make sure they were actually gone. When I walked back into the living room and saw Eric sitting there, just staring at nothing, my heart broke for him all over again. I couldn't imagine being raised by someone like his father and was still shocked knowing how loving Eric could be. I had no doubts he'd make a great father; all he'd have to do is continue being the man he was, the exact opposite of his own.

I couldn't stand seeing him like that, but having no pearls of wisdom to offer him I just took up residence in his lap again with my fingers lacing through his own. His face reburied itself in my neck and I smiled when I felt him inhaling deeply thinking if I couldn't offer him any words of

comfort at least my cherry scented shampoo could soothe him. My thumbs tickled across the tops of his hands and his body slowly relaxed underneath me when he finally spoke up, asking, "It was Pam, wasn't it? That wouldn't let him visit me in the hospital?"

I couldn't shrug, from my Eric-embraced prison, so I answered, "Probably. She never said anything to me about it though. I didn't know." Seeing his mixed reaction to his father, I had to ask, "Do you want to hire your father again? I know you only fired him before because of how he acts towards me, but I'd understand if you still want him around. He *is* your father." I'd hate it, but I'd suffer silently if it made Eric feel better.

"No. I should've gotten rid of him as soon as I turned eighteen, but...I don't know. It's hard, you know? He's my *father* and I spent my whole life waiting for him to act like I was his *son*, but I've always known I was nothing more than a paycheck to him."

I wanted to grin like a fool because *This* Eric was sharing something so personal with me, but I also wanted to cry for him hearing the sadness in his voice. Instead of doing either I turned to face him and gently placed my lips on his forehead; I kissed each of his eyes, his cheeks, and then the tip of his nose before settling on his lips. Our kiss wasn't driven by lust, but by my desire for him to know just how special and worthy he was. He seemed to know what I was attempting to convey because he didn't try to take things any farther and when we finally pulled apart I looked into his eyes and said, "You are loving; kind; smart; sweet; the list is endless and if your father can't see any of those qualities in you then it's his loss, but *I* see them in you and I know I'm not the only one."

Eric's eyes filled with unshed tears which only made mine spill out of me, but he brushed mine away while he blinked back his own and smiled, trying to lighten the mood, by asking, "But what about sexy? Do you think I'm *sexy* Sookie?"

*Duh! There was more cumfetti flying around here than at the Playboy mansion on New Year's Eve.*

Since he didn't need his ego fed by me, I opted to sort of answer him in song. I smiled watching Eric cover his ears while I screeched out my answer, in the form of Rod Stewart lyrics, into my Disney Princess lollipop turned makeshift microphone and used one of his crutches as my dance partner. His answering smile only made mine wider.

*I loved that smile.*

*I loved that man.*

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## Chapter 77: Chapter 75

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## EPOV

I watched Sookie dance and sing (I used the term loosely since she sounded more like a dying cat) around the living room and I'd never been more grateful for her than at that very moment; that I could remember anyway, with her presence lighting up the whole room and warming me from the inside out. When she'd left to run to the store I'd noticed the stark contrast immediately. The house felt empty; emptier than it ever had before and feeling like a fool for missing her already, I took a shower for the distraction it provided with a part of me hoping she'd find me there upon her return and jump in with me. The condoms I found in the bedroom and bathroom were also a distraction. I normally kept them in my closet so I could just grab them as I dressed to head out for the night, so seeing them in places where I might need them within the house, or *had* needed them, with Sookie was another shock to my system. I'd never brought anyone home before with my house being my sanctuary from the users I tended to find myself surrounded by and even though I'd only had a couple of days to get used to her being there, it wasn't until I found myself smiling like a fool that I realized just how much I *liked* having her there. As I was getting dressed, and heard the sounds of someone downstairs, I realized what a fool I really was. Instead of the light and warmth I'd already come to expect, when I saw who was actually in the house, my smile disappeared as I was filled with a gloomy chill having forgotten what it was like to be in his presence.

My mood had darkened considerably seeing my father and his cocksucker had shown up unexpectedly and even though I knew I meant nothing more to him than easy money, it still stung after all of these years. When I'd first hobbled into the room his first question wasn't how I was doing, but whether or not I'd gotten my head out of my ass or if I was still being ruled by my wife's pussy. While I was pissed at his accusation, I was distracted wishing I could remember what her pussy was like because the little bit I could see of it when she'd unknowingly flashed me the morning before looked like a spot I would love to explore for hours on end. Pepper's presence killed any hard on I might have had thinking about it, but it was a thought I would be revisiting soon and with any luck I'd get to find out firsthand just how good it was.

My lack of response to his question had him getting to the real reason for his visit; money. He was running out of it and I had plenty. It shouldn't have surprised me, but it did. He'd had total control over everything I'd earned up until my eighteenth birthday and he'd blown it all on fast women and booze, living a lifestyle that my hard work had afforded him. Pam convinced me to put an end to that as soon as I was old enough and even had to loan me the money to move into my own place at the time, but I was fortunate and got the prime roles that allowed me to build my wealth back up, even though my guilt kept him on the payroll. I'd heard him say time and again how much he'd sacrificed for me and I'd stupidly believed him for as long as I could remember, but looking back now I could see he'd just been riding my coattails all along. It was his lack of talent and ambition that had kept him out of the spotlight he craved, not me.

I often thought he should have named me Benjamin since that was all he wanted from me, all anyone had ever wanted from me, and between him and my mother I never really felt like I was worth more than what I could give anyone else. Why it still bothered me that he never acted like a father was puzzling still, but seeing Sookie walk into the room was like being thrown a life raft and once she was in my arms I felt whole again, never realizing I'd felt less than whole until she

was there. I was surprised when she didn't back down from either one of them, or their cutting remarks, but even more so when she took a defensive stance in front of me. My father never had much of a poker face and when his anger over being told to leave became apparent it left no doubt in my mind that she was prepared to fight a man twice her size in order to protect me. Her lack of self-preservation was worrisome, but I was left feeling touched that she thought enough of me to do it.

Once they were gone I was left reeling under an emotional overload and found myself spilling my inner thoughts about my father and his less than paternal nature out to Sookie. It seemed just her presence could knock down every wall I'd built up over the years and it made me wonder what else I may have told her during my lost time, but I didn't have long to contemplate it. Hearing her heartfelt praise of the person she believed me to be was, again, unexpected, but welcome. She seemed to want nothing more from me than for my memories to return and now that I'd spent more time with her, I wanted nothing more than for that to happen too. She was like no one else I'd ever known and I found myself only wanting to know more about her. She was funny and sweet and sexier than any other woman I'd ever seen and since she didn't *appear* to want me for my money, I had to question; what in the hell someone like her was doing with someone like me?

*Talk about emotional overload.*

Her distraction by singing was just what I'd needed and even though my ears were probably bleeding, my eyes were glued to her, watching her body sway as she rubbed herself all over my crutch and I couldn't help wishing she was rubbing all over my crotch instead. It was so much easier to distract myself with our physical connection rather than our emotional one and the more time I spent around her, the less control I seemed to have over my own body. Even a leg cast and broken ribs couldn't deter me from wanting to fuck her brains out, but until I was healed we'd have to hold off on any acrobatics for now. She'd told me a couple of nights earlier that I could see *all* of her naked again once I got my memories back, but what if that never happened? She wouldn't hold out on me forever, would she? I'd never had to work hard for any woman's attention before, and before Sookie, I never imagined I'd be willing to, but I would for her.

When her caterwauling was finally over, she unceremoniously flopped down on the couch in front of me and pulled off her hoodie while fanning her overheated skin. Her whole body was glistening with sweat and my eyes tracked a bead of moisture as it trailed down from her neck only to disappear in between her breasts and leaving me parched.

*And hard.*

I watched as she peeled the wrapper off of her lollipop microphone and I decided right then and there, if we were dressing up for Halloween, I'd be dressed up as a Blow Job.

*Pop.*

*A Blow Pop.*



"Want one?" she asked.

I nodded hoping she'd meant a blow job so I was more than a little disappointed when she handed me another lollipop from the bag and seeing the other bags of candy on the table, I gave up on getting her naked for the moment and asked, "Did you get a craving?" The lollipop was dangling from her gaping mouth with her eyes wide open as she stared back at me and I worried tears would soon follow if she thought I was alluding to her eating too much (again), so I quickly followed up with, "Chocolate; the breakfast of champions," as I tore open a bag and shoved a small candy bar into my mouth before I could say anything else she might misconstrue.

*Were relationships always this hard? They should come with a script.*

When her eyes returned to normal proportions my body relaxed as she finally said, "Halloween will be here soon and I wasn't sure if you had any trick-or-treaters in your neighborhood."

"I wouldn't know," I admitted honestly. I'd lived there for a few years, but I'd never been home on Halloween and I suddenly wished I'd kept my mouth shut while hoping Sookie wouldn't ask why.

"Why?" she asked. "You've lived here for a few years now."

*Of course. I'd forgotten God hated me.*

I didn't want to lie to her, so I worded my reply carefully as I said, "I haven't been home on those nights to know." The last few years I'd always attended Yvetta's annual Halloween party, although it was really more of an orgy than a party. There was no point in dressing up for them because no one's clothing ever stayed on for long, but when I saw her E-vite in my email the day before, I found I had no desire to go this year. I did, however, have a *strong* desire for Sookie to not ask too many questions about what I'd been up to on the Halloweens prior. Rationally, she couldn't fault me for having a life before I'd met her, no matter how depraved it was, (just like *rationally* I shouldn't want to skin Quinn alive and wear the scraps like a suit tailored by Buffalo Bill as a warning to any other man that came near Sookie), but I wasn't especially proud of my previous behavior and after she'd told me how special I was, I didn't want her opinion of me to change.

"Oh," she shrugged. She seemed to do that a lot, but my thoughts were distracted when she started pulling the other items from the bag. She suggested I move to sit on the couch in the family room where she plugged in the heating pad and returned with a bottle of water so I could take some ibuprofen before finally taking a seat next to me. We had candy for breakfast as we watched another DVD (The A-Team) that led to a discussion over what Mr. T's real life wife would be like with me contending that Missus T had to be fuck hot and a complete BAMF.

*It was a given.*

I'd forgotten all about Sookie's earlier remarks to my father until after the movie ended and she pulled a slip of paper from her pocket saying, "I guess I should give this guy a call about that job."

"What guy? What job?" I asked, not liking either one of those questions or their possible answers.

"Oh. When I was at the pharmacy I ran into Mrs. Beck. I know her from the Senior Citizens Center when I used to volunteer there. Anyway, her son is the principal at a high school and she said they were looking to hire an English teacher, so when she heard I quit my other job she gave me his number to give him a call."

"But..." I didn't know how in the fuck to finish that sentence without sounding like a pussy whipped douche. I didn't want her to work. I didn't want her to leave me for hours on end, but I didn't want to come off as a needy little prick by voicing that. It made no sense for me to feel that way, but I was quickly learning *nothing* made sense where Sookie was involved.

"But what?" she asked.

I racked my brain trying to come up with something to say that didn't start with the word 'Don't'; don't go back to work; don't leave me; and settled for asking, "But didn't the school year already start?"

"Well yeah," she admitted. "Mrs. Beck didn't give me any details though, so I need to give him a call and see. It might just be temporary as a substitute or something."

Before I could say another word she pulled her cell phone out and did just that. I sat there silently hearing only her side of the conversation while trying to figure out a way to get her to just forget about it all, at least for now. I didn't like the idea of her working when I needed her here with me; not so much because I physically needed her help, but so I could mentally figure out what in the hell it was about her that made me want her by my side all the fucking time. I'd already spent two days with her and should have been sick of her by then, but I wasn't.

*And we hadn't even fucked yet.*

*Fuck me...*

But I wasn't used to begging, which was what it would boil down to, and I couldn't bring myself to ask her to stay home with me, so it was my own damn fault when I watched her jot down some notes before smiling as she said into the phone, "I'll see you on Monday morning."

*Monday morning?*

"What's on Monday morning?" I asked as soon as she ended the call, even though I had a fucking idea along with a sense of dread.

"It's when I start teaching," she answered a little hesitantly.

I wondered why she'd seemed to falter when she answered and my father's voice crept into the back of my mind saying, *'The ink was barely dry on your marriage license and she quit her job.'*

Was it all an act? Was she waiting for me to say something? To try and convince her not to work?

I remembered Pam telling me that I'd wanted her to quit before, but I couldn't remember it or my reasons for wanting her to do that, so I had no idea of how to react now. I didn't have long to ponder because Sookie stood up saying, "I think I'm going to take a ride and drive to the school so I know where it is. Do you feel up to coming along or would you rather stay here?"

I was still indecisive over how I felt about her working, or rather how I'd let her know I didn't want her to, but remembering her shaking like a leaf when she'd returned from the store, I grasped at straws by asking, "Are you up to driving after what happened earlier? We can call Alcide."

*While I come up with a legitimate non-pussy whipped way to get you to forget about the whole thing.*

Her face locked down into what I'd come to know as her 'stubborn look' as she said, "I can't call Alcide every time I want to go somewhere and I won't be held hostage by those assholes with cameras. I'll be fine."

She didn't give me the chance to argue with her because she stomped from the room and came back a minute later with her keys in her hand asking, "Are you coming?"

"Yeah..." just not the way I wanted to.

Sookie waited patiently as I hobbled out to the garage and in an effort to make small talk, I asked, "So where is this school at?"

She shrugged again saying, "South of here."

As soon as we were both settled in the car Sookie punched the address into the GPS and I stared at it practically shouting, "It's in Compton?" I was met with another shrug from her as I seethed, "That's not *south* of here; that's the fucking *South side!*"

She ignored my outburst and I barely noticed there hadn't been any paparazzi waiting at the gate until she mentioned it in a failed attempt at changing the subject. I continued to glare at her as she pulled onto the I-110 S when she finally huffed, "What do you want me to do Eric? It took me a *year* to find a teaching job the first time and I don't have any other options!"

"Bullshit!" I argued back. If this was a ploy by her to get me to tell her she didn't need a job, it was working like a charm because the words tumbled from my mouth before I even knew they'd

formed. "No! You're *not* working in the fucking South side. You don't need to work. I'll take care of you."

*What the fuck? Where in the hell did I disappear to and who had taken up residence in my body that was now controlling my mouth?*

"No?" she asked incredulously, but I didn't give a shit about my choice of words, whether or not it was me or a fucking body snatcher speaking through me. There was no fucking way I was going to let her work in one of the most dangerous cities in America. No. Fucking. Way.

"No," I repeated, more of a command than an answer.

Sookie let me know she was by no means in thrall to me as she angrily said, "I don't *need* your permission to work Eric. You're not my *Daddy* and I've grown up just fine without one. You're not my *Sugar Daddy* either and if *I* want to work then *I will!*"

Her knuckles were white from gripping the steering wheel and her entire face was flushed red from her anger. I had half a mind to get Alcide to pick me up a pair of handcuffs so I could lock her to my bed on Monday morning, with or without sex being on the itinerary, but I just fumed silently beside her for the remaining twenty minutes it took to get to the school as I ran over different scenarios, running from realistic to the extreme, to get her to change her mind. Bondage factored into most of them.

When we pulled into the parking lot it was everything I imagined it would be; a virtual prison. The rundown building had seen better days and was surrounded by a tall fence with police cars parked in front and guards patrolling the perimeter. The front door was wide open so we could see the metal detectors from where we parked and the \$100K sedan we were driving in caused more than one head to turn when we'd driven into the neighborhood.

Sookie seemed to have been thinking along the same lines because she looked around and said, "I should get my car fixed so I can drive it to work instead of your car."

Fuck that. I'd buy a fucking armored tank and hire a mercenary to drive her here, but that wasn't necessary because there was no fucking way she'd be working at that school.

"No," I repeated for the umpteenth fucking time.

She turned to me, seeming to have forgotten that we were currently in the middle of a fight, and calmly said, "But I don't want to drive your car here. What if something happened to it?"

Like a gave a flying fuck about the car! "Nothing is going to happen to it because you're not working here. End. Of. Discussion."

I probably should've left off that last part because Pissed Off Sookie was back and in charge as she noticed we were in fact still fighting and glared back at me snapping, "You did *not* just 'end of discussion' me!"

"Yep," I egged her on like a dumbass. "I'm pretty sure I did because you're sure as shit not working here."

If I hadn't been so angry I probably would've been scared seeing the fierce look in her eyes. I was surprised there weren't flames shooting out of them from the glower she gave me, but instead of conceding to my wishes she grabbed the keys from the ignition and got out of the car. I had my door open a second later yelling, "Where in the hell are you going?" as I struggled to get my crutches from the backseat.

She turned and waited for me to come up alongside of her as she said, "Inside. As long as we're here I might as well meet Mr. Beck and get a copy of the curriculum I'll be teaching so I have time to prepare before I start on Monday."

I followed her toward the door saying, "You're *not* working here Sookie."

"Yes I *am* Eric," she snapped back making me wish I had the power to hypnotize her into submission. If I did, she'd be doing more than *not* working here.

After the guard at the door confirmed Sookie's identity with the main office, we were searched like inmates and then directed to the main office where we were met with a man that seemed to be carrying the weight of the world on his shoulders. Sookie's bitchiness took a backseat as she extended her hand towards him saying, "Mr. Beck, it's so nice to finally meet you. I feel like I know you already thanks to your mother."

He smiled tiredly in return as he said, "Well don't believe everything you hear. My mother tends to pick the roses from the bunch and leave the thorns behind."

Before he could say another word, the office door slammed open revealing a pissed off teenage girl that threw herself onto the bench outside of his office door making him turn to her and ask, "Again Tara?"

Her face screwed up into pure rage as she spat out, "It wasn't my fault!"

He shook his head and muttered, "It never is," as he directed Sookie and me into his office. Once the door was shut he elaborated, "That's Tara Thornton. She's one of our brightest students, but she's ruled by her emotions, anger being the main one. Her mother is an alcoholic and could care less about her, but Tara still manages to make it to school every day even if she acts like she doesn't want to be here."

Sookie shook her head saying, "That's awful." Seeing the sympathetic look on her face I realized that he needed to shut the fuck up and quit giving her more of a reason to want to work there. "Does she have anyone else in her life to encourage her?" she asked. I didn't need a GPS to see where *that* road was headed.

He shook his head saying, "No, but since you'll be teaching the AP English IV class, she'll be one of your pupils, so maybe you can get through to her."

*Fuck fuck fuck fuck fuck...*

Sookie nodded as she asked, "What happened to the previous teacher? You were a little vague on the phone earlier."

His eyes dropped to his desk as he sighed and said, "Mr. Ocella is getting older and decided to take a sabbatical to Europe." Seeing Sookie's quirked eyebrow he explained, "He's a little odd; has a fascination with Roman times. He's traveling to the various sites of the Roman Legions," adding, "He was also the coordinator for our drama club, so I was hoping you'd be willing to pick up the reins. Our students really look forward to having that outlet, but I'm afraid we wouldn't be able to pay you for the extra time it would require, so it would be strictly voluntary on your part."

Sookie's body tensed as she stuttered, "Oh, Mr. Beck. I...I don't know. I don't have any experience with anything like that."

He smiled back at her saying, "I'd understand if you're not willing, but it's really not that hard. Most of the kids in the drama club," he paused and eyed her knowingly before adding, "Tara in particular, know what they're doing and have been a part of it in some way or another in previous years. You'd be there as more of a chaperone and to provide feedback to the students." His eyes landed on me before returning to her, saying, "Perhaps your husband can give you a hand if you find yourself needing guidance?"

What. The. Fuck? I didn't even want her to work there, so why in the hell would I be willing to help her do a job that she wouldn't be taking?

Sookie's eyes turned towards me and the hopefulness mixed with helplessness I saw in them did something to my insides. It also diminished the connection between my brain and my mouth as I said, "I'll help if you want."

*Fucking body snatchers!*

I wanted to take back the words as soon as they were out because I didn't want her to take the job, but after seeing the grateful smile take over her face as her hand found mine, I was left mute with the same three words racing through my mind.

What. The. Fuck.

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**Chapter 78: Chapter 76**

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Chapter 76

**SPOV**

I felt conflicted while sitting in Mr. Beck's office and holding onto Eric's hand, both out of gratitude for his offer to help me and to keep me anchored since it felt like I was jumping out of the frying pan and into the fire. The thought of teaching high school aged kids still terrified me, but I also thought I might have something more to offer these kids, having grown up with little to no extra money to spare myself, and thought I might be able to relate to them better. It would be a far cry from the snotty little brats I'd faced at The Brigant Academy, that's for sure, and as Mr. Beck gave us a quick tour of the building and I saw the faces of the students there, my resolve to accept the job only deepened until we were once again standing in the main office and I took the stacks of forms and course work from his hands as I said, "I'll see you on Monday morning."

Eric had remained quiet throughout the tour and I'd thought he'd gotten over his ridiculous demands about not wanting me to work there when he'd agreed to help me with the Drama Club, but as soon as we were in the car he started up again, saying, "I don't like the idea of you working there Sookie."

"Why?" I asked.

"Isn't it obvious?" he asked with his arms flailing around the car.

Thinking he meant his car might get damaged, or worse, I snapped, "I told you I'd drive *my* car if that's what you're worried about." I had enough to worry about and Prick-ric was getting on my last fucking nerve at the moment.

"Sookie," he sighed exasperatedly. "I don't give a shit about the car. I give a shit about *you* and Compton is too fucking dangerous for you to be working smack dab in the middle of it!"

Any other woman probably wouldn't have romanticized the fact he'd said he 'gave a shit' about me, but given our current circumstances he might as well have hired a turbo prop airplane to have written 'I love Sookie' in the sky above us and my eyes clouded with tears as I asked, "You give a shit about me?"

I couldn't hold back the tears and whispered, "Aww..." with a smile when he gave me his 'Duh!' face.

"Stooooopppp," he begged. "No crying! Your tears are playing dirty and it's not fair!"

I wiped my eyes, waiting for him to stomp his good foot, but when he didn't, I managed to chuckle out, "Then should I distract you with my boobs?"

"Sookie," he warned, completely serious.

*Shit...*

I glanced down at the girls wondering when they'd lost their powers and asked, "What do you have against Compton other than it's the name of your asshat co-star?"

Lafayette grew up in a neighborhood similar to Compton, so I knew it could be a dangerous place to be lurking about, but I didn't plan on going door to door throughout the area and introducing myself. How dangerous could it be getting from the parking lot to the school building when they had guards there? Besides, during the tour of the school Mr. Beck had said the job would only last until the early spring when Mr. Ocella returned, so it wasn't a permanent spot. It worked out well for me since I'd get the teaching experience I needed and would be done well before the baby was due to arrive.

My question seemed to raise other questions in Eric's mind because he asked, "You know Bill?"

"Yes," I sighed, realizing just how much of our relationship we'd have to go over before he'd be caught up, not including the little bundle of Northman currently wedged underneath my seatbelt.

"From the show or did you know him before we met?" His tone implied that he hoped for the former and despised the thought of the latter, so I set his mind at ease and said, "Neither. I met him when he came over for one of your poker games."

"Oh," he replied and sat there quietly as I got back onto the freeway. Before I could muster up the courage to tell him what had happened that night, afraid he might go all caveman again, he asked, "Do you think he's an asshat because *I* think that or did you come to that conclusion all by yourself?"

I had to laugh and asked, "If you think he's an asshat, then why did you invite him over to play poker?"

"Because he's a better poker player than he is a human being." There seemed to be more to the story and I wondered if maybe he'd gotten one of his memories back, but my hopes were dashed instead when he said, "Quid pro quo Clarice. Why don't you like him?"

I really needed to start keeping a better grip on my shrugs because I saw Eric's eyebrow rise up into his hairline when I accidentally discharged one and was pissed at myself for wasting one on Bill Compton, but mentally brushed it off and answered, "He got a little fresh with me when he came over to the house."

"Fresh? What in the fuck is *a little fresh*?" he demanded. The case of baby brain I had going on at the moment was making my memories a little murky and while I tried to remember it all Eric gritted out through his teeth, "*Did he put his hands on you?*"

Hearing him say that phrase unlocked the events of the night from my mind and a smile formed on my lips over the fact he'd said the identical thing back then. I glanced at Eric again and knew his blood pressure must've been through the roof because his whole face was red and his fists were clenched, so I quickly said, "You asked that same question back then." Only he'd asked Bill, not me.

Eric didn't seem as excited over the fact that he was still the same now as he was back then and only said, "Sookie..."



Fine. Be that way. "No, he didn't put his hands on me. He just had a bit too much to drink and got mouthy when he cornered me in the kitchen. I kned him in the balls and you charged in a second later and kicked him out." I cringed all over again hearing Bill's voice in my mind saying, 'Sookeh.'

*Dick...*

I heard Eric huff out a breath right before he asked, "And where was *I* when he was *getting mouthy and cornering you?*"

"Playing poker!" I really hoped the baby didn't come out with a 'Duh!' face since Eric and I seemed to be making them a lot lately, not to mention the genetic connection it would have to Jason.

"And if the poker table had been in the *kitchen* where it *belonged* then it *never would've happened!*" he yelled.

I bit my tongue, biting back my first instinct to lash back, knowing our fight had nothing to do with which room the poker table was in. Just like our earlier fight had nothing to do with his fancy schmancy car. "You're worried about me."

Eric's hands were still clenched into fists, but I reached over anyway and covered as much of his hand with my own, letting my fingers trace along his skin until he finally laced his fingers with mine and admitted, "Yes."

I could understand why he felt that way and acknowledged his fears, saying, "I get it Eric. It's a rough neighborhood, but there are guards all over the place. I'll be fine."

"You don't know that. Why do you think they have guards there Sookie? It's because it's dangerous there," he said with his grip on my hand tightening. He turned to face me before adding, "I don't want you working there. You don't *need* to work."

Seeing the concern etched onto his face, I was glad he hadn't been *this* rational before we'd gotten to the school because I would've had a hard time going against his wishes, but now... "Eric. Did you see the kids that were there? I'm sure they have a few troublemakers, every school does no matter what the per capita income is, but the ones I saw were all paying attention to their teachers. They *want* to be there, more than likely because they know getting an education is their way out. It was *my* only way out. It's a good way for them to *do* something with their lives that doesn't involve a rap sheet or working two jobs seven days a week. They can do and be anything, but they need the opportunity and an education is the first step to get them there. Bon Temps is no Compton, but we're just as poor as them and if it wasn't for the encouragement I received from Gran and my teachers to study hard then I wouldn't have gotten the scholarship I needed to go to college and I'd probably still be waiting tables to this day."

Eric had his own childhood issues, but a lack of money and opportunity wasn't one of them. What he'd needed was an adult in his life that emotionally supported him on a continual basis

and I hesitated before opening that can of worms as I said, "A lot of those kids might not have someone at home that are pulling for them. They might have a parent like Tara who's an alcoholic, or maybe their parents are too busy working nonstop trying to keep food on the table and don't have the time to sit down and talk to them. Teachers, a *good* teacher that cares, can fill a little bit of that void in their life just by listening and being there for them, just like the teacher that gave you The Whales' Songs book." I paused, letting him digest that little tidbit before adding, "Besides, it's only for a few months."

I got worried that I'd overstepped the line by bringing up his childhood when Eric's eyes closed and his fingers loosened in my hand, but he took a deep breath and tightened his grip once more as his eyes opened to meet mine and he said, "I get it Sookie, but why does it have to be *you*?"

His entire demeanor was calmer, as though he'd come to accept my decision, so I took a chance by lifting his hand and placing a kiss on the back of it before setting it down in my lap and smiled saying, "Who else has an amazingly talented professional actor for a husband that offered to help out with the Drama Club?"

He quietly sighed out, "You do..."

The rest of our drive was spent in silence with me having my own little internal freak out over the thought of teaching teenagers, but Eric's wandering hand pulled me out of my reverie every now and again as I situated it farther down my leg each time it meandered farther up. The stolen glances in his direction told me he was trying to work his way out of his funk and seeing the small upturn of his lips whenever I pushed his hand away, I decided if it took him trying to cop a feel to help him along it was a sacrifice I was more than willing to make. Since Wicked was stuck pulling steering wheel duty, I had to keep track of Immoral or else she just might help him into my panties.

*Was it wrong for me to want to let her?*

I was still wrestling with my immoral dilemma, and Eric's hand, when we pulled into the garage and just as I thought to distract us both by offering to make a late lunch, Eric looked around and asked, "Is that your car?"

He'd thrown a tarp over it at some point a few weeks ago and when I couldn't get it to start a couple of days earlier, I covered it again while waiting for Alcide to come and get me. "Yeah, I need to call a tow truck or something to haul it away and get it fixed this week." I'd be a nervous Nelly driving Eric's car back and forth to work. It screamed 'expensive' from their parking lot and stuck out like a sore thumb, when it had blended right in at The Brigant Academy.

We both got out with Eric lifting the tarp off of the front of my car and said, "This isn't a car. It's a death trap!"

*Good Lord. Do we need to repeat every conversation we ever had? Do we need to re-hang the porn posters so he can rip them down the minute I'm out of the room too?*

"Yeah, yeah...beware of hummingbirds. There's *nothing* wrong with my car...except that it doesn't run, but I'll call a tow truck and get it fixed!" I huffed and coming to stand next to him.

"No, we'll call a tow truck and give it a proper burial," he said as he threw the tarp back over it.

If the Wonder Twins hadn't lost their powers I would've been tempted to take off my shirt just to get out of yet another fight, but knowing we would just be repeating our earlier argument over him worrying about me, I decided to use another weapon at my disposal. Eric's body was rigid, braced for a fight that I didn't have the energy or inclination to give him, so he wasn't expecting it when I pulled him down for a kiss instead, but he didn't resist it either. As a matter of fact, I'd say he quite enthusiastically joined in because he let his crutches fall to the wayside as his arms wrapped around me and I let myself get lost in him. I also let myself get laid back onto the hood of my car with him on top of me, while my reason for even starting down this slippery slope was lost on me as well. My body responded to his like no other and while I missed the intimate moments we'd shared, I thanked my lucky stars he was still too banged up to follow through on banging me on the hood of my car.

When we both needed to pull away for air, Eric continued to kiss and lick his way across my neck before his lips settled over my ear, causing a shiver to run down my spine as he breathed out, "You're still not driving this car."

*Damn it!*

The only thing I was up to fighting him over was getting his shorts down over his cast, so I tried to calm myself and laughed, "Well, it was worth a shot."

He licked the rim of my ear while grinding his hips against me and said, "Feel free to continue trying to convince me though. You gave up too easily."

"But my boobs don't distract you anymore." Apparently my brain/mouth filter gave up just as easily as the rest of me.

His hands slid down my sides and back up underneath my shirt before coming to a rest on top of my bra and he timed the thrust of his hips with the gentle kneading of his hands, making me arch into him as I gasped at the dual sensations. His lips were back on mine with him stealing the air from my lungs and my legs wrapped around him automatically, trying to keep him there, but when he hissed in pain our impromptu groping distraction was brought to an end.

"Sorry..." I repeated for the second time that day.

Eric pulled his hands from underneath my shirt as my legs fell away from his body and he braced himself over me before leaning down for one last chaste kiss as he said, "There's no need for you to be sorry." He smiled adding, "I just got distracted by your boobs."

"Good to know they still work," I laughed, so I wouldn't cry as he straightened up. My whole body was still tingling and I seriously considered just throwing him down and riding him off into

the sunset, but my stomach chose that moment to growl. I doubted a breakfast of nothing but candy was on my pregnancy 'Do' list, so I said, "Are you hungry? I can make us a late lunch."

He eyed me like I was a juicy steak with his eyes resting on my crotch as he asked, "Is lunch the only thing you're willing to let me..."

"Don't you dare finish that question Eric Northman," I quickly interrupted because I wasn't sure I wouldn't have stripped off my shorts and written 'Welcome to Chez Sookie' across my abdomen with an arrow pointing down for his party of one.

He looked just as disappointed as I felt as we walked into the kitchen and I stuck my head into the refrigerator hoping the cool air would cool my libido as well. Once I was sure I had a grip on my sanity I looked at the contents and said, "How about we barbecue up some burgers?" Beef wasn't the meat I was craving, but it would have to do for now until I could have the Eric-meat I really wanted.

I glanced over at Eric and saw him shift slightly in his seat as he looked down and admitted, "I don't know how to work the grill."

"HA!" The sound escaped me and was followed by a chuckle at Eric's confused expression.

"What?" he asked. "You've met my father. Do you think he stood outside with a spatula in his hand every Saturday afternoon wearing a 'Grill Master' apron?"

I laughed again saying, "Well thanks to you, he'd certainly know his seasonings by now." Eric chuckled as I clued him in explaining, "The first time I suggested barbecuing you didn't tell me you'd never worked a grill and damn near burned your face off. I should've known better since your kitchen skills began and ended with working the toaster to make Pop Tarts." I started pulling out the items to make the potato salad and said, "I think I can figure it out. If nothing else, I know what *not* to do."

Eric watched me get everything together, asking questions here and there about things like my childhood. When we got to the Quinn portion of my history I could tell it bothered him, but he didn't say anything and I was thankful when I found a way to change the subject because I didn't trust myself to not kiss away his troubles again so soon.

While the potatoes were boiling I made the burgers and suggested to Eric that he call his doctor and schedule a follow up appointment which he got for the following day. When he told me where his doctor's office was located, I knew right away where he was talking about. It was the same medical center where Dr. Ludwig was based out of, but I remained a chicken shit and didn't use the opportunity to tell Eric about the baby just yet. We were getting along so well, for now at least, and I didn't want to potentially ruin what was left of our day.

Eric broke me from my thoughts by asking, "Can we watch that video together later on?" He paused, adding, "The one from the photo shoot?"

I knew Pam had given him everything while he was still in the hospital; I'd packed it away with his things when he was discharged and thought maybe it wouldn't be so bad to watch it now that Eric and I were getting closer again and agreed, "Okay. Did you not watch it yet?" I figured he would have with the temptation being too strong to resist seeing with his own eyes what he couldn't remember.

"No, I did, but I had questions when I watched it that only you can answer," he admitted.

"Uhh...okay." I couldn't imagine what he'd want to know, but I'd answer his questions if I could.

Since I hadn't had the chance to shower yet, I left Eric sitting in the kitchen and ran upstairs to take a quick one while the potato salad chilled in the refrigerator. When I came back down I found him out on the patio tinkering with the grill and brought the burgers out with me as I said, "I'd feel better if you let *me* do that. I don't think your reflexes will be as sharp this time since you're all banged up."

He turned around and huffed, "It's fire. Men have been cooking with fire since the dawn of time."

I smiled while setting the tray down next to the grill and said, "And at some point, for the most part, women seemed to have taken over those duties. It was probably because the men were dying off having been burned to death and we needed to so mankind wouldn't die off like the dinosaurs."

Eric jokingly scoffed, "Women cook the babies and men cook the brontosaurus burgers. That's how it works."

I struggled to just tell him right then and there about the little Pebbles/Bam Bam that was currently in my oven, but like a chicken-a-saurus I kept quiet and deflected my own thoughts by saying, "I seem to remember Wilma Flintstone doing the majority of the cooking, so your theory is lacking."

"Well then, your memory is lacking because I clearly remember Fred did all of the grilling," he smiled.

I walked over and shoed him away from the grill saying, "And Fred also got pwned by the cat every night."

I nearly choked on my own spit when I heard him say from behind me, "There's nothing wrong with a man getting pwned by a pussy. I'm sure I'd be pwned by yours. We should give it a try and see."

My head nearly exploded, along with my panties, and I'd been so dumbfounded by his response that I barely had time to duck out of the way as I yelled, "Shit!" when I pressed the ignition switch on the grill. The gas had been building up underneath the closed lid while I'd tried to douse the fire in between my legs and nearly set myself on fire for real.

"Are you okay?" he shouted, checking my limbs for scorch marks while my eyes traveled down to my crotch to make sure there wasn't any smoke billowing out of my shorts from Eric's comments.

Seeing that my hoo-hah wasn't sending out any smoke signals, I answered, "Yeah, I'm fine." Our eyes met and the ridiculousness seemed to hit us both because we nearly fell over each other laughing our asses off.

Once we both caught our breath Eric choked out, "Maybe the next time you want burgers we should just run to McDonald's."

While I secretly agreed with him, I just rolled my eyes instead and put the burgers on the grill. After making several trips in and out of the house, Eric and I were finally sitting at the table outside eating our late lunch/early dinner. As soon as he swallowed his first bite he said, "Forget what I said about McDonald's. I'd rather have these so I'll just have to learn how to use the grill." My mouth was too full to respond, so I just tried to smile with a full mouth instead when he asked, "So how is it that nobody laid claim to you before I came along?"

When I was finally able to speak without food coming out of my mouth I asked, "What do you mean?"

He'd taken another bite in the meantime, so I waited until he swallowed and said, "You're beautiful, smart, sweet, and you can cook. Why were you still single?" When he saw my eyes misting up he jokingly asked, "Do you have a third nipple that I didn't feel earlier?" His face then twisted into mock shock as he added, "You're not a hermaphrodite are you?"

It worked because I laughed out loud and said, "Yes. I'm hung larger than *you*, which is saying something," I winked, "but don't worry. You won't give a rat's ass once you've experienced my baking skills."

He leaned forward on the table with both of his elbows planted on either side of his plate as he said, "Oh, but I've already had your *pie*."

*That 'Welcome to Chez Sookie' sign was flashing like a mother fucker in my shorts.*

"Huh? Did you remember something?" I asked.

*Because I certainly remembered it. Too well.*

It didn't help that we were out on the patio where we'd already been all up close and personal with each other's baby-making bits. Didn't. Help. At. All.

Eric smiled and said, "I was talking about the *cherry pie* you made the other night." His eyebrows rose up as he asked, "What did you *think* I was talking about."

*Sookie pie.*

"Really?" he asked before sliding his plate across the table. His eyes smoldered as he patted the empty spot in front of him and said, "Hop up. I'm ready for dessert."

I can only imagine how red my face was, feeling it burn hotter than when the grill tried to take me out, as I realized I hadn't thought 'Sookie pie'.

*I'd said it out loud.*

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## Chapter 79: Chapter 77

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### Chapter 77

#### EPOV

While Sookie had gone up to take a shower, I wandered out onto the patio and stared at the grill hoping just the near proximity alone would help me know how to use it. Cooking with fire should be an innate ability for any man, just like the ability to take a leak while standing up, and I really wanted to be able to do this for Sookie. She'd been taking care of me since I first woke up and pretty soon she'd be taking care of a bunch of inner city teens as well, but who would take care of *her* if not me? An even bigger question was why did I want to?

I was still confused over my feelings for her. She felt like a stranger and someone I'd known my entire life all rolled into one, but I knew neither was true. The physical evidence was there that she was a part of the small missing portion of my life, but the more time I spent with her, the more I started to believe the stories Pam had told me of how I was around her, even if I couldn't explain why. I felt protective of her, covetous to the point of irrationality, feeling like she was mine even though I couldn't remember her. While her decision to want to work in Compton ate at me inside, it dissolved every part of me that questioned if she was only with me for my money. I wasn't used to being told 'no' with people tending to do whatever it was I wanted, but I had to admit that I liked her fiery personality. Any other woman from my past would've jumped at the offer for me to take care of them financially, but it only seemed to piss Sookie off and while it pissed *me* off, it only made me respect her more.

The whole work thing still bothered me and while I could understand her reasons for wanting to help those kids, I still worried about her safety. She was so small and fragile, but I knew I wouldn't feel better even if she'd be surrounded by the President's Secret Service detail every day. I felt like it was my responsibility to keep her safe, no one else's, but I also knew I couldn't follow her around all day long either. Everything would be so much easier if I didn't give a shit about her.

*But, I gave a shit.*

My life, the one I could remember before the coma, had been so much simpler and I recalled some of my first thoughts after waking up to learn about Sookie and how I'd been willing to let

her go since I couldn't remember her; couldn't fathom the idea of caring about anyone else. I still couldn't remember her, but I admittedly *did* care about her and there was no way I'd let her go now.

*How could I when I couldn't remember?*

Sookie's arrival with the burgers pulled me from the darkness of my thoughts and just seeing her made me feel better. Her sense of humor and quick wit combined with her beauty and intellect, not to mention her cooking skills, left me wondering why she'd been unattached. She'd told me about her history with Quinn and while the thought of them together left me nauseous, I still couldn't see why men weren't clamoring at her door. Even though I'd never been in a relationship myself, before now at least, I'm pretty sure *I* would've been knocking down her door if I would've taken my head out of my ass long enough to see her for what she was; *who* she was. Having seen the pictures and video of us together, the idea of it didn't seem so farfetched anymore and I could only be thankful now that, for once in my life, I actually seemed to have made a *good* decision while drunk.

From what I'd been told, even without the accident induced memory loss, neither one of us remembered our initial meeting, so I was left wondering if it was alcohol infused dumb luck or something else entirely that made me want to marry her. I'd never been one to believe in fate, but unless Sookie suddenly turned into pumpkin at midnight, I just might become a believer yet.

While she cooked our dinner, I replayed our earlier kiss on the hood of her car in my mind and found I couldn't stop staring at her; her every little movement or facial expression keeping me completely captivated. I recalled the way she tasted; the feel of her body against mine and it ran on a continual loop in my brain only making me want more. I wanted to see the flesh my hands had touched; hear the gasps and breathy moans she couldn't contain; find each and every spot on her body that would cause her to make them and then use them to drive her insane. It was only fair considering how crazy she made me feel.

Luckily our conversation flowed easily because my thoughts were quickly headed south with Eric Junior steadily rising north and he registered her words before my brain did when she'd whispered, "Sookie Pie," underneath her breath. If she hadn't had my complete attention I wouldn't have caught the words, but since I couldn't take my eyes from her, I heard them crystal clear.

I knew it was a long shot, but my raging case of blue balls demanded I at least make an attempt and I slid my plate out of the way, suddenly ravenous for something else, and patted the tabletop as I tried not beg, saying, "Hop up. I'm ready for dessert."

Her face flushed crimson with her eyes bulging out in horror and I stared back at her apprehensively, wondering if I'd crossed an unseen line with my lewd suggestion, but my fears were abated when she nervously laughed out, "Perv."

My balls and I were both disappointed, but I was still unwilling to admit defeat and reached for her hand, saying, "You offered. I accepted."



I gave her hand a playful tug, but she didn't budge from her seat and her face reddened even more as she explained, "I...uh...was talking about the *apple pie* I made for you before."

Her darting eyes and lip chewing told me otherwise as I said, "My bullshit meter is reading that as a 'false'."

"No, *really*," she emphasized. "You loved it so much you said you'd eat it every day for the rest of your life!"

*I don't doubt it.*

"Are you sure I was talking about *apple pie*?" I coyly asked while tugging on her hand a little bit harder. I noticed, not for the first time, the plain gold wedding band she wore with the tattooed heart peeking out the top and wondered why she'd chosen something so simple when I was learning Sookie was anything *but* simple. I'd seen the video of our wedding and knew we got the tattoos in lieu of rings that night, but I would've imagined a trip to Rodeo Drive would've produced something better than a basic wedding band.

Before I could think on it anymore the sound of her voice pulled me from my thoughts. The redness was fading from her cheeks as she halfheartedly tried to pull her hand from mine and answered the question I'd already forgotten, saying, "Yes. We were in the kitchen. There were apples. You were eating them. It happened."

*Oh yeah...Sookie Pie.*

I couldn't understand what the problem was. She'd already admitted we'd had sex before and I'd already admitted I gave a shit about her. Why was she still refusing me?

The question tumbled out of my mouth as soon as it had formed in my mind as I asked, "Are you punishing me because I can't remember us?"

It was driving me nuts that I couldn't remember a goddamn thing. Pies; rings; anything, but I couldn't help it. I *wanted* to remember. Was she mad that I *couldn't*?

"What?" she gasped. "Why would you think that?"

I thought about it for a moment and replied, "Because I've already admitted that I care about you. You told me that you didn't want us to have sex if it didn't mean anything to me, but you *do* mean something to me. I've owned up to that a couple of times now, so I don't understand why you're still set against it, unless it's because some part of you is mad at me for forgetting."

Her lax hand was suddenly gripping mine and she pulled her chair closer to me as she said, "I'm not mad at you. How could I be?"

*Because sometimes I'm Prick-ric?*

My mind couldn't focus when she was that close to me, at least not on conversing, and my free hand moved to brush a few stray hairs away from her face as I mustered up something to say and asked, "Then, why? We're obviously attracted to one another. We *care* about each other. What else is there?"

Attraction had been my only requirement in the past and I'd never been anywhere close to begging a woman for anything, but my norm didn't seem to apply with Sookie and I wondered how much more upside down my life could be. I'd been a confirmed bachelor with my choice of women any day of the week who were willing to submit to my every whim. Then I wake up one day and find out I'm married to a woman I don't know, but don't want to let go of, and she's seemingly unwilling to go past second base with me.

*Talk about being in the Twilight Zone.*

Sookie stared at me long and hard before she finally said, "You don't know everything about us yet. It...it doesn't seem right for me to just jump into bed with you no matter how much I want to. I miss that part of our relationship, but it would feel like I'm taking advantage of you."

*As if...*

A part of me had been worried that she didn't see me the same way that she once had and maybe her feelings had changed since the accident, so all I needed to hear was that she still wanted me like I wanted her. I managed to stop the chuckle before it left my chest, saying, "We don't need a bed for you to take advantage of me," and pulled her forward for a kiss. Her lips were just as soft as I remembered them to be and all I could think was that I wanted her closer. I needed to feel her body against mine and my arms wrapped around her waist, encouraging her to slide onto my lap with her sitting sideways. She didn't resist me at all, with her arms wrapping around my neck, and every nerve in my body came alive at the feel of her on me.

*I wanted to feel what it was like to be in her.*

Even as she muttered into my mouth, "We shouldn't..." I had my retort ready.

"We should."

We abso-fucking-lutely should and I held her tighter, ignoring the protests of my battered body while swallowing every sound that might make her think she was hurting me, and took as much from her as she was willing to give. The only way I could see her taking advantage of me was because the leg cast and broken ribs limited my mobility, but I wasn't about to let that stop me. I internally cursed the patio chair we were sitting in, but I was more than willing to improvise. I had no idea of how far we'd be going and I tried to keep her occupied with my lips and tongue as my hands slowly slid her t-shirt up her body, worried that she'd call a halt to everything. My worry appeared to be unfounded when her hands seemed to have the same idea because they clutched at the hem of my shirt, pushing it as high as it could go, and Sookie broke our kiss long enough to look down at me and almost angrily say, "Up." Her eyes were nearly feral and my

arms rose up, mimicking another part of my anatomy, with my hands relieving her of her own shirt as soon as they were free.

Her eyes raked over my chest with her hands following right behind them as she asked, almost to herself, "Why can't I control myself around you?" It was an affliction we shared, but I'd admitted to enough lately and kept my mouth shut. A couple of smartass retorts ran through my mind, but my balls had already made other plans that had nothing to do with backing up my mouth and every thought soon disappeared when I took in what was in front of me.

There was no doubt her breasts were distracting and her pale blue lace bra was too tempting with my lips drawn to her bare skin like a gravitational pull. Her whole body shuddered against mine as I slowly traced the top edges of her bra with my tongue and when I pulled one side down with my teeth, so I could latch on to the rosy tip inside, I was rewarded with my name being moaned from her lips and her hands moving to hold the back of my head in place. Eric Junior was literally weeping, wanting at least a handshake from Sookie if not a kiss from their reunion, but I mentally told him to shut up. I may not have been able to cook dinner for Sookie, but I could certainly take care of her *this way* and I had every intention of following through.

Her hips squirmed in my lap with her ass teasing Eric Junior until he was ready to explode, but unless we moved over to one of the chaise lounges, there wasn't much room for her maneuver in and I wasn't willing to stop long enough to get up, afraid she'd somehow regain 'control' of herself. I was still worried she might try and stop me, so when I moved one hand to the button of her shorts I moved the other to the clasp of her bra and flicked them both open at the same time. My mouth immediately moved over to her newly freed breast while I used both hands to open her shorts the rest of the way and she opened her legs allowing my hand to slide inside. It was a tight fit, but I managed to brush over her clit a few times and make her cry out in pleasure.

*That noise was a hell of a lot better than breathy moans.*

All I could focus on was the taste of her skin underneath my tongue and the slick wet heat at the tips of my fingers. Her position in my lap and the denim shorts she was wearing didn't allow much room for my hand, so when her hands left the back of my head and she started pulling on the hand I'd jammed down into her shorts, I felt disappointed she was stopping me before I could finish her off. My lips unwillingly let go of her breast to move back to her mouth where I pleaded, "Let me take care of you."

I knew I'd meant that in more ways than one, but I concentrated on the task at hand (so to speak) and hoped to kiss the argument right out of her, but she continued to pull on my hand even as she kissed me back and when she moved to stand up, I couldn't stop the loud sigh that followed.

"Now you're taking advantage of me," I protested. I may have even stomped my foot as I said, "It's not like I can chase you around the yard."

*If only I had a lasso like The Lone Ranger...*

Thoughts of having Sookie tied up in my bed weren't helping matters, nor did the fact she stood facing me wearing nothing more than her open shorts and I drank in every detail I could before she could cover herself again, but instead of moving to get dressed, she stared into my eyes for a split second before pushing her shorts down her legs, leaving them in a heap at her feet and her completely naked before me. When she leaned down with her hands grasping onto the waistband of my shorts, I looked down and watched Eric Junior spring out as she pulled them down my body and I'm pretty sure I heard him cry out, "*Hi-yo Silver! Away!*"

Once my shorts were out of the way, I still wasn't sure how far Sookie was willing to go and even though every part of me was screaming for her, I wouldn't push her to do anything she wasn't ready for. I'd never felt so unsure while feeling so right at the same time and seeing her stare up at me from in between my legs made my cock twitch, but when she seemed to pause for a moment too long I wondered if she'd regained her control.

*I would beg.*

*I would plead.*

*Dear God, I promise go to church every Sunday and I help little old ladies cross the street.  
Amen.*

She almost looked as if she was trying to hold herself back while we stared at one another. "Are you sure Eric?" she asked.

I wasn't sure what she was asking me, but I knew I *was* sure I would beg, plead, and whatever else God saw fit for me to do if we could just keep going, so I answered, "Yes."

I knew her well enough to know that her lip chewing wasn't a good sign, so she barely had the time to utter, "But..." when I pulled her back into my lap.

A Naked Sookie pressed against a naked me was a very good thing and I slid my hands down, groping hers, and saying, "*This* is the only *butt* I care about."

*It was a fan-fucking-tastic butt too.*

I pulled her into another kiss with my hands running unhindered along her bare skin, enjoying it more than I thought could be possible and when Sookie pulled back to catch her breath, she whispered, "I don't want you to hate me later because I haven't told you everything yet."

*How could I possibly hate her, ESPECIALLY after this?*

I knew enough about her, had seen enough myself to know that I would only have regrets if we stopped now. I couldn't think of a single thing she could tell me that would change my mind, so I told her truthfully, "I couldn't ever hate you and I know enough for now." I knew my feelings for Sookie were unlike anything I'd ever felt about anyone else. I knew she was caring and had a good heart and, even though I hadn't given her much reason to lately, I believed she did love me.

I claimed her lips in another kiss before she could argue with me any further and I felt it when she seemed to give in, with her entire body relaxing against mine. Our hands began to roam as our kiss deepened and I could tell the precise moment when something shifted in her mind. I hadn't known until then that she'd still been holding some of herself back, but it was evident she was now throwing caution to the wind and I was reaping the benefits of her decision. Her lips, tongue, and teeth blazed a path across my neck and down my chest. She bit down on my nipple with the perfect amount of pressure at the precise moment her hand encircled my cock on a downward stroke. An unintelligible noise made its way out of me, but I was already too far gone to care. The rhythm of her hand never faltered as her mouth left a haphazard pattern of moist red marks down my body and when her eyes locked onto mine with her lips hovering above her hand, time stood still.

*Birds; squirrels; airplanes; the earth spinning on its fucking axis; the rotation around the god damn sun.*

*It. All. Stopped.*

The bead of pre-cum glistened on the tip beneath her and while her eyes clearly said she held all of the cards, or all of the cock, I'm sure mine were filled with nothing but blind anticipation, like I was watching the series finale of 'Friends' all over again, only Sookie was Rachael and my dick was Ross and neither one of us wanted her to be on that plane to Paris. We needed that kiss and before my mind could wander to any other TV shows I'd never admit to having watched Sookie's tongue darted out, wiping away that drop with one swipe before she took all of me in her mouth.

*All. Of. Me.*

*Never.*

Never before had I experienced a woman's lips around the base of my cock and I knew now that I'd been missing out. When I hit the back of her throat I'd expected her to pull back, but I felt her swallow instead and take in even more until there was nothing left. My eyes never left hers so I could tell that she was enjoying it, or at least my reaction to it, because her eyes danced as she began moving with purpose. The suction from her mouth and the caress of her tongue was making me lightheaded and I kept my hands firmly planted on the armrests of the chair I was sitting in, afraid of what I might do if I let go. It was probably a good thing the chair was made of metal because I probably would've ripped them off when she hummed the first time and ended up yelling out a garbled, "Fuck," when she did it again.

It was too much for me to handle. It had been too long; I'd been worked up too often lately and her skill was too honed for me to not embarrass myself by cumming like a thirteen year old locked in the bathroom with a Victoria's Secret catalog.

*Besides...I wanted to cum inside of Sookie.*

I grabbed a hold of her on her last upward stroke and pulled her body on top of mine, kissing her until neither one of us could breathe. The arms of the chair wouldn't allow for her to straddle my

lap facing me, so I turned her body with her back against my chest. One hand moved to her breasts while the other slid down her body with two of my fingers sliding right inside of her. She was wet enough that I could feel the moisture seeping down onto me and all I could think about was how much I wanted to be buried inside of her.

I nudged her hair away from her shoulder and neck, as much as I could with my face, and grazed my teeth along her skin, saying, "You're so tight Sookie. All I can think about is being inside of you; stretching you; feeling your pussy throb around my cock while I bury it in you." She whimpered hearing my words and I really hoped I didn't end up cumming on her back, but it seemed likely by that point. I could only hope I could get her to cum in the next few seconds and try and calm down while she ran inside to get a condom, but Sookie seemed to have other plans.

I thought I would be settling for a handjob when she reached behind herself to grab onto me, but she lifted her body up, placing me at her entrance, and slid herself right back down, gasping out a hoarse, "Fuck."

*I concurred.*

Whether or not she'd meant it as a sentiment or an order, I agreed with both and my hands held onto her hips as we both moved her body up and down on top of mine. I couldn't think about anything other than how she felt around me; the slick heat inside of her body; the way her muscles would spasm along my cock. I had wanted to be looking into her eyes, but when I watched her hand move across her body and her fingers slide down, I felt them trace along the vein on the underside of my dick as it slid out of her and my eyes almost closed from the sensations alone. With her thumb working her clit and her breasts bouncing around in front of me, there was nowhere else I *could* look and if I couldn't be looking into her eyes, the view I had was almost as good.

Her gasps and cries of my name only added to the experience and I was sure I would be apologizing to her in a couple of minutes because Ross and my balls, Joey and Chandler, were seconds away from exploding when Sookie's muscles clamped down like a vice as she screamed out my name. Her whole body seized for a moment before I heard her start breathing again, but I could only mindlessly move her body on top of mine, hoping I didn't hurt her from the force of it, knowing I could finally let go, when her wayward hand slid down even farther. Her fingers, wet with her cum, left a feathery stroke along the underside of my balls and I felt like my entire body burst at the seams as I came with a strangled roar, long and hard inside of her.

Our bodies seemed to move all on their own as we helplessly twitched in, on, and around each other, with my arms moving to circle her waist to keep her there.

*Forever.*

Her arms came to rest on top of mine and as my wits slowly returned, I couldn't recall ever having experienced what I just had with Sookie with anyone else. She truly was like no one from my past in any way and instead of questioning why that was, I could only be grateful for it.

When our breathing finally returned to normal, I kissed the side of her neck and jokingly said, "You need to relinquish all control over your body to me if that's what I get to look forward to."

She snickered and playfully slapped my arm saying, "Pfft...like I have any choice. I swear, I get a brainfart whenever I see you without a shirt on and the inmates," she held up her hands for emphasis, "end up running the asylum."

I made a mental note to go shirtless from then on and took her hands in my own, kissing each of them, and saying, "Then I'll have to do something nice for them. Maybe a lighter work detail or some extra cigarettes they can use to barter with the other inmates. Oh! Maybe I can work out conjugal visits for them!"

*Them; me. No one lost in that scenario.*

"You'd have to be pretty high up to pull those kinds of strings. Should I call you Warden Northman?" she asked.

*Was it wrong that I was getting hard again over the thought of Sookie in restraints?*

She wiggled her hips, having felt the reaction since I was still inside of her, and she said, "Uh uh...I need a break *Warden.*"

"Well then you shouldn't be wiggling your hips Inmate number 696969. Perhaps you need to be *restrained...*"

Our little improv was doing nothing to dampen my arousal, but Sookie just kept on talking like I wasn't about to fuck her all over again.

*I totally was.*

"You're *still inside of me* for Christ's sake! Hell, I'm still dripping you. Give a girl a minute, would ya?" she chided, but I could hear the smile in her voice.

Feeling the moisture that had pooled around and underneath me made me remember the condom we didn't use and I asked, "Umm...shouldn't we have used a condom?"

I couldn't believe we'd had sex without one; I'd never done that before, but like I said. No part of my norm applied where Sookie was involved. I felt her body tense up on top of mine and I worried for a second until she said, "We don't need them anymore." My hands immediately started running up and down her arms and shoulders, trying to loosen her back up and wondering what the problem was if she was on birth control.

It was *my* body that tensed up as she moved herself off of my lap and, sounding defeated, she sighed, "Let's get dressed and I'll tell you why."

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### Chapter 78

#### SPOV

I handed Eric his clothes and dressed myself slowly, putting off what was now inevitable; telling him we were going to have a baby. The guilt I felt was radiating through my body. I swore to tell him the truth, but by keeping this secret from him until now, I felt no better than Quinn. I betrayed him by lying through omission and now I had to pay up.

I wanted to blame the pregnancy hormones for why I'd given in so easily and had sex with him again, but the truth was I *needed* to feel that closeness; to share the intimacy between us that had become such a large part of our lives before the accident. I missed him and even though I felt selfish for going through with it, I didn't regret it. My sexual history was limited, but I knew no one could make me feel like Eric did and now I had to wonder if our third first time together would be our last.

I didn't realize I was done dressing or how long I'd been standing there lost in my thoughts when Eric's voice broke through the fog asking, "Sookie?" His fingers lightly trailed down my arm, leaving goose bumps in their wake, but I couldn't find the words to answer him. My brain had pulled an Elvis and left the building.

He tugged on my hand, attempting to pull me back onto his lap, but I knew I'd never get the words out if I took him up on his offer, so I sat on the table in front of him instead. I wondered if it would've been easier for me to tell him I was pregnant if I could say it in another language. I knew he could speak a little Swahili, but I couldn't even remember what the word was he'd said to me at the premier party. I knew it had meant 'Surprise' and figured it would be appropriate in this situation, so in an attempt to stall him without giving anything away, I asked, "Tell me some of the Swahili words you know."

His eyebrows furrowed as he looked confusedly back at me saying, "I don't know any Swahili."

"Yes you do! You said something to me in Swahili the night we went to the party for your show."

*I know he did. 'M' something.*

He smiled back at me asking, "Did you have a little too much to drink that night?"

*Not THAT night.*

I shook my head 'no' while I developed a sudden case of ADHD with my brain running through every language I could think of trying to remember anything that had to do with 'surprise' or



'pregnant'. If Eric was anything like Jason I could just use pig Latin and he'd be sufficiently stumped, but my conscience would be free and clear because he couldn't say I hadn't told him.

*If I had some sidewalk chalk I could draw pornographic hieroglyphics on his patio pavers and be done with it.*

"Sookie?" he asked again.

"Do you have any sidewalk chalk?" I asked, still stalling.

His eyes narrowed back at me asking, "If I did, would you tell me what's wrong?"

My eyes dropped to the flip flops dangling from my feet as I hedged, "Nothing's *wrong*."

I saw Eric's hand come into view as he lifted my chin until I was looking back into his eyes and he asked, "Then what is it?"

I had no idea if it was the stress or morning sickness, but a wave of nausea hit me and my body swayed as Eric grabbed my arms and looked back at me with concern asking, "What's wrong?"

His question probably had more to do with my sudden green pallor than why we didn't need condoms, but the answers were one and the same so I blurted out, "I'm pregnant," as leapt off of the table and took off for the bathroom. I barely made it to the toilet when I lost my dinner and didn't know whether to thank the baby or give it a timeout for making me run away like that. I didn't realize Eric had followed behind me until I felt him gather my hair in one hand and rub my back with the other, but just the fact he did either of those things made me feel like maybe everything would be okay.

Once I was done, I washed up and quickly brushed my teeth, thankful I'd had the forethought to keep a toothbrush and toothpaste in every bathroom in the house for occasions like this. When I was done, I turned to thank him, but seeing he was gone made my stomach fill with dread. I found him in the den, sitting on the couch and staring at the TV that wasn't turned on, so I sat down on the end opposite from him and waited.

*I didn't have to wait long.*

"You're pregnant," he said without any emotion; without looking at me.

"Yes," I answered, mimicking his emotionless state.

"Is it mine?" he asked, with his eyes finally looking into my own.

"Yes!" I answered without hesitation, no longer mimicking anything. I knew he didn't remember how we'd woken up that first morning, but I was still incensed he'd even question the paternity.

"How?" he asked, seeming to not believe either that I was pregnant or that the baby was his.

Either or, they both pissed me off, so I defaulted to my 'bitch state' and took the smartass road, answering, "You see, every twenty-eight days or so a woman's body releases an egg from one of their ovaries and it travels down their fallopian..."

"Not funny," he interrupted.

*No shit. Do you hear me laughing?*

"Did I know?" he asked. "Before the accident?"

*I wish.*

"No," I answered calmly. "I found out in the ER after my accident and you were brought in a few minutes later."

He didn't say anything else for a moment, but I could see the color rising on his face along with his angry expression before he even opened his mouth to say, "Why didn't you tell me before now? How could you let me..." He paused before adding, "You should have *told* me!"

His voice was starting to rise as well and it was only egging my own anger on so I took off my flip flops and threw them down on the floor in front of him saying, "Why don't you go for a stroll in those before you start throwing stones. What should I have done Eric? How would you have felt after waking up, not remembering me at all, and me saying, '*Hi. I'm Sookie. We're married and expecting a baby in about 8 months.*'" Feeling more defeated than ever, I admitted, "I didn't know how to tell you."

He sat there quietly while the wheels were spinning in his head before he asked, "How did *I* get you pregnant when I *never* fuck without a rubber on?"

"Really?" I asked with my eyes moving to look back onto the patio where we'd just fucked without a rubber on. I had half a mind to take off my cum filled panties and smack him in the face with them. Instead I filled him in on what he couldn't remember and said, "We woke up together in Vegas, naked and crusty, with an unopened box of condoms and not a wrapper in sight."

Ignoring the second part of my comment, he went right back to the first and accused, "*You* did that! I was thinking I'd have to wait for you to run and grab a rubber, but *you* took over. Is *that* how you got pregnant? Did you plan it all? Did you plan on trying to *trap* me into marrying you or to get child support?"

*Mother. Fucker.*

Now I regretted having sex with him again because it was so much harder separating *This Eric* from *My Eric*. I felt the tears falling down my cheeks, but I didn't know which emotion was stronger; hurt or anger, so I stood up, knowing he needed time to process everything he now

knew and hopefully calm the fuck down before I broke his other leg, and said, "I'm *nothing* like your mother." The last thing I saw before I turned and left the room was his gaping mouth.

I stayed away from him for the rest of the night, not that it was difficult since he disappeared into his office, and after cleaning up the dinner dishes I went upstairs to *my* room and took a shower, hoping the hot water would ease the tension my body was racked with. I thought over everything that had happened that day, from me getting another job to us having sex again and ending with the baby reveal. It was a lot to deal with and even though Eric had been angry and accusatory, the fact that he'd followed me into the bathroom after knowing I was pregnant kept coming to the forefront of my mind. Underneath it all I knew he cared about me and I put all of my hope into that one truth knowing I'd need it to get through The Return of Prick-ric.

My eyes kept straying to my still flat stomach and when I eventually climbed into bed my hands came to rest on top of it, as if they were trying to shield the baby from the pain I was in. With nothing left to distract me from my feelings, I cried myself to sleep.

EPOV

I don't know how long I sat there with my mouth hanging open after Sookie had left the room before I finally got up and retreated to my office, needing to be alone to make sense of the bomb she'd just dropped on me.

*Pregnant.*

*With MY baby.*

I felt like a complete and utter shithead the moment I accused her of planning it all; planning to *trap* me and felt sick to my stomach knowing I sounded *exactly* like my father. It was another slap to my face when she said wasn't like my mother.

*Did she know? Had I told her?*

I didn't know up from down anymore. The news of the baby was a shock, just like when I found out I'd gotten married, but I knew I would have to find a way to deal with it. It didn't take long for the idea of being married to Sookie to settle into my psyche and even seem like a *good* thing, but deep down I knew my *real* problem was the idea of *me* being someone's father. It scared me more than anything else I'd ever experienced. I was afraid of repeating my own father's mistakes. It seemed inevitable. After all, I couldn't stop myself from repeating his favorite accusation to Sookie.

It would be easier if I could make myself believe that she actually *had* planned it all. How in the hell could I have even gotten it up, much less actually *finished*, if I'd been so drunk that I couldn't remember anything the next morning? If I could believe I'd been duped by a con then I could try and cut my losses.

*It wouldn't be the first time I had to do it, but it seemed a hell of a lot more daunting prospect to try and let go of Sookie than letting go of my mother.*

Even though I was already questioning my ability to do so, I could still try to cut her loose from my life, even if it already felt like she would be a part of me forever. The only things I knew about her were the things she'd told me, so I had no way of really knowing who she'd been sleeping with before I came along.

*But was she THAT good of an actress?*

I'd always prided myself on being able to spot a bluff a mile away (it came in handy when playing poker), but she'd never seemed to be anything but genuine with me. I wanted to believe her and *not* believe her all at the same time. Ever since I woke up from the coma she had my emotions jumping all over the fucking place and I couldn't get a grasp on anything anymore.

I couldn't exactly 'run home to momma' with my problems, so I settled for the next best thing and called Pam. As soon as she answered, I asked, "Did you know?"

*If SHE had kept this secret from me, I'd take out all of my frustrations on her shoe collection.*

"I know *lots* of things Eric. Knowledge is power. It's what makes me good at my job, but I'll need you to be more specific," she said in an annoying singsong voice.

"Specifically," I gritted out, "did you *know* that Sookie is *pregnant*?"

I was met with nothing but silence until she finally replied, in a much more subdued voice, saying, "Shit. I didn't know *that*." When I didn't say anything else she continued, "Well, that explains all of her disgusting retching at the hospital."

She wasn't sick; she had *morning sickness* and it only made it all the more real that I might possibly be a father in another eight months. Hoping Pam might question the paternity, if only so I would feel better doing so, I said, "She said it's *mine*." I had already started liking the thought of *Sookie* being *mine*, but now there was more than just Sookie added to the equation.

"Well whose baby would it be?" she asked, as though the idea of Sookie trying to falsely pin her pregnancy on me hadn't even entered her mind.

"How in the hell should *I* know? I don't *remember*, but I've never fucked without a rubber before so why wouldn't I question it? All I've got to go on is what she's telling me!"

Nonplussed, Pam replied, "Well thank fuck there's not a video of your wedding night to go along with your wedding on the internet, but even if you *had* used a condom, shit happens. They break. Get over it and move on. I have no doubt that baby will be a little blonde haired blue eyed version of *you* when it comes ripping through Sookie's crotch, so instead of dwelling on what can't be changed, let's discuss names. I think *Pam* is appropriate, don't you?"

*I really was in the fucking Twilight Zone.*

"Why aren't you freaking the fuck out?" I asked. Just in case she was unaware, I clued her in to my mental state and added, "*I'm freaking the fuck out!*"

My ass automatically puckered out of habit hearing her tone of voice when she said, "Tell me you weren't Prick-ric when she told you."

I'd seen the tears; I'd heard the accusations flying out of my mouth with no filter. I was Prick-ric to the Nth degree, so I repeated my only defense, saying, "I was freaking the fuck out!"

Instead of lashing out at me, like I'd expected her to, I heard her inhale deeply before saying, "You know, one of these days you're going to push her too far and she'll leave you." The idea of her walking out on me brought me back down like a lead balloon and Pam surprised me again when she added, "Maybe it's for the best. Neither one of you planned on falling in love and since you don't remember it, maybe she should just cut her losses now." *SHE should cut HER losses?* "The stress can't be good for her being preggo and all and you only seem to want to question her every motive in being with you, so I can call your lawyer and have the papers drawn up. You can go back to fucking your mindless bimbos and she can get on with her life and find someone that deserves her."

My lead balloon deflated completely hearing Pam talking about Sookie being better off without me. It was *my* job to take care of her. I didn't want to fuck mindless bimbos; after being with Sookie earlier I knew I only wanted to fuck *her*. I might not *deserve* Sookie, but she was *mine!*

"Don't call any fucking lawyers," I ordered before hanging right the fuck up, but not before I could hear her chuckling in the background.

PPOV

*That was easy. Fucking possessive prick.*

SPOV

It was déjà vu all over again the next morning. I woke up trapped in Eric's arms and before I could wonder whether or not he was awake, he tightened his hold on me and said, "I don't like this bed. It's too small."

*Really? That was ALL he had to say to me after last night?*

"You have your own," I retorted. I tried to loosen his grip from me, but he was unrelenting so I added, "Consider your invitation to come into my bed officially rescinded." I knew I couldn't uninvite him from a bed or a room in his own house, but I didn't really give a shit. I was bitchy on principle alone.

"I'm sorry," he whispered into the back of my neck.

At least I wasn't facing him and his potentially bare chest, but since I was still angry and hurt, I spat out asking, "For what? Are you sorry that I'm pregnant? Or sorry that *you're* the father? Because you *are* the father."

He didn't answer any of my questions and instead said, "Pam thinks we should name it Pam."

That brought me up short, making me ask, "You told Pam?"

I felt him nod before he said, "You didn't."

"I didn't tell *anyone*. I thought you should be the first to know." It had been a hard secret to keep and an even harder one to tell without sidewalk chalk.

I felt him take a deep breath as he began, saying, "You were right. You're *nothing* like my mother, but I'm *exactly* like my father. The idea of being one scares me, but I shouldn't have lashed out at you. I'm sorry for everything I said last night."

*How could he possibly think he was anything like that asshole?*

All of the anger left me and I moved my hand on top of his, lacing my fingers through his own and moved it down to rest on top of my stomach, saying, "You're *nothing* like him. You're sweet and kind and you have a good heart." At least when he wasn't being Prick-ric, but I was hoping to break him of that habit over the next eight months. It hadn't taken but a few days the last time, so I knew how he really was underneath it all. I tried to keep my voice even, even as the tears welled in my eyes, and added, "You'll be a great daddy." I was full of doubts, but that wasn't one of them. I only had to recall him meeting Jessica at the shelter and knew he could never be like his own father. Eric was completely still behind me and when he didn't say anything after a bit, I jokingly asked, "But you don't have your own Paprika hidden away somewhere, do you?"

My question seemed to thaw him out because he pressed his body against mine even closer than before and softly said, "No, but I'm still afraid I'll fuck it all up."

"I'm scared too," I admitted. "I'd make a kick ass *Gran*, but I don't know how to be a *mom*."

*With my lack of brain/mouth filter, the kid's first word could conceivably be 'fucktard'.*

Eric's hand moved to my hips, pulling on me until I rolled over and he chuckled when my eyes didn't stray from his bare chest before saying, "You'll be a *great* mom."

"How can you be so sure?" I asked his chest.

"Because I've already seen how well you take care of *me*, even when I'm being an ass."

*But I was already a fan of his ass. He had a great ass...*

*Focus Sookie!*

"But..." I started to protest that I hadn't done much to help him and it certainly didn't equate to caring for a baby, but he cut me off by kissing me. Me + Eric's naked chest + kissing + a bed equaled the rapid subtraction of our clothes, which was why I could never be a math teacher. The numbers just didn't add up, but something *else* was up and we lost no time in making up. I didn't know if it was the fact it was makeup sex, the pregnancy hormones, or the that there was literally nothing between us anymore, but it was, without a doubt, the best sex I'd ever had and when it was all over, I gingerly flopped down onto his chest, mindful of his broken ribs, with both of us a sweaty mess, and heard Eric whisper into the hair on top of my head, "This is right."

*I couldn't have agreed more.*

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## Chapter 81: Chapter 79

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### Chapter 79

#### EPOV

When I'd left my office to find Sookie, after hanging up on Pam, I was still so full of doubts about everything, but the one thing that kept my feet moving was the undeniable truth that I didn't want to let her go. It felt crazy to feel that way after only knowing her for a few days, that I could remember anyway, but it was true. Whatever spell I was under had to have been a powerful one because the thought of being without her, even now, wasn't...ideal? Preferable?

*Who was I fucking kidding? If she walked out now it would have to be with me attached to her leg, kicking and screaming for her to stay.*

Yes, nothing made sense where Sookie was concerned. Black was white; up was down and, if necessary, I was inexplicably willing to beg a woman, *a pregnant woman*, to stay with me.

*Welcome to the Twilight Zone.*

Pregnant.

That word and all of its possible meanings were still swirling through my mind, even as I slowly sought her out. I had no doubt that I would've fucked her, drunk or not, on our wedding night. For all I knew we could've continued drinking well on into the night and that was why I couldn't remember anything. Pam was right; shit happens. Even if we had used a condom, it could've broken and while I wanted to believe Sookie wouldn't try to dupe me into believing the baby was mine, I was afraid. Not only afraid of being a father, but afraid of becoming attached to the idea of it being mine only to find out later that it wasn't. If it had been any other woman claiming I'd made them pregnant, I would've had no problems living my life exactly as I had been until a paternity test forced me to write a check every month. Any kid would be better off without me in their life, so it would've been easier to stay detached, but I was already so attached to Sookie, the idea of finding out it *wasn't* mine later on had the potential to devastate me.

*Fucking Twilight Zone.*

I found her thrashing in the sheets on her bed and went straight to her, climbing in beside her to save her from herself and hoped like hell for her sake the kid took after me when it slept or else her abdomen would be black and blue. Her body immediately settled against mine and I smiled to myself, glad that it was yet another way I could take care of her and, with my body wrapped around hers, it wasn't until I was drifting off to sleep that I realized I really did hope the baby *was mine*.

Despite the turmoil of finding out Sookie was pregnant, I was able to sleep, *ironically*, like a baby and had only just barely woken up when I felt her stir in my arms. She was, understandably, still mad at me, but even as she angrily asked if I believed I was the father, I couldn't honestly say yes, so I deflected by mentioning Pam's asinine request (it would be a cold day in hell before there was a *Pamela Northman* walking around). I didn't want to lie to her; I couldn't afford to, knowing it would lead to nothing good, so everything I told her was the truth.

I *was* sorry; she *wasn't* like my mother; I *was* like my father and while I certainly hadn't planned on attacking her as soon as we woke up, I couldn't help myself. Even with bed head and swollen red rimmed eyes from crying the night before, she was still more beautiful to me than anyone else and I reacted on instinct. I *needed* her like I'd never needed anything and if I'd thought the sex we'd had on the patio the night before was amazing, it paled in comparison to that morning. Something had shifted within me overnight; doubt about 'us' had changed into acceptance. I accepted now that Sookie was a part of my life, memories or not, if only because the thought of being without her turned me into an emo bitch, and while I didn't know if what I felt for her was love, it was damn close. With all of those emotions swirling through me, seeing her come undone on top of me was nothing short of spectacular and as we attempted to catch our breath, with her on top of me, I knew no matter what, this was right. *We* were right and, baby or no baby, I'd do whatever I had to, to keep her.

She eventually shifted to lie next to me, but I still kept her pressed against my side, unwilling to let her go just yet and she smirked, pulling the sheet over both of us and saying, "I can't think straight when you're naked."

I grinned back her and said, "Ditto beautiful." She really was and, unbelievably, Eric Junior started stirring with me wanting her again.

Sookie rolled her eyes in disbelief saying, "Puh-leez...I'm sure I look like shit right now, but *you* Mr. Sexiest Man Alive, not *once*; not *twice*, but *five times*, wake up looking like you're in the middle of a photo shoot. It's not fair."

And I found that title ridiculous *all five times*, so I looked back at her before rolling my own eyes, replying facetiously, "Yep. Every single day, I wake up and look in the mirror and think, 'Five times, mother fucker. Five times.'"

She just laughed at me saying, "Well...you didn't wake up *every* day, but don't worry. I thought it for you while you were out."



A joking happy Sookie was so much better than a crying unhappy Sookie, so I pulled her back on top of me making Eric Junior happy, asking, "Do *you* think I'm sexy Sookie?"

She kept giggling as she asked, "Do I need to sing to you again? Because if I do, then you're gonna have to let me go pee first or else we might have a *situation*."

Remembering her *singing* from the day before, I wasn't sure if I might actually prefer a golden shower instead, but I loosened my grip and watched her bound into the bathroom, thankful we weren't *that* married that she kept the door open while doing her business.

*Some things were better left a mystery.*

She laughed at the disappointed look on my face when she came back into the room wearing a robe and with a toothbrush in her mouth, so I gave her my *serious* look, saying, "Who said you could get dressed?" Dressed was bad. Naked was good.

She disappeared back into the bathroom to rinse out her mouth and came back into the room with a smile replying, "Whatever Captain Caveman. We can't stay in bed all day."

"Why in the hell not?" I asked. It sounded like a plan to me; a really fucking good one.

Sookie pulled another disappearing act, only this time into the closet, and came back out a few minutes later completely dressed. Before I could protest, she held her hand up saying, "You have a doctor's appointment and we have *all week* to get...*reacquainted* before I start work on Monday."

I went from chomping at the bit, thinking about an entire week of playing with Naked Sookie, to having a sudden realization. She'd accepted the teaching job in Compton *knowing* she was pregnant. Granted, I still couldn't fully accept that it was *my baby* growing inside of her, but she was legally *my wife* and it felt like she was *my Sookie*, so since her and the baby came as a set now I felt like *I* should have a say in where they both went.

"How could you be so fucking stupid?" I asked. Unfortunately, *my mouth* and *my brain* weren't fully functioning as a team yet. I blamed the lack of coffee.

Her flirty smirk disappeared in an instant and visions of a weeklong play date with Naked Sookie evaporated like a cartoon cloud of smoke as her eyes narrowed back at me when she said, "I'm sorry, you must be speaking Swahili again because I don't think I understood you."

I still wondered where in the hell she got the idea that I could speak Swahili, but I ignored that line of thought for now and asked, "Why would you accept a job in fucking Compton *knowing* that you're pregnant?"

Understanding filtered into her expression and she smiled while faking a gag saying, "Please don't say 'fucking' and 'Compton' to me in the same sentence. I vomit easily these days."

That cocksucker still had a lot to answer for, as far as I was concerned, but I refused to allow her to deflect our conversation and said, "I mean it Sookie. You're *NOT* working there." There were so many things that could go wrong. Kids were rowdy; she could get bumped into too hard; she could get elbowed in her stomach; she could get knocked down a flight of stairs. She was small enough to fit inside one of the lockers and if someone stuck her in one, it would take forever to find her.

*There were a lot of fucking lockers in that school.*

Seemingly unaffected that she could possibly suffocate or starve to death inside of a locker, she defiantly declared, "I *AM* working there. We've already discussed this."

"I wasn't fully informed when *we* discussed this and now that I *am*, I've changed my mind. You're not working there. End. Of. Discussion."

Had we been discussing anything else, I would've laughed at how comical it was to see her facial expressions change so dramatically. Even pissed off she was a sight to behold, which only made me mourn the loss of Naked Sookie all the more, but I'd need my mobility back to fully enjoy having angry sex with her. I could tell she was building up a full head of steam and, remembering what she'd said the night before, I decided to test her. Just as she opened her mouth to let loose on me, I sat up in bed, with the sheet falling down to my waist, and leaned back on my hands with my bare chest on display. I even flexed once or twice for good measure and tossed my head back to get my hair out of my face while biting back the smile that threatened to emerge when she did nothing but gape at me and sputter incoherently. When she finally threw her hands up in the air and stomped out of the room with a frustrated yell I couldn't help laughing out loud at my small victory.

*Yep. Five times, mother fucker. Five times...*

I pulled myself out of bed when I heard her stomp her way downstairs, not bothering to get dressed as I went into my room to take a shower. I'd foolishly hoped she would walk in on me and we'd have another round of morning sex, but my hopes were dashed and I later found her in the kitchen putting a stack of freshly made waffles onto a plate. Even though I felt like I was right, I didn't like the thought of her being mad at me, so when she didn't even turn around at the sound of me entering the room, I came up to stand right behind her. I leaned my body against her back, kissing the top of her head, and chuckled when she reached behind herself with her hands patting my body to make sure I was dressed before she sighed, saying, "I get that you're worried, but I'll be fine."

"You don't know that," I mumbled into the top of her head. "What if something happens? You don't *need* to work."

"You can't protect me from everything Eric and I *do* need to work," she sighed. I was about to protest, but she spun around and put her fingertips to my lips to stop me as she said, "I need to work for *me*. I worked really hard to get through school so that I could be a teacher and now that I finally have the opportunity to make a difference in someone's life, I can't throw it all away."

Why did she have to be so fucking rational when I felt anything but rational where she was concerned? She was standing too close for me to pull my shirt off, so I hoped a little bit of charm would work just as well and truthfully admitted, "You've already made a difference in *my* life. Doesn't that count for something?"

She smiled saying, "More than you can imagine." I thought perhaps Sookie was coming around to my way of thinking, but she followed up with, "But I need to do this for *me*." There was no hiding my disappointment. I was still opposed to the idea of her working there, but it seemed my desire to give her what she wanted outweighed everything else and when my shoulders sagged in defeat I was rewarded with a kiss. Not just a sweet 'thank you' kiss, but the kind that grew into 'I'd toss you onto the counter and fuck you into a coma if it weren't for my broken leg and ribs' kind of kiss. Now that I knew what it was like to have sex with her, I'd totally believe that could be the cause of my two week hospital stay.

I begrudgingly pulled away from her when she mentioned we had to leave for my doctor's appointment soon and we ate our breakfast quickly so we could get there on time. When we pulled up to the gate to leave I wondered if someone had leaked the news of the appointment because there seemed to be twice as many paparazzi as usual waiting for us. Sookie's whole body tensed up as she pulled through the gate, attempting to maneuver through the crowd and onto the main street, so I put my hand on her leg and gave her thigh a gentle squeeze saying, "I'm sorry about the crowd."

Her eyebrows furrowed as she glanced over at me asking, "Why are you apologizing? It's not *your* fault they get paid to stalk you. If anything, *I* should be apologizing to *you*."

"Why would *you* need to apologize?" I asked.

She chewed on her lip, which I'd come to understand was her 'tell' for when she was about to admit to something, and blushed slightly as she admitted, "Well, I've been known to read a gossip magazine or two because you were in it."

"Really?" I asked. It seemed so unlike her. She'd made it clear she didn't want my money since she refused to even let me pay for her grandmother's new mattress and she didn't seem to care about being famous either since she hadn't even bothered wanting to see the pictures from the GQ photo shoot, so it didn't make sense that she'd want to read some asinine article on where I happened to have lunch.

"Why?" I wondered out loud. When all she did was shrug her shoulders in response, I squeezed her thigh again saying, "Tell me."

She refused to look at me and finally huffed out, "I kinda sorta had a crush on you growing up."

A huge smile lit up on my face and when she chanced a peek in my direction, she rolled her eyes asking, "Should I open a window? The sunroof perhaps?"

"Why?" I asked. "Are you gassy?" If she wouldn't pee with the bathroom door open, I doubted we were we *that* married yet.

"No," she laughed, "but your ego might need the extra room. I wouldn't want to suffocate from your big head."

My hand crept farther up her leg as I said, "From what I could tell, my *big head* didn't appear to suffocate you at all last night."

*Best. Blow job. Ever.*

"Eric Northman!" she gasped, blushing and smacking my hand away.

"Even my name is a mouthful," I chuckled. "Just moan '*Eric*' instead." I fucking loved hearing her moan and my hand went right back to her leg, hoping to get her to make that sound again.

It would seem I'd overplayed my hand because hers moved lightning quick and dove into the waistband of my shorts, stroking me until my head fell back onto the headrest and I ended up moaning out her name instead. I didn't even realize the car had come to a stop until her hand disappeared and as soon as my eyes could focus I saw the smirk on her face as she said, "Come on. We don't want to be late for your appointment."

I looked around seeing we were in the parking lot in front of the medical center and only half jokingly glared back at her saying, "So. Wrong."

She just shrugged her shoulders smiling and said, "You started it. It's not my fault you waited and didn't give yourself enough time to finish."

As she got out of the car I tried to imagine every disgusting thing I could think of to will my hard on away so there wouldn't be pictures of me looking like Big Ben at high noon on the cover of every magazine next week, but the only thing I could think of was Sookie in various stages of undress. It *clearly* wasn't helping and she laughed at me again when she stood next to my open door with my crutches next to her waiting for me to get out. Seeing her wasn't helping my not-so-little problem either, but what I heard next did.

A woman walked by our car, on her way into the medical center, and the screaming newborn baby she was holding took me by surprise, just like Sookie's confession had the night before. The reality of what we were facing hit us both and I felt a little better seeing Sookie looked just as overwhelmed as I felt.

*She wouldn't look that way if she'd planned it, right?*

The paparazzi were starting to swarm by then and since Eric Junior had made himself scarce after hearing the baby cry, I was able to get out of the car without looking like a pervert and we slowly made our way inside. I normally did my best to ignore them, no matter how much they annoyed me, but one cameraman in particular got a little too close and ended up knocking into

Sookie. My instincts to protect her rose up like volcano and I dropped one of my crutches to catch her. As soon as she had her footing again, I reached out and shoved the offender as hard as I could, knocking him onto his ass, and barked out, "Stay the fuck away from her!" I spun around, tucking her behind me as best as I could, and started yelling at all of them, saying, "Isn't it bad enough you already nearly *killed her*? Just leave us the fuck alone!"

I felt Sookie's arms wrap around me from behind with her face pressed against my back as she urged, "Come on, just ignore them." She moved around to stand in front me, facing me, and handed me the crutch I'd dropped while the photographers continued to snap away and yell out questions as we finally made our way inside. My chest was still heaving in anger, but once we were out of their sight Sookie stopped walking to hug me again. I could feel her heartbeat pounding away in her chest and it made me calm down, if only so *she* would calm down with me hearing Pam's warning in my head about the stress not being good for her and the pregnancy.

"Are you okay?" I asked when I could finally speak calmly.

"Yeah," she snickered into my chest. "I'm just worried about your blood pressure reading when you get into the examination room. They might not let me take you home with me if it's through the roof."

I took another deep breath figuring it couldn't hurt and knowing she was right. I needed to calm down if only so I'd be there to take care of her, but we both tensed up hearing another baby cry a few feet from where we were standing. We broke apart simultaneously and looked down the hallway to see a woman digging frantically inside of a diaper bag while her baby screamed from the stroller. My doctor's office was a few doors down from where she stood and Sookie and I slowly made our way towards her when she finally found what she'd been looking for and she shoved a pacifier into its mouth, with the screaming immediately ceasing and a look of relief coming into her eyes. When she looked up at us, recognition lit up her face and she said, "Oh my God! I love your show!" I smiled and thanked her while she dug in her bag again, asking, "Would you mind posing for a picture and maybe giving me an autograph? My friends are never going to believe I ran into you!"

My eyes were glued to the little human swaddled in blankets that seemed too small to be real, but I always tried to be nice to my fans, the *normal* ones at least, and seeing Sookie smile understandingly, I didn't hesitate to agree. I was, however, totally thrown for a fucking loop when the next thing I knew this seemingly normal woman shoved her newborn baby into my arms (me; a total fucking stranger) and smiled like a loon at Sookie who was holding the woman's cell phone to take the picture. I'd held footballs that were larger than the baby in my arm and I couldn't seem to not look at it, imagining if I'd be just as fucking freaked out when I was holding *another* baby in a few months time. The baby's eyes didn't really seem to focus on me, but when it pushed the pacifier out of its mouth and it started to wail again, I froze.

*Yep. Definitely freaking the fuck out.*

"Eric?" I heard Sookie's voice and eventually managed to tear my eyes away from the screaming bundle of blankets in my arm to look at her. She tried to smile at me, I supposed at first, to

reassure me that everything would be alright, but when she moved her fingers up to her mouth to pull her lips into an exaggerated smile I realized she was trying to get me to pose for the picture. I tried to wipe the 'oh shit' look from my face and smile, but I know it was back when, as the flash went off, I felt, more than heard, a percussion against my hand worthy of giving the Boston Pops Orchestra a run for their money on the 4th of July.

I tried to shove the kid back at its mother as fast as I could, saying, "Uh...here." She didn't take it though, back to digging in her ginormous bag, saying, "I need to find something for you to write on." A second later, my hand was hit with another barrage, but there was no smell to go along with it.

*Did diapers contain the shit smell as well as the shit itself?*

Sookie moved to stand next to me and looked down whispering, "It's so small."

Another twenty-one gun salute went off in my hand and Sookie snickered when I looked back at her with my eyebrow raised, saying, "I believe there's a *situation* going on."

The crying hadn't stopped, but the mother was either oblivious to the sound or fucking deaf because she continued digging into her bag, so Sookie leaned in and said, "Talk to it to try and calm it down."

"What the fff... should I say?" I asked, filtering my language. "Would you please stop crying and pooping into my hand?"

Sookie smoothed the baby's hair and giggled, "It doesn't matter." She looked up at me and smirked, "It probably all sounds like Swahili to it anyway."

I was just about to ask her again where she came up with the ridiculous idea that I could speak fucking Swahili when the mother thrust a pen and diaper at me saying, "This is all I can find." I'd signed some weird things in my lifetime, but it was the first time I'd ever been asked to sign a diaper and seeing as how she might be a fucking nut case, I was just thankful it was an unused one. I handed her, her bowels-filled baby, and restrained myself from adding 'You're the shit' to my signature before she thanked us and we were able to move on.

When we got into the doctor's office, Sookie signed me in as I took a seat in the waiting area only to discover there were three more babies in attendance. I'd never really noticed kids before unless they were being a nuisance and as Sookie took a seat next to me, I couldn't help but look at her abdomen now that I knew what was growing inside.

*Was it really mine?*

*Could I really be a father?*

*Would it fire off rounds in its diaper like the opening sequence to Saving Private Ryan?*

*Was it a boy or a girl?*

*Whatever it was, it didn't really matter because right now it was just freaking me the fuck out.*

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## Chapter 82: Chapter 80

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### Chapter 80

#### SPOV

As we sat in the waiting room of the doctor's office all I could think of was what the fuck was with the babies suddenly springing up everywhere? Now that my secret was out it seemed like they were coming out of the woodwork and I was starting to freak the fuck out. I'd babysat here and there growing up, but never babies and after seeing the tiny baby Eric had been holding in his arms, I was starting to question whether or not we would be prepared to have our own in a few months.

*What if we fucked up?*

*What if it took after Jason and was dumber than box of rocks?*

*What if the only way for it to stop crying was to be sung Swahili lullabies and Eric never remembered a god damn word?*

My eyes landed on one of the babies in the waiting room and I tried to guess how old it was since it was much larger than the one from the hallway. When the mother noticed me staring, she gave me a weird look that told me I'd been staring too long, so in an effort to not seem like a baby snatcher, I smiled and lied, saying, "He's very cute," nodding to the miniature ginger-haired Jabba the Hut she was bottle feeding in her lap. "How old is he?" I asked.

Completely affronted, the mother responded, "*She* is four weeks old."

She then turned her body sideways, indicating our conversation was over, and I mumbled out an apology saying, "Sorry." My eyes dropped to my lap in embarrassment while I was only more sure now that I'd be a horrible parent since I couldn't even tell what gender a baby was, no matter how ugly.

My own mini-meltdown reminded me that while, at first, Eric had seemed tense holding the baby in the hallway, he managed to calm down pretty quickly, so maybe *he* would be the baby whisperer and be the better parent. I didn't plan on being a *bad* parent, but it was nice to know at least one of us seemed up to the task. He hadn't said a word since we'd sat down, but just knowing he was by my side made me feel calmer and while I was sure there would be more bumps in the road, I knew we'd get through it together.

Only a few minutes had passed when I noticed Eric's legs shaking next to mine and when I looked over at him, worried something was wrong, I relaxed seeing he was fighting to keep his laughter contained. Leaning in close enough to not be heard by anyone else, I whispered, "What?"

His arm went around my shoulder to keep me near as he whisper laughed back, "I thought it was a boy too." When we noticed the mother giving us the stink eye, he added, "Uh oh...better watch out. Mom of Chucky looks scarier than the Bride of Chucky in her lap."

Hearing Eric's description, I realized he was right. The kid *did* look like a bloated Chucky doll and I bit down on my bottom lip to keep from laughing out loud, but when she pulled the now empty bottle from its mouth and it farted loud enough that Jason would've been compelled to high five him, I mean *her*, I couldn't help snickering in a low voice to Eric, in an admittedly bad British accent, "How dare you break wind before me?"

Picking right up with the next line from Austin Powers, Eric spoke in a much better British accent, saying, "I'm sorry baby, I didn't know it was your turn."

I cackled out loud, slapping my hand over my mouth to try and contain it, but Eric's laughter only made mine worse and thankfully his name was called a few seconds later, so we fled the waiting room like our asses were on fire, wiping the tears from our eyes. We followed the nurse to an empty examination room and after she took Eric's vitals, looking at us like we were nuts thanks to the stray snorts we were letting out, she left us alone to wait for the doctor.

We'd both calmed down a bit by then, when Eric looked over at me and asked, "Are there always so many babies around?"

Relieved that it wasn't just me, I snickered, replying, "I never really noticed before now." Looking down at my stomach with concern, I asked, "You don't think ours will look like a Cabbage Patch Kid, do you?"

My head lifted back up hearing his chuckle and when he responded sincerely, "It'll be beautiful if it looks just like you," I felt all melty inside.

Seeing him sitting on the paper covered examination table was giving me porny thoughts, imagining different ways I could resuscitate the Kraken, but since I knew that was a no go I tried to clear my head and made light of his words instead, saying, "It'd be better off looking like you Mr. Five-Times-Mother-Fucker-Five-Times."

*He was worthy of the title. All. Five. Mother fucking. Times.*

Instead of laughing or rolling his eyes, Eric seemed to become serious and his eyes stared back into my own. Looking for what, I didn't know, so by the time he opened his mouth to say something I was literally on the edge of my seat, but the doctor chose that moment to walk into the room calling a halt to whatever it was he was about to say. I was allowed to stay in the room as Eric was checked thoroughly and the doctor repeated the same thing Dr. Lee had told us in the



hospital about Eric's memory. It might return, it might not, but everything else seemed to be good news. Eric had new x-rays done of his chest and leg and according to the doctor, all of the broken bones were well on their way to being healed and I actually clapped, letting out a dorky, "Yay!" when he said Eric's cast would be off before Thanksgiving.

They both turned to look at me, with the doctor amused and Eric confused, and I know I blushed as I explained, "Your cast will be off before we go to Gran's for Thanksgiving."

Eric's eyebrow rose up as he asked, "We're going to Louisiana for Thanksgiving?"

"Yes?" I semi-asked, since it no longer seemed like it was a firm plan. I should really start writing a Tell-Eric-About list.

The doctor waited and when Eric had nothing else to say, with our mini-discussion over holiday travel plans ended, he went on to say that as long as Eric took it easy, he could return to work the following Monday. I felt relieved because I'd been worried about him staying home alone when I returned to work. It was ridiculous since he'd lived alone just fine before I came along, but I didn't want him to feel lonely without anyone there to keep him amused.

We scheduled another follow up appointment for Eric the week before Thanksgiving and as we were leaving the office, I noticed Dr. Ludwig exiting the building ahead of us and motioned towards her telling Eric, "That's my OB/GYN." It was one thing I could cross off the Tell-Eric-About list I'd formed in my head.

"Huh?" he asked.

Eric was quieter than normal all during his examination, but I just chalked it up to him concentrating on whatever the doctor was saying. Now that it was just the two of us in the hallway I could tell his mind was elsewhere and stopped, oddly enough at the same exact spot we'd stopped at earlier, to repeat the question he'd asked me, saying, "Are you okay?"

"Yeah..." he hesitated.

I didn't believe him for a second. He might've been a great actor, but I knew him well enough now to know when something wasn't right with him. Unfortunately more people were entering and exiting the building, so I let it go for the time being and started a new list in my head titled Tell-Sookie-About.

The crowd of photographers had grown while we'd been inside, but Eric refused to wait in the building so I could pull the car up to the doorway so he wouldn't have to walk through them. He somehow managed to look even bigger as he gauged the crowd outside and handed me one of his crutches saying, "Don't be shy about using it as a bat." Using the other crutch to help him walk, his free hand grabbed onto mine and, together, we made our way through the three ring circus back to the car, reminding me of the first time we'd held hands making our way out of the casino. I kept my hand tightly gripped with his knowing it would be impossible for him to carry me if I fell this time.

Once we were safely inside and back on the road, I turned to Eric, ready to interrogate him about what was wrong a few minutes earlier, when he opened his mouth first, asking, "So Quinn was your only serious relationship?"

*Where in the hell did THAT come from?*

"Yeah..." I replied looking back at him confused. "Why?"

"Just wondering," he mumbled. I was still busy trying to figure out why he'd bring up Quinn out of all of the topics we could discuss when he asked, "So did you date much after that?"

"No," I answered, waiting to see where he was headed with his line of questioning.

"No' you didn't date or 'no' you didn't date *much*?"

Frustrated, I turned to him and said, "'No' I didn't date *at all*. Where is all of this coming from? What are you thinking about?"

Eric just stared back at me with his mouth opening and closing several times, but ultimately, he didn't say a word.

*Was he feeling jealous? Insecure about me? Us?*

If anyone had the ammo to be insecure and jealous in our relationship, it would be *me*, but since I knew perfectly well what that felt like, I reached over and put my hand on his leg, gripping it lightly, and went into a little more detail about my relationship with Quinn. He'd only gotten the cliff notes version a few nights earlier, so I told him everything, warts and all. We ended up sitting in the garage for a while before all was said and done, with Eric completely riveted to every word I spoke as though I was telling the most amazing story instead of the sad little tale that my love life had been until he came along.

I stared back at him silently, giving him time to process it all and when the haze finally cleared from his eyes, he said, "So he was your first." When I nodded, he added, "And then me?"

I smiled, wanting to reassure him, and nodded again before saying, "And then you; my *last* if I have anything to say about it." I could see the confusion in his eyes, understandable considering everything that had been thrown at him since he'd first woken up, and how he must feel about it all now compared to then. While we'd certainly made progress in our new relationship, I knew he wasn't ready to go making any declarations of love to me anytime soon. As far as I was concerned, it was only a matter of time because I already knew he loved me, even if he didn't know it, and even though I'd already told him how I felt about him, I didn't think it would hurt for me to repeat it.

Reaching over, I cupped his face, with my thumb playing over his whiskers, and said, "I love you." I smiled watching him do an impersonation of a goldfish, with his mouth opening and closing, before moving my fingers over to trace along his lips and added, "I don't need to hear

it." I then moved my hand farther down and placed it over his heart saying, "I feel it." I did feel it. His actions, Prick-ric notwithstanding, and the way he sometimes looked at me said it all.

*He wasn't THAT good of an actor.*

Eric looked stunned and when he didn't say anything for what felt like ages, I started to worry that I'd shorted him out somewhere with emotional overload. Wicked was already making plans on where she'd go looking for his reset button, when he finally opened his mouth and asked, "Is *that* what that is?"

I felt melty all over again, but I could tell Eric was teetering on a tightrope from the almost panicked look in his eyes, so I threw him a life raft and smiled, offering, "Or maybe you're just gassy."

When I hit the button to lower the windows and mockingly pulled the neckline of my shirt up to cover my nose, it was enough to finally break through whatever had him so tense and he laughed before pulling my shirt back down and kissing me. If I had to describe it, 'grateful' would be the word I'd use and with his forehead resting against mine, his whole face smiled as he said, "We're not *that* married yet."

*Thank God.*

We both got out of the car and as we walked inside, I said, "Well, I'm certainly not going to argue with you there. As a matter of fact, I'd be perfectly content if we were never *that* married." Lord knows being Jason's sister was bad enough. "But after everything we *heard* today, I think *you* should take the first nine months of diaper duty since junior's bun will be in *my* oven for nine months. Doody duty, if you will. It's only fair."

*I wasn't really kidding either.*

I'd been blindly following along behind Eric, so when he stopped short unexpectedly, I ran right into him. I'd forgotten he'd grown when we'd left the doctor's office and he was pretty solid for hobbling along on crutches, barely swaying when I 'Oomph'd' against his back, and he turned to face me with his eyes staring down at my stomach. He slowly reached out and put his hand on top of it, saying, "It all seems so surreal. You know...that we actually made a bun in your oven."

My baby freak-out was still hovering on the fringes of my mind, but I did my best to avoid it for now and joked, "Yep. You might not know your way around a kitchen, but that certainly can't be said about a bedroom."

He smirked, but didn't say anything and just continued to stare at his hand over my stomach. It was cute, but my feet were getting tired from just standing still and my bladder was rapidly expanding, so I asked, "What are you doing?"

Eric shrugged, answering, "I don't know. Isn't this what people do? Touch pregnant women's bellies?"

"They better not," I huffed. I'd be damned if people were going to start randomly groping me like I was a ripe melon. "Besides," I said, "I think people only do that when there's actually something to *feel* like a kick or something."

My bladder had reached its fill point and I was certainly feeling *that*, so his hand pressing down on me wasn't helping matters, nor did his goofy request when he said, "So make it kick."

I snorted which also didn't help my full bladder situation, and said, "Yeah, I don't think it works that way. Now let me and junior by so *we* can go pee."

"We're not naming it Eric Junior," he scoffed, as though I'd suggested naming the baby something horrible like 'Bosworth'.

I mentally signaled my bladder to remain patient and said, "I haven't really thought about names, but what's wrong with Eric Junior?" I would love a little baby Eric and decided to call it 'Beric' for now.

When Eric, Eric Northman who doesn't know the meaning of the word 'modesty', who dated porn stars for Christ's sake, *blushed*, I was fully prepared to have to mop up my own puddle of pee, because I wasn't going *anywhere* until I got to the bottom of it.

"Eric, are you...are you *blushing*?" I asked excitedly. I was constantly a shade of red around him and was happy he'd finally returned the favor. I could see why he enjoyed mine so much now that I got to see him that way.

"No!" he protested.

"Yes! Yes you are!" I clapped gleefully.

Eric was getting quicker with his crutches because he turned tail and practically ran away from me, but since he was a gimp I could still keep up. "Don't you have to pee?" he asked, still trying to get away from me.

"Yes, I do," I agreed, stalking his every move. "So hurry up and tell me why you were blushing over naming Beric Eric Junior so I can go."

He stopped his hasty retreat and faced me, asking, "Beric?"

Undeterred, I declared, "Quid pro quo, Clarice. Eric Junior?"

He attempted to stare me down, but I wasn't intimidated. I was amused, so he finally huffed out, "What if it's a girl? You can't name a girl Eric Junior."

I shook my head with a smirk, saying, "That's not why you were blushing. You don't blush over vaginas." I raised my eyebrow adding, "I know this for a fact."

"I wasn't *blushing*," he argued. "I was simply...*hot*."

*You're HOT alright.*

However, his ego was big enough so I kept that little tidbit off of the Tell-Eric-About list and since his entire face was locked down, I knew I wouldn't be getting anything more out of him. My bladder was issuing its final warning, so I rolled my eyes, saying, "Bull and Shit. Now let me and baby Pam by so we can go pee."

I giggled, hearing him yell out, as I closed the bathroom door, saying, "We're *not* naming it *Pam!*"

As fond as I was of Pam, I had to agree with him. *Silently* agree with him, but he didn't have to know that. I would worry about it wanting to wear five inch spiked heels as soon as it could walk if it took after its namesake.

Once I was sufficiently *relieved* I sought out Eric fully intending to try and pick up our conversation where we'd left off, but it seemed he had other plans because I found him in the den with what appeared to be the video of the photo shoot paused on the TV screen. When I looked at him with my eyebrow raised he merely said, "We didn't get around to it last night."

I would've felt more hesitant to watch this if Prick-ric were in attendance, but since it just seemed to be me and Eric I figured I was safe and said, "Okay."

I couldn't have been more wrong.

We sat down together on the couch and my eyes filled with tears seeing how happy we were together. Not that we weren't happy *now*, for the moment at least, but it was *different* then. Where Eric was confused over his feelings now, on the video it was clear as day how he felt about me. He loved me; no questions; no doubts and I wanted to kick myself for taking it for granted at the time. I knew deep down he still loved me, but I wanted *him* to know it *too*.

When I sniffled and tried to blink the tears back, Eric wrapped his arm around me and pulled me up against his side asking, "What's wrong?"

The couch could've been on fire for all I knew because I couldn't tear my eyes away from the screen, watching us dance without a care in the world, and I mumbled out a whispered, "Nothing."

I couldn't bring myself to look at the Eric next to me, trying to contain my emotions while keeping an eye on the Eric on the screen, but the dam broke when he pointed up at it, showing him whispering into my ear at the end of the dance, and said, "There. Your whole face lit up." He turned to me and asked, "What did I say?"

I still couldn't look at him and turned my teary face into his shirt sobbing out a muffled, "That you loved me." Tears; snot; anything that *could* leak from my face, *did*, with Eric just holding

me tighter against his body and rubbing my back, trying to soothe me, as I thoroughly ruined his shirt.

The video continued to play in the background, but I was too lost in my own memories and grief to pay attention and when my crying finally subsided into hitched breaths, Eric took my hand and placed it on his chest over his heart, saying, "Do you feel that?"

I didn't think he was talking about his Pecs. No matter how spectacular they were, there was more to him than just *that*, but I was too afraid to say anything. I knew he couldn't stand to see me cry, but I was too weepy and hormonal to do anything about it and I didn't want him to tell me he loved me just to make me feel better. I needed for him to *mean* it when he said it.

Oddly enough, his next words were *exactly* what I needed to hear to break me out of my funk and a small smile to form on my face.

With his face nuzzled into the top of my head, he whispered, "I don't think it's gas."

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## Chapter 83: Chapter 81

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### Chapter 81

#### EPOV

*I fucking hated it when she cried!*

While I tried to calm her down, knowing by now it would be a few minutes until she actually did, I attempted to sort through the things that had been running through my head for most of the day, boiling it all down to what I actually knew.

I knew she thought I was interested in her prior relationships based on the amount of detail she went into, when I asked, and even though it only made me want to beat the shit out of Quinn, my real focus had been on her. Hearing her say she'd hoped the baby would look like *me* had distracted me all throughout my appointment, so I concentrated on her facial expressions and body language, more than her actual words, as she told me about her past. Being in show business had its perks. One of them was the amount of preparation you did for a character you were going to play and I'd been cast as a cop in a film a few years earlier, so they'd sent me to a couple of real life interviewing and interrogation courses which benefitted me both in playing poker and now. Sookie showed no signs of deception the entire time she talked and instead just left me floored by the thought that she had only had one other lover. As beautiful and fun loving as she was, I'd had no expectations that she would've led a chaste lifestyle, but now that I knew, I couldn't stop the torrent of emotions I felt at the idea that I was going to be a father.

My doubts about the paternity had disappeared and short of being stranded with her on a deserted island for months on end (an unlikely scenario), I had no other way of knowing for sure anyway,

unless I trusted her. I realized now that I *did* trust her and I had never been more grateful than I was then to have kept my doubts to myself. She was so sincere with me, always being open and honest with her feelings, both good and bad, and the thought of how hurt she would've been if I'd told her I didn't believe I was the father made me shudder inside; almost as much as the thought of actually *being* a father did.

*Me...a dad...*

I was completely clueless about how to play that role, be that person, and it wasn't like I could call my own father for advice, but the one thing I did know for sure was that our baby wasn't going to be named after Pam or my cock. When Sookie didn't react negatively to the idea of naming it 'Eric Junior', I realized it was something we probably hadn't discussed before and I wasn't about to admit to her now that I'd named my dick.

*She'd probably think I was crazy. Who does that?*

I hoped she would just drop the issue, but since I fucking blushed like a virgin schoolgirl at an orgy, I assumed I only had a temporary reprieve. I would just have to find a way to steer her away from the topic when it arose again.

*Hopefully it wouldn't happen when HE arose again.*

That was another thing about Sookie that seemed perfect. How well she knew me in such a relatively short amount of time was both overwhelming and heartwarming. I'd never allowed myself to get close enough to anyone for them to sense me like she seemed to be able to. When we'd been in the car and she told me again that she loved me; that she felt love *from* me, I froze. I knew I felt something for Sookie unlike anything I'd ever experienced before, but I wasn't sure it was love. I had nothing to compare that emotion to and, honestly, the thought of letting down my guard to the point where I was left completely vulnerable scared me. Her ability to crack a joke and keep things light was a lifesaver for me and was only another piece of evidence at how attuned to me she was, but it wasn't until we were watching the video together that I finally understood.

When I'd watched it alone the first time I could see the connection between us, but since I didn't remember it, or know Sookie at all at that point, it remained abstract to me. It was akin to watching myself in a movie, but now; now that I knew her; knew how I felt when I was with her; I could see it clear as day.

*I'd already let my guard down once before with her.*

*I'd been in love with her then.*

*I was probably in love with her now.*

But thinking it and wholeheartedly accepting it were two very different things. It all still felt like it was happening too fast. For me, I'd only just met her four days earlier, learning first that we

were married and then, last night, that she was pregnant with my child. I couldn't even begin to describe all of the emotions that had been swirling through me over the last few days and I didn't want to tell her I loved her; didn't want to say the words out loud, until the 'probably' disappeared completely from my mind. So when she finally calmed down at my side I took a chance and admitted what I could for now, hoping she would understand and that it would be enough. I didn't want to lose her, but I wouldn't lie to her just to keep her. She'd gotten enough of that from that asshole Quinn and deserved more than just a regurgitated declaration of love, so when I alluded to my feelings, explaining what I *didn't* think that feeling was in my chest, all of the tension that had built up inside of me disappeared when her responding smile told me it *was* enough; at least, for now.

"Are you okay?" I asked, wiping the stray tears from her face.

Her hands moved to pull at my shirt as she stared down at the stains from her crying and said, "I'm doing better than your shirt. I'm sorry. It's ruined."

*Like I gave I shit about my shirt.*

I smiled at her and said, "You don't have to apologize. Just don't start crying again, and I won't mind taking this to the cleaners. I won't even mind getting a whole new shirt." I brushed the hair away from her face, asking, "Okay?"

Her eyes dropped from mine and I worried she would start getting teary again when she shook her head and said, "No, but do you want to know what *would* make me feel better?"

*An orgasm? It would make ME feel better right about now.*

I was willing to do just about anything to make her happy, so I answered without hesitation saying, "Tell me. You have to only ask and it shall be yours."

*Please say 'orgasm'. Please say 'orgasm'.*

She looked up at me like she'd just learned her puppy had died and my heart lurched, with me mentally berating myself for thinking about sex when she was obviously still distraught, when she blinked her eyes innocently at me saying, "You could tell me why you blushed over naming the baby Eric Junior."

My mouth fell open with me completely surprised by her request and when her eyes changed from forlorn to mischievous and she smirked back at me, I growled out, "Anything but *that*."

She climbed onto my lap, which did nothing to strengthen my resolve, as she pouted, "*Eric*... you said you'd give me *anything* I asked for."

I quickly replayed our conversation and found that I *hadn't* said that, so I denied, "No...I didn't."



Sookie sat up on her knees a little and moved closer to me so that her breasts were practically in my face as she purred, "But you *implied* it."

My hands moved of their own accord, sliding up her sides and intent on exploring the mountainous terrain in front of my eyes, but when she batted them away, I growled again, saying, "It's classified. I could tell you, but then I'd have to kill you."

"Really, Maverick?" she asked. It didn't surprise me she knew the Top Gun quote, especially after seeing the pictures and reading the article online where she'd surprised me with the ride in a fighter jet.

*I really wanted to fucking remember. Everything.*

Sookie sat back and smirked at me saying, "You can't even drive yourself to the cleaners to get your shirt cleaned and you expect me to believe that you could kill me?" When I just glared at her, she mockingly patted my chest and said, "Why don't you try singing The Righteous Brothers to me and see if that helps."

I might not be able to *drive myself to the cleaners*, but I knew what would distract her so while she sat back enjoying what she thought was her small victory, I whipped my shirt over my head and smiled at the glazed look that came over her eyes when she stared down at my bare chest.

*I win!*

Sookie sat there dumbstruck so I thought I'd help her along by pushing some of her buttons. The first ones I thought to try were her nipples since they were practically reaching for me.

*Who was I to deny them?*

My fingertips ghosted over them through her shirt and her hips pressed down onto my lap, rolling with every circle I made over the fabric and her hands moved down from my shoulders pressing some of my own buttons. Her lips followed her hands and while I could still think somewhat clearly, I ran through different scenarios of how we could ruin the couch just as much as my shirt.

*Who needs to drive anywhere? That's what the internet and a delivery service were for.*

Sookie had somehow managed to get my shorts open without me noticing, but I was able to refocus when she called out my name in what could only be described as a purr and a pout all rolled into one. Her eyes were locked onto mine, with her lips hovering just above my tip, as she used the same voice saying, "Tell me..."

*Tell her what? How we could ruin the couch together? Where we could order a new one? How long it would take to get delivered? WHAT?*

"Huh?" I asked in a daze.

Her warm breath blew over the drop of pre-cum on my dick as she said, "Tell me," and kissed the underside of my shaft at the base, "why you blushed," as she traced the vein from the base upwards with her tongue, "over the name," with her tongue darting out and licking away the drop, which was quickly replaced with more, "Eric Junior."

I was still in a daze, even though I'd managed to register what she'd been saying, and wanted to weep when I realized she wasn't going any further until I said something.

*I lose...*

Conceding defeat, I looked down at her and sighed, "Because there's *already* an Eric Junior."

I hadn't thought about how that would sound to her, so I was surprised when she shot up out of my lap and stared down at me looking like *I* was the one that killed her puppy as she said, "Your father's name isn't Eric. Do you...do you have a *son*?"

I quickly reached out and grabbed onto her hand in case she tried to get away from me and said, "No!" Seeing the lingering hurt and confusion on her face, I followed up with, "I...it's what..." I found I couldn't look her in the eyes with them dropping to my lap where Eric Junior stared back at me as if to say, '*Go on, tell her...*' Finally, I huffed out, "It's what I call my dick, alright?"

I could feel the heat of embarrassment flooding my face and Sookie's snickering in front of me did nothing to stop it, so when her face reappeared in my line of sight, above my lap, my eyes darted off to the side, unable to look at her just yet. They rolled back into my head when I felt her tongue make another pass across Junior before I was able to right them again and I looked down at her when she giggled, "Well then I guess 'Nessie' is off the list too."

"Nessie?" I asked.

She nodded, saying, "You know, the Loch Ness Monster." I had no idea what she was talking about, but she kept rambling on, adding, "And the Kraken, the beast, a whole slew of Navy ships...there's probably more, but I can't think of them right now."

"What?" I asked, more confused than ever.

"Oh!" she perked up. "I forgot Frankencock!"

*That* name I remembered from scrolling through the text messages on my phone and I grinned when it finally dawned on me what she was saying. "Sookie?" I purred. "Are those different names you have for my *cock*?"

She grinned wider, despite her cheeks getting redder, and said, "Yeah, so I see your point. The kid would get beat up on its first day of school with a name like 'Frankencock Northman'."

I couldn't help laughing out loud and reached down to pull her back up into my lap, needing to feel her in my arms, and said, "I don't know...we could shorten it and call him Frank when his friends are around."

She wrapped her arms around my neck and giggled, "But what if he does something bad? I'd have to yell out his whole name so he'd know I was serious and I don't think I could keep a straight face if I had to yell, '*Frankcock Northman! You get down here right now!*'"

We both laughed again and I couldn't believe how much fun I was having discussing names for a baby I'd been freaked out over just hours earlier. Only Sookie could make me feel that way and it eased my mind a little knowing at least I'd have her there to talk me down from the proverbial ledge I kept finding myself on. Not ready for it to end, I said, "I don't know. With a name like Frankcock he wouldn't have any problems finding a date."

She playfully slapped at my shoulder admonishing, "We are *not* naming it that! Can you imagine what people would say if Pam released *that* to the press?"

I just shrugged my shoulders saying, "Haven't you noticed how many celebrities name their kids the weirdest shit?" I only knew because of Pam's rants over the years and started listing them off. "Nicholas Cage named his son Kal-El; David Carradine's son is, I shit you not, I.P. Freely; Rob Morrow named his kid Tu! Tu Morrow! What the fuck is that? The most normal weird one is Apple."

Sookie laughed and offered, "Well then we could name ours Orange? Or iPod?"

I shook my head laughing, "No fucking way. It's like they're already setting them up to be on some celebrity rehab reality TV program twenty years from now."

*Not MY kid.*

It was when *that* thought filtered through my mind that I *knew* it was *real* to me. Sookie was pregnant with *my baby*. Sookie and I were going to be parents...

*...back to freaking the fuck out.*

I didn't know if she could sense the change in my demeanor, but I never thought I could be so happy to hear Pam's heels clacking into the foyer (without bothering to knock or ring the fucking doorbell), so Sookie was busily trying to close up my shorts when Pam walked into the room. Seeing Sookie's still red rimmed eyes and my arms caged around her body, Pam walked into the room and cuffed me on the backside of my head before she took a seat on the couch, saying, "No means no Northman."

I was pulling on my shirt when she'd been speaking, but before I could deny anything Sookie giggled, "You've got it backwards Pam. *I'm* the one that should be restrained." She emphasized her point by rocking her hips against my groin.

*Not helping...*

*Sookie...tied up...naked...*

No, those thoughts weren't helping either, with Pam in the room, so I looked at her and asked, "And to what do we owe the *pleasure* of your visit?"

She cocked her eyebrow up, but her eyes were gliding hungrily over Sookie's body where she was still perched in my lap, and I shot her a warning look, making Pam smirk as she said, "Well I could certainly make my visit *pleasurable* for *Sookie*, but I doubt *you* would enjoy seeing how inferior you are in that respect."

My possessive streak ran white hot and my eyes shot to Sookie, sure that she would be indignant right along with me, but I ended up gripping her tighter and growled seeing her staring back at Pam with bedroom eyes while licking her lips. It only lasted for a second before she giggled and turned to hug me, saying, "You're too easy to rile up."

*Ha. Fucking. Ha.*

Pam chuckled right along with her and I realized I was done for if both of them really decided to gang up on me. I knew Alcide was wary of Pam, and after seeing how he bowed up on me about treating Sookie right, when he'd driven us home from the hospital, I knew he wouldn't be in my corner either. My eyes moved to rest on where Frank was securely tucked away in Sookie's womb and hoped he would stand up for his old man when the time came. Well, when he actually *could* stand.

Pam's voice brought me back from my thoughts, saying, "So tell me what the doctor had to say."

I'd kind of zoned out during my appointment, still wondering about whether or not I was actually Frank's dad, so I was thankful Sookie spoke up and answered happily, "It went well. Everything's healing up the way it should and the cast will come off at his next appointment, which is the week before Thanksgiving."

"That's good," Pam replied. "At least you won't have to worry about traveling to Louisiana on crutches."

I'd forgotten about that, with everything else that had been running through my mind, so I turned to Sookie and asked, "We're going to your Gran's house?"

She looked back at me, chewing on the corner of her mouth, saying, "Well, that was the plan. Do you not want to go?"

I sure as hell didn't want to be without her for a few hours, much less several days, and I didn't know if she'd end up going without me if I said no, so I quickly agreed, saying, "Sure, we can go." Thanks to the pictures that had been on my phone I already had an idea of what it looked like and added, "Maybe being there again will help jog my memories."

Seeing the flash of sadness run across Sookie's face made me feel guilty for not remembering anything, but all I could do was hug her and whisper, "Even if it doesn't, I'd still like to go and meet your Gran." I thought about it for a second and added, "Again."

Whatever she'd been remembering made her snicker and say, "Yeah, well Gran already loves you, but I'll have to keep Maxine away before she grabs your ass again."

"Maxine?" I asked. Since I was already so enthralled now by Sookie after just a few days, surely I wouldn't have been flirting with another woman in her hometown. At least I *hoped* not.

"Gran's friend," she smiled. "Imagine if Fat Bastard and Tammy Faye Baker had a sixty year old gossip whore for a daughter. *That* would be Maxine Fortenberry."

*Was morning sickness contagious? Because I suddenly felt nauseous.*

"So, when can you go back to work?" Pam asked, not at all interested in the Bogeyman, or...*woman*, of Bon Temps I'd conjured in my mind, thundering down dirt roads in her red tartan shorts. If she liked me so much and learned Sookie was pregnant, she might try to snatch up the baby and eat him if he was my Mini-me.

*I watch too many movies...*

When I didn't say anything, Sookie answered, "Monday which is good, since that's the day I start at my new job." She turned to look at me and said, "I need to call about getting my car fixed."

I didn't get a chance to say anything thanks to Pam chiming in with, "What job? And, no."

Sookie's jaw set stubbornly, as she trained her glare on Pam, and said, "Teaching. And, yes!"

*Uh oh...*

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## Chapter 84: Chapter 82

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### Chapter 82

#### SPOV

I wasn't sure if Pam's issue was with me working or my car getting fixed, but I didn't really care. I got enough of that caveman shit from Eric and was tired of people trying to tell me what to do. I managed to get along just fine for twenty-five years, before either of them came into my life, and, while I could never repay Pam for being there for me when Eric was in the hospital, I wouldn't allow her to bully me. I wasn't made of spun glass. I was a grown woman; a grown woman that could make her own decisions and I would've thought Pam, of all people, would understand that.

The thing that irked me the most was how quickly my good mood had evaporated with her words. Eric and I had been having such a good time, joking around about baby names, which had done wonders to keep my baby freak-out at bay. He was so much more like *My Eric* when he was laughing and joking and I didn't realize how much I'd missed it until I had that part of him back again.

*Fucking Pam.*

*We needed to get the locks changed.*

"Sookie," she started, "you're not driving that death trap you call a car. It won't start for a reason." She looked at me with narrowed eyes, admitting, "I killed it."

Hearing her confession, I was furious and tried to climb out of Eric's lap, but he only held onto me tighter, so I glared back at her from Eric's Sookie-trap, saying, "Goddamn it Pam! Why would you do that? I need it to go to work!" Remembering her foray in tire slashing, it would probably be the only time I could ever sympathize with Eric's dad.

Unfazed, she stared back at me and calmly said, "One, you can drive Eric's car, and two, just where are you driving it to? You quit your job and, from what Eric's told me, there's a little baby Pam on the way, so you shouldn't be working anyway."

Her calm demeanor did nothing but piss me off more, so I spat back, saying, "I didn't realize pregnancy was a disability! I was offered a temporary job teaching at a high school until the spring and I took it!" Feeling Eric's hand rubbing up and down my back in an attempt to soothe me, I looked down at him and smiled a little, adding, "I'll be done working well before *Junior* gets here."

I watched him roll his eyes in exasperation, but honestly, Eric Junior was a much better name than Frankencock.

My eyes returned to Pam as she asked, "What high school?"

Figuring I'd be getting another dose of being Pam'd, I squared my shoulders and said, "Woodrow Wilson." When she had no reaction, I added, "It's in Compton."

*And...there's the reaction I was expecting.*

Every muscle in her face was frozen long enough for my words to filter through her mind, which only took a split second, before she shot up off of the couch and glared down at me yelling, "No! Fucking! Way! I know that you're stubborn; hard headed; it's a trait I happen to admire, but I didn't realize you could be so fucking *stupid* to think it would be a good idea to take a job in fucking Compton!"

Being called 'stupid' was the key that unlocked my inner bitch and I fought against Eric's hold on me so I could get up and knock Pam off of her high fucking horse, but Eric was a lot stronger than I gave him credit for because his arms were like a steel vice around me.

"Pam!" he barked. "Enough!"

Both of our heads shot over to look at him and I'm pretty sure Pam's expression mirrored my own; shock. Eric *never* took that tone with her, not that I'd ever heard anyway, and was eerily similar to the one he'd used to yell at the cameramen a few hours earlier.

*It shouldn't turn me on, right?*

The dampness in my panties told me my girly bits would *'Like this'* on Facebook, but of course Pam had to ruin that moment too. I turned and saw her rearrange her face from *'Holy shit!'* to *'No one will find the body'* as she barked right back at him saying, "You *can't* be serious! Did that car accident kill your last two brain cells too? You're *okay* with her working in the 'hood?'"

Eric's arms hadn't budged an inch only instead of feeling restrained I felt protected and was surprised he seemed to be on my side. I would've thought he'd be happy to have Pam making the same arguments he'd been making only hours earlier and partner up with her in the *'Let's tell Sookie what to do'* time slot of the afternoon. Instead he glared back at her saying, "We've talked about it and it's what she wants to do, so I'm supporting her. If you can't get on board with that then just keep your fucking opinions to yourself, but call her stupid again and I'll be looking for a new manager."

*Seriously. Should I be this wet right now? It was like Niagara Falls down there. It would only take one little push and I'd fall right over the edge, no barrel necessary.*

My eyes kept darting back and forth between them, with both of them equally pissed off, but I didn't want them to fight over me and that thought calmed me down. I knew, despite the fucked up dialogue they usually had with one another, they really were close. Friends even and I didn't want to be the cause of any discord between them, so I said, "Everybody needs to calm down."

*Do you hear me hoo-hah?*

At least two out of the three heard me with Pam and Eric returning to their metaphorical corners and while I could tell Pam was plotting something in her mind, she only asked, "And the...*car*?" She'd said *car* like it was it was a piece of *shit* and as payback I put her in the number one spot to go to when Beric made a number two. She wasn't the only one who could plot. "I suppose you're okay with that too, Mr. Pussy Whipped?" she asked.

Feeling Eric stiffen, and not in a horny way, underneath me, I sensed this could only go from bad to worse and hoping to inject a little bit of levity into the still tense atmosphere, I cocked my eyebrow at her, saying, "Hey now...that's a little personal. How my pussy treats Eric is between me and him. Since we're married I'm sure there's some sort of spousal pussy privilege law we have to abide by, but I will tell you he actually prefers little bites more than whips."

I heard Eric snort underneath me with his body relaxing again, so I knew he was okay, but my eyes stayed on Pam. I could see she was trying not to smile and maintain her Ice Queen persona and I called her out on it, saying, "You know if you try and hold in that laugh for too long, it'll come out the other end."

*Maybe that's what baby farts were; their inner laughter. If so, those two babies we saw earlier were positively gleeful.*

Pam eventually rolled her eyes, but I didn't miss the slight upturn of her lips as she said, "Fucking hell...you two really *are* perfect for one another."

"Thanks!" I smiled brightly at her. I'm sure that wasn't so much a compliment as a dig from her, but I didn't care. I was just happy everyone had calmed down again and Pam used the excuse of notifying the producers of Eric's show of his return to work date to leave.

Her heels were still clacking towards the front door when Eric pulled my face to his and kissed every thought right out of me. When I needed to breathe he simply moved on to chewing his way across my neck and I panted out breathlessly, "Not that I'm complaining, but what brought *this* on?"

He ignored my question until his lips were hovering over my ear and finally said, "I'm invoking my right to spousal pussy privilege. Your pussy *is* my privilege and I have every intention of reaping my marital benefits *right now*."

Visions of Eric dressed as a cop danced through my mind and his hands seemed to be everywhere at once. He quickly stripped me naked, with Wicked and Immoral returning the favor at a feverish pace, and pushed me so that I was lying down on the couch before climbing on top of me. His lips and tongue worked their magic on my breasts with my hips bucking upwards trying to find the friction I needed and just when I thought I would go insane with want, he moved farther down my body and tried to settle himself in between my thighs. It felt like it had been forever since his face and my hoo-hah had any deep and meaningful discussions, but between his leg cast and the length of the couch, it just wasn't gonna work. I squirmed away from him, earning me panty-wetting growl (had I been wearing any, that is) and got him to lie down on his back instead. When it finally dawned on him I was positioning us to play Sex-tris, I thought I might possibly pass out from the lustful stare he was shooting my way, but before I could blackout, he grabbed onto my hips and pulled my body until I was kneeling over his face, facing his feet.

*Yeah...his FEET weren't the first body part I noticed.*

The first swipe of his tongue had me falling forward, with my hands landing on each side of hips, and I'm pretty sure I drooled onto the V cut in front of my eyes as I came almost immediately, but that didn't stop Eric. He was taking the whole pussy privilege seriously and kept going. All of me was still trembling when my vision returned and I looked at the sight of his nakedness before me, still marveling at how his whole body was a wonderland. I scraped my teeth along his skin, nipping at his inner thighs with my teeth, before swallowing him whole. Eric grunted, moaned,



and growled underneath me in a continual loop like he was my own personal sex mix-tape, and adding his fingers to the playlist had me joining in with my own Ode to Eric. We'd been so worked up from before Pam's visit that it didn't take long for Eric's movements to falter as he swelled even larger in my mouth moments before he came with a yell.

*My girly bits really LIKED it when he yelled.*

I swallowed everything he had to give and started to pull away from him to give him a minute to enjoy his *moment*, but Eric was having none of that and wasted no time in getting back to invoking his rights.

*The Northman Rights: The New Millennium's Miranda.*

The way his tongue flicked across my clit had me moaning his name in no time and I thanked God, more than once out loud, that he hadn't lost one bit of his memory of how to do *that*. Thanks to the position of our bodies, I couldn't help but notice the beast was stirring again, twitching every time I cried out his name in pleasure and went to work on bringing him back to life. By the time he was rock hard again, I released him from my mouth because me and my second orgasm were hovering at the edge of the falls, just waiting for the tiny ripple necessary to fall over. Instead of giving me the push I needed to go over, Eric lifted me up and pushed my body forward, so that my front was leaning against the arm of the couch and balanced himself on his good leg, plunging into me from behind.

*I should've read him his rights a long time ago.*

I came again, but Eric pounded his way right through it and even though we hadn't been together for very long, I didn't think I could ever have enough of him. The way he filled me; the way he seemed to know what my body wanted before I did, never ceased to amaze me and I pushed myself back into his every thrust forward. His hands had been on my hips when one of them slid around my front and started rubbing against my clit making my whole body shudder, but what finally did me in was when he leaned forward, licking the sweat from my back, and grunted out, "Fuck... My... Pussy..."

I didn't know if he was claiming it or telling it off, but *his pussy* couldn't be bothered to care because my muscles clenched around him with me cumming hard enough that my arms gave out and I flopped forward onto the armrest completely spent, which allowed me to see Eric's lower half pounding into me twice more before he shouted my name as he came. I thought my upside down viewpoint seemed to be an apropos way to end our Sex-tris match.

*I'd say it was a draw.*

Eric slid out of me and pulled me down into his lap as he flopped back onto the couch, nuzzling the back of my sweaty neck and asking, "Are you *sure* it was a car accident that put me into a coma and not you fucking me into one?"

"I'm sure," I chuckled, still trying to catch my breath. "That would give a whole new meaning to the term *pussy whipped* though."

*Doctor, what's the patient's diagnosis?*

*Not good, I'm afraid he's been pussy whipped.*

*Prognosis?*

*He'll just have to cum out of it on his own.*

Eric snickered behind me, unaware of my inner bad porn movie script, and held me tighter as he kissed the back of my shoulder, saying, "You really are perfect. I've never seen anyone be able to make Pam back down like you did."

I was far from perfect, but ignored that part of his statement with my hands gliding along his forearms as I replied, "She's not that scary. She acts like a cuntankerous bitch to do her job, but you just have to know how to speak her language to get through to her and we both know she speaks *pussy*." When I thought about how he stood up for me, I added, "Thanks though, for what you said to her about supporting my decision to work. It means a lot to me."

I felt Eric's arms stiffen fractionally around me as he said, "I didn't disagree with *everything* she had to say."

*Yes he did! There was shouting and supporting and threats of finding new management. I was there! Spousal pussy privilege be damned, I heard the whole thing your honor!*

Just as I was working myself up into a snit, Eric continued, saying, "You're not driving that car again."

It seemed as though we were still in the '*Let's tell Sookie what to do*' hour and I tried to rein in my temper as I half whined, "Eric, I wouldn't feel comfortable driving *your* car and leaving it in the parking lot all day long. I'm not *stupid*; I know the school isn't in the best of neighborhoods and I would be too worried that something might happen to it while I was working. At least if they tried to steal *my car* they'd only have a 50/50 shot at getting it to start."

"Exactly," he replied smugly. "It's unreliable. How worried do you think *I* would be if you were left stranded there?"

*Nicely played Mr. Northman.*

"But I can't afford a new car," I said, clearly not thinking things through at first and quickly added, "and I wouldn't feel comfortable with *you* buying one for me either."

He sighed against my back and actually surprised me when he said, "I'm not offering to buy you a new car." I was left trying to figure out what in the hell it was we were talking about then when

he added, "I'm buying a new car for *Frank*. As his father, I refuse to allow him to get into a vehicle that can be taken down by a gnat."

Even though I could see his point, especially after the accidents both of us had been in a few weeks earlier, I didn't want to give in that easily and sighed, "Ugh...you and Pam are both car snobs. My car would totally be able to go up against a gnat. And what if it's a girl? Naming her Frank would almost be as mean as naming a boy Frankencock."

His magical lips kissed the back of my neck, weakening my resolve even further, as he said, "Your car would be totaled by a tsetse fly and I won't have you and *Virginia* getting hurt."

"Virginia?" I asked, wondering if he had some secret Civil War battlefields obsession I didn't know about. Gran would love that.

"Yes, Virginia; as in *virgin*, which is what she will remain throughout her lifetime," he replied, as though because he'd said it out loud, it made it true.

I'm sure he didn't appreciate my responding snort, but he turned my head and attempted to kiss away any further arguments from me. Being a tad cuntakerous myself, that didn't stop me from mumbling, "Jerk," into his mouth before I let him do just that.

We eventually got up and took showers again, separately because Eric was now excited to go car shopping, and I came back downstairs and found him on the internet looking at a website going over the best safety rated automobiles. I had a bit of an 'aww' moment that he was worried about me and the baby and any lingering fight I had about buying a new car disappeared. I flopped down next to him on the couch, asking, "Find anything?"

"Yes," he said and pointed proudly at the screen. "The BMW 5 Series four door model has an overall vehicle score of 5."

I looked at the numbers and saw that it had a few 4's in some of the categories they used to judge the cars and said, "Yeah and I'm sure a BMW would rank a 5 in the overall carjacking category too." I scrolled down the list and pointed, saying, "There. That one scored even higher than the BMW." Taking a closer look, I added, "It has the best rating out of all of them."

Looking at the screen, his lips turned down in disgust and I was just about to call him a car snob again when he asked, "A Hyundai?"

"Read it and weep Mr. Car Elitist," I snickered. "If *safety* is your real concern, then you should have no issues with it." I probably shouldn't have gotten as much joy out of his obvious misery, but I had no delusions that I was a good person, so it was okay. I made up bad porn screenplays in my head for Christ's sake.

"But it's a *Hyundai*," he whined.

I laughed at him and said, "Maybe *Hyundai Sonata* is the Swahili phrase for 'tough shit'."

Eric turned to glare at me, clearly upset that he really had no real argument that the *tough shit* car was the best one as far as safety was concerned and instead he changed the subject by asking, "Why do you think I can speak Swahili?"

I gave him my best 'Duh!' face, saying, "Uh... 'cause you *can*."

Eric had a really good 'Duh' face too and replied, "Uh... *no*, I *can't*."

"Well then you're a big fat liar because you said some weird word to me on the night of the premier party and when I asked you what it was, you said it was Swahili for..." I paused suddenly, not wanting to finish my sentence. I couldn't remember what the Swahili word was, but I knew it meant 'surprise'.

"Swahili for what?" he asked.

Since he must have made up the fact he could speak Swahili during the three weeks we'd been together that forgotten word felt like it was something that was completely our own. It had nothing to do with our feelings for one another; nothing to do with how we appeared to those around us and it suddenly became very important to me. It was a symbol of those three weeks that were missing from his memories and, knowing I would remember the word again if I heard it, I vowed to myself I wouldn't go looking it up on the internet. *I* would remember it when *he* did, so I refused to tell him, saying, "Nope. I'm not telling."

He looked back at me in disbelief asking, "Why not?"

I didn't want to tell him that either, figuring I might get all weepy again and make him feel bad for not remembering, so I remained silent and just made a motion with my fingers like I was locking up my mouth and throwing away the key. Ever the opportunist, Eric cocked his damn lickable eyebrow at me, using his sex-voice to say, "I have *ways* to make you *talk*."

*Of that, I have no doubt.*

I could already hear the chorus of '*Oh God*', '*Harder*', '*Faster*', '*More*', in my mind and from the look in his eyes, I could tell it would be a challenge for us to even get out of the house without going for another round on the couch, but the sound of my stomach growling interrupted our pre-sexivities and I glanced at the clock and saw it was already after four o'clock in the afternoon. Eric must have heard it too because he dialed his lust back and said, "But I'm taking a rain check. For now, I'll settle on getting your mouth to open by taking you out to dinner."

The thought of all of those cameras in my face again so soon only turned my stomach and I really didn't feel up to it. It was the one part of our relationship that I hated, but I would put up with it for him. He'd been so angry earlier though that I had to ask, "Do you really think that's a good idea? After what happened earlier at the doctor's office I would think you'd want to avoid your stalkers for a while."

Eric just shrugged his shoulders and said, "There's nothing I can do but try and ignore them." His eyes narrowed for a moment before he added, "But maybe we can avoid them."

*Could he fly us out of here? That would be handy.*

Thoughts of Eric in head to toe Lycra, like a sexy Superhero, only made me want to stay home with my own personal Sex Man, able to leap over multiple orgasms in a single bound, but his thoughts were apparently more pragmatic rather than pornstastic. I listened as he called a car service for us to be picked up at the house and he explained to me that the paparazzi wouldn't be able to tell who was in the car thanks to the tinted windows. Eric's neighborhood was ritzy enough that limos were always going in and out of the gate, but I thought it was a bit extravagant to take a limo out to dinner unless we were going somewhere really fancy, which I didn't want to do because fancy schmancy restaurant equaled paparazzi stalkers outside.

"Well, where are we going to dinner?" I asked. "Do I need to dress up?"

Eric turned back to his laptop and started typing while he said, "It's up to you. We can go wherever you want."

"But what if I want greasy Mexican food?" I asked, feeling him out a little. "Won't it look odd if we take a limo to Mucho Mas?" It was a relatively inexpensive Mexican restaurant in North Hollywood that made the best enchiladas around, but certainly wasn't limo worthy. Amelia and I used to go there all of the time, but more for the margaritas than the food and since I couldn't fill up on any of those, I'd just have to make do with extra salsa. Poor me.

Eric looked away from the screen and said seriously, "Sookie, I'd take you to Burger King in a limo, if that was what you wanted." He was so sincere that it made my insides all squishy, but before I could say anything, he added, "But we only need the limo to take us to the..." he paused and choked out, "*Hyundai dealership.*"

Seeing how difficult it was for him to say it, I jokingly rubbed my hand up and down his back, saying, "Aww...poor baby. That looked like it *hurt*. Are you okay?"

He tossed his head back and covered his eyes with his forearm, acting like a martyr as he grumbled, "Not really..." He moved his arm so he could look into my eyes when he added, "but the old saying goes, 'What doesn't kill me makes me stronger', so I suppose I'll survive."

I couldn't help grinning at Mr. Overdramatic, saying, "It's a *car* Eric, not *cancer*." He still looked pitiful at the thought of buying one, but now that I had enchiladas on the brain I didn't have time for his man-mope and he perked up significantly when I patted his knee and stood up to get my purse as I said, "But if you're a good boy while we're at the dealership, I'll play with your stick shift when we leave."

He couldn't get his coat on fast enough.

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### Chapter 83

#### EPOV

I could hear that Sookie was still in the shower when I came out of my room and the thought crossed my mind wondering why she wasn't sharing my room with me, but the thought about going in there to take another one with her, even though I'd just finished my own, overrode the first one quickly. I probably would have if that fucked up thing I had to use to cover my cast didn't take so long to get on, so I begrudgingly went downstairs and grabbed my laptop instead.

When I checked my email I saw I had one from the private investigator I'd asked to look into what had happened at the casino the night Sookie and I met. Reading that it was just a confirmation that he'd received my request and would look into it, I thought about just telling him to never mind. It might have been a foolish move on my part, but I'd stopped questioning Sookie's motives about being with me. Not only did I now believe she was carrying my child, her sincerity showed in her every interaction with me and I found myself fascinated by every little thing about her, from her innocent-girl-next-door look to her coming up with things like spousal pussy privileges. When she stood up to Pam, I kept her in my lap more afraid of what she'd do to Pam than any damage she might sustain, having no doubt Sookie would win that fight now that I'd learned not to underestimate her. Sookie won it anyway and I was glad I wasn't the only one that had met their match.

*Cuntankerous bitch had it coming to her for years.*

Still, I didn't think it would hurt to have the PI look into things, if only so it might jog my memory or hers, so I closed the email without responding and opened up Google to look up what cars were the safest. When she'd come downstairs and pointed out, *correctly*, that the Hyundai Sonata was the top one, I wracked my brain trying to figure out a way to get out of it because I really didn't think I could buy one. The money wasn't the issue, but my Y chromosome was having a full out balls-to-the-walls-no-fucking-way moment at just the thought.

*If only I could fuck HER into a coma, then she could wake up to find a Mercedes in the driveway. If she didn't remember anything I could tell her she had it all along!*

The only thing that got me off the couch was knowing she wanted Mexican food (and a possible handjob for me only sweetened the deal), but I swear to fucking Christ I felt like a complete douche climbing out of a stretch limo at the Hyundai dealership.

*Complete. Douche.*

From the looks of the salesmen loitering around the front looking for fresh meat, they agreed with my assessment. Before we'd left the house, I'd thrown on a black knit cap and sunglasses, but if any of them recognized me, they didn't let on and I just focused on Sookie's growing

enthusiasm over getting to pick out a new car. She was eyeing the cars on the lot and talking out loud to herself about what color car she might get. For all of her complaining, I could tell she was excited and while the salesmen were jostling their way towards us, I leaned down to whisper in her ear, "Have a change of heart?"

Sookie snickered and put her hand up saying, "Stop. You saw the ratings, so *tough shit* it is."

I pulled her closer and explained, "I wasn't talking about the *kind* of car; I meant you seem excited now that we're here."

Her eyes dropped to her feet and she shuffled nervously a bit before admitting, "I guess...it's just that... well, I've never *had* a new car before." I don't know why, but that thought had never crossed my mind. I knew she'd been raised by her Gran and gotten a scholarship to go to college, but it never occurred to me that she'd never had something as meaningless (to me anyway) as a new car and I vowed then and there that I would give her whatever her heart desired. I was still stunned silent when she looked up at me and smiled, leaning up on her tip toes and kissed my cheek, saying sincerely, "Thank you."

She was thanking me for buying her a \$20K piece of *tough shit* when I'd been willing to spend \$90K on a BMW.

*Like I said, she fascinated me.*

There were no less than five middle aged men wandering our way with each of them attempting to stay one step ahead of the others. I guessed there wasn't much demand for highly rated safe vehicles, but then, being the *car snob* I was, I wasn't really surprised.

Sookie leaned in and whispered, "I'll bet you the one in the middle carrying a beer baby makes it to us first."

I looked at the pack and seeing as how there were younger and fitter men around him, I confidently said, "I'll take that bet. What are we wagering?" I added, waggling my eyebrows.

She licked her lips and eyed me like a sex kitten, saying, "You're Mr. Hot Shot Poker Player. You tell me."

I suddenly wished I'd had the limo driver stick around so we'd have somewhere more private to go to for our *negotiations*, but with the gang of salesmen getting closer and the sea of Hyundai's in the background, I ended up saying the first thing that came to my mind.

"If *you're* wrong, we leave this shithole and go to the BMW dealership." So it wasn't the *highest* rated safe vehicle. It definitely rated higher on the man-scale.

Sookie chuckled as she shook her head ruefully, saying, "Gee, I give you my fuck-me face and you offer me a Beemer instead. I never knew I could be insulted by a luxury car."

"Sookie," I stammered, "you know I didn't mean it *that* way." I quickly wrapped my arm around her and pulled her against the front of my body as I spoke against the top of her head, "But if you want to wager sexual favors, then I'm all in."

She laughed against my chest, patting it with her hands, and said, "After that, it might be a while before you're *all in* again." Her eyes looked up seeing what I'm sure was the utter horror on my face at just the thought that she'd punish me like that and it only made her laugh louder before she said, "It doesn't matter anyway."

I was about to ask her why when Mr. Beer Baby sauntered up to us with his sweaty paw out in front of him and his eyes trained on Sookie's chest as he said, "Good afternoon. My name is Mike Spencer. Is there anything I can help you with or are you two just looking?"

Mike Spencer was moments away from getting a crutch to his crotch when Sookie spoke up saying, "Well *Mike Spencer*, seeing as how you're asking my girls," she motioned at *MY girls* with her hand and continued, "I can confidently say there is *nothing* you can help them with."

He stood there completely flabbergasted, stuttering some incoherent dribble as his face reddened, but Sookie just shooed him away with her hands and walked over to an awkward looking younger guy and put her hand out, saying, "Hi, I'm Sookie, and my husband Eric and I are looking to get a Hyundai Sonata. Do you think you can help us out with that?"

He seemed completely surprised that she had chosen him to work with, but he still shook her hand and nervously stuttered, "Uh...sure. Yeah, of course. I'm Barry. Barry Horowitz." His eyes never strayed lower than her face, so I was happy with her choice in salesmen, even if I was still unhappy with her choice in cars.

Barry was pretty knowledgeable about the cars he was selling and it turned out for an extra ten grand I could get the top of the line trim of the *tough shit* model with every option they had. Sookie tried to argue with me a bit until I asked Barry how many cars he'd sold that month. When he admitted that he hadn't sold any and we were his first real customers, I heard no further arguments from her. Once Sookie's car had been selected we sat down at Barry's desk and when he started pulling the paperwork out to finance it, I held up my hand and took out my checkbook, saying, "Just give me the total."

"You're paying for it all? Right now? You're not even going to try and bargain down the price?" he asked in disbelief.

"Is that a problem?" I asked since it seemed like a problem to him. Thirty grand seemed like a bargain price for a new car to me considering what I paid for my Corvette.

He blushed saying, "Um...no, of course not."

When I continued to stare at him wondering what the issue was Sookie nudged my leg and shot me a disapproving look before saying to Barry, "Don't mind him Barry. Writing a check for thirty grand like it was nothing would shock me too."



*Really?*

I thought about it as we sat there silently with Barry filling out all of the required paperwork and wondered when I'd gotten so jaded. When I really thought about it, up until Sookie I'd been surrounded by people who either had the same kind of money that I did or had no problems wanting to spend mine. I'd thought I'd come a long way from years earlier when I had to borrow money from Pam just to get out from under my father's roof, but was I really that far removed from everyday society?

Barry's voice interrupted my thoughts, asking, "Would you like both of your names put on the title?"

I spoke up before Sookie could say anything, answering, "No. Just have Sookie Northman put on it." I wanted it to be completely hers, no matter who paid for it, and liked that both the name and the concept were less foreign to me now.

"Eric, no..." she started to protest.

I turned to look at her and said, "Yes." When it looked like she was still raring to fight me on it, I added, "Or, when you wake up in the morning instead of a Hyundai parked in the garage you'll find a Ferrari." If she could be insulted by luxury cars I supposed she could be threatened with them too.

No matter how mad she looked she was still sexy as hell, even when she gritted her teeth at Barry, who was waiting to see who the victor would be, and said, "Go ahead. Put it in *my* name so that way if he gets any ideas and does anything to it I can call the police and have him arrested for grand theft auto."

*Fuck. Did spousal pussy privilege not apply? I should've thought that one through.*

As far as I was concerned, this was just a temporary car until she was done working and it would just be *tough shit* for her when it got replaced. Her anger dissipated completely by the time Barry was done with the paperwork and when he handed her the keys the excitement she felt was evident on her face. When we got outside she hugged me again, saying, "Thank you Eric."

I kissed the top of her head and said, "Anything for you Mrs. Northman." Saying her name out loud earlier had me repeating it mentally since then and I was liking the sound of it more and more. Besides, little did she know that when I'd said *anything* that included charges of grand theft auto to get rid of that ridiculous car in the spring. I was too pretty for prison, but I was 99% sure Sookie would drop the charges. If not, I had a lawyer on retainer for a reason (i.e. I'm too pretty for prison.).

When Sookie had gone for a test drive earlier, she'd gone with just Barry because there was no way I was going to fit into the backseat comfortably with my cast, but it turned out the same could be said of the front seat too. Sookie moved the passenger seat as far back as it would go and waited patiently for me to try and fold myself into it, but that was easier said than done. I

was just about to start bitching in frustration when I looked up and saw how happy she was, so I bit my tongue not wanting to spoil her moment. When we were finally on the way to dinner she fiddled with the radio, before taking my hand in hers, saying, "I really can't thank you enough Eric."

I gently squeezed her hand and replied, "You don't have to thank me Sookie. I'm just glad that you're happy." Her whole face was lit up and I couldn't remember having seen anything or anyone more beautiful than her at that moment.

*Would it surpass anything I might've seen during those missing three weeks?*

I couldn't know for sure without regaining my memories, but even then I was sure if I had seen something more beautiful it would've been her at just another moment in time.

"You think I'm stupid, don't you," she said out of the clear blue.

My thoughts immediately went to earlier that morning when I'd realized she'd taken the job in Compton knowing she was pregnant and I apologized, saying, "Sookie, I'm sorry about what I said this morning. I was just worried..."

"No," she interrupted me. "I meant about me being so excited over this car."

"I don't think you're *stupid*..." I hedged since the only excitement I got from this car was seeing hers.

"I know," she said, "it's not up to your standards, but I really do love it and I appreciate you getting it for me even though my beer appetite and your champagne income makes us both want to vomit."

"What?" Was she craving beer? Champagne? Those weren't good for pregnant women, were they?

She giggled, explaining, "I know you can buy pretty much whatever you want, but I've never wanted much so it didn't really matter to me what the best new thing out there was. What I'm trying to say is that I know you don't think very highly of this car, but to me it might as well be dipped in chocolate and come with its own Captain Jack Sparrow in the glove box. I love it so much because *you* bought it for me out of your concern for *my* safety and it overrode *your* concern for your hoity toity aesthetics."

I'd been paying attention up until she'd mentioned Captain Jack Sparrow because her fuck-me face flashed briefly before returning to normal again and then I didn't hear anything but the static that filled my ears as my vision turned red. "Captain Jack Sparrow?" I asked. I loved those movies and knowing Sookie had called my cock, among other things, the Kraken, I figured she loved them too. I just didn't figure her to be lusting after a dirty drunken pirate, even if Johnny Depp was underneath it all.

Sookie laughed again and seeing my un-amused expression she asked, "Really? That's all you got out of what I just said?" When I just cocked my eyebrow at her silently, and not so patiently, waiting for her to elaborate, she huffed out while still looking amused, "What? Captain Jack is hot. This shouldn't be news to you. Those movies raked in a ton of money for a reason."

The screenplays, acting, and special effects were the only reasons I thought they did so well. Silly me.

"What's so hot about Captain Jack Sparrow?" I asked. "He's dirty and smelly and a staggering drunk through most of the films." Another thought occurred to me that was even more disconcerting and made me ask, "Or is it just Johnny Depp?" His dark hair and eyes were the exact opposite of mine and that thought didn't sit well at all.

*At. All.*

"Oh my God, Eric..." she cackled, "Are you *jealous*?"

*Yes!*

"No," I lied. "I'm just curious." She clearly wasn't buying my denial, so I added, "You know, in case I ever get cast as a foul smelling, rotten toothed, transvestite."

*Maybe I should've left that part out.*

Sookie was clearly having a field day with my *issues* and her fuck me face made an instantaneous reappearance when she said, "*Dirty* never looked so *good* until Captain Jack Sparrow came along."

"Really..." I fumed.

"Really..." she sighed, staring ahead through the windshield.

Why it bothered me so much that she was practically swooning over a fictional movie character was beyond me, but the fact remained that I was *bothered*. I hadn't noticed my hand had left Sookie's and was currently in the official I'm-being-a-pouty-jealous-bitch position with my arms crossed over my chest, until I felt her hand sliding up my thigh.

*A handjob can't fix EVERYTHING.*

"Eric?" she asked timidly. "Are you upset?"

I felt like a fucking teenage girl that just caught her boyfriend eying a cheerleader in the lunchroom, but I denied it saying, "No."

"Oh," she said brightly, removing her hand from my leg in the process. "That's good because he really is *hot*."

*She could've at least TRIED the handjob route.*

I was in the middle of mentally beheading Jack Sparrow with my sword when she said, "Hey! We could name the baby *Jack!*"

"Absolutely not!" I barked out and turned to see her grinning face. "What?" I asked, wondering what was so fucking joyous to her.

"Seriously Eric? You're being all pissy because I like Captain Jack's *swagger*? Because I haven't brought up Bambi Big Hole *once* and I got to see not only the *lasting impression* you left on her thanks to her skank-agraphed poster, but I got to meet her live and in person with her trying to molest you right in front of me. I think on the scale of bitchitude, you're overreacting."

We'd pulled into the parking lot of the restaurant by then and she parked, turning off the car and faced me. Her face still showed some amusement and her voice was even and light, so she didn't seem upset, but I had no fucking idea what she was talking about and it must've shown on *my* face until she looked me in the eyes and said, "Yvetta."

*Yvetta.*

My stomach sank with dread knowing they'd somehow met each other and what Yvetta's reaction must have been. I was sure there was more to it, but I honestly wasn't sure if I wanted to know and ended up rubbing my eyes in resignation, asking, "What happened?"

Sookie waited until I looked at her and took my hand in hers as she said, "Nothing worth mentioning. I only brought it up to try and give you a little perspective."

*My perspective was that I was an asshole. A jealous asshole.*

"I'm sorry," I sighed. "It was stupid to get jealous over something so innocent, but..." I sighed again. I really *was* an asshole considering I was getting all pissed off over something like that knowing she'd only been intimate with one other person when I'd fucked more women than I could honestly remember. And Sookie probably *knew* that about me and still didn't judge me for it. I finally admitted, "I can't explain it. Just the thought of you with someone else, *wanting* someone else drives me batshit. I mean, that's dumb, right?"

Sookie unbuckled her seatbelt and leaned across the console, placing a soft kiss on my lips, and said, "I only *want* you."

*I didn't deserve her.*

I pulled her back for a much more intense kiss before releasing her and truthfully admitted, "I only *want* you too."

She smiled again, saying, "Good!" and then reached over to grab the door handle before looking at me and winking as she said, "Besides, I already checked the glove box and Captain Jack isn't in there."

"Ha ha," I said without any humor even though I felt some returning. "We should find somewhere with an open mike night for you to try out all of your new material."

Sookie walked around to my side of the car and waited for me to pry myself from the seat, which was a workout in itself, and said, "Nah...being in the spotlight isn't my thing."

"Really?" I asked. I was so used to being around people in show business that it was almost like *she* was speaking Swahili to *me*.

"Yeah," she replied. "I don't like being the center of attention."

It was just another foreign phrase to me, but by that time we were walking through the doors of Mucho Mas and were immediately seated. It seemed nice enough and Sookie didn't even bother picking up the menu, with her eyes instead darting around as she wondered out loud, "Where's our server?"

*In the kitchen lusting over Johnny Depp?*

My eyes were looking over the menu when I answered, "Having a siesta?"

She laughed saying, "Well then siesta time is over. *Jack* wants enchiladas."

*I would sooner name my son Cock than to name him Jack now.*

Thankfully the server showed up before I admitted that out loud and our orders were brought out to us fairly quickly, so our small talk ended with me watching Sookie eat, or more so listening to the sounds she was making as she ate, more than actually eating my own meal. Now knowing firsthand what sounds she made while having sex, her foodgasms weren't too far off the mark and I wasn't the only one that noticed. No less than six sets of male eyes were on her whenever she took another bite of her food and I temporarily lost interest in my own meal so I could stare each and every one of them down.

"Do you not like your food?" Sookie asked with her eyes darting to my nearly untouched meal.

"It's fine," I said, eying down one particularly obtuse asshole that didn't seem to see the wedding band on Sookie's left hand, probably too busy jerking off underneath his table.

"Then why aren't you eating?" she asked, taking another bite of her enchilada and letting out another moan.

After our almost-argument in the car, I didn't want to admit to feeling territorial over her, but now that I'd come to accept that she was my wife; my wife who was carrying *my child*, I was

fighting my instincts to cover her body with my own and growling at every male in the vicinity to back the hell off.

*But they seriously needed to back the hell off.*

"Eric?" she asked again when I didn't respond.

When the obtuse asshole finally noticed my death stare his eyes dropped back down to his own plate, so I picked up my fork and said, "I'm eating. See?" I took a bite and smiled at her while chewing my food. Little did she know that my smile came from not only looking at her, but the additional heads I'd mentally added to Captain Jack's that were rolling on the floor in my mind.

We eventually got home after another round of what Sookie had laughingly dubbed Eric Origami, with me trying to get back into the car, and her near constant yawns and watering eyes had me suggesting that we go to bed. It wasn't until we'd gotten upstairs and I watched her head into her room that my earlier thoughts came back to me and I followed behind her, asking, "Why didn't you ever move into the master bedroom?"

She turned to look at me with a mixture of surprise and sadness, saying, "Well...we hadn't...our relationship..."

Seeing her eyes start to tear up, I moved forward and took her hand in mine, softly asking, "We hadn't what?"

Sookie took a deep breath and blew it out, trying to blink back her tears, and said, "I guess we just hadn't gotten around to it? I mean, when I first moved in we weren't really together; it was just for show and then when we decided to try being a real couple everything just happened so fast and we'd been so busy that we never talked about it. We'd shared your bed before we ever had sex, but you'd never come right and asked me to move my things into your room." Her eyes looked up at me hesitantly as she admitted, "I guess I was just waiting for you to ask me."

Had I really been so caught up in everyday life that I never thought to ask her to move her things into my room? How could that be when I...

I blew out my own deep breath before asking, "Sookie? Would you please consider moving your things into *our room*?"

She smiled with her eyes glancing at the bed and said, "Well...that bed *is* a bit small for you and since you seem unable to sleep alone, I suppose it would be the kind thing to do."

Since I couldn't be much help carrying her things across the hall, I made myself useful by making room in my closet for her clothes and watched her make several trips back and forth. She looked even happier than she had been getting the new car and when we finally settled into bed for the night, there was only one thought on my mind.

*That feeling in my chest definitely wasn't gas.*

## Chapter 84

### SPOV

Once I had finished helping Lafayette clean up after the last of the food had been served I climbed into my car and headed home with my thoughts going back over the last few days. Eric had pouted a little when I told him I would be volunteering at the shelter that morning, but with him in a cast I knew he would get tired and uncomfortable having to stand for a long period of time and convinced him to stay home. We hadn't spent any time apart since the day I'd run to the store and came home to find his father at the house, so it was an odd feeling for both of us to be separated, but since we'd both be going back to work the next day I figured it was a good time for us to try and adjust.

Eric and I were making a lot of progress in our relationship and even though he still hadn't regained one bit of his missing memories, he was closer to being *My Eric* than I had dared to wish for. Everything between us had happened so fast the first time around that I don't think I fully appreciated falling in love with him. Maybe I'd been too blinded while in the moment or took it for granted that nothing could burst our bubble and while I was still in love with him now, the way he'd sometimes look at me or just silently reach out to touch me as if physical contact somehow made him feel comforted was making me fall in love with him all over again. I hadn't said the actual words again. I didn't want him to feel like he had to repeat the words back to me, but I knew, even if he was still unsure, that he did love me.

As I pulled up towards the gate I noticed the crowd of paparazzi had dwindled significantly and sent up a silent prayer of thanks. None of them ever looked twice at my car whenever we'd come and gone and figured they thought it belonged to someone that worked in the neighborhood, but since Eric had such a hard time fitting into it we'd taken his car when we'd run to the grocery store a couple of days earlier. Pandemonium ensued so when we were both feeling a little bit of cabin fever the next day we'd taken my car and gone for a drive up the coast. Eric knew of a beautiful spot where we'd pulled over and had a picnic lunch with the most amazing view. It was the most normal outing we'd ever had and I loved every second of it.

Pam's car was just pulling into the driveway ahead of me and Eric must've been waiting on one of us because he had the front door open before I could pull into the garage. Thinking something might be wrong I just parked in the driveway, but before I could do or say anything Pam got out and took one look at me getting out of the car, stomped over to Eric and started hitting him with her purse like he was a piñata, saying, "What! Is! Wrong! With! You!"

I ran over and put myself in between them, wondering what in the hell had happened, yelling, "Pam! Stop it!"

Undeterred, she kept trying to smack him by reaching around me and ignored me, continuing her rant with, "Stop! Being! An! Ass!"

"What the fuck is going on?" I asked while pinning her arms down at her sides. I'd only been gone for a few hours so I couldn't possibly imagine what had gone wrong, but she was a lot stronger than she looked and I hoped someone would start explaining before I had to knock her down into the rose bushes next to the front door.

"Yeah!" Eric shouted from behind me. "What the Fuck!"

"That!" she shrieked with her perfectly manicured finger pointing at my car.

"The Black Pearl?" I asked. Since the car actually was black, I'd jokingly named it after Captain Jack's ship just to get a rise out of Eric and it never failed to get a reaction out of him.

He snarled from behind me, "That's just wrong," making me snicker, but Pam's face was anything but amused.

She looked passed me and asked Eric, "Why would you let her go out and resort to having to buy something like that? Just because she doesn't *want* your money doesn't mean you can't spend any of it on her."

I spoke up before Eric could say anything and argued, "Eric *did* buy me that car!" I still felt a little weird about letting Eric spend so much money on me, but I loved it and her superiority complex was starting to piss me off.

I added, "It's safe!" at the same time Eric said, "It's temporary!" only making Pam and I ask in unison, "What?"

We all stood there waiting for someone to say something so I finally blurted out to Pam, "It was the highest rated vehicle for safety on the Edmunds website," and then turned to Eric asking, "What do you mean *'It's temporary'?*"

It was clear that Eric had spoken without thinking, given he refused to look me in the eye, and instead stared at Pam asking, "Are you here just to stir up shit or do you have an actual reason?"

When we both just silently stared him down he ran his fingers through his hair, frustrated, and said to Pam, "It was the safest car that was the least likely to get her carjacked at the school she's going to work at." He then looked at me and said, "It's *temporary* because as soon as you're done working I'm buying you a better car."

While Pam was apparently happy with his explanation it only made me angrier and I said, "I don't want a *better* car. I like *that* car and since it's in *my name* it's *my choice*. You can buy whatever in the hell you want, but I won't drive it."



I stomped into the house mumbling about *highhanded car snobs*, but Eric didn't let me get far. He grabbed onto my arm and turned me around to face him looking like *he* was hurt as he said, "Sookie...I know you like that car and it's why I didn't say anything sooner, but I'm just not comfortable in it." My ire started to rise again knowing how he felt about my tough shit, but he held his hand up saying, "Physically uncomfortable. I'm too tall; the car is too small...take your pick. I know we have another car, but I'd like for us *both* to be able to freely take whichever one is available. That's not asking too much, is it?"

He did have a hard time climbing in and out of it, especially with his cast, but still having a little bit of fight left in me, I said, "You said *better*, not *bigger*."

Eric pulled me closer and wrapped his arms around me as he shrugged and said, "The other cars on that website just happened to be bigger and bigger is better for me." When my body relaxed in his embrace he kissed the top of my head and rubbed his crotch against my body as he whispered, "Besides, wouldn't you agree that *bigger* is *better*?"

*Does a bear shit in the woods?*

I hated that his argument made sense because I really did love that car, but I wouldn't hold onto it knowing how difficult it was for Eric to get in and out of it and acknowledged that by saying, "Can it still be black? I'd hate to have to come up with another name when 'The Black Pearl' just rolls off the tongue."

A low grumble went through Eric's chest, but he held me tighter and said, "Since I'm the only one that'll be pillaging and plundering your booty you can call it whatever you want, but if I do my job right the only thing you'll be calling out is my name. *That* seems to roll off your tongue just as easily."

*Why couldn't I ever remember to buy panty liners?*

Feeling the length of Eric's body against my own was doing pleasant things to my libido and I, along with Wicked and Immoral, had completely forgotten about Pam's presence until she said, "Must you rub on her like a cat in heat?"

I sighed, disappointed by the reminder that we weren't alone, and snarked back, "Better than us fucking like bunnies since you're here." I couldn't even blame my hormones considering how rabbit-like we'd been prior to the accident and now that condoms were no longer an issue, we were constantly in some sort of state of undress. We had to get creative at times thanks to Eric's cast, but that was the only thing that slowed us down.

Eric ignored Pam's presence for the time being and rubbed his body against mine some more, with Eric Junior letting me know he was thinking along the same lines as me, as Eric said, "I could definitely go for another hop down the bunny trail." He finally turned to Pam and asked impatiently, "What did you need?"

I looked over and saw the amused yet disgusted look on her face as she deadpanned, "Brain bleach." When neither one of us said anything, she continued on saying, "But, since I haven't had my own brain trauma to help me forget the last five minutes, I'll have to learn to suffer through. Speaking of which, have there been any changes? Remember anything other than how to get into Sookie's pants?"

"No," Eric mumbled.

We'd talked a lot over the last few days with me telling him everything I could remember during his missing three weeks, but nothing seemed to stir his memories. I knew he was frustrated; I could see it in his eyes whenever I told him about the things we had done together and feeling his body tense up against mine, I looked up at him and offered, "Maybe we should go to the places we'd been together before."

He looked down at me confused, asking, "What? Where?"

"We could go for another outing on the whale watching boat or take a ride down to Miramar. Maybe actually being there will jog your memories." I wanted him to remember, if only so he wouldn't feel cheated out of that time we'd had together, but now that I mostly had *My Eric* back, I wasn't as desperate as I had been before for his memories to return. It seemed to me that we'd be okay whether they came back to him or not.

Eric shrugged saying, "It couldn't hurt, but maybe we should wait until the cast comes off." I watched a spark start to flair to life behind his eyes as he asked, "Do you think they'll let me go for another ride in one of those fighter jets?"

I smiled back at him, loving that the amnesia that had been the cause of so much heartache for him was no longer keeping him down as much anymore. I hadn't seen hide nor hair of Prick-ric since the night I'd blurted out that I was pregnant which was just fine by me. Squeezing him tighter I said, "I'll give the boys a call and see if something can be worked out."

Sam had called to check on me a few times while Eric was in the hospital and again after he'd come home, offering to do anything we might need. Both he and Terry were very sweet and when I mentioned to Eric wanting to have them over to dinner sometime soon, his hackles were a bit raised until I explained they were married to each other. Understanding dawned on him further once I explained who they were and how we'd met because it seemed Eric had donated a large sum of money to Terry's service dogs organization before the accident. I had no idea he'd done that, but he'd seen the donation on his bank statements and after telling him about how much Terry's own dog helped him cope with the trauma he'd suffered from the war, Eric was anxious to meet them in person again.

The only reason I hadn't called them to make any plans yet was because outing Eric's amnesia hadn't been decided on, but it appeared it was one of Pam's purposes for being at the house because she spoke up, saying, "I'll be at the studio with you tomorrow morning so we can have a meeting with the producers and tell them about your amnesia. I'll hold off on doing any kind of press release but I'm sure the news will leak eventually and then we'll just issue a statement

corroborating the facts, but treat it as a non-issue. At least we can thank the skank in today's headlines for clawing at her fifteen minutes of fame by claiming to fuck the May of the May/December Hollywood power couple. It should keep the paps off of your back for a while."

I no longer paid any attention to celebrity gossip news so I had no idea what she was talking about, but after having lived under the constant scrutiny of a camera lens for the last six weeks, I certainly felt bad for them. A marriage falling apart would be difficult enough to get through, but having it fall apart with the world watching had to be downright painful.

We'd moved into the kitchen by then and I didn't have time to ask who she was talking about because Pam moved onto the next topic by asking, "And what have you decided to do about baby Pam?"

Eric spoke up saying, "We're not naming it Pam," at the same time I asked, "What do you mean '*What are we going to do?*' We're *having* it!" The thought of being a mother still scared the bejeezus out of me, but I still wanted our baby.

Pam rolled her eyes at both of us, but answered me saying, "Of course you're *having* it. I meant, how long did you want to wait before making an announcement that you're pregnant?"

"Christ on the crapper," I mumbled. The only serious discussion Eric and I had about the baby so far was when I told him there *was* one. Every other discussion had been with us joking around about names and I was still more than a little freaked out over the concept that I would soon be a mother. Knowing that I would have Eric there to help me lessened my anxiety a little, but making official announcements would make it *real* when I could still pretend, at least for now, that it wasn't. It was still more dream than reality in my mind, but I knew it was only a matter of time before I couldn't pretend any longer. I wouldn't be able to ignore the physical changes that my body would be going through, but it wasn't because I didn't want our baby because I did. I was just afraid of screwing it up.

Seeing Pam's expectant look, I finally said, "Well we can't say anything yet. I haven't even told Gran and I don't want her to find out about it from a magazine."

She nodded her head agreeing and said, "The norm seems to be to wait at least until the three month mark before confirming anything."

The words she offered made my anxiety levels go down and knowing we would be at Gran's for Thanksgiving in just four weeks, which would only make me ten weeks along in the pregnancy, I said, "Okay. I can tell her in person when we go visit next month." I knew she would be over the moon hearing she would be a great-grandmother and wanted to see her reaction for myself anyway. Hopefully the additional time would allow me to wrap my head around it all by then and I wouldn't be so nervous about it anymore.

I still hated being in the spotlight though and grumbled, "But why do we have to say *anything* at all? Why can't everyone just mind their own business and leave us alone?"

From all of the eye rolling Pam seemed to do I was surprised her equilibrium wasn't affected as she asked, "Did you think no one would question or notice the beach ball you'll be sporting underneath your clothes? You'll be expected to say *something*. You married a celebrity. I would think you would've gotten used to your new reality by now."

The thought of being as big as those whales Eric loved so much did nothing to enhance my quickly souring mood. He'd been with so many beautiful women over the years I still sometimes questioned what in the hell he saw in me and my old Quinn baggage about my weight came back in an instant with me turning my back on both of them so they wouldn't see the tears forming in my eyes and I huffed out, "Well I would think you would've gotten used to my bitching about it by now."

My insecurities continued to flood through me wondering if Eric would still find me attractive when he wouldn't be able to get his ridiculously long arms around me any longer. I knew deep down he loved me, but he hadn't actually said the words again and I really wanted to hear them right about then. I would hope that he wouldn't be that shallow; that it wasn't my *body* that he loved; that it was *me*, but we hadn't been together long enough for me to know for sure how he would react. We'd never gotten around to discussing future children before the accident so I couldn't even placate myself with the knowledge of how he would've felt back then.

I didn't have long to ruminate because Pam's voice broke through my thoughts as she said, "Here," and I turned to see her hand Eric a stack of papers as she added, "Your script for this week's show. Since you're getting a late start you'll be taping on Thursday night instead of Tuesday."

"Thursday evening is when I have my doctor's appointment," I blurted out. It had been in the back of my mind; the *far back* since I was still trying to avoid freaking out.

"Well you don't need Eric there, do you? It's not like you'll be having the baby that night," Pam said. When I didn't say anything we both looked at Eric who looked like he didn't know what to say to either one of us, so Pam added, "Eric, you've been out for three weeks. They *need* you to be there for the taping. They've already bent over backwards to try and be accommodating with everything that's happened. A lot of people are depending on you."

I hated seeing him so torn and even though I wanted him to be there with me, I sucked it up and let him off the hook saying, "It's fine. I can go by myself. I doubt there'll be anything to see anyway."

*Anything other than how much the scale has gone up since my last appointment.*

A part of me was hoping that he'd say to hell with the show and he would go with me, so I was a little disappointed when he looked relieved as he asked me, "Are you sure? Or if you really want me to be there, maybe you could change your appointment to another day?"

I supposed I *could* change my appointment to another day, but unfortunately my hormones were in charge at that moment and they would've preferred him to say *he* really wanted to be there, not

did I really want him to be there, so I just shook my head saying, "No, it'll be fine." Suddenly needing to be by myself for a while I looked at them both and said, "Well I'll leave you two to talk business. I need to go over my lesson plans for tomorrow."

I ran up to our room so they wouldn't see the tears falling from my eyes and tried to look over what I would be teaching the following day, but my head couldn't focus on anything other than Eric not wanting to go with me to my appointment. I knew he had responsibilities and I didn't really *need* him to be there with me, but I *wanted* him there. I wanted him to *want* to be there.

When my eyes could no longer focus on the papers in front of me I lay down on the bed trying to talk myself out of my funk. I didn't realize I'd fallen asleep until I woke up with Eric curled around me. I could tell he was awake by the way he was breathing and I stretched out asking, "What time is it?" My energy levels were starting to pick back up, but at times it was nearly impossible to keep my eyes open. I was just thankful that my morning sickness seemed to be waning since I'd hate to throw up on one of my new students. If I did, I'd feel compelled to give them extra credit for their troubles.

"Almost seven," he answered from behind me. "I ordered Chinese food for dinner. It got here a few minutes ago."

I turned to look at him, still awestruck by his good looks. The pictures I'd seen of him modeling on billboards and in magazines were definitely drool worthy, but it was times like now, when his hair was messy and with whiskers on his face, that I thought he was the most handsome. *This* was the *real* Eric Northman and I was grateful that image of him was all mine.

Eric reached out and brushed his thumb along the skin underneath my eyes as he asked, "Why were you crying?"

My red eyes must have betrayed me, but my nap had done me some good because my hormones had backed down enough for me to not feel as distraught over the idea of going to my appointment alone. I still would've liked for him to be there, but I didn't feel like crying anymore because he wouldn't be.

I shrugged as best as I could while lying on my side and answered, "Just hormones." I knew Pam was right; people *were* counting on Eric to be there and I didn't want to make him feel bad by telling him the whole reason for my tears.

He stared back at me like he was trying to will the whole truth out of me, but when I didn't say anything else he leaned over and placed a kiss on each of my closed eyes and one on my lips before pulling back and asking, "Just hormones?"

"Yep," I answered a little too brightly. Hoping to deflect away from the topic, I added, "Chinese food sounds good." I started to pull away from him so I could deflect my ass all the way downstairs before he could try to get any more information out of me, but he pulled me back for a kiss that curled my toes instead. His mouth, his hands, his whole body should be insured by Lloyd's Of London and Wicked and Immoral were very happy at the sudden change in plans.

Our dinner had to be reheated.

It wasn't until a couple of hours later when we were back in bed for the night with Eric curled up behind me that he asked, "Does it make me pussy whipped that I don't want you to go to work tomorrow because I'll miss you?"

My heart melted hearing his confession and I pulled his arms tighter around me as I said, "Even if it did, Spousal Pussy Privilege would preclude me from having to answer that question under cross examination." When he didn't say anything, I added, "I'll miss you too, but you'll probably be so busy at work tomorrow that you won't even notice I'm not around."

I barely heard him mumble, "I doubt that," against my neck before he did his own deflecting, saying, "So, your first day tomorrow. Are you excited?"

I'd gone over the lesson plans enough over the last few days that I was confident in my ability to teach the subject, but my nervousness over teaching high school kids ebbed away at my confidence and I admitted, "Not so much excited as I am nervous. I'll just be happy if I don't shit my pants when I walk in there tomorrow morning."

He snickered saying, "I'm sure *everyone* will be happy if you don't shit your pants when you walk in there." I chuckled along with him until he asked, "Why are you nervous? I thought it was what you wanted."

"I don't know. I guess I'm just nervous that they'll all get mouthy at once and I won't get a word in edgewise. They're *teenagers* so it's not like I can distract them with glitter and construction paper." Then again, the snotty little shits at The Brigant Academy weren't easily distracted by that either.

Eric nuzzled the back of my neck comfortingly and left a soft kiss behind before he jokingly asked, "Do you want to bring my X-Box with you just in case?"

I seriously contemplated it for a moment, even asking, "Do they make games about *Pride and Prejudice* or *Cat's Cradle*?" If not, someone should really get working on that. "The first quarter is just about over and the AP English students have been studying British Literature, but we'll be moving onto a more 'world view' of a particular historical period through literature and juxtaposing classics like *Beowulf* with Gardner's *Grendel*." My minor in English Lit was really going to come in handy.

Eric didn't say anything for a long enough period of time that I wondered if he'd fallen asleep, so I was a little startled when he said, "You're like...*really smart*, huh?"

"Well I'm not like Doogie Howser smart, but I get by okay," I said. I'd always loved reading so the subject matter didn't worry me as much as the student body did. I probably wouldn't be as nervous thinking there wouldn't be too many badasses in an AP English course if I hadn't seen that girl Tara in the office. She would definitely keep me on my toes.

Eric hugged me tighter and just when I was about to ask him what he was thinking he spoke up saying, "Just when I think I know you, you say something that completely surprises me."

Having an idea of the caliber of women from Eric's past, especially after meeting Bambi Big Hole, his candid statement made me worry a little and I asked, "Is that a *bad* thing?" wondering if *really smart* equated to *really boring*. My nerd girl ways didn't exactly make me popular with the boys when I was in high school.

My worry disappeared completely when Eric moved on top of me with the moonlight coming through the window allowing me to see the glint in his eyes as he said, "No, it's a very *good* thing." He showed me just *how* good for the rest of the night.

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## Chapter 87: Chapter 85

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### Chapter 85

#### EPOV

I stood in the open doorway at the front of the house and watched Sookie drive away until I could no longer see her car as she drove to work for her first day at school and the small ache I'd been feeling in my chest only grew larger.

*What in the fuck was wrong with me?*

It was ridiculous to feel so attached to her. We'd spent practically every moment of the last week together. I should've been sick of her by now. I should've been relieved she was gone, but I could still taste her cherry flavored lip gloss on my lips and yet it already felt like I hadn't seen her in days. Knowing it would be another twelve hours before I would see her again only made it worse and I couldn't go after her, either on foot or in my car, thanks to my cast, but I still *wanted* to.

Instead I just went back into the house, taking a cursory glance around the empty rooms to see where I might have left my balls, before begrudgingly heading upstairs to take a shower when I couldn't find them. I'd already owned up, to myself at least, that I felt something for Sookie that I'd never felt for anyone else. Something about her drew me to her like a moth to a flame, but I couldn't figure out what it was exactly and it was driving me crazy. I wanted my missing memories back hoping to find the answer, but that hadn't happened yet either so I was stuck in limbo. I'd tried to reason it away thinking it was the knowledge that she was carrying my baby and maybe I was subconsciously trying to fill the role of a husband and father, but I knew that wasn't it because I'd already felt something for her before she'd told me she was pregnant. I'd waited, all week long, for the feelings of weariness and dissatisfaction from spending so much time together to appear, but they never did. It was unprecedented for me, never having been with the same woman for more than a couple of days before I would tire of their presence, but with Sookie I couldn't seem to spend enough time with her. Even as she slept at night I would find

myself awake just to watch her, needing to see her more than I needed sleep itself, and I wondered if those feelings would ever go away.

*Did I want them to?*

It scared me. I'd learned early on in life to not depend on anyone; to not rely on someone else emotionally and instead finding ways to fill that void with shallow gratification by surrounding myself with people that would feed either my ego or my physical needs, but while Sookie did both of those things she also did something else that was completely foreign to me.

*She just filled me.*

She made me feel whole in a way that I'd never felt before and since I already felt lost knowing I'd be without her for twelve hours, I wondered what in the hell would happen if I knew I'd be without her forever. I even tried to blame it on the sex because, again, it was something completely new to me even though I'd fucked more than my fair share of the female population and if I never had to use another condom in my lifetime I would die a happy man, but I knew it was more than that. More than how we seemed to fit together perfectly; more than how she seemed to be able to read my mind and give me what I wanted before I even knew I'd wanted it; more than how I wanted nothing more than to drive her to the brink of insanity making her scream out my name.

*Everything that had to do with Sookie, I just wanted MORE.*

I was in the middle of rinsing the shampoo from my hair when it dawned on me and my eyes automatically opened, getting burned in the process, but the pain only let me know I wasn't dreaming. It was real.

*I was in love with Sookie.*

There was no 'probably' or 'maybe' to go along with it. I was in love with her, but now that I'd come to that conclusion I was upset that she hadn't said those very same words to me in the last few days. Granted, she *had* told me she loved me a few times and she hadn't treated me any differently since then, but after spending so much time together I started to wonder if her feelings for me had changed. Was I different now than I was before the accident and she found she didn't love this new version of me? Why didn't she want to change her doctor's appointment so I could go with her? Was she already making plans to go through it alone because she didn't *want me* with her?

*Because she didn't want ME?*

Suddenly feeling panicked by the seizing in my chest, I hurried through the rest of my shower hoping to be able to call and catch her before school started. I didn't really want to tell her that I was in love with her for the second first time over the phone, but I'd do it if I had to. It didn't matter though because by the time I'd gotten out the clock told me I was too late and I certainly



didn't want to let her know my feelings in a voicemail or text, so I would just have to wait until I saw her again later on that night.

Once I got dressed I moped around the house hoping I was wrong; hoping I was just reading into things and she *did* still love me now that I was falling apart at the thought of her not wanting me anymore and I'd completely forgotten that I had to go to work that day until Alcide arrived at the house to pick me up.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked once I'd gotten into his truck.

"Nothing," I mumbled back, not wanting to spill my guts to him knowing how much I would sound like a pussy and if I beat his ass for mocking me I'd have no way of getting to the studio. He just shrugged his shoulders and left me to silently stew, so I decided to fill the time by looking up information about pregnancies on my phone. I'd been too busy being fascinated by Sookie to give much thought to it beforehand, other than just knowing she was pregnant, but thoughts of her wanting to go through it alone made me sick. It was *my* baby she was carrying and I wanted to know what was going on with it. According to Sookie she must have gotten pregnant on our wedding night which made her a little over six weeks pregnant and I was amazed by what I'd found.

Our baby had a heartbeat even though it would only be about 1/17 of an inch long. Its eyes, ears, and mouth were beginning to form along with the buds where its arms and legs would grow. The website I was looking at said morning sickness could be stronger now and Sookie still had a few bouts of it, but it didn't seem to affect her constantly. There were recommendations for the dad that said I should keep crackers by the bed and encourage her to eat a few before getting up in the morning and that she should eat more protein and carbohydrates along with drinking plenty of water, so once we got to the studio I made up a shopping list for Alcide to pick up those items and drop them off at the house. Maybe if I showed Sookie that I wanted to be a part of her life, and by extension a part of our baby's life, she would want me there too.

After Alcide left there was a near constant stream of people coming in and out of my dressing room to welcome me back. One visitor in particular made me confused because I was sure she'd wandered into the wrong room and thought she was just confused since she couldn't have been more than five years old. I'd never spent much time around kids and seeing her standing there made me wonder if Sookie and I were having a boy or a girl. The pretty little redhead in front of me was so tiny I could almost imagine what it would be like to see a miniature Sookie instead and knew I'd be completely fucked. It would be impossible for me to not be wrapped around her little finger.

She stood there silently smiling at me and I found myself unable to not smile in return as I asked, "What's your name?"

Eye rolling must be a trait all females were born with because that was exactly what she did as she giggled, but before I could wonder why I was shocked instead when she'd walked over and climbed into my lap, careful of my cast, and began speaking to me in sign language as though I'd known her for her whole life. Apparently she'd missed me and had been sad when she heard

about my accident which only made me more confused as I selfishly hoped I hadn't somehow acquired a daughter during my missing three weeks that I'd known nothing about.

*Sookie would've told me, right?*

It was probably wrong of me to feel that way if she was in fact my daughter, but parenting was something I only wanted to share with Sookie. The little girl pulled out a folded up piece of paper from her pocket and handed it to me that turned out to be a picture she'd drawn for me. At least I didn't have to ask what her name was again because she'd painstakingly written 'Jessica' at the bottom in red crayon. I could barely take my eyes from her since she was signing a mile a minute and I couldn't see any resemblance to me in her features so I signed back to her asking her to remind me how we met. My question was met with another eye roll that could've made me question whether or not she was actually Pam's daughter until she giggled as though it was a game and humored me by telling me we'd met at the shelter. Apparently I was the only one there she'd ever met that had known enough sign language to ask her what she'd wanted to eat and I'd later made up a story for her about Princess Sookie and her friends that consisted of squirrels and bunnies.

*Please Dear God, tell me I hadn't done coke again.*

"I'm sorry," I heard a voice say from the doorway and looked up seeing a woman that had to be Jessica's mother given their likeness to one another. I didn't recognize her so I was fairly sure I'd never fucked her and relaxed a little as she continued, "I didn't realize she'd run in here, but she was so excited to hear that you were coming back to work today and she wanted to give you the picture she'd made for you."

I tried to smile back at the woman who spoke to me like she knew me, but since it was only a matter of time before everyone knew anyway I finally said, "I guess you're Jessica's mother?" Seeing her confused expression I admitted, "I'm sorry, but I don't remember you." Motioning at Jessica in my lap, I added, "Either of you. I lost the last three weeks of my memories before the accident and from what Jessica's told me that seems to be when we met?"

"Oh my God!" she exclaimed sympathetically. "I'm so sorry. Um, yes, we met a couple of weeks before your accident. You actually got me a job working here at the studio after she charmed you at the shelter," she said with her eyes lovingly falling to her daughter. "My name's Holly."

I felt good knowing that I'd helped them out and smiled genuinely saying, "How could anyone not be charmed by her?" I looked down and saw bright green eyes and a big smile staring back up at me with her perfectly content to sit there while I talked to her mother and my thoughts again drifted to Sookie and our baby and I wondered what we'd be having.

*Whatever it was we sure as hell weren't naming it Jack or Pam.*

Holly and Jessica had barely walked out of my dressing room a couple of minutes later when the last person I expected to see walked through the door.

Bill Fucking Compton.

Before I could say a word the asshole smiled at me like we were the best of friends and said, "Good to have you back Eric. I couldn't help overhearing a moment ago as I was walking by, but did you say you'd lost your memories leading up to your accident?"

I'd seen that look on his face before when we'd played poker together. He was trying to bluff me and while I wanted to beat the shit out of him, I wanted to find out what it was he was up to and I pulled on my own poker face, replying, "Yep, three whole weeks. I can't remember anything from the time I was on my way to Vegas for that poker tournament until when I woke up in the hospital."

By the look in his eyes you'd think I just told him I'd discovered the cure for boring assholes so he'd no longer have to be one and I had to clench my fists so I wouldn't reach for him when he said, "Really...three weeks...so I guess you don't remember getting married to Sookeh then either?"

After knowing what he'd done to her in our kitchen, just hearing her name cross his lips, no matter how fucked up his version of it was, made me see red, but my curiosity overrode my anger for the moment and I drew on every acting skill I possessed to appear unaffected as I replied, "Nope." I'd been told I didn't remember the wedding even without the amnesia, so that didn't really bother me and I managed to force a smile as I added, "But at least that's on video."

The creepy fucker made my skin crawl as he licked his lips repeating, "Really..." I restrained myself from getting up from my chair knowing I wouldn't be able to resist throwing the first punch and watched him physically shake off whatever his thoughts were before saying, "Well that's a shame, but now that you're back to normal I suppose I can count on the Wednesday night poker games being back on?"

*Mother. Fucker.*

That was the last fucking straw and what little patience I'd had left me with nothing but tunnel vision that began and ended with Bill Compton's bloody beaten body beneath me. All pretense was gone as I stood up asking, "Why Bill? Did you think *my wife* wouldn't have told me how you acted at the last poker game? Did you think I'd invite you back into my home so you could try and force yourself on *my wife* again?"

He took one step back for every step I took forward and my anger only intensified when I realized he'd done all that while she'd been pregnant. My protective instincts were screaming at me to rip his head from his shoulders, but my initial shock over his next words halted my next step.

He'd squared his shoulders and the slight fear he'd shown at my advance was replaced with a predatory stare as he said, "Don't act like you *knew* her before you two shackled up. Your *marriage* is nothing but a sham and we *both* know it. You were never one to keep them around for long in the past, so I would think you'd be sick of her by now and you've never complained

before when I've taken up with your leftovers. Let me have her and it can remain our little secret."

My fist connected with his face before my brain ever made the decision to punch him and I hadn't even noticed Pam's presence until I heard her yell, "You mother fucker!" as I landed an upper cut to his jaw. He fell to the ground with me on top of him and I barely registered his blow to my ribs, too lost in my own rage as I continued to rain down blow after blow on top of him. I knew Pam had even managed to get in a kick to his ribs, thanks to the shiny red stiletto that appeared in my line of sight, before the other crew members came running into the room to pull us apart.

Once we were separated Bill was helped out of the room, a completely blood soaked mess, sputtering he was going to sue me, but hearing his new lisp made me smile hoping I'd knocked his teeth loose. I tried to catch my breath and winced finally feeling the effects from when he'd punched my side and I glanced over at Pam and said, "I think he might've re-broken my rib."

"Well I think I might've permanently marked my new Louboutin's, but it was worth it after hearing what that fucker said," she replied, seemingly unaffected by my new injuries. She looked up and smiled brightly at me adding, "I won't even charge you for them."

"Well gee...thanks Pam," I deadpanned while holding onto my side. Remembering everything Compton had said moments earlier, I had the leftover gawkers leave my dressing room and once the door was shut I turned to Pam and asked, "How did he know that Sookie and I didn't know each other before we'd gotten married?" From what I was told, the only other people that knew were Alcide and Sookie's friend Amelia who I hadn't met, again, since she was still somewhere in Europe.

"Fuck if I know," she said while she continued to mourn over her scuffed shoe. "Maybe it was just a lucky guess since he knew what you were like before. It's not like you ever had a steady girlfriend before Sookie."

That was the understatement of the year and it almost made sense, but I still didn't believe it. The way he'd looked at me when he'd said it was like he'd *known* something factual, but we'd never been friends so I knew I wouldn't have ever confided in him at any point during my missing time. I didn't have time to think about it more though because the producers of the show came in wanting to know what happened. I was lucky I'd had Pam and another crew member that had been passing by as witnesses that had overheard some of what Bill had said and it seemed the producers had taken a liking to Sookie when they'd met her previously and were almost as outraged as I had been. It looked like taping that week's episode would be put off for at least another week because Bill was getting fired and they needed to do rewrites to the script and hire his replacement. When Alcide came back from running the errands I'd given him, he was just as livid hearing what had happened especially since he'd been at the house on the night that fucker had tried to come on to Sookie and Compton was lucky he'd already left the building because Alcide was looking to put another beat down on him. It seemed I wasn't the only one that felt protective of Sookie; she unknowingly had formed her own little group of protectors.

Once Alcide had returned from what he'd called his prick-hunt empty handed, Pam made him take me back to the doctor's office to get new x-rays done while she went for much needed shoe therapy. It turned out the only damage I'd suffered was a fresh bruise on top of the one I'd already had, so Alcide dropped me off at the house with a new bottle of Tylenol only four short hours after I'd left that morning.

Being home again brought back all of the things I'd been feeling earlier that day and I made sure to bring the crackers up to our room and set them next to Sookie's side of the bed before wandering back downstairs trying to find something to do to calm my nerves while I waited for her to get home. Listening to music had always helped me in the past and I remembered seeing my iPod in my office a few days earlier so I got it and went back into the den to put it into the docking station in there. I was scrolling through my playlists trying to decide what I wanted to listen to when I noticed there was a video uploaded onto it and it only stuck out because it was the only one. I only ever uploaded music so my curiosity had me clicking on it to see what it was and for what felt like the umpteenth time that day, I was shocked.

*It was a sex tape.*

*A sex tape with Sookie.*

*Sookie and I had made a sex tape together.*

I watched it three times before I thought to plug it into my laptop so I could watch it on a larger screen. I watched it several more times before I connected my laptop to the large plasma screen TV in the den so I could see it even better. I'd never made a sex tape before knowing all of the women I'd ever been with were disposable to me and I didn't need any reminders of our time together to end up on the internet, but once I got passed the actual sex part of the video I was more stirred by the sentiment that had gone along with it.

From what I could gather from our dialogue the video had been both of our ideas, just separately. It was just more evidence of her being able to predict what I both wanted and needed without me having to tell her. I'd already experienced firsthand how playful and sexy she could be without even trying, but seeing her *love* me was something else entirely and both seeing and hearing how I'd loved her back blew me away. I could tell by the way I looked at her on the video that my feelings for her now were the same as they were then. I wanted to possess every part of her because she already possessed every part of me and if I hadn't already come to the conclusion that I was in love with her, this would've been all the evidence I would've needed to see. Hearing her tell me on the video that she loved me had me craving to hear those words from her lips again, but hearing myself saying those same words back to her made me realize that *she* deserved to hear them first.

I'd outright begged her to never leave me and made her promise to always work out whatever problems arose between us and she'd kept that promise in spades, putting up with more than she should've had to after everything that had happened. I'd been such a dick to her when I first woke up questioning every little thing about her, but she never gave up on me.

*She never gave up on us.*

I was so caught up in my own revelations that I didn't realize how much time had passed, nor did I hear Sookie enter the house until I heard her say from behind me, "What are you doing home?" I turned to see her staring at the TV where our sex tape was playing for the hundredth time and she cringed adding, "Oh my God...are you watching our iPorn?"

She was close enough for me to touch her and yet still too far away and I reached behind me and grabbed onto her hand, pulling her over the back of the couch until I finally had her in my lap and she giggled until she saw the serious expression on my face. I was once again afflicted with tunnel vision that began and ended with the woman in my arms and without one ounce of doubt I looked into her eyes and said, "I love you."

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## **Chapter 88: Chapter 86**

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### Chapter 86

#### **SPOV**

I drove home from school with a smile on my face and a sense of accomplishment I hadn't felt in a very long time. Perhaps they were still feeling me out a bit, but my students had been wonderful and even Tara had been tolerable. She'd eyed me suspiciously from the moment she entered my classroom, but the attitude I'd prepared myself to face from her never surfaced. She remained quiet while I taught the class and when I called on her to answer a question halfway through the lesson to see if she'd been paying attention, she'd answered me correctly without any hesitation. In the hallways it was easy to differentiate the troublemakers from the students who genuinely wanted to be there to learn and thankfully, with the advanced course I was teaching, my classes appeared to be thug-free.

*And I didn't even shit my pants!*

I found out from Mr. Beck the Drama Club met on Tuesdays and Thursdays after school from two-thirty until four, so I assured him I'd be there the following day. He was just as nice as his mother, if not a little frazzled, but it was understandable considering how much he had to do each day and I didn't envy him one bit. All in all, my day couldn't have gone any better and I wanted to share it all with Eric, but knowing I'd have to wait until he got home was my day's only low point. He shouldn't have been home until sometime after six, so when I walked in the door just after three, I was surprised to hear noises coming from the den and even more surprised to see Eric sitting on the couch watching TV.

Coming to a stop behind him, I asked, "What are you doing home?" My eyes lifted towards the TV to see what had him so captivated and I felt the blush blooming at a rapid rate underneath my skin seeing our bow chicka wow wow big screen debut and sputtered, "Oh my God...are you watching our iPorn?"

Eric and I had only watched parts of it together once, with me missing the majority of it thanks to me trying to see it through my squinty eyes, completely embarrassed seeing everything God gave me on video, and with everything that happened since then I'd forgotten all about it. I'd known Eric had uploaded it to his iPod before the accident and told him then that if he lost it even Jesus wouldn't be able to save him from me.

I was somewhat mesmerized and quite impressed by the HD quality seeing Eric's very lifelike naked ass on screen when I was suddenly pulled over the back of the couch, with Eric pulling me on me further until I was settled on his lap. I giggled thinking he was all hot and bothered from watching our Sookie Goes Down Under skin flick, but the laughter died away when I saw how serious he looked. I started to worry thinking maybe he was upset finding it; worried he thought it was something I'd been keeping from him, but his next words left me taken aback.

"I love you."

"Huh?" I asked, surprised. We'd spent an entire week virtually in seclusion with one another; we hadn't slept apart once since he'd come home from the hospital; we'd had sex in practically every room in the house and even outside on the patio, but it took him watching *a pornographic video* of us together to tell me he loved me? If that was the case, there sure as hell wouldn't be any sequel.

*Where in the fuck did my Master Wooer go?*

"I love you," he repeated. Seeing the intensity of his now glistening eyes took the wind right back out of my sails and before I could say anything he continued, "I've known for a while now, I think even from the moment I first saw you walk into my room at the hospital, that I felt something for you that I couldn't explain. It's been driving me crazy and I kept waiting for my memories to come back to tell me what it was or to see if maybe it would go away, but if anything, it's only gotten stronger. I'd *thought* it might be love, but I had no frame of reference to compare it to and I was afraid to be that vulnerable. But I'm not afraid of it anymore. I don't doubt it anymore. It *has* to be love because what else could explain all of the ways you make me feel? I want to protect you from the world and would do anything you asked of me, if only to keep a smile on your face and your tears at bay. I want to swallow you whole so I can keep you all to myself, but then I would miss seeing the mischief in your eyes and hearing your laughter. I wouldn't be able to feel the heat of your body against mine or bury myself so far inside of you that I no longer knew where one of us ended and the other began."

He moved his hands up to cup my cheeks and wiped the falling tears from my eyes, adding, "You make me feel whole. You make me feel alive. You just make me *feel* and the thought of losing you terrifies me. I've done nothing to deserve you; I *don't* deserve you, but I'll never let you go." His hands dropped from my face and laced the fingers of one hand with my left and brought them up to rest over his heart with his fingertips brushing across my wedding band, saying, "I don't need my memories to know what I feel in *here*. *You* are my wife." His other hand moved around my back and came to rest over my abdomen as he said, "*You* are the mother of my child and all that I am, all that I have is *yours*." He leaned forward with his forehead resting

against mine and looked into my eyes as he said, "I am yours because I am hopelessly in love with you."

*Master Wooer? Oh how I've missed you...*

I was a sobbing runny nosed mess by the time he was done and I flung myself at him crying, "I love you too...", but his pained gasp and the way his body flinched had me pulling right back again, asking, "What is it? Did I hurt you?"

*How much weight could I have possibly gained already?*

"It's nothing," he protested, while trying to pull me back towards him, but I could tell he was lying and only then noticed that his hands were a little swollen and had cuts on them.

"What happened to your hands?" I asked. Wondering what I'd missed out on during our few short hours apart made me remember that he shouldn't even be home yet and I followed up with, "And why are you home already?"

"Sookie," he growled frustratingly. "I just told you that I'm in love with you. I've been watching our sex tape for hours. Can we go over the rest of our day later?" He emphasized his point by grabbing onto my hips and rubbing me against *his point*.

*He made a strong argument. A compelling one.*

I wasn't going to argue with him, but he wouldn't have allowed me to anyway because his lips were on mine in the next moment, both tender and forceful at the same time. I could lose myself in his kisses if it weren't for his skillful hands sliding up underneath my blouse and kneading my breasts over my bra. I made a couple of points myself and Eric pinched and rolled them with his fingertips making my hips roll against his and now that all of me was on board the Eric Northman Express I was anxious for the train to leave the station, but Eric was intent on taking his time. When I moved my mouth to trail down the side of his neck, I decided to give him a little incentive and the bite I gave him on the curve where his shoulder began was rewarded with a grunt from him and I heard the buttons scatter across the floor at the same time I felt my shirt fly open with Eric nibbling his way down my chest.

*All aboard...*

Hearing us having sex in the background noise from the TV was a major turn on and I reached down, grabbing onto the hem of his t-shirt and pulled it up over his head so we could get to the good stuff. The good stuff starting off with his bare chest, but as soon as my eyes landed on the fresh bruise forming on his side, I asked, "What..." but Eric's hands halted my question when they pulled my slacks open with one sliding inside my wet panties and started rubbing over my clit while he said, "Later."

"Oh," I moaned. "Okay...later is good," I panted.



*So... fucking... good....*

Either I had already put on a few pounds or my slacks were made by Hyundai because Eric's hand was too big to be able to move around like I needed him to, so while I stood up to take them off Eric took the time to pull off his shorts before pulling me back down on top of him so I was straddling his lap. He'd turned his body so he was leaning against the armrest and kissed his way across my shoulder to my neck, nudging my head to turn towards the TV, and said, "Do you see us lover?"

My eyes, which had been closed, opened up and I saw Eric and me on the screen. There was definitely something erotic about watching us have sex while feeling his naked flesh pressed against mine and I moaned with my head falling back and my eyes still glued to the screen as he shifted his hips so he could tease me, sliding his length through my folds. Eric's lips latched onto my breast, tracing my nipple with his tongue, with his arms supporting the upper half of my body and he matched every swivel of my hips with a thrust of his own.

"Do you know how turned on I've been since I found your gift this afternoon?" he asked, as his lips moved across my chest to my other breast.

*I have a pretty good idea.*

He grabbed onto my hips and ground me down against him, asking "Do you know how *hard* it was to wait for you to come home?"

*From what I could feel it had to have been downright painful.*

Eric trailed open mouthed kisses up my chest, across my collarbone to my jaw line and ended with tender kisses across my face before he looked into my eyes and asked, "Do you know how much I love you?"

I melted in an instant seeing the emotional sincerity behind his eyes and nodded, whispering, "I love you too."

I realized, up until then, I'd only been kidding myself; telling myself I didn't need to hear Eric say the words; that knowing he loved me was enough, but hearing him; seeing the truth of it in his eyes made me recognize just how much I'd missed it.

*How much I'd missed him.*

When he slid inside of me I felt whole in a whole new way. Sex with Eric was always fantastic, but since the accident our exploits had mostly been about having fun or satisfying our carnal needs. But now, even without his memories, I felt like I had *him* back. It *felt* like I had him back in the way he moved inside of me; the way he looked into my eyes like, for him, there was no one else in the world. I could feel every beat of his heart both against my skin and inside of me. He was mine again, completely, and I didn't want the moment to end. I wanted to memorize every flicker of emotion across his face; every moan and pant that left his lips because I knew

now not to take them for granted. I knew I should cherish every moment we shared because tomorrow wasn't guaranteed and the intensity of it all took me by surprise and threw me over the edge into orgasmic bliss before I was ready to let go, but Eric held fast and powered through. With his hands on my hips he continued to thrust into me from underneath and I had to grab onto his shoulders just to stay upright. I'd intended to let my eyes take in the visual smorgasbord in front of me starting with the way his sweaty hair fell over his face, but when his blue eyes locked onto mine, I couldn't look away. If I didn't know any better I would've sworn he'd hypnotized me and commanded me to cum again with nothing more than the look in his eyes and when I did, Eric went with me and the cries that left our lips echoed the sounds coming from the TV.

His hands slid up my body with his fingers lacing into my hair as he pulled my face to his and kissed me until our bodies stopped twitching before pulling back and saying again, "I love you."

*And I would never tire of hearing it.*

"I love you too," I smiled and nuzzled against his chest with my face pressed against his neck. Nothing smelled better than Eric and I was sniffing him like a bloodhound while Wicked and Immoral went on a perimeter check of Eric's body when I felt him flinch. Remembering his new bruise I sat up to get a better look at it, asking, "What happened?"

I could tell Eric didn't want to talk about it which only made me more interested in what he didn't want to say, but he eventually sighed and said, "Bill fucking Compton. *That's* what happened."

"He *hit* you?" I practically screeched. It was one thing for Pam to beat on him, but I'd have no moral dilemma over slicing Bill Compton's balls off with a rusty spoon.

"I hit him first," Eric proudly proclaimed. "He overheard me talking about the amnesia and tried to worm an invitation to my next poker game."

"Are you serious?" I asked. "Did he think that just because *you* couldn't remember what happened, no one else would either?"

*Douche bag.*

I still thought that Eric had overreacted though, especially since he wasn't fully healed yet, and said, "But that's no reason to hit him. You could've gotten hurt. You're not all that mobile yet you know."

A part of my brain wondered if you could trademark a facial expression because his damn sexy raised eyebrow coupled with his smirk was definitely a money maker and he rubbed his nakedness against my nakedness saying, "You weren't complaining about my lack of mobility a few minutes ago."

Trying and failing to look unimpressed, I mocked, "Your ego is just as big as the rest of you. I'm surprised you don't have your own zip code."

Eric just grinned back at me saying, "Then I guess it's a good thing you love me *and* my big ego, huh?"

He looked so happy that in that moment *My Eric* and *This Eric* were no longer two separate people in my mind. This Eric *was* My Eric and I grinned back like a doofus and agreed, "Yeah. I do." The Master Wooer was also the Master Subject Changer so I quickly went back to our original topic, asking, "Did you get in trouble for hitting him? Is that why you're home?" Did they send people home from real jobs for fighting like they did in school?

"No and yes," he replied, still grinning in his post coital high.

"Not and funny," I responded back. I was Jason Stackhouse's sister. We didn't have cable TV growing up and the only *books* Jason picked up were *matchbooks*. I could play any dumb word game he could think of for hours on end.

When he attempted to distract me further by reaching for my boobs I swatted his hands away and pulled his t-shirt over my head since he'd ripped the buttons off of my blouse. When I just silently stared at him his eyes darkened as he finally explained, "He wanted me to *give* you to him."

"What?" I asked completely mortified. What in the hell did he think I was? An unwanted puppy?

"He said he knew our marriage was a sham. He claimed he knew that we didn't know each other prior to our wedding night and that I should be sick of you by now. He wanted me to give you to him and said if I did it would be our little secret." Eric was practically snarling by the end of his explanation and I was internally snarling right along with him.

"Did you hit him *hard*?" I asked, wishing I'd been there to have gotten my own wallops in.

His eyes lightened some and he smiled admitting, "I'm pretty sure I knocked his teeth loose. Pam got in a kick to his ribs too."

I was jealous having missed out on the Bill Compton beat down and remembered the stranger danger sensation I'd felt when he'd first walked into the kitchen the night of the poker game. Something just didn't sit right from the moment I'd met him and I asked, "How did he know though? How *could* he know that we didn't know each other before that night in Vegas?"

"I don't know," Eric shrugged. "Even without my memories of those three weeks I'm sure I never would've confided in him. Pam thinks it was just a lucky guess because I'd never had a girlfriend before you."

I tried to stifle the snort before it came out, but I was just a hair too late and Eric looked at me, asking, "What? It's true."

"It's *still* true," I laughed. "You went straight from booty calls to a wife. Technically, you've *still* never had a girlfriend." Eric did his best Pam impersonation by rolling his eyes while I snickered

uncontrollably and when I finally calmed down, I asked, "So what happened after you tried to turn him into a Jack-O-Lantern?"

*Shoving a lit flare up Bill's ass sounded like a pretty good idea with Halloween less than a week away.*

Eric pulled me down so I was lying on his chest again and ran his hand up and down my back as he explained, "The producers came in and when they heard what he'd said they fired him. It seems your ability to charm everyone you meet extends to them as well because they were pissed."

"That's me," I sighed theatrically. "I'm so fucking *charmed* I should have been cast to replace Shannon Doherty's character Prue. My character could've been named *Precious* or *Princessa*." I sat up so I could look at him and giggled, adding, "Since you're such a car snob they could've named me *Porsche*! I bet I would've gotten your attention then."

Eric looked back at me seriously and said, "*You* would've had my attention regardless."

*Master Wooer in da house...*

Once I got my meltiness in check I resumed my original position against Eric's chest and asked, "So what happens now with your show?"

"They're rewriting the script to write Bill's character out of the show and they'll recast another actor into his spot. The rest of us get a little vacation in the meantime."

My hopes started inching up as I asked, "Does that mean you'll be able to go to my doctor's appointment with me on Thursday?"

Eric pulled my chin up with his fingertips so he could look into my eyes, saying, "Yes." His brow furrowed a little as he hesitantly asked, "Did you *want* to go alone?"

"No!" I exclaimed a little louder than I'd meant to. Softening my voice I admitted, "I wanted you to go, but with work and all I would've understood why you couldn't go before."

*At least that was what I kept telling myself.*

Eric looked relieved and said, "I *want* to go. I want to be there for all of it." A smile broke out on his face as he added, "Frank is my baby too. I should be there to see how he's doing."

I grinned, despite my eye roll, and said, "*Jack* will be very happy to have you there."

Eric matched my eye roll, admitting, "If you didn't *lust* after Johnny Depp so much I might've agreed to the name Jack since he was created with the help of the Kraken."

I snickered, blushing over the fact that I'd told him all of the names I'd amassed for his baby maker, and argued, "I don't *lust* after Johnny Depp." Seeing Eric's unconvinced expression, I added cheekily, "I *lust* after Johnny Depp in a pirate costume complete with eyeliner, accent, and swagger."

*I'd be willing to bet there were MANY babies born out of women watching that swagger.*

"So," Eric asked, "if I wore eyeliner and drunkenly stumbled around with an accent you'd lust after me too?"

"That depends," I laughed. "Would you be dressed like a pirate or Dame Edna?"

Eric just stared back at me trying to not let his amusement show so I patted his chest and said, "You don't need any costumes or makeup. I lust after just you and have since I was ten years old."

Seeing the look on Eric's face I immediately regretted my honest admission. "*Really...*" he grinned uncontrollably.

"Uh oh," I choked out. Pretending I couldn't breathe, I clutched at my throat and gasped, "You're ego...it's sucking...the oxygen...from the room. Can't...breathe..."

Seeing the fiendish look in Eric's eyes would've made my panties wet had I been wearing any and he pushed me backwards onto the couch as he hovered over me asking, "Do you need mouth to mouth resuscitation?" He wagged his eyebrows adding, "I'm not a doctor, but I play one on TV."

"You do not!" I laughed. "You play a..." was all I could say because Eric cut off my oxygen supply for real with his lips on mine.

*Doctor Northman was in da house too.*

When we finally untangled ourselves we made our way into the kitchen and I opened the refrigerator to figure out what we'd be having for dinner when I noticed an ass load of chicken and steaks inside. There was even a whole turkey and I looked over at Eric, gesturing at the contents, asking, "Are you getting sympathy cravings?"

He looked back at me a little unsure and shrugged, saying, "I read online that you should be eating lots of protein, so I had Alcide run out and stock up."

"You looked up pregnancy info online?" I asked, both shocked and touched by his admission. Even though it wasn't a competition, he was already the better parent since I hadn't had the time to do it myself.

"Well, yeah. I was worried that you didn't want me to be a part of it all since you didn't want to change your appointment and I wanted to know what was going on," he said sheepishly.

"You know that's not true, don't you?" I asked, walking over and putting my arms around him.

He kissed the top of my head saying, "Yes, I was just a little *unsettled* this morning."

He went on to tell me how when he'd finally realized he loved me it was too late for him to call me and he freaked out for the rest of the day. Hearing his confession made me second guess not telling him that I loved him every day before then, but there was nothing I could do about it besides saying it again now. "I love you."

"Good," he said, kissing the top of my head again. "Because I love you too."

Feeling his arms around me made my thoughts from the previous day come back and I asked, "Will you still love me when I'm as big as a whale?"

*My singing was bad enough it could probably pass for a whale's song.*

His arms tightened around me as he said, "You won't be as big as a whale."

"So, that's a 'no'?" I hedged.

Eric pulled back to look me in the eye and said, "I'll love you no matter what. You won't be *fat*. You'll be *pregnant*." I was still obviously unconvinced, so Eric sat down in one of the chairs and pulled me down onto his lap and said, "Since you've been *lusting* after me since you were ten..."

I interrupted him, chuckling, "You're never gonna let that go, are you?"

"No," he smiled and continued, "So you know that I've been working for a very long time. I've made a lot of money and have great financial advisors that have invested my money wisely over the years. It's a considerable amount."

When he paused, I asked, "So what...you can pay for my liposuction after the baby is born?"

A low growl ran through his chest as he ignored my question and said, "I can buy pretty much whatever I want, but what you've given me; what you're *giving* me is something priceless. You've made it painfully obvious that *you* can't be bought and a baby is something I never wanted until I met you. Your body growing to accommodate our baby is just the gift wrap to the greatest present imaginable."

*He was good.*

The emotional roller coaster we'd been riding all afternoon, not to mention the Eric Northman Express, left me drained of energy and I wiped the tears from my eyes while attempting to lighten the mood by smiling and said, "My boobs will get bigger too."

Eric smiled in return and buried his face in between them, muffling his words as he said, "I'm sure I'll manage just fine."

*After hearing his heartfelt words, I was sure we'd BOTH manage just fine.*

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## **Chapter 89: Chapter 87**

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### Chapter 87

#### **EPOV**

Ever since I'd admitted my feelings to both Sookie and myself, everything seemed better. Not just our relationship, but food tasted better, the air smelled cleaner, the sky even fucking looked bluer. Had I known falling in love would give me such a high I wouldn't have fought against the idea of it for so long, but I knew it took meeting Sookie for that possibility to even exist. She was everything I never knew I wanted in a girl and I thanked fuck that she felt the same way.

The house didn't seem nearly as empty as it had that first day when she left for work, but after two days at home alone I was ready to pull my fucking hair out. I couldn't remember what I used to do to occupy my free time during the day before she'd come into my life, but when she left for work on Thursday morning I had a plan. Since she had to work late with the Drama Club after school and knowing she had her doctor's appointment later on that evening, I figured I would try and make us dinner. I'd watched the Food Network for two days straight and got the idea after seeing some guy make a bunch of shit I couldn't remember, but knew I liked Coq Au Vin. I'd had it before at restaurants and since it was chicken I knew the protein would be good for Sookie and the baby.

*How hard could cooking chicken and vegetables be?*

It took me a while to find what looked like an easy recipe online and after printing it out I went into the kitchen to make sure we had all of the ingredients before getting started. I had to dig through all of the cabinets since I had no clue where Sookie stored everything and found most of what I needed with the exception of pearl onions, shallots and a few spices. I was pretty sure shallots were those green onion thingies so I decided to just double up using regular onions instead and returning to the piece of paper, I glanced down at the directions to get started.

***In a large, heavy Dutch oven over high heat fry the bacon until crisp and all of the fat is rendered. Using a slotted spoon, transfer the crisp bacon bits to paper towels to drain. Reserve.***

*Dutch oven? What the fuck? Isn't that where you pull the blankets over someone's head after farting?*

I wandered over to the oven and saw the brand name was Viking so that was no help and started opening cabinets looking for what I had no fucking idea, but hoped to come across something that looked *Dutch* like a pot shaped like a wooden fucking shoe. I eventually settled on using the same frying pan Sookie always used to cook breakfast since I knew for a fact that you could fry

bacon in it. I turned the heat on high and once the bacon was sizzling in the pan I went back to the directions to see what was next.

***Season the chicken pieces with the salt and pepper. Brown the chicken pieces in the hot bacon fat, working in batches, if necessary, and turning to ensure even cooking.***

Sookie had put most of the things I'd had Alcide pick up at the grocery store into the freezer saying there was no way we'd eat it all before it spoiled, so the chicken was frozen solid. I tore open the package and tried to separate the pieces but they were stuck together pretty good and figured they'd come apart in the pan once they warmed up. I didn't notice, at first, but the kitchen was quickly filling up with smoke from the frying bacon and I was digging in the drawer full of utensils looking for a slotted spoon when the smoke alarm went off startling the shit out of me. I couldn't get to the window to open it fast enough and started fanning my arms trying to get the smoke out when it dawned on me that I should probably check on the bacon. The house phone rang a second later, but I ignored it knowing Sookie would've called my cell phone if she needed me.

What had started off as thick strips of bacon were now blackened bacon dust on one side and raw on the other. I pulled off some paper towels and set them next to the stove on the counter while I tried to scrape the remains out of the frying pan, but the slotted spoon only furthered my aggravation since the crumbled pieces slipped right through and I threw it aside in favor of using a large serving spoon I'd found in the same drawer. When most of the larger chunks were out, I grabbed the block of frozen chicken and tossed it into the pan making for one hell of a smoke, sizzle, and splatter storm and remembered at the last minute to add the salt and pepper, probably seasoning the pan more than the chicken, but it was hard to see through the smoke. While the chicken browned I figured I'd earned a healthy swig of the Pinot Noir the recipe called for and was in the middle of swallowing my second healthy swig when I heard a loud banging on the front door. I'd barely heard it over the sound of the chicken cooking and the smoke alarm that was still blaring, but I took the time to turn the chicken over first since it was starting to come apart.

*Note to self: When it's time to turn the chicken again, use something other than the serving spoon.*

The red dots where the grease splattered onto my arms were still sizzling as I made my way towards the front door when it crashed open and a bunch of firemen came barreling inside. I was thankful they'd at least thought to try opening it before busting it down while mentally chastising myself for leaving it unlocked yet again after I'd watched Sookie drive off to work that morning.

"What the fuck?" I yelled at all of them.

*Did they get etiquette lessons from Pam?*

The first one through the door approached me saying, "Your alarm company notified us that your smoke detectors had been activated and they got no response when they tried contacting you."



"Shit," I said, running my hands through my hair which was a really bad fucking idea since they were covered in frozen chicken bits and bacon grease. I could see the fire trucks through the now open door and it didn't dawn on me until then that the house's smoke detectors were tied into the overall alarm system. "Why didn't they call my cell phone?" As soon as I asked the question I remembered that I'd gotten my number changed during my missing three weeks and must've forgotten to notify the alarm company.

I was just about to tell them it was a false alarm when the fireman lifted his head, peering over my shoulder, and asked, "Are you cooking something?"

"Shit!" I yelled and half-hobbled half-ran back into the kitchen.

Since the fireman wasn't on crutches he got there first and was turning off the stove as I came into the room. The rest of the firemen trailed in behind me while the first one looked down into the blackened frying pan and asked, "Uh...what are making?"

*A fool of myself? A complete disaster? Take your pick.*

I cleared my throat and since I was surrounded by nothing but testosterone, I tried to sound manly as I answered, "Coq Au Vin."

"Really?" he chuckled while the rest of them laughed.

"Yes *really*," I snapped feeling sufficiently pussified.

Even though I stood a little over six foot four, I felt psychologically dwarfed by Mr. I'm A Big Guy's Guy That Puts Out Fires For A Living. Not only was Sookie lusting after that fucking pirate, but she'd gone on to list some of her favorite uniforms. Firefighters were at the top of her list and while she'd just been egging me on at the time, she'd unknowingly given me a lot of different ideas on how I could surprise her on Halloween, but it also meant I didn't want any of them in the house when Sookie got home.

*She was mine.*

The fireman poked at the chicken with the spoon and surprised me when he said, "You should've thawed the chicken first and cooked it in a Dutch oven since the whole thing needs to go in the oven to finish cooking."

"What?" I asked not hiding my surprise. "You know how to make it and what the fuck a Dutch oven is?"

"Sure," he replied. "I make it sometimes down at the firehouse, but since it takes so long I only ever make it on a Sunday."

*Since I didn't know what a Dutch oven was, clearly I had more testosterone.*

Forgetting all about my pussification and not caring how much of a shmuck I would look like, I hobbled over to the cabinet where Sookie kept all of the pots and pans and opened it, asking him, "Is there one in here?"

He at least found some humor in my misfortune because he chuckled again as he reached inside and pulled out a huge pot-like thing that had a lid and looked nothing like a wooden fucking clog. I found out his name was Benedict Talley, but he went by 'Eggs' and as the rest of the guys gathered their gear he gave me a quick tutorial on what I should do and showed me where the switch was to turn on the exhaust fan over the stove. I pulled another pack of chicken out of the freezer and, at his suggestion, thawed it in the microwave before they all headed out and wished me luck while telling me to the various names of nearby restaurants I could just order it from.

*Everybody's a fucking comedian.*

The joke really was on me since after a couple of hours it became overwhelmingly apparent that we wouldn't be eating anything I'd made. I couldn't even bring myself to taste test it thanks to the aroma wafting out of the oven that smelled anything but appetizing and gave up, calling a nearby restaurant for two takeout orders and then texting Alcide to pick them up for me.

I was trying to clean up the mess I'd made when I heard the front doorbell ring. I almost didn't recognize the sound since it seemed everyone just walked into the house on their own. I was already aggravated having failed at making dinner for Sookie and reined in my scowl as I opened the front door to see a smiling brunette on the other side. I wondered if she was Sookie's friend Amelia and almost asked when she opened her mouth, saying, "Hi. I'm your neighbor, Debbie Pelt." She pointed randomly down the street, but her eyes never left me as she continued, "I know we've never met, but I saw the fire trucks here earlier and just wanted to make sure you were okay." She took a step closer to me asking, "Is there anything you *need? Anything at all?*"

*Was I suddenly on Wisteria fucking Lane?*

She was pretty enough and there was a time I might've been tempted, but not anymore. Now I had my very own in-no-way-desperate housewife and was more than a little irked that she'd had the nerve to ring my fucking doorbell just to come on to me. Regardless of my *five times mother fucker* status, I knew she had to be desperate considering she was eye fucking me when I knew I probably still had bits of frozen chicken and bacon grease in my hair.

She must've taken my silence as a good sign and took another step closer, purring, "Well?"

Since I was already in a shit fucking mood I decided to spread the cheer and gave her what Sookie called my panty poofing leer because whenever I looked at *her* that way, her panties seemed to magically disappear. I knew for a fact there was no magic involved; I just had quick hands and Debbie's eyes flared with lust seeing it directed at her which made her shocked look all the more priceless when my features went stone cold and I followed up with, "No," and shut the door in her face.

I was still incensed a little while later, thinking about all of the nameless women from my past and how I used to think I was living a great life. I had a hot new woman at my choosing whenever I'd wanted one, but when I compared how I felt then to how Sookie made me feel now, I was almost angry with myself for making so many bad choices. Granted, I didn't know Sookie back then and even though she knew about my past she didn't judge me for it. She'd jokingly likened my sexual history to prehistoric times, calling it my 'Your Ass Ick Period,' but personally, I think she just liked my dinosaur. Even so, especially knowing that she'd only had one other sexual partner, I felt a little like my past disrespected her somehow.

*Or maybe it was my own shame and yet one more reason why I really didn't deserve her.*

I was lost in my thoughts when I heard the front door open and froze for a second wondering if it was the desperate housewife until I heard the heavy footfalls of Alcide with him calling out a second later, "Honey, I'm home!"

I didn't bother turning around when he came into the kitchen and he laughed out loud, asking, "Shit. Was there an earthquake I didn't know about?"

"Fuck you," I growled out while trying to wipe up the bacon grease that covered the stove and countertop, but only managed to spread it around more.

However he had my full attention when he asked, "Who's the brunette fan club of one in your driveway?"

"She's still out there?" I asked, turning to face him. She hadn't looked *too* crazy, but you could never really tell. "She said she's my neighbor, but I've never seen her before. But then, I don't know most of my neighbors," I said while heading towards the door.

"She was standing out there staring at the front of the house when I drove up, but when she saw me she turned and jogged away," he said, adding, "She looked kinda feral."

"What do you mean?" I asked. Sookie was due home any minute and I didn't want her to have a run in with a crazy bitch, but before I could even leave the kitchen I heard the door leading from the garage open. Sookie's voice called out into the house a second later, repeating Alcide's greeting of, "Honey, I'm home!"

I couldn't help the grin that came onto my face just hearing the smile in her voice and while she'd joked that she liked coming home to her house husband, offering to be my sugar momma if I wanted to quit work to be a stay at home dad, I had a feeling once she saw the kitchen she'd be changing her mind.

With the crazy bitch temporarily forgotten, my head darted around from side to side seeing how much evidence still surrounded me and I felt like a criminal caught red handed. I'd wanted to clean it all up before she got home and Alcide was enjoying my momentary panic and only laughed harder when she asked, "Do I smell bacon?" as she came into the kitchen.

"I'm pretty sure the whole neighborhood smells bacon," Alcide snorted.

"Eric?" she asked as her eyes widened and took in the mess surrounding me before they traveled down my food stained body. I wasn't at all tipsy from the wine I drank while I cooked, but I still wished I'd thought to put on some of her eyeliner so I could've swaggered on over and slurred pick up lines to her with a fake British accent to distract her from the mess. Instead I looked like a Chef Boyardee reject from Skid Row.

*If only I'd thought ahead and borrowed one of those firemen's uniforms.*

"How was your day?" I asked, acting like nothing was amiss and glaring at Alcide so he'd shut the fuck up.

"You cooked?" she asked, ignoring my question and looking both amused and sweetly disgusted.

"Yes," I answered. It wasn't a lie. We just wouldn't be eating what *I* cooked. I gave Alcide another glare and added, "I made Coq Au Vin for dinner."

Her eyebrow rose up as she asked, "You went from Pop Tarts to Coq Au Vin?" Moving so she could look at the counter behind me, she added, "You didn't stick the chicken in the toaster did you?"

"No," but I knew now, for future reference, that was a no go.

Alcide laughed again and held up the bag of takeout saying, "And I made a trip to the restaurant for the Coq Au Vin you can actually *eat* for dinner."

Sookie shot an amused but disapproving look at Alcide before her eyes continued to take in the biohazard surrounding me. She walked up and attempted to put her arms around me, but gave up when she couldn't find a clean part of me to touch. Instead she leaned up on her tip toes and kissed me, saying, "Thank you. That was very sweet of you."

"I'm just glad you didn't have to taste it first," I admitted with my face crinkling up.

"It's the thought that counts," she said as she picked mystery bits out of my hair and scrutinized it, asking, "Chicken?"

*Among other things...*

I knew I probably looked the worst Sookie had ever seen me, but her eyes were still filled with nothing but love as she stared back at me and offered, "Why don't you go up and take a shower while I clean up in here?"

I felt bad leaving the mess for her, but my need to be clean overrode it and I gave her a quick peck on the cheek before making a beeline for the shower. By the time I came back downstairs the kitchen looked normal again and Alcide was gone. Sookie had made up a couple of plates

and brought them over to the table, but I grabbed her before she could sit down and laid the mother of all kisses on her. I'd missed her all day long and thanks to my grotesqueness I'd missed out on what had become our standard greeting when she had gotten home. Once we broke apart, I smiled down at her saying, "Hello."

"Hi," she panted back with a smile. When we were both finally seated at the table, she asked, "So what brought on your sudden desire to cook?"

"Boredom?" I offered. "Besides, after working all day the last thing you should have to do is come home to cook dinner when I've been sitting on my ass." `Since I didn't see myself turning into Wolfgang Puck any time soon I said, "Maybe we should hire someone to do the cooking and cleaning."

"What?" she asked before quickly dismissing the idea, adding, "No!"

"Sookie, you work all day long. You're pregnant. You should be resting," I argued. Even if I learned how to do more of the cooking and cleaning, I'd be going back to work soon too.

"I'm not out digging ditches all day long and being pregnant doesn't make me an invalid. I can work *and* take care of things around the house. Women all over the world do it and I can too," she said with her face turning stubborn.

"And you don't *have* to do *either* of those things, but since we have the means to have help around the house I don't see any reason why we shouldn't," I said with my earlier aggravation coming through.

We ended up silently staring each other down while we finished our meal and as she was putting the dishes into the dishwasher I finally spoke up asking, "Why are you so against the idea of having help?"

I put my arms around her when her body sagged and she leaned back against me saying, "It would just feel weird to have strangers in the house doing things I can do perfectly well on my own." Her voice got small and I could barely hear her as she admitted, "I know it's archaic, but it would make me feel like I'm failing at being a good wife."

I spun her around and pulled her chin up so I could look into her eyes, asking incredulously, "Is that what you think?" Seeing her nod, I felt aggravated all over again that she would think so little of herself and set her ass straight. "Sookie, you are a fucking rock star of a wife. You cook, clean, do the shopping, the laundry and take care of my needy ass even though you've gone back to work full time all while your body is busy growing Frank. Everything you do for me, for us, is better than I ever imagined it could be. I know you *can* do it and do it well, but this would be a way for me to take care of you. Let me."

I could see her struggling internally and thought I had her until she gave me her own panty poofing leer and waggled her eyebrows, asking, "What if I wear a French Maid outfit while I dust?"

My pants tightened at the thought making me growl out, "Not fair Mrs. Northman." I could already picture her bent over my desk with her little black skirt flipped up over her hips with me pounding into her from behind as she yelled out, '*Oh mon Dieu! Oui Eric...oui!*'

She could undoubtedly feel the effect her suggestion had made on me and rubbed her body against mine with a sexy smirk on her lips, but it didn't reach her eyes and she said, "How about we compromise? You give me some time to get used to the idea and I'll let you know when it's too much for me to keep doing everything."

I knew Sookie hadn't grown up having much money and up until seven weeks ago she'd still been living paycheck to paycheck. Even though I'd had to borrow money from Pam to move out of my father's house, it hadn't taken me long to make enough money to not only pay her back, but for it to not even be much of a consideration for me anymore. It still boggled my mind that she had issues with me trying to spend any of it on her, but if she needed the time to adjust then I would give her that.

"Do you promise to actually *tell* me when it's too much?" I asked. Seeing her nod, I smiled and held her tighter against me, rubbing my hips against the front of her body, and said, "Okay. Now...tell me. Do you know where we can find one of those little French Maid outfits?"

She giggled and rubbed back saying, "No, but I'm sure Pam would." When my hands started to wander down to the buttons of her shirt she playfully slapped them away, saying, "Sorry buddy. I'm not about to travel up your Eiffel Tower now. We need to get going to Dr. Ludwig's."

I wanted to find some way to argue her point and find out how much French she actually knew, but I knew she was right and let go of her so she could get ready. As we were backing out of the garage I remembered the woman that had rang the doorbell earlier and turned to Sookie, asking, "Did you see anyone when you were driving up to the house?"

She looked back at me confused, asking, "What? Where?"

I told her about my strange visitor and could've sworn I saw a flash of her own possessive anger go across her face making me feel a little better knowing I wasn't the only one that felt that way. I finished the story with what Alcide had told me right before Sookie had walked into the house and then stared at her waiting to hear her thoughts on it all. My initial reaction to meeting the woman hadn't raised any red flags, but after Alcide told me she'd still been hanging around when he showed up almost thirty minutes later made me a little concerned.

Sookie laughed, asking, "The fire department showed up?" She waggled her eyebrows at me adding, "In their *uniforms*?" When my only answer was to silently glare at her she calmed herself and asked, "So you didn't recognize her at all?"

I shook my head answering, "No, but I don't really know any of the neighbors." It's not like there were block parties or I met anyone while I was out tending to the lawn. That's what everyone paid landscapers for.

Sookie shrugged her shoulders seemingly nonplussed and said, "Meh...she probably just wanted to play with your hose, but who doesn't? From the sounds of it you were pretty rude slamming the door in her face which, by the way, was the abso-fucking-lutely right response, so I doubt she'll be back."

Everything Sookie said made sense, but for some reason I wasn't so sure. I just hoped she was right.

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## Chapter 90: AI Outtake Pam & Sookie Clear the Air

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### AI Outtake – Pam and Sookie Clear the Air

#### SPOV

*Where am I?*

I didn't recognize my surroundings at all, but had a sense that I'd been there before.

*For fuck's sake...do I have amnesia too?*

All around me were scenes from the last seven weeks of my life interrupted with the mundane tasks of someone else's life. Laundry, working in some sort of office environment, and cleaning up stains from the carpet seemed to be a prevalent theme.

A blushing man appeared within the office that looked vaguely familiar and when he uttered the phrase *'See you next Tuesday'* I suddenly realized that *he* had to be the infamous OV. Fear rocketed through my body as I realized that I was in Hell; the author's brain.

"Sookie."

I heard my name called out in Pam's familiar voice and my feet moved towards the sound on their own, but my eyes were drawn to all of the different pictures of Eric as I passed them by.

*He looked hot as hell in a uniform.*

*Maybe I could convince her to put MY Eric in one.*

Seeing both Eric and Pam with fangs in their mouths seemed oddly normal and I didn't question it, instead calling out, "Pam?" while waving my hand in front of my face to clear the cigarette smoke clouding around me.

"Over here," she yelled back. "I'm in the back near the Duran Duran posters and the clip of Aaron Boone hitting the game winning homerun in the 2003 ALCS game when the NY Yankees beat the Red Sox. Oddly, the 2004 season seems to have been erased."

I finally found her where she said she'd be and couldn't help raising my eyebrow seeing the Menudo records piled into one corner, but felt relieved nonetheless seeing a familiar face.

"What are we doing here?" I asked hoping Pam would have a clue. I didn't want to have to spend any more time there than absolutely necessary. The collection of Autobots were taunting Harry Potter and I didn't want to be there when it turned ugly.

"We're here to clear the air," she answered with an air of contriteness that I didn't think she'd been capable of conjuring.

"About what?" I asked, adding, "And what are you sitting on?" seeing the huge overstuffed red chair covered in blue paw prints.

Looking a tad disgusted, she answered, "I believe it's called a 'Thinking Chair'. Apparently this woman mourns her children's inevitable growth and likes to recall the time when they were still little and sat inside of laundry baskets filled with stuffed animals watching something called 'Blue's Clues', but that's another story." She flipped open a yellow notebook and checked off an unseen item using a large green crayon, saying, "I'm here to apologize." Looking me squarely in the eyes she said, "I'm sorry."

"For what?" I asked as my eyes darted over to that Potter kid. He was agitatedly waving his wand in Optimus Prime's face threatening to turn him into a Matchbox.

*Great. Where the fuck did Weasley get a lightsaber from?*

Pam ignored the commotion and flipped through the yellow notebook until her green crayon landed on one page in particular as she said, "Here. In Chapter 49/48 I rudely barged outside onto the patio when you and Eric were 'mid-sexy time'. Apparently I acted in a 'rude' manner and since I'm *human* I should've known 'social etiquette'."

Hearing Pam refer to herself as *human*, I interrupted her saying, "You look very nice with fangs."

She rewarded me with a fang-free smile saying, "Thank you." She continued on, reading directly from her notebook, adding, "My actions were construed as me not showing the faintest ounce of remorse for embarrassing you and I continued to do so by talking about your breasts right in front you and suggesting I give you a breast exam."

"Where are you getting this nonsense from?" I asked.

She shrugged her shoulders in response as she replied, "A blog on emotional abuse in fanfiction. This incident was cited specifically and I had no idea I'd *emotionally abused* you. That certainly wasn't my intent. Please accept my sincerest apology."

I was thankful that I'd somehow managed to be seated in an identical 'Thinking Chair' because my legs would've given out from the laughter that rocked my body.



Pam didn't look amused at all and chastised me saying, "Sookie. I don't appreciate you laughing at my sincere apology. I feel like you're emotionally abusing me."

I put my hand out in the universal 'Stop' pose until I could get my breathing under control again and said, "Pam, you *did not* emotionally abuse me."

Her eyebrows quirked up as she argued, "Of course I did." She waved her 'Handy Dandy Notebook' in the air in front of her adding, "It says so *right here!*"

I managed to conjure up my own 'Handy Dandy Notebook' and flipped through the chapters asking, "Is it 49 or 48?"

Looking irritated Pam replied, "The chapter is labeled as 48, but is located in 49's slot. There was a bonus chapter written earlier that consisted of your wedding night that threw off the chapter numbers."

"Really?" I asked excitedly.

I couldn't remember that night and flipped back through the notebook looking to get a little clarity, but Pam dashed my hopes, saying, "You won't find it. She doesn't feel as though you need to know and was only included for the readers' enjoyment."

"Bitch," I mumbled under my breath at the writer. I flipped forward again until I found Chapter 49/48 and read through it quickly to refresh my memory, saying, "Maybe the problem is that this chapter was written in Eric's point of view."

Before I could say anymore, Pam interrupted, consulting her notebook again as she said, "Oh, he's mentioned here too. Apparently Eric didn't care in the least about your embarrassment and wants to 'break you of being modest' with modesty defined as 'you not being comfortable with a whole bunch of people seeing you naked.' I couldn't find any passages from Chapter 49/48 to corroborate that claim, but it's written here so it must be true."

"Oh please," I snorted. "Eric has no desire for *anyone* else to see me naked. Trust me."

Pam conjured a pair of black framed glasses to put on her face making her look much more scholarly as she tipped her head to look over them at me and said, "Some people might take that statement to mean that Eric is only interested in *possessing* you. That he means to *control* your every move and thought."

"Uh huh," I sighed. "It couldn't *possibly* mean that he loves and respects me enough to not want me flaunting what God gave me to everyone. It's not like he's from Sweden where everyone loves to be naked, or at least that's what I've *read* so it must be true." I waved the magazine that poofed into my hand containing an interview of an actor that looked strikingly similar to Eric. That was a pretty neat trick and I closed my eyes, putting my Thinking Chair to good use, and smiled when a Starbucks' mocha latte appeared in my hand.

I took a sip of the chocolate flavored nirvana and pet the unicorn that wandered over to my chair as Pam said, "So then tell me your thoughts on the incident."

"Well, if they'd bothered to include the rest of the chapter you can see right there that Eric didn't like you ogling my breasts. He referred to them as his BFF's and had no desire to share them with you. That would tell me that he didn't want to 'break me' of my modesty," I asserted. It was neat to be able to read his inner thoughts and snorted over him calling The Kraken his *Johnny Cochran*. Pam still seemed to be on the fence, so I added, "I'm sure you could take a few paragraphs from any story and, when taken out of context, spin it to mean whatever you want."

Pam closed her notebook and sat back in reflection, asking, "So you're saying that you *didn't* feel emotionally abused when I barged out onto the patio?"

"No Pam," I smiled reassuringly. "Embarrassed? Absolutely, but we *were* outside and I'm just thankful there wasn't anyone around with a telephoto lens. Even if you'd barged into our closed bedroom I wouldn't have felt *emotionally abused*. I'd have been angry enough to spit nails, but I honestly don't think even you would do that. And, no offense, but at the time of this incident we didn't really know each other. We were acquaintances at best with Eric as our only common link so I had no emotional connection to you to be able to feel *emotionally abused* by you. We weren't *friends*. I think since then we've grown into something like friendship, but that wasn't the case at the time, so while I certainly felt embarrassed I did not feel abused. I even snarked right back at you at the time calling you out on your behavior." I raised my eyebrow at her adding, "But you really need to learn how to use a doorbell."

Pam looked even more agitated, waving her notebook in front of her, saying, "So *this* is crap? I cleared my schedule to sit here in the midst of a bad 1980's flashback for nothing?"

Seeing the cast of The Breakfast Club dancing on top of their library desks, I shrugged answering, "A misunderstanding perhaps? Everyone has the right to their own opinion, but at the very least I think it would've been nice if the blogger would've asked for the writer's thoughts on the matter."

"C'est la vie, I suppose. The laundry isn't going anywhere so she can always go back to it when she's done here," she said before adding, "Do you think there's anyone else we should be apologizing to as long as we're here?"

There was probably a list a mile long, but the first one that sprung to mind was Ginger and when I said so to Pam she quirked her lips in minor protest. I gave her a knowing look and she finally huffed, saying, "Fine." Looking around the clutter surrounding us, she patted her leg and whistled, saying, "Here Ginger... Here girl..."

"Pam!" I rebuked. "That's not nice!"

*She was really asking for a whole other blogument.*

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### Chapter 88

#### SPOV

I climbed into my car as soon as the last student left after rehearsal wondering if I'd ever feel like I wasn't out of my element. I'd had no previous experience doing any sort of acting at all and felt like I was letting the kids down. A lot of them had been in the Drama Club before and while they seemed to do alright without much direction from me, it just didn't seem to be meshing yet and I saw that as my own personal failure for not being able to direct them properly. I'd talked it over with Eric numerous times over the last few weeks and he'd given me tips on what I could do to correct the problems, but I would've felt better if he would've been able to go to a few rehearsals with me so he could see them for himself.

Thanks to the massive delay in taping the show while Eric had been recuperating, after the Bill debacle they'd wasted no time in rewriting the script and casting a new actor, so Eric had been busy himself working nonstop so they could try and catch up. Even though we saw each other every day, I felt like we hadn't spent much quality time together and I missed him. He'd said that things would calm down once the Thanksgiving holiday was over and now that it was only a few days away I could finally see the light at the end of the tunnel.

I hadn't had any problems with the students or faculty at the high school and I felt like I was making progress with Tara. She was starting to open up a little with me, but I could tell she was still holding back. Knowing what I did of her home life I couldn't blame her for guarding her trust with anyone, so I was content to slowly chip away at her defenses and hoped one day she would let me in. She was probably my brightest student and her talent on the stage was something to behold. The emotions she was able to produce in any given scene left me with goose bumps, but I could tell she still lacked the confidence to really let herself go. It was one of the things I was hoping Eric would be able to help me with.

Since Thanksgiving was later on that week, Eric only had to go in for a meeting that morning to go over the following week's script, so everyone had the rest of the week off. Alcide was taking him to his doctor's appointment afterward so he could finally get his cast removed and once I was on the highway I called him to see how it went.

As soon as he answered his phone, I asked, "So how did it go? What did the doctor have to say? How are you feeling?"

"Fine. He said I'm good as new and I feel like I want to fuck you up against a wall now that I can stand on my own two legs," he growled. "When will you be home?"

*Not soon enough.*

I would've thought by now I would have some sort of immunity built up where his dirty talk was concerned, but he still managed to turn my insides into a pile of quivering Jello each and every time and I had to rein in the urge to press down on the accelerator as I blew out a deep breath and said, "Soon. I just need to stop by the grocery store to pick up a few things."

"No you don't," he countered.

It wasn't a very strong argument considering he didn't know what was on my list, but I still felt inclined to give in to him. Instead I steeled my resolve and said, "I only have a few things on my list, so it won't take me very long. Besides, Jack wants one of those cherry pastries they have at the bakery there." My morning sickness was a thing of the past, but my cravings were still holding strong and I sweetened the deal, so to speak, by asking, "Do you want one?" I'd planned on picking him up one anyway, but I didn't think it could hurt to tempt him with it.

My clothes were getting tighter by the day and even though I knew it couldn't be helped, I still felt like Jabba the Hut at times, but Eric always made me feel sexy no matter what so that helped my ego. I had only gained a couple of pounds at my last appointment and we'd both been disappointed when Doctor Ludwig wasn't able to pick up on the baby's heartbeat yet, but she'd assured us that it was a normal occurrence since I wasn't too far along at the time. My next appointment would be the on Monday evening after returning from Bon Temps and we were both excited knowing we should be able to hear something by then.

"Why didn't you give me the list this morning?" he whined. "I could've had Alcide do the shopping instead of flirting with Holly all morning."

Alcide and Holly had been seeing each other for a couple of weeks and made a very cute couple. I'd had no idea Eric had gotten her a job working at the studio until I'd overheard Alcide asking Eric to teach him a few words in sign language so he'd be able to talk to Jessica. Even though I'd offered to babysit while they went out on their dates, Alcide chose to take them both out on kid friendly dates saying he knew they were a package deal and didn't want Jessica to feel left out. It firmly cemented his 'good guy' status in my mind.

I gave Eric my best *poor baby* voice, saying, "There's less than ten items on my list. I'll be in and out." Switching over to a sexier tone, I added, "And then when I get home *you can be in and out; in and out. In. And. Out.*"

There was a long pause before he finally huffed, "Hurry. Up."

"Yes dear," I laughed. "I love you."

I could hear the smile he was fighting to hold back as she said, "I love you too."

Since it was Monday evening, the grocery store parking lot wasn't very full. I'd given up on going to Bristol Farms, even though it was closer to our house, thanks to the ever vigilant paparazzi that hung out there, and instead went to another paps-free store a little farther away. Grabbing a hand basket on my way in, I headed straight to the bakery to get the pastries before

going a few aisles over to the dairy section. There was a caution sign on the floor where someone had just mopped up a spill and as I was walking carefully over the still damp floor, I had my head down so I didn't trip over the sign and was blindsided in the stomach with a shopping cart. I ended up falling over on top of the sign and as soon as I got my bearings I looked up to see that I was all alone and the unmanned shopping cart had been full of several cases of water, making it all the heavier.

I almost wanted to laugh at being the victim of my very own drive-by when I was nowhere near Compton, but the soreness in my body pushed the urge away and I slowly stood up and gathered my basket and pastries from the floor. I did a quick 'systems check' and other than what felt like a bruised hip and ego, everything else felt alright. Looking around once more to see whose cart it might've been, I was still surprised to see there was no one else around. I was just thankful I'd worn a pair of khaki pants that day instead of a dress, although there was no one around that would've gotten a peepshow anyway, and shrugged it off. I continued to walk around the store and finished my shopping, making sure to keep an eye out on the few other people around me, and as I was standing in the checkout line I was hit with a weird feeling. I couldn't describe it even to myself, but just knew I somehow felt off.

The feeling came and went as I drove home, but I didn't think much of it until I saw Eric's face when I walked into the house. Given our earlier conversation, I'd expected to be pounced on with barely one foot in the door, but as soon as he saw me his eyes went wide with horror as he asked, "What happened?"

"What are you talking about?" I asked, wondering if he had some sort of Sookie sensor installed on my body unbeknownst to me. He was sneaky like that.

"You're bleeding!" he exclaimed, rushing forward. I looked at my hands and arms wondering if I'd gotten cut when I fell, but Eric pulled my arms away and stared down at my pants making my eyes go wide and move downward too.

There was a small patch of blood on the crotch of my pants.

I was suddenly panicking as much as Eric as I said, "I fell. There was a drive-by carting at the store and I got knocked down." Tears filled my eyes as worry for our baby filled my bones and I whispered, "It was full of cases of water. It hit me in the stomach. Hard."

Eric didn't say another word and instead scooped me up into his arms and I let the shopping bags fall from my hands to the floor at his feet as he carried me out to the garage and put me into the Audi. He was already on the phone when he climbed into the driver's side as he barked into the receiver, saying, "My wife was hit in the stomach with a shopping cart. She's ten weeks pregnant and now she's bleeding." He paused for a split second before adding, "Vaginally." Eric growled impatiently as the garage door slowly lifted and threw the car into reverse, backing out so quickly that I probably had whiplash now too, but I didn't care.

I only cared about our baby.

"Are you cramping?" he asked me in a softer tone. My inner voice was too busy screaming bloody murder inside, so I merely nodded my reply, thinking I'd finally figured out that was the weird sensation I'd been feeling. I'd thought it was a residual feeling of being knocked down, but now I realized I'd been feeling faint cramps. Eric relayed my answer to whoever he was talking to before saying, "We'll be there in five minutes."

We were ten minutes away from Doctor Ludwig's office and fifteen minutes away from the hospital, but I didn't bother to ask where we were going. Eric gripped the steering wheel with one hand while his other gripped my own hand and with his newly cast free lead foot we were screeching into the parking lot where Doctor Ludwig's office was kept five minutes later. He didn't bother looking for a parking space and instead threw the car into park in the fire lane right in front of the building. It was another move I couldn't chastise him for and was instead grateful that he didn't care about impending fines and tickets. He rushed me into the office and they took us back to an examination room right away without even asking who we were. I guessed by the panicked look on Eric's face and the tears streaming down mine, they knew we were the ones who had called. I managed to answer the nurse's questions through my poorly contained sobs and she told me to strip from the waist down, giving me a paper blanket to cover my lower half with, and I freaked out again seeing the spots of blood in my underwear. I crumpled them up in my hand, irrationally blaming them for causing us so much fear, and lay back on the table having never felt as scared as I was at that very moment.

We hadn't planned on having a baby. Hell, we hadn't planned on getting married or falling in love. All three of those things were impossibly high odds and yet they all managed to happen. Even Eric losing those precious three weeks of his memory hadn't been unable to undo it all and I couldn't help but to wonder if our luck had finally run out.

"I'm scared," I whispered as Eric brushed the tears away that were falling down the sides of my face and into my hair.

"Me too," he whispered back. When I started quietly sobbing again he shushed me and gently kissed my face before calmly asking, "Can you tell me exactly what happened? Who hit you?"

"I don't know," I choked out. "There was a caution sign on the floor and I was looking down so I wouldn't trip over it. I didn't see anyone. I was just knocked down by the cart." It was all my fault that there was something wrong with the baby. If only I'd been paying attention to my surroundings. If only I'd done what Eric had said and given him the shopping list, I wouldn't have been in the store to begin with and none of this would be happening. My crying became more jagged as I curled into a ball on the examination table and sobbed out, "It's all my fault. I should've paid more attention. I should've given you the list. I always want to do everything myself and now we could...we could lose..."

I couldn't bear to say the words. Once everything had seemed to right itself between Eric and I after the accident, the baby had become very important to both of us. Not that it wasn't always important, but whereas before I'd been filled with doubt over my ability to be a good parent, and dread over telling Eric the news, now we were both filled joy. We talked to it. We often talked *for* it when trying to bend one another to our own way of thinking. Eric would try to convince it

to kick while pressing his hand down on my stomach and I would try to convince Eric it was the father's job to take all of the midnight feedings and change all of the shitty diapers. We'd talked about nursery themes and curfews and God help it if it was a girl because we would have to name her Rapunzel when Eric never let her out of her tower. I wanted it. Eric wanted it. Now we might lose it before we'd even met it.

Eric leaned over me and wrapped his upper body around mine, saying, "Don't talk like that. None of this is your fault. I'm sure everything will be just fine."

"But what if it's not?" I whispered. I was terrified of getting my hopes up.

I couldn't say anymore than that, but Eric knew what I was talking about and he didn't say anything for a long moment before answering, "Then we'll get through it. Together."

A very small part of me felt better hearing he wasn't planning on blaming me for our misfortunes, but the larger part of me was taking up the blame reins for him. If we lost the baby it would most definitely be my fault and I would never forgive myself.

Before either of us could say anything else there was a short burst of knocks on the door with Doctor Ludwig breezing right into the room, asking, "What happened Sookie? I was told you were hit by a shopping cart and now you're bleeding?"

Eric had moved to stand next to my head and my hand quickly found his as I nodded, while still trying to catch my breath from crying. Doctor Ludwig stood alongside me and lifted my shirt, pressing down on my abdomen and asking, "Do you feel any pain now?"

I took her question seriously and thought about it for a moment before answering, "Not really. I feel sore from the fall and had a sense that something felt off afterward, but no actual pain." I was starting to question whether or not I'd actually felt cramps and instead latched onto the idea already feeling panicked because I hadn't felt any since we'd been at the doctor's office.

She nodded as if she expected my answer and asked another as she moved to stand at the foot of the table. "How much bleeding did you have?" My crumpled panties were still in my hand and I gave them to her before she had a chance to start my pelvic exam. Examining them she said, "There's not much here, so that's a good sign." Once she was started the exam she kept talking, saying, "A lot of women have some spotting during their first trimester. Have you experienced any dizziness or sudden fatigue?" When I answered in the negative she finished examining me and stood up saying, "Everything looks okay. There was very little blood, but we're going to do an ultrasound just to make sure everything is where we want it to be, okay?"

"Okay," I replied wondering what in the hell she meant.

She must have seen the question in my eyes because she stopped for a moment as she explained, "Sometimes the fertilized egg implants itself in the mother's fallopian tube, causing an ectopic pregnancy, but, as a general rule, those cases present themselves with a high degree of pain and bleeding. Other times, when there's trauma, the mother might have what's called a threatened

miscarriage. The good news is that your cervical os, the mouth of your womb, is still closed and you aren't feeling any pain when I press down on your womb. Light vaginal bleeding during the first trimester is common in twenty to thirty percent of pregnancies, so this may have just coincided with your fall. We'll have a better idea of what's going on after the ultrasound."

I knew Doctor Ludwig's soft smile and gentle explanation were meant to ease my fear, but it caused the exact opposite to happen with my worry and panic ratcheting up several notches with every word she spoke. No, I wasn't in a high degree of pain. No, there wasn't a lot of bleeding. Yes, my mommy bits were still all closed up to keep the baby inside of my body, but there was one more thing about me that she didn't know about.

*I had a history of beating impossibly high odds.*

She asked if I had to pee and explained that a full bladder helped during an ultrasound, so I chugged a bottle of water she brought me even though I already felt like my bladder was full. I watched silently as Doctor Ludwig pulled the ultrasound machine next to the examination table on the opposite side from where Eric stood. She moved it so that I wouldn't be able to see anything, I assumed to soften the blow if what she found wasn't good, and I loosened my grip on Eric's hand expecting that he'd want to move to stand where he could see, but his hand merely tightened on my own.

*He'd meant what he'd said. Good news or bad, we were in it together.*

She squeezed out some warm gel onto my abdomen and spread it around using what she called a transducer. I could hear the sounds of people moving and talking throughout the office, but in our own little corner of the world there was nothing but silence as Doctor Ludwig worked. There was no clock in the room and to keep from going stir crazy or asking her what she could see every five seconds, I counted silently in my head. Every time I hit sixty I would start over. Focusing on the numbers climbing in my brain and keeping track of every minute that passed us by kept me from focusing on the thought that we could lose the baby. I could only imagine what was going through Eric's head, but he didn't say a word and other than his thumb rubbing across the back of my hand, he stood completely motionless.

I didn't chance any glances at Doctor Ludwig, afraid of what I might deduce from her expression. If I saw anything remotely close to sympathy I would've lost it. As I was nearing the sixteen minute mark, the sound of her voice startled me when she said, "Well, you were right."

*Right? Right about WHAT?*

I didn't have to ask as she continued on, glancing at the notes in my file and explained, "Based on the size of the fetus, I'd say conception took place when you thought it did."

I already knew that little bit of information and normally I loved drawn out thrillers and mysteries when watching a movie or reading a book, but I was ready to scream if she didn't hurry up and tell us what we wanted to know. I glanced up at Eric's face and could tell that he was ready to jump out of his own skin, so when I looked back at Doctor Ludwig, about to tell her to



just spit it out already, the words were caught in my throat when I saw her smile. She turned the monitor so we could finally see what she'd been looking at the whole time and my mouth fell open while a fresh batch of tears flooded from my eyes.

There on the screen was our baby. It had arms and legs; hands and feet and was jumping all around like it was on a trampoline. I focused on it, trying to feel what I could see it was doing inside of me, but I felt nothing.

"It's so active. Is that good? Normal?" I asked her.

"It's very good and very normal. Everything looks good and I didn't see anything that would suggest that you won't have a successful pregnancy," she smiled back at me.

Eric's hand tightened on my own and I tore my eyes away from the screen and saw silent tears falling down his face, but the soft smile on his lips told me they were happy tears. I tugged on his hand until his eyes met mine and I smiled, saying, "I guess that explains my craving for Mexican food. We made a little Mexican jumping bean."

He blew out a breath so deep that I could see the tension leave his body with it and he chuckled, saying, "I would hazard a guess that it's asleep. It bounces around just like its mother."

All of the worry and panic I'd been feeling left me now that we knew everything was okay and I looked back at the screen, watching our little jumping bean flit around, and jokingly said, "Well, from the size of its head we can definitively say it's your baby. Its ego is already huge."

I felt the touch of Eric's hand on my face a moment later as he turned my head to look back at him and he leaned down, placing a soft kiss on my lips, before pulling back and smiling again as he said, "It should be. It's *ours*."

*It most certainly was.*

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## Chapter 92: Chapter 89

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### Chapter 89

#### EPOV

In the days leading up to our trip to Bon Temps, I was like a rabid dog when it came to Sookie's care. After our scare with the baby I didn't want her to have to lift a finger for anything and appointed myself as her personal butler, nurse, waiter, and all-around lackey. She'd allowed it at first, having been just as terrified over the thought of losing the baby as I had been, but it wasn't long before I could tell I was getting on her nerves.

Doctor Ludwig had told her she should take a day or two off before returning to work to give her body a chance to recover from the fall and thanks to the short week due to the holiday, she wouldn't be returning until the following Monday. I'd wanted to postpone our trip, but Sookie wouldn't hear of it and since the doctor had already said there was no medical reason why she shouldn't go, I had nothing more than my overprotective instincts over her and the baby to use to plead my case.

I couldn't help it though. Ever since I'd been able to fully wrap my head around the fact that Sookie and I were going to be parents, it was practically all I could think about. It may have just been because of my own childhood issues, but I was bound and determined to be a good father; a father that wanted and cherished their child.

*Like me, it may have not been planned, but unlike me, it would always be loved.*

I'd never been as scared as when I thought we might lose the baby. I knew Sookie was strong; stronger than she gave herself credit for, but I also knew that if we lost the baby, a part of her would die inside. It would kill a part of me too and it would've been hard to be strong for her, when she would need it the most, when I would be grieving too. So when the doctor turned the monitor and I saw our baby for the first time, healthy and strong and *safe* inside of Sookie's body, my knees nearly buckled from the emotions that swept through me. Hearing that it would be okay and seeing we'd somehow managed to make a tiny little piece of perfection with little arms and legs and the boundless energy of its mother, the love I felt for it swallowed me up like a tidal wave, pulling me out to sea with it, whether I'd wanted to go or not.

*I dove in head first.*

I'd gone to the grocery store the following day, every bit the rabid dog I'd become, and demanded to see their surveillance footage. I didn't let on that Sookie was pregnant since we hadn't made it public knowledge yet, but I would've been just as mad had she not been. My wife had been assaulted and I wanted heads to roll. The only problem was that they only had cameras at the entrance, over their registers, their stockroom, parking lot, and a few select aisles where they had high dollar merchandise. Cases of water and milk weren't on their list of priorities, so there wasn't any footage of those areas and I ended up walking out of there with no more idea of who could've hurt her than I'd gone in with. I refused to believe it was just a random accident considering there hadn't been anyone around her when it happened. Shopping carts didn't just go flying off on their own, but I couldn't think of anyone that might want to hurt her.

I had half a mind to contact my private investigator, but since I couldn't think of anything he would've been able to find out that I hadn't found out on my own, I didn't bother. My faith in him wasn't very high anyway since he hadn't been able to find out anything we didn't already know about when Sookie and I first met up in Vegas. According to him it would take nothing short of a court order to be able to view any security footage and since no crime had been committed, that wasn't likely to happen. He'd interviewed the bar and wait staff, but no one could remember anything other than seeing Sookie and I having a drunken good time together at the bar and on the dance floor. I'd been told we'd made a bit of a spectacle of ourselves, but no one had noticed

us beforehand other than that we were there. I honestly didn't really care anymore and was only thankful now that we'd met in the first place.

Our trip to the airport Wednesday morning had been uneventfully stressful. We'd gotten a temporary reprieve and were no longer being actively stalked by paparazzi hanging around the gate thanks to someone else's seventy-two day marriage falling apart and I may have felt a bit smug that mine was seventy-five days long and holding strong, but I knew they would return when news of Sookie's pregnancy became public. Regardless, there were always a few at the airport and with the Thanksgiving holiday upon us there were more than the normal amount hanging around. If I could have, I would've wrapped Sookie's body in enough bubble wrap to make her the size of a dwarf star and rolled her to the gate, but she wouldn't let me.

*I'd asked.*

Nor would she let me carry her, get her a wheelchair, or surround her in a group of privately hired mercenaries.

*I'd asked.*

Her stubborn nature matched my overprotective one in every way and only solidified the fact that she was perfect for me, even if her continued denials made me want to rip my hair out. I'd become so accustomed to the people around me giving in to my every request that her outright refusal was like a breath of fresh air, but my love for her only made me want to choke on it. Our frustration with one another was reaching critical levels by the time we got onto the airplane thanks to me barking at anyone that got within a ten foot radius of her. She was embarrassed and thought I was being rude, but I didn't care.

*It was my job to keep her safe.*

After I growled at an unsuspecting passenger, who had been standing too close to Sookie and whipping his carryon around like he was blocking an invisible barrage of bullets aimed at his body as we were boarding the aircraft, she threw herself into her seat and grumbled at me, "Are you going to be like this for the foreseeable future? Because if you try to keep me from hugging Gran she's gonna take you down quicker than a hooker's panties at a Viagra convention."

I knew she was pissed, but that really wasn't my intention. I also knew she'd been extremely horny as of late and my refusal to have sex with her was only adding to her frustration. Doctor Ludwig had said that we could, but I wasn't ready just yet. After everything that happened I didn't want to do anything that might make us lose the baby and whenever I was inside of her, my desire for her often clouded my mind to the point of insanity. I was afraid of being too rough with her, of somehow hurting her or the baby, and if that meant I had to wait until it was born safe and sound, than that was a sacrifice I was willing to make. Of course I didn't tell *her* that I was waiting until after the birth. That would just make her even more pissed off, but I was only trying to protect her and our baby. Denying Sookie sex, as well as denying my own urges, was no easy feat and I wished they made an anti-Viagra for me to take, but since I had no desire to fight with her either, I tried to make a joke and asked, "Do they have Viagra conventions?"

"I wouldn't know," she glared back at me. Lowering her voice so she wouldn't be overheard by the other passengers, she added, "But maybe if you would just fuck me already you wouldn't be so ornery."

"Ornery?" I chuckled while ignoring the fact that she was probably right. "Are you switching over to southernisms already? The plane hasn't even left the tarmac."

Sookie just rolled her eyes back at me and pulled out a book from her bag while mumbling, "I guess that's the only *lift off* I'll be getting any time soon."

No sooner than she had said the words, the plane started taxiing down the runway while the guilt I felt over denying her ate me up inside, not to mention the fact that I could probably level an entire petrified forest with the angry Woody Woodpecker secured away inside of my jeans. Sookie had made it perfectly clear that she felt increasingly unattractive as her pregnancy progressed, but, truthfully, I found her to be sexier with every passing day. Knowing that I was the cause of every new curve of her body brought with it a whole new level of eroticism. It was proof that *my seed* had planted inside of her and it only made me want to fill her with more of them, but thoughts like those didn't help to reinforce my willpower. Nor did knowing now that I had the use of both of my legs again, if I held her up, we could try fucking against the airplane's bathroom door.

*We could make our own 'Snakes On a Plane' movie only there was just one snake and it was inside of my pants.*

I was still lost in my inner pornographic directorial debut when a voice from the aisle next to my seat brought me back to reality.

"Oh! It's you again!"

I looked up to see a waif-like flight attendant standing next to our seats. She smiled at me with recognition in her eyes and I figured she might've been a fan that I'd met previously, but couldn't remember. I appreciated all of them, but it was mostly the nut jobs that stood out in my mind, like the woman who had me sign a diaper. When I smiled in return I watched her eyes shoot a glare in Sookie's direction before she looked back at me and added, "I heard about your accident on the news and that you lost a few weeks of your memory, so you probably don't remember me, but I didn't get a chance to ask you for an autograph the last time we met. Would you mind?"

I glanced over at Sookie and saw she was fully engrossed in her book, while wondering what the flight attendant was talking about. Sookie was always gracious and understanding when fans stopped me for autographs or pictures, but the woman's glare towards her would indicate otherwise. Since I couldn't remember meeting the woman before I just shrugged it off and took the cocktail napkins and pen she held out to me. I always tried to personalize them when there wasn't a large crowd and asked, "What's your name?"

She leaned down next to me whispering, "It's on the second napkin." Feeling her in my personal space made me look up at her where I saw her eyelashes batting back at me flirtatiously, as she added, "Along with my phone number."

I didn't have the chance to tell her I was married; thanks, but no thanks; or to fuck off because Sookie snatched both napkins from my hand and shoved them into the seatback in front of her saying, "You're a long way from Babylon Kate, but we all know your number is 666. Now you and your seven headed beast should be heading back before I give you a whole new appreciation for the word *Revelation*."

It was obvious that Sookie remembered meeting 'Kate' before and if she'd come onto me the last time, it explained the glare she'd shot at Sookie. I was just happy that Sookie's anger was directed at someone other than me and after Kate huffed and stomped away, I smiled back at Sookie asking, "You can coin phrases like 'Spousal Pussy Privilege' *and* quote bible lore? I'm impressed. You really *are* smart."

Sookie slammed her book shut and growled, "I'm smart enough to know where to hide her body if she doesn't back the hell off."

While I enjoyed Sookie's own possessiveness over me, I didn't want to get her worked up knowing the stress wasn't good for the baby and tried to calm her down, offering, "Maybe she just didn't realize that we were together." Glancing down at my tattooed ring finger, I rubbed my thumb over it, adding, "Maybe I should start wearing my wedding band again." I'd seen it in some of the earlier paparazzi photos of Sookie and me together, but I hadn't been wearing it during the GQ photo shoot or when I woke up in the hospital. She still wore the plain gold band on her left hand that I knew had been her mother's, but it never occurred to me to ask if she knew why I no longer wore mine. A part of me didn't like the fact that she wore a ring that hadn't come from me, but I understood the sentimentality behind her choice. However, I also knew of her practicality in choosing to wear that ring when we were still *pretending* to be a real couple and it bothered me now that we *were* a real couple.

I didn't get the chance to ask about my own ring when Sookie huffed, "Like that would help. You were wearing it the first time we met her and it didn't slow her down." I could see her earlier agitation coming back now mixing in with her current anger, so when she opened her book again I didn't try to maintain any conversation with her hoping she'd calm down while reading. It seemed to do the trick and by the time we landed in Shreveport Sookie was visibly excited to be so close to seeing her Gran again. I'd spoken to her several times on the phone whenever Sookie called her and had to admit that I was excited to finally meet her, again, too. It had been hard on both of us keeping JB (our new nickname for the baby, Jumping Bean) a secret from her, but Sookie wanted to see her reaction in person. I was just happy to be expecting a joyful one, opposed to the one I'm sure my father would have in store for us if he were still hanging around.

Once we were finally in our rental car, Sookie happily chattered nonstop all the way to Bon Temps. She'd warned me time and again that her brother was an idiot, but she couldn't expect everyone to be as smart as her and if they came from the same gene pool, I had my doubts as to the veracity of her claim.

*How dumb could he be?*

As we pulled up the driveway and the house came into view, a small bit of pride swelled within me seeing how nice it looked with the knowledge I had a small part in making it that way, even if I couldn't remember doing so. The front door opened before I could even shift the car into park with Sookie's Gran coming down the front porch steps to greet us with her arms held open wide.

Sookie burst into tears as she got out of the car and ran over to hug her, sobbing out, "Gran!"

The woman stood at least two inches shorter than Sookie and managed to appear both spry and frail at the same time, but her voice was strong as she happily chuckled out, "Baby girl! You hush with those tears before you get me started."

A solid looking man appeared at their side, his resemblance to Sookie unmistakable, as he said, "Gran cooked enough supper to feed Pharoah's Army so quit yer snottin' and gimme a hug. I'm so hungry, every time I swallow my aaa...butthole will say 'thanks'."

His unexpected greeting had me choking back my laughter, but it was enough to make Sookie stop crying as she snorted and both her and Gran swatted his chest, chastising, "Jason!" in unison.

While Sookie moved over to give her brother a hug, I moved forward towards them all with Gran wrapping her arms around me as she said, "We're so thankful that you're okay and able to come out here to spend the holiday with us."

Her frail appearance hid the strength she possessed as she squeezed my ribs, but I found I enjoyed it and hugged her back, saying, "I'm happy to be here. Thank you for inviting me."

She still had her face buried against my chest, while Sookie and Jason reverted back to their childhood and were playing some sort of slap game with each other, but my concern over Jason taking it too far was put on the back burner when I felt my shirt dampen. I looked down as best I could and saw Gran was crying, but before I could ask what was wrong, she said, "What invite? You're family so no invitation is needed. You're always welcome here."

Gran tried to discreetly wipe her tears away, but by then even Sookie and Jason had noticed while I asked, "Is everything alright?"

When she smiled back at me I could see Sookie had gotten her own smile from the Stackhouse side of her family tree and she explained, "Everything is just fine. I'm just so glad that you're okay. After seeing the pictures from your accident it was obvious that it was only by God's grace that you're here with us today."

The ability to stun someone into silence must also be a Stackhouse trait because I stood there with my mouth gaping open over her concern for me. While we were related through my marriage to Sookie, she didn't really know me from Adam and yet even now, two months after the accident, she was still reduced to tears over the thought of me being hurt. My own father

hadn't so much as wished me well when he'd visited me at the house right after I'd gotten home. I was beyond touched and found yet another reason why I loved Sookie. Being with her gave me the family I'd always wanted but had been too afraid to wish for.

After Jason helped me carry our bags into the house, we were told to wash up because supper was ready and smelling the aromas wafting out of the kitchen made me comply without argument. However, once we were seated, I realized Sookie and I had never discussed how or when we'd drop the baby news bomb. The only thing I knew was that we'd do it face to face, so when Sookie led off the conversation, asking, "So, is there anything new with you guys? Anything exciting going on around Bon Temps?" I figured she was laying the groundwork for a reciprocal question to be asked and made sure to pay attention to what was being said and by whom.

Gran told Sookie about things going on in the town and filled her in on the people she knew growing up, but it was becoming more and more obvious to me that Jason had something he wanted to share as well. Even though he'd been emptying and refilling his plate at an impressive rate, I could tell he was excited and was looking for an opportunity to jump into the conversation. He was fun to watch with his head jerking forward when he sensed an opportunity and then would snap back when either Sookie or Gran kept talking. His movements were jerky and I couldn't help picturing him as a flannel clad Frogger trying to leap his way across the road without getting plowed down by the Sookie's and Gran's barreling down towards him.

It wasn't until we were nearly done with dinner when he finally saw his chance and spit out, "Well I'm thinkin' a settin' up one a them social networkin' sites."

I was impressed. Maybe Sookie just saw him as dumb since he was her brother and I asked, "Do you know a lot about computers?" I knew he worked on the parish road crew, but that didn't necessarily mean he couldn't be tech savvy.

Sookie coughed out, "Porn," under her breath and then took another bite of her dinner as though she hadn't said anything.

Gran seemed none the wiser, but then neither did Jason and he looked back at me answering, "Well, I *have* one."

*Ooooh kaaayyy...*

As difficult as it was, I ignored the repeated coughed out 'porn' commentary next to me and tried to salvage the conversation since he was Sookie's brother and asked, "So what kind of social networking site did you have in mind? Something like Facebook?"

I figured I was on the right track when his face lit up as he asked, "Well have you ever heard a Twitter?"

*Pam. My balls. In her possession if I ever opened up an account.*

I left all of that out and just replied, "Yes."

"Well," he explained excitedly, "it's kinda like that, only instead a bein' called 'Twitter' it'll be named 'Shitter'!"

A piece of biscuit flew out of Sookie's mouth while my dropped fork clattered to my plate and Gran reached over and cuffed the backside of Jason's head as she said, "Jason Stackhouse! You will NOT talk like that at my dinner table!"

Sookie was lost in a fit of giggles while Jason rubbed the back of his head, apologizing, "I'm sorry Gran, but I cain't help it if that's its name."

I didn't point out the fact that since he was the one naming it, he could very well help what it was called, but I couldn't seem to help myself as I blurted out, "And what would this site be used for?"

Sookie leaned over, still laughing, and epically failed at whispering to me, "You're stirring up the shit now."

Gran rolled her eyes and gave up on keeping her grandchildren in line as she started clearing the dishes from the table, but all of my focus was trained on Jason as he furthered his explanation, saying, "Well ya see, the guys and I are always trading stories on some a the weird places we find ourselves when we gotta drop off the Browns at the Super Bowl and I thought it'd be neat to have a place to go and post it. Instead a 'tweets' we'd call'em 'sheets'."

Sookie was in hysterics by that point and I had to hold onto her arm just to keep her from falling out of her chair. She hadn't even caught her breath as she asked him, "Would you post pictures too? If celebrities joined would they be Shitter Verified?"

Jason looked even more excited as he said, "Hell yeah we'd post pictures, but I don't know nothin' 'bout verifyin' celebrities."

Sookie barked out even more laughter, saying, "Careful. If you don't you could be sued for Defecation of Character!"

I couldn't hold it back anymore, but Jason ignored our gasping laughter and tear stricken faces, saying, "One guy told a story about the time he had to go when he was out drivin' in the middle a the night. The only thing around was a construction site and he had to go so bad he ran right into the port-a-john and dropped a load before lookin' ta see if there was any toilet paper. There wasn't. He called out to his friend in the pickup to look around for anything he could use to wipe his self, but the only thing he could find was his kid's stuffed Alf doll in the back a the truck. He took the shirt off it to use, but since he'd had chili and hot wings for supper, he needed more than that tiny shirt and ended up using Alf. 'Course he wasn't about to take that back home to his kid so he left it there sittin' on the back of the port-a-john as a fond how dee do for the next fella that walked in. *That* was Shitter picture worthy!"



Gran walked back into the room a few seconds later and shook her head seeing Sookie and I leaning against one another still crying in laughter. Jason waited for her to walk out again before regaling us with stories of the time one of the 'fellas' took a tour of a fancy model home and it was only after his 'meeting with the Governor' concluded that he found out the toilet was just for show and hadn't been hooked up to the plumbing lines, so he beat feet out of there before the realtor found him and his housewarming gift. Another one took a dump while scuba diving and was immediately engulfed by a school of fish, all of them seeming to have an appreciation for what they considered his edible gift to the sea. The more Jason talked, the more the twelve year old boy inside of me wanted to invest in his website because I couldn't remember the last time I'd laughed so hard. I just thanked God that Sookie was laughing right along with me because it would've been hard to hide my amusement from her if she'd thought it was crass and I added another mental note to the ever growing list of things that made her perfect for me.

When we could finally breathe normally again we all got up and helped Gran clear off the table and clean up in the kitchen. I could tell by Sookie's poorly hidden eagerness that she wanted to tell Gran our news, so as soon as the last dish was put away Sookie grabbed my hand and we faced Gran as she said, "Gran, we have some news."

We must've been a little louder than I'd thought while we'd been listening to Jason because Gran raised her eyebrow, asking, "Does it have anything to do bodily functions?"

Coyness filled Sookie's voice as she responded, "Sort of..."

Gran clucked her tongue, saying, "Sookie! I expect that sort of thing from your brother and why you encourage him I'll never know, but don't think for one minute you're too grown for me to put a whoopin' on you too."

I watched a huge smile light up on Sookie's face as she said, "Yes ma'am. Just make sure you're careful of the baby when you whoop on me."

Gran's harsh look changed into uncontained joy in a heartbeat and her arms flew out to embrace us both while their earlier tears made another appearance. I could handle happy tears any day of the week and let them sob it all out, enjoying the amount of love that filled the room, when my eyes landed on a decorative plaque hanging just below the kitchen window.

*Live, Laugh, Love.*

It was a phrase I'd seen and heard a thousand times before, but only now understood thanks to the little blond woman in my arms that showed me how to do all three.

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## **Chapter 93: Chapter 90**

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## SPOV

Gran's reaction to the baby news was no surprise to me, but what did surprise me was Jason's. After his big Shitter reveal I figured he *might* one day get excited over the baby's future 'sheets', but when he walked into the kitchen to see what the fuss was about and heard the news, he hugged me with tear filled eyes, whispering, "My baby sister is having a baby." While we'd never thought twice about the lack of money we'd grown up with, it was the lack of family members we envied others for. Our cousin Hadley had already taken off when Aunt Linda finally lost her fight with cancer, so up until I'd married Eric, our family only numbered three and it was something we both felt cheated on. Despite our different personalities, I'd never once doubted that Jason loved me, but seeing him become so overwhelmed with emotion made me blubber like a baby all over again. The last time I'd seen Jason cry was when our parents died and even Eric got choked up witnessing it all, but thankfully they were able rein it in and turn it into a guy moment full of hearty handshakes with a half hug.

Jason and Eric didn't get to spend much time together the last time we'd visited, not that Eric could remember it anyway, but I was still surprised when they ended up moving into the living room to bond over a 12-pack of beer while Gran ooh'd and ahh'd over the ultrasound pictures in the kitchen with me. Their conversation eventually turned into laughter that echoed throughout the house and by the time she turned in early for the night, since she would start cooking before the sun even came up, I followed the sound and found Jason and Eric were three sheets to the wind; literally. Jason had decided to spend the night and had made up the couch with spare linens and a pillow while Eric had wrapped himself in an admittedly hideous afghan Gran kept draped on the back of the couch.

From the looks of it Jason must've had more than a 12 pack in his truck because I'd cleaned up at least that many empty cans with plenty to spare, but they were having such a good time together, I didn't mind and when I walked back into the room, Eric set his beer down and pulled me down onto his lap, wrapping his arms around me. The two of them were still snickering, making me ask, "What's so funny?"

"Shitter: The Movie," Jason exclaimed.

Even knowing I would regret my next question, I braced myself and asked, "What?"

"A movie!" he answered with my patented 'Duh!' face. "Since Eric here's in 'the business' we been coming up with a way to make my idea into a movie."

Eric didn't drink much, if at all, lately and was clearly worse off than Jason since his eyes could barely focus on me as he smiled like a goofball, slurring out, "It would be a blockbuster!"

"With who?" I asked laughing. "Fecalpheliacs? Would you advertise on rolls of toilet paper? Hang signs on the inside of bathroom stalls?"

I was nearly blinded by the light bulb that appeared over both of their heads and they gave each other a knowing look and nodded before looking back at me with Eric declaring, "Genius! You'll be in charge of marketing."

"Oh no," I laughed, trying unsuccessfully to remove myself from Eric's iron grip. "I'll have enough shit to deal with in about six months, but I wish you both well with 'Jason and Eric's Excrement Adventure.'"

Eric's already slack jaw fell open and he hugged me tighter, saying, "Forget what I said about marketing. You'll be on the writing team." He looked around seemingly confused, which made me wonder if he even knew where we were, before asking, "Did we bring the laptop? We should be taking notes."

If I were a meaner person I would've already pulled out my phone to record their drunken foray in fecal film making, but just shook my head no instead, even though the laptop was currently in the carryon bag sitting on the floor a few feet away. Watching the two of them bonding like long lost friends made my heart warm from the inside out and I laughed while they fleshed out ideas for a movie that would surely be flushed down the toilet by any respectable studio. They'd gotten as far as having the main characters traveling through time in a port-a-john before Eric's bladder could no longer handle the amount of beer in it along with my weight bearing down on it before he had to let me go and search out the bathroom.

"Don't go time traveling without me!" Jason called out as he stumbled down the hallway.

Eric turned looking completely affronted as he stated unequivocally, "Never!" making all three of us laugh again with me trying shush them before they woke up Gran.

As soon as we heard the bathroom door click shut Jason turned to me and smiled, saying, "I like him."

I returned his smile and his sentiment, saying, "Me too."

Eric had deposited me on the middle of the couch when he stood up, so I was sitting close enough to Jason for him to reach out and touch my belly. I'd expected him to make a jibe about my weight, so I was surprised when he said, "I really didn't know what to expect when I heard you married a movie star. I figured he'd a been all stuck up like he was better than the rest of us, but he ain't nuthin' like that."

Feeling a little affronted myself, I narrowed my eyes back at him, asking, "Did you think I would *want* to marry someone like that?" I conveniently left out the fact that I didn't know Eric at all when we'd gotten married along with the fact that I'd made the same assumptions, remembering our fight over his five hundred dollar pots to piss in.

Jason rolled his eyes, saying, "Puh leez...you been googly eyed over him for as long as I can remember. For all I knew he could a been the biggest asshole on the planet and you were blinded by the fact that he was *The Eric Northman*." I felt a head of steam building over Jason's

statement even though Eric had acted like the biggest asshole on the planet when we'd first woken up together in Vegas, but then, I'd been the biggest bitch on the planet that morning too. However, I wasn't blinded by the fact he was *The Eric Northman* back then; I'd been blinded by his naked body; and our matching tattoos; and our TMZ wedding video.

*Harlot; thy name is Sookie Northman nee Stackhouse.*

Before I could get my panties fully twisted he added, "But I know you wouldn't a *stayed* with him this long if he was like that. You're too good a person to put up with that shit. Besides, I can see how much he loves ya."

"He does," I agreed, unable to hold back my smile.

Jason smiled back at me now that my panties had sufficiently untwisted and he patted his belly, saying, "It's a good thing too. I'm too full to wanna have to go out back and dig a hole to bury his body in if he wasn't good to ya."

The look he gave me left me no doubt that he was only half-kidding, so I patted his leg and said, "Well he *is* good to me, so you don't have to worry about that. He's going to be a great father too." Was there such a thing as *too good* of a father? If he continued to refuse to have sex with me for much longer, I would certainly start to think so, but there was no way I was going to discuss that with my big brother.

Jason's hand returned to my belly and he smiled back at me like it was new news and said, "Hey! I'm going to be an uncle!"

"You are," I agreed, chuckling at his epiphany. Jason wasn't known for being quick on the uptake.

"I'm gonna buy him his first football and teach him how to throw."

I chuckled again at his surety over the baby being a boy and asked, "What if it's a girl?"

He gave me that same knowing look from just a moment ago and said, "Well then I'm gonna clean my rifle and make sure none a them yahoos get within a hundred feet a her."

I rolled my eyes feeling bad for poor Rapunzel, saying, "You sound just like Eric. Besides, how are you going to do that from all the way out here when we'll be back in L.A.?"

While Jason wasn't as drunk as Eric, I'd clearly stumped him so I waited, with the theme song from Jeopardy playing in my head, when I was once again blinded by the light bulb above his head as he said, "You all could move back here!"

*Shitter: The Movie was more likely to happen.*

"How would we do that?" I asked. "We both have jobs in California." Granted, mine was a temporary job and I had no idea if I'd be working after the baby was born. I knew Eric would be happy if I quit working right now, but that wasn't going to happen either. I liked working with the kids. I liked that they seemed eager to soak up whatever knowledge I could give them and wanted to do well despite their less than ideal surroundings. We had our poor upbringing in common, even though they didn't know that, and it made me want to do all that I could to help them succeed.

"You don't need to work, but even if you did you could always get a job teaching around here and Eric can just fly back whenever he's gotta movie to do," Jason said like it all made sense to him, therefore I should certainly understand it all.

I was already shaking my head while thinking this was one of the longest conversations Jason and I had ever had that didn't involve 'nuh uh's' and 'uh huh's'. "Eric works at the TV studio four days a week and sometimes has to do interviews and whatnot. I don't want a weekend husband and the baby isn't going to have a weekend father. Eric wouldn't want that either, so it's not gonna happen." Seeing Jason's dejected look, I patted his leg again and added, "But you can come out to California to visit and we'll come back to visit here as often as we can." If we didn't Gran would put a whoopin' on both me and Eric.

I could tell Jason wasn't too keen on that scenario, but he eventually shook it off and looked up at me with a grin, asking, "If I come out there to visit, do you think Eric'd be willing to introduce me to any a them fine ladies he used to date?"

I swallowed the 'nuh uh' that threatened to come out and laughed, smacking his chest, saying, "You'll have to ask him." There was no way I would want to be around for the introductions so I could see his former fuck buddies trying to get reacquainted, especially since he seemed hell bent on denying me lately, but talking about him made me realize that he had yet to come out of the bathroom and I looked down the hallway, saying, "I wonder if he fell in."

Jason stood up and pulled his cell phone out of his pocket laughing, "If he did, it'll be Shitter's first sheet."

I got up and trailed along behind Jason, not quite decided on whether or not I'd stop him from taking a picture if Eric had in fact fallen into the toilet, but got in front of him anyway and softly knocked on the bathroom door, not wanting to wake Gran, and asked, "Eric? Everything okay in there?"

We weren't *that* married where I would feel comfortable just barging into the bathroom not knowing what he was doing in there, but when he didn't answer I got worried enough to try turning the doorknob. I wasn't surprised it wasn't locked; it seemed to be an affliction of his just like the front door of our house, but I opened the door slowly to give him the chance to say something before we could catch him in a compromising position. I heard the snap of Jason's cell phone camera next to my ear before my eyes registered the fact that Eric was sound asleep curled up on the bathroom floor. It was a comical sight considering the bathroom was small enough that

he'd had to curl his body around the toilet in order to fit himself on the floor and would likely be grateful in the morning that Gran was such a neat freak because the floor shined.

*At least the bits of it I could see that weren't covered by Eric.*

I would've been worried if I couldn't hear him snoring over Jason's poorly stifled chuckling and turned to face him, trying to keep from laughing too loudly as I asked, "Can you give me a hand getting him upstairs?" While I loved Eric's ass, even when drunk, I knew it was too heavy for me to get up the stairs all by myself.

Jason snickered out, "Yeah." I moved out of the way and watched Jason put his face down near Eric's and smiling wide as he took another picture of the two of them before putting his phone away and pulling Eric up by his arms. He woke up enough to notice Jason and smiled at him, slurring out, "Jason! Buddy! We're gonna be famous when that movie comes out."

Jason maneuvered him to the stairs and chuckled, saying, "You're already famous dillweed."

He'd be infamous if Jason put those pictures on the internet, but I didn't have time to think about that when Eric snorted and laughed again, saying, "Noooo...Peppercorn is my father's girlfriend."

Jason just shook his head laughing as he said, "Your ass is heavy for being such a lightweight. Drunk as a skunk."

I was snickering while following along behind them, thankful that Jason didn't question Eric's statement knowing it would only lead to another round of drunken explanations and possibly another character in their Shitter movie. As soon as we got into my childhood bedroom Jason unceremoniously dumped Eric's body onto the mattress and with a quick, "G'night!" he left the room.

Eric's long ass legs were dangling off the side, so after I slipped into my nightgown I took the opportunity to remove his shoes and then got to work on getting his jeans off. I had them halfway down his hips when he growled and grabbed onto my hands, halting my progress and asking, "Sookie...you're not trying to take advantage of me because I'm drunk, are you?"

That thought hadn't even crossed my mind, but now that he'd mentioned it...

"Noooo..." I purred with my lips hovering over the Kraken making sure my warm breath blew over his quickly growing beast. Eric normally went commando so there was nothing stopping me from placing a wet kiss on his tip, besides his repeated warning that consisted of nothing more than my name, and I continued tugging at his jeans until they were finally off of him.

I was on my knees on the floor sitting up, right in between his legs when he looked down at me and tried to shake off his drunken stupor, saying, "You're not being fair."

My girly bits felt exactly the same way and by the way the Kraken was waving around in the air in front of me, I'd have to say he agreed. After our scare with the baby, I knew Eric was just concerned over something happening to it, so I couldn't really be mad at him for denying me. We'd both been terrified when we thought we could lose the baby and my insides even melted a little more because he seemed so willing to deny his own urges just so the baby would be okay, but Dr. Ludwig had assured us that we could resume having sex whenever we felt ready. I just had to convince him that *he* was ready.

I put on my best innocent look and said, "I'm not doing anything. I'm just trying to get you comfortable so you can go to sleep." What I didn't say was that he always seemed the most comfortable after a round of mind blowing sex and it was probably more than a little obvious that was my end game.

Even with his drunken unfocused eyes, he still seemed to be able to see right through me, but I acted like I wasn't trying to seduce him and slowly slid my body up along the naked lower half of his and if my lips, tongue, and breasts just happened to slide along the Kraken on my way up, well that was purely coincidental.

*Not.*

Unfocused or not, his eyes rolled back into his head as his hips involuntarily arched up into me and I quickly hid my face in his abs so he wouldn't see the grin I was currently sporting. I kissed each muscle as I slowly slid his t-shirt up his body, making sure to give extra attention to his nipples which I knew he liked and couldn't help laughing a little when he pulled his shirt up over his face and I heard a muffled, "So not fair," above me.

I gave one a light nip with my teeth and without feeling an ounce of remorse, I apologized, "I'm sorry. I just can't help myself." I swirled my tongue all across his chest, admitting, "Whenever I see you, all I can think about is how much I love you; how much I love kissing you; how much I love tasting you." I pressed my body down onto his, adding, "How much I love the way you fill me up."

Wicked and Immoral must've hated the fact his face was covered with his shirt just as much as the rest of me did because they pulled it over his head and tossed it to the floor so I could bury my lips down next to his ear where I whispered, "And how much I love how hard you make me cum."

Eric's hand moved to grip my hair and he pulled my head back so he could look into my eyes. His own were filled with indecision and perhaps a bit of pain, probably from the U.S.S. Northman that was currently trying to dock in my hip. When he didn't say anything right away, Wicked decided to pass the time by snaking down and taking hold of his rudder in an effort to steer him in the right direction and my brain only had the chance to hum the first bar of the Jeopardy theme song when he grunted and his lips crashed into mine.

I never acquired a taste for beer, but there was something about the way it tasted on Eric that made me dive in trying to lap up every little bit of it I could find. It had only been a few days

since the last time we'd had sex, but it felt like an eternity with my body quickly heating up. Since we'd gotten back from the doctor's office, Eric had kept our touching and kissing on the side of loving and gentle, but there was no trace of that to be found with the tenderness having been replaced with primal need. I felt the moisture in between my thighs as my body released a bit of cumfetti in celebration of its return when just like that, Eric's hands disappeared from my body and he pulled a pillow over his head, saying, "We can't."

I sat up in disbelief and had a bit of déjà vu when I looked down at him remembering how he was Mr. Pillow Face before I knew he was actually *The Eric Northman*, but instead of reminiscing I decided to pull out the big guns and pulled off my nightgown.

*Wonder Twin Powers: activate.*

He didn't move a muscle, so I tried to give him a little encouragement and whispered, "Eric?" I wasn't sure if he could hear me through the pillow, so I tugged on it a little and said, "Sweetie? Look at me."

It took a bit more tugging on my part and perhaps a bit of suffocation on his, until he finally allowed me to pull the pillow from his face, but he kept his eyes squeezed shut like he was afraid a monster was about to leap out at him. The girls were certainly growing into monster-like proportions, so I couldn't really fault him and instead cupped his face gently, asking, "What's wrong?"

Without opening his eyes, he accused, "You're trying to seduce me!"

*And according to my nether regional radar, it seems to be working.*

"No I'm not," I lied. I figured it wouldn't hurt to add a little truth and said, "I just love you is all."

"Sookie," he sighed. "I love you too. That's why..." Eric's eyes opened mid-sentence and his words disappeared when he saw that the monsters he'd been afraid of were in fact real and currently staring down at him. Thank God he couldn't seem to take his eyes off of them otherwise he might have seen the victorious look on my face.

Wicked and Immoral must be contagious because his hands seemed to move on their own as they slid up my sides before coming up to cup them with his thumbs doing wonderful things across my nipples.

*Eric Northman wasn't afraid of monsters.*

My back automatically arched into them with my hips grinding down on his when his body went stiff again and not in a good way, as his hand dropped down to the mattress at his sides and he pleaded, "We can't."

*We can! We could! We should!*



"But why?" I whined.

*I swear to God, if he made me beg for sex I was gonna be so mad at him.*

*Just as soon as he gave in.*

His hand moved to rest on top of my rapidly expanding baby bump as he said, "I don't want to hurt you or the baby."

Deciding to try a different tactic, I leaned down and placed gentle kisses on his face as I said, "You won't hurt us." I moved to the side of his head and traced the outer edge of his ear with my tongue, whispering, "If anything, it'll hurt so good."

His arms wrapped around me and held me tighter against him with his body betraying his words, as he said, "I don't want to take the chance."

The way the Kraken throbbed in between us told me it was certainly willing to take the chance, so I kept trying to get Eric's brain on board by taking the logical approach. "Dr. Ludwig said it would be okay. She would've told us not to if there was a chance something could go wrong."

Even as his hands moved down to my hips so he could hold them in place while he rubbed his body against them, he sighed saying, "She said we could 'resume marital relations'."

*Duh! Did he think I wanted to go do a naked tri-athlon?*

"Exactly," I purred against his neck. "We're married, so resume relating me."

I punctuated my point with another grind of my hips, but Eric's hands disappeared again as he explained, "I can't."

I was starting to get pissed off and sat up, moving my body down his legs with the Kraken standing up like the centerfold of a pornographic pop-up book as I pointed to it saying, "Eric Junior disagrees." I got up long enough to pull my soaked panties off and climbed back on top of him, adding a not so romantic thought, saying, "If you're too tired, feel free to just lay there. I'll do all the work."

Before I could impale myself on him, Eric grabbed onto my hips and held them up in midair as his eyes bored into mine, seething out, "*That's not the issue!* Even if I could convince myself that having sex wouldn't hurt the baby, I can't be convinced that I won't hurt *you*."

How I could feel frustrated to the point of exasperation, but still want to ride him like a bucking bronco no matter how much he was pissing me off was confusing to say the least. I blamed the pregnancy hormones as well as *The Eric Northman's* naked body and snapped, "How? How do you think you'll *hurt* me?" Gesturing towards Eric Junior, I added, "You're huge and all, but, no offense; been there done that. I can handle everything you can give me." Pointing at my baby bump, I said, "You'll get to see the evidence in another six months or so."

I could tell he was just as frustrated as me and probably would've hidden behind a pillow again if he could trust me to not use his body like a sex toy. It was a smart move on his part. Instead, his voice got low and dangerous sounding, which only made me want him more, when he admitted, "Up until now I've been leashed thanks to my cast. I don't remember what we were like before the accident, but I know how I feel right now." When I gave him a look that clearly said 'Go on', he added, "And, right now, I feel like I could fuck you right through this mattress, through the floor, through the first floor and probably halfway to China. It's been too long. I'm too wound up. I want you too much to trust myself to be gentle with you."

His admission took some of the wind out of my sails even as my hoohah released another helping of cumfetti like it was midnight on New Year's Eve over the thought of how much I wanted to be pounded. I could tell that it was killing him to deny, not only me, but himself as well and took pity on him, smiling softly and saying, "Well, I've always wanted to see China one day, but since you think you can only get us halfway there, I can see your point."

Watching him roll his eyes made me think he spent too much time with Pam, but I pushed those thoughts away and slid further down his body which made him ask, "What do you think you're doing?"

I settled my face over the beast and licked the tip, saying, "I'm unwinding you." My name was the only word he managed to utter before he gave up trying to talk. My mouth was too full to be able to maintain any conversation anyway and I went about unwinding him with every trick I could think of. The taste and feel of him throbbing in my mouth only turned me on more and he hadn't been exaggerating when he'd said he was too wound up because it seemed like I'd barely gotten started when I his whole body went rigid and he came with muffled roar. I swallowed everything he had to give and looked up in time to see he'd covered his face with a pillow again which explained the muffled roar, but before I knew what was happening Eric had flipped me over and his head was suddenly buried between my legs.

He was right; *it had* been too long and I came almost as soon as I felt the first swipe of his tongue. I did my impression of Mrs. Pillow Face and bit into it trying to suppress the sounds I couldn't help making when Eric didn't stop. I certainly didn't want him to stop and wasn't about to tell him to stop, so when his lips wrapped around my clit with his tongue flicking across it like he was Led Zepplin, I quickly climbed the stairway to heaven and reached the top when he thrust two fingers inside of me. Tears, among other things, were leaking out of me as I came down from my orgasmic high and Eric pulled the pillow away from my face before pulling my lifeless body alongside his. He stole whatever breath I'd managed to accumulate with a kiss that kick started my libido and then shocked the hell out of me when he swatted my ass, saying, "Seductress."

I was confused and turned on all at the same time and the only thing I could manage to say was, "Huh?"

My face was resting on his bare chest and I could make out every detail of it thanks to the moonlight coming in through the window, so the view certainly didn't help my coherency until

he explained, "Seducing your drunk husband." He tried to take on a shocked tone, but ended up fighting off a yawn instead, as he asked, "What would Gran think if she knew?"

Despite feeling wiped out, I was still turned on, if not a little indignant at his accusation no matter how true it was, and huffed out, "You weren't *that* drunk. Besides, I didn't hear you or the pillow complaining any." We lay there in silence for a few minutes while more than just my mouth drooled staring at his bare chest. The bed was really tiny with Eric in it which only made it logical for me to be practically lying on top of him. His nakedness only made it logical for me to want to proceed to round two and if Wicked and Immoral happened to go out on a reconnaissance mission, who was I to stop them?

*They'd made it perfectly clear they didn't answer to me.*

Since Eric didn't say anything, I attempted to distract him from their intelligence gathering on the ground, so to speak, and said, "Besides, now you're unwound." I started kissing his chest again and as I worked my way towards the middle, I hooked my leg over his side and slid my body on top of him, asking his Pecs, "You can be gentle now, can't you?"

All I could think about was feeling him inside of me again. It had definitely been too long, so when he didn't answer me, I pushed myself up and looked back at him expecting to have to seduce, I mean *convince* him again, only he ended up answering me; sort of.

*With a snore.*

He was asleep. I lifted my body up off of his only to ascertain that *all* of him was asleep and gently flopped back down at his side in defeat. Curling myself up against his body, his arm automatically wrapped around me, and I smiled when we sighed in unison despite my hoohah protesting his sleeping state.

I could wait. Thanksgiving was only a few short hours away and I had plenty to be thankful for.

*Besides, Eric hadn't met Seductress Sookie yet and she would be there with bells on.*

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## Chapter 94: Chapter 91

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### Chapter 91

#### EPOV

*Ugh...*

I felt my consciousness slowly returning while my pounding head and stiff muscles protested loudly, demanding I remain still. It was a command I couldn't seem to refuse and was more than willing to obey since I couldn't figure out why I felt like complete and utter shit.

*Shit.*

The word itself brought back some of what happened the night before, but my brain was still foggy on the details.

*A movie?*

*Shitty Shitty Bang Bang?*

God, when did I turn into such a pussy that I couldn't handle a few beers? Before last night, I couldn't remember drinking more than *a* beer since the accident, so I figured my tolerance level must have been flushed right down the drain, much like my career would be if I actually tried to pitch a movie about shit.

The light shone through my closed eyelids and I was afraid to open them knowing the initial shot of pain I would feel was inevitable, so, like the pussy I was, I reached out for my comforting Sookie security blanket only to find I was in bed alone. It was easy to surmise considering I barely had to spread my arms for me to feel both sides where the mattress ended, but just to be sure I spread my legs out as well in case she'd somehow ended up at the foot of the bed.

*Nothing.*

I told the throbbing in my head to fuck off as I tried to recall how I ended up in bed to begin with wondering if Sookie had just left me there, pissed at me for getting drunk with her brother, but I only had to slide my body against the sheets and feel that I was naked for it to come back to me.

*She seduced me!*

My eyes shot open as panic set in, not recalling all of the details, but worried enough that I might have hurt her, only for them to squeeze shut again as the morning sunlight tried to burn out my retinas. My mouth opened, intent on making some sort of noise due to the pain, but nothing more than an inaudible grunt came out thanks to all of the moisture in my body currently residing in my bladder. That was enough to convince me to slowly raise my eyelids once more only for me to wonder if I was still drunk enough to be hallucinating when I saw my surroundings.

*How in the hell did I end up in the middle of my very own shrine?*

Everywhere I looked I saw my face staring back at me. Posters from movies and teen magazines covered every surface of the four walls surrounding me and while it was creepy to see so many pictures of my teenage self looking down at me, I couldn't help the smile that formed on my face remembering Sookie's admission from a few weeks earlier that she'd lusted after me from the time she was ten. I hadn't seen her childhood bedroom the day before having just left our bags downstairs when we first arrived, but now that I had a better idea of just how much she'd like me back then, if I was a peacock my tail feathers would've fanned out and snapped to attention behind me.

*Speaking of cocks...*

Mine desperately needed to be drained, so I slid to the side of the bed and grabbed my jeans from the back of a chair in front of a small desk. As I stood up to pull them on I noticed a scrap of notebook paper pinned to a corkboard above it littered with oversized teenage scrawl.

*Mrs. Eric Northman*

At least now I knew where the heart dotting the 'i' in her tattoo came from and a part of me felt like I should be freaking out seeing everything. Had I not already been in love with Sookie I more than likely would have, but it wasn't until I took the paper down and held it in my hand that I had a flash of a dream? A memory?

My eyes squeezed shut once more with me desperately trying to hold onto it, but it was like gripping a handful of sand. The tighter I grasped it the faster it slipped through my fingers. I could barely see the ghost of Sookie in my arms fading away even as the blush bloomed on her laughing face along with the sense of feeling happy at the time that accompanied it. Now I was left with only the feelings of loss and regret, wondering if my previous night's bender was the reason why I couldn't hold onto the memory, and I was so focused on trying to resurrect the picture that had already disappeared from my mind, I didn't hear anyone enter the room until I heard Sookie's voice behind me saying, "Happy Thanksgiving!"

A whisper probably would've been too loud for my aching head, but Sookie hadn't whispered and my shoulders hunched automatically while I winced in pain and could only manage an, "Uh huh," in response.

Her arms wrapped around me a second later, with my own slipping around her without thought, and the need to feel her against my body was all consuming as I gripped her tighter, afraid she too would slip through my grasp just like the memory had moments before. The ache in my chest slowly receded now that I had her firmly trapped in my arms and the feel of her lips kissing their way across my chest made other parts of me stand up and cheer despite my headache with me quickly shaking off my melancholy, but it also reminded me of her late night seduction. With my arms already wrapped around her, I had easy access to playfully smack her ass as I buried my face into her hair and said, "Bad girl."

I was by no means upset with her which she knew since her kisses were halted by her giggling. Denying her had been an exercise in torture for both of us, but that didn't mean I was going to cave in so easily again. Of course that meant I should probably lay off the alcohol for the duration of the pregnancy which didn't seem like a bad idea considering the way I felt at the moment.

She pulled away from my embrace and I opened my eyes to see her staring back with amusement as she asked, "Remembered that, huh?"

"Did you think I wouldn't?" I asked. I would've gladly proclaimed that every one of our sexual encounters would be impossible to forget, but all things considered where my memory was concerned, I knew that wasn't really the case.

"Do you remember snuggling up with your mistress, Mr. Tidy Bowl, last night?" she laughed.

*See what I mean?*

She must've guessed from my expression that I had no idea what she was talking about because she patted my chest, saying, "Don't worry. Jason has pictures on his cell phone!"

Fuck...I rubbed my eyes to try and clear the rest of the haze from my mind, remembering he'd drunk at least twice as much as me, and tried to deflect away from my own pitiful state, asking, "Is he even conscious yet?"

"Please...Jason is part fish. It explains why he's such a pussy magnet." She chuckled at her own joke before adding, "He went out last night after helping me get you into bed and only got home a little while ago."

"What? He drove?" I asked incredulously. How he could even function after that many beers was incredible, but I knew firsthand what a bad idea it was to drive while under the influence and started getting angry thinking of how badly things could've turned out. It was a pot calling the kettle black moment for me, but I'd already grown fond of him and wondered if there was something about the Stackhouse DNA I was addicted to.

"No," she soothed quickly hearing the harsh tone of my voice. "He walked. The local bar and grill is only a couple of miles down the road."

My anger died down just as fast as it had bubbled up, but Sookie's wandering hands were starting to distract me so I took a step back before I ended up throwing her down on the bed when she caught sight of the slip of paper still in my hand. She looked back up at me with chagrin, asking, "This again?" Her question only confirmed my barely there memory, but before I could say anything she held her arms out like a TV game show hostess, pointing at my teenage face staring back at us, admitting, "Yes, I had a *huge* crush on you when I was younger. *HUGE!*" Smiling, she pointed at the piece of paper in my hand and added, "I'd be embarrassed, but I can't, considering how awesome my super powers are." Wiggling her ring finger at me she giggled, "It seems my teenage self was a psychic."

"I remember," I confessed.

Smiling through her confusion, she asked, "What? That I'm awesome? It's a hard thing to forget."

The prior despair I'd been feeling over losing the memory hit me again and I pulled her back into my arms as I explained, "I remember seeing this before. You were embarrassed and laughing." I quickly buried my head back into her hair and inhaled her scent knowing it would calm me down again. I suddenly felt very vulnerable now that I had a clue as to what I'd be feeling if Sookie

disappeared from my life for real and not knowing if my next admission was more for her sake or for mine, I said, "I was happy."

"Oh Eric..." Her words were muffled against my chest and I felt the appearance of her tears a second later. I had no clue as to what she was feeling and nothing to gauge it on considering her hormones were all over the place with her pregnancy. One minute she could be smiling and laughing and the next she'd be in tears, so I didn't know if she was happy I'd remembered something or sad I'd forgotten it all to begin with. Only days earlier I'd been ready to run out and buy her a puppy when she started sobbing watching a commercial for the ASPCA on TV and there was still a distinct possibility she might get one for Christmas.

When I felt her finally settle down I pulled back far enough to wipe the remaining tears from her face and asked, "Happy or sad?" It was my go-to question lately since I never had a fucking clue and wondered if there was a pet store in Bon Temps that was open on Thanksgiving. If her tears reached critical levels I'd have no problem going door to door offering to buy the first dog I came across.

"Happy," she frowned.

*Maybe 'Sookie' means 'contradiction' in Swahili. I'd have to look it up later.*

She still refused to tell me what I'd said to her in Swahili, but I knew better than to poke the hormonal bear and didn't point out that she didn't look very happy. My survival of her pregnancy induced mood swings depended on my ability to remain silent, so I waited until she worked through whatever was going through her head when she finally said, "When we get home we need to go everywhere we went to before the accident. Now that you're mobile it'll be easier and maybe it'll jog your memories."

"Okay," I agreed. It was something we'd planned to do anyway and while I no longer questioned my feelings for Sookie or our relationship, I still wanted to remember. I felt cheated over losing that time with her and wanted it back.

A smile replaced her frown and she tilted her face up towards me, leaning in for a kiss which I was more than willing to oblige her on. My bladder, however, was ready to stage an uprising and thankfully she pulled back instead of trying to deepen it and with a crinkled face she said, "You smell like a brewery. Why don't you jump in the shower and then we'll get ready to go."

"Go?" I asked. "Go where?" I'd been under the impression that we were spending Thanksgiving there at the farmhouse.

"The high school," she said with a smile. "There's a football game every Thanksgiving and this year I'll have you as a buffer to listen to Jason complain about how none of the kids come close to how good he was when he played."

"Was he really that good?" I asked, unable to imagine him being able to focus long enough for an entire game to be played unless shit was involved.

"He was," she admitted ruefully. "It's a shame he blew out his knee. I don't know if he was good enough to go pro, but he'd been good enough that colleges were scouting him."

"That's too bad," I offered. I genuinely did feel bad for him, but there wasn't much more I could say about it so I grabbed a change of clothes and headed into the bathroom. When I came out a little while later I followed the heavenly aromas coming from the kitchen and got a good morning hug from Gran before finding Jason sitting on the couch with his head leaning back and his eyes closed. I bounced down on the cushion next to him and, a little louder than necessary, said, "Hey Jason!"

He proved his reflexes were still good when I was slammed with a pillow to the face a second later, but other than that he hadn't moved, so when I saw his cell phone lying on the coffee table, I picked it up and scrolled through his pictures, deleting the evidence of my late night encounter with the bathroom floor. Twitter was already outlawed by Pam and I was pretty sure she'd keep me from opening a Shitter account too, but I was sure I could think up an appropriate alias if he actually started up the site. While I had his phone I took the liberty of adding my cell phone number into his contacts and then sent a text to myself so I'd have his number and was in the process of returning it where I'd found it when he stirred.

"Cockblocker," he mumbled while opening one eye to glare at me.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, not sure how deleting pictures of me on a bathroom floor equated to cockblocking him.

"You, Mr. Sexiest Man Alive mother fucker." I still didn't have a clue what in the hell he was talking about since the only females around the two of us I could have possibly cockblocked him from were his grandmother and sister, but before I could come up with any disgusting 'Deliverance-like' thoughts, he thankfully continued on like he'd been in the middle of telling me a story. "So there I was, walkin' into the bar last night lookin' for a little holiday cheer when I spot a cute little brunette at the bar. I ain't never seen her 'round here before so I thought I'd gift her with a little bit a the Stackhouse charm."

When he paused for a minute too long and closed his eyes again, I'd wondered if he'd managed to charm himself back to sleep, but before I could nudge him awake he opened them, acting like he hadn't just paused for a full two minutes, and kept talking as though he'd never stopped. "At first, all she could talk about was her boyfriend. Said they was in love but he was married to some cow and she was stuck waitin' on him to get a divorce. I cain't figure for the life of me who it might be 'round here that would rate someone like her on the side, but I know she ain't from these parts since she talks like *you*."

His strengthened glare at me had me asking, "What?" wondering if he was somehow blaming me for her not falling for the 'Stackhouse charm' or for my lack of a southern accent.

"Well I tried to teach her my motto: 'If ya cain't be with the one ya love, love the one yer with', but she wasn't buyin' it... And Hell, it ain't no secret 'round here who my sister's married to so I shouldn't a been so surprised when all a the sudden *you're* all she could talk about. Eric this and



Eric that. 'What's he doin' and where's he goin'? Ain't he so fuckin' great?' Hell, by the way she was talkin', if I didn't know any better, I'd a thought *you* were the guy she was runnin' around with."

"What?" I repeated, ignoring the look in his eyes that told me I wouldn't be leaving Bon Temps alive had that been true. If anything, it only made me like him more.

"Ya heard me," he grumbled before leaning back and closing his eyes again. "Ya know, I told Sook last night that it would be great for y'all to move back here with the baby, but now I ain't so sure. At least if you two were still out in California I could lure 'em in with promises of goin' out there ta visit with me." One eye popped open briefly as he smiled, "Course that'd be a load a horseshit. Sook said you'd introduce me to yer old girlfriends if I came out so I won't be needin' to bring any company with me."

"She did?" I asked. I could care less if he fucked the whole lot of them, but it didn't sound like something Sookie would agree to (especially since she'd already encountered Yvetta), much less promise her brother something like that without talking to me about it first, but Jason just shrugged in response and closed his eyes again.

I didn't have long to think about it though because my attention was drawn to the stairs when I heard Sookie coming down them. Then my brain exploded.

"What are you wearing?" I asked hoarsely, even though I knew exactly what it was.

If I could make my eyes look at her face I was certain there would be at least a smirk there waiting for me, but they were too busy taking a path that started at her shoulders and moved down her bare legs before traveling back up to where they refused to move away from my BFF's.

"My high school cheerleading uniform," I heard her answer from above them.

*Sookie was a cheerleader?*

"Not really," she answered. Either she'd read my mind or I'd asked my BFF's the question out loud, but either way my brain was clouded once again, only this time with lust.

"Why?" Why was she wearing it? Why was she standing too far away for me to touch her? Why was she so cruel as to torture me with it when we were abstaining?

*Why were we abstaining?*

"Gran convinced me to try out for the team so I could make more friends. I was just an alternate on the squad and that was only because the other alternate broke her ankle trying to do a back flip the week before the season started, but really, the only thing I got out of the experience was this outfit."

I could vaguely see her lips moving in my peripheral, but honestly all I heard was 'blah blah blah' since the girls were practically screaming at me to save them from the tight fitting red and black sweater that was currently holding them hostage.

*Their yelling made my other head ache.*

"Why?" I repeated, wondering what her answer had been the first time while thinking she must be really pissed at me to torture me like she was.

"Well only the popular girls made the squad and I wasn't, so..." she trailed off.

"Huh?" I was having another pot and kettle moment having a hard time focusing myself (on her words anyway) and wasn't sure what she was talking about, but her girls were definitely popular with me. In an effort to regain some of my sanity I closed my eyes, but that only made it worse because then all I could picture was her naked.

*After all, it was the centerfold of my mind's Sookie shrine.*

I'd completely forgotten about Jason's presence next to me until I heard him say, "Nuh uh sister. Get yer ass back upstairs and throw on some pants 'cause there ain't no way we're leavin' the house with yer cooch one good sneeze away from givin' e'erbody a very *Happy* Thanksgiving."

On one hand I completely agreed with his assessment and wanted her to change, preferably into a snowsuit, because the caveman part of me said her body was for my eyes only, but on the other hand I wanted him to shut the fuck up because she was supplying me with hours of fantasy fueled fucking.

*But we were abstaining...*

I didn't even flinch, too far gone in my fantasy fucking, when Sookie's hands landed on her hips as she spat out, "Jason Stackhouse, you aren't my daddy and have no say in what I wear or don't wear."

*Bent over...skirt flipped up...nothing on underneath...*

*Who's your daddy...*

*Fuck...not helping.*

Not fucking was also not helping, nor did it help when she pranced (*She fucking pranced!*) over to me and sat on my lap, seeming to have a *hard* time getting comfortable from all of the squirming she was doing while running her fingers through my hair.

*I was having a hard time...*

"Do you like my outfit?" she asked coyly.

Like it? I *loved* that fucking outfit and I *do* mean *fucking* outfit because it was clearly made with fucking in mind, but we *weren't* fucking at the moment and no matter how much I felt my resolve crumbling, beaten down by the hammer in my pants, I reluctantly said, "I *do*." When she stuck her tongue out at Jason I quelled the urge to latch onto it with my mouth and added, "But I agree with Jason. I think you should change."

*Because if you don't I'll end up passing out soon from all of the blood in my body maintaining my now painful hard on.*

"Why?" she pouted. "I thought you liked it."

*Christ, she was going to be the death of me, but what a way to go...*

For some reason my mouth thought it was a good idea to attack hers and had my dick not been trapped by the denim surrounding it, it would've been pointing right at the source of my mouth's inspiration. Sookie did nothing to stop me and instead her hands grabbed onto the back of my head to hold me there as she put on her own offense in the battle we seemed to be waging. My hands joined in the melee and were sliding up her legs towards the hem of her skirt when the sound of Jason clearing his throat next to us brought me back to reality.

*We weren't alone.*

*Oh...And we weren't fucking.*

I didn't know whether to punch him or kiss him for bringing me back from the edge and managed to chuckle when he said, "I know yer married and all, but would ya mind not gropin' my baby sister in front a me?"

At the sound of Sookie sucking her teeth in exasperation I looked back at her and was able to see right through her quickly rearranged 'I'm so fucking innocent I'm a born again virgin' look. With my eyes narrowed at her, I accused, "She Devil."

"Who...me?" she asked innocently, batting her lashes at me and shifting her ass ever so slightly to rub against my dick.

"Sookie..." I warned, not exactly sure what I was threatening her with. The only two things I could come up with at the moment were fucking her until she couldn't walk straight or pushing her tempting ass off of me and onto the floor. Neither one of those was an acceptable punishment for the same reason; she was pregnant.

It turned out I didn't need to think of what to do because Jason decided for me when he grabbed onto her bare foot and started tickling her, saying, "Are you gonna change or am I gonna have to keep goin' until ya piss yerself and cain't wear it anyway?"

Sookie squealed and cursed, threatened and begged, all while I pretended I was blind and deaf to her struggles as my cock continued to try and break free from its denim prison. When she finally

gave in and ran upstairs to change, I tried to will my hard on away while making up a list of everyone I would introduce Jason to when he visited us in California.

*My dick was begrudgingly in his debt.*

Sookie ended up only putting on a pair of jeans, but it was cold enough that she wore a jacket over her temptingly tight sweater. It was just one more thing to be thankful for on the holiday of thanks and the three of us headed over to the high school while Gran stayed home saying it was too cold for her, but dinner would be ready by the time we got back. My stomach was rumbling from the moment I'd smelled the food cooking earlier, but I put off eating anything so I could make a pig of myself later on without feeling guilty. The closest I'd ever come to having a family Thanksgiving dinner was when my father decided to take me out to dinner when I was younger and he'd been in between girlfriends. He was never big on holiday traditions though, so when we ended up at a Chinese restaurant, I had to make do with ordering Peking duck instead of turkey. Somehow, even back then, I just knew it wasn't the same, so I was really looking forward to this year along with everything else I'd get to experience with, and thanks to, Sookie.

She hadn't been exaggerating about Jason's diatribe during the game, but at least he mixed it up with the occasional elbow to the ribs as he'd whisper conspiratorially to me pointing out whatever woman caught his eye. He got the hint that I had no interest when Sookie got up to get us some hot chocolate from the snack stand and I elbowed him, pointing at his baby sister, and said with a leer, "Look at the ass on *that one!*" I'd come to learn it was one of his favorite phrases and his eager eyes fell when he realized I was gawking at Sookie.

"That's just wrong man," he shook his head at me.

I shrugged my shoulders responding, "*That's* the only ass I'm interested in." It was a truthful statement and seeing the way her jeans encased it made my own jeans get tighter.

*Why were we abstaining?*

"It's a good thing too," he chuckled, "'cause it looks like the president of your fan club I met last night is headed towards her."

"Where?" I asked out of curiosity. The paparazzi, in my experience, were generally predominantly male, but that didn't mean some gossip reporter couldn't have followed us here. I wasn't worried about what they might see or hear, but I didn't want Sookie to get hounded either. We were there to relax.

"There," he pointed. "The brunette standing behind her in line."

There wasn't a so much a line as a mob, but thanks to the cold weather everyone was wearing hats and scarves. There were plenty of brunettes surrounding Sookie, but since they were all facing away from us I couldn't tell who he was talking about and I watched for a few more minutes when one of the heads behind Sookie turned and her eyes locked onto mine for the briefest of seconds. Bon Temps chose to score a touchdown at that same moment and the crowd

in the stands around us stood up to cheer, so by the time everyone settled down again Sookie was already making her way towards us, but I still had an eerie feeling that I'd seen that brunette before; I just couldn't place where or who she was. I tried to reason that maybe it was just another memory from when we'd last visited, but my thoughts were interrupted when Sookie passed around the Styrofoam cups of hot chocolate to Jason and I before settling herself in my lap, claiming the bench was too cold for her to sit on. With all of the squirming she did during the second half, my lower half was hot enough to warm the ten foot radius around us and it was all I could do to not take her back out to the parking lot where we could fool around in the backseat of the car in keeping with her cheerleader theme. The thought alone had me contemplating a possible indecent exposure charge knowing if I whipped Junior out now at least the cold air would have a chance at getting him to behave since my willpower at denying Sookie the sex she was angling for was taking a massive hit, even knowing every move she made was calculated while she tried to appear innocent.

The shifting of her ass; leaning in to whisper 'blah blah blah' (that's all I heard, anyway) into my ear, but when she turned and wrapped her arms around me, burying her face into my neck and claiming she was frozen only to start kissing and licking the spot of skin in front of her, I froze...and it wasn't due to the temperature.

*How the fuck could I be so pissed and turned on at the same time?*

I didn't know if I was pissed at her for torturing me or at myself for paving our own highway to hell with my choice, but all I could do was say, "Stop." I was happy it at least sounded more like a warning than a plea.

"Stop what?" she purred against my neck before lightly biting the skin there.

It sent chills straight down my spine and I wouldn't have been surprised if sparks had shot out of my dick thanks to her, but I gritted my teeth and answered, "Stop trying to seduce me. It won't work."

*And maybe if I say it another billion times I might actually start to believe it.*

"I'm not seducing," she lied. "I'm snuggling."

Her lie was of such epic proportions that conceivably her pants *could* now be on fire and I pondered if that might be the reason it was so hot down there. I chuckled despite not being sure if I wanted to wring her neck or my own for letting her get to me like she was. She was killing me slowly and I hated that I enjoyed it so fucking much.

"I'm not wearing boots," I said into the top of her head, with my lips kissing her hair, unable to not be affectionate with her whether or not she was killing me. My eyes landed on a stretch of yellow 'Caution' tape surrounding a broken section of the bleachers and my mind got busy wrapping that 'Caution' tape around Sookie's body as a warning to both myself and anyone else that dared to get too close. It would serve as a reminder to me, realizing it was only a matter of time before she got me to give up on my no nookie rule and that I'd have to be gentle with her

even though I felt like I could probably fuck her across the entire span of the football field at the moment, and to caution anyone else from getting too close to her because I'd probably end up killing the next son of a bitch that tried to hurt her.

"What does you're not wearing boots have to do with the fact that I'm snuggling?" she asked.

The sound of her voice halted my mind's progression where it had been slowly peeling away the 'Caution' tape at strategic points on my Sookie centerfold and I shook it off, answering, "Because the bullshit is getting so high around here that I should be wearing a pair of shit kickers for the occasion."

"Aww..." she giggled with her warm breath against my neck making me shiver again. "Poor...poor...poor...baby." She'd placed a trail of open mouthed kisses leading from my shoulder all the way up to my ear with every word she'd uttered and left my whole body vibrating underneath her.

She really was playing with fire and I decided to give her a taste of her own medicine. Knowing how much she hated being in the spotlight I turned, lightly gripping the back of her head in my hand, and whispered into her ear, "You. Need. To. Stop. Or else I'm going to drag you underneath the very bleachers we're sitting on and fuck you until you the whole town hears you screaming my name." I got myself a little worked up over the images I'd just painted and was a little hoarse when I asked, "Are you going to comply?"

Since they meant the same thing, I almost threw out the word 'obey' to really get a rise out of her, but her hormones made it too risky of a move. I wanted to shock her into letting up with her seduction plans, knowing she was quite vocal whenever we had sex and wouldn't want us to get caught, but I didn't want to risk truly upsetting her and possibly ruining the rest of the day, so I didn't know what to do when Sookie pulled back to look into my eyes and I didn't see shock or upset in them.

I saw lust. Lots and lots of lust and when she licked her lips before responding, "Okay," I'll admit, I was a little scared.

"Okay' you'll stop?" I hedged, adding a shitload of 'pretty pleases' in my mind.

She sucked her bottom lip in between her teeth as she shook her head 'no' and leaned back in, whispering, "'Okay' let's go underneath the bleachers and fuck until I scream out your name."

Her teeth tugged at the bottom of my earlobe as I released a shaky breath, saying, "But what if we get caught?" Somehow I'd managed to turn into the shy teenage girl with her being the pushy boyfriend.

*I was living the most fucked up after school special ever.*

Her tongue traced along the edge of my ear before she whispered, "We won't." Because she was still sitting in my lap, no one but me could tell that her hand had snaked in between us to further

torment my cock by trailing her fingers lightly across its denim hell. On the flipside I'm sure everyone around us knew something was going on when my hips bucked up into her hand all by themselves and she nearly toppled onto the people in the seats in front of us since neither one of us expected it. She apologized profusely to them and when she attempted to sit back down in my lap, I grabbed onto her hips and put her onto the bleacher next to me, knowing it wouldn't take much more teasing from her before I really did fuck her underneath the bleachers.

*Our after school special would definitely get an X rating.*

It all started with a look from Jason, whose existence I seemed to forget about whenever his sister chose to lead me around by the invisible leash she held tethered to my balls, that made Sookie giggle. The more she tried to suppress it the louder she got and it only stopped when Jason leaned in and whispered something in her ear. It was enough to make her slap him and turn beet red in the process, but she still looked amused so I was more curious than worried about whatever he'd said. The game had been coming to an end anyway, so I waited until we were finally in the car on the way home to ask, "What were you two whispering about?"

Jason was driving with me riding shotgun, so Sookie was alone in the backseat when she crossed her arms and huffed looking out the window. He just snickered watching her through the rearview mirror and said, "I told her that if she kept it up someone was gonna film it and stick it on the internet. 'Sookie Does Eric' was the workin' title, but it ain't no 'Jason and Eric's Excrement Adventure'." I shook my head remembering the night before and swallowed the urge to tell him about my 'Shitty Shitty Bang Bang' idea while Jason continued on, saying, "Besides, if she kept it up, Gran would be hearing all about it on the Fortenberry Morning News Report." He turned to wink at me, adding, "I know that firsthand havin' been newsworthy myself over the years. That old bat ain't got nuthin' better to do than to stick her nose in where it don't belong."

"You know Jason," Sookie spoke up from the backseat. "Maybe what she needs is a good stiff one." She mumbled out an, "I know I do," so low that I doubted Jason heard it, but continued on asking, "Why don't you stick one in her to see if it'll keep her nose where it does belong?"

Jason and I both shivered at the thought. He'd pointed her out during the game and when he'd said, 'Look at the ass on that one' in regards to her, I knew it wasn't meant as a compliment.

"Keep it up and I'll tell Gran your suggestion along with how you was tryin' to show off your baby makin' skills in the middle of a high school football game. I swear, if you try and make me upchuck my Thanksgiving dinner, it's *on* baby sister." They glared at each other through the mirror all the way back to the farmhouse while I tried to become a part of the upholstery. I knew what Sookie's problem was because we shared the same frustration. We both needed sex. The releases we'd had the night before was enough to take the edge off for now, but we'd been voracious up until the day we'd run to Dr. Ludwig's office when we were afraid we might lose the baby. We both knew our relationship was more than just great sex; I loved her and she loved me, but...well, the sex really was great. And our bodies had become accustomed to getting that from one another and now that wasn't happening and hadn't happened in days.

*Four days, but who's counting?*

That doesn't seem like a very long time and I know we'd gone longer, but I'd been in a coma for all of it so it didn't count. Having sex only twice in one day qualified as a 'slow day' in our book and Sookie's horny hormones only added to her quick igniting temper. With all of the chemistry we had between us it was just a matter of time before one of us exploded; verbally or physically, but I couldn't help feeling worried despite knowing all of that; worried for our baby and worried that my lack of self-control with her would somehow be our downfall.

My worries and their non-fight were quickly forgotten when we walked through the door and saw the dining room table had been covered by every conceivable side dish I could imagine, all of them surrounding a giant turkey.

"Gran, you should've waited for us. We would've helped you set the table with everything," Sookie called out as she walked into the kitchen looking for her.

I couldn't imagine what else there could possibly be missing from the table for her to still be in the kitchen, but Jason and I quickly washed up and sat down at the table. When Gran and Sookie came out and we all joined hands while Gran led us in a prayer, I couldn't quite figure out what it was I was feeling until it was my turn to say what I was thankful for. Everyone else had gone before me with Gran saying she was thankful for her great-grandbaby that was on the way; Sookie was thankful for me and that Jason was close enough for her to kick when all he'd been thankful for was that we could finally eat when everybody stopped 'yappin', but as I looked around at the people surrounding me, I knew.

Clearing my throat and swallowing the hitched breath that threatened to come out, I said, "I'm thankful for all of you; my family." Truer words had never been spoken. It was all too easy to remember the times when I'd been, not lonely, but just alone. While I was close to Pam and even, to some extent, Alcide, for the most part it had always just been me, myself, and I. According to my therapy sessions, it had been the root cause of my bad choices. Cocaine had given me the high I'd wanted to feel and it let me hide my vulnerabilities and insecurities away from people like my father who only found worth in me based on the amount of money and success I attained. I could see it now that I had some distance from it, but it was only because of the woman sitting at my side.

Even with my undesirable past, I now believed a higher power saw fit to put Sookie in my path. They'd even known me well enough to make sure I was bound to her legally when I couldn't even see straight and then kept her there in front of me until she was all I could see. Our baby, conceived on our wedding night, bound us together for the rest of our lives and there were no words that could describe just how thankful I was for that, but thanks to a drunken night in Vegas I also had a grandmother that worried about me; a brother that made me laugh and a wife I loved more than anything else. It almost felt greedy to hope we'd all be sitting at that very same table the following year with our son or daughter there to add one more thing for me to be thankful for, but I hoped for it anyway.

The sound of Sookie's sniffles brought me out of my thoughts and she giggled when I pulled a tissue out of my pocket to hand her. It had become a recent habit of mine to be prepared because it was impossible to predict when her tears might make an appearance, but even though I knew



they were mostly hormone induced, it didn't make me feel any better seeing them. I was pretty sure I knew the answer before asking the question and leaned over placing a soft kiss on her cheek, whispering, "Happy or sad?"

She turned and grabbed onto my face before I could pull back and gave me a gentle kiss on the lips, answering, "Happy."

*Good, I'd hate to be the only one.*

There was no way the four of us could possibly eat the amount of food Gran had prepared, but good God we certainly tried. Jason and I were in a dead heat when it came to the turkey, but it was the mashed potatoes and biscuits that did me in. I'd even earned a shake of his head with him calling me a lightweight (apparently it was a second occurrence) as he told me I should've waited and ate them last because of how they would fill me up. Of course that didn't stop either one of us from eating a slice of all three of the pies Gran had made and at the end of the night, when Sookie and I crawled into bed, I found one last thing to be thankful for;

Tryptophan.

Sookie was out like a light the minute her head touched the pillow, but even if she'd stayed awake long enough to try and seduce me again, I would've been too full to perform. I was almost disgusted by the amount of food I'd eaten, but I'd loved every last bite too much to care and fell asleep curled around the one and a half members of my family I was the most thankful for.

The next two days passed by in a blur of running around and a near constant food haze thanks to Gran's affinity for cooking. While I loved being close to Sookie and we generally slept pressed against one another normally, that twin-sized bed in her bedroom was fucking ridiculous. My feet hung over the edge whenever I laid flat and brought with it taunts from my loving wife with offers to paint my body green before I go off to gather the vegetables I canned and sold at supermarkets. She wasn't feeling so jolly that night when she told me her inner balls were turning blue when I kept our kissing and touching to a PG-13 rating. She was exaggerating anyway. I'd done numerous and thorough checks of every part of her body that I could reach with the tools I was born with and the only balls I'd ever come across were mine when they slapped against her. Of course mine were also blue and thoughts of them slapping against her bare skin didn't help matters, but really I was just waiting until we got home. I knew I was no match for her powers of persuasion and it was just a matter of time. I'd force myself to be gentle for her then, but that didn't mean I couldn't keep tormenting her in the meantime.

I'd learned my lesson well from the 'tough shit' incident a few weeks earlier when Pam first saw Sookie's new car, so when Gran balked at the idea of us buying new furniture for her house, I had no problems giving her my puppy dog eyes while talking about how uncomfortable Sookie's old bed was for a man of my size. Even though it was true, I may have played it up more than necessary and could see a bit of Sookie's stubbornness in Gran's eyes, but the nurturer in her wouldn't let her argue with me over it. It took a little more coaxing for her to agree to let us replace all of her kitchen appliances and most of the living room furniture since all of it was older than Jason. Gran just wanted to keep the sentimental pieces, but I knew none of it would've

happened if I hadn't been able to get Sookie on board a couple of weeks earlier where our finances were concerned.

They were ours; end of story.

Her name had already been added to all of my accounts weeks before she ever agreed to use them and she couldn't even get mad at me when she found out I'd done it after I told her it was in case anything happened to me, I didn't want her to have to worry about contacting lawyers or accountants in order to take care of herself and the baby. I could tell something shifted for her then, but it wasn't until she had her direct deposit changed over to our joint account that I knew she'd really accepted it. I wouldn't have cared if she'd chosen to keep her paychecks going to her old accounts; I just didn't want her to have to use her money on things like groceries or anything else for that matter, but now that she'd come to accept it all, poor Gran didn't stand a chance against the two of us.

It was with heavy hearts and full stomachs when we bid them farewell that Sunday morning. We both had work the following day and there were tears shed by everyone, some more than others, but Sookie was calmed down by the time we reached the airport. It was crowded with everyone else trying to fly back from the holiday, so when I turned back to look out over the crowded terminal right as we were boarding our plane, I almost didn't notice her.

*Almost.*

My mind went into overdrive trying to think of how it was that I knew the brunette I'd seen at the football game and again just moments ago, but it stayed just out of reach. *The tip of my tongue*, I thought which made me realize I'd never asked Jason what her name was. Thinking that could be the key to unlocking the mystery, I sent him off a quick text message asking him about her as soon as we were in our seats and then tried convince myself to take a nap instead of thinking about how many ways I could *gently* fuck Sookie in the bathroom as soon as we reached cruising altitude. I'd seen her pack her cheerleader outfit when we were getting ready to leave and knew my nonexistent willpower was toast the minute I saw her in it again, but just as I was about to turn my phone off for the flight Jason finally responded. Hindsight was truly a bitch because had I known, I would've waited until we'd landed to read it knowing I'd never be able to nap now that it finally all clicked into place.

*Her name's DEBRA. Got all kinds a pissed at me when I called her Debbie. Said only her boyfriend got to call her that. Why?*

Why indeed...

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**Chapter 95: Chapter 92**

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Chapter 92

## SPOV

Normally I was the one turning pale white on a flight, but Eric beat me to it making me ask, "What's wrong?"

He stared at his phone oblivious to everything around him until the flight attendant managed to get his attention, telling him he had to turn it off and put it away, before he finally turned to me still deep in thought, asking, "What?"

"What's wrong?" I repeated and reached over to brush the hair out of his eyes. I'd take cranky-frustrated-overprotective Eric any day over the one in front of me now. He seemed lost and confused, not unlike that day he'd woken up from his coma, and it was starting to scare me.

Eventually his eyes focused on mine and softened as he mimicked my gesture, tucking my hair behind my ear, and said, "Nothing."

My mouth opened, prepared to call him on his bullshit, but the sound of the captain's voice over the PA system made it shut again and the first half of our flight was filled with Eric's attempts to distract me with everything from books and snacks to his lips on mine. My overactive libido didn't help matters and was only too happy to let him distract away, so it wasn't until we finally had to pull away from each other or else risk giving everyone in first class a show that I calmed down enough to ask, "What had you so bothered before takeoff?"

When his hand dove for my thigh I swatted it away before he could get me going again and he slumped down in his seat, sighing, "Do you remember me telling you about the woman that showed up at the house on the day that I tried cooking Coq Au Vin?" I'd forgotten all about her until he'd mentioned it again and nodded my reply while swallowing the urge to tease him about the fire department showing up that day because it would only lead to thoughts of Eric dressed as a fireman...with his hose out...dousing the fire between my legs...

*See?*

*Stupid oversexed pregnancy brain.*

I squirmed in my seat involuntarily at just the thought, but his next words shocked me back into the present. "She was in Bon Temps." At my dumbfounded expression he added, "And at the airport just now when we boarded."

"What?" I asked in disbelief. "How? Why?" Thinking there had to be more to the story, I asked, "Is she....you know, one of your past flings?"

The thought that one of his previous fuck buddies had come back into his life made my old insecurities flare and my stomach pitch, but his expression put me at ease as he declared, "No! I never saw her before that day. She'd even said that we'd never met before when she introduced herself, so I'm guessing we hadn't met during those three weeks I can't remember either."

I remembered him saying that same thing at the time and started digging into my purse, looking for my cell phone, as I said, "We need to call the police."

Eric's hand stilled mine as he said, "Sookie, we're thirty thousand feet up in the air over who knows what state. Besides, I don't think there's much that can be done. She only approached me the one time so I doubt I can get a restraining order yet."

I suddenly understood how Eric could get his hackles raised so easily over keeping me safe. In that moment all I wanted to do was lock him away from everyone and everything. If she was psycho enough to follow him from L.A. to Bon Temps, there was no telling what she was capable of. While I was making mental lists that involved bodyguards and head to toe Kevlar the sound of Eric sighing got my attention as he added, "She met up with Jason when he went to the bar the night before Thanksgiving too."

"What?" I screeched, not giving a single fuck that I was now causing a scene. Not only did she follow my husband halfway across the country, but she was sidling up to my brother, the Shitter mogul, too?

"Calm down," he said while wrapping his arm around me. "Stress isn't good for the baby. I'll call my private investigator when we get home and see if he can dig up anything on her. Hopefully she's just a harmless fan with a little too much time on her hands."

I tried to formulate a shitty response in 160 characters or less, but decided I would tell Jason he'd have to come up with a ShitLonger website since I couldn't pare it down and asked, "Private investigator? To hell with that, you need to hire those bodyguards you were talking about, only for you instead of me." Eric just rolled his eyes at my perfectly sound idea, but the last thirty seconds of our conversation finally clicked in my head and I repeated, "Private investigator? Why would you already have a private investigator?"

He blanched again and suddenly became very interested in everything that didn't have to do with answering my question. With my eyes staring a hole into the side of his head, I nudged him making him finally lean closer to me and whisper, "I hired him to look for my mother years ago."

Oh. I knew how painful that time was for him, so I wasn't going to dwell on it and for the rest of the flight I flip flopped between being panicked and calm with Eric trying to soothe my frayed nerves. By the time our flight landed, I nearly gave myself whiplash eying every brunette I could see and then pointing them out one by one asking Eric if they were his stalker. None of them were and on the drive home he said I was overreacting when I suggested getting a sketch artist to draw a picture of her. I wasn't overreacting; I wanted to know whose ass I was going to have to kick and I didn't think it was too much to ask.

We were barely in the door when I followed him up into our bedroom with our luggage and demanded he call the private investigator, listening as he described the details and only then hearing for the first time about the conversation the crazy bitch had with Jason. As soon as he hung up, I said in a detached voice, "She thinks you're her boyfriend."

Eric slumped down on the bed running his hands through his hair and sighed, "It sounds like it."

"And she's waiting for you to get divorced," I added.

His eyes locked onto mine as he emphatically said, "That'll never happen."

I could feel my face flushing with anger, not even caring about the part where she called me a 'cow', but never once doubting the veracity of his claim that they'd never met before. What pissed me off was the fact that it seemed everyone was out to get us. From the paparazzi to crazed stalkers, no one would ever leave us alone. I couldn't help it when I fell in love with Eric, but I had no grasp of what a life with him would entail. We would never have any privacy. We would never be able to go anywhere without looking over our shoulders. Being with Eric was my only out of this world dream growing up. Other than that, I'd just wanted the simple things in life; a husband, family, and career that I loved. Crazy amounts of money and fame were never on my wish list, but it seemed I couldn't have one without the other. How were we supposed to raise a family in that kind of insanity? What if she tried to hurt him? What if she, or some other crazy person, tried to hurt our baby?

I hadn't realized my fingernails were digging into my palms until Eric came to stand in front of me and pried them apart, saying, "Calm down Sookie."

I could no longer distinguish between my own feelings and the ones brought on by the pregnancy, but I didn't really give a shit at the moment and said, "No! I won't calm down! This is all bullshit! What if she hurts you? She's already under the delusion that she's your mistress, so what's to stop her from pulling a Kathy Bates and kidnapping you; tying you to her bed and breaking your ankles with a mallet if you tried to escape?"

*I was fond of those ankles damn it and if he was going to be tied down to any bed, it would be ours!*

Mischief lit up in his eyes and he grinned, saying, "Well, I *was* named sexiest man alive five mother fucking times." He took a step back and sighed dramatically, adding, "You can't really blame her. I mean, who could resist me?"

I didn't want to smile at his egotistical joke because I wasn't done being pissed off yet, but like he'd just pretty much said, he was irresistible.

*Damn him!*

Giving him my best stern face, I asked, "Have you ever thought about being in a superhero movie? You could be Ego Man with your arrogance sucking the oxygen from the room making the bad guys pass out."

A leer I'd seen many times over the last few weeks came on his face and he whipped his shirt off as he pressed his body against mine, asking, "Are you saying I have a *big head*?" He pressed his *other* big head against my front, but my eyes were too busy tracing his Pecs and abs to notice his

hands had undone the button on his low rise jeans until it seemed as though they'd magically disappeared, with my second favorite muscle of his coming into view.

*His ass was still my favorite though.*

The more I stared at it the larger it got, much like his ego, and I half wondered if that was my own super power; engorging dicks with my stare alone until the owner lost consciousness. I guess I'd know if Eric passed out, but I refused to be swayed, even while his hands started removing my clothes. I batted them away, saying, "Eric! I'm serious! We're not done talking about this!"

Undeterred, Eric gently nudged my body backwards toward the bed until the backs of my legs were pressed against the mattress and he grabbed the hem of my shirt, pulling it up over my head, as he said with a smirk, "Fine. Talk away."

My lips were barely open to continue my rant when he stole it, and every other thought in my head, away with a kiss.

*Whatever it was, I was sure it had been important.*

"Eric, I..." His lips pressed down harder against my own silencing whatever it was I was about to say, not that I could remember what it was anymore. My God, that man's lips would be the death of me, but oh, what a way to go. I had no idea if it was just a God given talent or thanks to his considerable experience that helped him perfect the art of kissing, but I didn't care. It almost seemed selfish of me to keep him all to myself because his lips could end of wars, but he was mine and I wasn't about to share him with anyone, much less some crazy psycho bitch trailing after him like a vulture.

I felt my pants fall down around my ankles and the girls being freed from my bra seconds later with Eric spinning my body so that his front was pressed against my back. My ass pushed back against him as one of his hands settled on my breast while the other one slid down my front and dipped into my panties. I was never 'not in the mood' around him, so I was surprised when he said in a husky voice, "You're already so wet for me, lover."

*Duh!*

Half of me wondered if his amnesia had spread to his memories after the accident, if that surprised him, while the other half wondered what happened to his stance that there'd be no Eric/Sookie nookie (unless I got him drunk first), but those thoughts disappeared right along with my panties as he bent me over the bed and nudged my legs farther apart while he growled out, "It's been too long...I can't wait..." I felt him place a soft kiss on the middle of my back and heard him whisper, "I'll make love to you later, I promise." His voice took a decidedly harder edge, as did his kiss when he lightly bit down on the skin in front of his lips, and he added, "But right now, I need to fuck you."

"Fuck!" I gasped as I felt him slide into me. It wasn't a question; a chastisement; it was total agreement. Fucking sounded really good to me and felt even better. He was right; it had been too long and I was grateful he wasn't making me wait any longer than necessary. The last week had been torture, but now that he and the Kraken were back where they belonged, all was right in the world, at least for the moment. There were no paparazzi or crazy stalkers, it was just me and him, and I let all of my worries go as Eric made sure I could think of nothing but him.

For all of his 'fuck' talk, he was surprisingly gentle at first, slowly working himself in and out of me. It was pure bliss and my head fell forward onto the mattress while I enjoyed nothing more than the feeling of him inside of me, but as his pace slowly started to increase, so did the tension coiling in my lower half and I managed to crawl up onto the mattress with Eric's help, bracing myself on my hands and knees, so the differences in our height wouldn't be an obstacle.

"Fuck..." he whispered when I presented myself to him like a cat in heat.

When he took a moment too long admiring the view, I arched my back as far as I could and said, "Exactly; now get back to it."

A wicked smirk came onto his face as he accused, "Bossy," and slid right back where he belonged. Our sextivities had been limited when Eric was still in his cast with me on top the majority of the time, like a country song trying to save a horse by riding my cowboy, but now that he was fully mobile again I intended on reaping the benefits before my growing belly put a damper on things. Thanks to the position we were in Eric was hitting not only my G-spot, but my H, I, and J spots too making my body spasm spastically in front of him like I'd been tasered. My arms had long since given up on keeping my upper half upright and had it not been for Eric holding up my hips, I would've been sprawled across the mattress. I'm sure if he hadn't been making my body sing the ABC's, I would've been embarrassed by my reactions to it all, but I couldn't be bothered thanks to the orgasm that ripped out of my body from my toes all the way out of my mouth in a horribly inelegant grunt filled scream.

"Beautiful," he purred from behind me with one of his hands leaving my hips to trail a line through the sweat glistening across my back.

Every nerve ending I had felt electrified and I involuntarily twitched at his gentle caress while I snorted at his appraisal. He'd slowed his pace for a moment to allow my body time to come back down from Mount Climax, but as soon as my eyes were able to focus again, he picked up his pace, saying, "We're not done yet."

"You're the bossy one," I huffed out, but my giggle gave me away. Eric's free hand slid from my back to my front and pulled my body upright and resting on my knees with him still inside of me. From our position on the bed, our reflection in the mirror above the dresser was directly in front of us and my breath caught in my throat seeing it.

My hair was plastered to the side of my head where it had been pounded into the mattress and my skin was flush with color, but my eyes could only focus on Eric. His eyes were trailing along our reflected forms and his left hand moved to my breast while his right slid down to where we

were joined. I gasped from the loss as he slid out of me only to thrust himself up through my folds while he said, "Do you see what you do to me?"

"Yes," I whispered hoarsely.

*A blind man could see THAT.*

He continued to tease me by sliding against my skin with his hand bearing down on himself providing additional pressure. My lust ratcheted up a notch seeing Eric touching himself so intimately, but I felt jealous at the same time and pushed his hand away, replacing it with my own. He hissed at the contact and bucked harder against me while I smiled knowing I affected him just as much as he affected me and closed my eyes to become temporarily blind myself, 'reading' the braille sliding across my fingertips.

*I wasn't at all surprised that it was nothing but dirty-talk.*

It wasn't long before the cock tease became too much for me to handle and I tried to slip him back inside of me, but he thwarted my efforts.

"Eric..." I whined, pushing my ass back against him as my eyes popped open. "You said we weren't done," I added grumpily. I sure as hell wasn't done and I knew he wasn't either. I didn't even care about how pitiful I looked with my lower lip pouting out like a child being told I couldn't have a cookie.

*But I didn't want a cookie; I wanted nookie.*

"Now who's bossy?" he chuckled, biting down on where my shoulder met my neck as he thrust back inside of me.

I would've glared at him if my eyes hadn't crossed and his fingertip finding my clit only made my forgiveness that much more hurried; just like my rapidly building second climax. My arms flung out at my sides seeking something to hold onto with my hands grasping nothing but air as my lips cried out Eric's name over and over.

"Look at us lover," he demanded into my ear and nipped at my skin.

My eyes uncrossed at his command and found Eric's eyes in the mirror across from us which were staring lower down our bodies. I stared unabashedly, watching as Eric thrust in and out of me while his hands played my body like a fiddle and I felt him swell even larger inside of me as he snarled into my ear, "Cum. Now!" He'd punctuated his words with a much more forceful thrust of his hips and I had no choice but to obey Mr. Bossy-No-Pants.

A sobbing cry left my lips as I fell apart with my second orgasm and Eric followed right behind me with a strangled roar. His knees started to buckle and we both fell forward onto the mattress while we tried to catch our breath. He'd moved to my side so I wouldn't be crushed underneath



him and when my heart rate slowed to near normal I turned to see Eric looking just as dazed as I felt. It irked me a little that he looked even sexier with his disheveled hair and sweaty skin.

*Five times, mother fucker. Five times, indeed.*

Well, since I was going to be a mother and he was the cause of that, and he'd already fucked me twice, I figured he owed me at least three more and set about settling our debt.

*Eric always paid his debts in full; even imaginary ones.*

Monday brought with it a return to normalcy, at least what was normal for us, with each of us going back to work. Eric hadn't heard back from the private investigator yet, but I was still feeling a little anxious about it all. I felt like we were being hunted by an invisible predator and I hated feeling helpless. I may have hated the paparazzi circus that seemed to spring up everywhere, but at least we knew they were there. They didn't lurk in dark corners, behind bushes, or in small town bars in Louisiana spouting off crazy talk to my half-witted brother. I wanted to track down this Debbie Pelt person and smack some sense into her.

*That was a lie; I just wanted to smack her.*

I knew it made me a bad Christian, but I couldn't help it. My protective instincts were on overdrive at the thought of anyone trying to hurt Eric or the baby and if I dwelled on it for too long, I could feel the anger pulsing through my body to the point where I was surprised sparks didn't shoot out of my fingertips.

*I hoped it would happen so I could give Debbie Pelt the shock of her life.*

I forced away all thoughts of crazy stalkers by the time the first bell rung on Monday morning and I'd noticed during the class I had Tara in that she seemed a little more standoffish than normal. I let her be figuring she might have just been having a bad day, but when her mood hadn't improved by Tuesday I couldn't hold my tongue any longer. She rolled her eyes at me one too many times during class, so when she did it again as I welcomed everyone back at rehearsal after school, asking how their Thanksgiving holiday was, I asked, "Tara? Is there something you'd like to say?"

"No," she huffed, crossing her arms across her chest.

I didn't need to be a mind reader to know she was lying and prodded her further, asking, "So, how was your Thanksgiving?"

She snorted angrily, asking, "Does Wild Turkey count? 'Cause that's the only turkey that was in my house."

*Shit.*

I immediately felt guilty. Thanks to Mr. Beck, I'd known that Tara's mother was an alcoholic, but I'd been so wrapped up in Eric, the baby, and just life, that it never even crossed my mind that any of my students wouldn't be able to celebrate the holiday because of their circumstances at home. She must've seen the remorse in my eyes and mistook it for pity because she immediately snapped, "Don't look at me like that. I wasn't expecting any different anyhow."

"Tara," I said softly, "clearly, you're upset. I'm sorry that..."

My anxiety was kicking up a notch with this very scenario being the epitome of my nightmares as she cut me off, while the other students stood wide-eyed at our escalating, now heated, discussion, saying, "That shit ain't what pisses me off. I don't live in no fairy tale thinkin' a big ass turkey with all the fixin's is gonna fix my fucked up life. YOU are what pisses me off!"

"Me?" I shrieked, with my tone and voice level now matching hers.

"Yes, you!" she spat back angrily. "What are you doing here?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, completely confused. "It's Tuesday. We always have rehearsals on Tuesday."

She rolled her eyes for the thousandth time, explaining, "What are you doing *here*; in *this* school; in *this* neighborhood? You lucked out and married some hotshot movie star, so it ain't like you need the money and as far as I can tell, you ain't performing any court ordered community service, so what in the hell are you doing here? Shouldn't you be out shopping on Rodeo Drive or some shit?"

The timidity I'd thought I would feel if I was confronted by one of my students never surfaced and instead I felt nothing but indignation. I'd gotten enough grief from Eric, and then Pam, and I wasn't about to be bullied by some teenager with a chip on her shoulder. My brain was nothing but a red swirling haze and I stupidly answered, "I work here!"

"No shit!" she replied just as angrily. "*WHY* do you work here? You obviously don't feel comfortable enough to wear whatever humungous diamond ring he must've bought you thinking one of us is gonna rob you and you couldn't be bothered to come in for more than one day last week when you probably jetted off to Hawaii or some shit for the weekend, so why are you even bothering with us? You should just quit so we can get someone in here that isn't too busy being some rich and famous guy's wife, easing her guilty conscience by *sometimes* coming to work in the 'hood."

My anger surpassed the internal red line that I thought was my limit and exploded into the room. In one angry tirade Tara managed to bring back everything I'd stupidly worried about at the beginning of my relationship with Eric; being thought of as a gold digger, but I was secure in not just my relationship with Eric, but in my place at his side now and would be damned if I was going to listen to anyone say otherwise. My voice got dangerously low as I took a step forward and everyone took a step back, including Tara, as I said, "I *did* luck out. I married the man of my dreams and for some reason he loves me just as much as I love him. This," I took off my

wedding band and whipped my tattooed finger in front of her face, "is the only ring he bought me when we got married and it's the only one I want. I didn't marry some *hot shot rich and famous movie star*," I seethed. "I married Eric Northman, the man. Everything else that comes with it; the fame; the money; is more nightmare than dream. We can't do anything or go anywhere without it being news. He's got demented stalkers following him halfway across the country. His own parents only want him for his money, but me? I. Could. Care. Less. I grew up just as poor as the rest of you and I worked for everything I ever got. I only got to go to college thanks to getting good enough grades to earn a scholarship and if Eric didn't have a penny to his name, I still would've married him." Of course I left out the part that Jose Cuervo played in matchmaking. "Giving me his love and affection are what makes me wealthy. No amount of money can top that." I'd been stalking towards her during my rant until she was finally pressed against the stage with nowhere else to go, so I took a step back, along with a deep breath, and announced to the room, "As for last week? When I left here on Monday afternoon I fell." Looking at all of the faces staring back at me, I explained, "I'm pregnant and there was some bleeding, so the doctor recommended I take it easy for the rest of the week. That's why I wasn't here." I knew it was only a matter of time before the pregnancy made its way to the public and felt comfortable sharing the news now that Gran knew.

I admittedly saw a lot of myself in Tara, especially in the stubborn set of her jaw, so I wasn't surprised when it jutted out as she asked in a much calmer tone, "But why are you here?"

My eyes stared back at her and I could see the little girl hiding behind the tough exterior. While we had underprivileged childhoods in common, I was fortunate enough to have had a loving caregiver in Gran and Bon Temps was considered safe enough that people rarely locked their front doors.

*If I didn't know any better, I'd think Eric was born and raised there.*

I wanted to wrap my arms around her; I wanted to somehow protect her from everything that ailed her, but I knew that would be pushing my luck, so instead I merely tucked some stray hair behind her ear and smiled softly, asking, "Why wouldn't I be?"

It took a moment, but the tension eventually dropped from the room and her shoulders relaxed with her eyes staring down at her feet before finally coming back up to meet mine. A small smile played on her lips while she just shrugged in response before asking, "Should I head on down to Mr. Beck's office?"

I didn't care about her mouthy retorts and I certainly couldn't throw stones where vulgar language was concerned. I may have viewed it differently if we'd been in the middle of class, but it was enough for me to know that we'd made some sort of progress and instead of beating a dead horse, I mimicked her shrug, asking, "Why would you do that?" I turned to the rest of the students staring at us and clapped my hands together once, saying, "Alright, this show's over, but we have another one to get ready for, so let's get to work."

But, I had a feeling the hard work was already done.

Chapter 93

**EPOV**

When the taping ran long on Tuesday night, I ended up working later than I'd planned, so I wasn't surprised to find Sookie dozing on top of the bed covers when I got home that night. There was a basket of folded laundry at her side, so I guessed that had been her last chore for the night whether she'd planned to do more or not. The stubborn woman that she was, I still hadn't been any closer to convincing her we should hire help for around the house, but now that I'd met her Gran, again, and knew what she was like, I planned on recruiting her as my ally in my quest to get Sookie to take it easy. She might be able to tell me no, but I was willing to bet one stern look from Gran would have her caving quicker than me when I'd been on the verge of being Pam'd in the past.

*If I had to, I'd figure out a way to have Jason put Gran on Skype, even if I had to become the first Shitter investor.*

I could tell by the way her hair was pinned up and the light cherry-almond scent wafting around her that she'd soaked in the bathtub at some point that evening and was sorry I'd missed out, but finding her wearing nothing but a robe wasn't a bad consolation prize. I'd been a fool to think that I could hold back from having sex with her until the baby was born and when she started freaking out in our bedroom on the night we'd returned from Louisiana, my goal had to be distract her with sex by making love to her. Little did I know that as soon as I saw, and then felt, her bare skin against my own, it would be my own undoing and I was just grateful that I hadn't hurt her when my primal instincts took over with fucking taking precedence over loving.

*But, I DID love her.*

And it was ridiculous just how much I missed her whenever she wasn't around. Rationally, I knew that we'd only be apart for a few hours; couples parted ways every day to go about their normal lives, but every time I watched Sookie walk out the door I'd feel the ache start to build up in my chest that wouldn't vanish until she was with me again. If she'd let me, I'd chain her to my side always; literally, but I knew I couldn't.

*When did I turn into such a pussy?*

*Maybe I'd get her a kitten for Christmas so I wouldn't be the only pussy in the house.*

I shook off my thoughts and grabbed the basket from the bed, putting the clothes away in our closet and found myself smiling like an idiot because her clothes were next to mine.

*Meow.*

For no one's benefit but my own, I silently formed the fingers of my hand into an 'L' shape and held it against my forehead in the universal 'Loser' sign with a sigh before stripping out of my clothes and stepping into the shower. I closed my eyes as the water ran down my body and my thoughts wandered to how everything in my life had changed so much in such a small time frame. It wasn't that I was unhappy about the changes, I wouldn't go back to my life before Sookie for anything, I was just flummoxed over how much my priorities had shifted, literally overnight. Before she'd come into my life the one thing I wanted most was to be on top; *the* actor every director sought out for their films. I wanted everyone to know my name and to see my work; I wanted awards and validation from the public; validation that I'd craved but never truly received from the people in my private life, but now none of that seemed as important to me anymore. I still enjoyed acting, but my true happiness lied with Sookie and the life she'd given me. While she'd made jokes about wanting me to be her house husband in the past, the idea was starting to sound more appealing with every passing day. Having spent close to a whole week with her where we were never apart only made any separation now that much worse. I should've been grateful for the small time apart, but I wasn't. I hated it and time was growing short for me to decide what I wanted to do. My contract for the sitcom would be up once the season was over and I still had to come to a decision on whether or not I still wanted to be in Victor Madden's movie with Sophie Ann. According to Pam, I'd taken off as soon as I'd heard Sookie had been in an accident, so even though the part was mine for the taking, nothing had been decided; no contracts had been signed. Pre-Sookie, I would've given my left nut to be in that movie, but I wasn't so sure now. I'd have to leave for weeks at a time. Parts of the movie were being shot on location in Sweden and Denmark and while I was sure Sookie would love to explore it all with me, the filming schedule would have us there during the late stages of her pregnancy and I doubted she would want to be so far away from home just then.

*Home...*

Undoubtedly, my home was wherever Sookie was, but Los Angeles was the only area I'd ever called home. I'd been around the world, seen many places most others could only dream of, but spending those few short days in Bon Temps had opened my eyes to a whole new world of possibilities. I'd liked the small town atmosphere. I'd liked that everyone knew each other and not just in a superfluous 'I've seen your work' sort of way around Hollywood. It seemed like the perfect place to settle down and raise a family. I'd noticed that the house next door to Gran's was for sale and Sookie had told me it had been empty for years after the previous owner had passed away. We'd walked by it one afternoon and I'd been surprised it was still standing given the state of disrepair, but Sookie had mentioned she'd loved the old southern style of it and hearing her then had planted the seed that was now starting to bloom with my own uncertainty about our future. Not our future *together*, but what lied in store for us after the baby was born.

*Did I want to raise our child under the spotlight we'd never be able to escape from living in L.A.?*

*Would we be able to shelter it from the trappings of being raised under an umbrella of fame of fortune?*

I seriously didn't want to spawn the future generation of Paris Hiltons, especially after all of the mistakes I'd made in my own youth, but it seemed so easy for children of celebrities and means to fall down the rabbit hole.

*Maybe I could convince Sookie we didn't need to actually cut the umbilical cord once it was born?*

I eventually shook off my thoughts when I realized my hands were pruned from being in the shower for so long. The tankless water heater assured the water would never run cold, but I still hurried to finish up my shower so I could find the peace I needed, which was lying asleep only a few feet away.

I didn't bother to dress; a pair of pajama pants would only be a hindrance later on and now that I knew I wouldn't hurt Sookie or the baby if things got a little heated at some point, I'd adopted the 'less is more' attitude; less clothing equaled more opportunities for sex.

Sookie still tossed and turned in her sleep whenever I wasn't there to keep her still and her robe had come loose while I'd been in the shower, only staying on around her shoulders from her arms being trapped in their sleeves and leaving me with the view of her perfect naked form. She'd been complaining about her clothes not fitting right anymore and fretting over every pound she gained, even though it was to be expected, but she looked perfect to me. Her baby bump was more noticeable without her clothes on and I gently crawled up alongside of her, pressing my lips against her belly button and whispering, "Daddy's home."

I'd watched the video Dr. Ludwig had given us of Sookie's ultrasound too many times to count, but it had yet to get old. I'd memorized every bounce it had made on that heart stopping day and even though Sookie had yet to actually feel its movements inside of her, I had no doubts it was bouncing around at that very moment.

*Just like its mother who at that very moment smacked me in the head with a flailing arm in her sleep before settling her hand in my hair and quieting down again.*

"Did you see that Bean?" I asked her belly, full of mock hurt. "Kick for daddy," I whispered against her skin and pressed both of my palms against her bump. I always wanted to touch Sookie, but if my hands weren't on more arousing spots on her body, then they could be found attached to her midsection. I knew it was too early to feel the baby kicking, but that didn't mean I was any less desiring for it to happen. I hated the thought of missing it when it finally did occur and it only strengthened my need to chain Sookie to my side.

*If only she were more materialistic I could tempt her with gold or platinum chains.*

But my Sookie was not materialistic in any way; it was one of the things that I loved about her while simultaneously frustrated the shit out of me. I wanted to take care of her in every way, but she fought me tooth and nail when it came to anything she deemed frivolous; which was almost everything. I'd been pleasantly surprised when she'd gone along with everything we'd gotten for Gran's house, but I knew that was only because those things had been for Gran. If I tried to do

more than gas up Sookie's car for her she acted as though I was using a staple gun to affix a diamond tiara to her head.

*I would not have that problem with Pam.*

I sighed softly against Sookie's skin and asked, "Were you good for mommy today Bean? You didn't make her sick, did you?" Sookie's morning sickness was virtually a thing of the past, but certain smells could set her off, so she wasn't out of the woods yet.

I pressed my ear against her bump as though the Bean might actually reply when Sookie's fingers, which had lay loosely in my hair, fisted the strands caught in between them. Her lower half squirmed as her hand pushed against my head and she moaned, "Mmm...Eric..."

*What's this?*

I felt my lips form into a smirk, not that I tried to stop it, and tilted my head to see that whatever it was Sookie was dreaming had her dripping with arousal. Placing one last soft kiss against her belly, I whispered, "Go to sleep Bean. Daddy's got to keep mommy happy."

*Because I'm altruistic like that...*

Even if I hadn't decided on my own on sliding further down Sookie's body, her hand in my hair was quite insistent that was precisely where it wanted me to go and her legs spread apart without any prodding from me, so I settled in between them and waited. Either she sensed where I was in her sleep or she'd felt the breath of air I blew across the wetness in front of me because I wasn't there for very long when she pulled my head towards her center while shimmying her body down the mattress, whining in her sleep, "Errriic..."

*What's a guy to do?*

I parted her folds with a swipe of my tongue making her gasp above me, but now that I had tasted her I couldn't be bothered to look up and see if she had awakened. My tongue moved slowly, seeking out every drop her dream state had produced and my hands moved to hold her hips still that were now writhing in front of me. More dreamy gasps of my name had me latching onto her clit while I slipped two fingers inside of her, reveling in the feeling of her walls contracting around them. My cock had sprung to life with her very first utterance of my name, but now it was throbbing painfully hard against the mattress knowing that even in her sleep it was *me* that made her feel this way.

"Eric," she cried, with her second hand joining her first and her hips grinding down against me signaling she was at least half awake, so I stepped up my game and it wasn't long before her walls clamped down on my fingers with her screaming something along the lines of, "Guh," and "Rick."

I licked my fingers clean and kissed my way back up her body before stealing a kiss from her lips. Seeing her dazed expression, I smirked, asking, "Who's Rick?"

My cock was literally banging against her, bobbing up and down right above where it wanted to be, and without missing a beat Sookie grabbed onto it, placing it at her entrance, and lifted her hips up to meet my descending ones, saying with a smirk of her own, "Rick Springfield, silly."

I groaned feeling the tight wet heat surrounding me, but stilled myself inside of her and felt my eyebrow creep up into my hairline as I growled, "Rick Springfield?"

*First Johnny Depp and now I had to worry about some has been soap opera star?*

Sookie tried to pull off a serious look, which was ridiculous since she'd literally just been fucked awake, but she nodded her head and wrapped her legs around me before replying seductively, "Mmmhmm... He's got that sexy Australian accent." When all I did was glare at her in response, she wiggled her hips, giggling, "What? I always wanted to be Jessie's Girl."

I'd seen her childhood bedroom and knew for a fact all she'd ever wanted to be was Mrs. Eric Northman, with a ridiculous heart dotting the 'i', so I knew she was kidding but that didn't stop me from coming to the conclusion that I needed to pound that silly notion about has been soap opera stars and foreign accents right out of her. She came to agree with me.

*Twice.*

I was waiting for Sookie in the kitchen while she finished getting ready to go to work the next morning. Sadly, coffee was one of the smells that made her sick, but didn't stop her from craving one either. I had absolutely no understanding of a pregnant female's hormones and just stopped for a cup in the mornings after leaving the house to save myself either the violent retching or pout filled looks of longing. I'd claim it was my altruism at work again, but really it was my self-preservation instincts kicking in.

*Sookie could be scary when she wanted to be.*

I'd just picked up my phone when I saw I had an email from my PI, Andy Bellefleur, on Debbie Pelt and reading it soured my good mood, making me wonder if he *ever* had good news. He had great credentials and stellar recommendations, but he'd been pretty worthless as far as I was concerned and reading that he'd found nothing on the woman, left me dumbfounded. Granted, she could've given me a fake name, but then again, he could just be an idiot; I had no way to know which one was a more likely scenario.

"What's with the face?"

I hadn't heard Sookie enter the room until she spoke and I looked up trying to gauge where she was on the hormonal roller coaster. I'd planned on telling her about the other task I'd given Bellefleur when I'd first woken up from the coma, but I hadn't wanted to do it when we were trapped on a crowded airplane with Sookie already freaking out about the maybe-stalker. I decided to ignore her question for the moment and felt her out by asking, "How are you feeling this morning?"



My acting skills must have been lacking because she saw right through me, answering, "Suspicious."

I glanced at the clock to see how much time we had before she needed to leave for work and decided she'd only be more suspicious if I didn't answer her in full, so I reluctantly admitted, "Well, the private investigator got back to me." I held up my phone and gave her the gist of his email, saying, "He didn't find anything on Debbie Pelt."

"What?" she asked, walking towards me and taking my phone so she could read the email for herself. When she was finished, she handed it back to me with her eyes narrowed, asking, "What do you think that means?"

I just shrugged, offering her my guesses, saying, "Maybe she gave me a fake name or maybe he couldn't find his asshole if he sat on it. Who knows." When she just stared back at me, I laid the groundwork for my segue and added, "He hasn't been helpful on any of the other jobs I've given him either."

I'd stressed the word *jobs*, as in *plural*, and it took a moment before Sookie caught on. "Jobs?" she asked, stressing the letter 's' and making it sound like a 'z'.

I ran my hands through my hair while the sting of betrayal ran through my veins. I hadn't known who Sookie was or what she meant to me when I'd first contacted him to look into how we'd come to be married, but that didn't make me feel any better about it now. My skepticism then seemed justified at the time, but now it just felt like I'd shit all over our entire relationship; on everything she meant to me now and I was worried that she'd see it that way too, but I didn't want to have any secrets between us. I'd hadn't been hiding it from her, per say, but it just hadn't come up yet. Resolving to just do it quick, like pulling off a band aid and hoping the adhesive wasn't attached to my balls, I confessed, "After I woke up from the coma and learned everything, I asked him to look into how we came to be married in Vegas."

My whole body tensed with my face and shoulders cringing from what I was sure to be her outrage or hurt, but instead her eyes lit up as she asked, "Did he find out anything?"

*Huh?*

*When will I learn that Sookie will always surprise me?*

I stared back at her dumbfounded wondering if she was the one that knew how to speak Swahili instead of me because surely I hadn't heard her right, but when she added, "Well?" I knew I had.

I shook my head no in response, asking, "You're not mad that I hired him for that? Upset?"

Her eyes glanced over at the empty coffee pot with a look of longing before meeting mine again as she said, "No, why would I be? I'm just as curious as you are."

The relief that flooded through my system made me feel a little woozy, but that didn't stop me from scooping her up in my arms and planting the mother of all kisses on her. She giggled when I pulled back to let her catch her breath, asking, "What was that for?"

*Everything.*

I verbalized my internal answer which just made her smile wider as she asked, "Does that mean you'd be willing to do me a favor?"

"Anything," I answered truthfully before realizing that wasn't true. I'd do anything but give her up.

She raised an eyebrow before asking, "Would you be willing to stop by the school tomorrow afternoon and sit in on rehearsal?"

"Of course," I replied. She'd mentioned it not going well a few times and while I wasn't sure how much help I could be, I was willing to do *almost* anything she asked of me.

*Just not give her up.*

On Thursday afternoon I found myself driving through Compton with a scowl on my face seeing, once again, where my pregnant wife spent a lot of her time. I found it admirable that she wanted to work and to try to make a difference in the young lives under her charge, but that didn't mean I had to like where she chose to fulfill that need. It made the idea of chaining her to my side all the more appealing, but if I tried, I'd have to make sure she was handcuffed too because she would beat the shit out of me.

I didn't feel any better about things when I walked up the steps and into the front door where there was a security station set up with no one manning it and walked un-accosted all the way to the auditorium. Rehearsal had already started, so rather than interrupting the flow, I sat down in the darkened back row and watched silently. The production they were putting on wasn't one of the more popular ones, so I'd never seen it myself and while the kids seemed to know all of their lines, it came across as rigid, like they were afraid of letting themselves go to be fully immersed in their characters. The show itself was just a couple of weeks away, so I knew there wouldn't be a lot of time to do much to fix it, but there was a Spring performance Sookie would be directing as well.

*But would I be there to help out?*

I still hadn't come to any conclusions on what to do about the movie, or the sitcom for that matter, but I wanted to get Sookie's input before I decided one way or the other. She'd be effected by whatever decision I made as well, so I wasn't about to sign on for something that she would end up resenting me for later.

My attention was drawn back to the stage by the girl that had just walked on. I remembered her as being the troublemaker Tara, that had come into the office when Sookie and I were there the

day she'd accepted the job, but after getting to interact with her in both class and at rehearsals after school, Sookie could only sing her praises. I'd have to defer to Sookie on how smart she was, but I could definitely see that she had a natural talent on the stage. She had a presence about her that couldn't be defined but made your eyes automatically gravitate to her. In my eyes, she was the best of the bunch, but she too held back a piece of herself and when it was over I stood up and found Sookie in the front row.

"You're here!" she exclaimed happily. I wasn't sure how much of a PDA she'd be comfortable with in full view of her students, which had all circled near the front of the stage, but Sookie didn't seem to care as she wrapped her arms around me and leaned up for a somewhat chaste kiss that led to "Ooohs," and the stray snickers from those present.

Remembering the empty security post when I'd entered the building, I looked back at her with a grimace, saying, "I am, not that there was anyone manning the front door to stop me or anyone else walking in." Debbie Pelt, or whatever her name was, was still lurking in the back of my mind. I wasn't concerned for myself, but for Sookie's wellbeing and the idea of hiring full time bodyguards for her came back to the forefront of my mind.

Sookie just dismissed my words with a "Pfft," and a light smack to my chest as she turned us to face the crowd and said, "Kids, I'd like you all to meet my husband, Mr. Northman. Eric, these are my kids."

I zoned out a bit as she named them off, one by one, knowing I'd never remember them all and when she was through, I smiled and nodded, saying, "You guys can just call me Eric." 'Mr. Northman', while true, reminded me of my father and made me feel older than I wanted to.

Sookie turned back to me, asking in rapid fire, "How long have you been here? How much did you see? What did you think?"

The pleading in her eyes, along with the eagerness of her questions, made me realize just how important this was to her and I answered honestly, "It wasn't bad." I'd certainly seen worse by seasoned professionals and this was just a high school play.

Her face frowned making me remember her hormonal roller coaster, but she took a deep breath before asking, "Well, do you have any tips on what we can do to make it better?"

*Start over?*

I was certain that answer would have me in the doghouse, but I also knew there wasn't a lot of time to work with. Their rehearsal time was nearly over as it was since it took me a while to get through the traffic on the freeway to get there, but I offered, "It really just needs a few tweaks here and there." They rehearsed on Tuesdays and Thursday, but Tuesdays were out for me since that was the night we taped the show, so I thought about it for a moment and asked her, "Is there any way to have an extra rehearsal this Saturday?" I wasn't aware of any plans Sookie may have had, but with the performance coming up so soon, it was all I could think of.

Her brow furrowed again in thought as she said, "Well, I'd have to ask Mr. Beck, but..." She turned to the students still gathered at the edge of the stage and asked, "Would you all be willing to give up a Saturday to come here for rehearsal?"

Most of them nodded with some of them saying they'd have to ask for time off from their part time jobs, but everyone seemed pretty much in agreement. It only made me respect them more for being willing to give up a day of their weekend to try and make their performance better, but the smile Sookie gave me was the cherry on top.

*And I'd do ALMOST anything to make her smile like that again.*

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## Chapter 97: Chapter 94

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### Chapter 94

#### SPOV

"ARGH!" I screamed without thought and tossing the fifth outfit I'd tried on in as many minutes to the floor. I needed to get my fat ass to work, but I didn't think it was prudent to arrive in nothing more than my bra and panties.

Eric came barreling into the closet moments later, but I wasn't startled by his sudden presence thanks to the 'herd of elephants' sound coming from the stairway that had preceded his arrival. "What's wrong?" he asked, finding me in the middle of the closet wearing nothing but my underwear and a scowl.

I stupidly gestured to my body because it was the epitome of what was wrong and with tears pricking my eyes, I sobbed, "Crazy was right... I am a cow..."

We'd started referring to Eric's stalker as just plain old 'Crazy' since we weren't really sure what her name was, but at the moment I felt just as psycho as her. Lately my mood swings were violent enough that I'd probably give any long time Cirque de Soleil acrobat whiplash with poor Eric bearing the brunt of them as he was now. "Sookie," he said soothingly and wrapped his arms around me, "you're not a cow." His voice took on a happier lilt as he added, "You're pregnant with the Bean."

*I know that!*

"I know that!" I yelled and stomped my foot like the inconsolable dipshit I was. I wretched myself free from his grasp and stood back pointing at the girls, saying, "But look! I've got udders now!" The Wonder Twins were impressive enough before I'd gotten pregnant, but now they were spilling out of the cups of my bra. They weren't superheroes anymore; they were a bad SciFi horror movie remake: The Blobs.

By the lustful look on Eric's face I gathered he didn't agree with my assessment and he said as much, after licking his lips, of course. "Every part of you is perfect Sookie. Did you really think your body wouldn't change?"

"No," I admitted sullenly. I knew it was going to happen, but it didn't mean I had to like it was happening so soon. Time had been flying by and it felt like only yesterday that I woke up to Mr. Pillow Face in the hotel room in Vegas. Now I was standing in front of my husband, Eric Northman, whom I'd dreamed of one day marrying, in nothing but my underwear crying over the fact that nothing fit because I was having his baby.

*I really was a dipshit.*

My shoulders slumped and with my lower lip pouted out, I whispered, "I'm sorry."

Eric had gotten used to my irrational spur of the moment tirades and just wrapped his arms around me, saying, "I don't want you to be sorry; I want you to be happy." Tilting my chin up from where it was buried against his chest, he looked a little worried, asking, "You *are* happy, aren't you?"

"Of course I'm happy," I sobbed in reply with a fresh gush of tears.

Eric merely wiped them away with a chuckle and pulled me back flush against his chest, saying, "Yes, I can see that. I was just checking..."

I really was a mess lately and thought about buying him one of Terry's puppies for Christmas. He'd fawned all over Terry's dog when they'd come for a visit a few weeks ago and at least that way there'd always be a happy face there to greet him. Once I got my emotions in check, I pulled away and glanced back at my clothes trying to figure out what I could wear. 'Slim pickings' was an understatement and as if Eric had been reading my mind, he suggested, "Why don't you go shopping for new clothes after work?"

"I don't want to," I pouted, even though I knew I *needed* to.

"Sookie," he began, a little more harshly, "this isn't about the money is it?"

"No," I replied just as harshly. Granted, I was still getting used to the idea of Eric's, I mean *our*, seemingly bottomless pit of a bank account, but that wasn't the reason for my hesitance. It was the thought of having to buy circus tents as clothing. I already had a *Big Top* to start with and I didn't need the added reminders.

*I should probably just change my ringtone in Eric's phone to a circus theme and be done with it.*

When all Eric did was stare at me questioningly, I huffed, "Is there a Burlap Saks Fifth Avenue on Rodeo Drive? Because if there isn't, then I don't know where to buy clothes that'll be big enough to fit."

Eric rolled his eyes, but calmly offered, "I wouldn't know, but Pam is stopping by this afternoon to go over a few things, so why don't you come home first? If there's one thing Pam knows about, it's where to shop."

I couldn't picture Pam perusing maternity wear on a regular basis, but then what in the hell did I know? She was scary enough that if we didn't find anything, I was sure she could intimidate some unsuspecting sales clerk into at least sewing two outfits together for me. After nodding my agreement, I pulled on a pair of slacks and used a hairband to loop through the button hole and around the button to give me a little more breathing room, leaving my blouse un-tucked to cover up my redneck resourcefulness, and headed downstairs.

"So what else are you going to do today?" I asked him as I gathered my things. Since it was his day off, I felt bad leaving him all by himself which only made the puppy idea seem even better.

"I'm not sure," he shrugged. "I'm going to the gym, but other than that, I'll just be sitting around here missing you."

A very small part of me melted hearing him say that and Eric gave me a hug and kiss goodbye, clinging to me like he did every morning as though he was afraid I wouldn't return, and while I knew he missed me during the day, he wasn't fooling me. He'd be out the door and walking into the Starbucks around the corner before I could even make it onto the freeway.

*Pregnant life could be so unfair...*

My pity party didn't last long because as soon as I was exiting through the community's gate, my phone rang. I half expected it to be Eric since it would be his first day off without me there since the baby scare, but I was pleasantly surprised to see Amelia's name on the caller ID.

"Ames?" I answered happily. I hadn't seen her in months since she'd fallen in love with some guy named Bob she'd met while vacationing in Europe and ended up extending her stay. Only Amelia could fall in love with a Mormon from Utah that she'd met in Venice, Italy. "How are you?"

"Oh Sookie," she sobbed.

When all I heard after that was her hiccups and sniffles, I asked worriedly, "Ames? What's wrong?"

"I'll tell you what's wrong," she huffed. "I kicked that piece of shit out with his tail between his legs."

"Why?" I asked even though I wasn't really surprised. The number of bed partners Amelia went through rivaled Jason's, but I didn't judge her for it. Her free spirited attitude was what drew me to her to begin with and I felt bad that she was hurting. She rarely 'fell in love' with anyone and she had been there for me through the whole Quinn ordeal, so I could do nothing less for her now.

"It's a long story," she sighed, "but I can fill you in tonight if you'd be willing to pick me up at the airport?"

"You're coming home?" I asked, trying to hide my excitement. Even though all of my free time was spent with Eric, I'd missed her presence in my everyday life and couldn't wait to see her again. None of our friends, other than Pam and Alcide, knew that we were having a baby, but now that she was coming home, I'd be able to tell her in person.

"Yeah," she answered. "My plane lands at LAX at eight o'clock tonight. Do you think you can come and get me?"

"Of course Ames," I agreed.

*That would give me plenty of time to shop for muumuus beforehand.*

I rolled my eyes at my own thoughts and jotted down her flight information before hanging up. The rest of the day passed by in a blur with Mr. Beck saying we'd be able to use the auditorium from noon until four on Saturday since the school would be open for a basketball game and I tracked down all of the kids in the Drama Club to tell them personally. I was excited to have Eric there to help me with their performance because, admittedly, acting was so not my thing, but I really wanted it to go well for their sakes. They all worked so hard and I hated the thought that it might fail because I lacked the knowledge to help them succeed. Even Tara seemed excited about the extra practice and I sensed that our little discussion a few days earlier helped to get us over the bump in the road. Hopefully it would stay that way.

By the time I got home that afternoon, Pam's car was already in the driveway. I didn't bother to pull into the garage since I knew I'd be going out again and walked through the front door to hear Pam yelling, "Tell me you're shitting me!"

*Poor Jason. He was missing out on a 'sheet' and didn't even know it.*

"I don't know, alright?" Eric said heatedly and when I rounded the corner, I saw him sitting on the couch in his classic 'hands in hair' pose which meant he was stressed out. Hot as hell looking, but stressed nonetheless.

"What's going on?" I asked.

Pam's mouth opened, but Eric beat her to the punch, answering, "Nothing."

*Bullshit*, my mind sang and I had half a mind to brush the imaginary dirt from my ass since he was under the impression I must've just fallen off of the turnip truck, but I reined in the urge and simply asked, "Does this have something to do with Debbie Pelt?" It was the only thing I could think of that would make Pam pissed off like she obviously was while making Eric's hands fly up into his hair.

Eric hadn't mentioned whether or not he'd already talked to Pam about her yet, but I surmised from her expression that he hadn't and her next question confirmed that. "Who's Debbie Pelt?" Her eyes hardened and shot right back to Eric where she smacked the side of his head, screeching, "Did you cheat?"

"NO!" Eric and I shouted at the same time. Since Eric was busy rubbing his temple and glaring at Pam, I took a seat next to him to block him from any future blows and explained everything that she'd done (which was plenty) and what we knew about her (which was next to nothing).

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" she asked, completely aggravated over us failing to follow her imaginary Pam Protocol Checklist.

Even though I didn't think she'd smack me too, I still flinched when her hand darted out, but relaxed when she shoved it into her giant handbag and pulled out her phone. "It's not like we were keeping it from you," I answered. "Besides, there's not much to tell. The private investigator Eric hired couldn't find anything on her."

Pam huffed as she scrolled through her phone, saying, "Yes, well Eric doesn't have the same *resources* that *I* do." Her fingers flew across her BlackBerry before she finally looked up and said, "There. We should know something soon."

My curiosity got the better of me making me ask, "Who's going to look into it?"

Her eyebrow slid up into her hairline and her lips pursed as she said, "Don't you worry about that. What you don't know can't be used in court."

That certainly didn't make me feel any better, but when I thought about just the idea that this crazy woman might do something to hurt Eric, my morals had a change of heart. I was still curious though and Pam and I had a stare-off with no end in sight until Eric finally butted in, asking, "So, are you going to go shopping?"

"Shopping?" Pam asked excitedly. If she had a tail, it would be thumping furiously. "What are we shopping for?"

Well, at least I didn't have to beg her to go with me since she invited herself, but since I was still wondering about what all the fuss had been about when I'd first walked into the house, I answered, "Maternity clothes. Now, what were you two arguing about earlier?"

Pam's eyes zeroed back in on Eric and my head turned to see him looking hesitant before he squeezed my hand, saying, "Just work stuff. We can talk about it later."

"But..." I started to protest, but the pleading look in Eric's eyes made me stop.

I didn't know if he just wanted for us to have a private conversation or if he didn't want Pam to get wound up again, so I decided not to argue over it since he'd already agreed to discuss it later.



Pam must've had a different take on things and shopping was temporarily forgotten because she said sternly, "Eric. We're not done talking about it."

"We're done talking about it for *right now*," he answered irritably. I became even more suspicious when his eyes darted to me before going back to her and they had their own silent conversational stare down with me teetering on the fence line over whether or not I should just force the issue now.

Pam decided for me when she finally stood up, saying, "Fine. Sookie? Come."

I mumbled under my breath asking if she was going to whistle too and thought about refusing on principle since she was talking to me like I was a dog, but between the now tense atmosphere and my waistband digging into my sides I decided against it. Standing, I followed her into the foyer, saying, "I'm only agreeing because my boobs are spilling out of my bra and I can't close my pants. That and I have a sneaking suspicion that you're just hoping I'll hump your leg later on."

Her grin reappeared and turned lustful as she replied, "Darling, you can hump any part of me whenever you wish," making Eric jump onto the dog themed bandwagon and growl softly behind me.

His arms snaked around my waist from behind, which made it difficult to pull my coat on, but I managed to turn to face him, asking, "Did you want to tag along?" I hated leaving him behind, but I didn't think he'd have much fun shopping for pup tents.

Pam broke into our conversation, asking, "Well, did you two plan on announcing baby Pam's impending arrival anytime soon? You and I will be able to shop incognito, but if the blond giant comes with us, the cat will definitely be out of the bag about what will be coming out of your pussy in the near future."

"Pam!" I snickered in a mock snit. She had a way of bringing out the most vulgar in me and I couldn't help myself, adding, "Eric's the only one *cumming* in or out of my pussy."

The dirty mouthed diva that she was, was nowhere near offended and rolled her eyes, trying to not smile, as she said, "Yes, I believe that's what got you knocked up to begin with."

Normally Eric would be laughing right along with me, but he was still silently tense behind me. I hadn't thought about how we might out ourselves by shopping for maternity wear together and wondering if that was the cause for his anxiety, I looked back at him, asking, "Well, what do you think? Do you want to tag along or stay home?"

As far as I was concerned, I'd be happy if everyone just left us the hell alone no matter where we happened to show up together, but I knew that wasn't going to happen. Eric just shrugged his shoulders, saying, "I think it would be better if I stayed home. The longer we can put off having to say anything, the less of a circus there'll be surrounding us."

Hearing him say 'circus' reminded me of what I had to shop for and the Ringling Bros. theme song played in my head when I suddenly shouted, "Oh!" I'd only then remembered that I'd promised to pick up Amelia at the airport and after telling Eric about our phone call earlier that morning, I could tell that he wanted no part of hearing her man-bash all the way back to her condo. I couldn't really blame him, so I asked, "But what are you going to do all night by yourself?"

*Maybe Terry's puppies were close enough to being weaned that I could swing by and pick one up for Eric tonight?*

I felt so bad at the thought of him spending the evening alone, so my relief was evident when I smiled hearing him say, "Maybe I'll call Alcide and tell him to come over. He's babysitting Jessica tonight while Holly is at a class, so we can order pizza and watch a movie."

I agreed that was a great idea and after getting one last kiss and a promise from Eric to save me a slice of pizza, we headed out on Mission Impossible: Operation Swathe Sookie's Fat Ass. I followed behind Pam's car since she had a dinner meeting to go to later on and I had to head to the airport, but I was more than a little pissed at her by the time we arrived at wherever in the hell we were.

"Did you at least get the checkered flag?" I asked grumpily, stomping my way into the store behind her and her goddamned lead foot. I was lucky to keep her taillights in view the whole way there and had no doubts if she ever joined the NASCAR ranks, there'd be a whole new Intimidator for the crowd to cheer. Seeing the sour expression on her face from my question, I changed my stance.

*They'd definitely jeer.*

Looking around, all of the clothing seemed to be formal rather than casual, and I looked over at Pam, saying, "I don't think we're in the right place."

She didn't bother to look up from the rack of formal dresses in front of her as she said, "Yes we are." When her eyes finally met mine, a smirk formed on her lips as she added, "This store caters to the birth control challenged."

I really had no argument to make considering the unopened box of condoms Eric pulled out of his suitcase the morning after the wedding and just said the universal 'fuck off' in the form of, "Whatever." I pulled a dress from the rack in front of me and held it up to Pam, asking, "Who in the hell wears gowns like this every day, much less when they're preggo?" I could just imagine waddling into the classroom surrounded in sequins. I'd probably cause the whole class to have a seizure just by turning around underneath the fluorescent bulbs to face the chalkboard.

"You need something to wear to the holiday party the studio is having in a couple of weeks," she answered.

"Party?" I asked. "What party?" Eric didn't say anything about a party.

Pam gave me a look that only Pam could pull off; affectionately abhorrent, as she enunciated as though English was my second language, "Hol-i-day Par-ty."

"Bi-itch," I mocked under my breath, even though Pam could hear me, and by the pleased smile on her face I surmised she was happy with her nickname.

After sorting through a whirlwind of dresses flying at me through the dressing room Pam had shoved me into, we found a dress we could both agree on, but when she stuck her head in as I was getting dressed, she took one look at The Blobs, saying, "What is this?" and motioning at my girls who, unfortunately, were uncomfortably pregnant right along with me.

"Breasts, Pam," I said in the same mocking tone she'd used on me earlier.

She shot me a look of exasperation because, really, Pam of all people knew what breasts were and she definitely *knew* a lot more breasts than I did. "I know that Sookie, but what are you doing to them? These are like the Mona Lisa. They should be treasured and framed adoringly in The Louvre. Instead you have them strapped down like a deer you ran over on the way home."

I gave her my own look of exasperation, but she just said, "Stay there," and disappeared again while I repeated, "Bi-itch," to the empty dressing room. Hours later, I was on my way to LAX with a trunk full of clothes; everything from bras and panties, to work, casual, and formal wear. I was just as exhausted as my credit card, but I didn't have the energy to fight Pam when I'd suggested we try looking at Target. She could be pretty scary when she wanted to be and even frightened away another customer that tried talking to me. Sandra had seemed nice enough, even if her blond hair was a bit over-processed, and she practically gushed at me when she'd recognized me as Eric's wife. When she asked me when I was due, Pamzilla shooed her away before I could say a word and when I'd shot her a reproving look, she merely said, "This is LA; we don't talk to strangers."

She got another, "Whatever," from me.

*'Cause I'm a badass like that.*

*And I was almost certain she wouldn't hit me with 'Baby Pam' in between us.*

Amelia was already waiting for me on the curb when I pulled up in front of the airport and after we piled all of her luggage into the backseat, since the trunk was full, she told me about the Big Bob Blunder. Apparently, he was not only a Mormon, but part of a 'Mormon Fundamentalist' group that practiced polygamy. He'd asked Amelia to marry him *before* telling her she'd be joining him and his two other wives.

*Big Love?*

*More like Fat Chance.*

I felt so bad for her that I didn't want to wave my happiness in her face with the baby news and instead invited her to come over for dinner the following night. I figured I would invite Sam and Terry over, as well as Tray and Lafayette, and anyone else I could think of, so Eric and I could share our baby news with them all at the same time before they found out on the news in case Sandra had really been a TMZ spy like Pam had accused her of.

Alcide's truck wasn't in the driveway when I pulled up to the house after dropping Amelia off at her condo, and I left the shopping bags in the trunk feeling too tired to drag them in. It was already after ten, which was late for me anymore, but I still made a beeline for the kitchen and did a little happy dance when I pulled the pizza box from the refrigerator, immediately shoving a slice into my mouth. I nearly choked on it when Eric rounded the corner and came into the room.

My eyes glazed over and with a mouth full of pepperoni heaven, I asked, "What are you wearing?" although it sounded more like, "Wah r ooh waying?" I couldn't tell if the drool in my mouth was from the pizza or looking at him, but I had a sneaking suspicion it was all him.

"This..." he asked, waving his hand down his body with flourish. His black lined eyes narrowed and his voice took on a British accent as he answered, "I believe, love, is called Pirate chic."

*Pirate chic? Panty vanish? They were clearly one and the same.*

Before that moment, the thought of Eric playing in my makeup would have made me laugh while weirding me out, but seeing the fruits of his labor, I voted that he do it more often.

*And, by extension, do ME more often.*

"Why?" I asked. Why was he wearing it? Why was he standing so far away? Why did he have to look so fucking hot while I was slowly morphing into fat ass Maxine Fortenberry's clone?

*Inquiring minds wanted to know.*

He didn't answer me, or if he did I didn't hear him over the mental screaming in my head demanding that I strip his clothes off and fuck him like the world was about to end while somehow keeping his outfit intact. I had no idea where he got a Captain Jack costume, but it looked a hell of a lot better on Eric.

*Besides, I bet it took a lot of hard work to get himself into those leather pants.*

*They really should've offered HIM that role; after all, he came with his very own Kraken.*

Instead he swaggered forward with those black lined baby blues scoping out the room before coming back to rest on mine. With that damned pornographic eyebrow of his raised up and still using a British accent, he asked, "Where's your booty?" He added a sexy smirk, admitting, "I'm going to *plunder* it."

*Okay!*

*And how can you miss my booty? It nearly spans the entire county.*

I suddenly felt energized, but that could just be because my heart was pounding as fast as a hummingbird's wings, which I felt shoot straight down to my playpen.

*Was it possible to cum just by looking at him?*

Wicked betrayed my thoughts by fanning my overheated face and I laughed as I put the kitchen island in between us, asking, "Oh, you think so, do you? What kind of lazy pirate are you that you're asking where my booty is?" I licked my lips and leaned over the countertop towards him with my deer kill on display, adding, "I'm not *that* easy."

*If we'd been in a church, God would have smote me dead right then and there for telling the most EPIC of lies.*

*I was SO THAT easy.*

Eric's grin turned feral as he took a step to the side, saying, "I do love a good battle. Prepare to surrender."

*I got as far as the stairs before my white cotton panties were waving like a flag in the wind, dangling from my extended leg, as Eric showed me just how good surrendering could be.*

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## **Chapter 98: Chapter 95**

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### Chapter 95

#### **EPOV**

I'm in love with Sookie.

I know this not only because of the way she makes me feel; how much she consumes my every thought; how I can no longer imagine a future without her in it, but because instead of sleeping in on a Saturday morning with perhaps giving her another reminder of how she got pregnant in the first place (not that either one of us can remember it) before driving into Compton to spend four hours with her Drama Club, I'm at the furniture store trying to act as though I really do care about the dining room set she's hell bent on buying this morning when, in actuality, I could give two shits and would much rather eat all of my meals off of her naked body.

*It would be messy, but fun.*

*Maybe I should've put on eyeliner this morning when she'd told me her plans.*

I'd bought that costume as a joke for Halloween, but it just didn't work with my cast, so I hid it away for future use. Now that I knew what kind of reaction it brought out in her, I had half a mind to make it my weekend outfit.

*Johnny Depp wasn't the only one with swagger.*

"Eric? Are you listening to me?"

The sound of Sookie's voice brought me back to the present from where I'd been replaying the previous night's pirate porn in my mind and I looked down at her, nodding with a, "Mhmm."

I would swear that she had a built in lie detector, or perhaps my acting skills weren't as great as I thought they were, because her eyes narrowed suspiciously as she repeated, "Mhmm...", and then added, "Alright, then what did I just say?"

*That you want to go for another walk down my plank?*

The salesman was giving us some breathing room, unless Sookie had questions about a particular item, and was standing far enough away that we wouldn't be overheard, so I waggled my eyebrows and repeated my inner thoughts. She valiantly fought off a grin before losing the battle and said, "I *knew* you weren't listening to a word I said."

"I'm sorry," I apologized. I blamed the lack of coffee, but more so, just her mere presence. Whenever I was around her, my thoughts seemed to stray to wanting to just be *in* her and I gave her my best apologetic look, asking, "What did you say?"

She grinned even wider, saying nonchalantly, "That Pam must be the Hindu goddess Kali reincarnated. With how frisky she got with me in the dressing room last night, she must have more than two hands."

*That's what I get for not paying attention.*

"Not funny," I growled at her, but despite my declaration Sookie was lost in a fit of giggles from my reaction. While I started planning suitable punishments for Pam that would never come to fruition because, let's face it, she was *Pam*, Sookie walked over to yet *another* dining room set, asking, "So, you're sure you don't mind moving the pool table?"

I knew my decorative skills screamed 'bachelor pad', but I gladly left that life firmly in my past. Now that I had Sookie I had no issues with letting her make us an actual home and said as much which earned me a kiss. She'd already called everyone we wanted to share the baby news with that morning and there was no way for all of us to fit around the kitchen table for dinner, which was why she was adamant on buying a dining room set now, so we could get it delivered in time.

"What about this one?" she asked, pointing at the set in front of her. They were all starting to look the same to me, but I tried to show a little more enthusiasm as I shrugged my indifference.

*Her clothing was covering my eating surface of choice.*

"You don't care," she pouted and my 'oh shit' alarm rang loudly in my head.

I knew then we were dangerously close to a potential death defying drop on the hormonal roller coaster and I put my arm around her shoulders, the contact more for my benefit than hers, and said, "I care about you being happy, so whatever you pick out is fine with me," and hoped it was the right answer.

*You'd think someone would've written a rule book by now on how to deal with pregnant wives.*

*Maybe Dear Abby had a helpful pamphlet on it. I'd have to ask the handsy Hindu goddess, Pam.*

Her response of, "Whatever," just made my stomach twist while I twisted my fingers into the sleeve of her shirt in case she tried to get away.

*It was my only option since I never got around to picking up those gold and platinum chains.*

Knowing Sookie's pregnancy hormones could also work in my favor, I nudged her body closer to the table in front of us with my own and surprised her by picking her up and placing her on the top facing me. The cast had been a cockblocker of sorts and I was grateful it was a thing of the past, so that I could just move our bodies into whatever position that happened to strike my fancy. With The Captain (Junior's new nickname as of the night before) pressing against her center and my hands locked down on each side of her hips, I purred, "This one seems to be about the right height."

Her breath caught in her throat and I couldn't help smiling when her legs automatically wrapped around my hips as she whimpered, "Eric..."

Her eyes had lost all of their previous frustration and now stared back at me full of lust as I moved my lips closer to hers, asking, "Yes, lover?"

Her hands had already started snaking up the front of my shirt, with her fingertips ghosting over my nipples causing a shiver to run down my spine, so I was surprised when instead of leaning forward for a kiss, she pushed me away with her legs dropping back down, saying, "We're *not* having sex in a furniture store."

*Oh yeah...we were in a furniture store.*

My shoulders were the only thing that dropped down with her words and I had to discreetly readjust The Captain while Sookie giggled at me, but at least she was in a better mood, even if I was the one that was left frustrated now. She slid off of the table and signaled the salesman to come over to us, but her eyes never left mine as she said to him, "We'll take *this* one."

*I had never looked forward to dessert more than that very moment.*

While Sookie filled out all of the forms to have it delivered, I called Alcide so he'd be there when they arrived, since we'd be at the school, and a half hour later we were finally on our way to Compton. Sookie had been rambling on about what she was going to cook for dinner, while I was just thinking about *dessert*, and then stopped short, asking, "What were you and Pam fighting over yesterday?"

I knew we'd have to discuss it eventually, but I was still undecided on what I wanted to do and knew Sookie would be asking that very question, so I'd hoped to have an answer for her beforehand. We still had another twenty minutes before we arrived at the school and I knew there'd be no putting it off until later, so I took a deep breath and answered, "It was about my career." Pam had been completely thrown for a loop when I'd told her I was thinking about taking an extended break from acting, if not retiring altogether. We had enough money socked away that we'd be able to live comfortably, especially if we moved to Bon Temps.

"What about it?" she asked, before adding sarcastically, "And thanks for telling me about the studio's holiday party."

*Oops!*

"Sorry," I said appropriately chagrined. I'd seen the memo about it, but hadn't given it any thought since then. Being one of the stars of the show, I *had* to go and was just happy at least now I'd have Sookie there to make it bearable.

She patted my leg letting me know she wasn't really mad and asked, "Now what was the fight about?"

Honestly, the whole ordeal had been stressing me out. I'd been working for virtually my entire life and didn't know any other way of living, so I figured I might as well just get it out and blurted, "I told her that I wasn't sure if I wanted to renew my contract for the sitcom at the end of the season and maybe skipping out on the movie deal too." I thought that was enough for one mouthful and held off on mentioning the possibility of me retiring from acting.

"What?" she gasped in shock. "Why wouldn't you want to do the movie? I thought it was what you really wanted." When I just looked at her, not sure where to even begin in order to answer her, her eyes dropped to her hands which were now twisting in her lap, and she added in a whisper, "It was the only reason you agreed to stay married in the first place."

The way she'd said it made it sound like it was *still* the reason I had stayed married to her and after everything we'd been through together, what I could remember of it anyway, it pissed me off. Even though I knew better, I snapped back with, "And from what I understand, you only agreed to stay married to keep your *job*. Is *that* why you're sitting here *now*?"

Seeing her eyes well up with tears, I felt like the biggest asshole on the planet and had to wonder if pregnancy hormones were contagious, so I grabbed onto her hand, saying for the umpteenth time that day, "I'm sorry. It's just that the way you'd said it made it sound like I wouldn't be here with you now if that movie role wasn't still on the table." When her eyes finally met mine and I



saw a tear break free, I couldn't stand it anymore and pulled over onto the shoulder of the freeway, so I could wrap myself around her, saying into her hair, "I love you. I don't care about anything else except for you and the Bean."

It was true. I'd give up everything I had if it meant I would have them with me and I knew me having to go away to film on location would be difficult for both of us. I was terrified that the separation would cause irreparable damage to our relationship, especially since it would have to occur during the late stages of the pregnancy. I didn't want to miss any of it, but at the same time, acting was all that I knew. *Torn* didn't begin to describe how I felt.

"I'm sorry too," she sobbed into my shirt. By the time she calmed down enough to pull away, we were already running late, so I pulled back onto the freeway and did my best to tell her everything; all of my concerns; all of my worries and by the time I was done, we were pulling into the parking lot of the school.

"Well?" I asked her, smoothing her hair from where it got messed up from her crying into my chest.

Her red rimmed eyes just stared back at me with no expression whatsoever when she finally forced a smile and said, "We can talk about it more later on, but whatever you decide, I'll support you."

I didn't like the way that sounded and squeezed her hand, correcting, "Whatever *we* decide."

I wouldn't be making that decision on my own without her input and the uncertainty in her eyes didn't make me feel any better, but when she got out of the car I had no choice but to follow along after her. The security guard was at his post when we walked in through the front door and I gave him the hairy eyeball, but didn't say anything about the last time I'd been there and it had been left unmanned and when we got just outside of the auditorium doors, we both stopped at what we heard.

*Singing.*

And not like Sookie's caterwauling rendition of 'Do You Think I'm Sexy', but actually *good* singing.

I watched as Sookie smiled back at me, our earlier emotional conversation seemingly forgotten for now, and she slowly pulled the door open just enough for us to slip through before letting it shut softly behind us. Up on the stage were all of her students and there was music coming from somewhere, but I couldn't be bothered with trying to figure out where it was coming from thanks to the performance going on.

All of the girls, and even some of the guys, were lined up on stage singing Beyonce's 'Single Ladies' and doing the dance routine from the video; perfectly. It was entertaining to say the least and Sookie and I slumped down into the back row to watch. All of the earlier problems I'd

witnessed in their acting performances with them not letting go were gone, now that there was music involved, and I leaned over to Sookie, asking, "Is this part of the show?"

"No," she smiled back at me, adding, "But I wish it was. They're fantastic."

'Fantastic' was an understatement and when it was over we both stood up clapping as loud as two people could. When the sound reached the stage, Tara, who'd been in the front row of singer/dancers, peered out over the seats and asked, "Mrs. Northman? Is that you?"

While I'd gotten used to the idea of Sookie being my wife, I still liked hearing my name attached to hers and smiled when she yelled back, "Yes it is!"

*Yes she WAS!*

We made our way to the stage with Sookie gushing, "You guys were fantastic! Where did you all learn to do that?"

Tara laughed and waved her hands like it was nothing, saying, "We were just messing around waiting on you to get here."

"But you all were so *good!*" Sookie exclaimed. "There's no way you all just pulled that out of your aa...butts."

Most of the kids snickered over her almost curse, while some of them looked shocked that Sookie actually knew *how* to curse.

*Little did they know...*

Tara studied Sookie's face for a moment before shooting me an evil eye, but smiled when she looked back at her, saying, "Nah...it's something that Mr. Velasquez had us learn to loosen up before choir practice."

I didn't know who she was talking about until Sookie turned to me still beaming and explained, "Jesus Velasquez is one of the Biology teachers. I haven't had the chance to talk to him much, but he seems nice enough."

*If nothing else, we at least knew he was a fan of Beyonce.*

I watched as Sookie climbed on stage and started herding some of the students to go over what scenes they'd be doing when Tara came down and stood next to me. I wasn't sure what the evil eye had been about until she glared at me, accusing, "It looks like Mrs. Northman's been crying. You being an ass?"

*Not anymore...*

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"Are. You. Being. An. Ass?" she enunciated sarcastically. When I just stared back silently at the little girl who looked like she wanted to kick my ass, reminding me of Pam in every way, she added, "Because you came to the *wrong* neighborhood if you think you can get away with that shit. We like her." She leaned forward, completely serious, and added, "We'll kick your ass."

I couldn't help laughing back at her, while considering the fact that she could probably do me some damage, and due to her loyalty to Sookie I decided to humor her, saying, "I apologized. She accepted."

She stared back at me gauging the truth of my words before settling down, saying, "Yeah, well, don't let us hear otherwise."

When our silent stare down started to get old, I offered an olive branch and said, "Your little performance earlier was really good."

Her eyes flicked back to the stage watching the other kids getting into their positions before coming back to me as she asked, "Did you pay attention to the words?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, confused.

She looked back at me like she didn't know whether she wanted to have a conversation with me or kick me before she finally said, "If you like it then you'd better put a ring on it."

Her eyes glanced pointedly at Sookie before coming back to mine, but I still didn't know what she was getting at and said, "What are you talking about? We're already married."

*Lost memories or not; I'd seen the video of the whole thing.*

I guessed I wasn't the only one to have seen the video because Tara shot back, "I know. I looked it up online." She eyed me disdainfully and added, "It was so fucking storybook romantic I'm surprised Walt Disney didn't come back from the dead just to be your best man." I just stared back at her completely flabbergasted that I was being taken to task by a teenager over how Sookie and I had gotten married. Tara just crossed her arms over her chest defiantly, snarking, "She showed us the *lovely* ring you got her too. Did it come with a single or double wide trailer?"

If I didn't know any better, I'd think she was Pam reincarnated and I glanced down at my matching tattoo and huffed, "Sookie hasn't complained," while now wondering if Sookie felt the same way. "She's *happy*; *we're* happy, so that's all that matters." Even as I said the words out loud, I wondered if I was trying to convince Tara or myself.

"Do you think *she* would?" she huffed back.

*No...*

I knew Sookie well enough to know that she would never complain about something that had to do with her; her wants; her wishes; her dreams. She could find the silver lining in anything and

would just set aside her own desires as long as the end result turned out how she thought it should. Only those closest to us knew the actual happenstance of our Vegas wedding; too much booze and a sexual chemistry of WMD proportions were the catalysts; not love and intimacy that grew over time. We had that now too, but had I done Sookie a disservice by not giving her the proposal or wedding she'd always dreamed of?

*Even that douche bag Quinn managed to propose to her.*

*And she'd worn HIS ring...*

I didn't like thinking he'd managed to do better for her than me in that regard, but I couldn't refute it either. She *must* have imagined over the years what it would be like; her 'Mrs. Eric Northman' teenage scrawl told me she had, but she'd never said a word to me about it. I knew she wasn't looking to get a big diamond ring; she simply wasn't wired that way and while I loved that about her, technically I *hadn't* put a ring on it and I didn't just *like it*, like the lyrics said; I *loved it*. I loved *her*.

Tara just stared back at me while my head went into a tailspin over everything she'd just brought up and now that I felt like a complete failure as a husband, I gave her my own evil eye and just said, "Don't you have rehearsal?"

She replied sarcastically with an, "Mmhhh..." and wandered away, softly singing the 'Single Ladies' chorus and leaving me to stew on my own.

The old adage said, 'If it ain't broke, don't fix it', and while I knew that our relationship was solid *now*, I couldn't help feeling like I had some fixing to do.

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## Chapter 99: Chapter 96

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### Chapter 96

#### SPOV

All through rehearsal I watched Eric move around the stage, where he'd sometimes pull one of the students aside and give them some tips on how to improve their performance or just stand back and watch, but I could tell he wasn't *really* there. To be honest, neither was I. My thoughts kept drifting back to everything we'd talked about in the car and I assumed that was the case with him as well.

While I'd known all along about his upcoming movie role, I truly hadn't thought about it at all since his accident and now the thought of him not being here with me for weeks on end made me want to burst into tears, but I wouldn't.

*I couldn't.*

I couldn't do that to him knowing how much he'd wanted that role, so I'd have to be strong. It would hurt to have to hide away my pain, but I'd do anything for him and it was a small price to pay if it made him happy. I knew the effect my tears had on him, so I was bound and determined for him to not see a single one where the movie was concerned. He would stay out of guilt, but I knew I wouldn't be able to bear looking at him knowing he'd given up his dream just to stay home with me. He'd given me so much already and not just in material things, but in the way he made me feel like I was the only woman in the world. I knew what his 'love' life had been like before we'd met, so that was saying a lot about him. Besides our child, this was the only thing *I* could give him and I couldn't let my own selfishness take away something he'd wanted so badly, so for the rest of the afternoon I kept repeating over and over that it would only be for a few weeks; he would only be missing the *fat* stage of my pregnancy; he would be back in time for the baby's birth; I'd keep busy and time would fly by while he was gone.

*And I could always cry when he wasn't around to see it.*

Our relationship was strong; I had no doubts about his fidelity, so the only real issue would be missing his everyday presence, but we could video chat and talk on the phone. It wouldn't be so bad and he'd be home before I knew it.

*At least that was what I kept telling myself.*

As the rehearsal was drawing to a close, I could definitely see an improvement in the kids' performances and as a reward for all of their hard work I ordered pizzas for all of them. Eric hadn't given as much direction to Tara during rehearsal as he had the other students, but I assumed that was because hers was better than the rest and I also assumed that was why she'd been giving him the evil eye all afternoon. I wanted to reassure her that she'd already been doing a great job, but as soon as the pizza had disappeared, so had the kids; Tara included.

*Apparently four hours of their Saturday meant exactly four hours.*

After the emotional drive to the school, I didn't want a repeat on the way home, nor did I really feel up to talking about Eric's upcoming movie role, so as soon as we were back in the car I turned to Eric and grabbed onto his face kissing him with everything I had. While he was shocked at first, he quickly got on board and when I finally pulled away, he asked with a smile, "Not that I'm complaining, but what was that for?"

"Everything," I replied honestly. I remembered quite clearly the horror I'd felt that morning not so long ago when I realized Eric and I had actually gotten married, but now I couldn't imagine my life without him in it. It wasn't because of the baby or what people would say and think learning the truth of our drunken night in Vegas; it was because I truly loved him, all of him. He could be with practically anyone he wanted; he could be doing anything that happened to strike his fancy, but he'd chosen me and to spend his day off helping me with my students. I couldn't help but to brighten up just thinking about it.

My one word answer seemed to be enough for now and it wasn't until we were on our way home that he asked, "Are you happy, you know, with us?"

*Please don't bring up the movie...please don't bring up the movie...*

"Of course I am," I replied a little too brightly. "Are you?" I added hesitantly. My hormones were all over the place lately and I wondered if I'd unknowingly pushed him to his limits.

"No," he responded making my stomach drop, but before I could lose it, he smiled and quickly added, "I'm better than 'happy'; I'm ecstatic. I was just wondering if there was anything you could change about us; anything you wished had happened differently, what would it be?"

I'd been raised to play with the cards you've been dealt and my eyes fell down to my wedding band with the redneck ruby peeking over the top, as I replied, "Nothing. Everything that's happened led us to being here right now, so I can't say that I'd change a thing." It was true. Even our Jerry Springer-esque wedding video of shame being broadcast for the world to see was a blessing in disguise because had it not been for the publicity surrounding our marriage, I was sure we both would have annulled that puppy faster than you could say Kardashian.

Eric eyed me for a moment before letting the subject drop and we talked about other things that were fast approaching. Christmas being one of them and he surprised me when he asked, "Do you want to go back to Louisiana for the holidays?"

I hadn't ever spent a Christmas away from home, but now that Eric and I were married, I kind of wanted to spend our first Christmas together in *our* home. Looking over at him, I asked, "Does it make me a selfish person if I said no?" I felt torn, both wanting to spend time with Gran and Jason *and* wanting to wake up in our own home opening presents under our own tree on Christmas morning. When I said as much, Eric offered, "Well, we could fly them out here instead."

Gran had seemed to be moving around okay when we'd visited over Thanksgiving, but I didn't know how well she'd handle being stuck on a plane for hours. "But what about Gran's arthritis?" I asked. "It might be too much for her to be sitting in those tiny little seats for hours." I really did want her to see where we lived and knew she'd love the flower gardens that surrounded the house, but I couldn't understand why Eric was looking at me like I was an idiot until he said, "Sookie, we'd fly them out first class."

*Oh. Well excuse me Mr. I-shit-gold-coins-so-money-is-never-a-concern. You'd be the perfect investor for Jason's Shitter brain child since he, like me, has shit for brains.*

*Fucking pregnancy hormones.*

I couldn't help that, at times, my brain automatically defaulted to when I'd lived paycheck to paycheck and just because that was no longer the case didn't mean that I was used to it yet. I'd spent my lifetime thinking in terms of being frugal; saving up for bigger ticket items that were only ever purchased out of necessity, but I knew it wouldn't be fair to take out my irrational anger on Eric either and despite the eye roll I couldn't stop myself from making, I calmly said, "Of course...silly me. I'll call her tomorrow and see how she feels about it."

His eyes examined my face, I was sure gauging my physical tells against my spoken words, and after a few minutes I decided I was done with being the subject of his scrutiny and chose to throw him for a different kind of loop.

"Fuck me."

No fanfare; no foreplay; just straight forward and to the point. I could tell my emotions were sitting on the fence and I could go easily fall either way; sad and angry or sated and happy. I was tired of being a whiney and weepy bitch for no justifiable reason and thought the latter sounded like a better idea to me, but I'd need Eric's *point* to thrust straight forward *into* me to get me there.

It worked because his entire expression changed in a heartbeat and he looked back at me like he wasn't sure he'd heard me right, asking, "What?"

"Sorry," I smiled sweetly. "Did that come out in Swahili? I meant to say, fuck me."

"What?" he repeated. "Here? Now?"

We were nearly at the gate to our neighborhood by then, so it probably wasn't very bright of me to answer him by taking his hand and shoving it down the front of my pants, but fuck it.

*The car had tinted windows and I had shit for brains.*

"Sookie," he growled.

If he thought his growly talk would dissuade me any, he was mistaken. It only turned me on more, so I unashamedly started moving my hips against his trapped hand and looked back at him, trying to seem unaffected by the impromptu finger fucking festivities going on, and innocently answered, "Yes?"

He looked angry, pleased, and turned on all at the same time, but didn't know which one to act on first, so I should've known there'd be hell to pay and it came in the form of the gate guard. Eric passively allowed me to rape his hand until he had to stop at the gate and while his hand was hidden by my coat, with the guard not being able to see me or what we were doing, Eric chose that moment to join the party that was now in full swing in my panties. Our roles in who was doing the fucking with his fingers were quickly reversed and in no time at all I was nearly biting through my lip trying to not let on that I was cumming like a mother fucker as Eric and the guard discussed the weather.

*News Flash: Forecast calls for torrential downpours and flash flooding. All of it in my underwear.*

He continued to tap my clit with his fingertip, making my whole body twitch, as we finally pulled forward and I gasped through it before removing his hand and smiling at him, saying, "That was so unfair."

His stern look aimed my way was spoiled by the smirk on his lips as he asked, "You have the audacity to call *me* unfair? You're cumming on my hand while I'm stuck talking to an extra chatty gate guard because they know their holiday tip is just around the corner, with The Captain standing at attention mind you, and *I'm* unfair?"

The Captain deserved to pull into my port for his troubles, but I was still feeling playful and as we pulled into the garage I smiled back him saying, "Poor baby..." I reached over as he shut the car off and stroked him through his jeans, purring, "You wanna know what else is unfair?"

"Hmm?" he hummed with his eyes closed and his head thrown back, no longer really paying attention to anything other than what my hand was doing.

I leaned over the center console and whispered in his ear, "That we don't have time for me to give The Captain a proper welcoming home because I need to get dinner going before everyone starts showing up."

By the time Eric caught on to what I'd said, I was already dashing into the house and laughed hearing him whine out, "Sookie!" I had no intention of leaving him hanging, so to speak, but I did need to get dinner started. I'd already readied everything that morning so I only had to stick the rib roast into the oven and when Eric didn't follow after me, I figured I'd probably have to kiss up to The Captain before I'd be forgiven.

*It wouldn't be a hardship to make nice-nice with his hard ship.*

I cut through the dining room on my way to look for Eric and noticed the new table already in place. With everything else going on, I'd nearly forgotten about it and took a minute to admire it when Eric's arms were suddenly wrapping around me from behind and something else of his rubbing up against *my* behind. I leaned back against him as he buried his lips against my neck, asking in between kisses, "Do you like it?"

I wasn't sure if he was talking about the table, what his lips were doing, or The Captain requesting permission to cum aboard, but the answer to all three questions was the same as I whispered, "Yes."

Wicked grabbed onto the back of his head while Immoral snuck around behind me trying give The Captain her not-so-secret handshake, but Eric pulled his hips back before she could latch on, saying, "I thought we didn't have *time*."

I spun around in his arms with Wicked and Immoral working in tandem to free The Captain from The Brig as I purred, "I'm sorry. I must've been speaking Swahili again. What I meant to say was that we have *plenty* of time..."

Eric's hands joined the melee by pulling my shirt over my head before ridding me of my bra, but even as his lips wrapped around my nipple his mouth argued, "But don't you have to cook dinner?"



*Seriously? How could he not be full from all of the pizza he'd just eaten?*

I was just about to tell him that the oven was doing the majority of the work, but he pulled my pants down and lifted me up onto our new table, saying, "Fuck it. We can always order takeout." His lips found mine as he pressed his weight against me, forcing me to lie down on the table, before trailing kisses slowly down my body. I shivered from both his lips and the cold wood underneath me, but I quickly heated right back up when I felt The Captain preparing to dock, only for Eric to pull back again.

"Eric..." I whined.

The cocky bastard smirked down at me with his fingers touching me in all of the wrong places, asking, "What? You said we had plenty of time."

I reached down and pushed his hand away, saying, "I already had the appetizer," and then shimmying my body closer to the edge of the table, I added, "Now I want the main course."

He teased my inner thigh by leaving a wet trail of pre-cum along the left one, but refused to get any closer.

"Starboard!" I snarled. "Full speed ahead!"

"Swahili again Sookie?" he asked tauntingly and continued to mock me, saying, "I thought we were discussing the menu, but I was thinking more along the lines of dessert."

I knew he was just teasing me, but his refusal wasn't making him very popular with my hormones and I answered through gritted teeth, "I made a cheesecake for *dessert*, now quit fucking with the pregnant woman!"

Eric must've sensed the danger he was in because he held on to my hips and filled me a second later, saying through his own gritted teeth, "Then I'll just *fuck* the pregnant woman."

I would've told him how much I agreed with choice and was happy to finally have him onboard, but my mouth refused to cooperate, instead just screaming out, "Yes," over and over.

*Hopefully that translated better for him than my Swahili.*

Eric really was a generous lover and he made sure that I came twice before finally allowing himself to let go, with both of us a panting sticky mess when it was all over. He kissed my lips and made me smile when he left another one on my belly as he stood up saying, "We should probably shower."

He was wagging his eyebrows at me while eying my naked self and I jokingly shoved him away, saying, "Alone. We should shower *alone*, but you go first. I need to clean the table."

I pulled on Eric's t-shirt and grabbed the rest of our clothes to bring into the laundry room when he wrapped his arms around me like a giant blond koala bear, saying, "Okay," but as he released me, he knocked on the tabletop still covered with my ass prints, among other things, and added with a smirk, "But only if you have Pam sit *here*."

I opened my mouth to ask him why, but in that same moment every time she'd ever walked in unannounced with her invisible cockblock radar working like a champ flooded into my head. Eric and I would be the only ones to know and I would still clean the table thoroughly, because even I wasn't that big of a bitch, but his grin only got wider seeing my own and I kissed him one more time, agreeing, "Deal."

And...because I'd forgotten I'd married a doofus with the mind of a teenager trapped in a man's body, I could only shake my head watching Eric leaving behind his own ass print on the tabletop before standing up again, asking, "What? It's probably the closest either one of us will ever get to her kissing our ass."

*I really shouldn't have been so surprised when he and Jason bonded over Thanksgiving.*

"Mmhmm..." I replied wryly, when in reality I was just focused on his bare ass as he left the room. It was still number one with me.

I'd just returned downstairs from showering when the first of our guests arrived in the form of Amelia. "Sookie!" she squealed and I laughed, both at her greeting and the look on Eric's face as he covered his ears. Looking up at him, she grinned, "I know you don't remember me, but trust me. You love me."

Eric loved Amelia like Yankee fans loved the Red Sox, but I didn't spoil her fun and instead was just happy to see her in better spirits than she'd been in the night before. "You're certainly chipper," I said.

She followed me into the kitchen, saying, "Eh, I'm at the 'fuck him' stage of grief and by that, I mean, I'll just fuck him right out of my head. Is Pam coming tonight?"

"Subtlety was never your strong suit, Ames," I laughed. "But yes, she will be here and as for whether or not she cums, I suppose that's all up to you."

We giggled just like old times and I was happy to have her back, so while she regaled me with stories of everything she'd seen while she'd been away, I finished getting dinner ready. I'd already set the table and even made up little place cards with everyone's names which Eric got a laugh out of knowing where Pam would be seated, but since Alcide and Holly already had plans, it would just be the eight of us.

Just as I was finishing up, the rest of our guests arrived and they all trailed into the kitchen one by one, minus Eric and Pam, but seeing Amelia's reaction to meeting Tray, I didn't think she had her sights set on Pam anymore. It appeared to be a mutual attraction on Tray's part as well, so I

left them to it and turned to Sam, Terry, and Lafayette asking, "How's everybody doing? I haven't seen you all in so long."

Looking over at Amelia and Tray's flirting, Lafayette replied, "Girl, I can't believe you didn't invite over a hot young thing for me. What's a pretty little thing like me supposed to do when it's time to pair off and play Seven Minutes In Heaven?"

"Seven minutes?" I asked laughing. "You must be losing your touch." He just glared at me, so I added, "Besides, it's not that kind of party you freak, but I'll keep my eye out. What's your poison lately?"

His man-moods changed quicker than my hormonal ones and Sam and Terry chuckled over him taking my question so seriously, as he thought about for a minute before replying, "I'm in the mood for something spicy. Latino? Lots of flavor on the tongue and can do the tango in the sheets."

I felt like I should have my old waitressing pad in my hand, but I laughed and said, "I'll keep my eye out." Sam was nice enough to offer to cut the roast for me and I pulled Terry aside asking him about his puppies. I really did want to get one for Eric knowing he'd never been allowed to have a pet when he was younger and after seeing how much he'd enjoyed playing with Terry's dog the last time they were over, I was sure he would love it. Terry agreed and said he'd already started training them, so I wouldn't have to worry about housebreaking it by Christmas time.

With that taken care of everybody helped bring all of the food into the dining room, but we were still missing Eric and Pam. I found them having a heated discussion in his office and butted in, asking, "Everything okay in here? Dinner's ready."

"Everything's fine," Eric answered, but Pam disagreed, saying, "No it's not. Victor Madden isn't going to wait forever and you'd be a fool to turn down this opportunity!"

*Ahh...the movie role.*

Eric turned to Pam with a lethal look in his eyes, so I pulled up my big girl panties, so high I could almost feel the wedgie, and said, "It's okay Eric. You should take the part."

His eyes turned to me full of disbelief, arguing, "But we haven't talked about it yet. I'll be gone for weeks. You're pregnant. What if something happens again? You need me here."

Hearing that all of his reservations had to do with me and not that he didn't want to do the movie, I walked over and sat down in his lap knowing my next words bordered on a lie, as I said, "I don't *need* you here." His mouth opened with a shocked gasp escaping, but I placed my finger over it to silence him, adding, "I *want* you here, but I'll still be here waiting for you when you get home. I'll have Pam and Alcide here if something happens, but nothing *will* happen. I'm sure we've already used up all of the baby drama points we're allowed."

"Sookie," he began hesitantly. "I don't know..."

I hated seeing him so torn. I hated feeling so selfish, but I knew I'd hate it even more if he ended up resenting me later on because I asked him to give up his dream for me. My heart felt torn in two when his head dropped against my shoulder with him whispering, "I don't know what to do."

*That made two of us.*

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## Chapter 100: Chapter 97

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### Chapter 97

#### EPOV

I knew Sookie was looking forward to sharing the baby news with everyone and that knowledge was the only reason I was able to get through the rest of our night because all I really wanted to do was kick everyone out so we could talk. The nagging in the pit of my stomach ate at me all through dinner and I couldn't even get any enjoyment from watching Pam running her bare hand along the wood grain of the tabletop, complimenting Sookie on her choice of finishes, and then picking up a dinner roll with that same bare hand that she ate, with another compliment to Sookie on the taste.

*She had no idea of just HOW good Sookie tasted and that was as close as she would EVER get to finding out.*

I did my best to try and participate in the various conversations taking place amongst our friends, but the only time I was fully engaged was when we made our announcement. Seeing the joy on Sookie's face and the unshed tears in her eyes pushed away all of the worry and uncertainty over what the future held. Deep down I knew that no matter what we decided, we would get through it together because it wasn't just the Bean that tied us to one another or a piece of paper with our drunken scrawled signatures, but the love we had for each other.

*I wouldn't even need those gold and platinum chains.*

It was close to midnight by the time everyone left and since Sookie had been up since early that morning she looked like she was about to fall asleep standing up, so I scooped her up into my arms and carried her to bed. She tried to argue that she wanted to clean up in the kitchen, at least that was my best guess based more on her annoyed expression than anything else, but her constant yawning wouldn't allow her to work up much steam or very many words other than my name. I stripped her out of her clothes quickly and put her under the covers and as soon as I slipped in her behind her and pulled her back against my front, she was out like a light.

However, I wasn't so lucky. For hours my mind tossed and turned while my body refused to even twitch knowing Sookie needed her rest. She was constantly moving when she was awake, doing what seemed like everything; for me; for her students; keeping up with the housework and doing all of it while her body was busy growing the Bean. My hand automatically caressed the soft skin

of her abdomen thinking about our baby just underneath my palm and even now I still felt gobsmacked by it all. So much had changed in such a short amount of time. Changed for the better, but changed nonetheless. My entire life, up until Sookie, had a singular focus; my career. I had allowed myself other distractions, mainly women and partying, but my career had been the only thing I really cared about. Now I had a wife; a son or daughter on the way and I loved them both more than any job, but would it make me selfish if I still wanted to have a successful career as well?

*Did I still WANT that career?*

Working with Sookie's students earlier that day reminded me of how I'd once been just like them; enamored with the idea of becoming a movie star and while I certainly had attained a high level of celebrity status, it was more because of my antics off-screen than my performance on-screen. I had the opportunity to change that now; the role of a lifetime was mine for the taking, but a part of me was still worried it could cost me the woman in my arms. The seven weeks I could remember of our twelve week marriage had been mostly great once I stopped questioning her motives for being with me, but it wasn't long enough for me to feel secure that any prolonged separation wouldn't have a profound impact on our relationship. We didn't have a normal courtship. We barely had *months* together much less the *years* of experience that would give me some indication that all would be well.

*Would she resent my absence?*

*Would I resent not being there with her?*

I didn't have an answer for the first question, but I already knew I would resent not being there with her. It might have been an easier decision if it wasn't for the Bean, but I couldn't know for sure. I did know that I didn't want to miss any part of the pregnancy. I wanted to feel every kick; hear every heartbeat at her monthly appointments and marvel at her expanding midsection gauging her growth against the size of my hands. Her baby bump was barely noticeable, which was something Sookie was both grateful for and hated at the same time. She wasn't looking forward to the added scrutiny when the news became public knowledge, but she often complained that her expanding waistline merely made her appear bloated and fat all of the time and didn't like that either.

*That's where we differed.*

I couldn't wait for others to know she was pregnant; pregnant with *my* child. Everyone would know that it was a part of *me* growing inside of her; her body; her heart; all of it was *mine*. I'd claimed her for my own in every way possible and our child was proof of that, but as for her growing body, she was completely insane if she thought she was anything other than completely fuckable regardless of her mood swings. Even those sometimes swung in my favor and just remembering her fucking my hand in the car earlier that day had me growing hard against her back and my eyes glanced at the digital display on the alarm clock next to the bed.

*Was a two hour power nap enough that I could chance waking her up with the Captain's salute?*

The sound of her softly snoring had me chastising myself for my selfishness. Hadn't I just thought about how she did too much as it was and there I was willing to wake her up from the sleep she desperately needed because of my own desperate need for her?

*I was an asshole.*

*And she was still completely fuckable.*

Rather than test my ability to remain noble, I got out of bed and went downstairs figuring the least I could do was clean up the kitchen so she wouldn't have to do it in the morning. There wasn't a lot to do since Sookie tended to clean up behind herself as she cooked, but it was enough to tame my urges to fuck her awake. I still wasn't feeling any more tired than I had when I'd gotten out of bed and went into my office and pulled out the script for Valhalla. I flipped through it, only stopping to read the more climatic parts, but by the time I set it down again, I wasn't any closer to knowing what I really wanted to do. Pam was right; I knew this was the opportunity of a lifetime, but Sookie *was* my life. I knew I couldn't honestly figure out what I wanted until I knew what *she* wanted, so I threw the pages back down onto my desk and went back upstairs knowing we'd need to talk about it come morning, but by the time I crawled back into bed, saving her from the sheet she'd become entangled in during my brief absence, I was finally able to fall asleep.

My dreams that night seemed to be mirroring the movie script I'd read right before I got back into bed and I found myself standing in the frozen tundra wearing nothing but fur pelts and worn leather boots with a sword strapped to my back. The sky was dark but I could make out a campfire just over the hill and walked towards it where I found Sookie sitting on a blanket made up of the same type of pelts I was wearing only she was dressed in nothing more than a flowing white gown.

"Sookie?" I asked hesitantly, not quite sure where we were, but I could no longer see beyond the circle of light from the fire. She looked up at me upon hearing her name, but she didn't say anything and instead let her eyes trail up and down my body before smiling and holding her hand out for me to join her by the fire.

My feet had never stopped moving towards her anyway, but when I went to take a seat next her she stopped me with her hands on my hips, saying, "That's a mighty big sword you've got."

"Is it?" I asked, turning my head to try and see what I could feel hanging down the center of my back, but my head whipped back around feeling her hands pulling on the leather cords that were keeping my pants laced together. My other *sword* fell out into her waiting hands with it quickly preparing for *battle*, but she was already on the offense and wrapped her lips around me.

"Sookie," I groaned enjoying the slick heat of her mouth. Even in my dream state I still marveled over how she could manage to take in all of me and my hands went into her hair just so I wouldn't topple over and ruin the weirdest best dream ever. There was snow falling all around us and I knew we should've both been freezing, but we weren't. At least *I* certainly wasn't, and if Sookie was, she wasn't giving me any indications that it was bothering her any.

*Maybe she was keeping herself warm from the friction of her lips sliding up and down my cock?*

It didn't take long before the outer edges of my consciousness started pulling on me, signaling that my dream was about to end, and as though dream Sookie could sense it too, she pulled back whimpering, "I'm sorry."

"Fuck!" I whined, and she gave me one last regretful look just as my eyelids started to flutter open, but it was then that I felt something else that took me a minute to realize was no dream.

Sookie was straddling my waist, completely naked, and then lowered herself down on top of me until I was buried inside of her to the hilt, rocking her hips against mine and repeating her dream apology of, "I'm sorry baby, but I just couldn't wait for you to wake up on your own."

*Sookie blew me awake? This woman was fucking PERFECT!*

I would swear on a stack of bibles that her breasts had the power to hypnotize me and now that all of me was fully awake, I gripped her hips helping her ride me as I sat up and took one of them into my mouth. I knew they were sometimes tender to the touch now, so I gently licked across the tip before increasing my suction and she cried out above me with her hands holding my head in place as she rocked even harder against me. I could feel her walls fluttering around my dick and grunted against her skin, encouraging her with the dirty words that always got her fired up even more. "That's right lover, fuck me like you mean it." Her rhythm faltered with my words as her muscles clenched even harder around me, so I held onto her and started thrusting into her in earnest from below, adding, "No! You sucked me awake and now you're gonna fuck me until we both cum screaming." All it took was me latching onto her other breast for her to do just that and the force of her orgasm pulled my own all the way out from my toes.

*Maybe even all the way from the Valhalla.*

I fell back to the mattress with Sookie still on top of me, as we both panted and our bodies glued together with more than just our sweat. All of me was completely sated and all I could think about was how perfect she was when she started giggling and asked, "So, am I forgiven for not letting you sleep in on a Sunday morning?"

I couldn't think of a single thing I wouldn't forgive her for after a wakeup call like that and her whole body moved when I chuckled, "I thought I was dreaming that your lips were wrapped around me."

"Really?" she asked quietly. "You could dream about anyone and you still dream of me?"

*She really felt the need to even ask?*

I wrapped her in my arms tighter and kissed the crown of her head hard, saying, "You're the only one I want, so why wouldn't I dream of you?" She melted against me with a soft, "Aww..." but knowing how quickly she could get weepy, I added, "Not everyone lusts after a grimy pirate."

My plan worked because I could feel her lips form into a smile against my chest before she sat up enough for me to see it and looked back at me, saying, "No, I'm pretty sure you're the *only one* I know that doesn't lust after that pirate." Considering her closest friends were mostly female or gay men, I couldn't really dispute her claim, so I did the next best thing and tickled her into submission.

Watching her laugh unabashedly while courageously ignoring her claims that she had to pee made me realize just *how much* I would miss if I had to go away, so after we had a very eventful, and very long, shower together, I decided to broach the subject of the movie over breakfast. I waited until we were halfway through our meal when I finally said, "So, tell me. How do you really feel about me taking that role?"

I'd already told her all of my concerns the day before while we were in car and was still on the fence about it, but knowing Sookie well enough by then, I watched her reaction to my question more than I waited to hear her actual words. Tara's suggestion that Sookie would never come out and *say* what *she* wanted still weighed heavily on my mind because I knew how fucking true it was, so when she stalled by taking another bite of her food, I eyed her suspiciously, saying, "Tell me."

Her eyes darted back down to her plate and she took her sweet time chewing until she finally swallowed and said, "It's a great opportunity for you."

I sighed, "That wasn't what I asked Sookie," and reached over and took her fork away before she could stall again, all the while knowing how dangerous my actions were since she was pregnant, and pulled her into my lap so I could inhale her neck while outright pleading, "Tell me how *you* feel."

She let her body melt into mine before she finally sighed, "I...I just want you to be happy. I know how much you wanted that part, so you should take it."

"But I'll have to go away," I added, although I highly doubted she'd forgotten that little detail.

"I know," she answered softly, adding, "but it's not like you'll be gone forever. It's only a few weeks."

*ONLY a few weeks. I hated being away from her for ONLY a few hours, so how in the hell would I cope going for six weeks without seeing her?*

Her calm demeanor over the whole thing surprised me. I'd expected tears at the very least, but either Sookie was a better actor than me or she really was okay with the idea of me taking the part and seeing that she was okay with it lifted some of the uncertainty I'd been feeling about it all. It might've had to do with the fact that I'd been networking to get that role for a year and a half before I'd ever met Sookie or that I was mostly a selfish creature by nature, but the more I thought about it the more I realized I *did* want to take the role. The only problem was it wasn't *all* that I wanted; I wanted the best of both worlds. I'd worked my whole life to get an opportunity like the one I had now and I wanted to prove to not only myself, but to everyone else who told



me that I'd never achieve anything more than a D-list celebrity status that I was better than that. But, I also wanted Sookie there with me. I didn't want us to spend that much time apart, so I looked back at her, asking, "*If* I took the part, would you be willing to go with me?"

Her face frowned with her question of, "How would I do that when I have to work?"

I knew my next words could turn the foreseeable future into a hailstorm of angry tears and accusations, so I very carefully kept my tone light as I said, "You don't *have* to work," as though she might've forgotten that little detail too and I was merely pointing it out.

Her eyes narrowed dangerously at me, but I did my best not to twitch under her scrutiny and she surprised me again, saying calmly, "No, I don't *have* to, but that wouldn't make me feel any better for walking out on my kids either." She sat up a little straighter in my lap and asked without any hint of anger in her tone, "Are you asking me to choose between you and them? Because if you are, I'll *always* choose *you*."

If I hadn't already been sitting down, her sincerity would've knocked me over. We'd argued over her working before and it had come up numerous times since then, but during those times her stance had never once faltered. She'd made it perfectly clear to me that she wanted to work, at least for now, and she wanted to do it somewhere where she felt she could make the biggest impact, but I had no doubt if I asked her now to quit her job just so she could go away on location with me because I would miss her too much, she would do it. It was a prime example of how she always put her own wants and needs aside for everyone else, especially for me, but even I couldn't be that selfish. She could've just as easily given *me* an ultimatum; her or the role, but she didn't.

*SHE wouldn't, so I couldn't either.*

"Of course not," I finally replied.

I was already feeling morose over the idea of spending that much time away from her and as if she could read my mind, she nudged me with a smile and said, "Maybe I could visit you though. A long weekend?"

That thought perked me up a little and I carried her into my office, refusing to physically let go of her because I'd already begun missing her, so I could check the filming schedule I'd initially been given with the script. The six weeks I'd be gone were from the middle of March until the beginning of May, but we'd begin shooting in the studio there in Hollywood as soon as taping for the sitcom ended at the beginning of February. Sookie looked it over and checked her own calendar before grinning up at me saying, "I think I can do better than a long weekend. Spring break is in early April so I could fly out for a whole week."

I looked at the dates she'd pointed out and saw that I'd really only have to go for two and half weeks before seeing her again and then another two and a half weeks after she left before I'd be back home. It was looking more and more doable, but before I could accept it in my head, I had

to ask one last time, "Are you *sure* you're okay with this? You still haven't really told me what *you* want."

She silently stared back at me for a while before leaning her head against my chest and admitting, "I'll miss you; a lot, but I would feel bad if you gave up this opportunity just to stay home with me." I knew I was going to miss her, probably a hell of a lot more, but before I could say that she added in a happier tone, "But, on the bright side, I've never even been to the east coast much less another country, so it'll be fun. I'll have to get a passport and buy a Shamu sized winter coat, but...yeah, fun!" She sat up to look at me with her eyebrow quirked and said, "And since we'll be in Sweden I'll be expecting one of those massages from you when I get there."

*She got that and more before it was even lunch time.*

The next week started off with me, and a very happy Pam, signing the contract to do the movie after Sookie reassured me via text message as my pen hovered above the dotted line that it was still okay with her and the rest of it blew by in a blur. With the holidays fast approaching it seemed there was always something that needed to be done and now that Gran and Jason had agreed to fly out and stay with us for the Christmas holidays, Sookie was acting like a woman possessed. Only one of the spare rooms, her *former* room, was 'fit for company,' so I was tasked with clearing out one of the others the following weekend while she went shopping for another bedroom set to put in there. I'd had no idea of just how much stuff I'd accumulated over the years and I gave some serious thought to draining the pool and chucking everything out the window into it and cementing it over, but the only thing that stopped me was knowing I wouldn't be able to see Sookie wandering around the backyard in a bikini come summertime.

*And then see to getting her OUT of it.*

At times it still felt weird knowing that I was married; that I was a husband and going to be someone's father. Even being able to think so far into the future that I already had plans to remove said bikini from Sookie was weird, but in a good way. I finally felt *normal* and that thought was only solidified later on that night when I was forced into the role of the waiting husband as Sookie finished getting herself ready so we could make an appearance at the studio's holiday party. I wasn't particularly keen to attend myself knowing I'd have to smile and act like I was having a good time when I'd much rather stay home with Sookie having an even better time.

The car that would be taking us had arrived on time, but when the driver had been left waiting for close to twenty minutes I finally knocked on the bathroom door, urging, "Babe? Are you almost done? We're running late and the car is waiting."

"*Do NOT call me 'babe'!*" she shouted through the still closed door.

*Yay for hormones...*

I'd never given much thought to how I addressed Sookie and realized I rarely called her anything other than her name or lover, but I didn't get why she'd be so opposed to being called 'Babe'.

*It probably had to do with that damn pig movie and her perceived flaws.*

"Oookaaay..." I began and then felt a little braver, hoping to get her out of whatever foul mood she was in by joking, "How about Baby Momma?"

*What? It was true.*

"Better!" was her only reply.

*Seriously? She'd rather me call her Baby Momma than Babe?*

I was about to ask that very question when the door opened revealing a mostly sexy Sookie. I say 'mostly' because I didn't find the scowl on her face very alluring, but I had ways of making that disappear and easy access to do it since she was wearing a black dress that fell to her knees. Because I knew we were already running late, I kept my hands to myself for now and just smiled, saying, "There's my beautiful Baby Momma."

Sookie imitated what sounded like a tire leaking air as she said, "More like your ball and chain." She pulled the front of her dress tight with her hands just underneath her baby bump and stared down at it, adding, "*Bowling* ball and chain."

I grabbed one of her hands and pulled her along behind me so she wouldn't see me roll my eyes while saying, "Stop it. You're beautiful. Besides, you don't even look pregnant in that dress." It gathered just underneath her breasts and the fabric flared out from there, so unless she planned on flipping her skirt up all night long, no one would be the wiser.

*But I'd better be the ONLY one she was flipping that skirt up for.*

"That's the problem," she shot back. "I don't look *pregnant*. I just look *fat*."

"So then tell everyone you're pregnant," I offered. It was really only a matter of time anyway, so even though it would just make the targets on our heads even bigger that much sooner, I didn't care as long as she felt better. I also thought it best to keep her moving so she wouldn't have time to pout over anything and helped her get her coat on before finally getting us out the front door.

"No," she said in a much calmer tone once we slid into the waiting limo. "I'll just let people think I'm fat for now. That way I can still go Christmas shopping without too much fanfare."

Hearing her mention the holiday made me realize I still had no idea on what to get Sookie for Christmas and while there were a million things I could buy her, I wanted to find something she would *really* want. I just had no clue what that might be and while Sookie prattled on, listing the things she still had to pick up, I was trying to come up with a way to figure out what to get her without actually having to ask her first. It was times like this that made me wish I could remember the time I'd lost from the accident. It was only three weeks of my life and it seemed like everything was back on track, but for all I knew Sookie could've told me every little thing

she'd ever wanted and I'd have my own lists full of things to buy her. Doubtful, but still a possibility.

I knew Sookie better than I'd ever known anyone in my entire life, probably because she was the first person I'd ever cared about enough to get to know that well, but I was sure there were still plenty of things I had yet to learn. I looked forward to finding out everything there was to know, but for now I'd just be happy for a hint at what she might possibly want.

The hotel the party was being held at wasn't far from the house, so it wasn't long before I was trying to guide us through the ballroom, having to stop every few seconds to greet people I mostly knew by face and not their actual name. Sookie, of course, charmed everyone she came across and I was in the middle of talking to one of the show's writers when I felt her stiffen at my side. My left hand had been resting on the small of her back and I looked down at her when I'd felt her muscles tense to see her staring ahead of us while twisting her wedding band. Seeing it I was distracted for a split second with my brain trying to put together *ring* and *gift* when her right hand suddenly reached around to lace her fingers through mine.

"Sookie?" I asked as her grip tightened, wondering what was wrong, but hearing the voice now directly in front of us was both aggravating and enlightening.

"Babe, I was wondering if I'd run into you here."

*It was a different kind of pig all along.*

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## Chapter 101: Chapter 98

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### Chapter 98

#### SPOV

*Seriously?*

*QUINN?*

*SERIOUSLY?*

Like the past week hadn't been bad enough with me running myself ragged so I wouldn't have time to think about Eric's eventual departure, now I had to deal with my douche bag ex?

I felt Eric go rigid next to me and a soft growl left his chest, but I couldn't take my eyes off of Quinn wondering what in the hell it was I ever saw in him. He was smarmy and icky; a cross between Mr. Clean and a lounge lizard in his shiny suit, and all I could think of was how thankful I was that it wasn't *his* hand that was holding mine. I'd felt so hurt and betrayed by him way back when that I honestly thought I'd never trust anyone again, but now I had Eric, whom I

would trust my life with, and couldn't even muster up *any* feelings seeing Quinn other than disgust.

While I knew it was rude, I also knew Gran wouldn't hold it against me considering who was standing before me and didn't bother to acknowledge his greeting with anything more than a cold stare.

*After all, he couldn't really throw stones since he'd been rude enough to throw his dick into anything that crossed his path while we'd been together.*

*Unless Eric stole them away from him.*

*NOT going there pregnant brain!*

"What do you want?" Eric barked out without even pretending to be civil, but I didn't care.

*It was after hours so he shouldn't have to act if he didn't want to.*

Quinn flinched ever so slightly and his eyes shot to Eric, but I couldn't remember whether or not I'd told him about what happened the last time they'd crossed paths. I didn't think it would look good for Eric to start throwing punches at a holiday party, so I pulled the hand I'd been holding around my back and settled his palm on the Bean hoping it would calm him down, but if anything, he seemed to get more territorial by pulling me flush against his side and repeating, "What. Do. You. Want?"

I saw it the moment Quinn's testosterone levels kicked up a notch and he squared his shoulders, answering, "I just thought I'd catch up with *an old flame*. After all, Sookie and I spent *years together*. Most of the time, *in bed*." He looked over at me smiling cockily, asking, "Isn't that right babe?"

*Do NOT call me BABE!*

Eric was literally vibrating next to me, but I barely noticed because I was suddenly afflicted with tunnel vision. All I could picture was all of those shitty looks I used to get from the people at the gym who obviously thought I'd been an idiot for not realizing Quinn had been cheating on me the entire time we were together; remember the hurt and humiliation I would feel with every offhanded remark he'd make about my weight; regretting all of those years I'd let him have that power over me, but no more. He'd already proven he could hurt Sookie Stackhouse.

*But I was Sookie Northman.*

I wrenched myself free from Eric's grasp and stalked forward towards Quinn, forcing my face into a coy smile as I reached out placing my hand on his chest. I had no doubt that it probably looked like an intimate caress, especially hearing Eric's angry and shocked, "Sookie?" behind me, but I didn't touch Quinn for the sake of having an intimate connection.

*I did it to keep my balance with an entirely different kind of connection in mind.*

Quinn's triumphant look back at Eric was timed perfectly with my knee flying up to connect with his balls and he doubled over before slowly falling to the floor, but I bent right over him and did a poor job of trying to keep my voice down, despite the spectacle of me having just kicked the cocksucker, and agreed, "Yes, we *did* spend a lot of time in bed together you crass ass, but that was only because I'm an optimist at heart. I kept hoping you'd get your shit together and realize *foreplay* doesn't mean you should only *play* for *four seconds*. I kept hoping you might one day last longer than a game of tic-tac-toe between two Rhodes Scholars. It was all I could do because I certainly knew better than to hope that thing you call a dick would ever find my G-spot; there's no way *that thing* could *reach* it. Still, you'd think with all of your extracurricular activities you would've picked up a trick or two, but I guess all you're really good at is picking up *tricks*."

I wasn't sure Quinn could even hear me over his own groaning, but I sure as hell felt a lot better and when I felt Eric's hands on my hips as he came to stand behind me, I stood up finding comfort in his touch. Pressing my back against him, *my husband*, I couldn't help adding, "But even with all of my *optimism* I could have never imagined having a lover like *my husband*. It takes all of my willpower just to let him out of *our bed*. Not only can he *reach* my G-spot; he's found so many spots the whole fucking alphabet isn't long enough. He's got so many tricks up his sleeve his name should be David fucking Copperfield, but not only do I get the benefit of his *colossal sized cock* for the rest of my life, I get to do it with a man I *actually love*. *Eric* owns me; heart, body and soul. *You* were nothing more than a reason why I needed to replace my vibrator every few months."

I genuinely smiled watching Quinn wince as he slowly stood up and he glared back at me, spitting out, "You're a *fool* if you think you're the *only one* he's fucking, especially since it looks like you're packing the pounds on again."

I nearly toppled over when Eric tried to rush towards Quinn from behind me, but I dug my heels in and pulled his hands tighter around my waist to keep him there when he finally gave up and just shouted, "Fuck you!" over my head.

A little over a year ago I would've shrunken into myself bemoaning my poor self-image and feeling like I wasn't good enough for anyone to love, but now I knew better. Now I had Eric and if I'd learned anything from him, it was this:

*I was beautiful.*

*I was perfect.*

*I was his and he was most certainly mine.*

Eric was still snarling behind me, but I merely took his hands and framed the Bean with them. They were in that position so often he didn't seem to even notice until I turned my body to the side and looked back at Quinn, saying, "That's due to another benefit of having Eric as a lover. All of that fucking means all of that cum has to go *somewhere*." Quinn's shocked face seeing my

now distinguishable baby bump was priceless, but I was done with him in every sense of the word and peeked up at Eric's face instead. *He* was the one that looked triumphant now and I fell in love with him just a little bit more seeing just how much he thought *I* was a prize, so when he finally looked down at me, I winked and added, "A girl can only swallow so much."

Eric seemed to have dismissed Quinn's presence too because his head fell back as he barked with laughter and then smiled back at me wickedly before leaning down to whisper into my ear, "You *know* how amazed I get seeing just *how much* you can *swallow*." I shivered when he nipped at the skin just below my ear and shook it off knowing we couldn't get frisky here.

*In the middle of the ballroom.*

*In the middle of Eric's WORK FUNCTION.*

That tunnel vision was a bitch because now that it had abated, I could actually take in our surroundings and this time I did shrink back into myself and Eric's embrace seeing we had quite an audience around us, Alcide, Holly, and Pam included. Seeing Pam made me wonder if her mere presence had activated my Sookie sensor indicating it was systems go for the blue bombs to drop and my blush swept over me so rapidly it could've been called a hot flash. I was sure even the skin in between my toes were sweating and I managed to squeak out into Eric's chest a soft, "Sorry."

*You know, because my apology should be WHISPERED, but practically shouting about Eric's colossal sized cock and swallowing floods of his baby making cum for the entire room to hear was perfectly fine.*

Eric just chuckled saying, "You have nothing to apologize for," but his words were quickly drowned out by a small round of applause and I peeked out seeing Pam, Alcide, and Holly among those clapping while Quinn gingerly stormed off.

I burrowed myself into Eric's body wishing I could just climb inside of him to hide in embarrassment, but still managed to hear when the writer he'd been speaking to before my clusterfuck cock and cum Christmas party confession, said, "Too bad we're not on cable. I could've used a few of those lines."

*Just. Kill. Me. Now.*

If I could have, I would have run from the room, but since we'd just gotten there I knew we needed to stick around for a while and I refused to make eye contact with anything other than my still sweaty toes as Eric led us to a table to sit down. I felt it when he placed a soft kiss on my red hot cheek as he said, "I'll go get you something to drink and be right back."

Since I hadn't been looking up, I didn't realize Pam had followed along with us until I heard her yell to Eric's retreating back, "I don't think that's necessary. She just said she's full from swallowing your..."

"PAM!" I yelled interrupting her and somehow managed to become even redder.

"Oh Sookie," she chuckled, taking the seat next to me. "I just love it when you lose your mind on people. It's always so entertaining. You should do it more often."

I had no doubts Pam would've been entertained, but I was concerned about what my dick disclosure might do to Eric's career and asked worriedly, "Did I just fuck up things for Eric?" The irony wasn't lost on me that Pam's initial reason behind Eric and I staying married had been so *he* would look stable.

*Too bad for him he'd married a crazy bitch.*

"Are you kidding?" she smiled. My eyes followed her gaze as she turned and pointed out Eric standing up at the bar. He was surrounded by some of the show's bigwigs, but before I could freak out, I saw they were all laughing and smiling. One of them even clapped Eric on the back and I sank back into my chair with a relieved sigh. Pam turned back to me, saying, "This is Hollywood Sookie. We all love a good show."

"Yeah, well...I never wanted to be a star and tonight certainly hasn't changed my mind." Now that I was calmer, I wondered out loud, "What in the hell is Quinn doing here anyway?"

The last time I'd seen him he was chasing down the engagement ring I threw across the gym floor, but Pam seemed to know when she didn't hesitate, answering, "He came in with one of the extras on the show. Dye job brassy blond; fake tits; fifteen minutes of fame in her lifetime."

*Huh...I guess if she knew all of THAT Pam must have her own superpowers.*

"You know," Pam interrupted my thoughts, "now that you've outed yourself in a room full of fame whores, the news is going to get out about Baby Pam."

Fuck...I guess that's what I got for letting my mouth bypass my brain filter, but there was nothing to be done for it now except put wishes under pillows that a rainbow would shoot out of my ass and said, "Maybe no one will say anything."

*It could work...after all I WAS Mrs. Eric Northman just like my teenage-self had wished.*

It came out sounding more like a question than a statement and probably even sounded Swahili given Pam's confused look back at me right before she burst into laughter.

*I guess that was my answer.*

The rest of the night passed without incident and either Quinn had left or he'd gone into hiding because we didn't run into him again, but when we got home that night Eric was sure to show me just how much he'd liked my impromptu '*Ode to my husband's celebrated cock*' earlier that evening.



*And Eric gave us both a reason to celebrate for the rest of the night.*

The following week was part perfect/part nightmare. Perfect because my kids in the Drama Club had worked their asses off and thanks to Eric's help, their debut performance in front of an actual audience went off without a hitch. They'd definitely gelled better than they had when it was just me helping them and I got quite a few compliments on how great their performance was. I was proud of them and even Eric was beaming at my side, but I was worried too knowing there was a spring performance we'd have to do. Now we had high expectations to live up to, but Eric wouldn't be able to help me the next time since he'd be away filming the movie.

I didn't feel *as* bad about it all now that I'd been able to wrap my head around the idea. It really was a once in a lifetime opportunity for him and he'd spent his lifetime working to get it. I was even looking forward to my first trip abroad to see him and had already sent the paperwork in to get my passport done, but the running around I'd had to do for everything was the nightmare part of my week.

Pam was right. By the morning after the holiday party, it was on the news that there were rumors circulating I was pregnant and conjecture that it was the only reason why we'd gotten married to begin with. I couldn't even muster up any outrage over it since that seemed like a much nobler reason to get married than one too many tequila shots, but the level of crazy that ensued was a bit much. The paparazzi were back in full force following us everywhere, so after talking it over with Eric and Pam, we decided to just go ahead and confirm the pregnancy hoping it would make them dial it back a notch.

*I had a better chance of having that rainbow shoot out of my ass.*

I just didn't get it. I knew Eric was a celebrity and all; he was sexy as all get out five mother fucking times, but with the way the press was acting you'd think I'd be pushing Jesus Christ himself out of my crotch in another six months and even though neither one of us could remember our wedding night, we both knew better.

*It wasn't an immaculate conception.*

By the following week the paparazzi had gotten braver. At first they would only follow me as far as the school grounds before veering off, but I assumed they eventually felt it was safe enough for them to actually stop and get out of their cars seeing that I was able to get to and from the school without being accosted. It was on the Monday morning of the last week of school before the holiday break would start when they all converged on me in the school parking lot and formed such a tight circle, I couldn't get through them. I was blinded by flashbulbs and questions, but ignoring them wasn't doing me any good. The school didn't have the resources to hire extra security guards to keep them out of the open school grounds and I was sure the police force in Compton had better things to do than make sure I wasn't having a million pictures taken of me every morning. I felt like I was about to either scream or cry when I heard her.

"Just back the fuck up!"

I don't know if *they* heard her, but Tara made herself known a second later and when I could finally see her, I saw she'd also brought reinforcements with her. Teaching an AP English course meant that my class had only the elite students, grades wise, but that didn't mean I hadn't noticed any of the other students when passing through the hallways. Some of them were downright scary looking and I'm more than a little ashamed to say that if I were passing by them out on the street, I'd move to the other side. Gangs were a problem in most inner cities and Compton was no different, but it would seem that Tara had made friends with them because some of the biggest and scariest of the bunch forced their way through the crowd of cameramen with her leading the charge. I didn't have time to wonder why when they all formed their own tight circle around me and led me into the school.

"Thank you," I sputtered out to them all, along with a few tears I couldn't hold back, as soon as we were inside.

I almost laughed seeing a few of the bigger guys looking uncomfortable, at either my thanks or my tears, but Tara spoke up again, saying conspiratorially, "No tears. You can't show'em any weakness or they'll eat you alive."

My eyes shot to her face and saw that she was kidding, but I didn't care if it made me look weak and hugged the lot of them in gratitude. Some of them chuckled while some of them blushed and while I knew I'd stick out like a sore thumb walking down any one of the streets in that neighborhood, inside that school at least, I felt like I was one of them.

I knew better than to say anything to Eric about it knowing he'd lose his ever-loving mind and put another rainbow-shooting-out-of-my-ass wish under my pillow that he wouldn't find out. It seemed to be working for the time being when I hadn't gotten any angry messages from him during the day and the same group of kids were waiting for me that afternoon to escort me back to my car with them forming a human blockade at the curb so the paparazzi couldn't follow my car out onto the street. The situation repeated itself every morning and afternoon after that and I didn't think twice when I doled out a fist full of hundred dollar gift cards to them in thanks on the last day of school before Christmas. I already knew I didn't have to buy their loyalty, but they didn't have to act as my bodyguards either and they were actually surprised that I'd bothered to thank them at all. It made me sad for them and while I knew there wasn't much I could do in the way of helping them in some other way, that didn't mean I wouldn't try and come up with *something*, but my thoughts were distracted on the drive home with my excitement building with each mile I got closer to the house knowing Gran and Jason would be arriving that night.

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## Chapter 102: Chapter 99

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### Chapter 99

**EPOV**

After the *defining dick* moment at the studio's holiday party (defining how much more Sookie preferred *mine* over that pussy *Quinn's*) something shifted inside of her. Had I not known her as well as I did beforehand, I might not have noticed, but whereas she used to be self-conscious of her perceived flaws, after their confrontation she seemed more confident in herself. I had yet to hear one negative thing come out of her mouth about her body or the changes it was going through since that night, so while I may have hated running into that asshole and hearing about them together in bed (actually, I enjoyed Sookie's take on the whole thing) I was actually glad it happened since her being able to tell him exactly what she thought about it all seemed to be the catalyst for the change. She was surer of herself, despite the added circus of the baby news becoming public knowledge, and I was glad for it. She *should* be confident because she was *perfect*.

However, we could both do without the added paparazzi presence the news evoked. When I heard the talking heads speculating on the pregnancy being the reason for us marrying at all, I internally scoffed and stopped watching the news altogether after that day. Knowing how well that choice turned out for my own parents, it was something I never would've done.

*But apparently tequila was a much more powerful motivator than a positive pregnancy test.*

I couldn't remember the last time I'd been excited about Christmas. Usually I tried to go away somewhere for the holidays only so I wouldn't have to be reminded that only normal people got to celebrate with their families, but this year I *was* normal and I was anxious for it to start. Sookie had transformed the house into something out of a Norman Rockwell painting and I had to keep reassuring her that I didn't mind every time she apologized for wanting to pick up *just one more thing*. I loved coming home and finding something new that she'd gotten, whether it was a snowman, a reindeer, or Santa Claus himself, but I didn't want to give voice to my inner pussy and gush over just how giddy I felt inside seeing them. I remembered the feeling back when I'd first gotten out of the hospital, but it was even truer now; Sookie had made the house a home and I loved her for it.

My father had never been one to do much for Christmas. I'd get the odd gift on Christmas morning when I was younger, but it was never really anything special. Celebrating in my household just meant he'd get to the bottom of whatever bottle was in his hand, but all of that was in the past. Now I had a *real* family; one I *wanted* to spend the holidays with and no longer had to worry about whatever fucked up mood he'd be in.

Now I even had a real Christmas tree.

Sookie had fought with me over it when we went shopping for one the weekend before Gran and Jason would be flying out, saying the one I wanted was way too big, but she was at least gracious enough to admit I was right once we got it home. The rooms in our home were much bigger than the ones in the farmhouse she'd grown up in, so it didn't look like it belonged in Paul Bunyan's house like she'd snarked at the Christmas tree lot while eying me from head to toe.

*I wasn't THAT fucking tall.*

And while I was looking forward to having Gran and Jason visit over the holidays, the only downside was that I couldn't arbitrarily strip Sookie of her clothes and have my way with her whenever and wherever I wanted to. I still couldn't get enough of her and the two of us having sex was almost a natural state of being anymore. We'd even managed to train Pam to actually fucking wait for someone to let her into the house instead of just barging in like she normally did. I considered it good practice for parenting for when the Bean got here because if we could train Pam then how hard could a kid be?

*Maybe I'd make an okay dad after all.*

I'd managed to set up a couple of surprises for Gran and Jason, but I wasn't too sure how Sookie would react to them so I decided to go with the mantra that it was better to ask for forgiveness than permission and didn't tell her. If anything I figured the high of having her family visit would outweigh the need she might feel to do me bodily harm when she found out and she wouldn't prematurely make herself a widow.

*One could hope.*

We would need to leave for the airport as soon as she got home and I'd made sure to clean up after myself all day long after she'd spent the night before in a tizzy cleaning the house. I knew now when Hormonal Sookie was in charge of my normally sweet and loving wife just by looking at her, so I knew better than to suggest a cleaning service again, but that was one of the things I was hoping Gran would help me convince her of when she got here and actually saw the size of the house. However I'd also noticed how she always seemed to be in a better mood after smelling the lemon scented cleaner she seemed to prefer, so I'd made sure to spray a few strategic spots she'd have to pass by on her way through the house when I saw her coming up the driveway.

My ploy worked because while she barked, "Eric! Why is there a limo out front?" her face was back to being serene as soon as she inhaled.

*Did they make lemon scented men's cologne?*

"Why aren't you dressed?" she asked without waiting for a reply to her first question.

I wasn't sure my lemon scented blitzkrieg would work once she saw the limo, so I'd made sure to be standing in nothing more than my low rise jeans and an unbuttoned shirt knowing how much the sight of my bare chest sidetracked her. I'd had to up my workouts with Tray at the gym for the upcoming movie and while I wasn't adding much more mass, the muscles I had were becoming more defined and, according to my Sookie Sensor, much more distracting, so I put a little swagger into my gait as I walked towards her slowly buttoning up my shirt and answered, "The limo is so we don't have to wait for parking at the airport." I omitted the other reasons why and probably could've recited the phone book and Sookie would've never known, just like she didn't know I was smirking at her since she couldn't take her eyes off of my chest. I wished we had more time so I could strip for her instead, but one look at the clock told me we needed to go, so as soon as the last button was done I tilted her chin up and put my lips against hers, saying, "We should go."

My ploy worked a little too well because Sookie's hands snaked up my front and started undoing the buttons of my shirt as she said, "They won't be landing for a couple of hours," while kissing every new inch of skin she uncovered.

She was distracting in her own right and I grabbed onto her hands while backing away, saying, "Umm...I changed their flight, so they're arriving sooner." It seemed like a good fucking idea at the time, but now I wanted to kick my own ass. You'd think I'd have built up some sort of tolerance where Sookie was concerned. We'd had sex more times than I could count, but it seemed no amount was enough. The more I had her, the more I craved her.

*What the fuck was I going to do when I had to go away on location and be without her for weeks?*

I didn't want to think about that now, so I quickly re-buttoned my shirt and grabbed her hand, leading her out of the house and into the waiting limo, before she could get her wits about her again and on the way to the airport I explained that I'd gotten them a direct flight to L.A. from Shreveport so Gran wouldn't have to travel for as long, while omitting the details that may or may not turn Sookie into the subject of a future Dateline special:

*When Pregnant Wives Lose Their Shit and Kill Their Well-Meaning Husbands.*

Since I didn't want to tempt either one of us by distracting her further with any nakedness, I used the holiday instead and asked her if she was sure she had everything she'd wanted to get. She'd been making list after list for weeks and my plan worked with her verbally ticking off item after item all the way until we pulled up to the airport.

When the car came to a stop and the driver opened our door for us, Sookie finally took a look around and asked, "Why are we getting out here?"

We weren't pulled up outside of the Arrivals section and instead were in another part of the airport where the private planes landed, so after we got out of the car, I answered, "Because this is where Gran and Jason are coming in." There were no direct flights from Shreveport to L.A., unless of course you flew on a private jet, and I knew the hours spent on a plane along with getting to a connecting flight would take a toll on Gran, so I'd made a few calls. It also helped that we would be able to avoid the paparazzi circus this way, so while the expense of chartering the jet was a *tad* more expensive than two first class tickets, it was worth it.

Sookie was no dummy and of course noticed the private plane pulling up right away, so she turned to me and glared, "Eric Northman! What did you do?"

I knew she'd be upset over it with what she would consider something like this as being too extravagant, which was why I didn't tell her about it beforehand. And I tried to keep that in mind, but even knowing my actions were likely to anger her, a part of me was slightly pissed off as well. It was bad enough she wouldn't let me replace that ridiculous car of hers yet, but I was getting tired of having to justify my every action and I really fucking hoped she didn't pull that shit when she found out what I'd gotten her for Christmas. It took me forever to finally come up

with the one thing I could remember her saying she wanted and I was excited about giving it to her, but seeing her glaring up at me now had me worried what her reaction was going to be, so my tone was a little harsher than I'd meant it to be when I answered, "I chartered a private flight so *Gran* wouldn't be stuck on two different planes for hours on end. *Now* she won't be stuck trying to get through a throng of cameramen at the public terminals. *Now* we can just collect their bags in peace and be on our way back home. She's *my* family *too!*"

I was sure there would be tears or yelling or a combination of the two and only hoped it would be over with by the time Gran and Jason disembarked, but Sookie surprised me once again because instead she just stared back at me for another split second before cocking her eyebrow up and shoving her hand down the back of my jeans. I knew she liked my ass (but I didn't believe for a second it was her favorite body part of mine no matter what she claimed) and before I could question her motives, she said, "Huh...you're going commando and yet I could've sworn your panties were all kinds of twisted up in there."

She flashed me a smile while I rolled my eyes and then she leaned up for a kiss, saying, "Thank you for being so sweet. I'm sure Jason loved it and you can just deal with Gran all by yourself when she gets off the plane while I hide behind the Bean."

*Uh oh.*

Sookie had yet to take after someone and on some level I knew the Gran-factor of this plan falling to shit existed, but surely she wouldn't be *that* upset. Would she? I didn't think taking off my shirt would work with her, so I just shrugged my shoulders in response and hoped if she was really that upset maybe Jason would do something really stupid and draw her ire away from me.

*And if I got too desperate I could always ask him about Shitter.*

Sookie had yet to remove her hand from the back of my pants and I had yet to spot a dark corner I could drag her off to while we were waiting, but it was only a moment later when our little bubble was invaded with an overenthusiastic Jason running up to us, exclaiming, "Hot damn brother! You sure don't do nuthin' small, do ya."

Sookie gave my ass one final squeeze and withdrew her hand as she turned and hugged him, saying, "*Nothing* about Eric is *small*."

I laughed at his 'eww' face, but my smile disappeared when I heard for the second time that night, "Eric Northman!"

*Would it be a pussy move if I threw my pregnant wife into the path of her angry grandmother so I could make a swift getaway?*

At first I thought Sookie had the same idea and was being a martyr only to frown when I realized she was just giving Gran a hug and not actually putting her life down for mine, so I squared my shoulders and waited for my whoopin' from the elderly woman now in front of me. "You!" she barked with her finger poking me squarely in my chest, "put up way too much of a fuss for an

old lady and her baggage, but I must say I've never felt more like royalty in my entire life." She pulled my stunned face down closer to hers and placed a kiss on my cheek, adding, "Thank you."

*Yep. Sookie took after her Gran alright. Surprises and all.*

The rest of the night passed by in a Sookie and Gran chatter filled blur with Jason and me as their spectators. Gran loved our house and my hopes got raised when after the tour ended she looked at Sookie incredulously, asking, "You clean this all by yourself?" I could tell Sookie wanted to get huffy, but wouldn't dare do so with the woman that raised her, so I felt brave enough to throw in the idea of a cleaning service again before I hastily retreated. Jason's only complaint that night was that there weren't any paparazzi hanging around to take his picture since we'd been in a private hangar.

*He'd bought new sunglasses 'an e'erythang!'*

Which was how I got roped into agreeing to take him to Joan's On Third (aka Paparazzi Central) for brunch the following day. It used to be one of my favorite hangouts, but I hadn't been there at all since I'd been with Sookie and hoped the fact it was Christmas Eve day would mean it wouldn't be as crowded. When we got there I saw the exact opposite was true and any other time I would've left because it just wasn't worth the hassle, but I decided I could stand it for a couple of hours to appease Jason's curiosity figuring it was a hell of a lot better than introducing him to any of my former '*lady friends*' which was what he *really* wanted. I thought I'd be brooding and annoyed the entire time we were there, especially since Sookie and Gran stayed home not wanting any part in what Sookie called our '*maiden excrement adventure*', but I'd forgotten how much fun I had with Jason. I found myself thoroughly entertained watching him preen in front of the cameras and didn't even balk when he asked if we could sit at one of the tables outside. We caught up with each other's lives and I thanked him again for his part in helping me with Sookie's Christmas present, but the biggest laugh I had was on the drive back home.

"So," I asked him, "was it everything you thought it would be?"

"That shit is *fan-fucking-tastic!*" he smiled. "I don't know what you and Sook are bitchin' about. It's kinda nice bein' popular like that."

"Can you imagine having that follow you everywhere you go? People making up stories based on what they *see* and nothing more, no matter what the actual truth is?" I knew it could look glamorous, but it really fucking wasn't.

Jason made a 'pfft' noise and waved his hand, saying, "Nah...who the hell cares what people think. *I don't!*"

"That's good," I smiled, adding, "because it won't be long before pictures of us get put on the internet. They'll probably speculate that you're my secret lover since you kept leaning over and whispering in my ear and then grinning like a fool." He had been too, but I was actually fucking thankful at the time since he kept whisper asking me if I'd '*slept with her too*' whenever another female passed within ten feet of us, until I finally snapped at him that rumors of my sexual

heyday were greatly exaggerated and I hadn't *actually* slept with every woman in the greater Los Angeles area.

*It was more likely the number was probably closer to half.*

Jason just looked horrified and I arranged a mock pout on my face and placed my hand on his knee, giving it a gentle squeeze as I said, "And then we fought."

"Fuck you man!" he said, pushing my hand away while I laughed at him. "Gran didn't raise no intolerant fuckers and I ain't got nuthin' against nobody, but if I lose out on gettin' me a starlet piece a ass because e'erybody thinks I want a piece a *yours*, I'm a gonna be *pissed!*"

We were pulling up to the gate by that point and, by chance, Sookie happened to be directly in front of us. Gran wasn't with her, so I assumed she'd just run out for something, but I gestured to the bane of my garage ahead of us saying, "I don't know why you'd be pissed. Your sister has no complaints about my ass. In fact, she claims it's her favorite part."

Sookie must have noticed us behind her because she turned and waved at us while Jason just cringed and stuck his fingers in his ears chanting, "La la la la la," over and over all the way until we pulled up to the house.

I was still laughing when Sookie came up to me, greeting me with a kiss and saying, "I had to run to the store to pick up some stuff Gran wanted to go with dinner tomorrow night." Seeing his sister had automatically tucked her hand into the back pocket of my jeans just made Jason avert his eyes and his 'la la la' volume increase making Sookie ask, "What's his problem?"

I was about to launch into the story of how all Stackhouses were in love with my ass when I noticed the car parked in front of the house. Sookie's eyes were drawn to it too and since her hand was in my back pocket she got dragged along with me as I made a beeline for the front door, making her trot a little, asking, "What's wrong? Whose car is that?"

I was already throwing open the front door about to answer her when Gran's voice called out, "Sookie? Eric? Is that you?"

She didn't sound particularly distressed, but I still practically ran into the kitchen with Sookie hot on my heels where we both skidded to a halt. I heard Sookie gasp next to me and my glare remained on the back of the head seated at the kitchen table across from Gran when she warmly said, "There you two are! I was just saying you all would be back any minute and once we were properly introduced I insisted he should just have a seat and wait. We've just been talking about how excited we are about the baby."

Jason came into the room with his fingers still in his ears, but I assumed everyone could sense the tension coming from me and Sookie because he just looked from us to our new guest and when no one said anything, his patience reached an end with him walking forward and thrusting his hand out, saying, "Hey there. I'm Jason Stackhouse, Sookie's brother. And you are?"



"My father," I answered curtly. "He's my father."

*No matter how many times either one of us had wished it wasn't true.*

Jason's grin just got wider as did Gran's, but that was only because they didn't know what a special brand of asshole was sitting there. Sookie had kept my childhood secrets between her and I and I'd just been vague about my parents when Gran had asked before, not wanting to get into it all. It was done. Over. There was no reason to dwell on it now, especially since he was no longer a part of my life, but I should've known better. The news of Sookie's pregnancy was surely his reason for being here if only so he could berate me for not learning from his mistakes.

*Of course, ME being the mistake.*

But I *had* learned from his mistakes. I learned exactly what I *shouldn't* do to be a good father, but on a positive note; at least I saw no signs of an over-processed bottle blond attached to his dick or an empty vodka bottle in his hand.

*It was a truly Christmas miracle.*

He finally turned to face me and the last thing I wanted was to cause a scene in front of Gran, so I quickly said, "Why don't we step outside to talk?" The words were barely out of my mouth when I felt Sookie's hand grip the back of my shirt. Given our past run ins I knew she was worried, but short of telling him to get the fuck out in front of her family, there was nothing else I could do to, well...get him the fuck out.

He looked just as apprehensive as me, which was an odd look for him, and he'd had yet to say a word, but I felt relieved when he nodded silently and stood up before turning and facing Gran, saying, "It was a pleasure to meet you Adele. I hope you enjoy your visit."

If there was ever a time in my life when I'd worn a 'What the fuck?' look, it was certainly now. I'd seen my father turn on the charm before; I'd seen him blow up more times than I cared to remember; I'd seen him completely indifferent to everything and everyone around him, but if I didn't know any better I'd say he was *humble*.

*Maybe this was all just a dream and I was actually still in a coma?*

I didn't like that idea at all so I pinched myself and then just to be sure I reached behind me and pinched Sookie since she was closest. Her answering, "Oww!" along with a soft jab to my back told me I was awake.

*Thank fuck for that.*

Gran stood up and I stifled the urge to pull her back when she leaned over and hugged him, saying, "Don't you talk to me like this is the only time we'll be seeing each other. You're coming for Christmas dinner tomorrow and that's the end of it."

He glanced at me quickly and then looked back at Gran and before I could protest he smiled at her and replied, "Well, I'll talk to Eric and we'll just play it by ear."

*Huh...I could've sworn this was the Hollywood Hills, but apparently I was smack dab in the middle of the fucking Twilight Zone.*

I watched my father walk towards us while listening hard for Rod Serling's voice, but heard only my father's voice as he said softly to Sookie, "Congratulations on the baby," as he moved passed her. When I turned around she looked just as shocked as I felt, so I kissed her forehead telling her I'd be right back and followed him outside.

I had no idea of what to say to him because while he looked just like my father it was obvious to me that he'd been taken over by alien body snatchers and after standing around in silence for several minutes, I finally took a seat next to him on the front steps and waited. After a few more minutes of silence he finally said, "You look happy."

His tone of voice was missing the usual sneer that normally accompanied such a remark, instead sounding wistful, and I turned to him wondering what his end game was. My expression must have mirrored my wariness because he chuckled, adding, "Well, you don't look happy *right now*, but I've seen pictures of you online and in the news over the last couple of months." His eyes met mine as he said, "You look happy."

"I am," I answered.

*I'm also very confused right now.*

His piercing gaze was a little disconcerting. He rarely ever looked into my eyes, but now it was like he couldn't look anywhere but them. It wasn't until I finally blinked and looked away that he said, "She seems good for you," making me look at him again. "Sookie," he clarified.

I couldn't help feeling like I was being set up for one of his tirades and I wasn't about to listen to him bash my wife or my life, so I finally gritted out, "What do you want? Why are you here?"

Instead of answering my questions he looked away again and seemed to steel himself before admitting, "I loved her, you know... Your mother."

No. No I didn't fucking know because he never talked about her. Ever. And it only made me wonder more about where this conversation was headed when he continued, "I always loved her. From the moment I laid eyes on her I was hooked. I proposed to her on our second date and every date after that, but it wasn't until she was pregnant with you that she finally said yes."

His voice was so low now that I had to strain to hear him, but there was no mistaking it when he admitted, "We were happy too."

I couldn't believe he was telling me all of this now when I'd spent my whole life knowing better than to ask any questions, afraid of his response. I wanted to ask questions now. Nothing he was

saying made any sense. Those few short months I'd gotten to know my mother she'd said he was overbearing; a control freak, but ultimately even she'd admitted it was her own demons that drove her away from us.

From me.

As if he could read my mind, he said, "Your mother had issues. I knew that going in, but I always thought that I could somehow fix what was broken inside of her. I know now that I couldn't, but I thought I could at the time. She got better for a while when she was pregnant with you, but once you were born she went back to that place inside of herself I could never seem to pull her out of. When she left us I was so fucking hurt that I didn't know how to even fix myself, but I had you to take care of. She always dreamt of being a movie star and I thought that if I could get you into show business; get her to see that we were living the life she'd always wanted that she might come back to us. But she didn't. Hell, maybe she couldn't. But every time I look at you I see her eyes. I took a lot of my pain out on you because of it and for that, I'm sorry."

I was too stunned to say anything. He'd never apologized to me before for anything and from everything he'd just said *this* was the mother of all apologies. Since all I could do was gape at him in return, he pulled his hand out of his pocket and placed two coins into my hand, saying, "I've been sober for two months now."

I looked down and saw I was holding two 30 day sobriety medallions. It was another first from him. Claims of cleaning up his act were never part of his repertoire; that was my mother's shtick, but I was still leery with part of me wondering if he'd ordered them off of the internet.

"I take it you're up to step nine?" I asked, having been through my own twelve step program.

"Yeah, step nine," he agreed. Both of us sat there for a while with nothing more said between us. My mind was reeling and while I wasn't upset with the information he was giving me, I wished the timing would've been better. I didn't want to be sitting outside knowing Sookie was inside worrying herself to death, but I couldn't make myself tell him to leave.

Instead I asked, "Why now?" Why tell all of this to me now? Why get sober now? Why not do it back when it might've made a difference in my life?

He just shrugged saying, "It was time. You seemed to have gotten yourself straightened out and it made me want to straighten my own self out." He stood up a moment later and looked down at me saying, "I don't expect you to forgive me. You had a pretty shitty life thanks to me, so I don't deserve it, but I just wanted you to know that I am sorry."

I stood up too, still not knowing what I wanted to say. It was too much to process right now, but as he turned to leave he stopped again, reached towards his back underneath his jacket and pulled something out. When he handed it to me my jaw fell open.

*The Whale's Song book.*

"You had it?" I asked, adding, "All this time?"

He just shrugged again, saying, "At the time, I didn't want you getting your hopes up that she'd come back, so after a while I stored it away."

*He knew? He knew that whole fucking time?*

My expression must have said as much because he smiled while shaking his head and said, "You don't know how many rose bushes I had to replace for that old biddy that lived next door to us thanks to you and your nighttime botanical raids."

Nope. Apparently there were a lot of things I didn't know.

*But I wanted to.*

He was halfway to his car when I called out, "Dinner is at six tomorrow."

He stopped in his tracks and looked back at me for a moment before nodding and getting into his car. As he drove away I heard the door open behind me and felt Sookie's presence before her arms had a chance to hug me from behind.

"Are you okay?" she asked. I could only nod in reply and she moved to my side and saw the book in my hands making her ask, "Is that *the* book? He brought it back to you?"

I could only nod again and instead wrapped my arms around her breathing in her scent while wondering just how much my father and I were actually alike. While I couldn't remember meeting Sookie, I must have felt something strongly enough to want to marry her within just hours no matter how much liquor I'd consumed that night. How would *I* feel if she left me to raise the Bean all by myself? A constant reminder of what I'd lost staring back at me every day. I would hope I'd be able to cope better, but hopefully I'd never know for sure because it wouldn't happen if I had anything to say about it.

As we made our way back inside, I placed the book onto the table in the foyer and stacked the two sobriety medallions on top of it. That book had always been my source of hope that I might one day get my mother back, but looking at it now a small part of me wondered if maybe I'd had it wrong all along.

Maybe it just might get me my father back instead.

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## Chapter 103: Chapter 100

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### Chapter 100

**SPOV**

My heart hurt watching Eric standing there staring down at the book he'd placed on the table.

### *THE BOOK.*

From the looks of it I could tell it wasn't a new copy. I'd searched high and low for one on the internet and came up empty handed, but seeing its tattered edges, I knew it was the very same book Eric had held onto as a child, wishing for his mother's return, and the thought of him like that made me want to cry. I wondered if the two coins stacked on top of it symbolized his father's two cents on the matter, but I was too afraid to ask.

Gran and Jason had clued into the fact that everything wasn't kosher between Eric and his father, so thankfully no one questioned me when I trailed after them a minute later with me channeling my inner Maxine Fortenberry where I watched them through the window while they'd been talking outside. Even more surprising than our unexpected visitor was the fact that that's all they'd been doing.

### *Talking.*

I'd only ever seen them together three other times and even though there hadn't been raised voices between them then either, the anger between them had always been like a living breathing entity, as if it was a constant third companion to their meetings. I'd felt it emerge from Eric once we saw who was sitting at the table with Gran, only to disappear as soon as they stepped outside and while Eric's expression now didn't look as though his puppy had died it certainly seemed, at the very least, lost.

### *Shit! The puppy!*

While Eric and Jason had been out that morning, I'd taken off and gone to Sam and Terry's house to pick up his present. I would have no choice but to give it to him early, but now I had to hope he wasn't chewing up my car's interior since that's where I'd left him when I ended up unexpectedly following Eric into the house. I was sure Eric wouldn't be upset by that because it would give him a reason to try and replace The Black Pearl, but I quashed the urge to run back outside and hugged him instead, asking, "Are you sure you're okay? Do you want to talk about it?"

He didn't answer me at first and just hugged me back for a while before he finally answered, "Yeah, I'm alright." He took a deep breath and added, "We can talk about it later after Gran and Jason go to bed."

I wanted to force the issue because I wasn't so sure I believed him. He was always out of sorts after seeing his father and I wanted him to be able to vent whatever it was he was thinking, but I really had no choice at the moment. Even if Gran and Jason hadn't been there, I still needed to get the puppy out of the car, so I smiled brightly at him, asking, "Well, do you want one of your Christmas presents a day early?"

"No," he finally smiled down at me. "I can wait until tomorrow morning."

"Uh...well maybe *you* can, but the present *can't*," I replied and grabbed onto his hand, leading him back outside.

As soon as I opened the door to my car, the puppy jumped out and raced circles around our feet before coming to sit just in front of where Eric stood with his tail wagging excitedly. Terry had adopted a pregnant dog from an animal rescue, so he wasn't quite sure what the puppy's exact breed was. He was a mixed breed of a Labrador retriever and something else, with a mostly black coat and spots of white on his chest and paws, but I hoped he wouldn't get too big and because I knew Terry had done some training with him, a part of me worried that the puppy came to sit in front of Eric. Terry's dogs were trained to ultimately become service dogs for people suffering from post-traumatic stress and the fact that he chose to sit next to Eric made me wonder if he was feeling more bothered by his father's visit than he'd let on.

Eric automatically squatted down next to him and began scratching him behind his ears with both of his hands, asking, "You got me a *puppy*?"

I couldn't tell by his tone whether or not he liked his present and even though Terry told me I could bring him back if it didn't work out, I was already fond of the little guy and took the chicken shit way out, answering, "No...*the Bean* got you a puppy."

*He wouldn't turn down a gift from his own kid, would he? Because I was pretty sure there was a whole shitload of gifts made from macaroni noodles in his future.*

Eric gave the puppy another pat on his head before pulling me closer and since he was already down there, he lifted my shirt and kissed my belly, saying, "Thank you Bean."

The puppy yipped at Eric's feet, drawing his attention back to him, and I wasn't sure if it was my maternal hormones or my love of animals, but I really wanted to smooch kisses all over his face however that thought was waylaid by Eric kissing me instead. I could feel the love and tenderness he felt for me and, like a sap, tears automatically sprung to my eyes and when he finally pulled away, he simply said, "Thank you."

*I had a feeling his thanks were for more than just the puppy.*

We eventually went back into the house, with the puppy trailing along behind us, and he turned out to be a good distraction from our unexpected visit from Eric's dad. All Jason wanted to do was play with him and got him all riled up with one of his toys and while I knew Gran was curious about Eric's dad, all it took was him saying he would be back for dinner the following day for Gran to leave the subject alone. Instead she busied herself with chastising Jason for getting the puppy so excited while we all tried to come up with a name for him. Eric didn't appreciate my suggestion of naming him Jack; even after I pointed out we couldn't name the baby that if the dog had taken the name, so we all spent the majority of the rest of the day offering suggestions. It wasn't until we were getting ready for bed when out of the blue, Eric said, "Bubba."

"What?" I asked with my toothbrush hovering in front of my mouth.

"The puppy," he replied. "We can call him Bubba."

I felt my eyes narrow at him and said worriedly, "I think you've been spending too much time with Jason. Sweetie, you're too pretty to be that redneck."

His mood throughout the day wasn't bad, but definitely somber, so I was happy to hear him laugh again as he explained, "Not like a redneck Bubba; Vegas Bubba, after the guy that married us."

*How could I have forgotten Bubba?*

I hadn't given much thought to our wedding at all over the past few months, given everything else that had been going on the meantime, and asked, "What made you think about that?"

As soon as I climbed into bed beside Eric, he wrapped his arms around me, and once the puppy settled on the bed at our feet, he admitted, "My dad." I'd been wondering all day long what had happened between them and stayed silent, just burrowing my body up against him perfectly content to let him tell me in his own time, which he eventually did and when he was done, I didn't know what to feel. I was elated for him knowing how much he'd wanted a normal family, but leery at the same time over his dad's possible motives. I certainly didn't trust him at all and was worried about Eric getting hurt by him at some point in the future, but I knew all I could do was be there for him no matter what. Even Eric admitted he didn't know what to feel about it all, but I understood his need to at least give his father another chance. My parents had been the exact opposite of his, but I had no doubt I would've wanted the same thing had I been in his shoes and couldn't fault him for it.

*I just hoped it didn't turn around and bite us in the ass later on.*

Eric seemed emotionally drained, so I didn't even try to distract him with sex, instead just holding him close while telling him I loved him, until we both eventually fell asleep, but when I woke up the next morning to the Captain's salute against my butt, it took all of my willpower to not do my patriotic duty. I wasn't sure what sort of mood Eric would be in after the events of the day before and while I'd woken him up with sex in the past, now it just felt wrong; like I'd be taking advantage of him or something, but it turned out I didn't have to worry about it because as soon as I shifted on the mattress, Bubba pounced on me. I still wasn't sold on his name, but since he was Eric's dog I figured he should have the final say about it and his excited circling on top of the bed made me remember that it had been a while since he'd been outside. The fact that Eric slept through it all didn't give me high hopes for help with future midnight feedings, so I pulled my robe on and picked him up so I could carry him downstairs. After I got a pot of coffee going I went to stand at the backdoor watching him seemingly catalog every blade of grass in the backyard when I felt Eric's arms slip around my waist. He nuzzled my neck with his whiskered chin, murmuring in a sleepy voice, "Merry Christmas."

His hands automatically caressed my rapidly growing midsection which was the norm anymore, either out of habit or because the Bean was hell bent on making itself known, but I didn't mind and turned around in his arms, teasing, "Are you saying that to *me* or your little bun in my oven?"

"Both," he smiled, seconds before his lips were on mine. I couldn't remember ever being happier than I was right then, standing there kissing my husband on our very first Christmas together and tried to imagine how different it would be the following year or the year after that. We hadn't talked about having more kids because finding out we were having one had been enough of a shock, but images of squealing blond heads running around through a whirlwind of flying gift wrap was enough to make me smile.

As our kiss wore on I could feel the effect it was having on Eric and I was contemplating on dragging him back upstairs for a little Christmas morning cheer when Jason bellowed, "Merry Christmas!" from the doorway.

The look on Eric's face when he pulled away told me he'd had the same idea and he turned us around so I could hide the physical evidence of those thoughts as he said back to him, "Merry Christmas Jase," but before anyone could say anything more, Jason was diving for the tree saying, "Present time!"

*Jason's was not the blond head I'd pictured amid the flying gift wrap.*

"Jason Stackhouse!" I said raising my voice, but not quite yelling. "You drop those presents right now! You're not opening anything until Gran comes down!"

Eric must have let Bubba inside in the meanwhile because he was suddenly jumping all over his new favorite uncle and Gran walked in seconds later which, in Jason's mind, gave him the green light to start opening gifts. Gran fussed that we'd gotten her anything at all saying everything we'd done for her house was more than enough for the rest of her Christmases and birthdays combined, but all it took was the combination of Eric and Bubba giving her the puppy dog eyes and she quickly got over it.

*Hopefully I'd get the Bean on my side early on because three against one were unfair odds and I'd be doomed.*

Eric was hard to buy for considering the man could pretty much go out and get whatever he wanted, so the only other thing I could think to get him was an iPad since he miraculously didn't have one and seemed to like gadgets so much. I even downloaded an English to Swahili translation app as a joke and while we both wanted his memories to return, I no longer felt like the world was going to end if they didn't, but it certainly seemed to stand still when he gave me my gift from him.

All I could think about was everything he'd already done for me; he'd gotten me a car; he'd restored my childhood home for my Gran; he'd flown my family out for the holiday in a private jet; he'd even taken to genuinely liking my shit for brains brother.

*What more could a girl ask for?*

Eric's obvious nervousness only compounded my own and seeing I now had the full attention of Gran and Jason as well only added to it, so I swallowed every 'you shouldn't have' that threatened



to leave my lips and slowly peeled the paper from the box. Opening it, I wasn't quite sure what it was I was looking at, but seeing the word 'Deed' at the top of the paper gave me my first clue. I already knew Eric had added my name to the deed on our house which admittedly ruffled my feathers at the time, but I couldn't fault his logic about wanting to make sure the baby and I were taken care of if, God forbid, something happened to him. No one ever wants to believe tragedy could strike them, but we'd already each had our own close calls recently, so I didn't fight him on it.

Looking more closely at the page in front of me, my eyes skimmed down the paper and when I saw the address was *202 Hummingbird Lane, Bon Temps, LA* I felt them go wide and looked over at Eric asking, "You bought the house next door to Gran's?"

Eric swallowed hard and looked a little scared, answering, "Yes," but it sounded more like a question.

"Why?" I asked. Jason had joked over Thanksgiving that we should move back, but Eric's job on the sitcom meant we would have to live in L.A.

He looked really nervous now as he replied, "Well, it was the only thing I could remember you ever saying you liked."

*I'd told him a thousand times how much I liked his ass and it was mine. That was more than enough.*

The house would've been beautiful in its heyday, but now it was a shithole. I'd be afraid the floor would give out just going up onto the front porch and knew it would probably have to be knocked down to its foundation and be rebuilt again from the ground up, but it would be next door to Gran's. We could stay there over the summers if Eric wasn't busy filming something and I felt tears well in my eyes already picturing a tiny mop of blond curls giggling as they bounced across the field towards her house with Bubba in tow and Eric happily pretending to chase them down while I watched.

Eric misread my tears and put his arm around me explaining, "I know it's not much to look at now, but I already had Calvin Norris go through and inspect it and he recommended just leveling it and starting over. They're going to start working on it after the holidays and then build whatever kind of house you want. See?"

He took the deed out of the box to show me a book full of southern style homes underneath, but I couldn't see it through the tears now falling from my eyes and I threw myself at him, sobbing, "I love it."

I felt the tension in his body go away as he relaxed in my arms muttering, "Thank God," into my hair and he hugged me back while Gran chimed in saying, "You don't know how happy you've made a lot of the families in the area. There's not a lot of work to be found around there, but now they'll be able to put food on their tables thanks to you."

Knowing just how true that statement was pushed away every worry that had started to creep in over just how much this would end up costing in the end and I just let myself be happy about it instead. After the gift wrap mess was cleaned up we sat around looking through the different house designs we could choose from when Eric's cell phone rang. Since I was closest to it, I grabbed it and when I saw Pam's name flash on the caller ID, I answered it with, "Merry Christmas Pammy!"

*"Bah humbug."*

We'd already exchange gifts a few days earlier because Pam was flying to Minnesota to see her family for the holidays, which she wasn't looking forward to, so I wasn't surprised by her less than festive reply and asked, "Shouldn't you be busy terrorizing your nieces and nephews? You know, scarring them for life by telling them Santa Claus is really Freddy Krueger in disguise and he needs their young pliable skin to make ribbons for the evil Chucky dolls he's leaving under the trees of the bad boys and girls?"

*It was the exact phrase she'd used when she'd told me she was going home for the holidays and served as a reminder why she'd never be allowed to tell the Bean any bedtime stories.*

*"Oh please Sookie, I took care of that last night and, honestly, you'd think I'd get a thank you out of their parents for getting them to stay in their rooms for the rest of the night. Ungrateful fuckers. I'm already at the airport waiting for my flight to return to L.A."*

I looked at the clock and saw it was just after eight in the morning our time and knowing she was only a couple of hours ahead of us, I asked, "Why are you flying back already? Weren't you staying for Christmas?" I wondered if she really had told the kids that horrible story and had to get out of Dodge.

*"I was there when the clock struck midnight, so technically I was there for Christmas. If my family wanted me to stay longer then they should've been more specific during our negotiations."*

I wondered what Pam's parents were like and pictured a cross between Ken and Barbie and Lucius and Narcissa Malfoy, but I quickly refocused and asked, "So when will you be landing?" I didn't want her to spend the whole day by herself, even if she didn't seem too bothered by the idea, and added, "Come here when you get in and you can stay for dinner."

My conversation seemed to have caught Jason's interest because I watched him lean over towards Eric and ask with a grin, "Is she a looker?"

The thought of Jason trying to put the moves on Pam made my eyes roll all by themselves, but it seemed to amuse Eric to no end because he laughed and vaguely answered, "I've heard many people call her 'striking'."

Pam was drop dead gorgeous; there was no doubt about it, but I had a feeling whoever had called her 'striking' were likely referring to her swinging hands and oversized purse in the form of a temporary restraining order. Meanwhile, Jason waggled his eyebrows in response, as Pam broke

in, saying, *"I suppose I could stop by. I wanted to give you an update on what Reuben found out about Debbie Pelt anyway, which isn't much, but he's still working on a few leads along with something else."*

"Okay," I practically whispered. Gran didn't know anything about the potentially crazy stalker, so I didn't want to grill Pam over the phone about her now and get Gran worried, so once we hung up I told everyone we'd be having another guest for dinner, which reminded me Eric's dad would be there too. It took a while before I had the chance to speak to Eric alone, but when I finally did, I said, "I know your dad and Pam don't get along, so we'll have to corner her when she gets her and tell her to behave."

Their newfound relationship was already starting out on shaky ground and I didn't want Pam to rock the boat too much, but Eric didn't seem worried and just chuckled as he shrugged, saying, "Sit her next to Jason and we won't have to worry about it."

*The man knew what he was talking about.*

Pam arrived later on that afternoon and I thought we'd need to beat Jason off with a rolled up newspaper just so we could have a few minutes alone in Eric's office. I'd tried not to think too much about the crazy stalker, but hearing Pam bring her back up earlier that morning had been needling away at me all day long, so as soon as the door was shut, I said, "What did he find out?"

She gracefully flopped down into one of the chairs, answering, "I told you this morning; not much. He couldn't find anyone by that name in the state of California, but he branched out and found a Pelt family in Mississippi who have an adopted daughter by the name of Debra and another biological daughter named Sandra. Debra had a history of mental illness and finally ran away several years ago and, coincidentally, Sandra was reported missing last month. He's working on trying to get a copy of Debra's photo, but it's likely to be at least ten years old."

Eric and I stood there with neither one of us saying anything and I wondered just how mentally ill she was in case they were one and the same, but Pam plowed ahead and blindsided us with her next words.

"And after you told me what an oaf your private investigator was, I also had Reuben look into your meeting in Vegas and he found something." Her eyes looked to me as she asked, "Do you recall meeting Bill Compton that night?"

"What?" I asked dumbfounded. "No! I never even knew who he was until he came here for Eric's poker night."

"Why? What does *he* have to do with anything?" Eric growled.

*Yeah, he couldn't remember it at all, but it still pissed him off.*

Pam could earn her own Emmy for all of the dramatic flair she put into her next words, saying, "Well, I could *tell* you, but why bother when I have the video of it right here?" We watched her

reach into her bag with her pulling out a DVD a second later and innocently held it up in between her perfectly manicured nails. It looked completely harmless.

*So why did I feel like it should've come with a bow made from fileted children?*

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## Chapter 104: Chapter 101

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### Chapter 101

#### EPOV

I stared back at Pam's hand, seething inside over the thought of Bill fucking Compton anywhere near Sookie and it was the last fucking thing I needed to see or hear. I'd been walking on eggshells all day long; first over giving Sookie her Christmas gift, which thank fuck she seemed to really like, and then over my father's pending arrival. It was going to be hard enough trying to act normal with him there, in front of Gran and Jason, and I'd come to realize in the last twenty-four hours, I really did hope we could eventually work something out and have a quasi-normal father/son relationship, but I knew that wouldn't happen if I was too busy being pissed off about whatever was on that video.

When I'd first asked Andy Bellefleur to look into our Vegas wedding, it was because I couldn't fathom why I would possibly want to tie myself to someone I didn't even know, either then or when I'd woken up, but I didn't give a fuck anymore because I could no longer fathom my life without Sookie in it. Was I curious? Hell yeah, but knowing whatever I would be watching somehow involved Bill Compton made my blood boil, no matter how little of a time I'd have to see him, and it would ruin what would've been the best Christmas I'd ever had if I watched it now.

*But I HAD to know one thing first or else it would eat away at me.*

"Did he *touch* her at all?" I asked through clenched teeth. It was an admittedly irrational response. I didn't know her then or even remember anything about that night, but I'd seen for myself how drunk we both were on the paparazzi videos and the thought of Sookie even giving him the time of day, much less flirting or, God forbid, anything else with him, made me want to rip him limb from limb and then vomit, even though I was no saint back then and couldn't throw stones.

*Fucking glass houses.*

There was no mistaking my anger and Pam wisely chose not to tease me at all, answering quickly, "Just minor touching; her elbow, forearm and hand when he tried to get her attention. That's all."

It took several deep breaths before the red haze disappeared from my vision and I turned to Sookie, saying, "I don't want to watch it." Seeing her eyebrow rise up questioningly, I added, "At least not right now. You can, if you want, but just knowing he's in it, seeing him will piss me off and I'll end up brooding for the rest of the night. I don't want to spoil our first Christmas together."

For all I knew, he was the one that introduced us, but I didn't give a flying fuck, remembering his last day on the set when I beat his ass after he asked me to pass Sookie along to him like she was a box of fucking cookies.

*Her box and cookies were all fucking mine!*

I also knew Sookie well enough to know that she'd be bothered watching it now too, but I would leave it up to her to decide and thanked fucking Christ when she agreed it could wait. Instead Pam gave us a brief synopsis explaining that the cameras in the bar area of the casino normally did sweeping pans across the room, unless their security department saw fit to move them manually, but all we would see was a compilation of the brief footage consisting of Sookie at the bar with Amelia; Sookie at the bar without Amelia and Compton next to her; me at the bar with both of them and then just me and Sookie together for a little while before we eventually disappeared too. Knowing at least that much helped to calm me down even more and as soon as we walked out of the office, Sookie giggled and even I was able to manage a chuckle when she said, "You all look like twins."

Jason and Bubba were standing there side by side, facing the door we'd just walked out of, with identical excited looks on their faces seeing us, only Bubba came skittering up to me while Jason went straight for Pam, saying, "Well, hey there pretty lady."

Sookie had shooed Jason away as soon as Pam had first walked through the front door, so this was really her first interaction with him and if I didn't think it might possibly spoil my dinner, I would've popped a bag of popcorn to go along with the show I knew we were in for. It was, at the very least, a good way to distract myself from thinking about Compton and my father's not-so-distant arrival.

Pam actually acted like a normal human being for once and pulled some manners out of her ass I had no idea she had, I assumed since Gran was standing there, and nodded towards him with a clipped, "Hello," before turning to Gran with an actual smile (a warm one!) saying, "Mrs. Stackhouse. It's a pleasure to finally meet you. Sookie talks about you all the time."

Not one to be ignored, Jason threw his arm around Pam's shoulders and the warmth dropped from her face as her back stiffened while he said, "Well I'm Jason, Sookie's brother, but don' mind nuthin' she might a tol' you 'bout me. 'Less o' course it had to do with what a great *single* guy I am." He ended his verbal dating resume with a wink and a smile that had Pam's left eye twitching only Jason seemed to misread it as a good sign because his grin only got wider.

Seeing what was about to go down, Sookie intervened with, "Jason! Pam's not interested in..." but I broke in, not quite ready to give up on my new favorite reality show, and finished for her, "standing around all day. Why don't we get you a beer and give the ladies a chance to sit down."

We'd already decided there'd be no wine or alcohol whatsoever served once my father arrived, not that I drank much of anything anymore anyway, so I merely accompanied Jason to the couch with his beer while they went into the kitchen. Our asses were barely seated before he looked at me asking, "She single?"

"Yes," I replied, trying not to smile too much.

His eyes narrowed back at me, asking, "She lookin' to get hitched?"

"No. Pam doesn't do monogamy," I chuckled.

*That was the under-fucking-statement of the year; one I could actually throw stones at.*

His eyes crinkled in confusion as he asked, "What do them 'lil folded up pieces a paper like birds and shit got to do with anything?"

*Sookie wouldn't let me buy him a helmet as a joke for Christmas, but now I really wished I had. Maybe I could go on Amazon and have it shipped to him.*

"No Jason, I just meant that Pam doesn't do relationships. She prefers to play the field," I answered still chuckling. It felt nice being the smart one in the pair considering how fucking smart Sookie was, but seeing that I'd still managed to thoroughly confuse him, despite explaining, and not wanting him to get his hopes up, I finally said, "Sorry Jase. Pam plays for the *other* team."

Not catching my drift, he asked, "What? Like the Cowboys?" His face brightened considerably and his voice got louder when he added, "She a cheerleader?"

I'd been petting Bubba who was lying across my lap and my eyes drifted down to him seeing even he seemed to get what I was saying, but I looked back at Jason, answering, "No Jason. You have the *wrong equipment* for Pam to be interested in having sex with you."

If he didn't know what monogamy was, I was afraid 'lesbian' would be out of his reach too, but knowing Sookie, or God forbid Gran, could walk in at any minute I didn't want to come out and say Pam would much rather be in between Sookie's legs than his.

*Nor did I want the mental image. That was MY spot.*

I was almost certain the beer in his hand was his first one of the day and was beginning to question whether or not it might be too late for that helmet after all when his brow furrowed in concentration and he reached into his pocket pulling out a condom. I hoped it was a case of

eternal optimism since I couldn't figure out why else he'd be carrying one with him on today of all days, but he looked down at it before looking back at me, asking, "She allergic to latex?"

*Seriously?*

My eyes darted to the doorway, with my ears straining to hear if they were anywhere near, as I lowered my voice, explaining point blank, "Pam only likes women; lots and lots of *women*." That and my career were the only two things we had in common for a very long time.

Jason, the doofus that he was, just smiled wider, saying, "Hell, we got that in common, so we should be gettin' on great!"

He really did look like he'd won the lottery and I felt bad having to tell him Pam wanted no part of his Power Balls, but it had to be done so I sucked it up and said, "Jason. Listen to me. Pam only has sex with *women*. She'll want nothing to do with *you* or anything you're *packing*."

If that didn't do the trick I'd probably have to resort to diagrams and looked around for Sookie's 'What To Expect When You're Expecting' book, so I could at least point out the pertinent body parts, when it seemed realization suddenly dawned on him. Looking over at me, he asked, "Are you tryin' to tell me her cooter box ain't acceptin' no *male packages* into her slot?"

*Cooter box?*

Bubba really was a good dog because he didn't seem bothered at all and only readjusted himself when I roared with laughter and fell over onto the couch, but it was enough to make the girls come into the room and as soon as I saw Pam, I couldn't help myself and snorted out, "Hey Cooter!"

"What?" she asked with her arched eyebrow warning me I was in danger of being Pam'd, but I couldn't stop laughing long enough to care.

*Hopefully Bubba would defend me.*

Once I was upright, I looked back at Jason who just smiled back at me mouthing the words, 'challenge accepted' and I maybe would have (but probably wouldn't have) dissuaded him, but I didn't get the chance since the doorbell rang a second later. I heard Sookie whispering to Pam something about behaving, but I was still chuckling at her new nickname (I would be ordering her new business cards in the morning) as I headed towards the front door. Between petting the dog and laughing with (more like, at) Jason, I really did feel much more relaxed, so when I opened the door I had a genuine smile on my face and said, "Merry Christmas."

It was odd seeing my father standing there looking nervous, but he seemed to relax a little seeing me smiling at him and said, "Merry Christmas," in return. Bubba had tagged along with me and was patiently waiting next to me with his tail wagging at our newest visitor. Terry must have put in a lot of work for him to be so well behaved and I wondered briefly if I could drop Jason off

with him for a couple of days to see what other kind of magic he could work, but my father's voice broke me from my thoughts, saying, "You got a dog."

I'd never been allowed any pets growing up, but he didn't sound upset about it, not that he had the right to, so I didn't get upset, answering, "I did. Sookie got him for me for Christmas from the baby. His name is Bubba."

"Bubba?" he chuckled.

Before he could make any redneck jokes about Sookie that I would definitely take offense to, I motioned for him to come in and explained how he'd gotten his name. By the time I was done, he shook his head, saying, "I would've gone with Elvis, even if he's not a hound dog."

I just shrugged in response as we rounded the corner into the kitchen where everyone had congregated. Sookie looked back at me nervously hopeful, but it was Pam who spoke first seeing us and saying, "Dick! Where's Gingerbread?"

"Pam!" Sookie loudly whispered. "What did we just talk about?"

"What?" she asked amused.

As Gran passed Pam, she said, "Oh, there's some gingerbread cookies in the cookie jar, but you should wait until after dinner so you don't spoil your appetite." I was one of four of the six people in the room who looked like they were trying not to laugh while Gran walked over to my father, giving him a hug and greeted warmly, "Merry Christmas. We're so glad you could come. Now I thought you said to call you Richard?"

Pam mumbled under her breath, "*Dick always comes...*" but my father just rolled his eyes in Pam's direction, answering, "Richard is what I go by. *Pamela* just likes to joke around."

Pam's, "Who's joking?" utterance also seemed to go by unnoticed, by Gran at least, but she got herself a pinch from Sookie who then took the opportunity to herd everyone into the dining room. I resisted the urge to let my father in on Pam's new nickname of Cooter, but I could already imagine having a father/son moment over it if things worked out between us.

Dinner started out as a quiet affair, but conversations slowly built up as time went on. Pam's continual staring daggers at my father kept getting interrupted by Jason's attempts to flirt with her, which were amusing the hell out of Sookie and me. He passed her every dish on the table (whether she wanted it or not) while flexing his biceps; he leaned in close while sniffing her hair and telling her she smelled 'purdy'; he snatched the pitcher of sweet tea from the table when Pam had been reaching for it and held it up, asking her, "Coffee, tea, or *me*?" while waggling his eyebrows at her. Gran's eyes had shot to him once or twice when she wasn't busy talking to my father, who also seemed to be amused by what was going on on the other side of the table, but it was mostly just me and Sookie who were trying not to choke on our Christmas ham at the Jason ham.



I had to give Pam credit though. She did her best to try and ignore and then politely discourage Jason without actually Pamming him, so it wasn't until after dinner and we'd all moved back into the family room that Pam took her best shot at getting him to back down. Gran was busy setting out desserts and coffee in the kitchen, while my father excused himself to use the restroom, when Jason came out and asked her, "How 'bout you an me go fer a drive an look at the stars?"

Seeming to have reached her Jason limit, Pam shook her head ruefully, while trying not to smile hearing Sookie's giggles, and said exasperatedly, "I work in Hollywood. I see stars all fucking day. I'm a *lesbian* for Christ's sakes!"

Jason didn't miss a beat, asking, "So you're an actor like Eric here?"

*Knew it.*

"Jason!" Sookie chimed in, not hiding her amusement. "Pam likes women. She clearly doesn't like *you*, so leave her alone already."

"So," he replied and then looked back at Pam, who looked even more amused now. Jason's affable personality was hard to dislike and even she chuckled when he said, "That's what Eric said, but we got that in common. *You* like women. *I* like women. *You're* a woman. See? It all works out!"

"YOU'RE A MAN!"

It ended up being a loud declaration since it was said by three different voices simultaneously, but Sookie knew Jason-speak better than any of us and blurted out, "Girl on girl, Jase. I'm sure you've got a few of those videos tucked away on your computer alongside Shitter."

"But there's always a *guy* that gets to *share*," he retorted as though Sookie needed her own helmet.

"I give up," she said throwing her hands up in the air. Looking at Pam, she apologized while still laughing and said, "I'm sorry Pam. Jason has a grudge against Bounty paper towels because he believes himself to be the quicker picker upper. Be glad that you are a lesbian because his idea of a fun time is farting in the tub and then biting the bubbles."

His head quirked up liked he'd actually heard someone fart and asked with a smile, "Shiiit...Eric? You got a hot tub 'round here?" before turning right back to Pam and saying, "Care to take a dip? We can wear our birthday suits if that's all ya got on ya."

"Sure, why not?" she replied sarcastically, but she'd unknowingly made a fatal error by smiling back at him because it would only encourage him more.

Her sarcasm was completely lost on him and I didn't see him giving up anytime soon, when his head turned back towards me and he mouthed, 'Told ya so.' I could only grin back at him and ironically had to bite down on his little Pam bubble by telling him, "Sorry Jase, no hot tub here."

*I knew he wouldn't get the irony either, but his Power Balls would have to remain blue.*

Jason wasn't discouraged at all and just tried to get Pam to go into the pool instead and reminding him it was *December* didn't discourage him either. The more he flirted with her, the less inclined Pam seemed to be in discouraging him too and instead offered to take him to a club the following night. I couldn't even blame alcohol being the cause since we hadn't served any, but at least I had Sookie there to share my *'What the fuck?'* looks with, so Gran calling us into the kitchen thankfully put an end to it all because I was sure if Pam and Jason somehow ended up hooking up before he went back to Louisiana, it would be one of the seven signs of the apocalypse.

*And if I came across four guys on horseback anytime in the near future, I'd be grabbing Sookie and Bubba and making a run for it.*

My father was already sitting there with a slice of pie and a cup of coffee in front of him when I walked in, but what I noticed more so was what he was holding in his hand. It was a framed photo from Sookie's latest ultrasound of the Bean we had given Gran as one of her Christmas presents, but the look on his face as he gazed down at it is what made me stop and stare.

*He was smiling.*

I wasn't really sure what the other six signs of the apocalypse were and seriously didn't know how to react. Everything I thought I knew about the man was being shot out of the water by his every action and reaction since he'd stopped by the day before, so it was hard to reconcile the man who was sitting at my kitchen table with the one who had raised me. We hadn't spoken about much more than things in general all night long, but that only seemed to be because he and Gran were getting along like a house on fire. Considering the effect she had on Pam, the woman could probably tame a pack of hellhounds to boot, but I'd welcomed it since it had taken the pressure off of me too.

For once we'd been in the same room without any snide comments or downright nasty accusations coming from either one of us for longer than twenty minutes. For once we were *both* sober. For once we'd both managed to laugh at the same things and it wasn't in a sarcastic way.

*I seriously didn't know how to react.*

Since the women were all standing around the island talking, and Jason didn't appear to be leaving Pam's side anytime soon, I grabbed a slice of pie and took a seat next to my father. When his eyes finally came up from the picture, he asked, "So, the baby is due in early June?"

"Yep," I replied, not sure if he'd learned the due date from the news or from Gran. I was just impressed he knew it at all.

"Do you know what you're having yet?"

"No," I answered after swallowing the food in my mouth. Chewing had given me the time to realize he was actually making an effort by asking any questions at all, so I offered, "We could probably find out at the next appointment, but we haven't decided if we want to know yet. There aren't a lot of surprises left in the world, you know?"

*Like you.*

*Or Pam and Jason possibly hooking up.*

"I do," he smiled back at me before putting the frame back down onto the table. We continued to each take small bites of food, I think because each of us were trying to be prepared to be able to answer the other's questions that weren't being asked. The darting my eyes were doing from him to the group of others had me wondering if your eye muscles could actually get a Charlie horse before they finally settled on the empty chair across from me.

*Hello Awkward, how nice of you to join us.*

"So," I finally blurted out, along with a little chunk of pie, since I couldn't stand the silence anymore, "I start filming Valhalla in a few weeks." It was a fall back topic; talk about work.

His brow crinkled, asking, "That's with Madden and Sophie Anne LeClerq, right?"

"Yeah..." I drawled out hesitantly. He'd been all for me getting that part when he was still my manager, but he also would've gotten his own percentage out of it. It made me wonder what he'd been doing to support himself since I'd fired him, but I was almost too afraid to ask.

*Maybe that was his end game? He was here acting this way so I'd support him again?*

I consciously put my fork down so I would have to consciously pick it back up again if I was going to use it to stab him to death hearing him ask me for another handout. He surprised me altogether when he just shook his head and said, "You be careful with Sophie Anne. She's bad news and will do anything to get her name in the papers and you're a hot ticket right now."

His eyes did their own darting over to where Sookie was standing, but I was barely able to keep my voice down with my irritation rising, saying, "I wouldn't *do* anything with *anyone* for me to have to *be careful*." Granted, my past record with women would likely lead anyone to that same conclusion, but I wasn't the same man anymore.

*I wouldn't cheat on Sookie.*

"I'm not saying you would," he answered, putting his own fork down and holding his hands out in front of him. "All's I'm saying is I wouldn't put it past her to leak stories to the press about some made up love connection between you two to drum up publicity for herself. She's done it in the past, so you might want to warn Sookie about it beforehand."

"Sookie trusts me." God knows why, given my history, but she did and I knew it.

He just shrugged his shoulders, replying, "Can't hurt, but you know her better than me."

We sat there in silence and I only realized it was too quiet when I glanced over to where everyone had been to see they'd left the room. When there was nothing left on our plates but crumbs, I finally bit the bullet and asked, "So, what have you been up to lately?"

If he was only here because he wanted something from me, now would be the time for him to tell me since we were all alone. I felt the disappointment creeping up inside of me seeing him look nervous again and I was already trying to think of a way to explain his sudden departure to Gran, when he surprised me, saying, "Well, I got a part in a production they're doing in a little community theater out by my way."

"What?"

I knew my father had once been a not-so-successful actor before I was born, but the only times he'd ever talked about it was whenever he was reminding me of everything he'd had to give up because of me. There were plenty of times I'd wanted to yell back at him to get his ass to a fucking audition if he wanted stardom so bad, but I didn't because I knew when he didn't get the part, I'd be the one he blamed.

*I had more than enough weight on my shoulders back then to want to subject myself to any more.*

"It's not much," he mumbled. "Just a small role, but it's nice to be doing it again." When his eyes finally met mine, he shrugged, adding, "It's where my AA meetings are held. Sort of one stop shopping for me."

When another long silence followed because my mind was all over the place, I was finally able to say, "Oh, well that's great." I must have been a glutton for punishment because I heard myself following up with, "Are you making enough to live on?"

I'd paid him well over the years, too well all things considered, but I had no idea what he'd saved or what my reaction would've been had he said no. It turned out I didn't have to worry about it when he answered, "I made some cuts here and there, but I've been getting by okay." His lips formed into a smirk as he added, "Once I cut Ginger loose, my expenses went down considerably."

I'd only been wondering if he still had her stashed somewhere because I'd been trying to imagine what would happen if he and I got along well enough for them to come see the baby. He'd probably be called Grandpa to the Bean, but what would that have made Ginger?

*Nothing I would've wanted the Bean repeating.*

Gran wandered back into the kitchen at that point offering to pour us another cup of coffee, but he took one last look at the Bean's picture and stood up saying, "No thank you Adele. I should get going."

Sookie had wandered in behind her (and I didn't care to know where Jason and Pam might be right then), but her look asked how it went, so I tried to convey 'okay' by shrugging my shoulders. Her raised eyebrow told me I didn't do know how to do that anymore than I knew Swahili, but she smiled back at him when he thanked her for dinner and then she surprised me by inviting him back for dinner the following Sunday.

*I guess we were both going to give him a shot.*

I knew she'd been worried about me, but considering how he'd treated her the last time he'd been there to see me after the accident, I wouldn't have blamed her for not wanting to be around him. I was still leery of being around him and doubted I would've been as forgiving had the shoe been on the other foot, but then I'd already known she was a much better person than me.

It wasn't until he'd picked up the picture again so he could hand it back to Gran that I left the room on a whim and met up with them again by the front door. The entire day from start to finish had gone better than I'd expected and as he said his goodbyes, I held out towards him the identical framed photo of the Bean that had been sitting on my desk and said, "Merry Christmas."

I could tell by his expression he hadn't been expecting it, but then neither had I, and when he didn't take it from me right away, I thought maybe I'd overestimated his reactions to it all and started to pull it back, but he stopped me by reaching out and taking it from my hand. Looking down at it, he smiled saying, "These have gotten a lot better than from the time before you were born. I could hardly make out anything the one time we got a look at you before you came into the world."

I was too stunned to say anything from his admission that he'd even gone to a prenatal appointment and Sookie seemed to sense that, so she picked up the reins and said, "They have 3D ultrasounds now and we want to get one of those too, but they recommend waiting until you're between 24 and 32 weeks along. We're barely passed the sixteen week mark now, so it'll be a little while longer."

His smile seemed to be for both her and the picture in his hand when he responded, "Technology is an amazing thing."

*So was his whole fucking visit. If I'd thought to bring my iPad along I could've translated 'amazing' into Swahili for him.*

By the time we climbed into bed later on that night I was still trying to process my father's visit. I went back through the entire night looking for indicators that he was running some sort of con, but I couldn't find a single thing. It was simply amazing.

*Or 'ajabu' according to my iPad app.*

Sookie snuggled up next to me with her head on my chest, asking, "So, did you have a Merry Christmas?"

"Yes."

I really fucking did. Better than I probably deserved, but hands down the best one of my life and I knew none of it would've been possible without her, so I nudged her to roll over onto her back and spent the next few hours making sure her Christmas was just as merry as mine.

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## Chapter 105: Chapter 102

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### Chapter 102

#### SPOV

"God...how is it you always taste like cherries?"

I arched up into his mouth with his tongue swirling around my nipple, breathing out, "How is it you always want to chit chat when there's work to be done?"

I could never get enough of Eric and now was certainly no exception feeling his teeth scrape lightly across my skin sending a shiver right down my spine while he gripped the girls in each of his hands with his breath blowing across my dampened skin, saying, "As I recall, you seem to like my *chit chat* very much."

He kept his lips just above my body so that I could only feel the heat of his breath, but not close enough to actually touch me and I tried to arch up higher only to be held down by his monster sized hands and grouched, "I'd like a stronger work ethic from you right now instead."

The man drove me insane in the best of ways, with his throaty chuckle shooting straight through the gates of my baby maker, and if those lips could speak, they'd be screaming out in frustration. They were already salivating as it was, but Eric seemed hell bent on making me beg (which wasn't out of the question right about now) by dragging his whiskers across my skin, saying, "So you don't want to hear about how much just the sight of your naked body makes me so fucking hard I can't see straight? Knowing how good it's going to feel when I finally slide inside of you with your pussy only sucking me in deeper? How it's all I can do not to come undone the moment your wet heat throbs around my cock when I fuck you?"

*Oh! Helllooo Dirty Talking Eric. How nice of you to drop by. Won't you cum in?*

There was plenty of throbbing going on already and if I could've formed any words, I would've told him he was missing out on some feeling some really good ones, but the only sound I could make was an inelegant, "Uhh..." when I felt the unmistakable *hard cock* he was speaking of sliding against the crease of my leg, only instead of using it to *fuck me*, he was just using it to *fuck with me*. It strengthened his case on the whole 'not seeing straight' claim, but I really doubted he could see out of that one eye no matter how much he managed to think only using

that head and regardless of how many times we'd had sex, I was always impressed how that thing could transform from downtime into battle ready at a moment's notice.

*Now if he'd just send his Optimus Prime into battle, I'd be all set because it was time for the climax.*

My legs fell open with my knees bent outward forming a diamond shape hoping to entice him with his very own Field of Dreams thinking if I built it, he would cum. Or at least maybe I would, but he continued to wander around the field of play like he was chasing a goddamn butterfly instead of reading the signals it was time for him to slide into home. I was just about to really let loose on him when the sound of music started filtering into our little bubble.

*'This was never the way I planned, not my intention.  
I got so brave, drink in hand, lost my discretion  
It's not what I'm used to, just wanna try you on.  
I'm curious for you, caught my attention.*

*I kissed a girl and I liked it,  
the taste of her cherry chapstick.  
I kissed a girl just to try it,  
I hope my boyfriend don't mind it.  
It felt so wrong,  
it felt so right.  
Don't mean I'm in love tonight.  
I kissed a girl and I liked it'*

Huh? Why the fuck was Katy Perry intruding on sexy time with Eric? It took another moment before the haze cleared from my mind enough to realize I was hearing the sound of my cell phone and I reached over, pulling it out of my purse, and answered just before it could go to voicemail, saying, "Hey Ames."

That ringtone probably wasn't a good one for her anymore since her and Tray had been hot and heavy ever since meeting at our house, but her growling back at me had my mind focusing once more as she said, "The fuck Sook? I've been sitting here waiting on your preggo ass for half an hour now. Push Eric off, get dressed, and get here already. He can just tap that ass when you get back home."

*If only...*

"Sorry Ames. I'm right outside in the parking lot. I'll be there in a minute." I took a second to silence my cell phone before shoving it back into my purse and a glance at the clock told me I'd been sitting there for at least fifteen minutes in my fantasy pornography trance, so I hurried up to get inside of the same Mexican restaurant I'd brought Eric to right after he'd gotten me the Black Pearl. Amelia had asked me out to dinner at the last minute and since I didn't have anything, or *anyone*, better to do, I accepted.

Time had really been flying by once the holidays were over and it felt like no sooner had the ball dropped in Time Square on New Year's Eve that Eric magically disappeared. Not really...but it felt that way. I'd had no idea how much work went into filming a movie, but even before filming began Eric was constantly going to meetings and costume fittings and just generally having to be everywhere at once. We'd at least still had our Sundays together and Eric's dad came over on most of them for dinner. They seemed to be doing really well together and I could finally see where Eric got his charm from, but I was still keeping my fingers crossed hoping nothing would happen and spoil it all. But that all changed as soon as the sitcom ended their taping for the season at the beginning of February and Eric was gone like the wind working sixteen to eighteen hour days on the set six, and sometimes seven, days a week. He had the lead role so he was practically in every scene.

*I hated it.*

But, I understood. I knew it would only be for a little while and my passport had come in the mail a week earlier, so I still had our little trip to look forward to. I just missed him and from the amount of phone calls and text messages I got every day, I knew he missed me too, but there wasn't much he could do about any of it for now. He'd be gone before I woke up in the mornings and wouldn't come home until I was already asleep, but even on the nights I tried to stay awake to see him, he'd be so tired he was basically sleep walking as it was, so the maternal instincts in me had me putting him right to bed.

*And I didn't mean*

*For sexy time, so I was*

*Horny all the time.*

I could make a fucked up Haiku, but I couldn't even get Bubba's company since Eric would take him with him everywhere he went. Terry had gone ahead and continued to work with him on the weekends so that now Bubba was a certified Service Dog and that only added to Eric's glee because now no one could legally tell him he couldn't take his dog into wherever he happened to be going, not that many people ever told his charming self no anyway. I wasn't necessarily immune to said charm, but I was drawing the line at the delivery room. I also knew that could mean I might have to substitute Eric's presence with Pam's, but fuck it. She always wanted to see me naked anyway and it was a good way to scare her off from all points of Sookie South.

*But maybe it wouldn't be a bad idea to get Eric one of those red vests like Bubba's and leave it out on the bed for him so then he'd know it was long overdue for his wife to be serviced.*

I found Amelia sitting at a table practically vibrating in her seat and since I knew her so well I had to silently question if she had something going on underneath the tablecloth that I really didn't want to know about, but considering how I was feeling I'd maybe ask her where I could get one too. As soon as she saw my face she calmed down and said, "Uh oh...I haven't seen *that* face since before we went to Vegas."



"What *face*?" I grumped knowing *exactly* what face she was talking about.

"The '*I need a good stiff one*' face and I ain't talking about your old pal Jose Cuervo," she smiled. "What's wrong? From what you've told me, Eric's dick could reach you clear across town, so it can't be that he can't get around the baby belly. Get up on all fours and do it doggy style."

"Amelia!" I whispered loudly knowing my cheeks were already flush from my bow chicka wow wow daydream. "Keep your damn voice down for Christ's sake!"

"Shit Sookie," she giggled, "if I was getting routinely hammered by Cock-a-saurus, I'd be shouting it from the rooftops."

"You *are* shouting it from the rooftops!" I whispered even louder. "Now use your 'I'm so far inside it might as well be fucking NORAD' voice. The paps might have calmed down, but I'm still a faux-lebrity and the last thing I need is reading about my sex life going by way of the dinosaurs."

*Although, I wouldn't mind having a life-size Cock-a-saurus model right about now.*

"How long has the Ice Age been?" she asked with more sympathy than I would've expected given the giant ass grin on her face.

"Long enough," I huffed. Eleven days, eighteen hours and thirty-seven minutes, to be exact.

*And yes I was fucking counting. Lately I constantly felt like a Sookie-sized Scrat frantically looking for Eric's nuts.*

I tried to view it as good practice for when he'd be gone, but most of the time I just saw it as my own personal purgatory because I could be a selfish bitch like that. Amelia and I were close enough that I didn't have to keep on a happy face and she knew me well enough to distract me from my thoughts by changing the subject and asked, "So...how's Chateau Northman South coming along?"

"Good," I smiled. I really was looking forward to us being able to stay there and Calvin said it should be finished in time for us to use it over the summer, with him emailing us weekly progress reports along with pictures of what they'd gotten done so far, as well as praise for Gran's baking in keeping them fed while they were there. It was sort of surreal, like building a house out of paper cutouts, only with Calvin and his men doing all of the real work in making it a real house. Eric and I had picked out the style of house we wanted together, but he left all of the little details up to me, so I scoured magazines and websites seeing what there was out there and found out there was *a lot*. I knew he was doing it just because he wanted me to have exactly what I wanted and it had been a good distraction from missing him at night as I picked out kitchen cabinets and bathroom fixtures all by myself, but sometimes as I sat there all alone at my pity party for one it felt like it was because he didn't really care even though I knew it wasn't true.

Our server showed up a moment later, so we both placed our orders and it wasn't until Amelia was handing over her menu that I spotted it and squealed, "Is that an engagement ring on your finger?"

I was such a bad friend, but Amelia didn't hold it against me and squealed back, "It is!" She and Tray hadn't been seeing each other for very long, but who was I to judge?

*I knew Eric for all of two hours before we got married.*

I knew that from the timestamp on the video we'd finally watched after Gran and Jason had gone back home, but there hadn't been much to see. Just like Pam had said, you could see Amelia and I up at the bar laughing and joking before she disappeared to the bathroom. Not long after that icky Bill Compton is sitting right next to me saying God knows what however it had been clear I wasn't impressed which only made him scowl, but his expression got even more exaggerated when Eric walked up to us. Present Eric was all kinds of tickled seeing Past Sookie having a complete fangirl meltdown at seeing Past Eric, and both Eric's had a deep appreciation for that slutty red dress Amelia had shoved me into that night. It was clear that as soon as our eyes met, we didn't notice anyone else in the room with us and it didn't take long before our third wheel had sulked away. It also hadn't taken long for Eric and me to move closer and closer to one another and as soon as his hand touched mine, we never broke contact from that point on all the way until we wandered off towards the dance floor and the footage ended.

Forcing my baby brain back into the present, I asked, "So how did he propose? When's the big day? Please God, tell me it's after the Bean is born so I won't have to be the fat bridesmaid and, yes, I just invited myself to be in your wedding party and then made it all about me, but you love me anyways."

She laughed at my rambling and shook her head, saying, "Sorry, there's no fucking way I'm having a Sumo Sookie bridesmaid." Before I could tear up or kick her, or possibly both, she added, "But I'll have a svelte Sookie Matron of Honor next spring?"

According to Jason, I'd always been a crier anyways, but my hormones only made that statement a thousand times truer and the tears fell as she leaned over and hugged me as I said, "Well, I can't promise you the 'svelte' part, but I would be honored to be your Matron of Honor."

We spent the next couple of hours talking nonstop mostly about wedding plans and she told me how Tray had pulled out all of the stops on the proposal and surprised her by showing up at her work dressed in a huge panda bear costume so she didn't even know it was him. He'd been carrying a bouquet of flowers and a fistful of balloons as he danced around her, but it wasn't until she realized it was Train's 'Marry Me' song playing in the background that she understood what was going on. When the song was over he dropped down on bended knee and held up a cue card that read, 'Will you marry me Amelia?' and then turned it around so she could read, 'Don't make me Sad Panda,' on the back. I probably would've been mortified by all of the attention, but it was incredibly sweet and romantic and I was very happy for her.

Hearing about her musical proposal, I filled her in on how I convinced my Drama club kids to do a musical for the spring performance. After seeing their impromptu Beyonce show, I'd ferreted out Jesus Velasquez, Science teacher and choir director extraordinaire, and begged and pleaded with him to give a pregnant girl a hand, since I wouldn't have Eric around, and he thankfully agreed. He was a lot of fun to hang around, always making me laugh, and although he hadn't come out and said anything, I had a pretty good feeling he would be perfect for Lafayette, but I had yet to come up with a way for them to meet each other. Since the next performance would be more involved than the last one, and I had no one to go home to anyway, we'd upped the rehearsals to three days a week and on the other two, I'd started staying after school to tutor a few of my parking lot protection detail. The three ring circus had died down so I didn't need them anymore, but I knew a lot of them were in remedial classes and thought I could pay them back for their kindness by helping them improve their English grades. All of them were bright in their own way and only a few of them were interested enough to take me up on it, but it saddened me that they'd somehow fallen through the cracks by being promoted to the next grade every year when some of them could barely read at a third grade level, so I was doing my best to fix that.

After Amelia and I talked a little bit more about the baby and I convinced her she didn't have to throw me a baby shower since it seemed like a waste when Pam had already taken on the role of personal shopper for the Bean and no amount of saying 'enough' was enough to get her to stop, we said our goodbyes in the parking lot and I was finally on my way home. It was only a little after eight when I pulled into the garage and my grin got huge seeing Eric's car was already in there, so I hopped out of the car and skipped into the house (as much as I could with my Bean belly anyway) only to come to a skidding halt seeing Eric standing there.

*In a mother fucking white Navy dress uniform.*

*Permission to cum aboard Captain?*

"Where have you been?" he practically shouted, which lowered my libido and raised my temper. "I've been trying to call you for over an hour and sending you text messages every five minutes!"

Since he just seemed angry and didn't look like perhaps somebody died, I glared at him and pulled my cell phone out which I hadn't bothered to check since I'd silenced it earlier. I ignored the voicemails and went to the texts, reading:

*I really fucking miss you and so does the Captain. As soon as we're done with this scene I'm fucking outta here and then I want to be fucking in you. Literally.*

*Where are you? Why aren't you answering your phone? Did you start without me?*

*I thought I'd start without you too, but watching the iPorn is only making me grumpier. You'd better be waiting for me naked in bed when I get home. Or. Else.*

*WHERE ARE YOU? I didn't even bother to change out of costume so I could get to you that much sooner and I come home to find an empty house with no one to cum home to!*

The last text was only from five minutes earlier, but considering everything I'd been going through without him around, I didn't have much sympathy for him or the Captain. The crowd surrounding home plate however came back to life and were cheering and holding up 'We love the Captain' signs seeing him in that damn uniform, so I heard an internal chorus of hisses and boos when I ignored their chanting and said sarcastically, "Oh, *I'm sorry*. Was I supposed to sit around and wait for you to come waltzing through the door even though you tend to not waltz through it until the middle of the night? Should I be wearing a skirt that hits me mid-calf handing you your tumbler of scotch and putting slippers on your feet before I go and pull your dinner out of the oven? Because, I swear to God, if you say yes, I can guaran-damn-tee you it'll be a looonnnngg fucking time before you have the opportunity to give me any of your homegrown pearl necklaces."

Wicked and Immoral were dying to mutiny, but I kept those double-crossing bitches clenched at my sides as my poor hoohah wept at the sight of him. Well, she was leaking something, but not necessarily tears. We hadn't really fought in a long time, probably not since before the accident, so he missed out on remembering a few doozeys, but it was like riding a bike; you never truly forgot how and just like back then, I simultaneously wanted to junk punch him and then kiss it all better with both sets of lips.

*Stupid hormones. Stupid eyesight. Stupid sexy man.*

From the look Eric was giving me, he didn't need his memories to know that even angry sex would be fucking awesome right about now, so his narrowed eyes traveled over my body from head to toe before he looked back at me and took a step forward, growling, "Where. Were. You?"

*Stupid sexy growl making my girly bits chant, 'Cock-a-saurus! Cock-a-saurus!'*

I forced the sounds of Queen's 'We Will Rock You' anthem out of my brain that I would swear was coming straight from Eric's crotch and took my own step forward, growling back, "Out. Are. You. Deaf?"

*Goddamnit, I wanted to lick him...*

His eyes once again traveled over my body, taking in the red jersey hooded top I'd paired with black leggings, and said, "Well, little red riding hood, my ears are quite big. All the better to hear you with, my dear."

*Can you hear Queen too? And were we seriously going to use a children's fairytale as foreplay?*

*Fuck yes! Might as well put that early education degree to good use!*

I tried to contain my smirk as I took another step closer and played along, saying, "My, what big eyes you have." Not really...they were half closed and full of lust, but I still wanted to lick his damn sexy cocked eyebrow.

*I wanted to lick his damn sexy cock too, but I wouldn't give him the satisfaction of admitting it however, if he played his cards right, I might give him the satisfaction of doing it.*

Eric had a harder time, pun intended, of hiding the effect my playing along had on him and he swallowed hard, taking one more step closer, answering, "The better to *see* you with, my dear."

*How in the hell does he even know or remember this story? Why in the hell am I even thinking about that when he's dressed in that uniform and looking at me like that?*

*Stupid pregnancy brain.*

The goddamn traitorous bitches that they are, Wicked and Immoral saw the weakness in my defenses and made a break for it by reaching out and flicking open those throb-inducing brass buttons one by one as I croaked out, "What. Big. *Teeth*. You have."

Now that I had his jacket open and with my eyes zeroed in on the straining zipper of his pants, logically he should have thought I was talking about *those* teeth, even though I was clearly talking about Cock-a-saurus', but Eric just leaned down and scraped his teeth across my neck to whisper hoarsely in my ear, "The better to *eat you* with, my dear."

*And the crowd goes wild...*

His lips were on mine a second later as he picked me up with my legs automatically going right around his waist. Thank God he'd been working out for the film and had such a long arm span otherwise it never would've worked with the Bean in the way, but we only made it as far as the bottom of the stairs when he said, "I can't wait. It's been too long and you're too fucking sexy for your own good."

*Pot. Meet Kettle.*

Eric practically ripped my clothes off, but I made sure to be extra careful getting his uniform off because we were definitely playing with that again (and again!) and like the generous lover he was, Eric's mouth and hands went right to work in making sure I was properly warmed up. But, I'd been *warmed up* for what felt like forever already, so I turned around and faced the stairs on my hands and knees climbing up to the right height, embracing Amelia's doggy style idea, saying, "Come on Big Bad Wolf, I'm ready to reach the *pinnacle* of the story, so give me my happily ever after already."

As if to call me a liar, or perhaps in a gesture of good sportsmanship, Eric's hand reached down to schmooze with the crowd and feeling how rowdy they were getting, like Babe Ruth pointing off into the distance, the Captain slammed it right outta the park. I was already cumming as soon as he thrust into me and he yelled out a hoarse, "Fuck!" feeling my walls clench down around him, but my mock military man plowed through it gritting out through his teeth, "Needed... This... Missed you..."

I couldn't have said a coherent word if my life depended on it, but Eric was fluent in Sookie sex speech by then, which was mostly just grunts and sighs, and read all of my cues. He kept his hands gripped onto my hips as he continued to pound into me from behind, but he leaned forward and kissed, bit, and licked a trail going across my back when he finally let one hand slide forward and try to coax another orgasm out of me.

*My hoohah held up a lighter like Jim Morrison himself was about to take the stage and sing 'Light My Fire.'*

He knew just how to touch me; how much pressure to use and what rhythm would have me screaming in no time and he put all of that knowledge to good use because it wasn't long before my entire body lit up like one giant flame in reverence to the Sex God that is Eric Northman. It was made even better feeling him finally lose himself inside of me too, but he was careful not to fall forward since the Bean and I wouldn't necessarily enjoy getting squished on the stairs and instead he held onto me and brought us both down onto the bottom landing with me in his lap.

Once I was finally able to catch my breath, I turned around in his arms and gave him a kiss on his cheek, giggling, "Welcome home soldier. I thank you for your sacrifice and service."

"Hell," he smiled lazily against my neck. "If I go outside and come back in do I get another welcome home like that one so I can *service* you again?"

"Pfft..." and I rolled my eyes for good measure.

*Which of course was Sookie-speak for 'Fuck yes!'*

"So, where were you earlier?" he finally asked much more nicely.

*But I was still hormonal. At least, that's what I was gonna blame it on.*

"Apparently I was back in 1957 with Wally and the Beav. It's probably why I didn't get your texts until Marty McFly got the flux-capacitor working again and brought me back to the future."

My words didn't have enough bite for my taste, so I leaned over and bit him lightly on his shoulder with my tongue darting out to taste him, but he just chuckled, apologizing, "I'm sorry, but I was really horny and grumpy, which could also be said because the day ends in 'Y', and because I miss you, which is all the fucking time too."

My insides were all gooey from his confession, but that wasn't *all* that was inside of me when the Bean made its presence known by kicking just underneath where Eric's hand was resting on my bump. I was almost twenty-four weeks along and had thought some of what I'd been feeling was the baby, but I couldn't be sure until now and Eric gasped, asking, "Was that what I *think* it was?"

*Stupid hormonal tears.*

"I think so," I sniffled into his chest. "But I had Mexican for dinner, so you never know."

I couldn't help smiling hearing Eric's barking laughter and his whole body shook, thereby making mine shake too, so the Bean kicked him again telling him to knock it off since I was too busy trying not to sob out loud. He only held me tighter, threats of refried bean gas bombs be damned, but he never took his hands from my belly and whispered happily, "I didn't miss it."

"Nope," I agreed thinking whatever I'd been feeling for the past couple of weeks very well could have been gas, so he would be happier having missed that anyway.

He reached out and lifted my chin so he could place a soft kiss on my lips as he looked into my eyes, saying, "I really love you, you know."

I did know and it was the only way I'd be able to get through the next few weeks without him.

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## Chapter 106: Chapter 103

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### Chapter 103

#### EPOV

*I felt the Bean kick!*

I'd never felt such a rush of exhilaration and considering the amount of drugs I'd used in my past that was saying a lot. Seeing the Bean flailing around on a monitor looking like it was doing an interpretive dance of its mother's god awful singing was one thing, but to actually be able to feel it happening was something entirely new and brought with it a fresh wave of love and excitement.

*And I was left feeling overwhelmed by it all.*

For a day that had started out pretty well, the news I'd received in the middle of it had left me in a fucked off mood for rest of it and I needed to tell Sookie about it, but I didn't want our little moment to be spoiled just yet. It was probably why I ended up getting unfairly bitchy with her as soon as she walked into the house, although I'd make a mental note that getting her pissed off led to really hot sex, but I really had missed her and considering how shitty I'd been feeling when I'd still at least been able to see her when I got home at night made me even more put off about going away on location. Homesickness was never something I'd had to deal with in the past because I never really had a home to miss, but now I had Sookie and couldn't imagine what it was going to be like not being able to hold her every day, even if I could only do it while she was asleep. And, of course, there was the Bean too. It was growing and kicking and now I was going to miss out on six weeks of feeling and seeing it.

*Now I felt even more overwhelmed.*

It hadn't seemed like that bad of an idea a couple of months earlier when I'd signed the contracts and the thought of having to go away was an abstract one, but now that the time for me to leave was getting closer and closer, it felt like a noose was slowly tightening around my neck. If I took a step back and looked at it objectively even I could see how ridiculous I was being, but it didn't change how I actually felt. I would miss her more than I could ever imagine.

*Because I'd become the world's biggest pussy.*

I'd learned admitting you have a problem is the first step to recovery, but I doubted they had a Pussies Anonymous group I could join and wouldn't want to sit next to either Pam or Jason if they did anyway, although they'd have to join for different reasons than my own. Seeing Sookie now happily getting ready for bed, I didn't want to ruin her good mood, so like a chicken shit, I put it aside and chose to go the more neutral route by asking, "Did you go to that Mexican place we went to before?"

*Where all the men salivated more over you than their meals?*

*When I wasn't with you to beat them off?*

*Maybe that question wasn't as neutral as I thought.*

For all I knew the fucking place had been built in 1957, so my little smartass could very well have had dinner with Wally, the Beav, and Marty McFly, but I had my doubts because I had enough of a man card left that I would've recognized the sound of a DeLorean outside.

"Yes," she answered softly, burrowing into my side right where she fucking belonged. "Amelia invited me out at the last minute. Did you know that Tray proposed to her?"

I knew Tray was serious about her, but I didn't know he was *that* serious and answered, "No."

"It was so romantic," she sighed. "He surprised her at work wearing a ridiculous panda costume and danced around to Train's 'Marry Me' song before dropping down to one knee and proposing."

*Shit...*

"Oh yeah?" I asked, all the while thinking I'd better come up with something just as romantic, if not more so. I'd gotten an idea on the perfect ring to give Sookie from Gran while she'd been here for the holidays and with her and Jason's help, I now had the perfect one hidden away in my office. I'd had to get it made though, so it took some time before it was ready and I'd only gotten it earlier that morning which was what had put me in a good mood, but I really hadn't given much thought on how I was actually going to give it to her. It seemed kind of weird to ask her to marry me considering we were already married and I'd thought I might just try and find the time to take her out on a date and give it to her over a romantic dinner, but now I had to come up with something better than that.

*She deserved better than that.*



"Mmhhh," she yawned. "They're getting married next spring and she asked me to be her Matron of Honor, which I of course agreed to, and then she tried to talk me into letting her throw me a baby shower, but I told her no, since Pam is doing her part in making sure the economy recovers by buying every conceivable piece of gender neutral designer baby clothes known to mankind."

Pam was really pissed at us for deciding not to find out if the Bean was a boy or a girl, but I just told her to have her own damn baby if she wanted to ruin the surprise and I cringed at the thought of us possibly having any sort of blood tie when Jason had come home from his night out with her telling me with a sly grin, "Mission accomplished."

*I was just better off not knowing some things and that was at the top of the fucking list.*

But I knew baby showers were a tradition, God knows I'd kicked in cash for enough of them at the studio whenever somebody turned up knocked up, so I asked, "You don't want one? Don't *all* women want one?"

I could see her point that there wasn't anything we needed that we couldn't buy for the Bean ourselves, but I still thought she would be missing out on some sort of mother's rite of passage when she answered with a soft laugh, "No. The only traditional thing about our relationship has been that we actually got married *before* getting pregnant and even that we only did by the skin of our teeth. We didn't date. We didn't get engaged. We didn't have a bridal shower or any of the other things that go along with it. Hell, our two witnesses were complete strangers. Why ruin our streak now and let our family and friends in on the bizarreness of our lives? But I still don't think we went wrong with Bubba/Elvis doing the ceremony," she ended with another yawned out chuckle.

Seeing as how we'd gotten married two hours after meeting one another, I knew she wasn't making any sort of dig at my lack of romanticism, but I couldn't help feeling like complete and utter shit about it all and it only brought back the snide comments Tara had made at rehearsal. The fact she was even claiming there was no need for us to have any of the traditional relationship milestones told me she'd at least thought about them and I knew she'd never admit to feeling slighted even if she really did. Sookie might talk like the sailor I was portraying in the movie, but she was so fucking girl-next-door otherwise that she might as well shit apple pies and piss ice cold lemonade. She should be treated like the princess I saw her as even if she still sometimes thought of herself as the pauper doomed to spend her life watching everyone else around her getting to experience the things she deserved as well.

*But how?*

Beyond the fact Sookie didn't have a materialistic bone in her body, no amount of houses, cars, or jewelry could ever make up for what she'd missed out on, but I needed to find a way to give her back at least some of it. A decent proposal was my only shot because there was no way I'd be willing to divorce her only so I could have a second chance at doing it the right way and when I heard her breathing slow down, letting me know she'd finally fallen asleep, it was my only thought as I drifted off too.

The next morning at o'fuck early I was in the kitchen getting Bubba's bag of food, toys, and treats, ready to go to the studio when I spotted what turned out to be Sookie's passport on the counter. Seeing it only reminded me that I still had to break the news to her that she wouldn't be able to visit me like we'd planned on and the knot in my stomach only twisted more. Learning *that* little gem is what had set me off the day before, but there was nothing I could do to change it.

I'd still be leaving in the middle of March as planned, but instead of going to Sweden for six weeks, we were now filming in fucking Greenland of all places. Madden had been able to kiss enough brass ass to get permission for us to film at Thule AB, but it was an isolated area and any Americans going or staying there had to get the military's approval, so Sookie wouldn't be able to come and see me. There weren't even any commercial flights in or out of there with everyone having to fly on a plane contracted through the Air Force. When Madden told me about the change in location I'd voiced my *dissent*, or perhaps *sarled* would be a better term, but the military base and its location went hand in hand with what we would be filming and would save the studio on the costs of building sets that would be damn near identical to where we were now going.

There wasn't a fucking thing I could do about it now, so I grabbed Bubba's bag and called for him to come, but I felt like I was forgetting something and when I couldn't find where Sookie had stashed my costume I figured that had to be it and just added it to the ever growing list of things I needed to talk to her about. We pulled up to Starbucks a few minutes later, as was our routine now, and I thanked every god I could think of they were open twenty-four hours since the smell of coffee in the house just made Sookie cranky because she couldn't have any, but as we were walking towards the door I had to stop and do a double take.

If I hadn't just left her asleep in our bed, I would've sworn I was looking at Sookie sitting on the bench next to the bus stop. From the way her blond hair was styled to the clothes she wore over her pregnant body made me shake the cobwebs from my head and stare. I recognized the outfit she was wearing as one of Sookie's favorites and I blamed their similarity in appearance on why I felt the need to walk over and check on her as soon as I realized she was crying.

"Hey," I said softly hoping I wouldn't startle her since it was still dark out with no other people around. "Are you alright?" I asked.

As soon as she looked up at me I could see where the similarities ended. Sookie was just too beautiful for her own good, but she was *mine* so it worked out really well for me. This woman was okay, but no one could ever compare to who I had at home however I was still taken a little off guard hearing her southern accent as she said, "I guess so."

Something about her seemed familiar, but before I could try and place it I heard Bubba's soft warning growl at my feet, so I shushed him wondering what was wrong. The only times I'd ever heard him growl was when he was playfully trying to tug whatever toy I happened to have out of my hand, but now he just sounded menacing. He always seemed to love everyone he came across and it was completely unlike him, but I brushed it off to him still being young and tightened my

hold on his leash before looking back at Not-Sookie, saying, "Sorry. I don't know what's gotten into him."

The way she was staring up at me was starting to weird me out, which made me feel like an even bigger pussy than the night before over being creeped out by a pregnant woman who was half my size, but seeing her intense gaze boring into me, I wondered if she even noticed Bubba's presence, so I started to slowly back away from her and said, "Well, I just wanted to make sure you were okay."

She smiled back at me with a dreamy expression, saying, "It was really kind of you to worry about me. You're a good man." As I continued to back away from the crazy pregnant lady I was now only worried about in the sense she was batshit, I forced myself to smile and wave halfheartedly, but when I had to stop and tug at Bubba's leash since he seemed to want to just stand there with his hackles raised up staring at her, I could've sworn I heard her say, "You deserve a good woman."

Since she was clearly a nut job, I didn't bother to tell her I already had the best woman at home and pretended I couldn't hear her while dragging Bubba into Starbucks. We were in there so often, the staff already knew and loved him and I rarely ever held his leash inside, so he'd normally sit next to the counter where they'd always give him a small cookie while I waited for my coffee, but when I dropped his leash this time he went straight back to the glass door and stared out of it still growling lowly.

"What's wrong with Bubba? Is there a stray cat out there?" asked the barista who I knew was named Bill, but since I hated all things Bill and didn't want to hate the guy that made my coffee every morning, I'd named him Edward in my head because he looked sort of emo and even though I hadn't seen him in the daylight yet, I wouldn't have been surprised if he sparkled.

"I don't know," I shrugged. "There was some pregnant lady out there on the bench crying and when I went to see if she was okay, he started acting up."

"A blonde?" he asked while trying to entice Bubba away from the door with his favorite chunk of un-iced carrot cake they sometimes kept off to the side for him. Seeing my nod and Bubba's odd indifference to his favorite treat, he gave up and said, "Yeah. She's in here a lot lately, normally around this time. Gets the double espresso."

"Really?" I asked feeling a little shocked. "You're not supposed to drink caffeine when you're pregnant," I babbled on. It was a major peeve of Sookie's that she couldn't have any and I'd heard her complain about it enough that I'd likely never forget it.

*Future comas notwithstanding.*

My opinion of the crazy lady with the Norman Bates vibe dropped even more if she wasn't willing to sacrifice her caffeine fix in order to have a healthy pregnancy and made me lump her in with my own mother. I couldn't even redeem her standing by blaming it on pregnancy hormones which, in Sookie's opinion, gave her free reign to act up at the drop of a hat, and even

she still gave up her 'coffee bean bliss.' Since I preferred my balls where they were and didn't want them nestled firmly underneath my sternum, I let her have that opinion without any verbal complaints from me and was just happy she wasn't telepathic.

By the time my coffee was handed over Bubba was back to sitting by my feet, but I grabbed his leash anyway and on our way back to the car I noticed Mrs. Bates was gone from the bench and spotted her farther down the street leaning down to talk to someone through the passenger side window. From the sounds of it, I assumed it was Mr. Bates because she was yelling that he wasn't the boss of her and she could do what she damn well pleased. That definitely reminded me of Sookie and I guessed she wasn't immune to the hormones either, but I'm ashamed to say I felt chills run up my spine when her head whipped around and her eyes landed on me again, so I hurried up and got us in the car before driving away.

*I really was a pussy. Maybe I should look into that support group after all.*

And I was really glad Sookie had given up coffee because the thought of her running into Mrs. Bates would scare me even more, especially if they were both in a hormonal mood, but I had pretty much shaken it off by the time I reached the gym. With the crazy hours I was putting in thanks to the shooting schedule I would gladly forego my workouts, but I'd needed to gain more muscle mass for the movie in order to fill out the costumes properly. Padding could always be sewn into them, but that wouldn't do me any good when I'd have to do a scene without my shirt on and it had the added benefit of making Sookie drool whenever she saw me, so Tray had been meeting with me every morning at four just so I could get an hour in on the weights before going to the studio.

How the fuck he could be so awake at this ungodly hour never ceased to amaze me, never mind the fact it was a fucking Saturday, when I heard his booming voice the moment we walked in, shouting, "Bubba!"

As had become their routine, Bubba ran over and pounced on a squatted down Tray knocking him over onto the mat with the two of them wrestling and only highlighted how odd his behavior had been earlier. If anything, I would've thought he would've been more receptive to a pregnant woman since he seemed to instinctually know not to be rough with Sookie. He didn't even tug toys out of her hand as hard and more often than not, simply let go of them and waited for her to just toss them.

*He also instinctually knew not to jump on Pam, but that was probably more survival instincts than anything else.*

But it didn't stop him from standing in front of her and giving her his puppy dog eyes with his tail wagging. Sookie claimed he had the power to bend people to his will with that look and blamed it on her inability to not feed him table scraps, and it seemed she might be on to something when even Pam couldn't resist petting him.

*Maybe Jason had puppy dog eyes and I hadn't noticed?*

*It was a possibility since I hadn't noticed Pam had a cooter box.*

I snickered out loud like the prepubescent tween Pam still accused me of being remembering my conversation with Jason and started my routine of stretching while Tray continued to lend credence to the idea he had a little bit of canine DNA in him somewhere. When he finally strolled over to spot me on the weight bench, I said, "I heard congratulations are in order Ling-Ling."

"Yep," he smiled wide. "That one's a hellcat in bed. What's not to love?"

"TMI Tray, TMI," I laughed. "Sookie said you all are getting married next spring?"

"Yeah, she wants a year to rub it in her father's face that she's marrying a personal trainer and figures it'll take him that long to get over it and walk her down the aisle anyway."

From what Sookie had told me about Amelia, it seemed she knew what buttons to push to get her way with her father, so I was sure this was no different and went on with, "What in the hell made you dress up as a giant panda? Didn't you have any better ideas than that?"

*And would you care to share what they were so I could get some ideas?*

"Eh..." he shrugged and smiled. "How could she say no after I made a jackass out of myself in front of all of her co-workers? Besides, it'll be a great story to tell the grandkids one day."

*Grandkids? The Bean had better be a boy...or else Sister Bean would just have to get her fill of the little kids at whatever Catholic orphanage she was running.*

Tray was no fucking help in giving me any ideas on how to give Sookie the ring, but then that could also be because I didn't tell him about it. I hadn't told anyone about it because I didn't trust any of the dolts in my life to not say something to her and my earlier scowl over the thought of a baby girl Bean being defiled in order to give me grandkids returned once I got to the studio.

Today Sophie Anne and I would be filming a love scene of sorts and while she hadn't done or said anything inappropriate in the short time we'd been working together, I was still leery, but it had to be done. If there was ever a time for me to put all of my years of experience in acting to use, it would be today when I had to look like I actually wanted her. Sookie had already read the script so she knew it was in there and had given me the hairy eyeball when she discovered it, but I tried to reassure her it was just acting. Nothing about those scenes were romantic in real life when you had ten other people standing around with cameras, makeup and making sure the lighting was just right. Her hormones had even worked to my advantage because she'd ended up ripping my clothes off and claimed me as hers by doing her best to fuck me to death.

*Ahh...that was a great night.*

A couple of hours later Bubba and I walked out of makeup and onto the set where Sophie Anne and Madden were waiting. Sophie Anne immediately crouched down, crooning, "Bubba!", but it

seemed Bubba's instincts were better than I gave him credit for because he had yet to give her any attention. He'd never growled at her like he did Mrs. Bates, but him and Sookie must have had a little chat because he wanted nothing to do with her.

"Your dog is so standoffish," she scowled at me while standing back up.

A second later one of the cameramen called out, "Bubba!" and he went happily trotting over to him, so I looked back at her and smiled, saying, "I wouldn't call him *standoffish* so much as I would say he's *discerning*."

*Fuck it. I didn't care if she liked me. She could join the club and just had to ACT like she did.*

Once we did a run through of what scenes we were doing and our places on the set, Madden called, "Action," and so started my attempts at an Oscar worthy performance. Even though I'd been the one to tell Sookie it was *just acting* and *it didn't mean anything*, I found myself wanting to balk over the thought of having to touch her or letting her touch me, but I went through with it anyway. It was the first love scene of any type I'd had to do in the time I'd been with Sookie and it just felt wrong, but I was a professional.

*And also a giant pussy.*

I tried to make it as believable as possible hoping we'd only have to do one take and I had a feeling Madden wouldn't be too keen on multiple takes anyway since him and Sophie Anne were seeing one another, so I forced myself not to flinch as she slowly unbuttoned my shirt and slipped it off of my shoulders. I didn't cringe at the feel of her hands sliding their way up my chest. And when I pressed my lips to hers and slipped my tongue into her mouth while my hands held her face as though I loved her, I didn't vomit.

*Because I hadn't eaten anything yet, just in case.*

I ignored how breathless Sophie Anne seemed to be when I pulled back and did an internal happy dance when I heard Madden yell, "Cut!" and was even happier hearing him add, "Well, *that* certainly looked believable, so I think we're good with one take."

I sighed with relief, but that relief was short lived when I turned and saw Sookie standing there off to the side and based on the look on her face, she didn't like whatever she'd just seen. Bubba was sitting next to her with his body pressed against hers, but she remained standing there stiffly staring back at me, so I hurried over to her saying, "What are you doing here?"

She'd been to the set with me before and after one day had declared it boring as hell, so I hadn't expected her to show up again, but I also should have chosen my words more wisely because she glared back at me, hissing, "Oh, *I'm sorry*. Did you not *want* me here? Is that why you didn't mention what scenes you'd be filming today? Because my presence would mess with you getting your groove on, *Captain*?"

*I was wrong. Sookie wasn't here. Hormonal Sookie was here.*

"Sookie," I sighed and wrapped my arms around her stiff body. The Bean was apparently pissed at me too because no sooner had I pressed myself against her than I felt a kick aimed right at me, but I pressed on anyway, saying, "Of course you're always welcome to drop by. You *knew* about that scene being in the script. I *explained* that it was just work. It's nothing like what *we have* together. *That is real. This is pretend.*"

"Looked pretty *real* to me," she mumbled into my chest, but I felt her body slowly relax in my embrace so I knew she wasn't too upset.

Hoping to get her to at least smile, I whispered to her, "Did it look like I wanted to throw up? Because I did."

Thanks to my still open shirt that I'd barely had a chance to throw on when I noticed Sookie, I could feel her lips curve into a smile as she asked, "Does she not taste like cherries? I could loan her my lip gloss."

"I don't think it'll help," I chuckled and leaned down to whisper into her ear, "She tastes like famewhore. Very unpalatable." Sookie snickered and finally wrapped her arms around me, whispering back, "Well, I can think of a few ways to remove the awful after taste from your mouth."

"Really?" I asked and automatically rubbed against her while picturing all of the places I could fuck her in my trailer. "I'm sure I'm due for a break right about now."

I grabbed her hand to start leading her away, but she dug her heels in and laughed, "Well, you're just going to have to suffer for a little while longer. The reason I'm here is to get Bubba. Did you forget he has an appointment at the vet's office to get his shots today?"

Fuck...I knew I was forgetting something this morning and I felt myself pout as I said, "But he's *always* with me."

Sookie's face contorted into mock anger as she said, "Eric Northman! Are you trying to tell me that you trust me to carry your *child*, but you're afraid to leave me in charge of your *dog*?"

Since I knew she was playing, I wasn't afraid to answer, "Yes." At her gasp of mock outrage, I said with more honesty than I'd ever admit to, "You'll only take him there, but if you stop somewhere for anything, you'll just leave him in the car when he's allowed *by law* to go into any place of business."

She looked back at me with a cross between a smile and a scowl on her face, saying, "He might be a *Service Dog*, but you don't *really* need him with you everywhere you go! It would be the same thing as going everywhere in a pair of sunglasses and pretending you're blind just so you could knock people around with a walking stick. You're just spoiled."

I rolled my eyes pretending to pout and said, "And you ask me why I don't trust you with my dog." I loved taking him everywhere with me and he seemed to genuinely like going everywhere and, up until this morning, he generally liked everyone he met.

"Keep it up mister," she scowled back at me, "and you'll come home to find your dog's been replaced by a hamster. At least *that* would be less conspicuous to carry around everywhere."

I pretended to think about it before asking, "Will it be one of those ones that dance in crappy car commercials? Or maybe one of the ones that row a boat?"

She shook her head laughing, "You watch too much TV and the ones that row a boat are guinea pigs."

I took her back into my arms and kissed her, saying, "You must watch just as much TV if you're correcting my commercial trivia knowledge."

Before she could respond, we were interrupted by she-who-tastes-like-famewhore, saying, "Sookie! What a pleasant surprise. I'm sorry you had to see that. I hope you don't mind me having to borrow your husband's lips today."

She stiffened in my arms and I was ready to tell Sophie Anne to fuck off, when Sookie replied, "Of course I don't mind. I know it's just acting. If anyone should be apologizing, it should be me to you."

"Why is that?" she asked.

"Well, I saw how Eric kissed you and *that* was clearly *acting* because the *real thing* would've left you crying out for more. His kisses are better than chocolate and from the looks of what he gave you, you got broccoli. I *hate* broccoli, so I'm sorry for you."

I could feel Sookie's fingernails digging into my back and knew she was pissed, but you'd never know by her friendly tone. Sophie Anne would only be doing it to herself by poking the hormonal pregnant lady and I wasn't about to stand in her way, but I wished I'd dragged Sookie away when Sophie Anne smiled back at her, saying sweetly, "Well, then I guess you'll have to stock up on six weeks' worth of *chocolate* when we go away to Greenland, huh?"

*Fuck my life...*

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## Chapter 107: Chapter 104

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### Chapter 104

**SPOV**



*That fucking redheaded bitch better back the hell off. Cock-a-saurus belongs to Preg-a-saurus and I'll chew her up and spit her famewhore tasting ass out.*

I knew they'd be having a couple of tame love scenes together, but actually watching them kiss wasn't something I was as prepared to see as I thought I was, so let's just say that Mr. Northman was very lucky the Captain was sleeping off the effects of his hard night partying with the crowd the night before, instead of standing at attention.

*Because you can bet your ass I looked.*

I was still seething inside when her sickly, and more importantly *falsely*, sweet words registered in my just-as-red-as-her-bottle-dyed-head mind. Greenland? What happened to Sweden and my Swedish massage?

*Weren't most native Greenlandic people Inuits? Like Eskimos? Would we just be rubbing noses instead?*

I really didn't care where we were so long as I got to see Eric, but before I could tell Sophie Anne exactly where I'd like to shove a fistful of chocolate along with a few stalks of broccoli, Eric quickly turned to me and asked, "Don't you have to get Bubba to the vet?" and dragged me away. Once we were out of earshot of everyone else, he stopped and turned to me again, saying, "I'm sorry. I only found out about the change in location yesterday and I was going to tell you last night, but I was *distracted*."

Seeing his raised eyebrow reminded me just how *distracted* we were and why, and really this wasn't so different from his inability to inform me of premier or holiday parties, so I smiled back at him, saying, "It's no big deal. I don't care where we are so long as I get to see you, but you're still obligated to give me a Swedish massage."

I waggled my eyebrows at him to let him know 'Swedish massage' was code for massive amounts of fucking and speaking of *distracted*, seeing Eric standing there with his shirt billowing open showing off all of his extra time at the gym, along with the traces of eyeliner they put on him for filming, was making me dizzy. Wicked and Immoral must have been *distracted* too because instead of hearing Greenland they must've heard Naples and decided to get a head start by going on holiday straight to Eric's nipples, but it seemed my waggler was broken and their holiday was short lived when Eric stilled my hands as he said with a broken expression on his face, "You can't come to visit."

*Whatchu talkin' about Willis?*

If I didn't know any better, I'd think he was getting some use out of his Swahili app, or perhaps he'd downloaded a Greenlandic one, but instead he explained, "We're going to an Air Force base there. It's remote and the military only approved a certain amount of people because of the limited space. We're staying on the base because there aren't any towns anywhere close to where we'll be, so they even had to pare down the crew that's going. I'm sorry."

*But...I got a passport...and he'd be gone for SIX weeks...and I wouldn't get to see him...and the crowd had already worked themselves into another frenzy spilling not quite beer because his stupid lickable chest was literally in my face.*

"Sookie," he pleaded through the mournful yet lust clouded haze in my mind. "Please don't cry."

I didn't even realize I was until his stupid lickable chest was pressed against my face and I felt the wetness that had nothing to do with the now jeering crowd down below, but hearing how upset he sounded made me try and rein it in and I sobbed, "It's...okay...I...I'm...not crying..."

He couldn't even laugh at my ridiculous hiccup filled lie and only continued to shush me while telling me how sorry he was and how much he loved me, but that only made it worse. Preg-a-saurus' evil twin Hormone-a-saurus had set up shop, so we were both out of luck. Eric hadn't noticed her putting out her 'Open for business' sign, so when I'd finally mostly calmed down he made the mistake of saying, "Six weeks isn't so long. I'll be back before you know it."

I heard the *cha-ching* sound of the register signaling her first sale and sobbed, "Six weeks *IS* a long time! That's a quarter of the Bean's lifetime. *A quarter of the Bean!* It's like making it grow another head! *Would you want your baby to have two heads?* I swear to God Eric, if our baby has more than one head it'll be all your fault!"

I knew I wasn't making a damn lick of sense and sent a silent prayer to God our baby wouldn't have two heads and I felt him sigh at my craziness, but Hormone-a-saurus was dancing around and shaking her ass, proclaiming herself 'In da house', so in a brilliant marketing strategy, she backhanded Brain-a-saurus so Mouth-a-saurus could make a break for it which is why thoughts of two-headed babies disappeared and the question, "What about Cock-a-saurus?" came tumbling out of my mouth.

*Stupid prehistoric brain!*

"Excuse me?" he asked and I just knew if I looked he'd be wearing that damn lickable smirk on his damn lickable face.

*Why did he have to be so damn lickable?*

I was worried Hormone-a-saurus had locked me in her shop and thrown away the key, but the only thing that seemed to bring me back from the brink of my absurd ice age was the sound of Bubba's soft whine and feeling him press himself against my legs. He'd done it earlier too when I felt like I was going to lose it seeing Eric kiss Sophie Anne, so I was only more impressed by the work Terry put in with him and I finally forced all of my emotions back into a box, sealing it tightly, and wrote 'Eric Northman – Greenland' on it so it would reach him at his new destination when I shipped it out, chock full of Hormone-a-saurus' evil wares.

*Probably not the kind of care package he'd be looking to receive, but oh well.*

When I thought I could speak without breaking down again, I mumbled, "I'm alright. Just hormonal."

*Understatement, anyone?*

"I know," he murmured into the top of my head. "It's why I won't push to find out about this Cock-a-saurus you speak of." He then proceeded to rub himself against me letting me know he knew *exactly* who Cock-a-saurus was, but his goofy porntastic efforts earned him a snort from me and he sighed again, saying, "I really am sorry."

I knew it wasn't his fault, nor was it his choice, so I couldn't hold it against him. We'd discussed him taking that role in depth before he ever signed on the dotted line and even if the location would have been Greenland from the start, I still would have supported him, so how could I do any less now? "It's not your fault," I said and meaning every word. "We'll get through it." I meant every word of that too.

*Hopefully Wicked and Immoral would use the time while their favorite target was away to turn into pyromaniacs and burn Hormone-a-saurus' shop to the ground.*

Once I reassured Eric I really was okay, he walked us to my car and I almost found it in me to laugh seeing how distraught he was over the idea of me taking his little buddy away, so I didn't bother to mention I doubted he'd be able to take him with him into the frozen tundra of Greenland either. Certified Service Dog or not, that would just seem cruel to take him.

*To take him from me that is.*

Bubba didn't seem especially upset having to go with me and he was picture perfect the entire time we were at the vet's office. He really was a great dog and when I swung by the maternity shop on the way home I could hear Eric's voice in my head yelling at me to '*Take him with you!*' It was a beautiful day out, if not a little on the chilly side, so I knew he would be fine if I left the windows cracked and went in alone. I only needed to pick up a few new bras because the girls were getting preposterously large and all it took was hearing Amelia's new nickname for me the night before, Lady Tits-A-Lot, to not procrastinate, but just the fact she knew Sir Mix-a-lot had an album named *Return of the Bumpasaurus* cemented her 'lifelong friend' status with me. Never mind *Baby Got Back*; I had that *and* front, but as I got out of the car and saw those woeful puppy dog eyes staring back at me, I couldn't resist. Those damn things were hypnotic, especially when it came to sharing my food with him, so I strapped his vest on him and grabbed a hold of his leash, feeling like the world's biggest liar as I took him into the store with me.

I'd stopped in there a few times since Pam first brought me there and liked most of what they carried. In fact, it was where I'd picked up my favorite outfit from and I could probably be found browsing through the racks on most Saturdays, even if I didn't buy anything, but only because I often got bored without Eric around.

Bubba was really starting to grow into himself and was now easily twice the size he'd been at Christmas, and since there wasn't much room in between the clothing racks, I had him lay down

near the wall close to where I was looking and tried to find a few bras that didn't scream 'early 90's rapper.' I wasn't paying much attention to anything other than the bras in front of me while trying my best not to think about Eric having to leave, when I noticed a woman I would swear could be my twin from behind. She even had my same color hair and ponytail, but what really did it was she was wearing my favorite outfit.

I couldn't help moving closer and when I saw her in profile, she looked to be about as far along as I was, but now that I could see her face, it was easy to see where our similarities ended. She must have felt me staring at her because she turned to me and smiled asking, "When are you due?"

Considering she was in the same boat as me, I didn't feel like she was being rude for asking and said, "Early June. How about you?"

"The same."

I felt kind of awkward now that she'd caught me looking at her and I didn't want to seem like a stalker, so I smiled and said, "I love your outfit. I have the same one at home. It's my favorite."

"It's very comfortable," she agreed.

When I couldn't think of anything better to say, other than 'Hey! We have the same hair color too!', I kept it to myself and just smiled awkwardly again before going back to looking for bras. After I finally selected a few I liked and tried them on without thinking about the size I now needed, I noticed my doppelganger was gone from the store when I emerged from the fitting room and grabbed a hold of Bubba's leash to go and pay for my things, but as we were walking to the car, I jumped feeling someone's hand on my shoulder from behind and then nearly fell over trying to keep a hold of Bubba's leash as he whipped around and turned into mother fucking Cujo. My adorable sweet puppy was suddenly a mass of angry snarls and gnashing teeth with the scariest deepest barking I'd ever heard. He'd moved to put his body in front of mine and everything about him was bowed up with his fur standing on end as he continued to growl menacingly and snap his jaw at what turned out to be my almost-twin.

She looked just as scared as I felt seeing him that way and I quickly apologized, saying, "I'm so sorry! I don't know what's gotten into him. He's never done this before."

I just thanked God he wasn't trying to go after her and seemed content to just stand there in between us and be horrible to her because I doubted I would've been strong enough to hold onto him if he'd really wanted to get away. She took another step backwards, perhaps sensing Cujo was only letting me believe I still had control of the situation, and said, "No, it's my fault. I shouldn't have snuck up on you. I just wanted to see if maybe you were up to having a cup of coffee. I don't know any other pregnant women and thought it would be nice to commiserate."

I didn't know any other pregnant women either and agreed it would be nice to have someone else to talk to that was going through the same things I was, but seeing as how I'd somehow ended up with the remake of Stephen King's rabid dog, I said, "Today probably isn't good seeing as how

my dog has been possessed by a hellhound, but how about we meet up here next Saturday around noon? We could maybe have lunch at the café across the street and I can leave him with his Master to guard the entrances of the afterlife?"

"Sure," she smiled. "I look forward to it."

Bubba's growling got softer and softer the farther she walked away from us, but I'd been so busy trying to convince him it really was time to get in the fucking car now, she was already gone by the time I realized I didn't even ask what her name was. As soon as it was just the two of us in the car he turned back into his normal lovable self and happily flopped down in the seat after I'd belted his harness in, only now instead of being filled with worry and dread over Eric's upcoming departure, I was worried about Bubba having a multiple personality disorder.

*I probably had a touch of it too, so it would make sense I'd pick a dog with the same traits.*

All I could think about was him possibly turning on the baby like that and the thought terrified me, but I couldn't bear the thought of giving him up either. I knew logically, he probably only reacted to me being startled and then took it out on the stranger that made me jump, but I needed more reassurance than I could muster up on my own and called the only person I knew that could give it to me.

Twenty minutes later I was pulling into Sam and Terry's driveway and Bubba's excitement was palpable knowing exactly where we were, so I felt comfortable enough in letting him run off of his leash as I made my way to their front door. Terry had it open before I could even knock and Bubba was acting the part of the adorably happy puppy seeing him, which just made me look like a liar considering Terry's first question was, "He tried to attack someone?"

"Yes!" I said feeling those goddamn tears come back. "I think maybe it's because I was startled and maybe I yelped, so he was probably just reacting to that, but still. He was possessed like everybody needed to hide out inside of a Ford Pinto only my name isn't Donna and I'm not having an affair and I don't want to name the Bean Tad because Tad dies and it's a fucked up movie," I ended in choked out sobs.

*Fucking Hormone-a-saurus is in the black today.*

It was glaringly obvious Terry wasn't used to dealing with crazy hormonal women, or perhaps women in general, because all he could do was stand there and gape at me with a deer in the headlights expression while I continued to sob uncontrollably with thoughts of my poor Bubba morphing from *Cujo* into *Pet Semetery*.

*Just how fucked up was Stephen King's mind anyway?*

Sam came to our rescue by brushing past a now relieved looking Terry and wrapping his arms around me, soothing, "Aww Cher, everything will be okay."

"Eric's leaving," I whisper sobbed into his chest. It felt and smelled all wrong, but beggars couldn't be choosers.

"What do you mean *he's leaving*?" he asked with his body stiffening and a scary edge to his voice.

*Was that where Bubba got his Cujo tendencies from?*

Both Terry and Sam liked Eric a lot, but I had no doubts whose side they'd be on if things ever got dicey between us and rather than have them going on a hunt for my husband, I quickly tried to pull myself together and said a little more calmly, "For the movie."

Sam's body relaxed again as he chuckled and asked, "Is that what this is all about? Cher, you knew he'd be going away to film on location, but you're going to visit him and he'll be back before you know it."

"No," I grumped. "This is about my dog turning into one huge chomping snarling jaw, but... I can't visit Eric while he's gone. They changed the location of where they're going and I can't go."

We all went inside where I explained the sudden change in filming location and they both nodded with Terry saying, "I've been plenty of places while I was in the military that civilians will never see. A remote place like that isn't going to have hotels and restaurants or even another airport within hundreds of miles, so they have to keep track of how many people they let in just for the limited amount of bunks available."

I wanted to gripe that I would've been bunking with Eric, my swollen belly gave away the fact that it wouldn't be the first time either, but I didn't want to beat a dead horse knowing nothing would change it so I tried to conjure up some acceptance and smiled pitifully at them both, asking, "If I go into premature labor, can I count on you guys to get me to the hospital?"

They both looked terrified with Sam asking, "Uh...there's nothing wrong, right? With the baby? You won't do something like that while Eric's gone, will you?"

*Cha-ching went Hormone-a-saurus' cash register.*

"Oh for Pete's sake!" I growled. "What do you think? I can just strap my knees together and keep the baby in there until Eric gets back? If I'd done *that*, there'd be no baby to begin with. You all act like you don't know how a vagina works!"

I watched as they turned towards each other and then back at me with a knowing look, making me realize how that might sound when directed at two gay men and I couldn't help laughing until I thought I might piss myself.

*As if my day could get any worse.*

While Terry took Bubba out back to work with him and see if he could get an idea of what went wrong, I filled Sam in on the redheaded she-devil and like a true friend, he scowled, hissed, and snarked in all of the right places making me feel infinitely better, so I was in a great mood by the time Terry came back in and said, "Well Sook, he seems right as rain so the only thing I can say is he must've saw that other woman as a threat to you. Did she seem angry or anything like that?"

"No. All she did was ask me if I wanted to grab a cup of coffee and bemoan our pregnancies together. If anything, I would've thought Bubba would've been sweet to her because she looked a lot like me."

"Dogs go more by scent and instincts than anything else. Maybe you should listen to him and if you see her again, just walk the other way," he said ominously.

"Oh please," I said exasperatedly. "Now I'm supposed to run my lunch dates passed the dog? Don't you think that's a little ridiculous? She's a waddling whale like me. What's she gonna do? Beat me up for my lunch money?"

It wasn't like a drove a fancy car or had a huge diamond ring on my finger letting everyone know I lived in a fancy schmancy gated community or that my husband was well off. She didn't even seem to know or recognize me which was always a plus in my book, so when Terry said, "Fine. Bring Bubba back here next Saturday morning around ten and I'll work with him for a couple of hours, but in the meantime, if he does it again, take notes on the who's and what's so we can try and pinpoint what his trigger is."

Bubba was back to sitting at my feet like a perfect little angel, so I agreed and thanked them again for all of their help before we finally headed home. I was feeling better about the idea of Eric's leaving as long as I didn't think in terms of just how long *six weeks* was, but seeing his text message when I got home didn't help matters.

*It looks like we'll be here for a while, so don't wait up for me. I promise I'll make it up to you tomorrow. I love you.*

I could feel my lower lip wobbling as I replied back that I loved him too, but I really didn't feel like sitting around the house all by myself all night long knowing I would just get all weepy again. I'd just seen Amelia the night before and knew she'd probably want to be with Tray, so I was trying to think of something to do when I happened to glance at the calendar on my way into the kitchen. I'd completely forgotten we had plans to meet Eric's dad for dinner before his big debut performance tonight and hesitated wondering if I should go alone. His father had been nothing but kind to me since he'd started coming back around again, but we'd never spent any time together without Eric there and I wasn't even sure if that was something he'd want to do.

I knew Eric would feel bad when he realized he'd missed the show and would feel even worse if there was no one there to cheer for his dad, so that was what tipped the scales and tipped my ass into a nicer dress and out the door. I almost left Bubba behind considering how he'd acted earlier that afternoon, but I figured if I was going to learn what his Cujo triggers were, I'd actually have

to take him places and was happy he had that little red vest so I could actually take him inside with me.

Oddly enough, we were having dinner at the little diner I used to work at what felt like a lifetime ago now and we arrived a few minutes early, but I could see Eric's dad through the window already seated inside. I'd been in his presence many other times by then, but I still felt nervous as we made our way into the diner and his head was buried behind the menu so he didn't realize we were there until Bubba nudged his leg looking for some pets.

"Hey," he smiled at me and then gave Bubba's head a good rub. Seeing it was just me, myself, and I, he asked, "Is Eric running late at the studio?"

I don't know why I always felt so chicken shit around him, aside from that one time I slapped him when we'd first met, but I continued to stand there awkwardly and answered, "Yes. Very late. As in he won't be able to make it."

I was starting to think this had been a bad idea and decided I'd probably just leave after delivering the message that Eric couldn't be there, but then I wasn't so sure anymore when he looked crestfallen and softly replied, "Oh."

*Damn Northman men with their damn Bubba eyes.*

As long as he didn't turn into Cujo, I'd be okay, so I offered, "But, umm...I'd still like to see your performance. You know, if that's alright with you."

His eyes lowered from mine as he tried to smile through the shame on his face when he said, "I don't know why you'd want to after the way I've treated you in the past." We'd never talked about how things were when we'd first met and I was willing to let bygones be bygones so long as he didn't fuck Eric over, but before I could tell him that, he said, "I'm sorry about that. I can't even really blame it on the booze so much as how much looking at the two of you together reminded me of me and his mother."

*Oh.*

We'd never talked about *that* either and I wasn't so sure now was a good time since I wasn't sure if Hormone-a-saurus had gone home for the day to roll around in all of the profits she'd earned earlier that day. Instead I continued to stand there awkwardly, shrugging my shoulders and smiled, saying, "Well, water under the bridge and all of that. I'm willing to let it go if you can forget the fact I slapped you across your face before I even crossed the threshold."

His barking laughter and the expression on his face reminded me so much of Eric's that I couldn't help grinning for real as he said, "Well, if you can forget what I said to make you slap me then you have yourself a deal. Now, are you gonna have a seat or are you just going to stand there until it's time to go?"



I rolled my eyes playfully now feeling more relaxed around him than ever and slid into the booth across from him, saying, "Oh, well if you *insist*." The Bean was insisting on a bacon cheeseburger and as we sat there, several of my former co-workers stopped by the table to catch up on each other's lives. Eric's dad was perfectly charming throughout the whole meal and even got to feel the Bean kick, which made his face light up just like Eric's, but when I found myself telling him about Sophie Anne's little display earlier that morning, I was surprised seeing him get more than just a little bit pissed off.

*It reminded me of someone else I knew, only about twenty-five years younger.*

"I told Eric he needed to watch out for her," he grimaced. Seeing my arched brow, he added, "She's a famewhore and will do whatever's necessary to get her name in the papers."

"According to Eric, she tastes like one too," I laughed. "But I'm not worried about Eric doing anything with her. He can't stand her and I know he loves me."

He seemed to relax a little hearing me say it and admitted, "That's what Eric told me too. Just don't be surprised if there are rumors leaked about some torrid love affair going on between them on the set."

Considering what my reaction had been just seeing them kiss, it wasn't a bad idea to start bracing myself for that too just in case, so I nodded my reluctant agreement and waited for him to use the restroom so I could follow him to the community theater. While he was doing that I shot a quick text to Eric to let him know where we'd be in case he got home before us, but I almost didn't remembering how well that had turned out for me the night before. Bubba had acted just like he normally did the entire time we'd been there and had been lying underneath the table on my feet when I felt the growl rumbling through him, but couldn't quite hear it yet.

Instead I just felt a shiver work its way down my spine as I heard, "Sookeh?"

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## **Chapter 108: Chapter 105**

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### Chapter 105

#### **EPOV**

I swear to fucking Christ Sophie Anne was fucking up all of her lines on purpose, but apparently that was just fine and fucking dandy since she was fucking Madden and her constant catty remarks about Sookie weren't helping either. I always thought I was above actually hitting a woman, but she was truly pushing my patience. What I really needed was either a muzzle for her or Bubba's calming presence, but since I had neither I just did my best to ignore her while trying to keep my internal dialog, in response to her bitchiness, from making its way out of my mouth.

"She's so BIG!"

*"Not as big as your fucking mouth you redheaded cunt."*

"Is she having TWINS?"

*"No, but honestly I wouldn't have been surprised if she was considering the amount of my cum that's constantly going into her."*

"It's a good thing she's got those CHILD BEARING HIPS to squeeze that thing out."

*"Sookie's still a tight fit, but I imagine if you ever get knocked up that kid will just fall right out of your infected hole. I'm surprised you don't walk around wearing a crown of golden arches flashing 'One Billion Served'. For the kid's sake, I hope it comes out in a biohazard suit."*

I hated that nasty bitch more than ever, but even I was surprised by how she was acting. She'd come on to me a few times whenever we'd run into each other before I'd ever met Sookie and I hadn't wanted anything to do with her then, so I couldn't imagine she'd think I would want her now. Up until now she'd been friendly in a strictly work sort of way and had even been cordial, if not a little stiff, when they'd met the first time Sookie had been to the set, but now she was acting like she was jealous and it was completely fucking ridiculous.

She kept her game face on whenever Madden was around though, so I started keeping myself within earshot of him and she finally seemed to get the hint and skulked away, but that's when she started fucking up all of her lines. All she had to do was pout out her collagen filled lips at old lover boy and all was forgiven, but the rest of us poor shmucks were left doing retake after retake well into the night and long after we should have been done for the day.

By the time we were finally able to call it quits I was cranky and tired, but I knew I'd have off the entire next day and it was that knowledge that fueled me with the energy to get my ass home. I normally left my cell phone in my trailer knowing if anything urgent happened, Sookie knew to call Alcide and he would get me, so I didn't even think about checking my messages until I was walking into the house.

*Just had dinner with your dad and then I'll be going to watch his acting gig. Have Bubba with me and I'll be home late. Love you.*

Fuck...I'd forgotten all about that. His performance was scheduled to start at seven and if Sophie Anne wasn't a giant cunt, I would've been able to be there. I felt better knowing that Sookie had gone though, and since her car had been in the garage when I pulled in and it was now after midnight, I knew she'd probably been home for a while, but it only got me in an even more fucked off mood since I'd missed out on going too. I didn't even get the satisfaction of Bubba coming out to greet me yet, so I went looking for him and found Sookie sound asleep in bed with Bubba lying down in my spot next to her. His body was pressed firmly against her side and even though he clearly saw me and his tail was softly wagging, he didn't budge.

*Traitor.*

"Here boy," I whispered, figuring I would let him out one final time before going to bed myself.

He lifted his head, but only to readjust his paws underneath his chin and laid right back down. His eyes stayed open and his tail still wagged, but he didn't seem to want to get up so I glared at him and gave up, going to take a quick shower instead so I could wash the skank off of me before climbing into bed myself. I tried to slide in underneath the covers thinking he would move out of the way to give me room, but all he did was huff out a breath of air and stayed exactly where he was.

"Bubba...moovve," I whisper whined and getting more pissed off, trying to shuffle him out of my spot next to Sookie, but all I ended up doing was shuffling myself underneath him so that I had his ass in my face and I noticed he was starting to get fucking heavy.

*And getting slapped in the head by his wagging tail was no picnic either.*

I couldn't figure out what in the hell had gotten into him, but I didn't want to launch him from the bed either and continued to push at his body while he dug his paws into the bed and our impromptu Alpha match had woken Sookie because she finally stirred enough to gruff out, "What are you doing?"

"Bubba...won't...move..." I huffed wondering if I needed to up my workouts again considering I was having trouble trying to move a seventy pound dog.

Sookie huffed herself and sat up a little, crooning, "Here Bubba," and patted the space next to her on the other side of the bed and my little buddy turned turncoat got up and gingerly walked around her body before resuming his former position pressed against her side. Normally he slept at the end of the bed by our feet, so I looked at her and half-barked, "The hell?"

She let her head flop back down onto the pillow and with only one eye open she said, "He's been acting weird all day, but after the Sookeh Monster snuck up on me tonight, he refuses to leave my side. I even had to go outside with him into the backyard so he could do his business."

*Whoa... Back. The. Fuck. Up.*

"Did you just say *Bill fucking Compton* snuck up on you?" I sat up and asked, no longer whispering.

*There was no mistaking his fucked up pronunciation of her name. How fucking hard was it? It rhymed with 'cookie' for Christ's sake!*

She still only had one eye open and it rolled into the back of her head before she smiled and asked, "Did I say fucking? I hope I don't make those kinds of slipups when I'm teaching because God knows the kids will fall out of their chairs and die of laughter."

"Sookie," I growled, not in the mood for her deflecting banter. Normally I found it funny and sexy, but now I was even angrier, and tired, and all around too pissed to enjoy it. My day had gone from bad to worse and I was fucking done with the bullshit.

"Eric," she mock growled back. When it became clear I wasn't amused, she finally picked her head up off of the pillow and said, "It was nothing." I might have been able to handle it better if I hadn't had such a fucked up day, but it took all I had to not start yelling and when she seemed to sense it, perhaps from the fire shooting out of my eyes and the steam billowing from my ears, she finally croaked out in a fucked up voice, "Sookeh..." and then spoke normally, adding, "That's as far as he got because Bubba started snarling from underneath the table and then your dad came back from the bathroom at the same time. I guess he didn't know everything that happened before with good ole BFC, but he didn't hesitate to put himself between us and sent him packing in a way that would've made you proud. Of course, I was red, but since his asshole was directed at that prick, I didn't really care."

"What the fuck was he doing there?" I growled, fighting the urge to command her to stay at my fucking side for the rest of her life so I could beat the shit out of any and all fuckers that dared to look at her.

*But I had a sneaking suspicion she'd beat the shit out of me if I even suggested it.*

"It's a *diner* Eric," she huffed just like Bubba had a moment earlier. "He was probably there to *eat*. After your dad scared him away our waitress mentioned that he's been going in there regularly for the past few months."

*Shitdamnhellmotherfucker...*

I wanted to throw the bullshit flag because I refused to believe it was just a mere coincidence that he *just happened* to show up where she *just happened* to be having dinner, but I had nothing other than my gut feeling to go on.

*And my guts hated Bill fucking Compton's guts and unfortunately, my mouth just decided to go with it.*

"That's fucking bullshit!" I yelled. "That's it! You're not going anywhere anymore without someone with you!" I threw myself back down onto the mattress and ended with, "You're getting a fucking bodyguard and that's the end of it!"

"Excuse me?" she asked while poking her finger into my back. "If you're unaware, that's Swahili for '*I don't fucking think so.*' What in the hell crawled up your ass and died?"

I punched the pillow picturing that fucker's face and kept my back to her, growling, "It's not up for discussion. You're getting a bodyguard. The end."

"Like *hell* I am!" she practically yelled. "You're overreacting *as usual* and you sure as shit can't *make me* take a bodyguard everywhere I go!"

"Watch me," I gritted out through my teeth.

"Fuck. That," she spat back at me. "You're leaving in a few weeks anyway. *You won't be here. You will be traipsing your ass around exotic locales kissing Sophie Anne while I'm stuck here ballooning up like one of those whales in your fucking book!*"

I knew that shit was gonna bite me in the ass and I whipped around to face her, seething, "*Exotic locales? Kissing Sophie Anne? I'll be in the middle of fucking nowhere, WORKING and freezing my fucking ass off!* It's not like you didn't know what I did for a living beforehand. Hell, you've known what I do long before you ever met me. Your little shrine in my honor back at Gran's house is proof enough."

From the look on her face, I could see *that shit* was gonna bite me in the ass too and no sooner had I realized it when she threw the covers off of herself and got out of the bed.

"Where in the hell are you going?" I asked. We'd fought before but we hadn't not shared a bed since...well...I could remember.

"I'm going to sleep in the guest room," she huffed while angrily stomping out of the room, but not before she added, "That bed is too small to share with the dinosaur sized *dick* that's in it and I'm not talking about what's in between your legs!"

Even Bubba managed to glare at me before he too trotted from the room after her and in my frustration, I yelled back, "Perfect! Just fucking perfect! Perfect end to a perfect fucking day!"

*Fucking hell...that bed had never been bigger now that she wasn't in it.*

*And I hated it.*

I planned on giving her some time to cool off, or maybe fall asleep, and then I could slip in beside her unaware. If I hadn't been so tired from the long ass days I'd been working, I doubted I would've been able to sleep on my own anyway knowing Sookie was in the next room undoubtedly pissed off at me, however I somehow managed to not only fall asleep, but slept well into the next morning. I really didn't think I'd done anything wrong and if anyone had been overreacting, it had been her, so I'd expected her to be waiting for me downstairs with an apology on her lips and then reaping the benefits of having a day's long makeup sex session, but she wasn't waiting for me. She wasn't even in the fucking house. I knew because I searched the whole damn thing. Even Bubba was gone, along with her car, so I grabbed my phone to call her only for it to go to voicemail.

'*Where are you?'* I texted, wondering if she'd just run out to pick up something or if she was being a bitch and showing me that she could, in fact, go out without the bodyguard she was still getting.

It was several minutes before I got my answer to both questions.

'Out.'

*So, being a bitch it is.*

I knew her pregnancy made her hormones out of whack, but there'd been no tears or crazy ramblings from her the night before, so I knew she was just pissed for, in my opinion, *no fucking reason*. I, however, had every reason to be fucking pissed now that she was ruining my one day off. I'd wanted to spend it with her and we'd even talked about maybe taking a drive down to Miramar to see if it stirred any of my memories, but now I'd be stuck sitting alone and worried until she walked through the fucking door again, so I texted back, *'Where?'*

I'd be her fucking bodyguard for the day and had every intention of going to wherever the fuck she was, even if all we'd end up doing was glare at each other while walking through the fucking grocery store aisles. She must have realized my plans though because she only texted back, *'Out and about.'*

Fine. If she wanted to play fucking games then I could too. I stormed into my office and went online, logging into our cell phone carrier's website and added on the GPS locating service onto her phone line, but my stalker plans were foiled when I realized I'd need her phone to actually download the software onto it before it could be activated, so I sat back in my chair running through the ways I could track her down.

Call in a missing person's report to the police?

*'How long has your wife been missing?'*

*'An hour? Maybe two?'* Yeah, not likely to get anything more out of that than a ticket for myself.

Report her car stolen?

*She'd kill me by running me over with her car as soon as she got the chance.*

Call TMZ to see if they knew where she was?

*The recording of my call would be on their website within seconds of me hanging up along with the headline, 'Trouble in paradise? Eric Northman stalking own wife.'*

Pam would kill me.

*Pam!*

Pam and Sookie got along better than even Pam and Jason did, and considering their *mission accomplished* night out together that was saying a lot, so I shot her a quick text asking her to call Sookie and find out where she was. While I was waiting to hear back from her I took the ring, I still needed to find a way to give Sookie, out from its hiding place in the back of my desk drawer and stared at it. I was glad I'd talked to Gran first because I would've never known what to get

her and probably would've gone overboard, thereby pissing her off. Again. And even though I was pissed off at her now, I knew the fight we were in the middle of would blow over soon enough and still wanted to find some special way of giving it to her. She deserved something *normal* at least *once* in our relationship.

*But I wasn't normal enough to come up with any ideas.*

Just as I was tucking it away again ten minutes later, Pam finally text me back.

*'She said, and I quote, "I'm a grown woman. I'm OUT! You can just tell my Neanderthal husband I'll be home when I'm damn well good and ready. I may be pregnant, but I'm not barefoot and chained to the stove. He can just order pizza for dinner." You're a dick. That's me saying it, not her, but I'm sure she's thinking it and she's right.'*

Fucking bullshit! Goddamn women always banded together like they were all born from the same fucking cooter box. I jabbed my reply onto my touchscreen so hard, I was surprised it didn't break.

*'Did she tell you that fucking Compton is stalking her?'*

It was only seconds later when I got my reply.

*'No. She told me he HAPPENED to go into the same diner she was in for dinner. Seriously, you watch too many Lifetime movies. I always knew you were a pussy.'*

I had to stop myself from pitching my phone against the wall and the only thing that kept me from doing it was the fact Sookie wasn't in the fucking house and might need me. Or, God forbid, she might actually want to *talk* to me at some point before the Bean was born.

I still didn't think I'd overreacted the night before, but I supposed I could've gone about it differently. I was already tired and bitchy when I'd gotten home, so I may have taken that out on her, but I still had half a mind to text her that the Bean was half mine too and she had no right keeping it from me by staying out all day long. There were a finite number of kicks I'd get to feel between now and the time I would have to leave in another three weeks or so and she was making me miss out on a few. It was bad enough that she'd taken my dog with her too.

I wandered around the house for the next couple of hours completely fucking restless and it only drove home the point that I was fucking useless without her there. Those chains I'd thought about getting to tie her to me were looking better and better when my dad arrived for our usual Sunday dinner, only I'd forgotten all about the fact he was coming over at all.

"What's wrong with you?" he asked as soon as he saw my face.

*Was I that fucking transparent?*

"Sookie and I are fighting," I admitted as we walked into the kitchen where there was no dinner cooking because I was lame and couldn't fend for myself when she wasn't around.

I took out the takeout menu for the local pizza place and internally kicked my own ass since that had been her snarky suggestion in the first place, as he asked, "What did you do?"

"Why are you assuming it's my fucking fault?" I huffed back. Just for that, I was ordering pepperoni because I knew it gave him heartburn, but he still couldn't resist it.

*I knew it was childish, but figured I had the right to be since I missed out on doing it when I'd actually been a child thanks to him.*

"Fine," he chuckled. "Then what did *she* do?"

It no longer felt weird talking to him about stuff that didn't have to do with my career and ever since he'd shown up on Christmas Eve, he had yet to give me any reason to suspect he was being anything but sincere in making an effort to just be my dad, so I didn't hesitate answering, "She told me about that fucker Compton showing up last night, so I told her she wasn't leaving the house again without a fucking bodyguard."

"And how did that go over?" he asked while doing a piss poor job of hiding his smile.

"How do you fucking think?" I growled. "I woke up this morning and she was already gone. She won't answer her phone when *I* call, but she'll answer for fucking Pam and she even stopped answering my texts about an hour ago. All she would tell me was that she was '*out*' and when I tried to get out of her when she planned on fucking coming home, all she would say was '*soon*'. Well her take on the definition of *soon* is fucking different than *mine*." He tried to cough to hide the fact he was laughing at me, but I ignored it and said, "You were there last night. *You* saw Compton and, from what I heard, you scared his ass off, so you must agree with me."

"Oh, she gave me a what for too. I never liked that asshole anyway and since she looked uncomfortable with him standing there, I didn't think. I just reacted." He grinned at me, adding, "You must get that from me."

*Fucker.*

"So, you think I'm overreacting?" I asked.

"Eh," he shrugged. "You've got a pregnant wife you're being protective of. You're not the first poor schmuck to feel that way and Compton's a creepy fucker, but do you really think he's out to get Sookie? From what our waitress was saying, he's in there all the time. It was probably just a coincidence."

I might have agreed with him had it not been for our run in that led to him being fired from the show, but my dad didn't know the reasons behind it and if I told him now, I'd have to tell him the truth about how Sookie and I had actually met.



*But did I trust him enough to tell him that secret?*

I ordered our pizza and after thinking about it one more time, I decided to tell him everything. What surprised me the most was how unsurprised he was and when I was through, all he said was, "You sure are one lucky son of a bitch. You could've done so much worse." Seeing my shocked expression, he laughed, "What? I can tell that she loves you and God knows you get all mooney-eyed whenever she's around. She's good for you and I get a grandkid outta the deal. What's there to be upset about?"

He was a far cry from how he'd used to be, but then so was I, so I couldn't throw stones. Nor did I realize I got *mooney-eyed* whenever Sookie was around me, but I couldn't argue the fact either and ignored that part, saying, "Compton! He was there the night we met. He was sitting next to her at the bar and from the looks of it, he was trying to pick her up. Then he tried to fuck with her when he was here for a poker game, so if you add to it everything he said right before I beat his ass, don't you think all of that adds up to fucking weird?"

He shook his head, saying, "Just because you've got yourself your own stalker doesn't mean she's got one too."

He knew about Debbie Pelt, or whatever the fuck her name was, but I couldn't even be sure the photo Pam's guy had been able to get was the same woman who'd come to the house the day the fire department did. The eyes maybe looked the same, but I just couldn't tell for sure because who in the hell looks the same as they did when they were fifteen?

*I'd forgotten how much I'd changed until I'd seen Sookie's childhood bedroom. Which I threw in her face the night before. And pissed her off.*

I didn't say anything because I was feeling more and more guilty for the way I'd treated her before she stormed out of our room, so as I grabbed my phone to text Sookie an apology, hoping that would get her to finally come home already, he said, "Maybe he'd been trying to pick her up that night and was pissed she chose you instead, but that was months ago. She told me herself she hasn't seen him since the night he'd come to your house, so do you really think he's all of the sudden stalking her now when she's six months pregnant with your baby? Or do you think maybe he just happened to go to the same diner he's been going to for months and ran into her, but because you already hate him, you're assuming the worse? Hell, for all I know he was going to apologize to her before I threatened his family jewels."

*Could it really be that simple? Was I overreacting?*

Before I could give it too much thought, the doorbell rang, so I grabbed my wallet to pay for our pizza only when I opened the door, it wasn't the pizza guy.

*It was the police.*

"Is there a problem officer?" I asked while trying to remember if I'd actually called in the fake missing person's report.

"Are you related to a Sookie Northman?" he asked, making my stomach drop.

"Yes!" I answered with my voice rising as I started to panic. "She's my wife! What's wrong?"

"Sir," he answered calmly, "She was found lying unconscious next to her car at the dog park. They've taken her to Cedars Sinai, but I'd be happy to take you there."

*Unconscious? How? Was that why she didn't respond to my texts?*

"But...but...she's pregnant. What about the baby?" I stuttered from my mind going at warp speed.

My father was at my side a moment later, asking, "What's wrong?"

I ignored his question for the time being and asked again, louder this time, "What about the baby?"

"I'm sorry sir," he shook his head. "I don't have any information on her condition other than how she was found. Now would you like me to take you there or will you be driving yourself?"

"Sookie?" my father asked. "What's wrong? Take you where?"

"She was found unconscious at the dog park and they have her at Cedars," I answered before turning to run back for my keys, but he caught my arm, saying, "No. I'll drive you. You're too upset and you know what happened the last time."

He was right. I couldn't remember it, but I knew he was right because *I couldn't remember it*, so we both got into his car and ten minutes later we were pulling up to the hospital. My lead foot was another trait I shared with my father and I was thankful for his. There were a couple of policemen standing just outside the Emergency Room doors, but the only reason I even managed to notice was because one of them was holding Bubba's leash and as soon as he saw me he started whining and trying to pull his way free to come to me.

I didn't plan on stopping, but I couldn't leave him either, so I ran up and said, "That's my dog. He was with my wife. They said she was found unconscious at the dog park? Sookie Northman?"

"Yes sir," he answered while Bubba continued to whine and wrapped himself around my legs. I supposed he was feeling a little traumatized too, so I took the leash from him and as he said, "She must have put him in the car first because he was inside of it when we got there and tore up the interior of the driver's side door, we assume, trying to get to her." My eyes looked back down to him and it was only then I noticed he had gashes on his front paws with dried blood. It was harder to see with his dark fur, but they contrasted against the concrete sidewalk. I didn't care about the car though and Bubba seemed fine for now, so my only concern was for Sookie when he kept on talking, saying, "But we're guessing she must have gotten attacked by another dog because she's got bite marks on her arms and from the looks of it, she fell and hit her head pretty hard on the pavement."

I didn't listen to another word they had to say and instead ran inside with Bubba and my father at my side. As soon as we got to the desk, I rambled in a panic, "I'm Eric Northman. My wife Sookie was brought in? They said she's unconscious and was attacked by a dog."

I hoped God wasn't a cruel bastard because having one amnesiac in a couple was enough for anybody, but trying to explain who I was and the fact she'd be having our baby in another three months, if she didn't remember any of it, might be more than either one of us could handle.

"She's my patient." I looked over at the small Hispanic woman as she said, "I'm Doctor Garza. Why don't you follow me and I'll bring you to her."

My feet were already moving as I asked, "Is she awake? Is she okay? Is the baby okay? They said she was attacked by a dog?"

"She's not conscious yet, but the CT scans didn't show any signs of swelling on the brain or fractures and yes, she did sustain several puncture marks to her forearms consistent with a dog bite as well as some gouges on her body that look like claw marks."

Her eyes went to Bubba who was still with me and I automatically defended him, saying, "He would never hurt her. He's very protective of her and is extra gentle with her because of the pregnancy. He's a certified service dog and that's his own blood on his paws from him trying to get out of the car to get to her."

She didn't look like she wanted to believe me, so my father said, "Why don't you leave him with me and we'll wait for you out here."

"Fine," I said, not wanting to prolong any added delay, but I added, "Thanks."

I was grateful that he was there and he seemed to know that by looking at me, but he just patted me on the back and said, "Hurry up. I'm worried too."

When we turned to go down the hallway, she checked the chart in her hands and said, "She's just down the hall here in trauma room three. You said she's pregnant? How far along is she?"

*How in the hell could they not notice she was pregnant?*

I hoped it was just some doctor speak they were taught to repeat back the patient's or family member's concerns so they'd know they were heard instead of imagining she'd gotten her medical license by mailing in a bunch of fucking box tops, but I kept my mouth in check and just answered, "Twenty-four weeks."

"Really?" she asked as we stopped outside of the room marked "Trauma 3". "Are you sure?"

"Are you serious?" I asked, finally losing my temper. I strode into the room and ripped back the curtain, barking out, "Go get me another doctor that can recognize a pregnant woman when they see one!"

Only when I finally turned and looked down at the bed, Sookie wasn't lying there.

And the woman didn't look pregnant.

But she looked exactly like that crazy bitch outside of the coffee shop.

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## Chapter 109: Chapter 106

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### Chapter 106

#### SPOV

I felt something was 'off' when I woke up the next morning, before I fully regained consciousness, and it took me opening my eyes to realize what it was. Seeing that I was in the guest room – my old room – brought back the memories of the night before and what had brought me there to begin with, but the 'off' feeling hadn't come from sleeping in a different bed, it had come from sleeping in a bed without Eric there beside me.

*Bubba's big ass pressed against me just wasn't the same as the other big ass asleep in the room across the hall.*

I couldn't believe Eric's reaction, or overreaction, the night before. While *Bill fucking Compton* would never make his way onto my Christmas card list, I didn't think the man was secretly stalking and lusting after a Preg-a-saurus. I hadn't seen him since the night he'd been to the house and if anyone needed a bodyguard, it was Eric since *he* was the one with the crazy stalker bitch after him. God only knew what bush or tree she was hiding behind before she jumped out and showed her face again and his attitude and demeanor the night before of the whole thing only reminded me of his doucheyness of the olden days.

*Why couldn't he have reverted back to when he was the Master Wooer instead? If he was going to act like a caveman, couldn't he at least leave it to just pulling my hair a little while he fucked me like an animal?*

The other thing I couldn't believe – more than anything else – was that he hadn't slipped into bed with me at some point in the night. Granted, had I been awake and felt him climb in beside me, I might have kicked him in his shins, but he still could've at least tried. The sad part was I was already becoming accustomed to going to sleep and waking without him because of the crazy hours he'd been working and I supposed it was good practice for when he left for *Greenland* to play *kissy face* with *Sophie Anne*.

*And I hoped she had a penchant to eat massive amounts of garlic and onions before each and every one.*

While I knew he was stressed and tired from working all of the time, I didn't think that excused his behavior in the least. I had my own stresses to deal with; the pregnancy, working, and his upcoming departure to name a few, so he wasn't the only one who had issues and the fact that I'd been his fan girl growing up didn't mean I would kowtow to the great Eric Northman now.

*If he hadn't lost those three weeks of his memories, he'd know that.*

I knew it still irked him he couldn't remember that time and we'd talked about taking a drive to Miramar that day, but the thought of being locked away within the interior of his car, undoubtedly arguing for several hours with nothing but a console, and perhaps Bubba's needy ass in between us, didn't sound pleasant. I was still angry for a whole slew of reasons and knew I'd either say something I would regret or turn into a blubbing idiot. Neither of those things sounded like a great way to spend the day, so rather than turn into a Sookie Monster of a different kind, I opted to go out for a little while to try and clear my head.

I hadn't intended on standing there and watching Eric sleep for twenty minutes, nor had I intended on kissing his stupid kissable forehead before I left, but taking Bubba with me had been all Bubba's idea because he darted out into the garage and refused to go back into the house when I tried to leave him there. I supposed Eric would need to get used to not having him around too, so I didn't try very hard to get him to stay and doubted I could've pulled his heavy ass back inside anyway, but as soon as we turned out of the gates surrounding the neighborhood, I had no idea of where we could go, so I just drove until we'd ended up at the shelter I used to volunteer at. With everything else going on, I hadn't had the time to go there regularly anymore and it was already too late to do much now since I'd already missed the breakfast rush, but Lafayette's car was still parked outside so I pulled in next to his and since I didn't have pockets, I tucked my cell phone into my bra like any respectable redneck would. The girls were so big now, it fit perfectly right inside of my cleavage and couldn't be seen thanks to my maternity top.

No sooner had we walked through the door when I heard his voice asking, "Hookah, how in da *hell* do you keep upright with them ta-ta's gettin' up in here five minutes before you?"

"Shut the hell up," I smiled. "Do not mock the powers of the Wonder Twins. They not only bring the great Eric Northman to his proverbial knees, they make milk too!" Spying his mug on the counter next to him, I asked, "Need a little cream for your coffee?" I laughed outright seeing his face contort into horror and added, "What? I'm just trying to be hospitable. It's the southern lady in me."

My boobs beeped a second later alerting me I had a new text and as he watched me reach into my top to pull out my phone, he snickered and reached into his own tight top pulling out his cell phone, saying, "Girl, I think my ghetto fabulousness has rubbed the shine off a your southern lady-ness." Seeing my grimace as I read Eric's text, he asked, "Somethin' wrong shuga?"

"It's Eric," I answered as I hesitated in replying back to both of them. I didn't want to tell Eric where I was for fear a Humvee full of mercenaries might pull to a screeching halt outside seconds later, but I didn't want to give him any more reasons to worry about me either, so I gave

Eric an evasive answer and explained to Lafayette, "We're sort of fighting and he wants to know where I am."

"Jus' flash dem titties at him and he'll forget all about it!" he chortled as though that would cure everything along with world hunger.

*They weren't THAT big, but it would probably at least distract Eric for a little while in the meantime.*

"No," I glared back at him. "That would be rewarding him in spite of his highhanded fuckery last night."

Laf pulled up two chairs for us to plop down into and said, "Tell mamma all about it."

So I did, fully expecting him to agree with me like any good friend should, but Laf always had a way about him that made him see both sides of the coin and this case was no different. I both loved and hated that about him because really all I wanted to hear was that I was right and Eric was wrong.

*Because he was.*

I didn't want to hear that Eric was just worried about me and the Bean; how he wanted to make sure we were okay and probably felt like shit because he knew he couldn't be there to do it himself; how he might feel like it was thanks to *his* career that put me in the hospital to begin with and it terrified him it could happen all over again – even worse – when he was thousands of miles away with no way of getting to me.

*Nope. Didn't want to hear one fucking word of that.*

*But some of it might have leaked through despite my reinforced bitch shields.*

So like any normal girl in the throes of full on denial, I distracted him by saying, "So, I think I may have found you that bit of spice you were looking for, only I don't know how to go about asking him if he'd be interested. I know he's single and my instincts tell me he's gay, but he hasn't come out and said anything."

And just like that, Lafayette's attention was focused on everything that didn't have to do with the little bit of guilt that was creeping up inside of me over Eric as I continued to dodge answering his texts on my whereabouts. After his nagging reassurances extolling the powers of my innate ability to blindly seek out and befriend the members of the gay and lesbian community (and doing a quick run through of my closest friends confirmed his suspicions), I left Lafayette with a promise that I would mention him to Jesus when I saw him on Monday afternoon at rehearsal.

Bubba and I had just climbed back into the car with me contemplating going back home to face Eric and get it over with when Pam called which only got me fired up again, so after telling her what happened with Eric (and getting her caveman concurrence) I didn't want to give him the

satisfaction of doing what he was so hell bent on getting me to do just yet and drove to the Senior Citizen's Center instead. I hadn't been there in ages and spent the next couple of hours catching up with all of them (after first silencing my cell phone because pulling it out of my bra in front of Lafayette was one thing, but there was no way I would do that kind of thing there) while they all showered Bubba with affection. He ate it up and hadn't acted like Cujo once, so as a reward I took him to the local dog park so he could run around and play with the other dogs.

There weren't a lot of people there thanks to the dreary afternoon and when he seemed sufficiently tuckered out, I called him over so we could finally head home. I knew Eric's dad would be there soon and while I'd told Pam Eric could just order pizza, I didn't really want him to have to knowing he didn't get to enjoy many home cooked meals anymore thanks to his schedule. I'd pulled out some chicken to fry up for dinner before I'd left that morning and needed to get it started, but just as Bubba jumped into the driver's side door, I heard a somewhat familiar voice call out from behind me, "Sookie?"

Bubba had just been making his way into the backseat at the same time when I turned to face the voice, but all I saw was him streak by me as he nearly knocked me down in order to get around me. His scary Cujo bark was back in full force and I yelled out his name as I watched him leap onto the unsuspecting woman I now recognized from the maternity store while I ran over to them trying to get him off of her. She screamed as he bit down on the arm she'd put in front of her while I tried to pull him off by his collar, but he was too big and he ended up knocking her down to the ground with her hitting her head and I watched in horror as it bounced hard on the pavement.

Bubba finally let go of her arm and she was covered in streaks of blood, but he stood over her growling until we both seemed to realize she wasn't moving and in my panic, my adrenaline spiked giving me the strength to wrestle him into the car and shut the door. I ran back over and knelt down to check on her, but now that I didn't have Bubba's body in the way, I could see something else that made me panic.

*In the melee, her fake pregnancy belly pillow had come loose and was lying beside her.*

Alarm bells were ringing in my head and the sounds of Bubba's deafening angry barking made a quick return, but over it all I was still able to hear from right behind me, "Hello Sookeh." I barely had the time to gasp, much less turn around, before one arm banded around my body from behind as another hand came up and pressed a sweet smelling rag to my face. I tried to break free to no avail and just as my body and mind started to fade, I heard him speak softly into my ear, "Never send a woman to do a man's job."

I don't know how much time had passed when I started to come to, but I could tell that I was moving and when I tried to stretch out, I quickly realized I couldn't and my eyes finally popped open as the adrenaline started pumping through my body again, now remembering the last moments before I'd slipped away.

*I was in a car, going God knows where down the freeway, sitting next to a familiar yet entirely new kind of monster.*

"Ahh..." Bill purred. "My little southern belle has awoken."

I wanted to yell and scream, but there was something in his eyes that scared the ever loving bejeezus out of me seeing the massive amounts of crazy behind them. Even more so than the fact that he'd apparently kidnapped me and I was afraid of pissing him off when I couldn't defend myself or the Bean thanks to my hands being bound by something behind me and my seatbelt tightly secured over my body. He must have pulled the belt out so that it locked back into place as he released it again because it had no give whatsoever when I tried to move, so my survival instincts kicked in, with me hoping I'd eventually have the opportunity to kick him, and I meekly asked, "Bill? What are you doing?"

It was stupid, considering the predicament I was in, but my mind flashed to Bubba and I hoped he hadn't done anything to him. My eyes welled up at just the thought, but I didn't have the courage to ask knowing I'd fall apart if he told me he'd hurt him; or worse.

"I'm taking back what is rightfully mine," he answered calmly.

*Too calmly.*

*The crazy kind of 'I ate his liver with some fava beans and a nice chianti' calmly.*

"What do you mean Bill?" I asked, even though I was terrified of his answer. "What's yours?"

"Why you, of course, Sookeh," he replied, looking over at me like I was a dipshit.

*Great! Apparently I attracted not only bi and homosexuals, but cavemen as well.*

A big part of me wanted to ignore him; pretend he wasn't there and I wasn't there with me wishing like hell I'd listened to Eric and stayed home. He was never going to let me live this down, if I lived at all, and the thought of spending hours arguing in the car with him was so much better than where I was now, but a larger part of me needed answers. I couldn't understand why on earth Bill would think I was *his* when I didn't even know him. I didn't want to give away the fact that Eric and I had seen him in the casino's security footage, so I just asked, "Why do you think that I'm yours? We don't even know each other."

"That is where you're wrong, darling," he replied and making me want to vomit, but his explanation made it all so much worse.

"You see, I know all there is to know about you, partly thanks to your cousin Hadley."

*Hadley? I hadn't seen Hadley in years.*

"Now darling," he started with his voice full of contriteness which only freaked me out more, "don't be upset, but before you I used to *date* your cousin." He paused before clarifying, "Well, I use the term *date* loosely since I was obligated to pay her for her time."



He looked back at me and when the realization dawned on me he was saying Hadley was a prostitute, which sadly was no big surprise, he continued on with, "She was a beautiful girl, but her beauty was fast being ruined by her drug addiction. I sometimes dabbled with her, but I've since given that up. Since you didn't hold that against *him* I will assume you won't hold that against *me*."

Hearing him talk like we were going to be together in a way that didn't involve restraints, while refusing to say Eric's name, made me want to yell out over and over that I was most definitely *Eric's* in a way that was just as crazy as him, but I had the Bean to worry about so I kept my fucking mouth shut in the hopes he would continue telling me just what in the hell any of it had to do with me while trying to figure a way out of the mess I was in.

*The old adage 'Be careful what you wish for' came to mind when he was done.*

"You see, I tried to get her to clean up her act. I'd come to care for her, in a way, and could see the southern beauty she used to be underneath the abused waif she'd become before drugs took over her life. I thought she would make a respectable...not wife because I would never marry someone with that kind of history, but partner of sorts. Someone I could proudly display on my arm when I went anywhere, but who also knew her way around a bedroom. When I *suggested* she change her lifestyle, she laughingly told me if I wanted a wholesome version of her, then I should seek out her cousin. She'd seen you working at that little diner one night when she was out *working*, but had never gone inside to make herself known to you. She said she didn't want the hassle knowing you would attempt to try and help her when she didn't want anyone's help. I, however, did want help because I'd already set my mind to having her to myself, so I went looking for you thinking you could help me in achieving that goal."

His head turned to look into my eyes and I didn't like what they held as he said, "And then I saw *you*."

*Ass puckered? Check. Deer caught in the headlights? That was me.*

"Darling, I could tell from the moment I saw you that you were perfect for me. Not only were you more beautiful than Hadley could ever hope to be, but you were the type of woman I could actually marry. She'd told me about how you grew up as a bookworm; that you were studious and didn't waste your time doing the same kinds of things she did." His voice took on an angry edge that had me shaking when he spat out, "She mocked your virtue even as she took my money, paying her as the whore she was."

Hadley had been right; I would've done everything in my power to try and help her if I'd known where she was and what she'd been up to. Growing up, she'd always been closer to Jason, but she was still my family and that would always mean something to me.

He seemed to be on a roll now that he was talking and before I could ask him about her, he explained, "I watched you for months. I would sit outside of that little diner at night and watch you through the front window; always with a smile on your face; a kind word for everyone you met. I got to know your routine and saw how selfless you were volunteering your time in feeding

the street vermin before going to spend time with the elderly." He looked at me again with a seriousness on his face that made his next statement crazy times a thousand as he said, "While I can appreciate you wanting to help those less fortunate, I will not allow you to continue on with that now that we are finally together. Your time should be spent with me."

Months. He said he'd been following me for months before I'd ever met Eric and the fact that he knew those things about me at all made me believe him. Eric couldn't even blame his celebrity for this since it seemed I had a stalker first.

*I hoped to God I would have the opportunity to be able to jokingly make a neener neener face at him.*

Maybe Eric had had a sixth sense about him the whole time because even though he'd had no real reason to suspect him, Eric had been right all along. My whole being was tense and had been the entire time, but my mind was surprisingly calm. My heart wasn't trying to thump its way out of my chest, so I didn't know if I was in shock or my body was trying to save my energy for when I'd hopefully have a chance to escape. We couldn't stay in the car forever and the sun was already disappearing from the sky, so with him mainly sticking to the far right lane of the freeway, I didn't even have the opportunity to try and signal anyone with my facial expressions that I needed help.

*But oh how I needed it.*

Eric would be going ape shit by now, but thanks to me showing my ass all day long, he wouldn't even know where to begin to look for me. No one knew where I'd gone because it had been a last minute decision and I could only hope that someone would notice Bubba in the car, if Bill hadn't done anything to him, and call the police. Surely they would call the house, even if they towed my car, since Bubba was there, but that only reminded me of who else had been there and Bill's words of 'Never send a woman to do a man's job' filtered back through my head.

"Who was the other woman at the park?" I asked softly. I knew it hadn't been Hadley, even if she did look similar to me.

"Ah," he nodded and answered, "Debbie."

"Debbie Pelt?" I asked in disbelief. The picture we'd seen had been ten years old and while she could have dyed her naturally brunette hair blond, we knew her eyes were brown and that woman had had blue eyes.

Her face didn't even look the same, but before I could say anything he answered, "Yes." Shaking his head like he felt sorry for her, he added, "She's a very sick woman. I'm afraid she's obsessed with *him* and she's gone off the deep end."

*Hello? Care to glance into that mirror above your head? Look familiar?*

"We met, in of all places, in Las Vegas," he said while now glaring at me. "Sookeh, I was very disappointed to see you dressed as you were that night. I hadn't even expected to see you there at all because I'd only gone for the celebrity poker game and one last weekend of bachelorhood before I formally committed myself to you. I'd planned on approaching you when I returned."

I had to swallow back the bile that threatened to come up realizing just how long he'd been after me, but he kept talking like it was nothing at all, saying, "After *he* showed up and you'd fallen under his sway, like *so many others*, I decided to forgive you your fanaticism over him and continue on with my plans of courting you. He was never one to stay with one woman for more than a night or two, so I would be the bigger man and help you heal your broken heart when he cast you to the side like everyone else. Debbie, it turns out, had followed him there and had been trying to garner his attention, but she was no match for you and he understandably chose the better. Since I was allowing you your little last dalliance, I saw no reason not to have my own and we spent the night together in my hotel room. She'd been very vocal about her obsession over him and my association with him on the show worked to my advantage, but when we woke up the next day to the news that you'd actually *married* him, it changed things. Again, I did not believe it would last longer than it would take to get an annulment signed, but then you moved in with him. *He* accompanied you everywhere and then you never left his side after the accident. Debbie was the one to figure out you were pregnant and while she refused to believe it was his, I knew you well enough to know it must be. You were not a whore like Hadley, or Debbie for that matter, and *Eric Northman* is not the type of man who would want to become a father, so I knew he probably only agreed to the farce for publicity's sake. I had no doubts you would separate after the child was born, so I put my plans on hold while still keeping an eye on you. However Debbie did not stick to those plans and continued to put herself into Eric's path. She followed him to Louisiana; she dyed her hair and got extensions so mimic your own; she wore contacts to have the blue eyes she thought he would rather see; she even had minor plastic surgery trying to alter her face to look similar to yours, but as you could see, she failed. Beauty such as yours cannot be falsely obtained."

*Was I supposed to be flattered? Because I so wasn't. He was fucking cuckoo for Cocoa Puffs.*

"I'd placed a tracking device on her car, like I did with both of yours, so that's how I knew she'd been following you both," he said casually while my body flushed feeling thoroughly violated. I could feel the urge to start yelling again, but I swallowed it now knowing just how insane he was.

*I was going to be the subject of one of those Lifetime movies Pam had accused Eric of watching too many of. I just knew it.*

He was a chatty fucking Cathy now that he was confessing his psychosis and kept rambling on with, "I started going to that diner you used to work at as a way to still feel close to you after I knew I would have to wait for the child to be born. Seeing you there last night, up close for the first time in months, changed my mind. I no longer wanted to wait to have you when you were mine first. *I* saw you first and *Northman* had no right to take you from me. You were always supposed to be mine and yet somehow I found myself once again waiting for him to throw you away like all of the others. I decided he'd had you for long enough and I knew Debbie had taken

to following you around since he's been filming where she couldn't get in to see him, so I called her. She told me how you'd agreed to have coffee with her next Saturday, but like I said, I didn't want to wait. I told her to approach you and talk you into going with her today and then she could have him that much sooner. Had she done her job correctly, you would have merely become disoriented and fallen asleep when she slipped a little something into your drink and I would've come to your aid and taken you away quietly. You wouldn't have been subjected to all that you were earlier. I didn't want to scare you."

*Like THIS was any less fucking terrifying now?*

My mind had been soaking up every word he'd said, filing and cataloging it away for – hopefully – a future trial, but one thing kept getting stuck in my head, so when he'd fallen silent again, I fearfully asked, "Why did you refer to Hadley in the past tense?"

He'd said she *was* beautiful and it had been bothering me, just like it bothered me when he pursed his lips and contorted his face like he smelled something bad as he answered, "Now darling, I don't want to frighten you with what I'm about to tell you, but it really is for the best."

*How in the hell can you brace yourself for something like that when it was coming from a madman?*

*I'll tell you... You can't.*

He gave me what I assumed was supposed to be a comforting smile and patted my knee, making me outwardly cringe and shy away from him, which made him change his look into a menacing one and scaring me even more, while he answered, "I killed her."

I couldn't help the startled gasp from leaving my throat or the tears that finally fell from my eyes and he had the nerve to look sorry again as he explained, "Darling, don't be upset. Really, it was for her own good. She would never become a productive member of society. In fact, had I not killed her when I did, she would've likely shown up on your doorstep when she learned you'd landed a rich husband. It was why she'd come to me right as I was getting ready to leave for Las Vegas, looking for a handout, and she lashed out in her jealousy when I told her we were through; that I would be pursuing only you once I returned and she said some very nasty things to me in return. My anger got the better of me, but now we don't have to worry about her intruding on our lives anymore. I buried her body in the middle of the desert on the way to Las Vegas, so no one will ever know." He paused and added thoughtfully, "I doubt anyone has even noticed that she's gone."

Hearing just how far gone he was in his mental illness had the fear and adrenaline pumping like mad through my body now. I needed to get the hell away from him and I wondered where in the hell the paparazzi were when I actually needed them, but since I could tell by the signs on the freeway we were still in California – headed south apparently – I didn't know when or where I'd get my chance. I assumed if he'd wanted to kill me, he would've done it already, but from the sounds of it we were going to run away and live happily never after together. I just didn't know

where La-La Land existed, so I pushed aside the grief and anger I felt over Hadley's murder and in my fear for my own safety, I asked, "Where are we going?"

Since he seemed to take that as an, *'It's okay that you murdered my cousin. I'm over it,'* he smiled broadly answering, "Mexico."

Mexico? What in the hell was in Mexico? I didn't even know how long it would take to drive to Mexico, but from the clock on the dashboard I could see I'd been gone from the dog park for over an hour now. My mind went into overdrive as I thought about the fact we would have to go through the border crossing and I knew could yell out to someone then for help, but either I had a flashing billboard on my forehead detailing my plans or Bill was telepathic because he said, "I'm afraid I'll have to sedate you again before we get there in case you try and alert anyone that I might have taken you unwillingly." He looked back at me as if to question if I would dare do so, but I was no actor and doubted my ability to hide the fact that yes, I guaran-damn-tee you I would be screaming my fool head off. He must have read that too because he shook his head as though he was hurt I would dare to think that way and said, "If they even ask about your sleepy state, I'll blame the pregnancy and then once we're in Mexico we can take care of that little issue and get on with our lives."

*What? Take care of WHAT little issue?*

"What do you mean?" I asked, unable to keep the terror from my voice.

Again, he looked at me like he was speaking to a child, and said, "Why the pregnancy, of course. If you go to the right doctor and have the money, they don't care how far along you are to abort it. Then your only ties will be to *me*."

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## Chapter 110: Chapter 107

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### Chapter 107

#### EPOV

I stared down at the blond woman in the bed wondering if my eyes were playing tricks on me as it felt like time was moving in slow motion, with the sounds of the emergency room becoming more and more faint until there was nothing but silence, right before it seemed to catch up to itself again with the noise now thundering around me, only I drowned all of it out, yelling at her unconscious body, "WHAT DID YOU DO WITH MY WIFE?"

"Mr. Northman!" I could hear the doctor calling out behind me, but I didn't bother turning around and barked, "Go get one of the policemen! They're outside!"

"Why?" she argued. "What's wrong?"

I could see the fear in her eyes when I turned around to face her, so I can only imagine how scary I must have looked when I said lowly, "This woman has been stalking me and now she's been found with my dog and my wife's car. Now, go. Get. Them."

She stared back at me for a split second with her eyes glancing at her patient behind me before she turned down the hallway calling out for someone to get the police, for all I knew to restrain me, but I didn't care so long as one of the showed up, when I heard a soft moan behind me and whipped around again. Her eyes fluttered open showing one of her blue contact lenses had floated up and to the side of her brown eye, but it was enough for things to quickly fall in to place with me asking incredulously, "Debbie?"

She didn't look quite the same as I'd remembered from when she came to the house and she'd been too far away to be absolutely certain it was her when I'd spotted her at the airport in Shreveport, but I was ninety-nine percent certain it was her now and her responding smile told me I was right when she answered, "I knew you would remember me. I'm so happy you're here."

I could hear the sounds of the policemen's radios getting closer to the door, but all I wanted to do was choke the answers out of the bitch in front of me and I grabbed her upper arms, shaking her violently, with my face inches from hers yelling, "WHERE IS MY WIFE?"

Two sets of hands grabbed each of my arms a second later as the policemen pulled me off of her, but I fruitlessly fought against their hold, still yelling, "WHERE IS MY WIFE YOU FUCKING BITCH!"

"Settle down, Mr. Northman," one of the officers said at my side, while she looked back at me with tears in her stupid fucking eyes, whimpering, "Why are you mad? We can finally be together now. Bill said!"

*Bill?*

Just like that my body froze, but I dug my heels in trying to keep them from hauling me out of the room, asking her, "Bill Compton?"

If she replied, I didn't get to hear it because I was swiftly pulled out of the room and into the hallway a second later with one of the officers saying, "You need to calm down. Now, are you saying the woman in there isn't your wife?"

My father appeared a moment later, probably due to the amount of yelling I'd been doing and I only added to it, screaming, "NO THAT'S NOT MY WIFE!" The panic running through me had me rambling out, "*That woman* has been stalking me and now she was found with my dog and my wife's car, but I don't know where my wife is and she just said something about Bill. Compton, I think. He's been after my wife. We have to find her," I ended as I struggled again to get loose.

Bubba had been barking like mad and trying to get to me until he heard her yell out, "Eric! Come back! I love you!" and he then turned towards the door struggling to go after her instead. It made

me realize he had been the one to attack her and I felt a brief moment of 'atta boy' for him before I said, "She must have done something to my wife and Bill fucking Compton is involved! Let me go! We have to find her!"

We were wasting time. God only knew how long he'd had her by then and my eyes darted frantically around me searching for a clock when they finally landed on one. The last time I'd gotten a text from Sookie had been an hour earlier, but for all I knew it could've been sent by that fucker if he'd already gotten to her by then.

When I agreed I wouldn't go back into the room and pummel that bitch, they finally let me go while another officer showed up and I recognized Sookie's wallet in his hand just as he said, "We found this in the car when we got the dog out." Pulling out her driver's license, he added, "It looks a lot like the woman in there, but you're saying it's not?"

"NO!" I yelled again, outraged over their doubt that I might not know what my own fucking wife looked like, but seeing her things; hearing that crazy bitch saying Compton was somehow involved and knowing Sookie was likely taken by him was too much for me to handle. He was insane; they all seemed to be fucking insane and I was terrified of what could happen; what might have *already* happened to her, and the Bean, and as the realization came over me that I might never see her again, I broke.

*Was this how I felt when she'd been in the car accident and I ran out like a madman only to get into one of my own?*

Without those memories, I had no way of knowing, but even so, I was certain I loved her even more now than I possibly could have back then. We hadn't been together for very long in the grand scheme of things, but I couldn't imagine my life without her in it and the thought of not seeing her again was wreaking havoc on my insides. I supposed it was close to how she must have felt when I'd been in a coma, but I don't think I'd ever truly realized just how traumatic that had to have been for her until now. While she may have had my body with her, she had no idea if I would ever regain consciousness, but Pam had told me over and over again how strong she'd seemed. No one other than her knew she was pregnant at the time and yet she managed to hold herself together to be strong enough for all three of us and now I was barely strong enough to breathe for myself. I loved her so much, both her and the Bean, and was scared out of my mind at the thought I might not get them back. Sookie was always so much stronger than me. I knew she was with me now only because she *wanted* to be, but I fucking *needed* her. From the moment I woke up from the coma I needed her in one way or the other, but now...now I wouldn't survive without her. I didn't want to and I hated that it took this to happen for me to grasp just how much she meant to me.

*I only hoped I would get the chance to tell her.*

My vision dimmed while my body slumped against the wall as I slid down to the floor with Bubba coming over to me, but all I could do was lean against him and try to get my bearings again. It felt like I had no air left in my lungs, but no amount of gasping by me seemed to pull

any in and my father's concerned face appeared in my line of sight before he stood up again and let loose with a commanding voice that I hadn't heard come out of him in a very long time.

"Who the fuck is in charge around here?" he barked, glaring down at each of the policemen standing around us. In addition to my lead foot, I also got my height from him and he stood at least three inches taller than the tallest one of them, so he leaned down, putting his face inches away from the closest one to him, snapping angrily, "My daughter-in-law is missing under some suspicious as fuck circumstances and that psychotic bitch in there implied who it is that might have taken her. I saw Bill Compton approach her just last night, now I want someone to go and find him. NOW!"

I glanced up at the three police officers who looked fearfully back at my fifty-five year old father, rightfully so since I'd been in their shoes under the intense focus of his fierce gaze before; the only difference was this time he was sober and one of them finally asked, "Well, uh...when was the last time you had any contact with your wife?"

It took me a second to realize he was directing the question at me since his eyes hadn't left my father's, but it was a second too long because my father was in my face again, saying sternly, "Eric! Pull yourself together! When was the last time Sookie texted you?"

My mouth had gone incredibly dry, but as he grabbed onto my arms and forced me to my feet, I was thankful at least he had the ability to keep his wits about him and managed to choke out, "A little over an hour ago."

"Did you find her cell phone in the car?" my father asked the one still holding her wallet. He shook his head no, so my father followed up with, "Can you find her that way? Track her cell phone signal?"

"She doesn't have the software downloaded to her phone," I interrupted. "I signed up for the service today, but she had it with her so I couldn't put it onto her phone."

A second officer was on his own phone and from the sounds of it, they were starting to realize just how serious this was while the third one said, "It doesn't matter. As long as her phone is on, we can track its location to within ten feet. What's her phone number and do you know the full name of the man you suspect that might have taken her? What kind of car he drives?"

*Fuck! Please tell me she just ran away from the crazy bitch!*

I didn't think to try calling her again so I pulled my phone out hitting the speed dial to call her and the joy I felt when it first rang slowly ebbed to despair when it finally went to voicemail. Hearing her happy voice over the recording was enough to get the tears to finally fall from my eyes as I said, "It's on, but she's not answering."

Once I gave them Sookie's phone number along with that fucker's name, things started moving pretty quickly. Several detectives showed up with two of them going in to try and question the crazy bitch in trauma room three while the other one had me explain all I knew about Bill



Compton and why I thought he might have Sookie. I didn't hold anything back, from the night we met in Vegas until now and a shiver ran through my body, along with an overwhelming urge to throw up, when one of the officers came into the room the police had commandeered in the hospital with a fake pregnancy pillow in his hand. "We found this next to her body at the dog park. We recognized your wife's name from her ID and thought maybe you all were pulling a fast one on the public about being pregnant for publicity."

For a moment I wondered why they would think anyone would be crazy enough to do something like that until I realized I was smack dab in the middle of a pile of crazy shit, but all of those thoughts fell away when one of the other detectives who had been questioning Bizarro Bitch came into the room, saying, "She refuses to talk to us or even acknowledge us." His eyes turned to me and said, "All she keeps saying is that she wants to talk to you."

"Me?" I asked heatedly. "She won't want to be in the same room with *me* if she knew what I want to do to her!"

He seemed to be pondering over something when he finally asked, "Do you think you can set that aside for now?" I don't know what he saw on my face, but I imagine it looked like something close to *'hell fucking no'*, however he continued on anyway, explaining, "We need something more than her saying the name 'Bill' in order to get a warrant to search this Compton guy's house. We have a patrol car there now and it's locked up tight, but it appears to be empty. His car is gone and there's an APB on it blanketing the entire state, but if you go in there and *talk nicely* to her, she might tell us something. Granted, she's a whack job and might start spouting off about the two of you romping through fields of wildflowers full of unicorns and rainbows or she might actually have some worthy information she's willing to share. As of right now she is merely the victim of a dog attack. She's not in our custody and we're approaching her as a possible witness to your wife's abduction, so we don't have to read her, her rights and if she happens to make a spontaneous confession to you with us there, then so be it. Whether or not it's admissible later considering her mental state is for the prosecutor to worry about, but your wife has already been gone for over an hour. Our tech guys are working on finding her cell phone signal, but we don't even know if it's with her. She could've dropped it in the middle of the park, so we're wasting precious time if someone actually did take her."

I had no doubts someone took Sookie and his name was Bill fucking Compton. She never would've willingly left Bubba behind or not found a way to call me by now if she could, but talk nicely to that psychotic bitch? I might manage to smile after I beat the shit out of her, but knowing Sookie's safety was in jeopardy was the only thing that made me willing to go back in there. I would do whatever I had to do to get her back.

*I might have been an actor for my whole life, but I didn't know if I could pull this one off.*

"Fine," I agreed. After he warned me one final time to keep my emotions in check, I steeled my nerves and plastered a less lethal look onto my face as I walked into her room.

The fucking cunt looked over and smiled cautiously at me, saying, "You're back! You're not mad at me anymore?"

*Sweet fucking Jesus. What color was the sky in her crazy world?*

She didn't even seem to notice the two detectives trailing in behind me and all appeared to be forgiven by her from when I'd yelled her back into consciousness, so I managed to unclench my teeth, saying, "You wanted to talk to me, so talk. Where is my wife?"

*You have sixty seconds to tell me everything you know before I knock your fucking teeth out.*

"I'm so happy you're here," she smiled back at me.

*Fifty seconds.*

"I'm not," I growled as I took a seat next to the door and the detective cleared his throat as if to tell me to calm the fuck down, but I didn't feel fucking calm. I *faked* sounding calm and asked, "Did Bill Compton take her?"

I could see the recognition in her eyes hearing his name, but she clenched her own teeth, saying, "She's gone now! *I'm* here. Now *we* can be together."

Next she was probably going to tell me all about her pet unicorns, but I didn't have time for her bullshit. Since she'd seemed so adamant on wanting to talk to me, I decided to try and use that as a bargaining chip by standing up and saying, "If you're not going to answer my questions then I'm leaving."

I barely had my back turned towards the door when she called out, "Wait! Don't go!" so when I turned to face her again, she asked, "Will you stay with me if I tell you what I know? Will that make you happy?"

*I'd be happy to put my fist through your fucking skull.*

I knew she was crazy, but I was still stunned over just how deep it went if she thought there was anything she could do to make me happy. All I wanted was my wife back, safe and sound, and perhaps Bill Compton's dead body in my grasp, so I chose brooding silence instead of answering her and when she didn't say anything else, I turned to face the door again when she said, "Yes. Bill has her."

My stomach dropped hearing her confirm it, but I turned around and slumped back down into the chair because I wasn't sure my legs would be able to hold me up for very much longer. When my eyes finally lifted to hers, she fucking smiled like she was sharing some sort of juicy gossip with me and said, "Well, I *think* he does because I passed out and didn't get to see it, but he was the one to have me go up to her today because he wanted me to invite her to go get a cup of coffee and then I was supposed to slip something into her drink so he could take her. He was in the parking lot when I walked up to her. I saw him."

I would kill that fucker if it was the last thing I ever did and I glared back at her barking, "Where? Where is he taking her?"

"Away," she answered like I should've known that. "He's been watching her since last summer and didn't want to wait anymore for *that baby* to be born."

*Last summer? LAST FUCKING SUMMER?*

That was enough to shake me to my core, but hearing the way she spit out the words, '*That baby*,' made my heart stop.

*Was he crazy enough to try and hurt the baby?*

Hell, he was crazy enough to kidnap her so there were no guarantees he wouldn't try to hurt the Bean and I rose to my feet, asking, "What do you mean he doesn't want to wait anymore? Where is he taking her?"

"To Mexico," she smiled. "He's taking her to Mexico, so she can get an abortion." Then she sighed with relief and added, "She's long gone."

I was torn between wanting to knock her the fuck out for being so goddamn happy over the nightmare she'd just given me while wanting to run screaming from the room all the way to Mexico at the same time, but before I could do either, one of the detectives seemed to confirm at least part of her story, saying, "They have a lock on her cell phone signal. It's moving south of here heading towards Carlsbad and from the looks of it they're on the I-805."

I could only hope she was with it, but as I started to leave the room she yelled out, "No! She's with Bill! There's no reason for you to go now!"

"Why in the hell would I stay? To be here with *you*?" I yelled back having lost any amount of the control I'd had seconds earlier. "I fucking *hate you*!"

One of the detectives pushed me out of the room in front of him before I could get any closer to her and once we were back out in the hallway I could hear her shouting, "You should be happy he's getting rid of that thing! I doubt it was yours anyway!"

If he'd let go of me, I had no doubts I would've been facing murder charges and the only thing that kept me from trying to wrench myself free from him was him getting in my face and saying, "Let it go! Think about your wife right now, not her."

He was right, but now all I could think about was that fucker had been stalking Sookie since *last fucking July*. We hadn't gotten married until September, but he'd somehow known about her before we'd even met and now he had her.

*And the Bean.*

Realizing just how long he'd been after her only made me more enraged, but what I felt most of all was my fear for both of them when the detective looked back at me, saying, "You should head home and we'll call you once we know anything."

*Head home? I didn't HAVE a fucking HOME without Sookie.*

There was no fucking way I wasn't going to wherever in the hell they ended up at and I stared back at him defiantly, saying, "I'm going to wherever my wife is, with or without you."

He was already shaking his head before he said, "Mr. Northman, we already have officers on the way to the location. There's nothing you can do for now. It would be best for you to go on home and we'll keep you informed of any news."

"Go home?" I asked incredulously. "I'm not fucking going home! How am I supposed to sit there and wait when she's with some crazy fuck that wants to kill our baby?"

His expression changed to look like he was about to deliver bad news and he cautiously added, "We don't even know that she's with her phone. She could've dropped it somewhere and it was picked up by someone else, so it would be better if you just went home and wait for us to contact you. Besides, the highway patrol will be at the location shortly and it's ninety miles away. It'll be long over with before you could get there."

*Not if I still had my Corvette.*

I hadn't bothered with replacing it now that we had the Bean on the way, but the Audi wasn't exactly slow either and he must have read it on my face because he said, "If you take off and go down there like a bat out of hell you'll be more likely to get yourself or someone else killed. Don't make me take you into custody for your own sake."

I knew he could do it if he wanted to, but thinking about all of the plans we'd made together, for us and for the Bean, everything we'd already done in getting ready for the baby to be born, threatened the little bit of control I had left. Ever since I'd woken up to find out I was married and later to learn I had a son or daughter on the way, there was never a time when I didn't want them. I was scared out of my mind and confused; I didn't understand all of the feelings Sookie was able to evoke in me, but not once did I not want either one of them and now I just wanted them more than anything. My eyes glanced down at his left hand and seeing the gold wedding band on his ring finger only served to remind me of the one Sookie wore, and the one I never got the chance to give her, so I asked, "What in the hell would *you* do if it was *your* wife?"

He actually seemed to think about my question while he stared back into my eyes before he finally shrugged his shoulders and moved towards the door, saying, "Come on. It's quicker when you have lights and sirens."

I didn't say anything else out of fear of him changing his mind and we rushed out into the hallway where we came up on my father and Pam who looked frantically at me, asking, "What's going on? Did they find her? I'm going to kill that fucker!"

*Not if I get to him first.*

I didn't have the time or the inclination to tease her about how frazzled she was since I was just as frantic and only said, "They're tracking her cell phone signal. It's moving south on I-805 near Carlsbad. We're going there now."

They both fell into step alongside us with Pam asking, "How are you getting there? Carlsbad is over an hour away. It'll take too long!"

"Well if I could sprout fucking wings, don't you think I would fly my ass down there?" I growled back at her. It wasn't my fucking fault I couldn't fly.

We were coming up to the doors leading out of the hospital and my steps faltered seeing the circus of reporters and cameramen waiting outside, so my eyes turned to Pam questioningly and she answered, "Somebody in the ER must have a big fucking mouth. I certainly didn't call the press." I could see the wheels spinning behind her eyes just before she said, "But, wait here. I'm going to go get you a pair of wings."

We all watched as Pam strode out the doors like she owned the fucking place and peered at the crowd before she grabbed one reporter in particular and dragged him by his lapels back inside behind her. As soon as he was standing in front of us, she stared back at him, saying, "I'm going to offer you the deal of a lifetime, so pay attention buttercup. At some point in the near future, Eric will give you and your station an exclusive interview about today's events. In exchange, your station is going to fly him in their helicopter right now down to where his wife is. You *will not* film him during the flight, nor will you record or report on anything he might do or say while he's with you. You *will not* intrude or get in the way of the police or the Northmans when they reunite. Do we have a deal?"

He was already pulling his cell phone out and speaking quickly into the receiver when he looked up and nodded, asking, "Where to?"

I looked over at the detective next to me to see if he was going to object, but he answered the reporter's question, saying, "'Carlsbad,'" and then looked back at me adding "It'll get you there in half the time. I'll see you there." He patted me on the back as I left Pam and my dad in my wake with me running behind the reporter to their waiting news van and ten minutes later I was ascending from the station's rooftop helicopter pad. There wasn't room for Pam or my dad to come along, but I'd promised to let them know something as soon as I did and thankfully neither the reporter nor the cameraman seated in the cabin asked me any questions. I took the seat next to the pilot and once we were in the air he told me we should be there in about twenty minutes before he switched the radio on so we could listen in to the police radio band.

The very first thing I heard coming through the earphones was that Compton's car had been spotted and I let out a small exhale of relief hearing there was a blond woman in the passenger's seat fitting Sookie's description, but my relief turned into anxiety hearing he was refusing to pull over and was now leading them in a high speed chase. I hated feeling so helpless knowing there was nothing I could do and I silently willed the helicopter to go faster as I prayed to God nothing would happen to her. I needed to see her again; to hold her and tell her how much I loved her, but all I could do was stare down at the landscape underneath us wishing we were there already.

It felt like it took forever for twenty minutes to come and go, but now that Compton was running from the police they were already passing San Diego however we were gaining ground because I noticed Miramar Naval Air Station as we passed it by. Sookie and I were supposed to have gone there today to see if I could remember anything, but seeing it now from the sky didn't bring back one fucking thing other than regret. Had I not acted like an ass to her the night before then she wouldn't have gone out today. She'd be home with me instead of trapped in a car with a psychopath.

It seemed we weren't the only ones listening in on the police radio band because as we finally got to where they were there were already several other news helicopters flying overhead, along with the state police, but I only had eyes for the car carrying my wife at a reckless fucking speed. He was zigzagging in between other cars with no less than six patrol cars chasing behind them and I could hear them talking about setting up road blocks, throwing down spike strips to deflate the tires or doing a pit maneuver to spin the car out, and while I wanted the car to come to a fucking stop, I was terrified of Sookie getting hurt in the process. From the sounds of it, they seemed to dismiss the ideas for the very same reasons, so they tried to move their patrol cars into position to box him in and force him to come to a stop, but he started driving even more erratically, as though he was going to slam into one of them, and at the rate they were traveling, I had no doubts the car they were in would've rolled.

*Please God, let her have her seatbelt on.*

The thought had barely passed through my mind when Compton tried to dart in between lanes where there was a military convoy of trucks in the far right and other motorists trying to get out of their way when the front of his car clipped the back of a semi that had nowhere else to go and his car spun out. Time once again stood still as a strangled, "NOOOOO!" left my throat when I watched helplessly from above as their car took to the air right on top of an overpass with no ground on either side to catch them.

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## **Chapter 111: Chapter 108**

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### Chapter 108

#### **SPOV**

*Oh HELL no!*

*No fucking way! No fucking way! No fucking way!*

My head started turning every which way trying to find *someone* who would notice me struggling, but the seatbelt held my body fast against the seat. It dug into my shoulders as I pushed against it with all of my might, with my legs joining in and flailing about, but there was no fucking way I was letting him do anything to my baby.

*I would just as soon die first.*

"Sookeh! What are you doing?" that fuck face asked.

*I'm trying to picture Eric's bare chest or ass in the hopes that Wicked and Immoral will break free you asshole.*

It was no use though because all I could picture was gouging that fucker's balls off with a rusty spoon if he tried to do anything to my baby, but with all of my jostling in my seat I could feel my cell phone tucked away in my cleavage and I wanted to burst into tears knowing no amount of chanting '*Wonder Twin powers activate*' would get them to dial 911.

"Sookeh!" he yelled. "Stop that before you hurt yourself!"

Now that I knew what his intentions were, I no longer gave a flying fuck about trying to appease him by staying calm and yelled back, "*Hurt myself?* You're telling me that you want to *murder my baby* after you just told me you *murdered my cousin*, and you're worried I'll *hurt myself?* FUCK YOU! I'll fucking kill you myself!"

"Sookeh!" he gasped before getting angry again and growling out, "*Proper southern ladies do not use that kind of language, nor will you.*"

*Was he fucking serious? That asshole didn't KNOW ME as well as he thought he did.*

I continued to struggle in my seat while becoming every bit as crazy as him, yelling at the top of my lungs, "FUCKITY FUCKITY FUCK FUCK YOU GODDAMN FUCKING CRAZY ASS DOUCHEBAG DICKFACE MOTHERFUCKING ASSHOLE COCKSUCKER!"

My head snapped to my right before I could feel the sting of his slap to the left side of my face and I tasted the blood on my lips as I momentarily fell silent. I turned to face him again, fully intending on giving him another defiant 'Fuck you!' for his troubles, but when his eyes dropped down to look at my belly, I stopped. He could hit me all he wanted – anywhere but there – and he seemed to realize he once again had me bound – my mouth this time – with nothing more than his threatening gaze, but even so he started to reach into his pocket, saying, "Perhaps I should just sedate you again and keep you that way until we're in Mexico and it's all over with."

"No," I choked out, now terrified again of what I could wake up to. "Please don't."

*Please don't sedate me.*

*Please don't kill my baby.*

*But please tell me those are police sirens I hear in the distance.*

Bill seemed to hear them too because his eyes darted to his rearview mirror while I tried to turn around in my seat hoping they were somehow coming after us. I couldn't begin to guess how

they would know I just so happened to be kidnapped by him, but I prayed for it anyways while he slowed his speed, I assumed hoping they would pass us by. I had no way of signaling them I needed help, so I continued to try and get my arms free, without calling too much attention to myself this time, while he continued to drive with one eye on his mirrors.

*And then my prayers were answered.*

I watched his knuckles turn white as they tightened on the steering wheel when the sounds of the sirens started blaring from directly behind us, but my relief was short lived when he accelerated from the sixty-five miles per hour we'd been traveling upwards to hover near ninety.

"What are you doing?" I asked, starting to panic all over again. "It's over! The police are here so there's no way you're getting me to Mexico! Just pull over and give yourself up before you get us both killed!"

I really didn't give a damn if *he* died and very much hoped I would have the opportunity to help him along in that regard, but I didn't want to die in some horrific car crash and hoped I could get him to see reason.

*But I'd temporarily forgotten he was crazy and therefore unreasonable.*

"No!" he growled while making some dangerous moves in between lanes of cars. "I've worked too hard to get to this point. I've sacrificed over and over and now that I finally have you, I'm not letting you go!"

*Christ...he was crazier than a shithouse rat.*

"To get to *what* point? Having your goddamn mug shot on CNN's Headline News? You don't *have* me!" I argued back, feeling a little more confident now that he was too busy trying to watch the road to bother with physically threatening me, while ignoring the fact, that technically, he *did* have me restrained at his side, but I wasn't something *he* could ever own.

*Eric owned me in a way no one else ever could and always would.*

He continued to dodge cars left and right making me reevaluate my hasty assessment of Eric's driving skills, so I thought it best to just not look at the images blurring by and asked, "What did you honestly think would happen? That I would miraculously fall in love with you after you *stole* me away from my life? My husband? I've loved Eric from the time I was ten years old and there is nothing you could do to ever change that!"

"Trust me," he snarled with his head turning to face mine and the dangerous look in his eyes was the only thing that kept me from yelling at him to watch the fucking road as he added, "There are ways to break you down, By the time I'm through with you, you'll worship the ground I walk on."

*Only if you're buried underneath it while I squat down and drop a huge pile of shit on top.*



I couldn't see any way he would be able to get away from the police cars that were chasing us, so if anything, I could at least look forward to my fiery death instead of whatever fucked up nightmare he'd planned on me living through. As far as I was concerned, it was the preferable option of the two and I looked away from him trying to come to some sort of peace in my mind. If I was going to die, I didn't want my last image to be of his demented fugly ass, so I closed my eyes with the one person who mattered to me the most filling my mind's eye.

*Eric.*

It had always been Eric; years before we'd ever met, but what had been a superficial fan girl crush was now full blown love for the man underneath the pretty face. His ego knew no bounds, but that too was superficial because I knew he didn't see himself as I did. Out of all of his faults, the biggest one of the bunch was that he never gave himself enough credit for being the good person that he truly was inside. Once you got through the protective layers he'd built up out of necessity to protect himself from the people who only wanted what his celebrity or money could give them, underneath it all he had a heart of gold and I'd been fortunate enough that he'd given it to me. If I was going to die now, I could only hope and pray that he would take care of it and cherish it like I would have had we gotten to live the life we'd dreamed of sharing together.

The tears spilled from my eyes once more, but instead of coming from the fear and worry for my own wellbeing, they were for Eric's. Losing both me and the Bean in one foul swoop would hit him hard, but he had his dad back in his life now and I honestly believed his intentions were sincere, so I hoped that would be enough to get him through it until one day, hopefully a long time from now, we could meet up again in the afterlife.

*And perhaps even get to remember that second first meeting after it happened.*

As I continued to silently say my goodbyes to the rest of my family and friends, I could feel the car veering left and right, but I kept my eyes closed until I'd said farewell to them all and when I opened them again, I was surprised to see we were passing Miramar Naval Air Station.

*It sure wasn't any fun being taunted by God.*

I didn't want to, but couldn't stop myself from playing the 'if only' game; if only I'd stayed home; if only I'd stayed in bed with Eric the night before I would've likely been trapped by his pterodactyl like arm span when I woke up and not been able to make a silent getaway; if only I'd listened to his concerns about what I now couldn't argue had been a good idea about me having a bodyguard; if only I'd told him *once* today that I loved him.

That was my biggest regret at the moment, but I couldn't do anything more than push my love for him out into the atmosphere and hope that he felt it wherever he was however when I felt the car jerk and opened my eyes in time to see that we were now airborne, I wondered if I might have pushed too hard and my unknown superpower was now going to bite me in the ass.

*Why couldn't I have been gifted with the power to teleport instead?*

I screamed at the top of my lungs and my eyes slammed shut with me not wanting to see death coming for me as I tried to brace myself for impact having nothing more to use than my legs and feet, but I felt the car flip over once before slamming down hard and the airbag deployed at the same time I could hear the sounds of glass breaking and metal twisting while we continued to spin and skid forward into something else that caused another deafening crunch. It all happened so fast and it felt like we were both still moving and not at the same time, but I was afraid to open my eyes and it wasn't until I could hear the sounds of people shouting over the blaring of the police sirens that I finally forced them open.

*And I really wished I hadn't.*

*Hello. My name is Sookie Northman and I have a fear of falling.*

Not down steps or even from great heights like the top of Eric's head, but tall buildings? Yes. Roller coaster drops? Absolutely. I'd had countless nightmares in the past of me driving along the interstate only to come to a section where part of the road is missing, except I didn't have Keanu Reeves at my side to push my foot down onto the gas pedal and cage my body with his own as our transit bus leapt the impossible distance.

*Because I wasn't as lucky as Sandra Bullock.*

But in those dreams I would always wake up before I got to the edge and my eyes unwillingly glanced over at my would be Dennis Hopper only to see he'd been knocked unconscious and appeared to be painfully pinned down by the pushed in steering wheel.

*That asshole had all of the luck.*

So I was left being the unlucky one that got to see how we'd managed to come to a stop; on the side of an overpass; and I do mean *on the side* because from what I could tell it was just our front tires keeping us there.

*Dear God. This is Sookie. You can stop taunting me any time now. Kthxbai.*

I didn't want to look around too much, or breathe for that matter, because I could feel the ass end of the car dangling in the air, but of course my eyes didn't get the strongly worded memo my brain was trying to send and they assured the rest of us that yes, we were impossibly high up in the air and those rocks way down below didn't look cushiony at all.

*If we did fall, I hoped they got gouged out first. Sadistic bitches.*

The side we'd ended up on was in between the north and southbound lanes, so with every big rig that went by behind us, the car swayed that much more in the resulting breeze and I really wished someone would get them to knock that shit off already, but I was too afraid to yell out, or blink, and cause the car to move any more than it already was.

"Mrs. Northman? Can you hear me?" I heard a man's voice yell out and I cautiously moved my eyes upwards where they landed on a police officer standing close to where the front of the car was resting, but in my delirium all I could think of was how good Eric would look in that uniform.

*Even now my fucking hormones ruled my world.*

"Are you hurt?" he asked once he'd given me the chance to answer and since I didn't, I could only hope he attributed it to my shock from the accident and not my wondering over the possibility he had a spare uniform in his trunk in Eric's size.

"No," I finally managed to say. Both the windshield and window on my side had broken open in the accident, so I could hear him clearly and added, "I don't think so."

"Don't move," he warned. "The car isn't stable."

*That's okay...neither am I.*

"I can't move," I answered instead since my brain's whorish ways weren't any of his business. "My hands are tied behind my back and I'm locked in by the seatbelt."

"We're gonna get you outta there. Just hang tight," he called back.

*Ha fucking ha. Ladies and gentlemen, Mr. No Name Policeman. Let's all give him a big round of applause.*

*Oh wait. I can't.*

Oddly, I didn't feel as panicked as I probably would have if I hadn't already experienced the worst fucking day ever and nothing felt broke, nor did I feel any pain coming from my abdomen, so I was good enough for now. If anything, I felt even safer now when I was a squirrel's fart away from plummeting to my death than when I'd first woken up realizing I'd been kidnapped by one Bill fucking Compton.

*At least I wouldn't be dying on his terms.*

I rolled my eyes at my own stubbornness and vowed I would work on that shit when it came to my interactions with Eric if I ever got out of this mess and hoped somebody would let him know that I was kind of okay at the moment so he wouldn't panic.

*At least he couldn't see it.*

I could hear the policemen talking about how long it would take fire and rescue to arrive at the scene and forty-five minutes sounded way too fucking long, but I didn't think my bitching about it would make them get there any sooner. I guessed we were perched a little more precariously than I could see and from the sounds of it, they needed some big industrial sized forklift to

steady the car before they could risk climbing down to get us out and that was the cause of the delay. As far as I was concerned, they could leave his demented ass right where it was and I'd happily give the front bumper a swift kick just as soon as my feet were on solid ground, but until then I could do nothing more than wait.

*And try not to breathe, blink, or fart.*

Now that I was trying to believe that my death was no longer imminent, I must have started hallucinating because I would swear that I could hear Eric shouting my name, but that was probably just my subconscious warning me that he was going to give me a big what for when I got home, however I'd gladly take it and in the meantime I let my eyes glance around at the interior of the car with me noticing for the first time that we were in a BMW. I remembered one of their cars had been on that list of safest vehicles and seeing as how I wasn't dead, I could hardly disagree, but I still saw no reason to replace the Black Pearl.

*That wasn't being stubborn; it was being practical.*

I was drawn out of my odd inner car debate by the sound of another voice and drew my eyes up to see a young guy in what looked to be a Navy uniform.

*Eric had looked better in his, my mind told me, so I then told my brain get the fuck out of the gutter already.*

*Now was not the time!*

He pointed at the car and then farther down the road to where I couldn't see, but the policeman nodded and got on his radio speaking rapidly into the mike. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but my eyes closed having turned into two frightened bitches a few minutes later when I heard the sounds of a large truck approaching from behind. I'd thought they'd stopped the traffic going northbound because I hadn't heard anything since I'd first spoken to the police officer, but it seemed I was wrong when I heard the same voice from earlier call out, "Mrs. Northman!" I forced my eyes open and looked over at him as he continued, "You're going to hear a lot of loud noises coming from behind you, but it's a forklift that we're going to try and stabilize the car on so we can get you out, so don't worry, okay?"

*Oh sure...don't worry...I'll just have more inappropriate thoughts about my husband. Maybe in eyeliner and a pirate costume this time.*

Actually, that worked wonders to keep my mind off of the loud mechanical sounds coming from behind me that demanded my head to turn around and watch, even though I knew I wouldn't be able to see anything anyway, but a startled cry still left my lips when the forklift made contact with the bottom of the car and jostled it some more with my not-so-helpful eyes tracking a piece of broken concrete that fell from the added movement all the way into the rocky ravine below.

*Those blue bitches were brutal.*

After a few more minutes I could hear other sounds coming from behind me when a new voice accompanied them, saying, "Ma'am? My name is Kevin Prior and I'll be getting you outta there in a jiffy. I'm coming up alongside you now so I don't want to startle you."

"Oh," I softly laughed and now feeling a little more relieved, I added, "After the day I've had, I imagine it would take a little more to startle me than usual."

When he finally made his way to the window I could see it was the same young Navy guy who had been talking to the police officers earlier and he smiled kindly at me, saying, "Well, I'm sure you've had better days, but I'll make sure this one ends on a high note. How about that?"

"That would be great," I smiled back at him and wondered when they started letting fourteen year olds into the military. He could've been easily blended in as one of the kids at the high school.

He was wearing a safety harness that was tied to a line trailing behind us and there was another harness thrown over his shoulder, but first he reached in with a large knife and cut away the airbag while asking, "Are you hurt?"

"I don't think so," I answered, but I was sure I'd be sore as hell in the morning. I'd be glad for it though because it would only serve as a reminder that I was still alive. He continued to check me over while I felt the unnecessary need to make small talk and asked the obvious, "So, you're in the Navy?"

"Yes ma'am," he answered while staring at the other side of the mangled door with a frown on his face.

While he contemplated whatever was making him look that way, I kept rambling on with, "So, uh...good job on that whole Bin Laden thing. You know, thanks for that."

I was all for 'an eye for an eye' which was why fuck face's balls still had an appointment with my rusty spoon, but my oddly timed gratitude made his frown turn into a smile as he looked at me and answered, "Well ma'am, we aim to please. That was the work of one of our SEAL teams, but I'm actually stationed out of Miramar."

"Oh," I said excitedly. "My husband and I were there a few months ago and we were supposed to go today, but...didn't make it."

Saying it out loud and feeling the weight of every fucked up thing that had happened that day, I suddenly burst into tears which made the poor guy look panicked and ask, "What is it? Are you in pain?"

"No," I sobbed. "I'm just a pain in the ass. Just ask my husband."

I felt so sorry for everything that had happened that day and the guilt of it was eating away at me while I tried to wipe my snotty face onto my shoulder since I still didn't have the use of my arms,

but he smiled back at me, saying, "I know. Not that you're a pain in the ass, and I highly doubt that by the way, but that you all visited our base. Me and a couple of my buddies were there that day. You all were real nice and I even got a picture of me and your husband together. My girlfriend back home was mad at me for not getting his autograph for her."

I didn't recognize him from that day, but there had been a lot of people all dressed the same.

*They call it camouflage for a reason.*

"Well I'm sure he'd be more than happy to give you one now," I offered. "Or call her personally, or name our baby after you even since you're rescuing me and all."

"That's nice of you to say ma'am," he smiled while reaching in and cutting the seatbelt free, adding, "but it's not necessary. I'd be out here doing this if you were just any regular person too."

I wanted to argue that I *was* a regular person, but I could see his point and stayed quiet as he tried to slip the extra harness over me, but since my hands were still tied behind my back he had to pull my body forward thanks to the way we were dangling facing up towards the sky and another startled cry left my lips when we felt the front of the car slip a little against the broken concrete railing it was dangling off of. He didn't waste any time after that and quickly cut through what turned out to be a man's tie from around my wrists, but my arms had long since fallen asleep and were completely useless to me at the moment, so he had to work my arms through the harness himself before securing it tightly around my body.

It too was tied to some sort of line that ran behind the car and once that was in place he took one more look at the outside of the passenger door and said, "I don't think I can get this open without making the car destabilize even more, so I'm going to have to pull you through the window, okay?"

The frame was littered with bits of shattered glass, but I figured getting a few cuts was better than dropping down into the ravine and nodded my agreement, but he surprised me by maneuvering his blue camouflage uniform shirt off of his body, through his harness, and leaving him in just his t-shirt as he draped it over me using it as an added barrier between me and the glass. When he leaned into the open window to grab onto me the car shifted again, a lot more this time, and I screamed out in surprise, but I *really* screamed when I was halfway through the window and felt a hand wrap around my ankle as he was pulling me free and heard, "SOOKEH!"

Bill's grip was surprisingly strong, but I hoped Kevin's was stronger and I started crying all over again, screaming out, "Let me go!" but he refused.

I was being pulled at both ends and couldn't even wrap my arms around my would-be rescuer because they were still limp from the loss of circulation, when Kevin tightened his hold on me and gritted out, "Why is he holding onto you?"

"Because he's a crazy asshole that kidnapped me. He was trying to get me to Mexico where he was going to kill my baby," I sobbed.

"Oh...well then," was all he said and then he braced both of his feet onto the outside of the mangled passenger door and wrapped as much of his body around me as he could before he kicked off with all of his might. Bill's grasp on my leg broke loose as we went flying through the air with nothing more than his arms around me and the lines tied to our harnesses keeping us suspended in the air, but the force of it had moved the car enough that it came free from the railing and we watched as it crashed into the rocks below us.

"I hope that wasn't your car," he said as we stared down at the wreckage and I couldn't help laughing out loud in relief.

*It was finally over.*

We were slowly being pulled up to the road again and when I was finally calmed down enough, I said gratefully, "Thank you for that. I don't know if you knew what would happen when you kicked us free, but I don't think I would've been able to sleep at night if he was still alive."

There was no missing the fact that Bill was dead. I could see the evidence of it beneath me and it was an admittedly morbid welcome one, but when I looked back up at Kevin he smiled and said noncommittally, "Well ma'am, I'm just a Seabee. I don't know anything about physics or gravity or crazy assholes that take nice ladies wanting to do nasty things to them."

He ended his speech with a wink and I wished I could hug him with my arms, but my eyes would have to do and I smiled back with, "Well sir, it seems it's not just the SEALs who are heroes."

We were finally at the edge of the northbound side of the highway across from where I'd been dangling and two more sets of arms pulled us over the railing, but my delirium made a spectacular comeback because I would swear I could see a frazzled looking Eric running towards me. He pushed his way through the Navy men and waiting EMT's with his arms fastening around me before I could say anything and he cried into my neck, "Oh my god. I'm so sorry I yelled at you last night and acted like an asshole. It's all my fault, but I love you so much and I thought I was going to lose you and the Bean and I'd never get to tell you again."

I would like to say that I couldn't believe he was actually there with me, but it was Eric. Of course he was there because he loved me and couldn't be anywhere else, but I didn't like hearing him be so upset with himself and since my arms weren't quite working just yet, there was nothing I could do except try and talk him out of it. I'd had more than enough of the sad and scared emotions for the day and at that moment all I really wanted was just to see him smile again, so when he finally pulled back to look at me and started fretting over god knows what kind of damage had been done to my face, I stared up at him with a questioning look, asking, "Who are you?"

His eyes bugged out as he asked, "Did you hit your head? Oh my god! You don't remember me?"

I only let him freak out for a few seconds before I started giggling and admitted, "Well I don't know if I hit my head, but how on earth could *I* forget *you*? *The Great Eric Northman: boy of my teenage fantasies; man of my womanly dreams; spermatozoa of my ovum.*"

He stared back at me like he didn't know if he wanted to strangle me or kiss me and it kind of reminded me of the early days of our marriage only making me grin back at him even wider, so when he just sighed with relief and wrapped his arms around me again, muttering into my hair, "You're lucky I love you because you can really be a bitch sometimes," I could hear the smile in his voice and laughed into his chest again, agreeing with his point by saying, "Oh please...you love me *because* I'm a bitch."

*What more could I say? I was a bitch...Eric's bitch and I always would be.*

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## Chapter 112: Chapter 109

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### Chapter 109

#### EPOV

"Are you okay?" I asked into the top of her head, needing to hear it from her knowing the relief running through me could come crashing to a halt at the flip of a switch, but feeling her nod against my chest, I relaxed a little bit more.

Now that I finally had Sookie in my arms again I didn't ever want to let her go and she'd be lucky if I would even let her go to the bathroom by herself, so there was a good chance we were about to be *that* fucking married. Watching the car flip through the air only to slam down again and spin towards the edge was my worst fucking nightmare come true knowing there was nothing I could do to stop it, but God smiled down on her and kept her from going over the side. I still didn't know how badly she was hurt though and thankfully I didn't have to start yelling and screaming at the pilot to set us down because we were already moving towards a patch of grass further down the highway. As soon as we touched down, I was out the door and took off in a sprint towards Sookie, dodging the now stopped cars and gawkers who'd gotten out to see what had happened ahead of them, but seeing how bad the wreckage looked the closer I got had me yelling out her name in a panic. I had tunnel vision and could only see that, which is why I didn't see the police officers standing there with one of them catching me around the waist and not letting me get any closer. No amount of, "Fucking let me go! That's my wife!" could get him to loosen his grip and I really wished my father was there since he was a lot scarier than me and they seemed to have no problem listening to him.

The only reason I stopped fighting them was hearing that she was conscious and didn't seem to be panicking, but they worried if she knew I was there that she'd lose it. The car wasn't stable and if she started flailing around there was nothing to stop it from falling over the edge, so I stopped. It felt like everything, except for the small swaying of the ass end of the car dangling over the edge, stopped with time standing still too and hearing it would take forty-five minutes for them to get the necessary equipment there to get her out only added to my rapidly growing ulcer, but then I noticed the guy in the Navy uniform run up and talk to the policeman who'd been talking to Sookie. When he pointed I turned to see the military convoy of trucks I'd forgotten all about seeing from the air with my eyes landing on a huge forklift.



*What were the fucking odds?*

It was surreal watching everything that was happening, all of it with the sole purpose of getting Sookie out of there, and I felt helpless all over again. I just wanted Sookie out of that car safe and sound, but knowing I was so close to having her back and yet just as close to losing her at the same time, I could barely keep my knees from buckling. My eyes had zeroed in on the same young kid as he tentatively inched his way across the forks towards Sookie and while I was too far away to hear what he was saying, seeing him smile back at her like they'd merely run into one another on the street and she wasn't in danger of falling to her death, I was both impressed and grateful for the level of calm about him that I knew I would never be capable of. Every second that passed felt like a minute with the minutes feeling like hours and all I wanted to do was fast forward the god awful scene in front of me, but I changed my mind in a split second wanting to hit the pause button instead when I watched them suddenly swing through the air with nothing more than a few feet of rope holding onto them as the car finally lost its footing and fell.

But it was over now; now I had her again; both her and the Bean. They were safe and in my arms and I was never going to let them go.

"Ma'am, we need to get you to the hospital to get checked out," I heard from my left and turned to notice one of the EMT's standing there.

I'd heard them debating about waiting for someone more qualified to rescue Sookie from the car, but there'd been no time however I knew he was right, so I loosened my grip on her and stood back, agreeing, "They're right." I'd noticed her cut and swollen lips along with the rapidly forming bruises along her collarbone when I first looked at her and I couldn't stop myself from lightly tracing my fingertip across her lower lip, saying, "You're all banged up from the accident."

That same lower lip I'd kissed a thousand times pursed into a scowl as I helped her climb onto the gurney, thankful she wasn't going to argue over going to the hospital, as she said, "If you're referring to my split lip, you can thank our good ole pal BFC for that."

"He *hit* you?" I snarled with my eyes looking over the edge of the overpass and down into the ravine for the first time. It was a long fucking way down; farther than I'd been aware of, but now that Sookie was out of harm's way, I rejoiced in that fact seeing the unmistakable dead body down below.

*If only Debbie Pelt had been sprawled out next to him, this day might have actually turned out to be a pretty good one.*

If she'd nodded her reply, I'd missed it because all I heard from her was a pained whine which brought my eyes right back to her in a panic asking, "What is it? What's wrong?"

I'd seen for myself how violent the accident had been and knew somewhere in the recesses of my brain that she could have internal injuries, so I was rapidly ascending into full blown panic mode again when she gestured up towards the sky and said, "I'm OJ Simpson."

I didn't know what in the hell she was talking about since I knew she had nothing to do with that fucker's death and no one would have convicted her even if she had killed him, but my eyes followed her hand and saw the hovering helicopters up in the sky. I knew she hated being the center of attention so I tried to shield as much of her body with mine as I could while they wheeled her towards the waiting ambulance and hoped to lift her spirits by smiling down at her and joking, "Don't be ridiculous. You could never throw a football that far." I could tell she was fighting off the smile her lips were trying to form, so I added, "Well you're much prettier than him, so I can't really blame them."

"Yeah," she snorted and then winced from the pain of it making me panic a little again. "I'm sure I'm particularly lovely right now."

"You're beautiful," I replied honestly. She was alive and breathing and bitching and moaning and I couldn't be happier about it. The cuts and bruises would heal, but no matter what her injuries were, I wouldn't care what she looked like; I was just relieved to have her back.

I climbed into the back of the ambulance and sat alongside her all the way to the hospital with the words, "I love you," falling from my lips with every lull in between questions from the paramedic sitting next to me. I knew she already knew I loved her, but I couldn't seem to stop myself from telling her until I noticed the tears starting to fall from her eyes, making me ask for what felt like the hundredth time that day, "What's wrong? Are you in pain?"

"I...I...I was just so worried," she finally choked out.

All I wanted to do was hug her again, but I couldn't with the paramedic checking her over, so I gripped her hand tighter, shushing, "It's okay. You're safe now. Both of you."

A part of me wished Compton hadn't died so I would have the opportunity to fucking kill him myself, but I was taken aback when she shook her head, saying, "No, not about me. I was worried about you."

I hadn't been the one who was kidnapped, so I didn't understand what she meant and she must have seen it by the expression on my face and explained, "I thought I was going to die. I *would have* died before I let him hurt our baby, but all I could think of was how devastated you would be losing us both."

My eyes involuntarily looked away from hers before she could even finish her sentence. I didn't want to think about that now when I had both of them back, but she tugged on my hand making me look down at her again and said, "Promise me, if something ever happens to me that you'll go on. Grieve for me, but live your life afterward. I love you so much and I want you to find a way to be happy again. You deserve to find someone else to share that with."

"Stop talking like that!" I snapped back at her while fighting off the tears.

I'd been too close to losing her that I couldn't stand the thought of it now when I finally had her back and she quietly muttered, "Just know that I'm okay with it," but I ignored it.

I wasn't okay with it; *any* of it and if I, hopefully, happened to die first and there was a way, she could bet her ass I would be haunting *hers* if she even looked at another man, but I kept that to myself.

*She could just find out the hard way.*

Now that time was finally moving forward at a normal pace again, it seemed like we were pulling into the ambulance bay of the local hospital emergency room doors in no time and were met by a nurse who followed us into of all fucking places, Trauma Room Three.

*Thank fuck we weren't at Cedars.*

The nurse smiled down at Sookie and introduced herself saying, "My name is Maddy. Now I understand you've been in a car accident, is that right?" Sookie nodded while I kept my more colorful description of the day's events to myself, so she asked, "How far along are you in your pregnancy?"

"Twenty-four weeks and two days," Sookie replied while the nurse started hooking her up to various machines, nonplussed over the fact we knew exactly when she became pregnant making me think it wasn't all that uncommon.

"Are you feeling any pain in your abdomen or anywhere else?" she asked.

Sookie hadn't mentioned feeling any pain, so I paid attention when she answered, "I'm not really sure. I'm sore all over, including my abdomen and my neck and shoulders hurt some. My arms are still tingling, but they'd fallen asleep. My hands had been tied up behind my back, but I'm starting to get the feeling back in them now."

Both of their eyes shot to me when a growl left my throat hearing what that fucker had done to her, but they both chose to ignore it while the nurse went back to checking Sookie's vitals. As she pushed Sookie's shirt up and explained she was attaching a fetal monitor to her belly I could see the angry outline across the lower part of her baby bump from where the seatbelt had kept her strapped in and my heart skipped a beat noticing the small amount of blood on the crotch of her pants. I kept trying to tell myself that we'd already been through that once before and everything had turned out okay, so my eyes finally moved to the monitor when I heard the first whooshing sound of the Bean's heartbeat. Hearing it again, I was only relieved for a few seconds until I realized the number of heartbeats weren't as high as they normally were, but before I could ask about it I heard Sookie say, "I feel nauseous."

Her normal coloring seemed a little lighter than usual too and I watched the nurse's eyes for signs I should fucking panic now, but either she wasn't worried or she'd be one hell of a poker player because all I could do was go by her words as she said noncommittally, "That happens sometimes," while she moved a small plastic container next to Sookie's head and jotted down more notes.

Once she assured us that she didn't have to throw up right now, I just watched her like a hawk while trying to not freak the fuck out and a doctor by the name of Ben something swooped in moments later. He checked Sookie over while asking her question after question, but all I could do was sit there rigidly while waiting for someone to tell me everything was going to be fine because that's all I fucking wanted to hear. It must have been the only thing my brain was willing to process because I didn't realize they were getting ready to do an ultrasound until they wheeled the machine up next to Sookie with her voice calling out, "Eric?"

My eyes were watching the fetal heart rate monitor as the number continued to lower, but I tore them away from it again to see the tears back in her eyes as she stared at it too, whispering, "I'm scared."

She didn't have to tell me that; I could see it written all over her face, so I forced myself to man up and not fall apart like I wanted to, feeling every bit as scared as she was, and tried to sound reassuring as I said, "It'll be okay."

*And I prayed like hell that it would.*

Another doctor came into the room, with ours greeting him with nothing more than, "Jack" and a nod, with the two of them watching the screen as they passed the wand over Sookie's bump. The Bean looked a little bigger than the last ultrasound we'd had, but my stomach clenched seeing it wasn't moving around as much as normal. There was the occasional twitch of its arm or leg, but nothing like the movements that gave the Bean its nickname to begin with. Both doctors were quietly discussing what they were seeing and I heard one of them mention she needed a CT Scan, but everyone's attention was drawn back to Sookie when she said, "I...feel...funny."

*And then she passed out.*

Our nurse was a lot stronger than she looked because I'd no sooner yelled out Sookie's name in a panic than she'd shoved me out of the room with everyone else moving to surround the bed and through the closed door I could hear snippets of phrases containing the heart stopping words of "low blood pressure", "fetal distress", and "internal bleeding."

I only knew my fists were clenched when I went to wipe the wetness from my cheeks as the doors to Sookie's room flew open a minute later with them wheeling her down the hallway at a fast pace, but before I could follow behind her the first doctor came out and immediately started explaining, "We believe your wife suffered what's called a placental abruption in the accident. It's where part of the placenta becomes detached from the uterine wall..."

"Can you fix it?" I asked interrupting him. "With medicine? Surgery? Something?"

His face said it all before he even opened his mouth to answer, "No. If it was to a lesser degree we could try waiting it out and monitor your wife and the baby, but she's losing too much blood and the baby isn't getting enough oxygen. If either one of them is going to have a chance, we need to get it out now and get the bleeding under control."

"But it's too soon," I weakly argued back. The Bean was too small; the nursery wasn't ready; I hadn't given Sookie her ring or thrown her the baby shower she said she didn't need; I wasn't ready to be a dad *today*, but most of all I would never be ready for the possibility of losing them both all over again.

*I just got them back.*

He must have read it all on my face because his expression softened somewhat as he said, "At twenty-four weeks there's about a seventy-five percent chance of survival because the lungs aren't fully developed yet. Your wife is getting an infusion of steroids as we speak to try and help promote the function of the baby's lungs before the delivery and we'll do all that we can, but neither one of them stand a chance if we don't deliver the baby now."

There was nothing I could do but blindly sign the permission forms before I was led to the surgical waiting room which was thankfully empty when I sank down into a chair with nothing more than my despair to keep me company. Every minute of the entire day ran through my mind and I once again berated myself for ever giving her a reason to want to be away from me that morning. If I hadn't been such an ass to her the night before then we wouldn't be here now and my eyes closed as my breath caught in my throat remembering her words in the ambulance if something were to ever happen to her.

*How could she not see that without her there was no me?*

Without Sookie I was a miserable fucking son of a bitch who trusted no one and tried to hide behind the façade of indifference; taking what was offered to me and giving nothing of myself in return. But *with her* I was a husband; an almost father; a decent fucking human being. I'd laughed more in the last few months than the entirety of my life before then; I'd felt more alive than I'd ever felt and it was only thanks to her. *She* was the reason I'd become the man she could find it within herself to fall in love with and without her there'd be nothing left but an empty shell.

I was so lost in my thoughts I hadn't heard the approach of anyone until the door to the waiting room burst open with Pam and my dad rushing through it. They both froze where they stood with no one saying a word, but seeing the worry on their faces along with the foreign welling of unshed tears in both sets of eyes staring back at me made me lose the already tenuous hold I'd managed to keep on my own emotions. Racking sobs left my chest as I completely fell apart with my body curling into a ball trying to keep the pain in. The pain over the thought of losing either one of them was all I had left to hold onto and I didn't want to let it go until I had something else to grab a hold of; be it hope or complete devastation.

A strong pair of arms wrapped around me with my father pulling my head into his chest while I felt a smaller pair of hands rubbing up and down my back, but I could hear that my sobs weren't the only ones in the room and after a few minutes I finally managed to calm down enough to tell them everything that had happened. When I was done passing on all that I knew, we just sat there in silence with all of us lost in our own thoughts until all three of us shot out of our chairs hearing the approaching footsteps.

I held my breath seeing the other doctor, Jack, come through the door and he took a deep breath as he took off his surgical cap, but I couldn't read anything from his expression.

*And it was slowly killing me.*

"It's a girl," he softly smiled.

*A girl.*

*We had a daughter.*

He was smiling so I assumed she was okay, but the floodgates opened up with me asking in rapid succession, "Is she alright? What about my wife? Is she awake? When can I see them?"

He held his hands up in front of himself trying to get my mouth to slow down and answered, "Your wife is still in surgery. She's lost a lot of blood and she's getting a transfusion, but they're still working on trying to stop the bleeding. Your daughter is as well as can be expected given how early she was born, but she managed to get one good yell out of her lungs as soon as we got her out. She weighed in at one pound nine ounces."

I heard Pam gasp beside me, but I was too stunned to speak.

*One pound nine ounces? I had steaks that were bigger than she was.*

When I didn't say anything, he asked, "Would you like to see her?"

I'd never felt more fucking torn apart in my life. On one hand I absolutely wanted to go see her, but at the same time I didn't want to leave Sookie either and I felt my father's hand land on my shoulder just as he said, "We'll wait here until we hear any news on Sookie and one of us will come and find you to let you know. Go see your daughter."

*My daughter.*

I still couldn't wrap my head around it, but his slight shove against my back was enough to get my feet moving and I followed the doctor to the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. He explained the risks she would face being born so early, but I was having a difficult time concentrating on everything he was telling me with it more or less entering in one ear and out the other. I felt like I was already failing as a father when he ended with, "Don't worry. I know this is coming at you fast, but we'll go over it all again later on after you've had a chance to process everything."

I nodded in thanks and was shown to a sink where I had to scrub my hands all the way up to my elbows with a scrub brush and was then led into a surprisingly darkened room. The level of lighting was kept extremely low and the nurse who met me at the door of the NICU explained it was to keep the babies settled since the majority of them were still supposed to be in the womb. When she stopped next to one incubator in particular my eyes automatically went down, first to

see the Baby Northman label attached to the side, and then to the impossibly small bundle inside of it.

*The Bean.*

She would have easily fit into the palm of my hand with plenty of room to spare and her entire body was covered in downy white blond hairs. Her skin was so thin I could see the veins running just underneath it and there was a tube running into her mouth and another into where her umbilical cord had been with a bunch of wires stuck to her chest, feet, arms, wrists and legs, but there was a little cotton blindfold covering her eyes and the majority of her face, so I couldn't tell if she looked like either me or Sookie.

*But I was officially in love.*

"Does she have a name yet?" the nurse asked.

"No," I whispered, unable to take my eyes off of her. Sookie and I had discussed a few names for both boys and girls, but we hadn't decided on one yet because we weren't supposed to be parents yet. I couldn't make that decision on my own, but then I remembered exactly where Sookie was at that very moment and my chest seized again over the thought of *having* to make that decision all by myself. Staring down at our daughter, so small and fragile, had me questioning if I could be strong enough for her if I didn't have her mother at my side. Sookie had proven time and again she was the stronger one in our marriage, but no sooner had I had the thought than her little fist twitched forward like she was punching the air and pulled back again.

"She's a little fighter," the nurse remarked.

*Just like her mother.*

"Would you like to touch her?" she asked. "It's too soon to try and cuddle her just yet, but if you'd like, you could put your hand on her back."

"But she's so small," I argued, suddenly terrified.

I still couldn't take my eyes off of her, silently counting ten fingers and ten toes, but I could hear the smile in the nurse's voice as she put her own hand into the incubator, saying, "And you'll be gentle." She carefully pulled the blindfold up so I could finally see her face and I felt the tears fall once more staring down at the microscopic version of the only other girl I had ever loved.

*Was this what my father had been talking about?*

If something went horribly wrong and I was left to raise the Bean all alone I would be reminded every day of what I'd lost; who I'd lost.

*But looking down at her now, if anything, I only loved her even more because of it.*

Her eyelids were still fused closed but I could make out the tiny blond eyelashes and eyebrows, so I had no doubts there were baby blues in there just waiting to talk me into whatever her little heart desired and I found my own hand tentatively reaching down to hover just above her, both afraid to yet wanting to touch the living breathing evidence of the best thing I'd ever done.

When her little fist shot forward again I lightly touched her hand with my pinky just as she started to draw it back and I gasped out loud when her fist opened up with those tiny little fingers wrapping around my own. If Sookie had been there I was sure she would giggle out an, *'I told ya so,'* because feeling her firm little grasp that wasn't even big enough to fully circle my finger, I instantly became completely wrapped around *her* little finger and knew there was nothing I wouldn't do for her.

*No matter what fate had in store for us, I would do whatever I had to do to give my baby girl a happy life.*

I could only hope there would be an *'I told ya so'* in my future and while I didn't even want to consider the possibility of losing Sookie, I knew now I would have to survive it if only for the Bean's sake. She wasn't anywhere close to being out of the woods herself, but her strong grasp continued to hold my finger firmly in her tiny little hand and I knew with my whole heart our daughter was a fighter.

*Just like her mother.*

Nor was she letting go.

*Just like her father.*

So while I waited on hearing any news about Sookie, with the tears having yet to stop falling from my eyes, I couldn't help but smile down at our baby girl and whisper, "Happy Birthday Bean."

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## **Chapter 113: Chapter 110**

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### Chapter 110

#### **SPOV**

I could feel myself hovering on the edge of consciousness with my head swimming in a massive fog, but I tried to fight my way through it, rather than allow myself to slip back down into the depths of sleep, not yet knowing why I should but knowing that I must. Everything was a haze in my mind and I tried to piece together the little bits that were slowly coming back to me, but it wasn't until I was finally able to open my eyes that the beeping noise I could hear made sense now seeing I was lying in a hospital room bed. Eric was asleep in a chair by my side with his head resting on the mattress, but I didn't know why I was there. The last thing I could remember



was being in the ER with the doctor doing an ultrasound and my hands automatically moved to my baby bump only to feel the deflated skin where it should have been instead.

A hoarse cry left my lips with the words, "No no no no no..." tumbling after them and tears streamed from my eyes down into the pillow underneath me while I pushed down on my empty belly only confirming my worst fears.

Eric jerked awake next to me, asking, "Sookie?" but I was too far gone to answer him and cried out in choking sobs, "I'm so sorry. It's all my fault we lost our baby."

My legs tried to pull up as I attempted to curl into a ball on my side facing away from him, but feeling the pain in my abdomen, I cried even harder now knowing why it was there. I couldn't understand how Eric could even stand to be in the same room with me, much less why he was sliding into the bed behind me, but the only thing my mind could register was the pain knowing our baby was gone.

*And it was all my fault.*

If only I'd listened to Eric and not left without having someone with me. If only I'd noticed Bill following me all of those months ago. If only I'd realized the blond pregnant lady was really Debbie Pelt in disguise.

I was quickly descending into a darkness I never knew had existed within me when I heard Eric bark out, "Sookie!" and my eyes tried to focus through the blurry tears to see he'd moved me so that I was once again lying on my back, with him now hovering over the top of me, and his face was inches from mine. His eyes were red rimmed and bloodshot, only magnifying the tears that fell from them now, and I felt the stabbing pain rip through my chest knowing I'd made them that way. I tried to croak out another, "I'm sorry," but his finger landed on my lips to silence them. I couldn't blame him though.

*How can someone adequately apologize for killing their baby.*

"She's alive."

*What?*

I was so sure my mind was playing tricks on me; hearing only what I was desperate to hear and lulling me into a false sense of relief only so the rug would later be ripped out from underneath me, but his smile told me otherwise and my mouth formed the words before my head could fully comprehend any of it, asking, "She?"

*The Bean was a she?*

"She," he smiled wider, "is beautiful and looks exactly like you." More tears fell from his eyes, adding, "We have a daughter."

I was afraid to believe what I was hearing and choked out, "But...how? It's too soon."

He moved one of his hands and cupped the air in between us, saying, "She would fit perfectly right here, but she's strong. She's a little fighter." That same hand moved to cup the side of my face and his eyes looked down into mine as he said, "Just like her mother."

A million questions fought their way to get out at once while my mind tried to wrap around the fact that I was a mother. I'd always known the end result would make me one, but I'd stupidly believed I would have more time to prepare for it however I doubted any amount of time could prepare anyone for the reality of becoming a parent until it actually happened.

Since my voice had gone silent from my brain being locked up, Eric leaned down and gently kissed my lips, but his tears were streaming down harder when he pulled back again whispering, "I love you so much. I thought I was going to lose you, but you fought your way back to me." I didn't know what he was talking about and my eyes must have said so because he continued, "You could have died. The doctor told me when they first took you into surgery they weren't sure but had assumed the placenta had torn away from your uterine wall in the accident, but when they cut you open and could actually see, it turned out it had, but just barely. Any other time they could've waited and just monitored you and the baby so she'd have a chance to get bigger before trying to deliver her, but you developed something called Acquired Hemophilia A. It's rare, but it sometimes happens in pregnant women and isn't usually diagnosed until there's some sort of trauma or the baby is born. Your blood wouldn't clot, so you were literally bleeding to death, but they managed to figure it out quickly and got it under control."

It was just one more thing for me to feel guilty about and seeing the lingering worry on his face I choked out another, "I'm sorry."

"It wasn't your fault," he shushed. "The odds of it happening are like one in a million."

The odds. Our entire relationship was one made up of impossible odds and yet we continued to beat the house every damn time.

*Hopefully our luck would hold out and extend to include the Bean in our good fortune.*

Thoughts of her had the most pressing of my questions come through with me asking, "Where is she? Can we go see her?"

I tried to sit up, but Eric was in my way and he gently pushed me back down, saying, "The doctor needs to check on you first."

"Can you go get them for me?" I asked, suddenly feeling rushed. I wanted to see her more than I'd ever wanted anything and didn't want to wait, but knowing she was all alone, I added, "Why don't you go sit with her while they're doing that? I don't want her to be alone."

She wasn't used to it. She was used to using my bladder as a punching bag and I felt the tears well up again knowing it was my fault she no longer could, but Eric's next words distracted me as he said, "She's not alone. Gran is with her."

"What? Gran? How?"

Eric carefully maneuvered himself over the tubes and wires attached to me as he climbed off of the bed, answering, "Pam took care of it all. She called Jason on their way down here and had him go tell Gran what was going on before she saw it on the news. It was already too late for them to get a flight last night, but they flew in first thing this morning and my dad picked them up at the airport. They've been here for a couple of hours now."

It felt surreal to find out so much had happened while I'd been out of it, but I was grateful that we had such a close knit family, which also included Pam as far as I was concerned, and even more tears managed to fall from my eyes knowing they were there. In the back of my mind I'd been worried, given Gran's age, that she might not ever get to meet her great-grandbaby and while I would've rather had the Bean stay inside of me until she was supposed to come into this world, I couldn't help but be a little happy that Gran got to meet her.

"She's okay though?" I asked. "The Bean? She's so small," I added looking at what had until then been Eric's massive size hands, but the thought of a baby fitting inside of one made them seem incredibly small now.

"One pound nine ounces," Eric said as he took his phone out from his pocket and smiled down at it before turning it so I could see and the tears flooded down my cheeks again. It was a picture of Eric's left hand gently cupping the side of what was surely the world's smallest baby and he was right; she would easily fit inside of it. His Sookie tattoo would likely completely encircle her upper thigh, but when he flipped to the next picture showing me a close up shot of her face I smiled through the tears and found it within me to argue with him just a little, saying, "You're wrong. She looks just like you."

*It only made sense the most beautiful man, five motherfucking times thank you very much, would make the most beautiful baby.*

"Clearly you're still loopy from the drugs," he sniffled at my side. "Our daughter is the spitting image of her beautiful mother."

*Our daughter.*

It seemed more real now that I was staring down at her tiny little face, but my gooey insides churned when he said, "She's got a few hurdles to overcome from being born so early. Her lungs weren't fully developed yet, but they said she let out a wail when they first took her out of you. Brain bleeds are apparently common, but she seems okay for now and it'll take some time for her lungs and intestinal tract to fully mature. If everything goes well, we should be able to take her home in a few months."

*A few months.*

I knew Eric would be leaving in less than three weeks and would then be gone for six weeks after that, but even though I wanted to cry all over again at the thought of him leaving and having to worry about our little girl all alone from halfway around the world, I knew it would be hard enough on him and didn't want to add to his misery. I took a few deep breaths and when I knew I could keep my voice in check, I said as casually as I could, "Good. At least you should be back from Greenland in time for us to come home."

I assumed we were still somewhere near San Diego, but there was no way I was leaving our daughter there all by herself and figured I would stay at the hospital and just get a hotel room, if I had to, to sleep and shower every day.

"Sookie," he huffed incredulously, so I turned to look at him as he finished, "I'm not going to Greenland."

"But..." I interrupted. He'd signed a contract. It wasn't like he was a bit player in the movie. He basically *was* the movie and appeared in practically every scene.

"But nothing," he replied. "After Pam got off of the phone with Jason she called Madden and told him what was going on and once the baby was born, she got back on the phone and told him I would let him know when I was ready to resume filming."

"Can you do that?" All I could imagine was some massive lawsuit looming over our heads in addition to everything we were already facing, but I was willing to go through it if it meant that he would be staying.

His eyes narrowed back at me before he smiled and said, "*Pam* can do that. As soon as Madden started huffing over the phone she threatened him and the studio heads with a publicity nightmare. Everything we've gone through over the last twenty-four hours has been blaring through the news nonstop. I had to tell the hospital staff to start turning away all of the deliveries sent by well wishers and had them send the flowers to the local nursing homes with all of the toys and stuffed animals going straight to the pediatric floor here at the hospital. The whole country is pulling for us, so it wouldn't be in Madden's or the studio's best interests to try and force me into doing anything right now. I'll go back to it later, when both of you are healthy and home. Nothing else matters to me."

Tears filled my eyes again with the relief sweeping through my body, but now that our daughter was here and we knew she was a *she* it didn't feel right to keep calling her the Bean. We hadn't decided on any names though, so after Eric got up and spoke to the nurse who'd just come into the room to check on me, asking if we could see the doctor, I asked, "Have you thought about any names for her? We can't keep calling her the Bean."

Eric's expression instantly changed into a guilty one and he took a deep breath and said, "I kind of already named her."

I was surprised, more than anything, since he hadn't been dead set on any name in particular for a boy or girl (so long as we didn't call them Eric Junior, Jack, or Pam), but seeing how worried he looked had me smiling encouragingly at him, asking, "And what did you name her?"

I was sure there were a lot of mothers who might not take too kindly to their husbands naming their children without any say so from them, but after everything I put Eric through in the last day I was determined not to give him grief over anything. It helped ease my mind somewhat that he seemed just as put off by the oddball names some celebrities named their kids, so I wasn't worried our daughter would be saddled with a name like Kraken.

*We might as well just name her Eric Junior.*

"Lilly," he said hesitantly. "Lilly Adele Northman."

I had a feeling I knew why he'd chosen that name and was surprised it hadn't occurred to me before then, but I wanted to hear it from him and smiled back asking, "Why Lilly?"

"From the book," he admitted sheepishly. "When I woke up from the coma you had filled my room with lilies, but I couldn't do that here in the ICU, so I thought if I named her Lilly...I don't know...that you'd somehow know and come back to us."

*Oh...my Master Wooer was back.*

Even though I'd expected an answer like the one he'd given me, tears streamed down my face as I started sobbing all over again, but Eric misconstrued my reaction and rushed out, "We can change it! We can name her whatever you want!"

I tried to form the words to tell him I loved her name, but what came out instead was, "I love you."

His relief was evident and he gently wrapped me up in his embrace, saying, "I love you too." When all I could do was continue to ruin his shirt, he asked, "You're okay with her name?" and at my nod against his chest, he said, "Good, but I'll admit I had an ulterior motive in naming her so quickly." I pulled away wondering what it could be when he smiled and said, "You know Pam. If I didn't jump on that quick we'd likely be taking home Pamela Ravenscroft Northman in a few months."

He shivered dramatically like it would be the worst thing ever and it was enough to make me chuckle through my tears, but they didn't truly stop until I heard someone clearing their voice and pulled away to see, I assumed, my doctor standing in the doorway. He came forward, watching me wipe away the tears, but seeing the smile on my face, he smiled in return and said, "Well, your tear ducts are in working order, so that's one thing I can check off my list."

He introduced himself as the surgeon who had operated on me the day before and then told me to call him Ben as he explained everything that had happened during the surgery while he checked my sutures. He told me I would have to stay in the hospital for at least a week so they could

monitor my blood while they continued to give me the necessary medications, but said whatever it was they had pumped into my blood stream during the surgery had worked to help counteract the AHA I'd developed. If all went well, it could disappear entirely, but I'd have to follow up with my regular doctor for several months and if I were to become pregnant again, it would be something my OB/GYN would have to be on the lookout for, although I wouldn't necessarily get it again. One baby was more than enough for me right now, so it wasn't even something worth worrying about at the moment. I was just happy she was doing well and once he was done with his examination, he jotted some notes into my chart while the nurse removed everything from my body but the IV line I would have to take with me. My legs were still wobbly and the pain I felt where my incision was wasn't too bad, so they both helped me into a wheelchair the nurse had brought into the room with her, but before he could leave I looked up at him and started crying all over again, saying, "Thank you for saving our baby."

Never mind the fact he was quick enough to realize in time to save me that I had some rare blood disorder, my first priority was the wellbeing of our baby, but he took it in stride and smiled kindly at me while he joked, "Are you kidding? I'm like a Rock Star right now. My value has gone up exponentially all because I helped Eric Northman's baby, so you're lucky you got in on the ground floor because I think my rates are about to go up."

I managed to snort out a laugh through the tears and Eric smiled as he shook his hand one last time before he wheeled me towards the NICU, but we only got as far as the waiting room when I realized that when Eric had said 'they' were here, he didn't mean just Gran and Jason. The room was filled with Pam, Amelia, Tray, Sam, Terry, Alcide, Holly, Lafayette, Jason, and Eric's dad and while they all greeted me at once, it was Jason that pounced on me, saying, "Sook!" as he wrapped his arms around me. The tears in his eyes when he pulled away again only unleashed my own, but his snarl looked out of place and sadly the first thing that came to my mind was wondering if someone had stolen his Shitter idea, until he said, "That fucker is lucky he died in the fall or else I woulda taken my time killing him."

*Oh yeah. Bill.*

Seeing the look in his eyes, I didn't doubt him for one second, but we had bigger things to worry about now and feeling Eric tense up at my side had me reaching out and taking his hand as I answered, "He's gone. That's all that matters now."

I hated that he got half of his demented wish to come true with me no longer being pregnant, but it only seemed fitting that our daughter was giving him one giant 'fuck you' by living in spite of it all. It made me wonder just how much she could understand while in utero because she might look like her father, but that attitude was all me.

"Fuck that," Jason snarled as he stood up and started pacing the room. I hadn't noticed until then just how truly angry he was. I'd seen him pissed off many times before then, but mostly it was when his favorite football team had lost or a bird had dared to shit on his precious truck after he'd just washed it.

*He didn't get the irony when I laughed every time since he used a cloth diaper to wax it.*

Finally he stopped and faced Eric, asking, "What about that Debbie Pelt bitch? I never thought I'd hit a woman, but it sounds like a pretty fucking good idea right about now."

"I'm in," Pam chimed in, with Eric adding, "Me too," and the rest of the crowd seemingly started to form their own lynch mob, so rather than letting them all get themselves worked up enough to go out and get arrested (because I wasn't leaving the hospital so they'd all just have to sit in jail), I turned to Eric's dad and changed the subject by asking, "Have you gotten a chance to see your granddaughter yet?"

His whole face lit up as he smiled back at me, saying, "I have. Prettiest little baby I've ever seen."

Hearing him say that seemed to pull Pam back from her premeditation and she smiled wide, saying, "Just wait until you see the clothes I'm having made for her! Baby Pam will be the chicest baby on the planet."

"Baby Pam?" I asked with a smile. Eric had been rightfully worried in naming the baby quick since we both knew how *influential* Pam could be and I hoped she was just kidding, but I wouldn't put it past her to have had a whole new birth certificate done while a small part of me was left wondering if she had her own little sweatshop set up somewhere making tiny little haute couture.

*To Pam, the word 'pamper' did not equate 'diapers'.*

Eric squeezed my hand drawing my eyes back up to him just as he said, "They don't know her name yet. I wanted you to be the first one to know."

"What's her name?" all of them asked in chorus.

My movie star husband seemed to suddenly feel shy in the spotlight, so I tugged on his hand and smiled at him saying, "You tell them. You were the mastermind behind it."

He smiled back at me before looking at the expectant faces in front of us, saying, "Lilly Adele Northman."

Recognition appeared in two sets of eyes with the rest of them saying how much they liked it. It didn't surprise me Eric's dad would know the significance and I'd since explained it to Pam, after Eric had come home from the hospital, on why I had insisted on playing the whales songs and filled his room with lilies.

"I love it," I heard in a voice rising above the rest and coming from the doorway. It was one I hadn't heard in person since just after Christmas and I turned to see Gran standing there beaming. My waterworks started up all over again and she walked over shushing me and saying, "We'll have none of that now. Are you feeling alright?" I nodded against her shoulder and inhaled her unique scent which always worked wonders on making me feel better, so in pure Gran no

nonsense fashion, she added, "Good. Now you need to pull yourself together so you're not dripping tears all over my great-grandbaby."

"How is she Gran?" I asked, more anxious than ever to see her.

"Why she's perfect, of course," she chuckled back at me while wiping the tears from my eyes. "Now go on and get in there. Your baby girl needs to meet her momma."

*Momma.*

I was suddenly overcome with fear and anxiety over the concept. It was one thing to become a mother to a perfectly healthy baby, but ours wasn't and she would need the best care possible. I was such a fuck up I couldn't even keep her inside of me long enough for her to be ready to be born and in my fear, I whispered so only Gran could hear, "What if I do something else wrong? I've already messed up which is why she's here to begin with. I'm scared I won't be good enough for her. "

"Baby girl, you did nothing wrong," she whispered back at me. "Every new parent is afraid of messing up, but children are resilient. Your baby girl has a few extra hurdles to overcome, but she's got some strong Stackhouse genes her and it won't do anyone any good to focus on what you can't change. There's an old saying that goes, 'God didn't promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way.' Look around you Sookie. Everyone in the room is here with you, for you, and will do anything you need, but even without any of them you have Eric. That man loves you both, so when you need to let him be your strength, give you comfort, and light your way and, when he needs it, you do all of those things for him."

She sounded so confident I only hoped it would somehow rub off on me. I was still scared of doing something else wrong and while I was nowhere near as saintly as Mother Theresa, a quote from her popped into my mind.

*'I know God will not give me anything I can't handle. I just wish He didn't trust me so much.'*

I had a sudden urge to stand up and shout 'Can I get a witness?', but rather than do that I steeled myself and tried to muster up some of the confidence everyone else seemed to have in me, finally asking Eric if he would take me to go see her. We left them all in the waiting room as he wheeled me to the NICU where he helped me scrub my hands, careful of the PICC line inserted in my arm, all the way up to my elbows at the sink and then brought me into the darkened room. Amongst the nurses were several other sets of parents spread out at various incubators, all with worry etched onto their faces, but they each managed to give me a soft smile and my tears tried to fight their way free again when I realized then that I'd become a member of a very special group. Whatever the reasons behind it all, none of us got to experience the happiness that came with giving birth to a healthy baby, but seeing the underlying determination on their faces made my own resolve solidify. I would do whatever I had to, to see our baby through this, but the battle with my tears was lost as soon as Eric pulled me up alongside one incubator in particular however I managed to keep the sobs inside of me not wanting to startle her with my cries.



She looked so tiny lying in the middle of a nest made up of blankets and my heart ached seeing how vulnerable she was with the guilt over my failure of keeping her safely inside of me quickly eating away at me.

"I'm sorry," I whispered, both to her and her father. I'd give anything to be able to change it all; anything to balloon up like one of Eric's beloved whales if it would mean she would still be safe and sound inside of me where she belonged instead of lying there covered in wires with tubes giving her what my body had been in order for her to grow.

Even knowing how much Eric loved me, I couldn't understand how he didn't hate me right now seeing what I'd done to our daughter, but his hand was suddenly on my cheek pulling my face to meet his as he knelt down beside me. Wiping away my tears, he said firmly, "Stop it. It's not your fault. It's that asshole's fault and no one else's. Neither one of us could have known just how psycho either one of them were, but it's done now. We need to concentrate on getting you and our daughter healthy, so no more guilt. Okay?"

That was easier said than done, but I was still awestruck by Eric's demeanor. My panicked husband of the day before had changed into a calm steadfast father, literally, overnight.

*Thank God one of us had their shit together.*

Hopefully the day would come when our roles were reversed and I could calm *him* down when Lilly was going out on her first date, but thinking about it drew my eyes back to her and I pushed away every feeling but the love I had for both of them as I softly laughed, asking, "Have you already called the contractors for our poor Rapunzel? They could film it and call it, 'The Eric Northman Compound: Tower Edition.'"

He laughed softly at my side and agreed, "Yep. A moat too, so the next time we're in Louisiana we need to scout out a few alligator farms."

We watched as her little arms and legs flailed around, seemingly in protest to her father's renovation plans, before settling back down again and my breath hitched in my throat seeing it, but unable to feel it. The guilt was still there, but I kept it to myself and thankfully Eric spoke up, saying softly and without remorse, "I'm warning you now, I'm going to be next to impossible; overbearing and completely insufferable when it comes to either one of you."

I couldn't really blame him after everything that had happened and after living through the last day or so, it seemed my inner feminist had packed her shit up and gone home. Maybe with some time and space from the horrors we'd faced we would feel differently in the future, but for right now I needed a next to impossible overbearing completely insufferable Eric at my side. I wasn't strong enough to do this on my own and I was grateful I didn't have to. I knew it was only because he loved us that he felt that way and I loved him even more because of it, so I took his hand in my own and simply said, "Sounds good to me."

"Can I get that in writing?" he chuckled next to me.

"Got a pen?" I asked while staring down at our little girl and feeling every bit as fragile as she looked.

*How could I argue over giving ourselves over to the one person who loved us more than anything when I'd already given myself to Eric long before the ink would ever have the chance to dry.*

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## Chapter 114: Chapter 111

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### Chapter 111

#### EPOV

I let my eyes close as soon as we turned to get onto the freeway to head back to San Diego now that I'd fulfilled my promise, or rather *Pam's* promise, for me to give the station their exclusive interview on the events the day Sookie had been kidnapped a month earlier. It had been hard to talk about and I did my best to try and remain detached, reciting the events as though they'd played out in a movie and hadn't happened to the two people I loved more than life itself, but I managed to get through it only because I was so grateful for their help that day knowing if I hadn't gotten the ride on their helicopter, I never would've made it in time to see Sookie before she'd been wheeled into surgery.

So much had happened in that short amount of time that it was hard to remember what life was like before Lilly had been born. Sookie and I'd had no choice but to quickly assimilate and we now knew more about preemies along with the necessary medical jargon than we could have imagined possible, but seeing her grow stronger every day made it all worthwhile however, for me at least, the biggest change of all had been Sookie herself.

I hadn't been kidding when I'd warned her that day about my protective instincts rearing its head, but surprisingly enough, she hadn't been kidding when she'd agreed to accept it. By the very next day I'd hired her new bodyguard from the reputable Flood Agency and instead of getting angry – like a part of me had expected – as soon as she'd met Rasul, she shook his hand welcoming him into our fold, and then looked back at me asking where was mine. I almost balked at the suggestion I needed my own bodyguard and even though we knew of no other threats to either one of us now that Debbie Pelt was locked up, I figured it couldn't hurt which was why I could rest on the drive back to San Diego now that Mustafa Khan was in the driver's seat. Neither him nor Rasul were overtly huge, with their bodies leaning towards the lean edge of the spectrum, but their resumes were impressive with each of them having served in the military and I got the feeling it was one of those situations where if they'd told me all that they'd done they would have to kill me.

*I was curious, but not THAT curious.*

They also didn't hold back in ganging up on us and giving us both a very professional ass chewing once they learned of everything that had led up to that fateful day, not only for ignoring our own instincts with both Compton and Pelt, but for ignoring Bubba's warnings as well and considering how everything had played out, we couldn't really argue with them. He seemed to instinctually know neither one of them could be trusted and once I got him back from Terry and Sam, who had been taking care of him in the first few days after Lilly was born, Rasul and Mustafa had begun taking turns working with him some more, with both of them having worked with canines while they were in the military. Both were impressed by his natural abilities and Bubba just seemed to be happy he had two new friends, even if his snoring coming from the backseat at that moment didn't show it.

Once Sookie had officially been discharged from the hospital, a little over a week after she'd been admitted, and Lilly hadn't had any major setbacks, Gran and Jason had both gone home to Louisiana two weeks after their arrival, but there was still a steady stream of support at the hospital most days from our friends coming to visit and my father chose to stay in San Diego for the time being. The only times he drove back to L.A. were to attend his AA meetings. I'd never been more grateful to have him back in my life and his love for his granddaughter nearly surpassed our own. 'Completely smitten' was what Sookie had said when she'd seen the two of them together and she was right, but it wasn't something I'd ever expected to see from him. Hell, nothing of my life now was anything I had ever expected to have – much less thought I would've wanted, but I wouldn't trade any of it now. I shuddered to imagine what my life would have been like had I never met Sookie – with my potential future guest appearances offering commentary on assorted World's Dumbest videos coming to mind – and could only be grateful that she'd saved me.

*From myself.*

Even though the movie was on hold for now, the sitcom I technically still currently starred in and its future was in the forefront. The producers had been gently pressuring Pam for an answer on whether or not I'd be back for the upcoming season and we'd had a business lunch with them earlier that afternoon while I was in L.A. where they'd even gone so far as to offer to make concessions for the movie's filming schedule while bumping up my salary – thanks to my skyrocketing popularity which they wanted to capitalize on, but I was still undecided. We didn't really need the money, especially if I could get a decent movie role once a year, but I wanted to talk to Sookie about it all before I made any decisions. After everything we'd been through, the thought of moving to Bon Temps for the majority of the year was sounding better and better, but there hadn't been any time for us to discuss any of it yet. I also had to consider the rest of the cast and crew. While shows got canceled all of the time with little or no notice, I knew there were a lot of other people counting on the show coming back for another season. Part of me felt selfish for wanting to bail on them, but a larger part of me wanted to spend time with my family. And Sookie hadn't even said whether or not she wanted to go back to work at some point and while I didn't think she'd want to go back anytime soon, it was still a concern. I'd been too chicken shit to ask her knowing if I didn't like her answer it would lead to a fight and neither one of us was in the right mindset for that to happen. We were both still too raw over everything and all of our time and energy went into making sure Lilly was doing okay.

Thankfully she hadn't had any setbacks and every Sunday following her birth, Sookie would take a new picture of her with my hand alongside her tiny body – a replica of her first photo – to gauge her growth. It made us feel better actually *seeing* her progress when we would compare the most recent with the first since we spent so much time with her it was hard to tell with just our eyes, no matter what her weight on her chart said. She was growing, arguably looking more and more like her mother every day, and we'd been on 'Big Blue Watch' waiting for her eyes to open, but she was stubborn – also like her mother – and hadn't given us a peek yet, which was ironic considering her little pink blindfold had "No Peeking!" on the front. She still needed help breathing, but we'd been assured her lungs were developing normally and we'd been told once she could breathe on her own and she gained a little more weight, we would finally be able to hold her. In the meantime all we could do was hold our breath and pray like mad that our luck would hold out and we could take her home in a couple of months.

If my father could be described as 'completely smitten' with Lilly, then I was that times a thousand. I loved her more than I thought possible and I could easily spend hours just gazing at her memorizing every little detail, counting every breath she took and cataloging every twitch she made. She slept a lot, but seemed to recognize our voices – especially Sookie's – by turning her head a little towards the sound whenever we talked to her when she was awake and her coloring was getting better now that she was starting to get bigger. It felt like she'd been there forever and yet time seemed to have flown by at the same time, but I was anxious to get her healthy and home. I wanted the midnight feedings and bleary-eyed days – the giggles and tantrums signaling her toddler years had commenced – because it would mean she was out of the woods and it couldn't happen soon enough.

Once she was stable enough we'd discussed the possibility of having her transferred to Cedars, so we'd be closer to home, but it only took all of five seconds before it became clear that neither one of us wanted to do it. The staff in the NICU knew her – knew us – and had become like an extended family of sorts. The hospital had their own security measures in place to guard all of the newborns, but we had our own temporary team that kept watch outside of the NICU twenty-four hours a day. After everything that had happened, we were both being as careful as possible, but the staff understood our need to have our own measures in place if only for our own peace of mind. The nurses were extra protective of Lilly too knowing the press was clamoring to get a picture of her and while we'd gotten to know some of the other parents in the NICU, having a bodyguard in the NICU at all times seemed overbearing for everyone involved, so they kept an eye out – just in case – to make sure no one tried to get that world exclusive shot and Sookie and I decided together we would be staying put until we could all go home together.

Everything about our lives now was so different from what it had been. While Sookie and I were together nearly 24/7, it felt like there was a wedge between us and I didn't like it, but I didn't know how to make it go away either. We were both exhausted the majority of the time – most of the time we both had to be reminded to eat – and I was sure a lot of it had to do with our focus being solely on Lilly, so it made me feel guilty for missing 'the old Sookie' like I did, but my guilt didn't stop there.

Even though Compton had been stalking her weeks before we'd ever met – my stomach still turned remembering the photos the police had shown us they'd found on his computer that he'd

secretly taken of Sookie – I still felt responsible for it all. I was the one that had invited him into our home. I was the one that had not so good-naturedly mocked him for years for bedding my cast-offs. In his mind, I'd stolen Sookie out from under him and I guessed I had – even if she never would've given him the time of day otherwise – but it didn't make me feel any less culpable. I should've known Debbie Pelt was a danger and questioned who she was just based on the fact she'd knocked on our front door. After hearing Jason's tale of his unsuccessful pickup in the bar, I should've sought her out when I spotted her in the airport when we were leaving Shreveport and put two and two together instead of flying off. I should've paid attention to Bubba's warnings when we'd come across her outside of the coffee shop. If I had – considering how chatty she was with me – she may have told me about Compton's plans any one of those times. None of this ever would've happened and instead of our daughter being in the NICU, she'd be safely tucked away in Sookie's belly where she belonged while I would be freezing my ass off at the North Pole.

*It was a trade I would gladly make.*

Nothing could change any of it now though, so I didn't my best to let it go and just concentrate on our future. It had been the first time I'd been away from both Sookie and Lilly for such an extended period of time – and with it brought a fresh wave of guilt since I felt rested just from the change in scenery, but the ache I felt in my chest lessened with every mile we got closer to San Diego until I was nearly bouncing in my seat by the time we made it back to the hotel we were staying in. The hospital was less than five minutes away so we could be there at a moment's notice, but since it was already after nine, it was too late for me to see Lilly again – I'd spent a couple of hours with her that morning before I had to leave – and I knew Sookie would be back in our room by then. I'd taken Bubba with us for the day since he didn't get to go many places lately and once he was done doing his business outside, we went in and all piled into the elevator.

Since Jason and Gran had gone home two weeks earlier, we now only had five rooms booked for the foreseeable future with two of the rooms usually having my father in one and Pam, or some other visitor, in the other. Sookie and I shared a suite with Rasul occupying the room directly across from ours (so he could see anyone at our door) and Mustafa used the one on the other side of us that had a connecting door to our room in case he needed to swoop in movie-action-hero style to put a beat down on whatever fucking nut-job came at us next. Sadly, I'd learned my lesson the hard way and wanted to be ready for any eventuality. I called it being prepared.

*The looks Sookie gave me told me she called it being paranoid.*

She was surprisingly a good sport about it all though and let me do whatever my paranoid heart desired with no complaint whatsoever, but I was smart enough to know my free reign would only last so long. I couldn't lock her away forever, but we were both smart enough to know taking extra precautions wouldn't hurt either and neither one of us questioned any of Rasul's or Mustafa's security related suggestions.

Rasul was standing outside of our door when we made it to our floor, so I knew Sookie was in our room and after getting a quick uneventful report from him, I bid the two of them goodnight

and headed in. I didn't see her right away but I could hear the shower running and followed Bubba into the bedroom to see she'd left the door open, but instead of following him in there, I just said, "We're back," loud enough for her to hear and started getting changed. It had been so long since we'd been intimate at all and was probably the biggest cause of that wedge I felt, but I knew she was still recovering from the accident and from giving birth and wasn't enough of an asshole to try anything.

I could stare at her all day long and never get enough, but there was something decidedly sexier about her now that she was a mother. I didn't know if it was because I'd come so close to losing her or if it was because I'd been the one to make her a mother, but whenever I had her alone I had a hard time keeping my urges at bay.

*A hard time.*

I missed having that physical connection with her and from the way she sometimes kissed me goodnight I would guess she missed it too, but I always ended them before they got out of hand knowing it was too soon.

*And when she'd fall asleep, I'd run straight to the bathroom for a hook up with my right hand.*

I was already changed into a t-shirt and shorts by the time the water turned off – sleeping naked was no longer an option since rolling over and *into* her in the middle of the night was no longer an option – and it was only moments later when she appeared in the doorway in nothing but a towel and a smile, asking, "How did it go?"

If she'd been asking about my dick's reaction to seeing her, I'd say, "Straight up," but knowing she was asking about the interview I tried to ignore the tent I was currently pitching and shrugged, "Okay, I guess."

It was a taped spot that would be played on their parent company's morning news show, but I knew it was a big deal for the reporter himself to be the one to do the interview. I'd mostly shaken off the depressive feelings from reliving it all earlier that day, so instead of focusing on that and becoming maudlin all over again, I let my eyes focus on the drops of water that fell from her hair and onto her shoulders, trailing down her neck and into the towel.

*Depressed or horny – I couldn't decide which one was worse.*

Sookie didn't seem to notice and instead walked over to the dresser where she pulled out a tank top and shorts before walking back towards the bathroom, but just as she got to the door she let the towel fall off and I got a glimpse of what was underneath.

*Horny. Horny was definitely better.*

I gave my right hand a knowing look all while she chattered at me from the bathroom and I knew I should be paying attention, but all I could think about was what it would be like to get my hands – among other things – on her again. It made me feel a little guilty thinking of all of the

dirty things I had done – and was looking forward to doing again – to the mother of my child, but I couldn't help it.

*I knew I had 'mother' issues, but this was something else entirely.*

"What are you thinking?" she asked appearing in the doorway now dressed for bed.

*That it's time for a reunion for me and my BFF's?*

I missed them – a lot – and felt like an even bigger perv since I knew they made her uncomfortable ever since the birth and her breast milk had come in. She expressed it with a pump a few times a day so it could be given to Lilly, but I was more than willing to share.

"Eric?" she asked as she climbed into the bed beside me. "Are you okay?"

I knew I should say something – something that had nothing to do with sex; or lack of sex; or wanting sex, but now all I had was sex on the brain.

*Oh, and a hard-on to rival the flag raising on Iwo Jima. It was even leaning thanks to my shorts.*

"Yep," I lied. I knew it wasn't fair to her to get myself all worked up when she was likely tired and I couldn't really *take care* of her needs since she had yet to be cleared by the doctor. She was still taking medication for the hemophilia but her prognosis was good – thank God – and she was moving around a lot better than she had been since the surgery, but I wouldn't feel better until we got the all clear from the doctor. I also wouldn't chance having sex again without birth control since it seemed my sperm were like heat seeking missiles with her eggs locked in their sights.

*And then she wrapped herself around me so that my other heat seeking missile gave her leg a warning that it was loaded and ready to fire.*

"So then why are you all tense?" she asked, snuggling even more against my side.

The fact that she had to ask told me it was too soon for any kind of sex to occur since her early warning radar system – which worked without fail for the last six months – was on the fritz, so rather than admit to all systems being a 'go for launch' and risk upsetting her, I lied again and forced out a yawn, saying, "I'm just tired."

The fact that she was just out of the shower meant that her cherry scented skin and hair was more pungent than usual which only served to turn me on more. I associated that scent with Sookie which meant I associated that scent with sex which meant my case of blue balls was only going to get more painful until she fell asleep and I could do something about it, but if that was the worst of my problems, I could live with it.

*Because I still had her.*

It was two weeks later when we were getting ready to leave for the hospital when Sookie said, "Don't let me forget that I have my follow-up appointment this afternoon."

I hadn't forgotten, nor would I, because I wanted to know that she was one hundred percent healthy.

*And if she wanted to celebrate with a night full of orgasms, I was more than okay with that too.*

But, I didn't want her to think that was my primary concern – because really, it wasn't – so I just replied, "Okay," while pulling my shoes on. When I stood up I noticed she was looking at me oddly, making me ask, "What?"

Her eyebrows were furrowed and her lips were pursed like she was trying to figure something out before she looked away and said, "Nothing."

I didn't think much of it until I saw her discreetly wipe her hand across her eyes, so I walked over and turned her by her shoulders seeing her eyes were glassy with unshed tears. "What's wrong?" I asked, pulling her into my arms.

"Nothing," she mumbled against my chest.

"Liar," I softly accused. We'd both shed our fair share of tears lately, but she was nowhere near as bad as she had been when she was pregnant, so something had to be bothering her.

"It's just..." she paused as her breath hitched in her throat.

I waited for a few more seconds, but when she didn't say anymore I finally prodded, "It's just what?"

"I just...do you..." After another moment she blew out a deep breath, saying, "Never mind. I'm just being stupid," and tried to pull away, but I wasn't willing it make it easy on her knowing *something* was wrong, so I refused to let her out of my arms, saying, "Just tell me."

When she realized I was like The Borg and resistance was futile, she looked up at me with a fire in her eyes that I hadn't seen in six very long weeks and huffed out, "Fine. You want to know what's wrong? I'll tell you what's wrong. What's wrong is that you don't touch me anymore. I know we've both been tired and all and for the first couple of weeks after Lilly was born they could've used me up in the rafters for the remake of 'Carrie' on prom night with the amount of blood that was coming out of me. I get that and it's probably my fault too because it's not like I tried too hard to initiate any sexy time when I started feeling better, but the reason I didn't is because I just...I get the feeling that maybe you just don't see me the same now. I mean, you've been front row center for my most non-sexy moments ever and you're probably scarred for life, but you're still sexy as all get out and I still want you. *Obviously* I still want you because I've at least tried to get your motor running when I've kissed you goodnight, but you always pull back, so I feel gross and unattractive and now you're stuck with me and I don't know if I should even bother to ask my doctor about birth control."



From her tone and facial expressions, she didn't know whether to be angry, frustrated, or sad. It was easy to spot considering I was feeling all of the same things only I had amusement added to the mix. She hadn't really fully been herself in the weeks after the accident, but now she was exactly like the little spitfire I remembered and it was turning me on.

*So I attacked her lips with my own.*

I knew I surprised her, but she only kissed me back for a few seconds before she started pushing against me, arguing, "No! I don't want a pity kiss. I know you love me, but if you don't want me like that right now, I don't..."

Her words trailed off as soon as I grabbed her hand and – in a very ungentlemanly fashion – shoved it down the front of my pants so she could feel the evidence herself how much *I still wanted her like that*. I grabbed a hold of her face, not trying to hide the smirk on my own seeing her shock, and looked into her eyes, saying, "Not that I *was*, but I could *probably* fake a pity kiss, however there's no such thing as pity wood."

Even though she still looked a little stunned, that didn't stop her hand from automatically wrapping itself around me and stroking up as she asked, "There isn't?" I saw the twinkle in her eye right before my own rolled back – I was powerless to stop them – and she added, "No empathetic erections?"

"No," I sighed out relishing the feel of her hand touching me since it was so much better than my own.

My eyes had closed when I felt her other hand start undoing the buttons on my jeans with her asking, "So this isn't a case of consolation cock?"

I barely had the chance to open my eyes and force out something along the lines of, "Unh uh," when I watched her drop to her knees and kiss the tip of my cock before asking, "What's your stance on forgiveness fellatio?"

*All for it...*

There was no time for me to answer her before I was once again welcomed into the nirvana that was her mouth and while I loved the funny and dirty things that came out of it, I loved being *in it* a hell of a lot more. Our cumfessional was taking place in the center of the room, so there was nothing for me to hold onto other than her hair and I locked my knees hoping I wouldn't end up falling on top of her when the time came.

*Because I was about to.*

I'd been taking care of myself here and there, but that paled in comparison to what she could do for me – and to me – and I didn't have it in me to be even the tiniest bit embarrassed when it only took a couple of minutes before she hummed everything out me while I may have yanked a few

hairs out of her. Every thought in my head – both upper and lower – were gone, but one thought came back to me as soon as she stood up with a smile on her face.

*Our cumfessional worked both ways and it was time to pay penance to her pussy.*

She must have read it in my eyes because she caught my hands before I could grab onto her jeans, leaning up for a kiss, and saying, "There's no time, but if all goes well at my appointment later, you can settle up later on tonight."

For a moment I'd lost myself back to the days when we could – and often would – fuck all day long and while I wouldn't give up having Lilly for anything, I couldn't wait for those days to return.

*I was already flipping through my mental rolodex of babysitters so we could practice making a new one.*

As if she'd read my mind, Sookie said, "We should pick up condoms while we're out. I need to find out what our other options are for birth control, but regardless, none of them will be working by tonight."

She'd just swallowed who knows how many of Lilly's potential siblings, but knowing it was going to happen, that I'd finally get to be close to her again in the 'I get to see her naked while I'm naked and we'll do things to each other's nakedness' was just hours away made me euphoric.

*And horny, but really, that was nothing new.*

She giggled into my mouth when I swooped in for another kiss and she was the one to pull away first, saying we needed to go. Seeing Lilly (and picking up condoms) was the only thing to get me to leave our hotel room, but even with just our short but intense encounter, the wedge was gone. The tension in my shoulders, the weight in my chest disappeared altogether and it wasn't for the obvious reasons. While Sookie and I always held hands, now we were leaning in towards one another whereas before there was a bit of a distance. Neither one of us had stopped smiling since we left our room and it seemed to even be noticed by Rasul who'd been waiting for us in the hall. He was too professional to say anything, but it was there in his eyes and that's when I knew we'd shifted back to how we'd been before. Rasul didn't know us back then and things would never be exactly the same because now we had a baby girl and bodyguards, but the overall bliss I felt was exactly the same. It was like the cloud that had been hanging over us for so long was suddenly gone.

*Thank fuck for that.*

We dropped off Bubba with Mustafa and headed out, walking into the hospital only a few minutes later. Lilly had finally opened an eye a few days earlier and because Sookie liked to taunt me, she'd wondered aloud if Captain Jack had been in Vegas too since *my daughter* was imitating a pirate. She wasn't.

*She was winking at HER FATHER.*

We were guessing her eyes – or at least one eye – was blue, but honestly it seemed to be mostly made up of her pupil so it was hard to tell. I didn't care. I was just happy she had an eye and I was anxious to see the second one, but as we passed through the lobby and I spotted the little convenience store at the far end, I told Sookie I'd meet up with her in the NICU in a few minutes.

"I need to pick something up," I winked.

*Like MY DAUGHTER.*

Her eyes glazed over for a second before she remembered Rasul was standing there and she blushed, saying, "Okay. See you in a few," with them turning to head towards the elevators.

I turned towards the shop, not sure if they'd actually carry condoms, but it was a purchase I didn't want to forget to make. I was perusing the shelves while making a mental pornography of the things I was going to do to Sookie later on that night when I heard, "Eric?"

I didn't get bothered much at all at the hospital since I spent the majority of the time in the NICU where the only celebrities were in the incubators. Even coming and going, most of the people coming to the hospital had other more important things to worry about and getting my autograph or picture wasn't one of them, but there was still the occasional fan. My smile from earlier still hadn't left my face until I turned around to face the voice I hadn't recognized right away and just like that the cloud was back.

"Mom?"

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## **Chapter 115: Chapter 112**

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### Chapter 112

#### **SPOV**

As Rasul and I rode the elevator up to the NICU together I was in a bit of a daze, with an odd mixture of the chorus to R. Kelly's 'Sex Me' song playing in the background of my mind intermingled with scenes from The Hunt for Red October because my tube was definitely flooded and ready to fire Captain.

*So flooded I was lucky I didn't sound like a wet sneaker squeaking against a freshly polished floor when I walked.*

It was ri-*dick*-ulous how much I wanted Eric's, well...*dick*, but really – who could blame me? I mean, of course I loved him – was *in love* with him more than ever, but I'd be damned if I didn't

want to just lick, bite, and hump every square inch of him. And I'd done that very thing many many times, but it had been so long – too long – and I was slowly going insane from withdrawal.

And just thinking of the words *long* and *withdrawal* had my dirty mind and libido going into overdrive.

*You know, because those words brought to mind other ones like thick and thrusting.*

And I was sure I could hear my crotch go, '*Squeak squeak*,' as I stepped off of the elevator despite the fact it had been six weeks since my *floor* had been *polished*.

Looking back now, over the last few weeks, I felt like such a dunce for thinking Eric didn't want me anymore. It was hard to miss his periscope rising up from the sea of blankets searching for nearby targets, but when he systematically ignored my bull's eye every night and scuttled his ship, I couldn't help but wonder.

*Even Wicked and Immoral felt baffled.*

We'd gone from six straight months of constant flirting, groping, leering, and pawing at one another to *nothing* and while I rationally knew my health and everything else with Lilly factored into that, that didn't make going cold turkey any easier. It was his modus operandi – be it the morning after our drunken wedding night or his amnesia homecoming – and I'd come to not only expect that from Eric, but I craved it more than I knew and now that I had a little bounce to my step knowing the fucktential of the night was high, I may have left a few 'breadcrumbs' in my wake for him to follow my trail.

*Breadcrumbs – cum drops – one and the same, but at least I might get a warning on his advance when he stepped on one and the squeak from the sole of his sneakers rang out in the hallway.*

Besides his snub of my hub and my own fatigue most nights, the only other thing that had been holding me back from being more aggressive with him in bed had been my own worries over my changed appearance. I'd been no super model to begin with and I was pretty sure Eric had 'dated' a few – I refused to confirm this suspicion for my own sanity – so my sagging belly, the Wonder Twins who'd formed into the shape of leaky udders, and C-section scar did nothing for my self-esteem. In fact, the more I thought about it now, the more I thought a little light bondage might be a good idea if my appointment later on went well and the doctor gave me the thumbs up for pants down.

*If I tied Eric down and blindfolded him then he would be none the wiser that the amusement park he'd been riding had turned into a funhouse mirror.*

There wasn't much I could do about it now anyways except to hope that he'd still find me just as attractive with my clothes off as when my clothes were on. My hoohah was calling the shots at the moment and promised me she'd blind him with orgasms, so I'd just have to take her at her word, but just in case, I sent a little mental command for Wicked and Immoral to start preparing for battle.

*If everything went according to plan, tonight we'd be crossing over enemy lines to seize the Captain.*

As soon as we reached the doors of the NICU Rasul went to speak to one of the temporary guards that were keeping an eye on things at the hospital while I forced all sexy thoughts away for the time being and scrubbed up to go see our little girl. Eric was already afflicted with another type of blindness to not see that she looked *exactly* like him, but it was obvious to more than just me considering it was the first thing any of our friends said when they'd seen her. I didn't mind one bit and was happy she took after her World's Sexiest Daddy, but I had a feeling Eric wouldn't be liking it too much when she was old enough to start dating and I'd have to tie him down for real just so she could leave the house.

*Of course that didn't mean I wouldn't take advantage of his restrained body.*

We were still both worried about her health – she wasn't out of the woods yet, but I could see a light at the end of the tunnel. Lilly showed us every day how strong she was – a true fighter – and I was slowly starting to let myself believe that she'd be okay. I'd been terrified for her at first – like any parent would be – and I still worried now, but it almost felt like I'd be doing her a disservice if I dared to doubt her perseverance in surviving. Despite the horrific circumstances that brought her into the world too early, she was thriving against all odds and I was grateful our luck seemed to have been passed down to her.

My own guilt over it all still ate away at me, but I was getting better. It helped that Bill was dead, so I knew I'd never have to face him again and maybe had I known he'd been stalking me all along – if I'd lived with that fear and knowledge for all of those months – I might have been more traumatized about it all now than I was, but it was a catch-22. Having that knowledge beforehand might have made the difference in that he wouldn't have been able to kidnap me because I wouldn't have left Eric's side – ever, but it would have changed both me and Eric. Neither one of us would be the same people that we were now and while we each still had our moments of paranoia – and not always at the same time or over the same things – I imagined it was to be expected given our circumstances. Sometimes I still woke up in a cold sweat in the middle of the night having relived it all in a nightmare, but at our core we were still the same people we were the day before Lilly was born and seeing as how she was okay, it was hard not to view it as the lesser of two evils.

The love I had for her was something I couldn't have imagined possible and having her to focus on instead of the nightmare surrounding her birth was a godsend. I still had my doubts and fears about being a good mother, but they only made me want to strive to be a better person for her. The stupid little things that used to bother me no longer seemed important now that she was my focal point and I couldn't even find it within myself to feel guilty for not wanting to go back to work. I hadn't said anything to Eric about it yet, only because I wanted to be sure of my decision, but I honestly couldn't imagine leaving her in someone else's care while I went off to work for money we didn't need, thereby taking a paycheck away from someone else who *did*. Yes, I loved my students and felt a great sense of accomplishment whenever I knew I'd made a difference in their lives – no matter how large or small, but I loved Lilly more and the difference I wanted to make in *her* life by being there to experience it with her outweighed everything else. Gran busted

her ass in doing all that she could to give us a roof over our heads and food in our stomachs, so I knew enough to be grateful that I had a choice in being able to stay home knowing not every mother was as fortunate and walking into the NICU, I decided I would tell Eric my thoughts on the matter when he showed up. I knew all too well what his stance on the matter was and hoped his earlier blow job would help temper any potential need to explode with happiness over my no-more-job news.

*But the thought of him having to wear scrubs, instead of cum stained clothes, and playing 'doctor' with him definitely had its merits.*

Lilly was just as cute as ever when I walked up to her incubator and I would swear my heart grew just a little bit more every time I saw her. I was finally starting to see the difference in her growth over the last six weeks, but not so much from her size as her coloring. Her skin had been so thin that we could see every vein and artery underneath it with her looking like she was in a constant state of being pissed off since her skin was always so red. But now, she was starting pink up with her body finally gaining some fat. She was still incredibly tiny, only weighing just over three pounds, and her head was still disproportionately large for the rest of her, but she was getting there and even though her little blindfold said no peeking, that's just what I did as soon as I came in every morning and I was happy to see both of her eyes flutter open. Eric would be heartbroken to not get his good morning wink, but he'd get over it just as quickly when he looked into his baby's blues for the first time.

I longed for the day when we could finally hold her, but she was still too little and wasn't quite breathing on her own yet, so I leaned down over her and whispered, "Well hello there baby girl."

She was too young for her eyes to focus on anything, but her head moved fractionally at the sound of my voice and I stared at her for just a few seconds longer before I put her blindfold back in place. I loved Lilly's nurses and the one on duty walked over to give me a brief rundown on how she'd been doing since I'd last left the night before and once she was done, I sat in a chair beside her. There wasn't much we could do for her yet – she was still being fed through a tube and diaper changes were a tricky process we weren't able to do yet with all of the wires attached to her – so mostly we just spent our days watching her while occasionally speaking to the other parents in the NICU. It was easy to lose track of time – especially in the beginning when we didn't know what was going on or if she'd even pull through, but I hadn't realized just how much time had gone by until I was surprised by Eric's dad suddenly appearing at my side. He normally didn't show up until just before lunch time and he would sit with Lilly while Eric and I grabbed a quick bite to eat. A quick glance at my watch told me he was a little earlier than normal, but almost two hours had passed since we'd arrived at the hospital making me wonder where Eric had gone off to.

*I internally shuddered as scenes flashed through my mind of him running like a madman from a horde of paparazzi with his arms full of boxes of condoms.*

"What's wrong?" he asked as soon as he saw my face. "Is something wrong with Lilly?"

"No," I answered quickly. "I just lost track of time I guess." He immediately looked relieved, so I asked, "Did you happen to see Eric on your way in?"

I couldn't imagine what would take him so long and tried not to panic hoping he'd just been delayed by a phone call or fan.

*Or a horde of condom picture taking paparazzi, but I hoped they didn't ask him to model one.*

*The Captain was mine.*

"Nope," he answered unconcerned and smiling down at Lilly. "Why? Where did he run off to?"

"The gift shop downstairs," I answered while grabbing my purse. I didn't want to alarm him even though I was starting to panic and tried to sound indifferent as I said, "I'll just go find him and we'll grab something to eat before coming back up."

"Take your time," he called back while I tried not to run out of the room, but Rasul noticed the panic on my face as soon as I came out.

My voice didn't hide my worry either, as I pulled my cell phone from my bag and turned it on, asking, "Have you heard from Eric?"

My stomach dropped seeing I had no new messages while he replied, "No," and checked his own phone. Both of us now had the locator apps downloaded to our phones so we could be found if necessary and it only took a minute before he said, "His phone is still here in the hospital."

Neither one of us said a word as we got into the elevator and took it to the ground floor. We swept through the gift shop but there was no condom carrying blond giant to be found and Rasul spoke quickly into his phone before turning to me and saying, "Khan is on his way. He has not been in contact with Mr. Northman either."

I was wound tighter than a spring – and my libido had nothing to do with it this time – so with Rasul shadowing my every step we headed to the cafeteria hoping Eric had stopped for a cup of coffee and I immediately breathed out a sigh of relief seeing him sitting at a table in the corner. I didn't pay any attention to who he was sitting with or the expression on his face and instead ran up to the table, snapping at him in my worry, "Where have you been?"

All I could picture was us reliving the nightmare all over again only this time it was Eric who was kidnapped, so I only vaguely heard Rasul on his phone telling, I assumed, Mustapha that he'd located Eric, but I was too exasperated to do much more than glare at Eric.

*And tap my foot impatiently while Wicked and Immoral took up their righteous positions on my hips.*

"I'm sorry," he said, reaching for me. He pulled me to his side, saying, "I lost track of the time."

I was still too wound up from my freak out to appreciate the remorse in his voice until he gestured across the table, saying, "Sookie, this is my...uh...mother. Crystal North...I mean, um...Norris."

My unease suddenly doubled for a wholly different reason and I felt my eyes bug out while my ass puckered now realizing what – or rather *who* – had kept him. I consoled myself with the fact she would only be able to see *one* of those involuntary reactions as I turned to look down at the woman who'd destroyed the man I loved.

*Twice.*

She looked weathered with the evidence of the hard life she'd lived etched clearly on her face, but even seeing her frailty – like she'd be carried away on a stiff breeze – all I wanted to do was throw her to the ground and practice a few of the moves Rasul had been teaching me on her. I'd been apprehensive when Eric's dad had first started coming around again, but I'd never once gotten the feeling that I needed to protect Eric from him, at least not emotionally. I didn't know if it was because I was a mother now myself and couldn't imagine ever walking away from Lilly, and while I knew I had no right to judge her – walk a mile in her shoes and all that – I'd be damned if I wasn't doing just that.

*There went my six week streak of trying to be a better person.*

"It's nice to meet you," she smiled.

I wanted to sneer.

I wanted to scoff.

I wanted to punch her in her stupid smiling face.

*I wanted Bubba there so he could do his 'growl test'.*

Instead I put on my Crazy Sookie smile and nodded, "Mmhmm," noncommittally, afraid to open my mouth knowing there was a strong possibility the word 'mother' would come out in conjunction with another word that rhymed with 'trucker'.

*After all, the only sound I could make started with an 'M'.*

My eyes shot straight back to Eric hoping to read something from his expression, but he was completely locked down. Seeing that didn't give me any warm and fuzzy feelings either because his face was always so animated – be it a cocked eyebrow or smirky lips – I could always guess *something* that was going on in his mind, but I had nothing to go on. The silence was deafening until Eric finally offered, "She...um...just stopped by to see how we're doing."

I felt my own eyebrow rise up – filling the void left by Eric's motionless brows – and repeated, "Mmhmm," while internally yelling *Bullshit!* Both Rasul and Mustapha had told us over and



over again to never discount what our instincts told us and mine were suspicious as hell, but I was torn. On one hand I was his wife and while neither one of us could remember our initial meeting or subsequent vows of 'until death do we part', we'd come to eventually mean it and I certainly wouldn't be the first wife to dislike her mother-in-law. Her demons were her own and I hadn't even known Eric when she'd last been in his life, but knowing how her abrupt departure had affected him – knowing she'd left him feeling worthless and used so much so that he'd nearly killed himself trying to drown his sorrow in drugs – I didn't think I was capable of overlooking it, even if it wasn't my place to be the one who would need to forgive her. Eric and I hadn't ever really spoken much about her after he'd first told me everything that had happened– I had to be the one to tell him he'd told me all about her before his car accident since he still couldn't remember anything, but even before this moment I knew he wasn't over his abandonment issues because I only had to look at our daughter's birth certificate to see the scars she'd left on him – Lilly's name and what it symbolized from his childhood pain said it all.

We would *have* to talk about her now and all I wanted to do was pull him out of the room so I could know how he was feeling. The last thing he needed was any more stress thanks to her sudden arrival and while I was thankful everything had worked out between him and his dad, my hopes weren't high for a repeat performance no matter how lucky we seemed to be.

*That was just fucking pushing it.*

"I was hoping to be able to meet my granddaughter," she said timidly.

*Oh...I don't fucking think so.*

It was bad enough how piss poor she'd treated Eric *when* she was around, but I'd be damned if I was going to let her stroll into our lives acting like she was family when she was nothing more than a stranger after having done nothing more for him as his mother than to have pushed him out at birth. God knows I wanted for Eric to have some sort of relationship with her – if she had changed for the better – if that was what *he* wanted, but I sure as hell didn't trust her and I wouldn't let her anywhere near our daughter.

*Not yet.*

*Maybe never.*

I'd demand random piss tests and blood work at a minimum, but not knowing how Eric felt about it all yet, I wasn't about to say it out loud because we would most definitely have a fight over it if he felt differently and this time there'd be no forgiveness fellatio at the end of it all.

*Just call me fucking Wolverine because my mommy claws were out and I would cut a bitch before I let her near my baby.*

I saw Eric open his mouth out of the corner of my eye, so I cut him off before he could speak by saying, "Dad is with her right now." Once I'd stopped thinking of him as just *The Asshole*, calling him Mr. Northman seemed too formal and Richard didn't feel right either. Pam still called

him Dick, but I honestly thought it was just in fun now since they seemed to have bonded over their car ride down to San Diego on the day of the nightmare. He was the one to hesitantly suggest I call him Dad when I kept stumbling over addressing him and now it just felt right. He'd more than earned my trust and respect over the last few months and I loved him like he was my own father now. It may have been why I disliked her more than maybe I should knowing how badly her disappearing act had affected him too, but I wasn't sure if Eric's mother knew my own family history, so just to make sure she wasn't confused, I clarified, "You know, *Richard*."

Realization dawned on her immediately with what little color she had draining from her face as she sputtered, "*Richard* is here?"

"Yes," Eric and I answered in unison only mine was defiant whereas his was a sigh.

"Oh," she replied and started gathering her things together. She stood up, adding, "Maybe I can see her on another day then? Before she leaves the hospital? She'll be here for a while, right?"

I didn't give Eric the chance to say anything by saying, "Dad is here *every day all day long*."

My words may have come out a little on the taunting side, but it seemed he wasn't just good for cooing over his impossibly small granddaughter while keeping her company – he was also good for deflecting her questionable – albeit biological – grandmother as well because she immediately looked defeated. I felt triumphant.

*But the day was already a wash with me trying to be a better person anyway, so it was all good.*

My triumph lasted until Eric stood up saying, "He's not here first thing in the morning. He usually comes by around lunchtime."

My heart sank seeing his mask of indifference fall off. He *wanted* her to come back. He *wanted* her back in his life again.

I *wanted* her to get hit by a bus as soon as she stepped off of the curb out front.

I supposed the *whole week* was a wash.

I watched helplessly as she stepped forward and hugged him – watched him not only return her hug, but linger over it for a second too long until he finally let her go.

"You'll come back?" he asked her, trying and failing to keep the hope out of his voice and making my heart break for him.

"Of course I will," she smiled back at him before turning to face me. I was sure I exuded '*Don't touch me bitch*' from every pore, so she just smiled awkwardly and said, "It was nice to have met you Sookie."

"Mmm..." I nodded.

*It was the nicest response I could come up with.*

I resisted the urge to point at my eyes with my pointer and middle fingers and then turn them on her to let her know I was watching her, but I'd be sure to mention my distrust to Rasul as soon as Eric was out of ear shot. I couldn't stop him from seeing her if he wanted to – and from all appearances he *wanted* to, but we'd be having a long discussion later on, on the why's and hell no's of her seeing Lilly any time soon. However Eric's idea of 'later on' was right fucking now because as soon as *she* was out of ear shot he turned to me and said, "What's your problem?"

Lilly would likely be entering high school by the time I was done listing them all at the moment, so instead I played dumb and asked, "What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean," he said defensively. "*You of all people* are perpetually gracious no matter who you're talking to unless they give you a reason to be a bitch otherwise. My mother didn't do anything to you, so why were you being a bitch?"

*Maybe not to ME, but she sure as shit did a number on YOU!*

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I asked a little louder than I'd meant to. Considering we were in the corner of the hospital cafeteria and Eric would stick out anywhere regardless of his celebrity, it wasn't the place to be having that discussion, so rather than give the tabloids a new headline, I turned and walked out with him hot on my heels.

I saw Mustapha had arrived in the meantime and joined us from his station at the door with Rasul and I tried to smile at him, but Eric's snapping in my ear turned it into a grimace as he repeated, "What is your problem?"

I waited until we were in the elevator with no one but our guards, who already knew we were arguing anyway so there was no point in hiding it, and snapped back, "My *problem* is that *you* don't seem to have a *problem* with her sudden reappearance! I don't trust her as far as I can throw her and considering she's a waif, I could probably chuck her pretty far. Have you *forgotten* what happened the last time she came into your life? What does she want? Money?"

I was terrified of him being hurt by her again – of feeling used and worthless when he was the greatest person I'd ever known. He deserved better than that and had enough worry in his life as it was. The last thing he needed was anything else piled on top of it and while I was expecting us to argue it all out, I was more than a little surprised and hurt when the elevator reached our floor and he didn't step out. Instead he stayed inside – thankfully Mustapha did too – and scathingly replied, "If she wants *money* that *I* earned, then it's *my decision* on whether or not to give it to her. And, no, I haven't *forgotten* what happened the last time. In fact, the only things I've ever *forgotten* had to do with *you*."

He didn't even look at me to see the tears start to fall from my eyes and instead he turned to face the back as he let the elevator doors close again.

*What in the hell just happened?*

Chapter 113

**EPOV**

*What in the hell just happened?*

*Even more concerning was what in the fuck did I just do?*

My head was a mess and had been since I first laid eyes on my mother. I didn't know how to feel or what I felt at all about any of it and while I didn't know if it was true, the one thing I knew I *did* feel was that in some way I was being forced to choose between my mother and the mother of my child, but if that was the case then it was already out of my hands.

*I already knew I could be happy without my mother, but I also knew without a doubt I'd be miserable without Sookie.*

The elevator doors had just closed when I whipped back around and hit the button for them to open again, barely waiting for them to part enough for me to slip in between them and seeing the tears falling from her eyes – knowing I was the cause of them – was like a punch to my gut. I instinctually reached for her as I closed the gap in between us and yanked her into my arms, thankful she didn't push me away, and inhaled her scent trying to calm my nerves as I whispered into her hair, "I'm an asshole. I'm sorry."

I may not have been able to remember those first three weeks after we'd met, but I remembered all too well how empty I'd felt before she'd come into my life. It had been my mother's earlier rapid fire questions about how Sookie and I had met that had brought my frustrations to the surface – both at my mother's inquisition and my amnesia – that made me lash out, but I knew that didn't make it right.

I was literally trembling as we stood there so I was sure she could feel it, but the emotions stirring inside of me were too much – too many – too conflicting for me to make sense of anything at the moment. Anger, remorse, frustration, and fear all tried to fight their way to the surface, but all I could do was try and keep it together until I figured out a way to sort through them all. All I knew for sure was that I loved Sookie more than anything and while I didn't appreciate her attitude towards my mother, I could at least understand why she would feel that way. Had the situation been reversed I knew I wouldn't have had the fortitude to be half as pleasant as she had been.

"I'm sorry too," she sniffled into my chest. "I *was* being a bitch, so that cancels out your assholery."

The tension I felt eased somewhat knowing I hadn't done any irreparable damage to our relationship. She was the best thing that had ever happened to me and I felt like the world's biggest dick for being such a prick to her a few moments earlier. We argued over stupid things all the time – it was a lot like foreplay for us in the past, but this wasn't anything like one of those times and the guilt I felt weighed on me as I admitted, "I don't like it when we fight. Not like that."

Her arms tightened their hold around my waist before she pulled back far enough to look up at me and smiled with unshed tears still in her eyes as she said softly, "We're like Tyson and Holyfield. At least we fuck like champs too."

*She always knew just what to say to make me feel better.*

I couldn't help chuckling at her assertion and felt like an even bigger idiot for everything I'd said and done over the last few minutes. No matter what life threw at us, as long as *we* were good, I knew we could handle it. We still needed to talk about it all and try to come to some sort of agreement on the newest curveball in our life – my mother's sudden reappearance, but that's what it was – *our life*.

Sookie was my rock. She was what kept me grounded. She managed to make me both strong and weak at the same time because there was no obstacle that I wouldn't overcome to be with her and yet she was my biggest vulnerability because she could easily destroy me by simply walking out the door. The only reason I was okay with that fact was because I trusted her like no one else. No one knew me like she did. No one but her could make me smile or laugh so easily. No one else had ever loved me so unconditionally and no one else ever made me feel like I was enough.

*I'd be a fool not to see I'd be no one without her.*

Of course my small reprieve only lasted so long because God clearly hated me at times – or He enjoyed having me as the punch line to his jokes – when one of the other elevators slid open to reveal Pam. She stepped out with her critical eyes taking in both our embrace and Sookie's tear stained eyes before rolling her own and with her hand gesturing at the two of us, she asked, "Is this because of the link I emailed you a few days ago showing Johnny Depp was in Vegas the night you two got married?"

"No Pam," I huffed while Sookie tried to hide her snickering against my chest. I liked him – or at least I *used* to until I realized just how much Sookie *liked* him – and even though I couldn't remember that night, I was sure I would have hit him over the head with a bottle of rum if he'd tried to put the moves on her.

*Besides, it had been my pictures plastered all over her childhood bedroom walls. Not that 21 Jump Street mother fucker.*

"Well is it because of the picture I included with it of him photoshopped next to Sookie on top of a wedding cake? They really do make a handsome couple."

Sookie chortled while I snarled, "No Pam," wondering if I was paying her too much considering all of the extra time she seemed to have on her hands to dedicate so much of it purely to fuck with me.

"The photoshopped picture of *the wedding night*?"

"No." I would recognize Sookie's naked body anywhere and that woman didn't come close to her perfection, but the only reason my laptop survived was because the guy in the picture was clearly *inferior*.

"The bullet points listing the similarities in physical attributes between Johnny Depp and Lilly?" My answering growl had her making an exaggerated wink like she'd gotten something in her eye – making me contemplate putting my fist there – as she exclaimed, "That's obviously a *pirate's* wink Eric."

"He's not a real fucking pirate, Pam!" I spat back.

*He was Tim Burton's bitch.*

Rasul was trying to hide his amusement – just like Sookie – while Mustapha openly glared at Pam – just like me.

*At least we each had one person on our side when it came to Pam.*

Sookie was still smiling when she pulled away, saying, "Enough Pam. You told me, and I quote, 'Lilly is the carbon copy of the blond giant,' so there'll be no Maury Povich 'Who's My Baby Daddy' specials in our future. Besides, after everything you've seen up until you learned how to use a doorbell, you of all people should know I only want Eric's Kraken." Even though Rasul and Mustapha had moved further down the hall to give us some privacy, Sookie automatically blushed realizing she'd slipped up saying one of her many nicknames for The Captain out loud while Pam mock gagged, but I felt a different kind of growl roll through my chest. Thanks to everything else, I'd forgotten what the night possibly held in store for us and I was anxious for Sookie to be cleared by the doctor knowing, if nothing else, I could easily lose myself by releasing the Kraken and fucking her all night long.

*It would certainly clear both of my heads.*

"And anyhow," Sookie said casually, "the *wink* is no more." Looking up at me, she smiled, adding, "Both of her eyes were open this morning."

*My heart sunk knowing I'd missed seeing it...*

I winced hearing Pam's squeal and looked over to see her digging in her giant bag before she pulled out a tiny pair of pink sunglasses, saying, "Then these arrived just in time."

"Seriously Pam?" Sookie laughed.

"I know," she frowned. "They're not much to look at, but there isn't a huge selection of designer sunglasses for babies, so these will have to do until my little princess gets bigger."

"That's not what I meant," she chuckled, taking them from Pam. "They're adorable, but it's not like she's going to be walking the red carpet any time soon. Or even *walking* any time soon."

"Sookie," Pam chided. "That baby will be the most photographed little girl in the world the second she leaves this place and I don't want her itty bitty Johnny Depp-like eyes to be hurt from the camera flashes. God knows I might not be as traumatized had I worn a pair before walking into your den of iniquity."

"It's just a den," Sookie snickered, "but the whole house would qualify. You just never caught us in the kitchen or on the dining room table." Sookie laughed seeing Pam's expression and I laughed too remembering where she sat for Christmas dinner, but knowing she was right – the media would dog our every step – made living full time in Bon Temps sound better and better. Even if only to get away from Pam's daily dose of bullshit, but that only made me realize Sookie and I had a ton of stuff we still needed to talk about and that didn't even include the clusterfuck of a morning we'd had. Now certainly wasn't the time for any of it though, but realizing Sookie still hadn't eaten anything, I rubbed her back and said, "Why don't you two head back down and get something to eat before your appointment. I'll go in and see Lilly for a bit until then."

Sookie's raised eyebrow in my direction preceded her concerned reply of, "Okay, but *Dad* is in there."

*Dad* – who didn't know about *Mom*. I knew what she was asking, without coming out and asking – would I tell him about her – so I just shrugged noncommittally because I didn't know the answer yet. I'd never told him about the only other time she'd been in my life, but only because I didn't want the hot mess that had turned out to be to weigh him down. Even though he was sober now and we were actually getting along great, I knew he still carried a lot of guilt over my childhood and considering what I also now knew – her disappearing act was what drove him to drink – I'd been afraid of what it might do to him if I told him about that time in my life.

Since Pam didn't know either and had no clue what we were talking about, she asked, "Is he being a prick?" She didn't give either one of us the time to answer, adding, "I should've known better than to think me, of all people, could actually start to like Dick."

I wasn't prepared to spill the Mom-beans to Pam at the moment knowing I'd get Pam'd and Sookie knew me well enough to know that as well because she patted my chest and gave me a quick kiss before grabbing Pam by the hand and led her away, saying, "Well Pam, I think Jason is going to be heartbroken when he hears you don't like dick anymore."

As they stepped into the elevator with Rasul in tow, Pam shrugged, admitting, "It was a phase. I was just experimenting."

*T-M-fucking-I.*

I shook my head trying to clear the ick from my brain and turned to head to the doors leading to the NICU when Mustapha asked, "The woman from earlier, she is your mother?" After I nodded, he asked, "If she returns when you aren't here, is she to be allowed to visit your daughter?"

That was the sixty-four thousand dollar question. In actuality, it was closer to fifty thousand considering how much her first visit had cost me, but I wasn't sure of the answer. I didn't really see the harm in letting her see Lilly, but Sookie had made her thoughts clear on the subject and while I still felt bad for snapping at her, I was still a little pissed over her attitude. She'd said she didn't trust my mother and while I couldn't really fault her for it, I didn't know what she was so worried about. It wasn't like my mother was going to try and steal Lilly out of the NICU – she hadn't even wanted to keep *me* when I was a baby – so I couldn't fathom what Sookie thought could go wrong. But I also didn't want to have what would likely be a huge fight over it by giving my permission without talking to her about it first, so I shook my head no, saying, "Not without Sookie or me."

Considering how fast she left after learning my dad was there, I didn't think she'd be showing up again that day anyway – or maybe ever again. If she disappeared altogether it would certainly take care of the issue and I hated the small part of me that still wanted her around – wanted her acceptance, but I couldn't deny that it was still there.

*Why couldn't I just grow the fuck up already and accept I would never have a real mother?*

I shook off my melancholy by feeling grateful I at least still had Sookie, but walking into the NICU and seeing my father standing there with the perma-grin on his face staring down at Lilly, I felt a fresh wave of guilt spread through me because I realized I still had him too. No matter how shitty he'd been over the years at least he was fucking there. He could've ditched me – given me up for adoption – left me in a fucking box next to a dumpster, but he didn't. He did the best that he could at the time, considering his own demons he was fighting, and knowing my mother was the cause of them only made me feel worse – like I was somehow betraying him for wanting her around.

"Where's Sook?" he asked as soon as I walked up.

Like a pussy, I couldn't meet his eyes, so I stared down at Lilly and reached in, lifting her blindfold and couldn't help smiling seeing two little eyes fluttering open back at me, saying, "Downstairs getting something to eat with Pam."

*My baby girl looked nothing like that Willy Wonka mother fucker.*

"Pam eats?" he asked with a chuckle. "I would've sworn she just survived on the blood she sucked out of her victims."

"You have a point," I smiled. "And she sparkles out in the sunlight, but I think that's just from her designer bullshit."



"Since you're in here, I take it you've already eaten something today then?" he asked with more than a hint of concern. Both Sookie and I had been bad about taking care of ourselves when Lilly was first born because neither one of us wanted to leave her side, afraid of what might happen while we were gone, but it only served to reinforce my guilt because it just proved that he cared about me.

*I felt like a shitty son.*

I could only nod – I'd picked at a muffin while I'd had coffee with my mother, but my tongue got tied when he asked, "Is that what you were doing downstairs when I came in? Sookie said you were in the gift shop."

*Should I tell him? Would he be upset? Mad? Would he storm out and hit the nearest bar to drown his sorrows?*

*Would it be my fault if he did?*

I was too chicken-shit to find out the answers just now, so I nodded again and deflected by saying, "I was looking to see if they sold condoms at the gift shop since Sookie has her follow-up appointment later on." I never did get to see if they carried them and I tried to make a mental note so I wouldn't forget later on.

He slapped my arm, scolding, "TMI, Eric."

*Considering my thoughts over Pam's oversharing from just a few minutes earlier, I could see we were more alike than I knew and at the moment, that fact made me feel better.*

"Serves you right," I chuckled. "How many times was I subjected to Scary Spice?"

He huffed knowing he couldn't deny it and said, "Well, I guess you got me there, but I consider us even now, so I don't want to know what you're doing to my favorite daughter-in-law behind closed doors."

*How about what I'm going to do to her up against the door later on?*

"Well," I countered, while gently putting Lilly's blindfold back in place, "considering how much you're in love with the end result of what happens thanks to what I do to her behind closed doors, I'd think you be happy about it."

I didn't have to look at him to hear the smile in his voice as he admitted, "True."

We spent the next hour with me telling him about the ridiculous sunglasses Pam had bought which led to much eye rolling from both of us over the amount of clothes she'd already gotten Lilly. She'd have to wear three outfits a day for a year in order to get through them all, but Sookie and I had already given up on telling her to stop since it only seemed to spur her on.

Sookie and Pam showed up a little while later with Pam greeting my father by haughtily saying, "Dick," and then furrowed her eyebrows in confusion when he used her same tone and responded, "Vampire," but I just laughed. It was nice to be able to just laugh again and only made me realize that I hadn't even smiled when I'd been in my mother's presence earlier.

*I wasn't sure if I should read into that or not.*

Sookie and I left the two of them there before walking to the maternity side of the wing where she'd be meeting up with her doctor for her appointment. Knowing the nightmare we dealt with on a daily basis with the paparazzi, he'd been nice enough to work in her appointment when he was at the hospital doing his rounds. We both had bittersweet smiles seeing the full term babies, but Lilly was getting there so neither one of us were truly upset and we didn't speak at all about my mother except for when I shook my head 'no' when she asked if I'd said anything about her to my father yet.

My feelings about her visit, along with the fight Sookie and I had because of it, were all jumbled in my head. I felt guilty and angry over the fight. I felt guilty and angry over my mother just showing up out of the blue. I felt guilty for feeling like I was cheating on my father which just made me angry because I shouldn't have to choose between the two of them.

*For fuck's sake...I felt like a ten year old sometimes.*

At least I did until Sookie got the all-clear from her doctor. Hearing him say, "You can resume having intercourse whenever you're ready," had me turning right back into the same age that was on my driver's license and if I'd had a condom in my pocket I very well might have shoved him out of the room and put those stirrups attached to the table to good use.

*Sookie was already lubed up. Why waste it?*

For the rest of the afternoon and evening I was completely enthralled by Naked Sookie. Real life Sookie had been at my side – fully clothed – the entire time, having no clue I was mentally tearing her clothes from her body any time she looked up and smiled at me. At least she wasn't mad at me anymore, so the night was definitely looking up from this morning, but I also knew she was going to want to talk as soon as we got back to the hotel and were alone. I didn't want to talk.

*I wanted to fuck. A lot.*

'Fuck first – talk later', was the motto I wanted to live by at the moment and it only increased when we all climbed into the car to return to the hotel that night, so as soon as we walked into our room I grabbed her and pushed her up against the door with my body grinding against hers hoping she'd choose to live by my new motto too. She giggled but pushed me away saying I needed to take Bubba out to do his business while she went to wash her 'KY crotch' away. Normally he would've spent the morning with Mustapha and then the afternoon with Rasul, so he would've been taken care of by them. But since Mustapha had been called to the hospital early

and Rasul had stayed the whole day – I think they were both wary of leaving us alone sensing things would go bad if my mother returned – Bubba had been all alone.

His whining and pushing against my legs made me give in quicker than I would have otherwise and it wasn't long before I was back in our room, taking my clothes off as soon as the door swung shut behind me. Sookie was still in the shower when I crept into the bathroom and I smiled seeing Naked Sookie and Real Life Sookie had finally merged into one being. She'd been rinsing the shampoo out of her hair – her cherry scented shampoo that only made my dick ache more – so she didn't see me step into the shower with her. I announced my presence by fondling my long lost BFF's.

*I missed them.*

"Eric!" she half-yelled in a startle.

"It has been too long," I said as my fingertips ran over her already tightened nipples. "You used to moan my name," and in an effort to get her to do just that, I leaned forward letting my tongue take over for my left hand, so it could go to work further down her body.

Her hips bucked as I barely parted her folds with her now moaning out my name and I chuckled against her skin saying, "That's better," as I licked my way across her chest before my other BFF could get jealous.

"D...don't...you...want to talk?" she sputtered since my finger was circling her clit.

"Only if you use words like: Oh God, harder, and faster. Feel free to adlib anything else that has to do with how big I am," I smirked against her chest.

"You mean like your ego," she panted, yanking my head up by my hair and shoving her tongue into my mouth.

My earlier blow job was long forgotten now that I had her slippery naked body pressed against mine. I wanted her. I wanted to lose myself in her because she was my home. She was where I loved and could be loved in return, whether we took it slow and sensual or fast and frantic.

*Sookie was where I belonged.*

Shower sex definitely had its merits, but I'd been sleeping next to her in that bed for weeks now fantasizing every night about having her there, so I turned the water off without breaking our kiss and wrapped a towel around her as best as I could before carrying her into the bedroom. She giggled all the way there while I admitted, "This is a lot easier without the Bean in between us."

My steps faltered hoping my spontaneous statement wouldn't make her upset, but she agreed, "I'll say, but she has a name now. You should know – you named her."

I tossed her onto the bed, enjoying the way she bounced, and started kissing my way up her legs saying, "Now she's Lilly, but the baby that was in there," I tapped her belly, "will always be the Bean." I knew they were one and the same, but to me they were separate beings. One showed their love by punching and kicking me at night while the other just wrapped herself around my little finger as soon as we'd met and was where she'd likely stay for the rest of my life.

But considering everything I was about to do to her mother, I didn't want to think about that right then, so I nipped at Sookie's thighs hoping to distract her with my teeth before moving to hover right in between her legs. Instead of having her hands in my hair like she usually had in the past, both of them were resting firmly – oddly – on her lower abdomen.

*Right on top of where her scar was.*

I'd already seen it – multiple times, but never as close as I was now and I figured she was self-conscious about it. I didn't want her to be though, so I gently pulled her hands away and she automatically tensed up, but didn't say anything – allowing me to kiss my way across the length of it and say, "All of you is beautiful. You don't have to hide anything from me."

I could tell she wanted to contradict me – we really were like prized fighters at times – and since my tongue wasn't convincing her with my words, I figured I could use it to at least distract her from her perceived flaws in other ways. One lick through her folds was all it took for her hands to find my hair and by sucking her clit in between my lips, I got her to say each of the words I'd suggested she use when she'd wanted to 'talk' a few minutes earlier.

*And thrusting two fingers inside of her got her to yell my name out loud.*

I was quite proud of myself knowing I'd rocked her world until I heard her say, "Ugh."

"Ugh?" I asked. 'Ugh' wasn't something she'd ever said and meant it in a good way, but when I looked up I saw her trying to cover herself with the towel and it made me ask, "What are you doing?"

"I'm doing my impression of a dairy cow," she huffed while blushing hard. "I guess more than just my lady bits leak when you throw a party down there."

"Really?" I asked and pulled the towel away, fascinated by the way her body had changed even though it hadn't really changed all that much. Her scar – which in my eyes was a badge of courage she should be proud of – and boobs I now had to share with a breast pump until Lilly could manage on her own.

"You're not grossed out," she asked, still trying to cover herself up, but I pulled her hands away, admitting truthfully, "Not in the least."

*But I was curious.*

The water from the shower was all I could taste earlier and before she could realize my intent, I leaned forward and licked away the path of milk left behind on her skin. She gasped above me, but I didn't know if it was because my mouth had circled her nipple again, licking away whatever came out without drawing it out, or if she was grossed out by what I was doing. When I finally pulled away, I said, "It's sweet." Looking into her eyes, I smiled asking, "Does it make me pervert for liking it?"

She stared at me for a long second before she broke out into a fit of giggles, saying, "That falls way down on the list of things that makes you a pervert."

"Hey," I mock pouted before openly leering at her, "I resemble that remark." My hands went straight to her ribs, planning on tickling her until she begged me to stop, but my woman knew me well because she grabbed onto my dick and started stroking me at the same time.

*I would not be begging her to stop.*

My mouth found hers when she nibbled on my lower lip, asking, "Did you get condoms?"

"Ffu..uuu..uccckkk..." I cried.

*A show of tears was a very real possibility.*

"Yes Eric," she said. "Condoms...for fucking, but I take it from your whine that's a 'no'?"

"And you *mock me*?" I nearly sobbed against her shoulder. "I thought you *loved me*."

Her arms and legs wrapped around me tightly – doing nothing for my predicament – as she said, "I mock you *because* I love you." I huffed against her neck and tried to just enjoy feeling her nakedness pressed against my nakedness, but she was pushing my self-control when she licked her way up my neck to trace the outer rim of my ear with her tongue. Just as I was contemplating how effective the pullout method might be, she whispered, "And because I love you *I* have a box of condoms in my purse."

"Really?" I whispered back, afraid she was joking. If she *was* joking there was a very good chance Lilly would have a sibling in another nine months.

"Really," she purred back.

"Fuck I love you!" I exclaimed as I sprang out of the bed.

"Love Pam," she laughed. "I made her go out to get them. I asked her over lunch how she ever dealt with Pregosaurus Me and wasn't she glad that was over. When she agreed I told her it was going to happen all over again if she didn't go and get us a blond giant baby maker barrier. She shuddered arguing that she didn't want people to think she was heterosexual, so I told her she could either pretend she was making inappropriate balloon animals or go and get me a pregnancy test in three weeks."

I had a condom on in less than thirty seconds, even though the contents of her purse were now scattered on the floor, and I jumped back onto the bed, asking, "Did you say something about Pam?"

All that had been going through my head was '*condom sex fucking condom sex fucking*' so I missed everything she'd said. She smiled through her eye roll, but they stayed in the back of her head when I started to slowly push inside of her. I'd forgotten how tight she was. How her pulse would beat against my own. I'd forgotten all about what it was like to actually wear a condom since we hadn't needed to for – well – as long as I could remember, but it was a small price to pay to be with her that way again.

I bottomed out and held still just enjoying being physically connected to her again before taking her lips in a soft kiss and saying, "I love you."

No matter what, that would always remain true. At the end of the day, as long as I had Sookie by my side then everything else was just details. My mother, my father, work...we'd sort it out one way or another. Even if we fought again, I knew we would eventually work it out because the only deal breaker for me would be if it would cost me her.

"I love you too," she said before adopting a wicked smile and pulling my head down to lightly bite my ear, adding, "Now fuck me like a champ."

I grinned back and pulled almost all the way out before thrusting back in, grunting out each syllable with every thrust of my hips, "Ding...Ding...Round...One."

*We decided to call it a tie and declared the need for a rematch just as the sun broke over the horizon.*

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## **Chapter 117: Chapter 114**

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### Chapter 114

#### **SPOV**

I don't know how long I stayed awake watching Eric sleep, but even though he'd exhausted my body, my mind wouldn't shut down and instead of replaying the matches of our sex Olympics I kept coming back to what he'd said earlier that morning before the elevator doors closed. It had been a while since he'd brought up his amnesia, but then we'd had a lot going on in the last few weeks and while I knew it still bothered him on some level I hadn't realized just how much until he'd spat out those words. It would be easy to blame his anger on his mother's sudden arrival and on some level I knew she had a lot to do with it, but even more than the hurt I felt over his nasty tone, I was worried about what he might do if she screwed him over again. Our lives had changed so much since we first woke up in that Vegas hotel room, but in the grand scheme of

things what was seven months of our marriage compared to a lifetime of the hurt she'd caused him?

*Would Lilly and I be enough to keep him from going over the edge a second time?*

If he hadn't come right back to try and make things right – if Pam hadn't shown up and given us a reason to not focus on the metaphorical ticking time bomb his mother represented – I don't know if I would've been able to calm down enough to see it wasn't really *me* he'd been angry with. What I didn't know was if it was his mother or himself he was angrier with and seeing how easily she could draw him back in, I was afraid if I pushed him too hard by stubbornly refusing her presence in our lives he would break and I loved him too much to be the one to do that to him.

*I just hoped I would be enough to fix him if she broke him again.*

What I really hoped was that she would just disappear again so we wouldn't have to worry about her at all. If only I could summon that elusive Vegas odds man to see what the numbers looked like I might be able to get some sleep, but since he didn't happen to be in our San Diego hotel room I was shit out of luck and out of time to get any sleep anyway. Eric didn't stir at all when I got out of bed and he was still down for the count when I emerged from the bathroom after my shower, but I let him sleep in knowing he needed the rest.

*And a small part of me hoped if we just happened to arrive at the hospital at the same time Dad did, then maybe we could put off Crystal for one more day.*

I grabbed a cup of coffee and sat down next to the window staring out at the park across the street from our hotel room tormenting myself with the 'what ifs' his mother's return would cause. Not the fairytale kind where everyone suddenly held hands and sang 'All You Need Is Love' while we swayed inside of rainbows we'd farted from our asses, but the kind where Eric's dad would be left lying passed out in a gutter in front of a bar because I would be too busy using Lilly's baby aspirator trying to suck out the cocaine from Eric's nostrils before dragging him off to rehab.

*After all, she'd been the cause for both of those things to happen in the past, but not once had I been told she'd caused rainbow farts.*

Eric's drug addiction was something he'd conquered before we'd ever met, so I'd never had to deal with it or the repercussions. Other than our wedding night and the one time at Gran's, when he and Jason bonded over beer cans and shitty movie screenplays, Eric didn't even drink much alcohol. He had the occasional beer, but that was it and the thought of him turning to drugs again if his mother fucked him over scared me. However as much as the thought scared me, I loved him and would feel compelled to follow him to the ends of the earth to bring him back, but it wasn't just us now – we had Lilly too. How could I leave her so I could go chasing him and his demons?

*But how could I not try and bring her father back to her?*

*Talk about torn in two.*

Ever since Lilly's birth Eric had been the strong one in our relationship. Sure, he was scared for Lilly's wellbeing, but he somehow managed to stand tall – be the brick wall separating us from anything that could potentially do us harm and I felt like now it was my turn to do that for him. I couldn't explain why, but I knew Crystal's reappearance in our lives wasn't a good thing and it wasn't because of the way she'd hurt Eric the last time she'd shown up out of the blue. As soon as I realized who she was I got that same chill down my spine I'd had when I'd first laid eyes on Bill Compton walking into our kitchen and I knew better than to dismiss it as nothing. I didn't think she'd be kidnapping either one of us, but whatever her endgame was wasn't in our best interests. I just didn't know how to make Eric see that too.

*From the way he'd hugged her goodbye, I could've missed the rainbow shooting from his ass since all I could see was red.*

Gran's words of wisdom came back to me in that moment – *'God didn't promise days without pain, laughter without sorrow, sun without rain, but He did promise strength for the day, comfort for the tears, and light for the way'* – and she'd been right. Eric had done and been all of those things for me over the last six weeks, so now it was my turn.

I would be strong for him and hold him up if he felt too weak to stand on his own.

I would kiss away his tears when they inevitably came until he saw how worthy he was in my eyes.

And I would set that bitch on fire for hurting him again.

*Maybe not what God had intended, but I couldn't turn her into a pillar of salt and I could always pick up some gasoline and a book of matches.*

"What are you thinking?"

I startled in my seat hearing Eric's voice and turned to see him standing in the doorway looking back at me. He wore his freshly fucked look well and seeing his small smile, I didn't want to be the one to take that away by admitting my murderous barbeque fantasies, so I tried to look innocent as I shrugged, "Nothing really."

Eric hadn't yet realized shrugs danced along the fine line between lies and truth and I wasn't about to give away my only advantage now.

As much as I wanted to see Lilly, I really didn't want to run into his mother again figuring if she showed up at all, it would be in the morning now that she knew Dad wouldn't be there until the afternoons, and since it was still early enough that he wouldn't be there just yet, I asked, "Do you want to take a ride out to Miramar this morning?"



I hadn't forgotten about his snappy remark over not remembering our first three weeks together and knew it still bothered him. It had been our plan to do that on the day our world went to shit thanks to our stalkers and since we were already in San Diego it wouldn't take but a few minutes to get there.

"Now?" he asked confused.

He looked like he was going to argue about it, but I knew that would just morph into an argument over his mother – an argument I wasn't prepared to have just yet, so I tried to smile and said, "Yeah, it'll be fun. Maybe it'll help jog your memories. We don't have to stay long, but I think we should do it now since they said it won't be long before we can finally hold Lilly, and you know once that happens, neither one of us will want to be away from her."

It was a dirty tactic to use our daughter against him, but I was desperate and desperate times called for desperate measures.

*If that didn't work, I'd whip out the girls and offer to sweeten up his morning cup of coffee for him.*

He looked torn. I should know because I was probably wearing the identical expression and the thought of possibly losing Eric thanks to his demon mother had Wicked and Immoral changing allegiances tout suite, with them now hovering over the top button of my blouse in case we needed to blind Eric with breast milk. I wasn't sure how they'd rate as snipers, but hoped they could calculate the proper aim of what would equate to a Sookie Soaker.

*Nerf had nothing on the Wonder Twins.*

My mind's eye conjured the old SNL skit that would leave Jason and me in tears with me glancing down at them hearing, "I am Hans." "Und I am Franz." "Und ve just vant to pump... (clap) ...YOU UP!"

*Maybe Eric's mom wasn't the only mother who needed help.*

"I don't think that's a good idea," Eric said and left me scrambling thinking maybe he'd heard them too, until he followed up with, "My mom will probably show up this morning."

*Ugh...was that HOPE in his eyes?*

I didn't have the heart to say any of the downright nasty things I was thinking about his mother and only replied, "Do you really think she will?" while sending up a silent prayer to God to strike her dead. Or at the very least, give her amnesia.

"She said she would," he shrugged. "She only has a few days off from her job, so she'll have to head back soon."

*Not soon enough.*

With that he turned and walked back into the bedroom and I heard the shower go on a minute later, but I was frozen in the spot I sat on. After our heated exchange the day before, he had an idea of how I felt, but I'd never come out and told him I didn't want her near Lilly. I'd been too busy accusing the one woman he'd been pining over for his entire life of being a gold digger and then blamed my memory challenged husband for somehow forgetting what she did to him the last time.

*Silly me. I was the only one he'd forgotten.*

Now that we were no longer in the heat of the moment it was easier for me to be a little more rational. It was Eric's heart that would be broken if she fucked him over again, not Lilly's, and while I would never agree to give her unrestricted access to see Lilly like Eric's dad had, I didn't want to alienate Eric by refusing altogether. Lilly was his daughter too and if his mother decided to leave because I wouldn't let her see her granddaughter, then I knew Eric would blame me. And given the power she seemed to still have over him I wasn't so sure he would pick me over her if he was forced to choose.

*Our seven months together was a pittance compared to how long he'd wanted her back.*

I didn't say anything more and resigned myself to let the chips fall where they may and as soon as Eric was ready we all headed to the car. While I thought Eric's memory loss seemed almost inconsequential anymore, I knew he didn't feel the same way and that it bothered him he still couldn't remember. Now feeling like his mother may have come out ahead of me in our invisible race for his affections, I wondered if those three weeks could push me to the front of the line, so I hesitantly asked, "Are you sure you don't want to take a quick ride to Miramar?"

It was literally minutes away and considering we didn't have Terry there to make any of the arrangements, I doubted we'd be able to get onto the base anyway. I was just hoping the sight of the gate where Eric had finally realized why we were there and had become so excited would come back to him again.

He looked a lot tenser than he should have considering how we'd spent our night and roughly ran his hands through his hair before sighing, "Yes, I'm sure." His eyes stared down at me with a look I hadn't seen in a long while as he asked in a challenging tone, "Are you pushing for it so we won't see my mother?"

The gauntlet had been thrown and was lying there just waiting for me to pick it up and swing it at him to start our next fight. Honestly, Tyson and Holyfield had nothing on us because at times I'd wanted to bite off more than just the tip of his ear, but be it over drugs or an argument, I refused to lose him because of that woman. Instead of snapping back at him, I sighed myself and calmly said, "No, you just made mention of your missing time again yesterday and I thought it might help. We can do it on another day if you want or we could still do the whale watching boat tour sometime."

Since our championship fuckathon was over Eric must have been itching for another kind of battle and he took my peace offering and promptly threw it back at me scoffing, "What's the point? It's been almost six months. If I haven't remembered anything by now, I'm not going to."

We were already in the car by then, with us in the backseat and Rasul at the wheel, and I shrank back from him a little even as I reached out and put my hand on his knee. He was getting wound tighter and tighter and I knew it was because of his mother. It made me hate her even more seeing how much just the idea of her possibly being there or not was affecting him, but rather than throw *that* in his face I just softly said, "I'm sorry. You know it doesn't matter to me though, right? It doesn't change anything."

*Other than give her the lead in our Eric-athon.*

Since the hospital was literally minutes away too Eric didn't have the opportunity to answer me, but I felt better when he reached for my hand as we made our way inside. All three of us scanned the different people in the lobby, but Eric's mother was nowhere to be seen and I made sure to keep my internal sigh of relief to myself as we stepped onto the elevator. Eric looked lost in his thoughts, but knowing we could no longer avoid his Ghost of Mothers Past, I squeezed his hand and asked, "What are we going to tell your dad?"

Eric didn't bother to hide his sigh and slumped in the spot he stood, saying, "I'm hoping we won't have to. She knows he's not here until lunchtime, so...*if* she shows up, it'll be in the morning. They probably won't even run into each other."

I didn't have the heart to tell Eric that we'd probably used up all of our 'beating the odds' points and half thought about getting him a pack of Skittles from the vending machine he could eat for breakfast so he'd have a better chance of shooting rainbows from his ass. Instead I'm sure both of our asses puckered as we stepped off of the elevator and turned towards the NICU seeing Eric's dad standing there glaring.

*At Eric's mother.*

She was standing there – or rather she was shrinking back from his looming stance – holding a stuffed dolphin from one of the many places that sold them thanks to Sea World being right there in San Diego. But instead of feeling any warmth over her little gift, I let out a little scoff thinking she couldn't even get that right.

*If she were a better mother she'd know to get a WHALE.*

At my audible impersonation of being the Scoff Monster both of their heads turned and given whatever he saw on our faces had Eric's dad saying, "I take it you've already met then, so I guess I'm the only asshole left in the dark up until now."

The hurt in his voice was undeniable and I would've gone straight over to him if it hadn't been for Eric's vice like grip on my hand. It made my earlier thoughts come back to me and I made a

mental note to have Pam or Alcide get Eric's dad from the gutter while I dragged Eric off to rehab when this was all said and done.

*Maybe they could share a room.*

"What's going on?" Eric hesitantly asked.

"What's going on," Eric's dad repeated with his glare now trained on us, "is I came to visit *my granddaughter* since I have my AA meeting later on this evening and while I was visiting *my granddaughter* one of the nurses came up and said there was a woman out here making a ruckus saying she was Lilly's *grandmother* and was trying to see her. I thought maybe Adele had flown back out and you all forgot to tell me, so I came out to see and *this*," he spat with his glare turned back to her, "is who I found."

All Eric and I could do was stand there and gape at the two of them when Eric's dad seemed to have enough and growled out, "Since I don't need to make any introductions, I'll be on my way."

I started trying to pull my hand free from Eric's, having every intention of grabbing onto his dad because I didn't want him to leave when he was so obviously hurt, but it made no difference because instead of storming past us towards the elevators, he turned and made a beeline for the stairwell, disappearing through the door seconds later.

We all stood there momentarily shocked with no one saying anything, but as soon as I looked up into Eric's remorseful eyes still trained on the stairwell door, I found my voice again. I patted his chest with one hand while I pulled the other free from his grip and said, "You stay and...visit and I'll go after him."

I didn't really want to leave him alone with her, but I couldn't be in two places at once and hoped she couldn't do that much damage to him in the time I would be gone. Eric finally let go of me and nodded mutely, but I may have shot my own disapproving glare at his mother as Rasul and I sped past her to on our way to the stairwell.

We flew down the stairs all the way to the parking garage, but we had no way of knowing if he was already long gone. I didn't want to waste time searching through a sea of cars looking for his, so I leaned against our own car and pulled my phone out hoping he'd take my call. I reckoned it seemed the man was just as pigheaded as his son (and perhaps daughter-in-law) when he let it go to voicemail, but thanks to all of the fuckedupness that was our daily lives, Eric had thought to have his dad's phone added onto our Big Brother plan on the off chance it would be his turn to have his own stalker. Rasul was able to hone in on his signal just a minute later and we hopped in our car with me hoping like hell he wouldn't go back to L.A. He'd found a new AA group there in San Diego and hadn't gone home in weeks, so I breathed a sigh of relief when it appeared he was sticking to the city limits, but that relief was quickly flushed down the drain when we finally came up to where his signal had stopped moving.

He was in a bar.

I was surprised it was even open considering the early hour, but given the seedy section of town we were in I shouldn't have been. Thankfully the bar was nearly empty so it was easy to spot him just sitting down in a booth in the corner and I ran over in time to see him staring wistfully down at the glass of whiskey in front of him and begged, "Please don't do this."

Rasul took up a spot just in front of our table with his back turned to us while I slid into the booth across from him, but Eric's dad didn't seem to notice anything but the amber liquid in front of him. I started to wonder if he'd even noticed me at all when he finally asked, "How long?"

I wasn't sure if he was asking how long she'd been in town; how long she was staying; or how long we'd known she was around, but before I could ask, he gave me a hint by adding, "I have a hard time believing she's been around for very long. Eric might be able to bluff a poker hand, but I'd like to think I know him well enough by now to have spotted something like this."

I nearly reached for his hand when I saw it move towards the glass, but he stopped himself while we both watched it shake and before I could say anything his hand formed into a fist and pounded the tabletop making the liquid nearly slosh out of the full glass. Slumping back in his seat and mimicking Eric's earlier moves by running his hands through his hair, he mumbled, "Shit. Maybe I just *want* to believe I know him better now. Serves me right, I guess, to think I could have any kind of father/son relationship with him now after all of the bullshit I put him through growing up."

"Stop it!" I snapped at him despite the tears in my eyes from seeing the struggle in his. "Eric loves you – we *both* do – and I'm sorry we didn't warn you, but she just showed up yesterday out of the blue. Eric and I were too busy fighting about it and then avoiding the topic altogether, but we should have told you. After everything you've done for us, you deserved better than that. I'm truly sorry."

"What have I done?" he scoffed. "I accused him of marrying you for your tits and then added on in my bid to become father of the year by calling you a money grubbing whore on top of it. His entire life I've done nothing more than make him feel like a burden while guiltting him into believing I'd sacrificed my life's dreams for him."

His hand came down and gripped the glass, but he made no move to lift it, only saying, "He never had any idea...*he* was my life, but in my drunken stupidity I thought I was doing him a favor by teaching him early on not to depend on anyone emotionally. His mother taught me that and yet he spent every night wishing for *his mother* to come back and save him from me. Thanks to me and all of my *fatherly coaching*, I nearly ended up getting him killed."

Eric had never told him the reason behind his descent into drug addiction, but I knew it was to spare his father from having to relive the pain of knowing the woman who he'd loved had come back, even if it was only long enough for her to nearly destroy Eric too. But now hearing him take the blame all on himself, I couldn't stand it. The cat was out of the bag anyway now that he'd seen her, so I started off by saying, "Eric doesn't blame you. The fact you knew about the book and those damn flowers did him a world of good and everything you've done since you showed up on Christmas Eve has made up for whatever you did to him as a child. He has a better

understanding now and he's forgiven you, but this right here," I pointed at the glass in between us, "is why he never told you about the *other time* Crystal waltzed into his life."

His head shot up with his eyes trained on me as he let that sink in before asking, "What are you talking about?"

*In for a penny, in for a pound...*

I knew it wasn't my story to tell and hoped Eric would forgive me, but I also knew how much he worried his father would fall off of the wagon if he ever learned about that time in his life. I figured since we were already teetering on the edge of it, we had nothing to lose and could only hope by telling him, it would pull him back instead.

It didn't take much recollection on my part since that story was all I could think about since finding him in the cafeteria with her the day before and I started at the beginning. How she'd waited for him outside of the coffee shop he used to frequent and then quickly worked her way into his life. How he'd gotten her an apartment and supported her while she wormed her way into his heart. How she claimed she'd gotten clean, but even if she had been it didn't take long for her to start draining him – emotionally and financially. How when he finally realized she was using again he tried to help her, begged her to see reason and offered to pay for her to go to rehab. How he thought it would be enough. How he'd thought he finally had his mother back and that she'd fight her addiction for him because he loved her enough to fight for her, so when she disappeared from his life – *again* – without so much as a goodbye, he nearly killed himself with cocaine because the only thing *his mother* had taught him was that *he wasn't enough*.

Remembering it all and saying it out loud was only serving to make me angrier, but I didn't have time to let it fester and I grabbed onto both of his hands with my own, pleading, "Don't you see? Eric needs you now more than ever. I don't trust that woman to not hurt Eric all over again and if you feel like you should've done better by him as a child, then stand up and be there for him now. Don't do this to yourself or him."

Eric would be devastated to lose his dad all over again and the tears finally spilled over my cheeks as I softly cried, "You're the only parent we have left."

He sniffled trying to fight off the tears in his own eyes, but my breath got caught in my lungs when he pulled one of his hands from mine to grip the glass. I could do nothing but watch as he lifted it to his face and took a long drag of the aroma, but seeing him place the otherwise untouched glass off to the side I released a shaky exhale.

The smirk I'd come to realize was a Northman genetic trait appeared on his lips as he tried to lighten the mood, saying, "Jesus Sook. Eric told me your tears were like Kryptonite. He wasn't kidding."

I couldn't help snorting a little and slid out of the booth, pulling him by his hands until he stood up in front of me, and wrapped my arms around him sniffing into his chest, "Well then it's lucky for me that I married into a family full of Supermen."

"No," he said softly and pulled my chin up so I'd look into his eyes before placing a peck on my forehead. "*We're* the lucky ones."

*Damn charming Northman men making me blubber like a baby.*

We left the bar with Rasul and me following his car all the way back to the hospital, but Eric's dad headed into the cafeteria to get a cup of coffee while he waited to hear when the coast was clear. He was afraid he wouldn't be able to hold his tongue if he came face to face with Eric's mom again and didn't want to make it even harder on him, so I promised to let him know as soon as she was gone and headed up.

We'd been gone for well over an hour by then and as Rasul and I stepped off of the elevator and turned towards the NICU we saw Eric emerging through the doors alone. We both ran towards each other with him saying, "Where is he?" at the same time I said, "Where is she?"

It was an impasse until he finally replied, "I was coming out to call you. She's grabbing her things," but just as he'd said the words, she walked out.

She looked nervous as hell and her eyes darted to me as she said, "Hello again Sookie."

I bit back every nasty thing I was thinking and took one for the team – Team Northman – and only said, "Hello Crystal."

Eric's eyes danced nervously between the two of us – I wouldn't be surprised to learn he had a telepathic connection to me and could hear the stream of curse words going through my mind – but he seemed to relax a little when I didn't let any of them out and broke the silence by saying, "She saw Lilly."

*Then can she fucking leave already?*

"Yes," she smiled, making me wonder if she was the telepathic one. I tried not to grimace as my hopes were dashed when she added, "I did. She's so small – the stuffed animal I brought was bigger than she is – so unlike her father." Her eyes almost reluctantly moved to look at Eric when she softly added, "You were a big baby."

*He was NOT a big baby! You abandoned him for HEROIN! TWICE!*

Rationally, I knew she was talking about his infancy and not his emotional character, but I wasn't feeling all that rational at the moment. After rehashing the story for Eric's dad, I was left feeling raw from it all, so rather than stand there and possibly tell her *exactly* what I thought of her – thereby hurting Eric – I forced a smile onto my face that only became genuine when Eric said, "She's leaving. She's got to get back for work."

I could tell Eric was still out of sorts and only hoped and prayed that her visit went well enough that he wouldn't be left brooding once she was gone, so I maintained my smile and politely said, "Well, I'll leave you two to say your goodbyes then. It was..."

*Tortuous? Distressing? Agonizing cruelty that should only be heaped on the vilest dregs of society?*

"...*nice* to finally meet you Crystal."

*Woo boy...that hurt.*

I all but ran into the next room to scrub up, but sent Eric's dad a quick text first telling him she would be leaving in a few minutes and once I was sufficiently clean I walked into the NICU. Lilly was sleeping, but seeing the stuffed dolphin lying alongside her had me wishing they made a Crystal cootie spray while I snatched the offending plush toy out of there and chucked it onto the floor by my purse.

*Because it should've been a WHALE.*

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## **Chapter 118: Chapter 115**

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### Chapter 115

#### **EPOV**

Sookie couldn't seem to get away from us fast enough – albeit a lot more politely than she'd been the day before – and I was torn between going after her to find out what happened with my dad and seeing my mom off. Ultimately my mother won out because I couldn't be sure if or when I'd see her again and I knew Sookie wouldn't have appeared so calm if any serious damage had been done to my relationship with my father.

I silently followed her to the elevator and she seemed startled to see me step in with her as she said, "Oh, you don't have to come down with me."

*Did she not want me to?*

She hadn't really shown much of a reaction to me at all and other than the obvious tension she felt seeing my father again when we'd first come up on them earlier, her face had been locked down until she openly gushed over finally seeing Lilly. I didn't know what to make of it at the time and wasn't really jealous per se, but it still stung a little knowing it wasn't really *me* she was there to see and I tried to be happy that at least my daughter could make her face light up like it did.

*Nope. I wasn't jealous.*

*Well...maybe a little.*



But Lilly had the power to make even Pam drop her bitchface and morph into a normal human being, so I shouldn't have been surprised to see her magic work on her own grandmother and it was that biological fact that had me staying put inside of the elevator as I said, "I don't mind. I could use a cup of coffee anyway."

"Oh," she said looking flustered. "I don't have time for coffee. The bus back to San Francisco leaves soon."

She'd told me the day before she had eventually ended up there and gotten a job working as a waitress at a little diner, but she only had a few days off before she had to be back at work. I internally winced over the idea of her having to take a bus all the way back knowing what a long and uncomfortable ride that would be and my mind immediately flashed to the car rental place just down the street from the hospital, but I kept it to myself and only shrugged indifferently as I said, "That's okay. I still want a cup of coffee."

*And a fucking clue on how I should feel about you.*

Since I didn't know how to feel and she hadn't made any mention of keeping in touch, I tentatively put myself out there by asking, "Do you...want my phone number? You know, just in case?"

*Just in case you need something?*

*Just in case you need me?*

*Just in case you need money...*

Before I could latch onto that depressing thought, I sounded pitiful even to my own ears as I said, "If you give me your phone I'll text myself so we'll both be able to call...each other...whenever."

I'd seen the cell phone in her bag earlier, but hearing my pathetic request she clutched at her purse like I was demanding she hand it over at gunpoint and said, "Oh. My phone...is uh...dead. The battery is dead," but seeing God knows what look on my face – nothing good I suspected, considering what *else* I now suspected she might have in her purse – she dug out a slip of paper and quickly jotted down her number and handed it to me before having me do the same.

With that taken care of, now that we were in the hospital lobby, there was nothing left to do but actually say goodbye, and not wanting to incite a media frenzy by walking her outside, I said, "So, I guess I'll uh...talk to you...soon?"

*Pathetic.*

*Completely and utterly pathetic.*

"Sure," she smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. There was something else there behind them, but I had no clue what it was.

*Regret, maybe?*

I couldn't begin to guess what she was regretting since her whole fucking life should be chock full of them, but now that I had Sookie, I no longer felt a lot of the anguish I used to thanks to my mother. Sookie had healed more of the pain I'd carried inside than I even knew I had, but some of it was still there and I doubted I'd ever be rid of it entirely. It helped having my father back in my life and only served to remind me that I needed to find him and apologize.

But, as far as my mother was concerned, I knew what addiction felt like and tried to reason to myself that she was simply too weak to overcome it at the time. I didn't believe she had intentionally set out to hurt me therefore I thought I should be the bigger one and let it go, hoping maybe we could start over with a clean slate.

Again.

So it was being in that frame of mind that had me reaching for my wallet and pulling out the few hundred dollars I had in there, and handing it over to her while not thinking about what she might use it to buy, as I said, "Here, take this just in case." She couldn't have been earning much money and she hadn't actually asked me for any, so I didn't feel bad offering it to her knowing she could likely use it.

"Eric, I..." she hesitated with her eyes darting to the money in my outstretched hand and back to my eyes before she finally took it and quietly whispered, "Thank you."

Her arms wrapped around me as she briefly hugged me to her and I tried to lock down my own emotions as she quietly whispered, "I'm sorry," into my chest before making a hasty exit out of the hospital.

*Well, at least that was something new. She actually sounded sincere.*

I didn't want to hang around deliberating over it and inadvertently leave myself open to any well-meaning fans looking for an autograph, so I headed to the cafeteria to get that cup of coffee and was surprised to run into my father on his way out. I hadn't known if he'd left the hospital or stayed, but I was glad to see him. I'd felt horrible over the way he'd found out about my mother coming back and wanted to apologize for not telling him sooner, but looking at him now, the words got stuck in my throat. We were the same height and yet I felt like I was a child all over again, peering up at him just waiting for the yelling to start about what a disappointment I was.

*At least this time it would be true.*

*Maybe my mother's visit fucked with my head more than I knew.*

The apology was already locked and loaded, but it was still jammed up in my throat when his hand landed on my shoulder and squeezing it slightly, he said, "Sookie just texted me that your mother was leaving. Are you doing alright?"

*Maybe?*

I'd purposely *not* dealt with her unexpected arrival the day before, so even now I still didn't know what to make of it. The shock of seeing her again is what I felt the most, but I thought I'd done a pretty good job of keeping her at arm's length, emotionally speaking. Sookie had made it perfectly clear she didn't trust her – not that I could blame her – and I wasn't dumb enough to make the same mistake twice. She'd burned me once already, so I was doing my best at only trying to have realistic expectations of her now. Maybe we'd talk every once in a while and catch up with each other's lives, but I didn't think she'd suddenly become the mother I'd always dreamed of having.

*My happily ever after was already spoken for and was spelled S-O-O-K-I-E.*

My eyes subconsciously darted down at my tattooed finger as a reminder before coming back up to rest on my father's face again. Seeing the concern in his eyes I knew I didn't have to worry if my mother never contacted me again.

*The only parent I needed was standing right there staring back at me.*

"I'm fine," I finally answered and threw my arm around his shoulders to lead him back into the cafeteria where I eventually did apologize and told him about her visit. There wasn't much to tell, but when I started to tell him about the other time we'd crossed paths – thinking he deserved to know the whole truth – he held up his hand and stopped me, telling me Sookie had already filled him in. Hearing about where she found him and what caused her to spill the beans, I couldn't be mad at her. She'd stopped him from taking the first step in what could potentially be his downward spiral into the bottom of a bottle and it dawned on me then just how much I owed her.

She'd gotten better over the past several months, but there were times when her panties still got twisted over what she deemed frivolous spending – I was already preparing myself for the Battle Royale when she got a look at the new SUV I'd ordered in the days following Lilly's unexpected arrival – but no matter how much money we had, no matter how much I spent on her, it would never be enough to repay her for what she'd given me.

She'd given me a home.

She'd given me purpose.

She'd given me a daughter.

She'd given me worth – more than any dollar amount on a bank statement could ever reflect.

In hindsight, I had already been heading down that same road that led me to rehab the first time when something about her must have drawn me to her in Vegas. In the days, weeks, and now months that followed, being with her is what had kept me on the straight and narrow and – by his own admission – is what ultimately made my father want to give sobriety a try. Thanks to her I

had him back – twice now. Thanks to her I had a life and a family I still wasn't so sure I deserved.

*How could I possibly ever repay her for that?*

In the days following my mother's visit Lilly's lung function improved to the point where she no longer needed any help to breathe and I wasn't ashamed in the least little bit when the tears fell freely down my face when I got to hold her for the very first time. She was still incredibly small, but she'd finally grown bigger than my hand – although not by much – and she proved she was her mother's daughter when she smacked me in the face as I told her how great life in a convent would be.

*Quick flying Stackhouse hands were apparently a genetic trait.*

Now that we'd reached another milestone I felt like everything was going great and things were finally looking up for us. Sookie had kept a wary eye on me ever since the day my mother had left, worried I would succumb to whatever horrors she'd imagined in her head, but I really did feel okay and she seemed to eventually believe me. Even so, more than once I thought about calling my mother just to make sure she'd gotten back to San Francisco okay, but I always stopped myself before I could hit the send button and ultimately I just tried to push her into the far corners of my mind deciding to leave it up to her to make the first move.

And if she never did – I really was okay with that too.

It had been close to a week after my mother's departure when we were sitting in the NICU early one morning with me watching Sookie hold Lilly – once again playfully arguing over who she took after – when Rasul stepped in, telling me, "Pam called. She wants you to call her. Now."

We always kept our phones on silent when we were in the NICU, but I had a feeling she wanted to talk about the sitcom and as bad as I felt for everyone else on the show, it only took me staring down at Sookie and Lilly to come to a final decision. Going away to film movies on location were going to be bad enough, but I would miss too much of their lives working the daily grind of a television show. At least I could make sure they would be able to come with me on most of the movie shoots in the future – Greenland notwithstanding – but I didn't want to miss out on everything. With Lilly getting bigger by the day there were a finite number of 'firsts' we had to look forward to and we were fortunate enough that neither one of us had to work. I didn't necessarily want to give up acting altogether, but there were ways I could stay in the business and still have a personal life. Sookie had already told me a couple of days earlier that she wanted to stay home to raise Lilly which I was completely – perhaps selfishly – on board with and we didn't get any sleep that night celebrating her early retirement, so why would I chose something that would take me away from them?

After giving each of them a quick peck on their heads, I ducked out to call Pam and decided to get a cup of coffee while I was at it. I waited until I had the cup in my hand and took a seat in the nearly empty cafeteria before pulling out my phone to call her, but seeing the numerous text and

email alerts already loaded onto my phone, I quickly scrolled through them and stopped on the most recent text from Pam.

*'Heads will fucking roll. I'll make sure of it, but it's already too late for me to stop it. I'm sorry.'*

Attached to the text was a link for one of the celebrity gossip rags and I clicked on it wondering what they could possibly be reporting that would have her up in arms.

*When she held Lilly she fucking cried too, so it wasn't like I was the only one.*

I thought perhaps it was some sort of salacious scoop on what was going on inside of the NICU from the mysterious and never named but always well informed 'sources', but it was a good thing I'd been sitting down because I felt the blood rush down to my toes when my screen lit up and I probably would've fallen over. Staring back at me wasn't a bunch of bullshit 'sources' account of our lives, but a picture of Lilly in her incubator still covered in tubes and wires, some of which she no longer wore. The blood quickly rose up until I was sure my face was on fire from the anger now boiling through me and I stood up with enough force that my chair flew backwards as I started stomping my way out of the cafeteria wanting heads to fucking roll. Up until then I'd had no issues with the hospital's security measures, but it was obviously lacking considering someone had somehow managed to take a picture of my daughter and sell it to the highest bidder. Sookie and I were protective of her – overprotective considering how fragile she was – and even though we'd known she'd be photographed eventually, we didn't want it to be like this.

*Hadn't we already gone through enough?*

*Hadn't we already paid a high enough price just for having the audacity of wanting to try and lead a normal life?*

I was supposed to protect them from this bullshit, but it was glaringly apparently everything I had done so far wasn't enough and it wasn't until I angrily stabbed the button to call the elevator when I realized just how deeply my failure went.

I'd been too busy seeing red to notice the stuffed dolphin lying next to Lilly. It was the toy my mother had brought with her and the same one Sookie had promptly snatched from the incubator when she'd gone into the NICU. I remembered our silent stare down when I'd seen it on the floor after I'd gone back in there and had it been a stuffed whale I might have found it in me to argue with her over it, but I had already been feeling bad for snapping at her earlier and dolphins weren't my thing so I didn't say anything when she took it with us that night and gave it to Bubba.

But seeing it now being used to show just how small and fragile our daughter was, with her picture shown side by side with a second identical stuffed dolphin showing its size next to a ruler – I knew it could only be one person who'd taken that picture. It had been a premeditated and calculated move by the one person I'd thought to protect myself from, but hadn't thought twice about putting my daughter in her sights. I failed in not only protecting Lilly but now Sookie too since she would be devastated once she found out what had happened.

*What I let happen because I'd been played by my own mother.*

I ignored the now waiting elevator and stormed off, scrolling through my contacts and hitting the send button on my mother's phone number. Considering the evidence I now had of just how much of a cold bitch she was, I wasn't surprised when I got an automated message saying the number was no longer in service, but I still wanted fucking answers. I wanted this nightmare to not be my reality where my own fucking mother screwed me over – and for what?

*A few thousand dollars?*

If I had known that was what she'd been after all along, I would've paid her that much and more just to fucking go away and now remembering how she'd taken the cash I'd offered to her as she was leaving that day – *knowing* she was going to be paid even more once she sold *my fucking daughter* to the wolves at the gate – I wanted to fucking kill her.

*She'd said she was sorry. I just didn't know it had nothing to do with any remorse she was incapable of feeling and instead was only because she made Joan Crawford look like June Cleaver.*

In my rage, I didn't think and just slipped out a side entrance I'd never noticed before – thereby avoiding the *other wolves* in front of the hospital – and went for a walk to clear my head, only my head just seemed to become more and more clouded with every step I took. When I finally looked up I noticed the car rental place I'd briefly pondered over hearing my mother would be taking a bus back home, and now imagining her trolling around in a limo *my fucking daughter's privacy* paid for had me marching inside and renting a car.

Because I needed to keep moving.

I needed to get answers.

I needed to somehow fix this clusterfuck even though I knew it was already way too late for that.

As soon as I was in the car headed north on the highway I realized I didn't even know where she fucking lived. I could no longer believe a fucking word that had come out of her lying fucking mouth, but I did know the gossip rag's headquarters were in L.A., so I figured that was a good enough place to start. I didn't think they'd know or tell me where she was, nor did I want to give them another photo opportunity with me storming into their offices and trashing everything in sight, so I stewed in my own anger the entire way there and as soon as I took the exit off the highway, I headed straight to the neighborhood where she'd lived before.

*On my fucking dime.*

Considering I hadn't thought to put my mother up in crack alley – even that would be too good for her now – I still drove the surrounding streets looking for something – anything that would lead me to her.

*Unfortunately there weren't any flashing signs saying, 'Evil fucking bitches that should've had their cunts sewn shut: Line up here.'*

The sun was already falling from the sky when it occurred to me to drive to the neighborhood where my parents had lived when I'd first been born. It wasn't the best then and had gotten even worse in the years that followed, so there were a lot more crackerific places to look for her. I knew it was a longshot, but I still drove slowly up and down each and every street, stopping and staring at every waif-like woman who looked like my mother from a distance, only to be disappointed when I got close enough to realize it wasn't her. I didn't even know what I would do if I found her now that my anger had turned into despair.

Sookie would know about the pictures by now.

She would know that I failed in protecting her and our daughter.

*From my own mother.*

I hadn't bothered to look at my cell phone after shoving it into my pocket when I rented the car, but even though I'd left it on silent I could still practically feel the missed calls vibrating on my leg. But I couldn't bear to look. I didn't know what to say.

*How could I plead for her forgiveness when I couldn't even forgive myself?*

My mood must have brought on the rain clouds because a storm moved in which called an end to my fruitless search since everyone who'd been out on the streets scattered looking for shelter. I didn't know what to do – where to go. I couldn't drive back to San Diego just yet because I didn't know what to say to Sookie and I was more scared of what she might say to me.

*Would this be it?*

*Would this be what finally made her realize that she'd be better off without me?*

*Would she realize I wasn't worth it and never really was?*

She could go back to Louisiana with Lilly and live a normal life where no one would dog their every step. I'd already made that possible by giving her a readymade dream house to live in, so why wouldn't she want to go? If she decided I wasn't worth the hassle anymore, then she had no reason to stay. She had nothing tying her to California other than me and imagining them in the house we'd picked out together, living a quiet life – a life I once thought I would share – I couldn't even picture me with them anymore.

I didn't want to return to our house either, not ready to face the emptiness that would surround me for the rest of my life, and found myself pulling up to one of my former hangouts. It was more of a bar than a club, but all I wanted was a drink or ten to dull the growing pain inside of me. It was the middle of the week, so it wasn't too crowded and I made my way to the bar and ordered a Jack and Coke, but inadvertently made myself feel worse saying that name out loud.

*Johnny Depp was single now, so Sookie could conceivably end up with him. He even had a daughter named Lily so it would already feel natural to him to say it.*

My mood had quickly spiraled downward from there and I was mired down in my own gloom working on my second drink when I felt someone's presence to my right. I caught a flash of blond hair in my peripheral and my head whipped around thinking Sookie had somehow found me – had somehow forgiven me and cared enough to come after me – so my heart once again shattered seeing it was just another faceless blond.

*Because Sookie wasn't going to come after me.*

*I wasn't worth it.*

"You look like you could use a friend," she softly smiled at me.

*I could use a time machine more.*

When I actually thought about it, I may as well have been in one because it was very likely exactly one year ago I had been in that same bar with another faceless blond on the barstool next to mine. The only difference was I wouldn't have been staring back at her letting my eyes go out of focus to see if I could squint enough for me to believe it was Sookie smiling back at me.

*Her smiles were priceless and had I known I only had a limited amount of them, I wouldn't have squandered them away.*

"Do you want to tell me about it?" she asked while coyly stroking my forearm.

I cringed at the contact and pulled away to swallow the rest of my drink whole while wondering if this was now my life. Would I be sitting there night after night doomed to pick up blonds I could only squint myself into believing they were Sookie? Would I have to douse them in cherry scented soap before fucking them with a blindfold on to try and hide the truth from myself? Would I even be able to get it up considering the amount of alcohol I'd have to have in my system in order to delude myself into believing they were Sookie?

*Did I even want to?*

No.

The thought of being with anyone else – much less *Sookie* being with anyone else – threatened what little hold I still had over my sanity and the contents of my stomach. I'd already lived that life and wanted no part of returning to it.

*What in the fuck was I doing?*

I was drowning my sorrows when I should be on my knees in front of Sookie begging her for her forgiveness and if that didn't work I could always pick up those gold and platinum chains until I



could convince her otherwise. The very real thought of losing her now overrode my selfish and guilt fueled stupor with my brain kicking into overdrive on what I needed to do to fix it and the more I thought about it, the more I realized how much I'd overreacted earlier.

We may have been drunk when we got married, but Sookie had eventually known who and what she was dealing with when she decided to stay with me. Even without those missing three weeks of my memory there had been more than enough bullshit we'd had to face together – the paparazzi; the amnesia; the stalkers and the aftermath – and she'd never once said, "Enough."

Maybe *I* was enough after all?

I'd watched what she'd dubbed our iPorn too many times to count, but what always stuck out to me the most was me begging her to never leave me and her promise not to.

And she'd kept that promise in spades.

Now I felt like I was no better than my mother – running away at the first sign of trouble and turning to a piss poor chemical substitute that would never be able to fill the void I'd have without her in my life, no matter how many bottles I got to the bottom of. The thought of Lilly growing up and resenting me for not being there to be a part of her life only added to my pain – almost as much as the thought of Sookie finding someone else to fill that role if I abandoned them.

Nothing about our relationship was normal – or ever had been – and while my own mother selling us out didn't help matters, it seemed to stick with the theme of our life together.

*Fucked up.*

Maybe I didn't get the chance to court her properly. Maybe she didn't get to have the wedding she'd always dreamed of having and God knows I'd probably never be able to give her a 'normal' life, but the only thing she'd ever shown me was her acceptance of what was because she was happy with the truth of what is.

*And the truth is that we loved one another. The rest was just details.*

"Well?" the faceless blond asked, leaning over just enough to put her cleavage on display and licking her lips to let me know she was offering me a hell of a lot more than just a shoulder to cry on.

"No thanks," I said to more than just her offer. I was done with that life and had been ever since Sookie had come into mine. Standing up and throwing a couple of bills onto the bar to settle my tab, I added, "I need to get back to my wife."

*My wife – my life – they were one and the same.*

But first I needed to make a quick stop because while too many tequila shots may have made her choice for her in walking down the aisle and unwittingly step into the spotlight of the fucked up world I lived in, I wanted to show her I still meant everything I'd drunkenly promised her that night. That she would always be my one and only choice and I could only hope she would still feel the same when I asked her.

Again.

*Because when it came to my life with her, I was all in.*

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## **Chapter 119: Chapter 116**

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### Chapter 116

#### **SPOV**

I watched Eric walk from the room to go call Pam and felt myself sigh. Not because he was leaving, but because of the way those jeans did my favorite part of him justice. However Lilly got my attention again in true Stackhouse fashion by smacking my face.

*Maybe Eric was onto something about it being genetic.*

My biggest argument with Eric at the moment had been she was Northman through and through and he was blind not to see it.

*Maybe it was because Lilly had his eyes.*

I snorted at my ridiculousness and just stared down at her, enjoying the feel of her against my chest and wondered if she knew just how much we loved her. How lucky we all were that there was a light at the end of this godforsaken tunnel and hoped we were also at the end of the drama that seemed to stalk us like, well...our stalkers.

We got occasional updates from the detectives and prosecutor on Debbie Pelt and the last we'd heard, she was being treated for her delusions with medication and was relatively sane now, but because the court appointed doctor treating her had declared she'd been capable of distinguishing right from wrong at the time of the crime, they were going forward with her prosecution. Not only would she go on trial for what she'd done to us, but she was charged in the death of Bill Compton as well since he'd died in the commission of a felony she'd been an accomplice to. That also meant Eric and I would have to testify at some point in the future, but her parents had hired an attorney for her that was making a case to plead she was mentally incompetent which they must have believed considering what else she admitted to once she was back on her meds.

It seemed after she was done stalking us in Louisiana over the Thanksgiving holiday, she'd made a spur of the moment trip home to Jackson Mississippi where she abducted her sister. Debbie had

been adopted as a baby when the Pelts couldn't conceive a child of their own – that is until she was two years old and Sandra was born. Be it sibling rivalry or something more that had to do with her mental state, she had resented her sister and what she perceived as her parents' preference for their biological child over her. Debbie's brown hair and eyes were the opposite of her sister's blond and blue and since her parents were also fair haired, she felt like the black sheep of the family. She'd been so jealous of me for being Eric's wife that she took out her frustrations on her sister and murdered her – the first blond she'd ever been jealous of, so when she was done facing charges in California she would have to return there for a second trial.

I didn't feel sorry for Debbie – I wasn't that good of a Christian – nor did I forgive her for everything she'd done to us, but I did let go of the anger because I knew it wouldn't do anything but fester and take away from the life I was trying to lead now. I'd be happy to never see her again, but that just called for another wish for gassy rainbows because we'd have to face her when it was time for her trial.

*That was just a bridge we'd have to cross when we got to it.*

*And if Pam was there, she just might throw her over it.*

I felt a little tug at my heart just thinking about it – not over Debbie, but because it brought back memories of my own parents' deaths. The flash flood had come up out of nowhere and swept their car off of the bridge they'd been driving over and out into the river. It took a full day before their bodies were found nearly a mile downstream. Thinking about them now made me look down at Lilly and try to pick out any discernible features of theirs in her, but it was no use.

*She was a Northman through and through.*

But still I wondered over what their reactions would have been seeing her. I had always been daddy's little girl, so I was sure he would've been over the moon holding his granddaughter for the first time and then he would've taken a shotgun to Eric now that he had physical proof Eric had defiled his little girl.

*If he only knew...*

My mother however would've loved both of them. She was a friend to everyone she met and in every memory I had of her she was always smiling, if not laughing, and it was what helped me come to terms with their deaths as I got older. Jason and I missed out on having years of memories with them – happy stories I would have had that could be passed on to Lilly, but I knew they never would have chosen to leave us that way and at least I wasn't left with any doubt they had been happy with their lives. What we may have lacked in money or material things we made up for in spades with a life full of love and that was what I wanted most to give to Lilly. Eric's career might have afforded us a financial security, but I'd give it all up in a heartbeat if it meant her life would be rich with happy memories instead.

We were at least fortunate enough that my mother had insisted on taking pictures all of the time whether or not there was a celebration at hand. Gran had hundreds of them documenting the time

from when they were just high school sweethearts all the way up until their deaths which was why I was determined to do the same for Lilly. We had the paparazzi to thank for documenting the start of our relationship, but we'd gotten better about taking pictures ourselves and probably had hundreds of her by now too, but the ones that meant the most to me were the weekly shots we took of her with Eric's hand alongside of her. To me there was something about them that transcended the sterility and fragility of both her and her environment. Seeing his hand gently cupping her bare body, wearing nothing more than tubes and wires, didn't bring with it feelings of a cold and harsh reality because in those moments it didn't matter that he was a rich and famous actor or that she was the most talked about baby in the world. In those photos he could've been any man – he was every man who had ever been a father that loved their child and that was what those pictures illustrated to me.

*And I would've loved for my parents to have seen them too.*

Those thoughts not only threatened to unleash a few stray tears, but my bitterness as well. It seemed unfair that good people like my parents were taken from this world much too soon when people like Eric's mother still walked the earth no matter how recklessly they lived their lives.

I still worried Eric's mood would take a nosedive at some point where she was concerned, but it hadn't happened yet. I'd expected at least an argument when I'd taken that stupid dolphin back to the hotel with us and given it to Bubba as a chew toy, but he hadn't said a word other than to apologize for snapping at me earlier that day and admitting his mother's return was the reason behind it. I had already guessed as much, and wasn't mad at him for it, and with every passing day the eggshells underneath my feet seemed to lessen a little more. Almost a full week had passed since she'd left and she hadn't called once. She hadn't tried to use him for his money. She hadn't seemed to hurt him at all while she'd been there, so I had hope we'd perhaps dodged another bullet.

*Or perhaps Eric had farted a rainbow while I'd been gone.*

I snickered feeling a little rumble coming from his daughter's hind end, but unsurprisingly no rainbows appeared and watching her sleep soundly on my chest while feeling the warmth of her skin pressed against me made my own eyes droop. Eric had been way too enthusiastic over the past several nights in wanting to celebrate my 'early retirement' and it was starting to catch up with me.

*Because every night when he chased me, I always let him catch me.*

I closed my eyes intending to rest them for only a few moments, so I was surprised when Eric's dad was suddenly at my side gently shaking me awake and saying, "Sookie. Have you heard from Eric?"

"What time is it?" I asked, thinking I couldn't have been out for very long, so I was shocked when he replied, "It's almost one o'clock."

*One o'clock?*

We'd gotten to the hospital a little after nine that morning and weren't in the NICU for very long when he'd walked out to call Pam. I shifted in my chair so I could stand up and put Lilly down, saying, "He went out to call Pam, but that was a while ago. Did you check the cafeteria? Maybe he got hung up signing autographs?"

As soon as I started putting Lilly down in her incubator she started fussing which made me pick her back up. I knew I was setting myself up for long days and nights of constantly having to hold her in the future, but I wasn't about to deny her. She'd gone through enough fuckery in her short life, so if she wanted to be held, then damn it that was what I was going to do.

*Fuck Dr. Spock. I preferred Mr. Spock anyways.*

I soothed my non-Vulcan baby in my arms and reached for my cell phone, but didn't really expect to have a message from Eric since he knew I wouldn't get it until later on anyway, however seeing the tension on Dad's face made me falter for a second and hesitantly ask, "Why? What's wrong?"

*Fuck me for seeing that damn light at the end of the drama tunnel. I probably jinxed our asses.*

He looked around at the other people inside of the NICU and half-whispered, "Step outside with me and I'll tell you."

Lilly was still squirming in my arms and the last thing I wanted to do was put her down now that I was worried about whatever new bullshit was getting thrown at us, so I clutched her to my chest and pleaded in a whispered shout, "Just tell me!"

He must have seen the determination on my face because I watched his shoulders sag in defeat just as he said, "Have a seat first."

*Fuck. This was sit down news?*

I moved back towards the chair on shaky legs and sat down, with Eric's dad coming to kneel in front of me, as he said in just barely more than a whisper, "Pam called me when she didn't hear from Eric." I almost interrupted him saying he'd left with the express purpose of calling her, but seeing his grim expression made me keep quiet. That is until he held up his phone to show me the picture of Lilly on the screen and I gasped out loud when he explained, "This is from a gossip magazine's website. Someone got a picture of her and sold it to them."

Someone?

*Someone my ass.*

Seeing that picture of Lilly didn't bring any of the warmth I normally felt seeing one and instead I only felt outrage. It felt as though we'd been violated all over again only this time I didn't have Bill Compton to blame it on.

"It was her," I said as my heart sank for Eric while my anger rose for my daughter. Seeing that fucking dolphin lying alongside her body, I knew without a doubt who had sold that picture.

*Who had sold out her own son.*

"Her?" he questioned with a growl in his voice, probably having already guessed who.

"Yes, *her*," I gritted out. "*Crystal Meth* strikes again."

I knew heroin had been her drug of choice, but *Crystal Meth* just flowed better and had been what I silently called her in my head.

*And in that moment I could totally picture myself fighting her on The Jerry Springer Show. I never would've guessed all of those many months ago the whore I would be fighting to chants of 'Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!' would be Eric's own mother.*

"How can you be sure?" he asked. Not because he didn't believe me, but more than likely because he wanted to shout out his evidence as he beat her into a coma.

*I fully supported him in his bid for a domestic violence charge and would be the first one in line to bail him out of jail.*

"The dolphin," I sighed. "It's the same one she brought with her that morning and I took it out of there as soon as I saw it. It had only been in Lilly's incubator when *she* was in here, so it had to have been her."

Bubba ripped it to shreds that very same night as if he'd somehow known it oozed evil – or perhaps that was just Crystal's natural scent lingering on the toy – and I may have taken a split second to fantasize about him doing the same to Crystal until my *Oh Shit* alarm went off.

"Where's Eric?" I stupidly asked considering that was what he'd more or less just asked me.

I quickly handed Lilly over to him and dove for my purse to pull out my cell phone, not waiting for a reply to my first question and asking another. "What did Pam say when she called you?"

"A lot of stuff I'm not going to repeat in front of my granddaughter, but the gist of it was that she'd been fielding phone calls from reporters wanting to know if you all planned to release a statement and to confirm if that picture is really Lilly. She'd been waiting for Eric to call, but figured the two of you saw her text and were going apeshit, so she waited a little while and when she still couldn't get a hold of Eric, she called me."

What was there to confirm? Hanging right above her sweet little head was the pink hospital tag with the words 'Baby Northman' written across it and again I was assaulted with images of Crystal hanging from a noose while I beat her like a piñata.

*Only instead of candy falling out of her it would be dirty syringes and crabs.*

But I forced down all of my rage knowing Eric had been wandering around God knows where for the last few hours likely knowing it was his mother who had fucked him over again and used his own daughter to do it. My hate for her could wait, but my need to find Eric could not and as I stared at my phone seeing there was no word from him, I knew then what I had to do.

My eyes flicked over to my still fussing and squirming daughter, but instead of feeling torn over leaving her to go find Eric, I felt only relief seeing the two strong arms that held her. The two large hands that could physically do a world of hurt, but I knew would only protect her and keep her safe because I had no doubts about her grandfather. I was grateful we had him as a part of our family and knew I could depend on him to take care of her, so I could go and take care of her father.

*And, God help me, I would be lucky enough to get the chance to TAKE CARE of her bitch grandmother.*

Seeming to read my mind, he stared back at me and only said, "Go. I'll stay here with her. Just let me know when you find him."

I could only nod before running from the room and as soon as I slid to a stop in front of Rasul, his eyes widened seeing my panic as I nearly shouted, "Where's Eric?"

He didn't waste time bothering with any guesses and whipped his phone out to search for his signal. My heart stopped while I held my breath seeing his own eyes widen before looking back at me and saying, "Los Angeles."

*The hell?*

There was no need for me to give him my 'What the fuck you talkin' about Willis' speech because both him and Mustapha always knew what we had planned each and every day. Our schedules had rarely changed considering we were at the hospital day in and day out, but he still called Mustapha once we got to the parking garage and confirmed that Eric was not with him nor had he contacted him. Eric often had to field phone call after phone call, so Rasul had no need to question why he'd been gone for so long having been witness to a few of those marathon sessions and it wasn't like we were prone to go running off either. The hospital had been our home away from home and we both knew better than to leave without Rasul or Mustapha with us, so seeing our car still parked where we left it that morning made me start to panic wondering if maybe Eric had been kidnapped and taken to L.A.

*All things considered, it wasn't that farfetched.*

All things considered... I probably had every right to jump to paranoid conclusions, but I knew Eric well enough to know when he saw that picture he would've been livid. He would go storming off wanting heads to fucking roll. His passion didn't just lie in between the sheets – or up against the shower wall just that morning – but after every shitty hand we'd been dealt, he was fiercely protective of us. He'd always been that way starting with our first morning as husband and wife when we'd become separated in the casino lobby. We didn't even like each other then

and he was still like a rabid grizzly bear warning everyone in his path to not fuck with what was his. Lilly and I were his more than ever now and I hated that it never even occurred to me that his mother would hurt him in *this* way. To use our daughter to feed her own greed was unfathomable to me and I knew once it sank in – if it hadn't already by then – it could go one of two ways.

*He would either come back under the blanket of guilt he had no reason to feel or he would sink down into the pit of despair where I couldn't be sure I would even be able to reach him.*

We hopped into the car while I tried calling Eric over and over, leaving him both voice and text messages telling him we would deal with it together, but for Christ's sake...*answer the fucking phone already!* Traffic was a nightmare and then we were stopped for a full two hours on the interstate thanks to an accident somewhere miles ahead of us, so what was normally a ninety minute ride took fucking hours thanks to all of the rubberneckers we were sharing the road with. Trying to drive through downtown L.A. during rush hour was no picnic either, but I kept pinging Eric's phone the whole way there to see where he was while hoping it would keep its charge. He hadn't charged it the night before but he'd had three bars when we'd left that morning. Normally that would be more than enough, but I was sure my constant calling and texting would've worn it down. No sooner had I had the thought when I pinged his phone again, now that we were in the city, when it came back saying his signal couldn't be located.

I recognized the one section he'd mostly been tooling around in while we were still on our way as being the general area where his mother had lived before. I figured he'd run off to go track her down and I'd help him bury the body if that's what it came down to. He'd said she'd moved to San Francisco, but I was guessing he no longer believed it or thought she might've stayed in L.A. after her big payday. However that last location we had for him put him in a part of the city I wasn't familiar with at all, but we headed there anyway and when we got there, what I saw scared the shit out of me.

*Granted his mother was a drug addict, but had that been Eric's only reason for coming there?*

I was sure if I rolled down the windows I'd hear the COPS' Bad Boys theme song blaring through the night air because we sure as shit weren't in Diagon Alley. This was Crack Alley – I was sure of it.

*Somebody probably just stole the sign telling you it was.*

I wasn't sure what the look on my face was when I bug-eyed Rasul as if to say, *'I don't like it either but we're fucking staying until I find my husband,'* so I tried not to be alarmed when he reached underneath the driver's seat and pulled out a military looking handgun that he put in his lap before giving me the side-eye.

*Gee, things sure have changed. All I ever found underneath the seats was a stray pen or loose change.*

We drove the streets for a while at a complete fucking loss all while I threw prayers and wishes out into the stratosphere hoping he hadn't turned to drugs to dull his pain. I vowed I would never



leave him – promised I would work through whatever problems came our way, but I never promised I'd do it with a smile on my face. I could understand his hurt and I'd do whatever I needed to, to help him through that, but as soon as he was thinking clearly again, I'd kick his fucking ass for putting us through this. How he could possibly do that to Lilly after the pain his own mother put him through thanks to drugs...

I took a deep breath to calm down knowing I was getting ahead of myself – getting pissed off in my fear of the unknown, over possibilities I didn't know for sure existed yet. What I did know was that Eric loved us and no matter what he may or may not have done tonight, it wouldn't be the end of the world. If he had a onetime slip up then we'd deal with it together.

*But in order to do that, I had to fucking find him first.*

Without Eric's signal we had no way of knowing if he was near or far and we had no idea of what kind of car he was in. I figured he must have rented one and knew what credit cards he had in his wallet, but I didn't know any of the logins or passwords to even begin to track him down. Eric had written it all down and showed me where he kept everything in his office, but that was all I knew.

*Their location – not his.*

I knew our best shot at finding him was looking through his credit card charges to see if he'd rented a car and then try to find out what kind of car he was driving, but I was torn – afraid to leave the neighborhood imagining the moment we did, Eric would turn the corner we'd just left. For all I knew Eric had been in enough of a snit he just handed over a pile of cash to the first unsuspecting motorist he came across and they were driving him around, which then made my mind leap to another possibility and my eyes turn upwards to the sky.

*Nope. No news helicopters.*

I was almost disappointed and I could tell Rasul was getting antsy too, so once the rain started and made it nearly impossible to see through the windshields of any passing motorists, he finally convinced me to return to the house. I'd tried calling the home phone every few minutes after Eric's cell phone had died on the off chance he'd headed there, but all I ever got was the answering machine. According to my text messages from Eric's dad and Pam, no one had seen or heard from him either and if nothing turned up on his credit card accounts, I was prepared to stand in the middle of downtown L.A. with a bullhorn yelling out his name.

As we pulled up to the gates of our neighborhood – a sight I hadn't seen in close to two months – I was too bogged down in my fear and worry to get my hopes up that he might be there when Rasul asked the guard on duty if he'd seen Eric recently.

*And then my heart nearly flew out of my chest hearing him say he'd just driven through a few minutes earlier.*

It wasn't just my spirits soaring because Rasul floored it as soon as the gate opened and we flew down the street and up our driveway. The first thing I noticed was the two unfamiliar vehicles parked in front of the house and I started getting pissed off again wondering what in the hell was going on for him to have a guest at the house, while I'd been ten seconds away from interrogating street dealers looking for his ass, but when I got out of the car my anger was put on hold seeing Eric come through the front door.

He just stared at me like he wasn't sure I was actually standing there and I started to wonder if he even wanted me to be standing there, but my feet decided they didn't care and ran towards him anyway. Most of my worries were put to rest when he met me in the middle and then caught me in his arms.

*My anger, however, was back to burning hot.*

"You came for me," he mumbled against my neck, but thanks to our close proximity I could easily smell the alcohol on his breath.

We'd gotten rid of all of the liquor in the house once Eric's dad started coming over again, only so he wouldn't have to face the temptation, and I pulled away enough so I could look in his eyes. They were tired and a little red, but his pupils weren't dilated like he'd taken anything else, so Wicked held onto him tightly while Immoral punched him on his arm as I snapped, "You've been in a *bar* this whole fucking time?"

*It seemed at least SHE was a Stackhouse.*

I felt bad when Eric dropped to his knees even though I hadn't hit him *that* hard, so I was even more confused when he rambled out, "We took the biggest gamble of our lives when we got married – when we decided to *stay* married, but..."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" I interrupted, still pissed off. "We've been driving around for *hours* looking for you and *you* were off getting your drunk on this whole time?"

Through the red haze in front of my eyes I saw Eric roll his own as he sighed, "Not the *whole time*. I spent a fair amount of time in Crack Alley looking for my mother."

*I knew it. Maybe they stole the sign right before we got there.*

"But when I didn't find her," he added, rambling on with, "I *did* go to a bar. I didn't know what to say to you yet because I didn't think you'd forgive me for letting that bitch get close enough to do what she did and I went there to drink myself under a table because I couldn't stand the thought of losing you both, but then I ordered a Jack and Coke which made me think of that pirate mother fucker and he's single now and you could end up with him, but he's already got his own fucking Lily and she's *my daughter goddamn it* and I don't want her to hate me."

*Christ...how drunk was he?*

"Eric!" I yelled while grabbing onto each side of his face. "*What* are you talking about?"

"Don't you see?" he smiled.

*Duh...No!*

"I was sitting there at the bar and when that blond sat down next to me, eye fucking me and asked..."

"Whoa," I interrupted again. "What eye fucking blond?"

"That's not the *important* part," he huffed in exasperation.

"Oh, I think *I'll* decide what's *important*," I huffed back.

*Seriously...I felt like I needed to throw a sheet over him. Out of sight – out of eye fucking minds.*

He ignored my jealousy and yet stoked it even more, saying, "I would bet my last dollar a year ago tonight I was sitting in that very same bar with another faceless blond or brunette or redhead, with fake tits and fake everything else, and probably woke up next to them without even bothering to find out what their name was."

*Oh, sure...THAT he remembers.*

Just how much did he have to drink that he thought this was a conversation I would want to have *now* when his sober mind would know the answer to that question would always be *NEVER*?

My eyes narrowed down at him as I calmly gritted out, "As much as I'm not enjoying your stroll down Fuck 'em and Leave 'em Lane, what's your point?"

"Sookie," he said softly. "My point is that I've lived that life. It was all that I knew and I thought it was pretty great. I thought I had everything...money, fame, any woman I wanted, but the truth I know now is that it was all a lie. What I have in you and the life you've given me is more than – *greater than* – anything I could've ever imagined was possible and as much as I'd always wanted to be rich and famous, I'd give it all up if that was the only way for me to keep you. I have more money than I could possibly spend and yet I can never give you a normal life. I can afford to pay for guards and turning this place into a fortress to keep you both safe, but I can't go back in time and undo what's already been done. I can't go back and do things the right way by romancing you, taking you out on real dates that could eventually lead to giving you your fairytale wedding and I'm sorry for all of it. I don't remember that night or the weeks after, but Drunk You chose to marry me. Practical You chose to stay married to me for your job and to spare Gran the disappointment of the truth. Scared and Pregnant You chose to stay married to me when I couldn't remember you at all because you loved me and hoped that I would get my memories back, when it turned out I never needed them at all because I fell in love with you all over again."

I felt the urge to interrupt him again wondering where all of this was going, but I was distracted watching his hand pull something out of his pocket as he said, "I've had this for a couple of months now, but with everything else going on, it never seemed like the perfect time to give it to you. I tried to think of something or some way for me to make this special for you, so I'll appeal to your practical side and say there's really no better time than now. There's no romantic gesture I could possibly make to make up for everything you've had to go through because of me, but what I'm asking is for you to choose me anyway. You know every secret and blight of my past – you know what it's like to live in the fucked up fishbowl I'm doomed to spend the rest of my life in, so – knowing all of that – here in the relatively private and not-so-romantic setting of our driveway, I'm asking you now to make an informed decision on if you would do me the honor of spending the rest of your life swimming in the fishbowl at my side."

I didn't have time to comprehend it all and seeing the ring box in his hand I figured he was needlessly proposing given we were already married, but my mind went completely blank when he opened it and I saw the ring.

*Not any ring... THE ring.*

I could barely see through the tears in my eyes and I desperately tried to blink them away while my legs gave out and I landed on my knees in front of him, but I couldn't tear my eyes away from it and I was barely able to choke out, "How?"

That ring was more precious than anything Gollum had ever grasped and I hesitantly reached out with a shaky hand to touch it not truly believing it was real. My parents' lives weren't the only things lost in that flash flood all of those years ago. A piece of Stackhouse history had been lost with them in the form of the engagement ring that had been passed down for nearly a century starting with my great-grandmother Rose. Her beau, and eventual husband, George Stackhouse had been a wealthy landowner in the early 1920's, but when they fell on hard times during the Great Depression, great-grandmother Rose's ring was all they had left to survive on. She'd pried the diamonds out and sold them herself in order to keep her family afloat, like any woman worth her salt would. They survived it and were able to get back on their feet, but they never fully recovered to where they had once been financially. Great-grandfather George had eventually replaced the stones with fake ones, but his wife had loved it and worn it with pride just the same and ever since then that ring had been passed on to the next generation of Stackhouse women with Gran being the next in line and then my mother. I'd spent hours sitting in my mother's lap running my fingers across it, memorizing every little detail and imagining the day when it would be mine.

*Because even back then I knew Jason would probably never get married, but it had more to do with his past noxious odor than his present philandering ways.*

The ring had always been a hair too big on my mother's finger and she'd never gotten it sized, so when she got thrown into the river it too was lost.

*Until now...*

"Gran," he answered softly and finally drawing my eyes back to him. "I asked her over Thanksgiving about what type of ring she thought you might want and she told me about this one. She gave me pictures and I had a jeweler make a replica. The only difference is that these diamonds are real."

It was perfect in every detail that would forever be etched into my memories. The ribbons on the sides that I always thought looked like hearts and may have played into our drunken tattoo designs, but now it no longer existed only in memories or pictures.

*Because my Master Wooer had given it back to me.*

A dam of rapidly building sobs was caught in my throat, so I couldn't even breathe until he unleashed them all at once by taking my silence the wrong way and hesitantly said, "I know it's not the same. It's not the *real ring*, but if you..."

"I love you," I finally gasped out and threw my arms around him, no longer able to hold back the uncontrollable sobs that wracked through my body.

Eric held me against him and let me cry it out while quietly saying he loved me too, but when I eventually calmed down to nothing more than sniffles and hitched breaths, he asked, "So...is that a yes?"

I forced myself to sit back on my knees and stared back at him, with his blue eyes blazing back at me, and once again wondered over my luck, but feeling the exact opposite of how I'd felt on the morning we'd woken up together and found out we were married. What I had hated with every fiber of my being back then – the notoriety; the lack of privacy; the assumptions made by not just us, but everyone who had an opinion of our relationship – and were so far removed from what I considered normal for any human being (*five hundred dollar pots to piss in and all*), but I wouldn't change a thing now.

No, we would never be a normal couple. No, we would never be able to go about our lives in anonymity nor could we turn back time and do it all over again the normal way. But we weren't normal and never would be. Eric wasn't normal, but not because of his fame or fortune. He was my hero because no normal man could give me something as precious as what he had given me.

*My past and my future.*

*And my brother was a wannabe Shitter Mogul, so who was I to throw stones at what was normal?*

Realizing he was still waiting for me to say something, I realized we'd come full circle. Neither one of us could remember how it all began, but I knew as long as it ended with Eric at my side then I would have my fairytale, so I leaned forward and with my lips pressed against his, I let him know unequivocally that my answer to him way back then was still the same now. It would always be, "Yes."

## EPOV

I poured every ounce of love and affection I had for Sookie into our kiss before finally pulling back and pulling her to her feet, knowing her knees were probably hurting just as much as mine by then. She cried again when I slipped the ring onto her finger, but knowing the story behind it from Gran, I wasn't surprised. I was just happy she didn't give me any grief over having real diamonds put into the setting and seeing Rasul patiently waiting in the car – pointedly not looking at us to give us some privacy – I started walking her towards it so we could head back to San Diego. I figured I would just have Alcide take the rental back in the morning, but as I opened the car door for Sookie she finally tore her eyes away from the ring to look at the other cars in the driveway and asked, "I'm guessing the sedan is a rental, but who does the other one belong to?"

*Uh oh...*

I ignored her question long enough to usher her into the backseat hoping she'd get distracted by her ring again, but seeing her now suspicious eyes trained on me, I shrugged and asked, "Can I borrow your phone to call Pam?"

I discovered mine had died when I'd gotten to the house to get the ring, but my evasiveness wasn't working on her, with her only narrowing her eyes at me even more and saying, "Eric."

Hoping I could charm my way out of it I gave her what she'd called my panty poofing grin and said, "What? Bubba ruined the interior or your car, so I replaced it. Your only requirement was that the new one be *black* and *that* is black."

*And it was closer to the size of the Black Pearl than the last one, so it was a better fit for the name.*

"Eric Northman! *That* is not a *car*. *That* is a *tank*!"

*And the Conquest Knight XV was bullet proof too!*

I kept that part to myself and only said, "And my requirement was that it have adequate leg room, which that one does."

"For who? Chewbacca? Did you buy it from the Governor when Arnie came out of office? Who in the hell drives around in something like that?" she ranted.

*Batman?*

In typical amusing Sookie fashion she threw her hands up in the air and let loose on me fuming, "Can you even get to the end of the driveway without needing to fill it with gas? Have you *heard* of global warming? The polar icecaps are melting Eric – *melting*! You might want to keep that in mind before you take it for a spin because there might not be any Greenland left for you to go

film your movie. Think of all of those poor polar bears drowning at sea because it's too far in between icebergs for them to swim."

"More food for my whales," I shrugged just to egg her on.

*She was always so much more irresistibly sexy when she was angry.*

"Ugh," she sighed. "I can't believe you spent God knows how much money on something so unnecessary! No normal person needs something like that!"

I cut off her tirade with a laugh and pulled her face to mine, leaving a big smack of a kiss on her lips, and quipped, "Too late. You already knew that about me and still said yes."

*And I thanked my lucky fucking stars for that.*

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## Chapter 120: Epilogue

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### Epilogue

#### EPOV

"Move a little to the left..."

"Spread 'em...I *know* you can do better than that..."

"No no no...not too far..."

"Yeah...*right* there. Okay, easy now...nice and slow..."

"That's the way...oh God...it's...almost...*out*."

*No one ever warned you babies could magically shit up their backs or just how difficult it was to get those tiny onesies off without spreading more shit everywhere.*

Bubba lifted his head up trying to see his favorite person flailing around on the changing table and I was about to test just how Lassie-like he was by asking him to go and bring Sookie back with him, telling her I'd fallen into a well of shit, when I heard the click of the camera behind me along with Sookie's snickering from the doorway, but I knew better than to turn away from Lady Shits-A-Lot. Her flying Stackhouse hands would go straight for the shit.

*After all, she was related to Jason.*

"You know," she said from behind me. "It would've been easier to just cut it off of her, but I did enjoy listening to your porn speak on the baby monitor."

*Now she tells me...not the porn speak part because THAT I knew, but the scissors part.*

Lilly was twenty-eight weeks old, four more than when she'd come out of the womb, but because of her being born prematurely she was only about the size of an average three month old baby. I, however, was very proud of all thirteen pounds and twenty-five inches of her, even if she probably just lost a pound in her diaper.

"Help," I pleaded, maybe to God, but more than likely to Sookie who wasn't so saintly at the moment.

Her only response was to laugh out, "No way...she got me just the other day and all you did was laugh at me. Payback's a bitch."

True.

In fact, I had that picture safely tucked away on my phone to use as my maiden 'sheet', but refusing to acknowledge defeat I appealed to the fairness of the situation and whined, "But you had Gran there to help *you*."

"Yeah," she snickered again. "I bet you're rethinking that whole '*We'll be all alone*' plan *now*."

While I hadn't taken shit covered babies into account, it was all good. Lilly had finally gotten released from the hospital at the end of May, close to a week before her actual due date, and we spent the first couple of weeks at home adjusting to life with a newborn as full-time parents. It was terrifying at first knowing we no longer had a staff of nurses and doctors on hand in case we fucked anything up. There were times when we felt overwhelmed because at times Lilly seemed to want to cry for no other reason than the sky was blue or gray or sunny or cloudy and like every other new parent, most of the time we were exhausted.

*It was completely, utterly, perfectly normal and I couldn't be happier.*

After a few weeks of getting our bearings, we decided to fly back to Louisiana and spend the rest of the summer at our house in Bon Temps – or as Sookie called it, Northman South. We talked my dad into coming out with us for the first couple of weeks and Sookie and I were able to celebrate our shared birthday as a family with Gran and Jason, but we'd returned to California a few days earlier because I would have to return to the set to go back to working on the movie in a couple of weeks. Greenland was no longer a location option – not because the polar icecaps had melted due to our new SUV, but because the military was set to do training exercises during the dark season, so we were back to going to Sweden after all.

*All of us.*

But first we would be celebrating our one year anniversary and after seeing the pictures from GQ, I couldn't think of a better place to stay than the house from the photo shoot. I'd rented it for two weeks as a surprise for Sookie because, even though I couldn't remember it, she'd told me it was where we'd first declared our love for one another. There were plenty of other places I still



wanted to take her, but it seemed like the perfect place to spend our first anniversary. She'd kept her eyes on me when we first walked in the day before, looking for some spark of recognition in mine, but there was nothing more than what I remembered seeing in the photos. Other than the little flashes I'd had months earlier, none of my missing memories had returned, but I was okay with it. I didn't need them any longer because I no longer had that aching need for answers when the answer had been right there in front of me all along.

*Well, technically she was standing behind me and laughing her ass off, watching as I lifted Lady Shits-A-Lot and held her out in front of me like the biohazard she was, carrying her into the bathroom to give her a much needed bath.*

*Eric Northman led a glamorous life indeed.*

## **SPOV**

I left Eric and his fecalpheliac daughter – we could have played on my name and changed the 'S' to a 'D' and called her 'Dookie' – to manage on their own while I cleaned up the aftermath of Shitgate 2012. I never once questioned his ability to be a good father, but I'd had no idea of just how accurate my feelings were way back when, when I first told him I was pregnant. Even not knowing who I was or what we meant to one another, I never once doubted *this side* of him would eventually emerge and it was true because as far as he was concerned, the sun rose and set on that baby girl, even if it wasn't rainbows that came out of her hind end.

*However we both blamed her excrement expertise on Jason.*

I tossed the ruined onesie into the plastic bag, along with the rest of the trash and was hit with a momentary pang of being wasteful for not even trying to wash it, but considering Lilly had more clothes than Eric and I put together – thanks to Auntie Pam – I got over it fairly quickly. It was still difficult for me at times to not fall back on old habits where money was concerned and no matter how much Eric and I had socked away – no matter how many ridiculous sized paychecks he got in the future, I wasn't sure if those feelings would ever go away completely.

My new *car* was a prime example.

That tank was completely ridiculous. Any anonymity was lost the moment we drove through the gates because no one other than The Terminator would be driving around in something like that on the city streets.

*Only Eric wasn't a reprogrammed cyborg sent to protect me, nor was my name Sarah Connor.*

The name The Black Pearl had changed into the full-sized version to go along with its size, *The Curse of the Black Pearl*, and the only reason I didn't demand my beloved piece of tough shit Hyundai back was because Eric had gotten it repaired with an all new interior and suggested we give it to Tara as a high school graduation gift. She and I had kept in touch during all of those weeks we spent at the hospital, but it was Jesus Velasquez who'd told me Tara had gotten a partial scholarship to UCLA. They had not only a stellar academic program, but their School of

Theater, Film, and Television was great too. Between her grades and performances in both the Drama Club and Choir she was a shoo-in, but the scholarship only covered tuition and books. With the way the transit system worked, she'd be stuck on a bus at all hours of the day and night getting to and from the campus, but thanks to Eric she didn't have to worry about that anymore. He'd gotten wind of how she'd led the band of my parking lot protectors from the paparazzi hounds and decided not only would she get my car, but he was paying for her room and board so she could move out of Compton and live on campus too.

*So I kept my mouth shut and rode around in *The Curse of the Black Pearl* while trying to make the best of it by pretending we were outrunning cyborgs sent back from the future by Skynet.*

While I waited for Eric to finish cleaning up Lilly, I sat down and opened my laptop to reread what I'd been working on when I first got distracted hearing his porny dialogue over the baby monitor. It was an edited version of the journal I'd kept in the days and weeks following Lilly's birth. There was so much getting thrown at us at the time, I'd written it all down every night when we returned to the hotel knowing time would slowly eat away at my memories of it all and I didn't want to forget any of it. It was kind of therapeutic for me at the time because it had been a way for me to keep her with us at night when we'd have to leave her at the hospital until we could return the following day, but I never thought of doing anything with it until his mother made her bitch-move.

As I'd suspected when I'd followed him back to L.A., Eric had taken the weight of the blame upon himself over her betrayal and no amount of me telling him it wasn't his fault did any good. He felt responsible. He felt like he'd failed in protecting us and while I too had felt violated seeing Lilly's picture splashed across the tabloids, it was in no way his fault, but there was nothing we could do to change it. The only thing we *could* try and do was change was the public's perception. Instead of having them only see the frail child of a superstar, I wanted to show them the love of a father and the determination of his baby girl to survive something that no amount of fame or money could help her overcome.

Using the pictures we'd taken each week following her birth of Eric's hand alongside her body, I used my journal entries to tell our story. Our fear that she might not make it – Eric's fear I wouldn't survive her birth – and how scared he was at the thought of having to face the possibility of raising her all alone. I documented our joy as she reached every milestone and our heartache with every setback we faced.

The day after our adventure in Crack Town USA, Lilly had been tested and diagnosed with having Stage II Retinopathy of Prematurity, or ROP for short. Because she'd been born prematurely, her eyes didn't have the chance to develop as they normally would have in the womb and instead the blood vessels in the back of her eyes were 'moderately abnormal'. She wasn't blind and it wasn't severe enough they felt she needed to have any invasive treatment, but it was something we needed to be cognizant of – from the types of toys we used to visually stimulate her with to keeping in mind her sensitivity to lights and glares. Of course that was all Pam needed to hear before we were drowning in a sea of baby sunglasses, at least now she had a good excuse. Lilly might need further treatment or eyeglasses in the future, but all in all, we

knew we couldn't complain given the other horrors she could have faced and were grateful we'd gotten out of it relatively unscathed.

I didn't, however, mention Bill Compton, Debbie Pelt, or Crystal Meth in the article because it wasn't a story about them. It was meant to be a story of triumph over tragedy that covered Lilly's birth all the way up until the day we were finally able to bring her home, culminating in her final shot in the incubator that morning. Only instead of just Eric's had alongside her body, it was both of ours.

Eric had spent nearly his entire lifetime walking around needing to keep his head down, his eyes shielded by sunglasses and, other than our drunken wedding night, he moved through life out in the open operating under the mantra of, "Don't say a word. Don't show them any reaction. Just keep moving." It was exactly how he'd acted in trying to get us out of the casino that day and it was how we went through life as a couple in the days and weeks afterward. It was all the public ever got to see, so I wanted to tell the human side of the story the public *didn't* get to see. Beyond the glitz and glamour of Eric's fame and fortune, he wasn't just a rich celebrity or an actor or even just my hero husband.

He was human too.

Jodie Foster had recently come out publically in the defense of another young actress whose life had been drastically affected by the celebrity culture we lived in. While I may not have agreed with her choices, I wasn't righteous enough to condemn her for her actions because I'd never walked in her shoes, but I could identify with the other people who'd been affected by them and I did know what it was like to be young and make a mistake. The thought of having to live through Quinn's betrayals with the world watching was the things nightmares were made of and our wedding night notwithstanding, I couldn't imagine having my own errors in judgment put on display for the entire world to see and judge. It was exactly how Eric had felt seeing Lilly's picture sold by the very person he should have been able to trust and Ms. Foster's words in defense of her one-time co-star struck a chord with me when she said,

*"Actors who become celebrities are supposed to be grateful for the public interest. After all, they're getting paid. Just to set the record straight, a salary for a given on-screen performance does not include the right to invade anyone's privacy, to destroy someone's sense of self."*

*Amen to that.*

Before I'd become Mrs. Eric Northman, I too had been guilty of that myself and now that I could see both sides of the coin, I could see the error of my ways and felt it was my duty to try and right a wrong I myself had once committed.

Eric's celebrity was the driving force behind his mother's invasion of our privacy and putting Lilly on display for the world to see, for nothing more than lining her own pockets before she seemed to disappear off the face of the earth. One could only hope, but Pam was still looking for her out of her own need for justice.

So, we decided together that we'd have our say too. When she wasn't on the search for His Mama Bin Hidin', Pam put out feelers to more reputable magazines outlining what I had written and in doing so had sparked a bidding war amongst them on who would get to publish our story. But unlike his mother, we weren't doing it for the money which was already earmarked for different charities – Terry's service dogs organization, The Wounded Warriors Project, and Lafayette's soup kitchen among them. We were doing it to serve as a warning for every other person out there who sought fame and fortune thinking it would give them a perfect life. We were doing it for every other parent out there who sat afraid in silent vigil at their child's bedside hoping and praying for a miracle, so they'd know they weren't alone.

*And I made sure I thanked God each and every day for our little miracle, no matter what came out of her little booty.*

## **EPOV**

Once Lilly was shit free, Sookie fed her and went to put her down for the night, with Bubba dogging her heels and, no doubt, curling up on the bed next to her bassinet so he could keep an eye on his favorite human. I wasn't jealous of his reaction though and happily played second fiddle. From the moment he first laid eyes on her in the car on the way home from the hospital, it seemed like she was all he wanted to see. Lilly was his only interest and wherever she was is where you would find him. She'd been too young to really notice him at first, but now she looked for him whenever she heard his collar jangle and in her waking hours she was happiest when he would lie down beside her, wherever or whoever had her propped up. He'd proven his worth time and again, so how could I be upset with the added security he provided, knowing he'd rip the throat out of anyone he deemed a threat.

*It almost made me wish my mother would turn up for another visit.*

That whore was dead to me now. Sookie may have absolved me of my failure in protecting them from her, but I would never forgive myself for allowing her to get close enough to do what she had. There would never be any forgiveness for her from me either and I no longer had fantasies of having any sort of relationship with her. The ones I did have of her all ended with her painful death. I didn't need her in my life, nor did I want her in my life. I had all the family I needed and she would never get the chance to be a part of it, and while I didn't actively go looking for her, that didn't mean I wouldn't unleash on her with both barrels if our paths ever crossed again.

*Or I could just unleash Bubba and let him have at it.*

"What's with the angry face?" Sookie asked as she walked back into the room.

I hadn't had the time or opportunity to work on my poker face in recent weeks and not wanting to bring up the evil whore and spoil our evening, I put on a leer instead, saying, "Lilly is finally asleep and you return to me fully dressed. I find this unacceptable."

*It wasn't even a lie.*

She eyed me like it *was* a lie, but didn't call me out on it and instead sat down on the couch across from me, putting me out of arm's reach of her, and slid the Scrabble board we'd been playing earlier in between us. I could see the wheels spinning when she smiled coyly and said, "Well then, I propose we up the stakes in our game. I will strip off every article of clothing you manage to spell out on the board, but you have to do the same."

*Strip Scrabble?*

*I could only assume the winner and loser would both get an orgasm out of the deal, so it was a certifiable win/win to me!*

Like the horny bastard I was, thoughts of anything other than playing with Naked Sookie disappeared from my mind, as I quickly flipped over the tiles I had looking for 'bra' or 'panties', but finding nothing more tantalizing than 'shoe'.

*And she wasn't wearing any of those.*

She also wasn't having any luck in undressing me, so we changed the rules to include things we could do to each other which led to a 'kiss' for her and fortunately for me, 'tit', which I took quite literally in saying hello to my BFF's. However, even with all of the ridiculous names she had for The Captain, she couldn't manage to get the tiles she needed in order for her – and therefore getting any enjoyment out of it for me – to get reacquainted with him and I was about to call an end to the torture by flipping the board over, *accidentally on purpose*, when her eyes lit up with her next draw of tiles.

With baited breath and a raging hard-on, I watched her lick her lips as she slowly placed the tiles on the board building off the letter 'C'. I was hoping to see an 'O', 'C', and 'K', but instead my eyes narrowed watching her put down a 'U', 'M', 'F', 'E', 'T', 'T', and 'T'.

"Cumfetti?" I asked and added, "That's not a word."

'*Shut up!*' said The Captain since apparently his brain caught on before mine did.

"That's your argument?" she giggled. "Are you going to argue with my triple word score too?" she asked as it finally sunk in what she had spelled.

*Fuck and No. Well, make that Fuck and Yes. No to the arguing part and Yes to the fucking part.*

The board and tiles scattered as I dove across the coffee table and pounced on her on the opposite couch. She laughed out loud, but it didn't take long for our clothes to go flying too. My newly acquired bat like senses, that apparently came with having a baby, heard Bubba briefly come into the room to check out what the noise was before I heard the jangle of his collar over the baby monitor as he settled back on the bed, but it wasn't long before all I could hear were Sookie's moans and pants of, "Yes," "Oh God," "More," and "Harder."

Even after all of this time, an entire year of having her in every way imaginable – most of which I could remember – I knew I would never get enough. It would never be enough and as I slid into her for the countless time, with every pulse of her heartbeat, every throb of her surrounding me and the rest of me surrounding her, I knew I would never tire of her. She was literally my other half by then and I couldn't imagine a life without her, nor did I want to, and as we continued to ruin the couch and each other for the rest of the evening, I couldn't imagine my life could get any better than this.

We hadn't been in bed for very long when Lilly woke up in the middle of the night, but seeing as how I'd done my best to exhaust her mother, I felt it was only fair for me to get up with her. Sookie mostly breastfed her, but she expressed milk so I could feed her with a bottle too and Lilly didn't seem to get confused over the change or prefer one over the other and I was glad, wanting to have that bonding time with her as well.

After she was in a fresh diaper and fed, I walked with her out onto the balcony hoping the ocean air would work its magic in getting her to go back to sleep. As I stared out at the crashing waves below us underneath the moonlit sky, I thought back to my idea of living in Louisiana for the majority of year and realized not having the ocean right there would be the only drawback for me. I loved the small town atmosphere of Bon Temps and it probably wouldn't take much to talk my father into coming with us, so we would be able to live most of our daily lives out of the spotlight and surrounded by our family. The idea appealed to me so much that I almost felt guilty for the good fortune I'd had over the last year. Yes, there were a lot of shitty things that had happened too, but overall I knew I was a lucky bastard. *Too lucky*, some would say – me included – but that was something I was working on. I no longer felt as undeserving as I once did because Sookie showed me every day that she felt I was worthy.

*And I argued that point with myself less and less with each passing day.*

Besides, as long as *she* found me worthy, that was all that really mattered to me and probably for the very first time in my entire life, I truly felt at peace. I no longer felt like I was on edge waiting for the next bad thing to befall us and there was nothing inside nagging at me, be it work or life in general. For the first time I felt like all of the weight I'd carried on my shoulders for as long as I could remember was gone, so I sent out a silent 'Thank you' into the universe for giving me not just the gift of bringing my two favorite girls into my life, but with them a very real and tangible peace.

I'd exhausted not just Sookie that night, but myself too and had just settled down onto one of the overstuffed chairs on the balcony, gently patting Lilly's back hoping to soothe her back into slumber, when I heard it. Somewhere out in the distant darkness I heard the unmistakable sound echoing back to me in the form of a whale's song.

*And like a row of dominoes lined up in my mind, one by one they fell until there were none left standing.*

**SPOV**

I stirred awake hearing Eric coming into the bedroom and opened my eyes in time to see him placing Lilly back into her bassinet, but he'd worn my ass out so I closed them again, only acknowledging my half-asleep status by whispering out, "Was she up for very long this time?"

I was barely able to stay awake long enough to wait for his reply, only instead of answering me, he crawled on top of me causing my eyes to open again – more fully this time – and seeing the smile on his face had me asking, "What?"

He looked at me with a kind of wonder that I didn't know what to make of until I gasped out loud, now realizing the cause in hearing his one word reply.

"Mshangao."

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## Chapter 121: Bonus Outtake One Night in Vegas

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### One Night in Vegas

#### SPOV

"Get your ass out here Stackhouse! Let's see the goods!" Amelia yelled through the bathroom door where I was still safely hidden away.

I stared back at my reflection, not sure if the four gin and tonics I'd consumed over the span of an hour or so would be enough liquid courage to get me to open the door, much less go downstairs into the casino dressed like this. The red designer dress had always looked sexy on Amelia's slight form, but now that it was on me it looked scandalous at best.

*Trashy at worst.*

I'd gotten a lot better about my body image over the last year – dropping the two-hundred thirty pound weight Quinn had been did wonders for my self-esteem – and I'd actually grown fond of my curvy figure, but this seemed like too much.

*And by 'too much' I meant the girls were one sneeze away from showing all of Las Vegas my very own snake eyes.*

I didn't have too much time to ponder the *'too much'* though because the word *'patient'* would never be used to describe Amelia unless she was getting treated for the clap – again – when she burst into the room and smiled with her eyes glazing over seeing me.

*I really needed to start remembering to lock doors behind me.*

"You look *fuck hot* Sook," she leered back at me in the mirror.

"I *look* like I should be *charging by the hour*," I huffed back.

*Slutty Sookie at your service. My pro-dick-tivity is unparalleled in the seedy underground of sex for sale. Would you care to try our special for this evening? One taste of my blow-jobotomy and all of your worries will disappear because it'll blow your mind, among other things.*

Either I'd been on one too many interviews or had been a waitress for too long, but at least I didn't have to worry about either one of those things anymore now that I'd finally gotten a teaching job. The Headmaster, Mr. Brigant, looked like he could use a blow job to loosen up, but Lord knew I didn't want the job *that much*.

*But I might suggest it to that poor Preston Pardloe guy because he seemed willing to do just about anything to make the Headmaster happy.*

"Looking like *that*," Amelia broke into my thoughts, "You should charge *a lot*. But, there's one thing missing..."

Before I realized what she was doing, her hands flew faster than the speed of light up underneath the dress and pulled down the panties that I'd been wearing, but all I could do was yell out, "AMELIA!"

*No wonder she was so popular!*

"What?" she asked innocently, which was lost on her considering she was tugging my panties out from underneath my feet. "The panty lines were ruining the image we're going for."

*Which was what, exactly? Street walker chic?*

My mind flashed to an imaginary Glamour magazine equivalent called *Skanker*, with the image of my panty-lined ass being a *Tramp Don't*, but my only choices were either to give up my underwear or fall over onto the bathroom vanity, so I begrudgingly lifted my feet and let her have her prize, while wishing I had a fart stored up to pay her back, so long as she was already down there.

*Not the best superhero power to have, but it would come in handy right about now.*

*And not only did we look alike, but that thought alone proved I was Jason Stackhouse's sister. At least I'd be teaching a bunch of five year olds, so on the bright side I'll be surrounded by a group of my intellectual peers.*

"Loosen up Sookie," she smiled after standing up, although she wouldn't be saying that if she knew about the ass assault she'd be under if my bowel scowl would cooperate. Seeing the glare on my face, she added, "We're here to have fun and celebrate you getting your new job."

"I could do that with my panties on," I grumbled back at her.



"No you couldn't," she argued back. "Clearly they were all twisted up in there giving you that sourpuss, so with any luck – now that you're wedgie free – your *other* puss will have a reason to smile."

*With Amelia's 'free love' spirit, her other puss must look like The Joker by now. Instead of Catwoman, would that make her Pussywoman?*

*Maybe those gin and tonics were kicking in after all...*

"It'll just be one less obstacle for whatever lucky man down there that strikes your fancy tonight, because *tonight* you aren't *School Teacher Sookie*. *Tonight* you are *Sexy Sookie* who takes what she wants without apology. You deserve to have fun for once and you've been cock-free for much too long." Seeing my glare still aimed her way, because she was more concerned with my cock-free diet than me, she smiled and said, "He doesn't have to be *Mr. Right* when *Mr. Right Now* who's DTF will do and while Quinn may have been an overall dick, here's to hoping you find one that can actually get you off."

She raised her glass at the end of her garish toast with a cheesy grin plastered on her face and I couldn't help but laugh and clink my glass against hers, even though we both knew that wasn't going to happen.

*Down To Fuck or not, I would never just fall into bed with someone I didn't know.*

## **EPOV**

Alcide and I had been sitting at the poker table for a couple of hours, but I'd been losing hand after hand because I just couldn't seem to concentrate. I felt off somehow – flustered for no discernible reason whatsoever – and kept fidgeting in my seat. I'd been looking forward to this trip for weeks, but now that I was here, it felt like it was the last place I wanted to be.

As always, there were a flock of women surrounding us, but even that didn't seem to help and, if anything, only seemed to make matters worse. There was always a beautiful woman within arm's reach that I could use to work off whatever pent up frustrations I was feeling, but lately I'd been getting tired of that too. I knew they didn't want me for the *real me* – they couldn't because no one had ever met the *real me* before, but then I didn't want to know the real them either. They'd be lucky if I even remembered their name, if I even bothered to ask in the first place, but all of it was getting old. Sure, it got me off, but was that all there was to be had?

*Working and fucking random women until the day I died?*

If anyone had posed the question to me hours earlier, I would've said, "Hell yeah!" and meant it, but ever since we'd come down from our rooms and walked into the casino, I felt on edge. My eyes kept darting around like I was missing something, but I couldn't figure out what in the fuck it was.

*And it was making me anxious.*

I was twenty-nine years old with more fame – more like *infamy* – and money than I knew what to do with, but at the end of the day I went home alone where it was just me, myself, and I. Everyone thought I led this great life when inside, more often than not, I felt like a fucking loser and I couldn't help but wonder if that was all there would ever be for me.

*Maybe Pam was right and I WAS a pussy.*

I'd been having more and more of those depressing thoughts over the last few weeks, but I'd always been able to push them away before they could take hold. For some reason now, however, it felt like they were finally taking a hold of me. Countless women falling at my feet with their legs spread wide open and a different party every night of the week weren't cutting it anymore in making me feel any better than I had been ever since I'd gotten out of rehab. So far I'd only found one way to feel good about myself and it had nearly killed me, and the fact the producers of the show had staged a little mini-intervention with me that very afternoon told me it showed. I hadn't been fooling anyone that everything was fine because I could feel myself heading down that slippery slope that led to my drug addiction the first time, only this time I would have no one to blame but myself.

*That, I feared, was the cause of my current anxiety.*

I was afraid my former demon was trying to make a comeback and suddenly I felt claustrophobic, abruptly standing up needing to take a walk just to clear my head, but seeing the hopeful eyes of the women standing there like contestants in *The Bachelor*, waiting to see who would be given the rose and move onto the next round, made me wince.

*I'd only ever left flowers for one woman and, in part, it was thanks to her I slid down the cocaine slide to begin with.*

*And she was also the reason I'd be a lifelong bachelor.*

My father was a dick, but I knew some of that hatred stemmed from my mother leaving us. Sure, I saw a lot of couples who appeared to be happy, but I had a hard time believing all of that was real. I couldn't imagine ever finding one person who I'd want to spend the rest of my life with when I couldn't even find someone I could tolerate for longer than a weekend. I hadn't necessarily been looking for *the one* either, but then I doubted she existed anyway, so if there was indeed a higher power in the universe they'd have to all but hit me over the head to notice her to begin with.

*And tying me to her with a ball and chain would likely be required too.*

Seeing all of the hopeful eyes batting their lashes at me only made me more depressed knowing they were my only option. I really was tired of it all, but at the same time I was resigned that this was my life, so I put on the charm and my acting skills, smiling at them all and saying, "I'll be right back ladies. Why don't you keep my seat, and my pal Alcide here, warm while I go and see a man about a horse."

I could tell by the vacant look in their eyes none of them got the phrase that I needed to take a leak and probably thought I'd come back on a white stallion, plucking one of them from the horde and riding off into the sunset with them. But I was no Prince Charming and they weren't damsels in distress.

*There'd never be any happily ever after for me.*

Alcide gave me a wary look, but he must have recognized my need to be alone because he just gave me a slight nod and got the girls' attention by saying, "Let the man have a few minutes. He'll be right back."

The last part of that sentence sounded more like an order to me than an appeasement to them, but I didn't care. I just needed to get away from them and walked off like I was a man on a mission.

*But it was a Mission Impossible because no matter how far I walked, I would never be able to get away from myself.*

After I exited the bathroom, I didn't want to return to the table just yet. Nor did I want to return to my empty room, so I wandered the casino floor with my head down, trying not to draw too much attention to myself, but the more I walked around, the more pissed off I became. Not at anyone in particular – more so at my life in general – at least that was until I attempted to dodge a persistent brunette I'd spotted following me and wasn't paying attention to anything else.

*When I got slammed into from behind and knocked into the corner of the wall I'd been rounding, spilling the drink I'd just ordered.*

I spun around to give who I thought would be the brunette hell, but choked on the words seeing the busty blond in front of me. My anger turned into lust – the likes of which I couldn't remember ever having felt so strongly before – with her putting all of the women I'd just walked away from to shame. She had on a sinfully tight red dress and curves in all the right places, looking like she could've walked straight out of a pinup calendar from 1942, but maybe without the comical look on her face akin to a deer being caught in headlights. She quickly shook it off and exclaimed, "Oh, I'm so sorry. Are you alright?"

"No, but I'm willing to go back to your room and let you kiss it all better," my mouth told Calendar Girl on reflex. It was crass – even for me – but I couldn't stop myself in time. However, I'd certainly back up their offer and from the way she was dressed, I couldn't imagine being disappointed with what I found when I stripped the dress from her body. I hoped she was free for the weekend.

*My dick wanted to pencil her into my calendar.*

"Excuse me?" she asked with her eyes opened wide. "I was going to offer to buy you another drink, but I think I'll pass. You're kind of a dick."

I grinned at her rebuke and said, "Your lips. My body. Or, if you'd like, I could go first. As for my dick, feel free to find out *exactly* what kind I have and I'll let you buy me breakfast in the morning instead of another drink now." I smiled even wider getting more turned on seeing her skin flush with color.

"Fuck you!" she spat.

"I'd love to," I agreed and unintentionally took a step forward, feeling – among other things – the need to be closer to her. I blamed my obnoxious behavior on being blinded by her spectacular breasts – I was positive they were real – and they were also the reason why I'd missed her flying hand which made stinging contact with my face just seconds before she angrily huffed, "You shouldn't speak to a lady that way. Didn't your mother teach you any manners?"

*No, my mother taught me to not trust any woman.*

She took off without waiting for a reply, but my eyes couldn't help but follow her back to the bar and even though I was a little embarrassed by my behavior, I still chuckled to myself thinking I'd hated seeing her go but loved watching her leave.

*She had an ass made for biting.*

I slowly followed behind her as though my dick had suddenly turned into a bloodhound – or a creepy stalker – and watched as she sat down next to a different brunette where I assumed she proceeded to tell her about our little run in, if I was reading her pissed off expression and wildly gesticulating hands correctly. She really was beautiful – and smoking hot when she was fuming mad – so I stayed there for a few moments and allowed myself to be entertained by watching her. Out of the corner of my eye I could see the other brunette I'd been trying to dodge earlier slowly inching her way towards me and while she was pretty enough, she didn't hold a candle to the Slap Chop model I'd just encountered. Besides that, her eyes gave off a *crazy* vibe that I wanted no part of, so I decided my pinup girl entertainment would have to be cut short if I wanted to avoid her and started to walk away. I only turned back one last time to try and commit the blond to memory so I could try and pretend the next woman I ended up taking to bed was her, but my feet stopped moving when I saw someone else sliding into the now empty seat her friend had just vacated.

Bill Compton.

## **Bill POV**

I was positively livid inside seeing Sookie dressed as she was – no better than her whore cousin who I'd just left buried in the desert – and I tried to calm myself before taking the now vacant seat next to hers.

For months I'd watched her from afar, learning all that I could about her and seeing her here dressed like *that* left me seething. My little southern belle was acting no better than common trash and I wondered if perhaps I'd misjudged her, but quickly cast those notions aside. I knew

her better than anyone after having watched her for the last several weeks – from the way she interacted with her customers at that hole in the wall she worked at to doing her good deeds on the weekends and everything in between. She didn't date. She didn't go out to bars or clubs. She didn't even seem to notice the always too interested looks from the men in her presence, so I blamed her whore roommate for Sookie being there – the last place I would've expected – and dressing her in something so vulgar.

However, if Sookie wanted to play the role of a whore for the night, than I was more than willing to be her 'John', but she would learn. I would *make her learn* she would only ever be a whore for *me*.

"Sookeh," I said, smiling back at her with every ounce of my acting abilities on display, hiding my anger behind false pleasantries, and touching her arm to get her attention.

"Huh?" she asked, seemingly startled by my presence. It was almost comical considering I'd been following her for so long, but I'd never actually been *this close* to her before and I could barely contain my reaction now that I finally had her at my side.

*Where she belonged.*

"How did you know my name? Have we met before?" she asked without any recognition in her eyes, making me realize I'd committed an error.

I blamed *her* since *she* was the one who shouldn't have been here. She also shouldn't have been dressed like a tawdry harlot put out on display for the leering crowd I'd observed watching her. Wanting her.

*She was mine.*

Lying was easy. Most of my life was one big lie. It was even my job to lie and I did it well, so I casually offered, "I heard your friend say it," and reached over to brush a stray lock of hair behind her shoulder, but she flinched away from my contact. It only served to anger me more, but it served my purpose as well just the same since she'd been too distracted watching one hand and missed seeing the other drop the GHB into her drink. I'd brought it with me just in case whomever I chose as my companion for the evening needed a little more incentive than my natural charm, but now that Sookie was there, there would be no other choice for me.

"Compton!" I heard over my shoulder and cringed slightly, while watching her eyes flick upwards at the voice I recognized all too well. She looked angry and relieved at the same time, now seeing the bane of my existence I felt coming to a stop behind me.

"Eric," I said calmly through gritted teeth and straightened up in my seat. Of course she recognized *him* and from the looks of it, I knew her well enough by then to know she liked what she saw. *Everyone* knew who *The Great Eric Northman* was and it appeared Sookie was no different.

*But she would learn – I was the ONLY ONE she would be allowed to look at like that.*

He moved to stand nearly in between us and asked, "Who's your friend?" without taking his eyes off of her.

Before I could answer – not that I'd wanted to – she spoke up, saying with a little venom in her voice, "We're not friends, which is why he should keep his hands to himself, but at least he hasn't all but insinuated I'm some cheap floozy." Her eyes turned to narrow back at me when she added, "But don't make the mistake of fucking touching a woman you don't know, *especially me.*"

Her vulgar reprimand only angered me more, especially after all of the countless hours I'd dedicated to getting to know her. I'd spent even more time cultivating the plans I'd made for our life together, but then she'd had no idea she was already spoken for.

*But she would learn that truth soon enough.*

"Really..." Eric drawled out and turned to briefly glare down at me. Turning back to her with a smile, he also turned on the charm, asking, "So, if I introduce myself then am *I* at liberty to let my hands wander? I'm Eric."

She still appeared angry, but her lips minutely curved upwards into a smile at his offensive remark anyway before gazing back at him like he was the only man on earth – or at the very least, the only man in the room with her – and replied, "I'm not *that* easy, but then I would've thought you learned that lesson by now. My name is Sookie, but *you* can just call me Miss Stackhouse."

From what I gathered, they already seemed to know one another, but I was confused by their introduction and the fact I of all people would've known if she'd been with Eric before. My hands clenched into fists while I froze the muscles in my face before my expression could give me away.

I saw her first.

Her smile should've only been for me.

*THAT would be her first lesson.*

## **SPOV**

*Stupid sexy fantasy husband.*

"Sookie," he smiled wider, "An unusual name for an unusually beautiful woman."

"You must really have a hard head or maybe a case of ADD. I said you could call me *Miss Stackhouse*," I replied having my own Janet Jackson moment.

*Lah. Hooz. Er!*

*But damn he was sexy.*

I was still a little angry over how he'd spoken to me earlier, but my inner teenage fan girl wouldn't shut the fuck up with her internal squees sounding off in my brain, so I took another deep breath to try and calm down while rolling my eyes at him. I was sure women dropped their panties on a dime for that smile he was sporting, but unluckily for him I wasn't wearing any.

*However that didn't mean HE would be getting lucky with me.*

*But my God did he smell good.*

*Like I-wished-I-was-wearing-panties-to-catch-the-flood- of-Eric North-cum-leaking-out-of-me good.*

"So...*Miss Stackhouse*," he purred out my name, making both of my pusses smile just like Amelia said they would, but at least I could make one of them actually frown while he asked, "Are you from around here?"

"Ha!" I snorted while my internal Bieber-like tweenager squeed, 'Oh-My-God-Eric-Northman-Is-Close-Enough-To-Touch- And-He-Just-Used-The-Lamest-Pickup-Line-On-Me-Ever !'

*That bitch must've downed a Red Bull when I wasn't looking.*

I wrangled that dirty little whore into a choke hold and added a bit more calmly, "Louisiana originally, but now I live in L.A."

*Like you!*

*SQUEE!*

*Fucking Bieberette.*

"Oh," he seemed to grimace which proved I was the only squeeing fool here. He sighed slightly outwardly, while I sighed hugely internally hoping I'd be able to keep her from squeeing out loud, when he adopted a knowing look as he asked, "So, I take it you're an actress?"

"No," I found myself laughing a little at just the thought.

Night. Mare.

The longer he stood there, the less of a douche bag he seemed to be, and despite him being my secret fantasy husband, I was starting to look at him more like he was a normal human being. The alcohol had loosened up not just my hands but my tongue as well so that I wasn't tripping over it just talking to him, but I wasn't so inebriated that I'd forgotten just who I was talking to.

Sure, he was my fantasy husband, but I'd read enough gossip magazines to know he was a player and had seen for myself it must be true. A part of me had already assumed he would be a douche bag to begin with, so at least that wasn't disappointing and he dated porn stars for Christ's sake, so he would never be my Mr. Right. And no matter how much my lower lips were secretly salivating for him, he wouldn't be my Mr. Right Now either.

*Wait...porn stars...*

Sweet baby Jesus in a manger... Does he think I make *porn*? Is *that* why he asked me if I was an actress? Was it the dress? Was it because I wasn't wearing panties?

My horror over the thought mixed in with the four gin and tonics already in my system and had my upper lips moving faster than my brain could rein them in with the words, "I don't have sex on film!" blurting out of them and into the atmosphere never to be seen again.

*Oh...but they were heard.*

His eyebrow rose up as his mouth fell open and I felt my skin burn like the dirty little whore I was dressed up as.

*Mort. I. Fied.*

*Dear Lord, please strike me dead. Right now. Amen.*

My eyes darted around looking for an escape, or perhaps an errant bolt of lightning, while I kept an ear out hoping for at least a fucking clap of thunder, but all I could hear over the pounding of the blood now rushing through my veins was Eric's chuckle as he said, "That's good...see? We have something in common since I don't do that either."

*I know, Bieberette would've used a fake ID and bought the DVD if you had.*

I was sure I looked like Professor Moody, with one eye looking at him while the other spun around in its socket looking for a way out, and after taking a huge sip of my drink, I started to calm down seeing he hadn't run away nor had I turned into a pillar of salt.

*I didn't know if I should be happy or disappointed over that fact.*

After swallowing hard – my pride was a bitch to get down – I smiled a little and said, "Sorry. I always knew I had a potty mouth, but I seem to have developed a sudden case of diarrhea of the mouth."

*And I still couldn't decide if I wouldn't prefer it coming out of the other end right about now.*

When he softly smiled back at me, I swear to fucking Christ I could hear angels singing. Or maybe that was just my girly bits squeeing again, but my brain short circuited for a long second while my hands made a break for it and reached for his lips, wanting to see if they were as soft as



they looked since they weren't focused on them earlier when I'd slapped him across the face. I realized what they were doing and pulled them back just in time, taking another sip of my rum and coke in the meantime while I tried to shake off my stupor enough to remember what we'd been talking about.

*Oh yeah...porn.*

Surprisingly, I found myself actually starting to enjoy our conversation and didn't want him to go away just yet. Despite our earlier altercation, I couldn't contain Bieberette to the point of dismissing him altogether, so long as he didn't cross any more lines.

*Wait...was that why Amelia had taken my panties? So there'd be no lines for anyone to risk crossing?*

*Sneaky bitch.*

It wasn't until he slipped into the seat next to mine that I realized the skeezy guy – Compton I surmised from Eric's greeting – had left us alone, but I was grateful and offered, "Thanks, by the way, for coming to my rescue. Your friend there gave me the heebie jeebies."

He really had and if Eric hadn't walked up and given me my own little blow-jobotomy, I would've run off to look for Amelia. Now I just hoped she would stay away and not embarrass me even further by telling my fantasy husband about my Mrs. Eric Northman doodles back home.

*Or that I was going commando.*

"Well, you seemed a little uncomfortable when he sat down next to you and I figured your hands might not be up for another slap fest just yet," he smiled back at me before adding, "I'm sorry about earlier. I guess I do have a thing or two to learn about how to treat a lady."

"Well then, you're in luck," I smiled back at him, happy he had the decency to apologize. "I happen to be a teacher and I'm sure our class would love to have you. I think you'll fit right in with all of the other kindergartners."

He laughed and I'd be damned if I didn't discover a line that led from my ears to my suddenly curling toes that rushed straight out of my hoohah, like a high school football team running onto the field at their homecoming game.

*He may as well have laughed out 'Marco' because my lower lips were screaming 'Polo!'*

"Bill's an actor too. He's on my show," he said while studying my face, looking for what, I had no clue, but at least he hadn't said 'Marco'.

*That would've been embarrassing.*

His blues eyes were intense as they stared back into my own and I found myself having a difficult time focusing. He really was a beautiful man, but I was beginning to see there might be more to him than that. My mind was really starting to feel scattered and I'd once again forgotten what we'd been talking about when I finally remembered and just shrugged, replying, "He's creepy, so I suppose he'd need to be rich and famous for foreplay. That doesn't float my boat and besides, I wouldn't know who he was anyway. Is he on your show? I don't watch a lot of TV."

"Yeah," he sighed and then asked, "So you know who I am then?"

*Duh...could you not hear Bieberette's deafening squees?*

Again, he almost seemed disappointed, but I mean, really...who *didn't* know who he was? There was an underlying sadness in his eyes that I felt compelled to try and take away from him and the alcohol in my system decided to make light of the situation. I figured I'd never see him again after tonight, so it didn't really matter what he thought about me and he looked like he could use an ego boost, so I found myself admitting, "I do. In fact, I'll even admit to having a bit of a crush on you growing up."

*'HA!' said Bieberette.*

That was like saying I had a bit of moisture pooling in my nether regions when in reality, I wouldn't be surprised if a tiny little ark fell out from in between my thighs carrying two of every animal on the planet, riding the flood of Eric North-cum into the promised land. However I would NOT cop to the fact I had what equated to Eric Northman wallpaper back home in Bon Temps unless he broke out into sobs.

*That was just...no.*

"So, what's changed that you no longer have a crush on me?" he asked.

The sadness was still there despite his small smile and once again I felt compelled to try and make him feel better, so I let Bieberette out of her choke hold for only a moment and then wanted to kill the bitch when pandemonium ensued as she made me smile back and ask, "Who said it was past tense?"

*That's it! Her ass was getting locked up in a home for wayward fan girls just as soon as we got home!*

He moved a little closer and whispered so low that I had to lean in to hear him when he playfully said, "Your slap earlier would indicate otherwise."

*The flood leaking out of me would indicate Noah himself would be joining us shortly.*

I didn't have the wherewithal to pull away from him and, if anything, I only wanted to move closer. My head was swimming with all things Eric and his scent was overwhelming my senses.

*I wanted to lick him.*

"Kiss me."

I couldn't be certain if I'd heard him right because that very well could've been Bieberette making her last stand, but when his lips were suddenly getting closer and I was suddenly feeling cross-eyed I knew I hadn't imagined it. Bieberette was screaming loudly by then, jumping up and down and drawing hearts all over the inside of my skull, but I still heard my grown-up voice ask, "Excuse me?"

*Did he just lick his lip?*

*Dirty playing bastard.*

I still couldn't believe I was actually face to face with Eric Northman. Literally. Up until tonight, he only existed on television or the pages of a magazine, but now he was real.

*And he still smelled REALLY good.*

It was dumb, but I'd never really considered behind it all there lived a human being. His life was almost otherworldly compared to mine with his celebrity putting him into the annals of history while I'd just be a footnote in the lives of those I'd actually met and I preferred it that way. I'd seen the horde of paparazzi on the sidewalk when we'd first arrived, but they seemed to have to stay out there and I was especially grateful now. The last thing I needed was to be photographed with him and speculated to be Eric Northman's latest fling girl.

*Mr. Brigant would LOVE that.*

I wouldn't, however, be opposed to having my picture taken with him privately and then anonymously sent to Quinn. He'd never believe me otherwise and, childishly, I knew it would piss him off even now after all of this time.

Oh well, revenge *would've* been sweet.

"Do you see that brunette standing over there?" he asked, pulling me back from my scattered thoughts.

*Unless she was sitting on his face, I wouldn't have seen her.*

*But I might've gotten into a cat fight with her if she had been.*

I shook off some of the lust I was feeling – it would be impossible to get rid of it all – and tried to concentrate on his eyes, watching them dart to my left, and when mine followed, sure enough I saw a brunette giving me the *'Die-Now-Bitch-Glare'*.

"What about her?" I asked, hoping he wasn't going to suggest a threesome because my hands were itching to do something other than slap him again.

"She's a potential problem I'm trying to nip in the bud. In order to do that I need to nip your lips."

*Which ones?*

I pushed those sinful thoughts away as best I could and figured it was *just* one kiss, right? I mean, in what other universe would Bieberette ever have the chance to kiss her fantasy husband?

## **EPOV**

*God she was sexy.*

And now that I was closer I could tell she even smelled like cherries. There was something about her that drew me in more than her beauty and body – oddly it was her mind. The way she wasn't impressed with me. The way she made me work to get her attention – her approval – wasn't something I'd ever encountered before. Nor was the fact that I was willing to do it.

I discovered she was funny – quick witted – and seemed comfortable in her own skin. I didn't know whether to kick Bill's ass or kiss him on the lips because if it hadn't been for her wary expression when he'd joined her, I would've kept walking.

*Maybe.*

Another odd happenstance was the overwhelming, possessive feelings that came over me seeing him hit on her.

*Like she was mine.*

*Even though she wasn't.*

Most of the other women I met came across as too confident or too needy – empty-headed bimbos with fake tits and matching personalities, but Sookie just came across as real.

*And after living my lifetime in the land of make believe, it only made her stand out that much more.*

I couldn't remember the last time anyone had made me laugh like she had and when she'd said she lived in L.A. I automatically assumed she was a wannabe actress, although *not* the porn star variety. After all, she was a beautiful girl and that's what all of the other ones I'd ever met had wanted to be, but hearing she was a teacher made my dick twitch even more.

*I was Hot. For. Teacher.*

No woman had ever talked to me the way she had – at least none that I'd been interested in – and instead they only flirted or downright propositioned me, but not Sookie. Even though she shocked me when she admitted to having a crush on me when she was younger, she didn't seem all that impressed with me now that I was some supposed hotshot movie star and wasn't trying to be anything other than who she was. It was a breath of fresh air.

*Cherry scented air.*

It just gave my dick one more reason to twitch and gave me one more reason to be pissed at my dad for keeping me out of school to work my whole life – thereby missing out on fantasy teachers like Sookie – and sitting there now, I realized my earlier anxiety was gone. It had disappeared the moment I saw her and oddly enough, I felt myself envying whatever lucky bastard she'd eventually end up with. He'd probably be a normal guy with a normal job and would get to come home to her every night. They'd share a house filled with laughter and maybe a rug rat or two where she'd be waiting for him each night with a kiss and a home cooked meal, while I was stuck eating out and having to choose amongst the least annoying women surrounding me, picking the one who had the most realistic tits.

*It just wasn't fair.*

Not only because I suspected her tits were real but because I knew it was a life I would never have. I didn't deserve someone like her. Sure, she was smiling and laughing with me now, but she had no idea of who I really was. All she saw was Eric Northman the actor, not the loser with a former drug addiction whose own mother couldn't stand to bother sticking around for and whose father cursed the day he'd ever been born.

Sookie didn't deserve someone like me. Just from seeing the little bit of her that I did, I figured she deserved a hell of a lot better than I could ever be, but I was selfish. I was also a masochist because I wanted that kiss from her so I could torture myself for however long afterwards having sampled something I knew I could never really have. I should've gotten up and walked away. I should've left the seat at her side so the lucky bastard could take my place.

And I would, but not yet.

First I needed that kiss.

"Just one kiss?" she asked softly.

*I didn't even deserve that much.*

"Just one kiss," I repeated.

*Because I was a selfish prick and wanted at least that much before I walked away.*

"A showmance to get her to back off?" she asked.

*More like the first flake that would start an avalanche.*

I couldn't even answer her because my brain was locked up with my throat too constricted to form any words. My usual confidence had abandoned ship and left me feeling a level of uncertainty I couldn't remember having felt before. I wanted her more than I wanted air to breathe which was probably why I was subconsciously holding my breath, but when I saw her lips move fractionally closer, she was only able to say, "I guess..." before I descended on her with my lips cutting off the rest of her reply.

*And then I was done for.*

Her lips were just as soft as I'd imagined they would be and I growled tasting the cherry flavor I found there, and then growled again when she moaned into my mouth. My hands automatically moved to hold her head in place knowing I'd never experienced anything like it before. I felt a charge detonate in my fingertips and radiate up my arm the moment my hand touched her, but still I held on because I didn't think I'd ever be able to let go now that I'd had a taste of her.

*I never imagined 'just one kiss' could do me in.*

When I felt her start to pull back, I begrudgingly let her, but still kept my hands on her needing the contact. Seeing her still smiling face and shining blue eyes staring back at me, with the blush coloring her cheeks, made my plans to walk away from her hard enough, but when I locked my gaze onto her own I felt an overwhelming longing cleave open my chest. I'd been struck stupid as soon as my eyes had first landed on her – my asinine behavior was proof of that, but I'd only approached her because she'd looked so uncomfortable from Bill hitting on her. That bastard didn't deserve her either, but now – seeing her looking at me like she was, panting in air through lips I'd made swollen with my own – having tasted just an ounce of what she had to offer, made me want her in an entirely different way. It wasn't sexual, despite the fact I wanted to fuck her into a coma.

It was instinctual.

I wanted her to be mine.

*But even more so, I wanted to be hers.*

That thought scared me to death because I knew it would never work. *We* would never work because I didn't do relationships and didn't know how to be in one, but I had a sneaking suspicion that besides porn, Sookie didn't do one night stands either.

*Her slapping hands had made that abundantly clear.*

What scared me even more was that I was pretty sure I wanted more than that from her, so like the coward I was I grabbed her glass which was still half full since I hadn't replaced the one I'd spilled earlier. Using the hand that wasn't still clutching hers, because I had a feeling it was the only thing keeping me from falling into the pits of Hell, I finished the rest of her drink in one go

and tasting the rum and coke as it passed over my taste buds reminded me I'd seen Johnny Depp's ass swaggering through the casino earlier, but I pushed the errant thought away and forced myself to focus.

I needed to focus. I needed the liquid courage to either walk away from her now and never look back or hold on and never let her go. The first option would be what was best for her, but unluckily for her, I was a selfish bastard and even though I knew I'd have to let her go eventually, for one night at least, I thought I could be that lucky bastard. I wanted to be *that guy* she would eventually look at and think he might be *the one* and even though I knew it would never really be me she ended up with, for one night at least, I could pretend to be him.

*And for some unexplainable reason it was a role I found myself wanting more than anything.*

## **SPOV**

*His lips WERE as soft as they looked.*

Bieberette had taken over completely because my eyes couldn't stop looking at him, nor would my hands let go of him. My mind couldn't even form any reasons why either of those things were a bad thing.

*Probably because nothing else could get through the scribbles Bieberette had left behind painting 'Mrs. Eric Northman' everywhere.*

Our matching smiles seemed permanently affixed to our faces while we ordered a few more drinks and seemed to laugh the night away with him telling me stories I never would've imagined to be true while I told him about my dunderheaded brother, who he laughingly outright accused me of making up.

Then, at times, he even seemed a little insecure of himself, but I couldn't for the life of me figure out why. Not only was he *Eric Northman*, but he was sweet and charming and funny – and his lips should be insured by Lloyd's of London – with no sign of his earlier douchebaggery in sight. I couldn't deny I felt a connection to him that had nothing to do with my Eric Northman obsession from years earlier and instead found myself interested in the man who was just Eric sitting across from me. He hung on every little word I had to say about my very unexciting life and I chuckled a little when he'd wondered aloud how nice it must have been to have grown up back in Bon Temps. If anything, I would've thought his life would've been a lot nicer, but something told me I would've been wrong. Something had gone very wrong for him at some point, but I didn't know what and all I wanted to do was fix it for him. Even if we never crossed paths again after this night was over, I wanted him to be happy.

*Everyone deserved to be loved and he was certainly no different.*

That making him happy fixation apparently extended to wanting to keep him in my grasp as well because I just nodded mutely when he asked me to dance. My head felt like it was swirling, but it was likely a mixture of the booze and my company. We hadn't let go of one another's hands since

he'd first clasped them together at the bar and as time wore on, I was less inclined to ever give it back to him.

On the way to the dance floor Eric was approached by some fans and he was gracious enough to smile and stop to sign a few autographs, so I let go of his hand and tried to blend in with the scenery when I noticed the angry looking brunette standing several feet away glaring at me. Normally I would've returned her unwarranted bitchface, but something about her was a little scary.

*Like she was going to eat my liver with some fava beans and a nice Chianti scary.*

Trying to avoid her deathly laser eyes, I took a step back diagonally to my left, putting Eric in between us so she couldn't see me, but then she moved too putting me back in her sights. My eyes darted down to where my liver was looking for the red laser dot I was sure would be there, but it must've blended in with my red hooker dress, so I took another horizontal sidestep to my right to block her again.

So she moved again.

Backwards. Forwards. To the left. To the right. No matter which way I moved, she moved too and I was about to turn myself around to complete my Vegas Hokey Pokey debut when I heard Eric's amused voice and realized he was done with his fans.

"Sookie, what are you doing?"

"A hoe down?" I was dressed like a Ho and the brunette one clearly had it out for me, so it kinda made sense.

*One of us was going down and if it was me, the girls would spring free from my dress, thereby crowning me this season's winner of the Ho Factor.*

A part of my brain cringed over the imaginary taunts I could hear in Simon Cowell's voice while the rest of me knew I sounded like an idiot, but I felt oddly free. Liberated, like it was okay to act like a fool and I should do it more often, and Eric confirmed that fact when he laughed and pulled me into his arms, saying, "Clearly I'm being very poor company if you're reduced to having to dance by yourself."

*Clearly, you're ten shades of sex on a stick and my panties would've been reduced to ashes had I been wearing any.*

*Watch your step. Puddle of Eric North-cum at your six.*

His blue eyes were sparkling down at me while other less sparkly things ran down my inner thighs and whatever inhibitions I had left were lost somewhere between the bar and the dance floor because the longer we danced, the less amount of space we seemed to want in between us. Those feelings continued to grow and only intensified when he finally kissed me again. If I could



have I would have wrapped myself around him, like the Sookie tortilla to his Eric chimichanga, but the best I could do was just be the wannabe stripper to his pole. My thoughts were still scattered but the one that seemed to remain at the forefront was me wondering if he cared to sample the pink Sookie taco in my non-existent panties.

I wanted him – more than I'd ever wanted anything, and my hands seemed to want him even more because they couldn't get enough of him. As the night pressed on, we could barely keep any part of our bodies off of each other, or our clothes on, so when he suggested going up to his room it seemed like a really good idea. Only somewhere inside of my lust hazed brain, Responsible Sookie lurked and didn't arbitrarily serve her pink taco to fantasy husbands she'd only just met, so that bitch smothered Bieberette and took control of my mouth, saying, "I can't. I've never even been to Mexico!" Seeing his confused expression, I realized Responsible Sookie had been taken out by Drunk Sookie and had another bout of diarrhea of the mouth explaining, "I can't give you my taco. I'm not like that. I don't make porn or have sex with anyone I don't know." Trying to reel my flighty thoughts back into coherency, I added, "I've only ever been with one other person and I was going to marry him until he turned out to be a cheating bastard. I'm sorry...if I've led you on."

I couldn't believe the words I was saying – Bieberette had passed out while Responsible Sookie looked around for smelling salts – and my girly bits were clenching from more than just frustration, but regardless of what my mouth was saying, my hands rebelled by desperately clutching at him not wanting him to get away. He made me feel special. He made me feel desirable, running his huge hands all over my body and whispering nothing but flattering things into my ear over what he'd found all night long. He made me feel like I actually belonged with someone as beautiful as him – both on the inside and outside. He made me laugh. He made me happy and I knew I could do the same for him. I'd *always* wanted him, but now that I knew him a little better – knew the man behind the celebrity – I couldn't imagine ever wanting to let him go. I didn't care about his money or his fame. I just cared about *him*. My thoughts may have been scattered for most of the night, but I knew enough that I didn't want just a one night stand with him. I wanted all of him.

*Oh my God! Had I actually fallen in love with him?*

## **EPOV**

*I was such an idiot!*

Of course Sookie wasn't like any of the other women I'd ever been with and I offended even myself for suggesting she come back to my room with me.

Again.

Not only did I feel a little dizzy and confused, she made me feel special – like maybe there was someone worthy of love on the inside, but I already knew she was the only one who would ever make me feel that way. She was the only one who managed to tear down the walls I'd meticulously built throughout my lifetime and even after getting a glimpse of what was behind

them, she still wanted me. She'd already shown me she was better than all of the other women from my past combined because she genuinely wanted me for me. Not my money or my fame, but me.

*Eric Northman the man, not the celebrity.*

She didn't care about any of that. She hadn't been the slightest bit impressed by me, demanding I respect her, when every other woman had always swooned at my feet regardless of the way I treated them, which was anything but respectful most of the time. Well, she was swooning a bit now – we both were – but it was late and we'd been drinking, so it was to be expected.

Sookie was special – she performed one-man flash mob hoe downs! – and the fact that she both smelled and tasted like my favorite cherries cemented the idea in my swirling head that God saw fit to send me an angel better than anything on any Victoria's Secret runway.

*I would know. I'd sampled a few of them.*

The initial attraction I'd felt when I first laid eyes on her only increased as the night wore on. My head was clouded with all things Sookie and what told me it was real was the fact I never once bothered to look and see if there was anyone better in the vicinity I could move on to. I already knew there was no one better than her and by being with her, for once, I didn't have to settle.

*I was finally the lucky bastard!*

My inner caveman, however, saw red hearing her mention another man – a man she would've married had he not been a cheating bastard and therefore she wouldn't have been there with me right now so I could *be* the lucky bastard – so I did the only logical thing I could think of to keep her with me forever.

Right there in the middle of the dance floor I dropped to one knee and then yelled out, "Fuck!" cursing myself for not having a ring ready to give to her.

"What's wrong?" Sookie asked, dropping to her knees with me. "Did you slip in my puddle? I told you to watch your six! Fucking Amelia! It's all her fault for stealing my panties! Are you hurt?"

"No, I..." trailed off, not able to comprehend anything other than the fact Sookie wasn't wearing panties.

"Did you drop a contact?"

"No, I...my vision is perfect."

*And yet no matter how hard I concentrated, I couldn't activate any latent x-ray vision superpower to see if her panty-less claims were true.*

"All of you is perfect," she smiled and her words only made me wonder if *she* had x-ray vision.

*I never wore panties. Or boxers. Or briefs. Or boxer briefs.*

My mind seemed to be everywhere at once, but I watched as her eyes darted down to the floor, with her hands moving over them like she was playing an invisible shell game, but the joke was on her because I already knew the balls were in my jeans where there weren't any panties, boxers, briefs, or boxer briefs. I decided I'd make a horrible conman because I was about to tell her where they were when she looked up at me and asked, "Did you drop a cufflink?"

"What? No, I'm wearing a t-shirt," but I still checked my wrists to be sure because I did own cufflinks. Seeing my wrists were sans cuffs I figured I'd left my cufflinks at home and hearing her mention jewelry got me back on track, so I said in a bit of a whiney fashion, "Sookie, I don't have any cufflinks with me. And I don't have a ring."

*The lucky bastard would have a ring ready. And maybe cufflinks too.*

"Do you want a ring?" she asked, with her glassy eyes brightening as she smiled up at me. "I can draw one on your hand until we find yours."

Without waiting for a reply, she started digging in her purse, producing a tube of red lip gloss, and I watched her – dumbfounded and hard as a rock – as she applied it to her lips and then took my left hand in her own. Something came out of me then – a whimper; a growl; some precum – when she sucked my ring finger into her mouth and pressed her lips down around the base before swirling her tongue all over the rest of it as she pulled back and released it with a pop.

*Or maybe the pop sound had come from my pants.*

"There you go," she smiled and then laughed, "You're a lucky bastard because I don't have a gag reflex. You've got *really* big hands. They're *all over* tumblr."

*She said it! I was the lucky bastard!*

She'd taken my hand and held it palm side up in front of her mumbling something about hand and feet size, but I didn't like not being able to see her face, so I grabbed both of her hands in my own and kept them in between us. Her eyes were looking down, from the looks of it I guessed she'd finally figured out where the balls were for her shell game, but I didn't want to play any games right now and pleaded, "Marry me." And because it couldn't hurt my case, I truthfully added, "I won't be a cheating bastard."

I couldn't imagine ever wanting someone as much as I wanted her. She was perfect – almost too perfect in that she could do way better than a dirtbag like me, but that would only make me strive to be better for her. To be a man who deserved someone as special as her and I swayed on my knees as we sat in the middle of the dance floor while I held my breath waiting for her answer.

"Do you love me?" she asked with her eyes filled with hope. They were kind of red too, but it was late and she was probably tired.

*I wondered if they smelled like cherries too. I loved cherries and she smelled like cherries, so of course I must love her too!*

"I do," I replied without hesitation and then dropped my face to hers to see if her red eyes were cherry scented, because what else besides full-blown-knock-you-on-your-ass-because-you-never-even-saw-it-coming-love could make me feel this way?

*And she smelled like cherries!*

"Yes," she cried while I sniffed her face.

"Yes?" I repeated, not sure if maybe I'd imagined it.

"Yes," she repeated and added, "I love you too. I always liked you, but now that I know the real you, I...I love you and I don't want to ever let you go."

My heart soared and I scooped her up into my arms as I stood up and swung her around while kissing her all over, saying, "You've made me the happiest man in the world."

"You're making me dizzy," she laughed, so I put her down but refused to let go of her when she started tugging on my arm and said, "Let's go upstairs."

Talk about being torn in two – my jeans were likely to be torn in two from the amount of wood I'd been sporting thanks to being the subject of her ring making skills and running my hands all over her heavenly body all night long, but I wanted to do things the right way for once. We were in Vegas, so it would make it easy to do and make it harder for her to get away from me later on if she changed her mind, so I resisted the urge to consummate our union just yet and instead said, "Let's go get married first."

"What? Now?" she asked.

"Yes, right now," I replied and started tugging her out of the club before she could argue with me. The last thing I wanted was for her to think I didn't mean what I'd said, nor did I want her to take back what she'd said, so I figured so long as I kept her moving, then everything would be okay.

*Because for once, I was the lucky bastard. She was mine and I wanted the piece of paper that would tell the world to back the fuck off.*

I relaxed a little hearing her tinkling laughter behind me as she slurred a drawn out, "Oookaaay," and let me pull her towards the casino's front doors, but from out of nowhere her friend from earlier and Alcide swooped in with each of them talking at the same time, more or less asking the same thing by saying, "Just where do you think you're going?"

"We're going to get *married* Amelia! Isn't it romantic?" Sookie gushed and then her eyes narrowed at her friend as she added, "See? I *told* you he wasn't a fucktard. Well maybe I said it earlier, but I take it back just like you took my panties, so he hasn't crossed any lines!"

"Sookie, no!" her shitty friend yelled. "This is a mistake and you're going to regret it!"

"It's *not* a mistake!" Sookie yelled back and grabbed my left hand, holding it up to show off my smeared ring and saying, "See? I already marked him. That *my ring* on his hand."

My chest – among other things – swelled hearing her claim me and I seriously considered just finding a dark corner to fuck in our newfound love, but I was more concerned Sookie might actually listen to her shitty friend, so I tugged her out the door. As soon as we stepped out onto the sidewalk the paparazzi who'd gathered there for the celebrity poker tournament going on that weekend swarmed around us. Thinking it would be a good idea to get ahead of any potential proposal take-backs, I rubbed myself against her so I could mark her as mine since I wasn't wearing any lip gloss and yelled to the crowd, "You're all invited! We're getting married!"

I smiled when they all cheered for us, happy that at least someone else was happy for us, and one of them shouted back, "Was it love at first sight?"

I narrowed my eyes at him wondering if he too had fallen in love with her now seeing her, but before I could rip them from their sockets or grab her lip gloss to paint her in it, Sookie spoke up and calmed my inner beast by saying, "I've always loved Eric!"

*Crisis averted.*

It was exactly what I needed to hear which was unsurprising since she was just cherry scented fucking perfection, so I quickly said so she would never have any doubt, "And I love you!"

I couldn't stop myself from kissing her again and she kissed me back – voraciously – which only made me want to hurry up with the wedding so we could get on to the wedding night. I even grinned a little wider realizing we wouldn't need to use condoms because who in the hell does that with the woman they're married to?

*Wives don't carry sexually transmitted diseases!*

Alcide however broke into my wedding night bareback fantasies by leaning in and angrily whisper shouted, "I'm *not* going to let you throw your life away on an easy piece of ass no matter *how hot* she is!"

Every part of that sentence pissed me the hell off. I wasn't *throwing* my life away – I was making it infinitely better. Sookie wasn't *an easy piece of ass* – she was fucking heaven sent and my soon to be cherry-scented wife. And he had no business noticing *how hot* she was, so I turned and let my fist do the talking for me.

I only noticed her friend had followed us outside too when Alcide fell on top of her, but seeing our chance to make a quick getaway I pulled Sookie into the first waiting cab and said, "Step on it!"

"Step on it?" Sookie giggled. "That's such a lame line. Where are we? Beverly Hills 90210? Melrose Place? Oh! How about Hawaii 5-0?"

*Huh? Were those places she wanted to see or did she not know we were in Vegas?*

It didn't really matter because I'd take her wherever she wanted to go, but the driver had in fact *stepped on it* so he asked, "Where to?"

"We're getting married, so the nearest chapel that's open," I replied, but Sookie was quick to add, "One with an Elvis impersonator!"

When I looked down at her with a chuckle, she only smiled back at me and shrugged, "What? I'm only going to do this once, so who better than the King to marry us?"

*Goddamn right she was only doing this once.*

## **SPOV**

I still couldn't believe I was actually about to become Mrs. Eric Northman. My childhood dreams were actually coming true only the reality was so much better than anything I'd ever dreamed. Eric loved me and I loved him and that was all that mattered, but when we arrived at the Love Me Tender Wedding Chapel he noticed my frown.

"What's wrong?" he asked. "You didn't change your mind, did you?"

My lip jutted out seeing him look so distraught and I immediately kissed him back to being happy again before pulling away and decided I should just be honest with him because marriage was all about communication. "I just don't want you to take that *too* literally," I said, pointing at the sign.

"You don't want to marry me?" he whispered looking heartbroken.

I cursed myself for already fucking up our marital communications and quickly shook my head before there would be no marital fornications.

*I was dying to see if it was true about what they said when a guy has big hands and feet.*

*Eric's were HUGE!*

"No," I smiled back at him. "I only meant that I don't want *tender* loving. I want a night of hard fucking."

It felt good being honest with the man who was going to be my husband because his relief was soon superseded by his lust as he leaned in kissed his way across my jaw to my ear, saying, "If that's what *my wife* wants then that's what *my wife* shall have."

*His wife.*

*I was about to become Mrs. Eric Northman.*

*And there would be hard fucking involved.*

*SQUEE!*

## **EPOV**

We climbed out of the taxi and saw we'd been followed by the group of cameramen from the casino. Normally I would've ignored them, but for once I felt completely free – like nothing could or would ever go wrong because I now had Sookie. Or, at least, I *almost* had her.

*First she needed to sign on the dotted line and say 'I do'.*

Figuring we'd need a couple of witnesses to our fated union and since neither Alcide nor Sookie's friend were there – and they were against it anyway – I didn't want their bad mojo at our ceremony and called out into the crowd, "Who's happy that we're getting married?"

I picked the first two guys whose hands shot into the air – not just for their goodwill towards us but also because I was impressed with their dexterity.

*That shit had to be hard to do without dropping their cameras.*

I had them follow us inside and quickly filled out the required forms, but while Sookie filled out her info, I started fretting again over not having a ring. The one cameraman, who'd said his name was Long Shadow and looked like an 80's metal hair band reject, never stopped filming us, but the other, whose name was Ahmed, came up to me asking, "Are you alright? Do you need something?"

I took a few steps away so Sookie wouldn't overhear that I was an *unprepared lucky bastard* and admitted, "I don't have anything to give her. No ring. I know I can get her one later, but it just feels wrong to not have anything to give her right now."

He smiled back at me, saying, "In my country we say, 'Barua kutoka moyo inaweza kusomwa kwenye uso.' It is Swahili and means, 'A letter from the heart can be read on the face.'"

*Swahili? I didn't know any Swahili. Did that mean I should use Sookie's lip gloss to draw an 'L' on my forehead for 'Loser'? Or maybe an 'LB' for 'Lucky Bastard'?*

Seeing my confused expression, he asked, "Do you love her?"

The way he asked wasn't like he was trying to get the inside scoop, but more like he was trying to make me understand something, so when my eyes automatically landed on Sookie, I really *looked* at her and even though somewhere in the back of my mind I knew this was crazy, I just didn't care. The thought of her walking out the door and never seeing her again threatened to claw its way through my body and out through my chest, leaving nothing but the shell of me in its wake.

"Yes," I replied because what else could make me feel like that.

"Then she will see that on your face," he smiled. "And if she is truly worthy of your love, it will be all that she needs."

Worthy of *my* love? I already knew without a doubt *I* was the *unworthy* half of our couple, but I could only hope she would stay with me anyway and when my eyes glanced down at my now smeared ring I realized it didn't matter it had been made with lip gloss.

*She'd already branded me just as surely as if she'd used a hot iron instead of her lips.*

My earlier euphoria was starting to nosedive into a headache, but as soon as Sookie turned and faced me, wearing a brilliant smile, it was gone. She took a few steps forward and when her hand reached out and took mine, a calm spread through me and despite feeling a little dizzy, I knew everything was going to be okay so long as she never let go.

The ceremony itself only took a few minutes, despite our combined laughing fit over our officiant telling us his name was Bubba.

*If we'd had a reception, he could've led our first dance hoe down.*

I was still feeling a little dizzy and now a little nauseous when we got to our vows, but my euphoria overrode it all hearing Sookie say those life changing two little words.

"I do."

*She did.*

*I did.*

*She was mine.*

I didn't even wait for Bubba's blessing and pulled her to me for a kiss, still marveling over how she could still possibly taste like cherries, but it only made her more perfect in my eyes.

And in my mouth.

When we got outside I was so happy that I twirled her around in front of the crowd, announcing, "May I present to you, Mrs. Eric Northman."



The crowd cheered – as they should because this was seriously the best thing to ever happen in the history of best things that ever happened – and Sookie must have thought so too because she squealed and jumped up and down in delight, making me wonder what other sounds I could get her to make.

"Let's see the ring!" some asshole called out from the crowd, highlighting my failure after I'd desperately tried to hide it from her.

Trying to play off my faux pas, I quickly said, "She'll get her ring from Rodeo Drive when we get back home. My Sookie deserves the best."

Normally I knew I would've been abhorred over not only the idea of getting married, but being expected to buy something so expensive for any woman. I'd dropped more cash than I cared to remember on them in the past thinking that's all I was really good for anyway and always regretted it afterward, but Sookie was different. I would give her the world if she asked for it.

*The difference between her and the others was that Sookie deserved it a hell of a lot more than I deserved someone like her.*

The next thing I knew was Sookie's lips were on mine and then it was all I knew until she pulled away and nearly blew me away with her smile, saying, "Baby, I don't need a ring. I just need you."

That right there told me I was right about her. She wasn't like any of the others and I found myself voicing my inner thoughts out loud, saying, "See? That's why she's perfect. She doesn't love me for my fame or money. She loves me for me."

I crushed my mouth to hers wanting to eat her. Not literally – well *maybe* literally since I definitely intended on finding out if she tasted like cherries *everywhere*, but I was having a hard time holding back from trying to consume her. My head was stuck on the Sookie channel with my mind crushing the remote so it would always stay that way.

"I love you. I'll always love you," I breathed into her mouth, unable to let her go just yet.

"I've always loved you," she returned and added, "So there's no reason for me to ever stop now."

*Thank fuck for that.*

I pulled away trying to get myself under control before we ended up giving the crowd an X-rated show because Sookie already told me she didn't make porn, when a flashing neon sign caught my eye across the street. It was a tattoo parlor and Ahmed's earlier words came back to my mind in a jumble.

Something about letters and love. And maybe a branding iron.

My confusion didn't really matter because now I knew what I wanted to do. What I had to do.

*Mark Sookie as mine permanently.*

"How do you feel about tattooed wedding rings?" I whispered into her ear after I'd licked my way there via her neck. The lip gloss around my finger was nearly gone, but she'd already branded me on the inside so I figured we may as well do it on the outside too.

"How do you feel about hearts?" she asked with a laugh.

She already had mine, so if she wanted me to show it off, then who was I to argue?

We dodged traffic as we ran across the street and into the shop where Sookie told the guy exactly what she wanted. My only contribution – more like demand – was that hers read '*Eric's*' because that's what she was.

*Mine.*

She went first and my dick got harder and harder with every letter that was permanently etched into her skin, forever branding her as mine, and seeing she'd dotted the letter 'i' in my name with a heart made me decide to do something similar. Thanks to lucky circumstance, the 'i' in my name sat in the middle of her finger, so her heart looked almost like a ruby solitaire, but if I'd done the same it would've been off to the side. Besides, guys didn't wear ruby solitaires – well, *some* did, but I wasn't one of them – so I had them make the 'o's' in her name into hearts instead. It wasn't quite wearing my heart on my sleeve, but I wore different sleeves every day and this would always be there.

*Just like she'd always be mine and I would always be hers.*

## **SPOV**

I was feeling a little dazed and confused thanks to hurricane Northman, but I was eager to have him blow through my bayou. I was still feeling dizzy from when he twirled me around on the sidewalk, but I'd never been so happy in my entire life. Staring back at him watching *my name* being permanently marked onto his skin, I couldn't help smiling like an idiot.

*He was really mine.*

When he'd mentioned going to Rodeo Drive for rings, I immediately got that notion out of his head. There was really only one ring I'd ever wanted to wear – which was what had made it easy for me to throw Quinn's ring back at him – and that one was gone for good, but this one was just as good too. Eric's even had two hearts in his, just like the my mother's ring had, so it was almost like he'd given a little bit of that back to me and I loved him even more because of it.

I had a hard time focusing, with my eyes darting from my ring, to his ring, to his face, but that's where I stopped. I couldn't look away, nor could I believe I'd actually married Eric Northman, Sexiest Man Alive.

*Five times!*

But he was so much *more* than that. He was sweet and caring. He made me feel like I was the only woman in the world and that he felt like *he* was lucky to have *me*.

*He was nothing like the douche bag I'd always assumed lurked underneath his clothes.*

But once I started thinking about *what else* was lurking beneath his clothes, that was *all* I could think about and not even Amelia and Eric's friend showing up as we exited the tattoo parlor could break my concentration. They pushed us into the limo and climbed in after us, berating us for our 'stupidity' all the way down the strip back to the casino, but they were wrong.

It wasn't stupidity.

It was fate.

So I ignored them completely and climbed onto *my husband's* lap, ready to start the rest of our lives together.

*But first we were going to break the bed with a night filled of hard fucking.*

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## **Chapter 122: Bonus Outtake - The Little Things**

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### Bonus Outtake – The Little Things

#### **SPOV**

"I'm moving out."

"What?" I asked, caught completely off guard and floundering even though I'd known it was coming.

"I'm not happy anymore," he said, looking – as he'd just declared – unhappy. It felt ten times worse considering he looked identical to the man I had married three years earlier and yet now it felt like I was looking at a complete stranger at the same time.

*He was Eric and yet he wasn't.*

"Wha...what?" I stammered again, while fighting off the tears I could feel welling in my eyes, despite telling myself – I. Would. Not. Cry.

"I'm not happy," he repeated just as coldly. His eyes held all of the warmth of an ice cube when he bitingly specified, "I'm not happy with *you*." He appeared to swallow the lump building in his throat, while his eyes darted away from mine to regain his composure. I watched as he took a

deep breath and stole the very air from my lungs when he straightened his shoulders before turning back to stare down at me, declaring quite vehemently, "I don't love you anymore."

"Bullshit," my mouth and heart yelled back, with each of them choking on the word.

"I...I *don't*," he stammered, getting choked up in spite of himself. I could see him shutting down his own tumultuous emotions. It was like watching candles flickering out one by one, before he let his eyes sweep over me and gritted out, "I've changed. *You've* changed and we both know it. You're not the same woman I married. I don't love who you've become. Christ, I don't even know who you are anymore."

My eyes unwillingly darted down to see what in the hell he was talking about and I cringed seeing the truth of his words. I *had* changed. Gone were the days of tiny short shorts and fitted tank tops with them having been replaced by baggy tees and stretchy yoga pants. There hadn't seemed to be any point in dressing up anymore since Lilly viewed me as not just her mother, but her own personal tissue. And the forgiveness of elastic allowed me to put on more pounds than I cared to know about. I avoided scales as much as I seemed to avoid makeup these days and even now there were the crusted remains of her jam covered handprints on the hem of my shirt.

*What in the hell happened to me?*

The tears started flowing down my cheeks and lost in my own pity party, I initially fought off his grip on my chin. But Eric was never one to back down so easily and he held tight until my eyes had no choice but to meet his own. There was a mixture of remorse and amusement in them that I unfairly wanted to slap off of his face, until he started wiping away my tears with his thumbs and softly chuckled, "Ad lib much? I knew this was a bad idea."

"It's not," I tried to say, but thanks to my choking sobs it sounded more like, 'S'not,' which was what I was quickly becoming covered in.

*So. Not. Sexy.*

Sexy, like *he* still was.

His arms trapped me in a bear hug that choked the rest of the air out of my lungs and I would've yelled at him for it, but I had a sneaking suspicion it was his way of taking the argument right out of me.

*How could I yell at him when I couldn't even breathe?*

Unlike me, Eric hadn't let himself go at all. He still went to the gym on a regular basis and was even sexier three years into our marriage. It was how he managed to still be able to lift my fat ass up into his arms and sit us both down on the couch while I cried into his shoulder. When the soft sobs finally quieted, he laughed, "Maybe *you* should be the one reading for the part. You're much more believable than me."

"Bullshit," I said again, repeating the line I'd added to the script.

The very same one I'd just been helping him read for his audition later on that afternoon.

It had been my dumbass idea to begin with. I'd helped him read his lines a thousand times before now, but this time the script struck too close to home.

*And it was too easy for me to believe one day those same words wouldn't be spoken from any script but from his heart.*

"What's this all about?" he asked when I finally looked up at him.

"You're too good of an actor," I biting and unfairly accused, but that didn't make it any less true.

'*And sexy*' I silently added. Also true, but I didn't want to feed his ego even though that want apparently didn't carry over to me feeding my own fat ass.

I tried to squirm my way off of him, but he held tight and waited for me to huff in his face. Only to be greeted by the sight of his eyes rolling into the back of his head while a smile played on his lips, as he playfully asked, "Really? Do you think I'll get the part? Or maybe even *an Oscar*?"

"I think you're in danger of suffering deadened limbs. None of the blood can make its way to the lower half of your body so long as I'm on your lap," I sighed. Again, unfairly.

*And again – just as true.*

"Hmm..." he pondered, while gripping my hips and moving his own against my ass. "I think your worries are unfounded, lover. There seems to be plenty of blood flow down there."

I couldn't even deny it.

*It*' was poking me in the ass.

All of the fight left me then with me melting into Eric's chest. We hadn't spent more than seven days apart since we'd gotten married – it was our Number One Northman Family Rule – so he'd been there to see every pound I'd put on and not once had he ever made me feel undesirable. Not once had he ever even looked at me with anything less than love in his eyes – unless you counted five minutes earlier, which my irrational side had unfairly taken to heart. Nothing about him had changed and I knew he still loved me just as much now as he did way back when. It was the little things he still did that had made me feel safe and secure in our marriage. He still groped and chased me around. He still looked at me like I was the only woman in the world and not once had I ever caught him looking at anyone else, so I hadn't given any thought at all that one day that might change.

*What was wrong with me?*

I had the sexiest husband on the planet. Women gawked and fawned all over him at every opportunity. Even if they were gracious to me as well, I didn't believe for one moment they wouldn't give their right ovary to have him in their beds.

Or showers. Or on their dining room tables. Or up against a wall.

He was *that* kind of sexy.

*And he was all mine.*

I was certain Eric loved me – all of me – but I would be a fool if I continued down the path I was on. He'd brought up wanting to try for another baby over the summer – yet another sign he had no plans on leaving me – so I'd officially been off of the pill since our birthday. Subconsciously I must have decided to give up on watching what I ate too, knowing I'd be piling the pounds back on anyway. But with no baby in utero yet, there was no excuse for letting myself go. And the fact it was now the week after Thanksgiving didn't help matters any, nor did Lilly's newfound love of baking, but it had been easy to put the pounds on.

A cupcake here, a slice of pie there, and suddenly elastic waistbands weren't just convenient, but necessary.

I wanted the old me back. Not the neurotic me I'd been when I was with Quinn, but the me Eric had married. And when I really thought about it, I realized I didn't want to do it for Eric at all.

I wanted to do it for me.

*Because I didn't know who I was anymore either.*

Wife. Mother. Maid. Nurse. Playmate. Snotty-nose/shitty-ass wiper. That was what my life had boiled down to over the last couple of years. I always put myself last on the never ending list of things to take care of and while I wouldn't give up any of it, I needed to find a way to squeeze some time for me back in there too.

*And speaking of squeezing...*

My uterus felt like it was trying to wind itself around my lower spine, sending me the telltale signal my period was about to start, so I guessed baby making month number five was another bust.

*At least I could blame my weepy episode on that.*

For now.

**EPOV**

I knew reading those lines with Sookie was a bad idea, but at the time I thought it would've been because I would be the one to lose their cool. And I nearly did. It had been hard to look into the face I loved and say the things written in the script, but I figured if I'd been able to say them convincingly while looking at her, I could say them to anyone and be believable.

*Who knew they'd bite me in the ass?*

*And not in a good way.*

She, of all people, should know how I really felt, so I could only hope hormones were the cause for Sookie's meltdown and secretly prayed she was pregnant. We'd been trying for another one for the last few months, but no such luck so far. I wasn't worried though.

*And it was a hell of a lot of fun trying.*

Now that Lilly was older – and mobile – we couldn't just arbitrarily fuck each other whenever the mood struck, which was a shame since her yoga pants just begged to be ripped off of her all of the fucking time. Even now my hand was already sliding into them, with me silently cheering the greatness that was elastic waistbands. But my hopes for getting the chance to try again for another baby right now were dashed by the sounds of "Daaaddyyyy," echoing down the stairs, ironically interrupting my shot at being a daddy again.

Begrudgingly, I pulled my hand from her pants and pulled Sookie's face to mine, kissing her breathless again, before saying in a mixture of sex and a whine all rolled into one, "More than one monster has awakened, so I'll have to take a rain check, lover."

*But Frankencock would be storming her gates before the night was through.*

I waited until her smile was a genuine one before I let her stand up to get lunch started, while I answered the call of my other little monster. Her door had a childproof cover over the knob, so she couldn't go on a walkabout in the middle of the night – again. And when I opened it I found her standing buck ass naked in the middle of her room. No sooner had the door swung open than she streaked by me, leaving behind a trail of giggles and the sight of her bare ass rounding the corner. So I grabbed her clothes and took off after her, calling out, "Get your lily white aa...butt over here right now young lady!"

"Nooo!" she called back, using her favorite word. And from the direction and distance I knew she was already halfway down the stairs.

By the time I reached the top of the landing she was already jumping off of the bottom step, so I took them two at a time, huffing out, "Yeeesss!" while hoping the front door was locked so she wouldn't run out and give our neighbors a show.

Again.

I found my little she-devil in the family room and she turned to face me, putting her hands on her hips with a scowl on her face – all the more comical since she was naked – as she stomped her bare foot and harrumphed at me wearing a familiar look.

*Familiar because she'd most definitely inherited it from her mother.*

She pushed her glasses back up the bridge of her tiny nose and thumped her chest, eyeing me in a way that said very clearly I was an asshat, and hotly informed me, "Lilla Adayul!"

*Sookie was blind to not see the resemblance between them. Attitude and all.*

She was still a tiny little thing and her legs might've been the length of my forearm, but it was just an optical illusion. I was certain she had invisible wings because she could fly faster than the speed of light.

*All I had to do was blink and she'd disappear into thin air.*

Bubba, the traitor that he was, stood in between us. Not out of circumstance or even to be near his favorite human. No, in these times he was her accomplice, both ready and willing to dart in front of my feet if I got too close and send me sprawling into a wall or a tree.

Again.

"You need to get dressed," I said calmly, while taking a small step forward, trying to not use any big movements that would send her off on another sprint around the house.

I was getting too old for that shit.

"No fanks!" she giggled and took a huge step back. "It's like bein' nakey!" she announced and then turned to shake her lily white ass at me.

*This had to be God's punishment for my pre-Sookie lifestyle. My daughter liked dancing naked.*

*And I hoped like hell she would grow out of it – like within the next hour.*

She was two going on twenty-two and while I'd heard the term 'the terrible two's' before, it was one of those things you couldn't truly understand until *your* kid went through it.

*You know...like passing a kidney stone the size of Mount Rushmore.*

"Baby," I whined. "Come on. We don't have time for this. Come to daddy!"

Lilly was definitely a daddy's girl, but only when it suited her – like when her mother was making her do something she didn't want to do like brush her teeth or take a bath. Right now, however, she wanted no part of me or her clothes.



"Not a *baby!*" she glared back at me. "It's a *big girl!*"

She even made a 'hmp' sound which elicited a round of quiet chuckles from the peanut gallery who were now passing through on their way to the kitchen. Rasul and Mustapha must have come in while I'd been upstairs and they seemed delighted by our Mexican standoff, but they'd been around long enough to know who really wore the pants in this family.

Or *didn't* wear the pants, as the case may be.

They did their jobs well – no one could get near us if we didn't want them too, but when we were safe and secure at home they were like any other member of our close knit group of friends. Sookie wouldn't have had it any other way and was even teaching Mustapha how to cook now that he had a new girlfriend he was trying to impress. But the truth was Lilly held the strings and they were her willing puppets. We hadn't gotten any new threats or even a single sign any of us were in danger of falling prey to a new stalkerazzi, but that didn't mean I would be comfortable with letting our guard down by letting our guards go.

Never again.

It was a shitty way to live, but it was a fact of life for us. Lilly didn't know life to be any differently and she likely wouldn't until she tried sneaking off at some point as a teenager and found herself surrounded by guards.

Maybe they made sparkly ankle bracelets that doubled as LoJack's for teenagers?

I'd have to ask Pam.

"Lilly!" I barked out, halting her yet-to-be-fitted-for-a-GPS-locator lifted foot, as she prepared to skitter away again. I made a mental note to check the soles of her feet to see if they'd sprouted roller blades during her nap and ordered, "Come. Here. Right. Now."

I hated using that tone of voice with her, but I needed to get her dressed. Sookie was taking Lilly with her to go shopping for bridesmaids' dresses with Amelia and I had an audition to get to.

*And after her little display earlier, I was just thankful I wasn't up against Sookie for the part.*

It was easy to see Lilly had inherited some acting abilities from me because her defiant expression changed into one worthy of Oliver Twist as her lower lip jutted out – just like her mother's – while she asked, "Cookeh?"

It made me cringe because it only served to remind me of that fuck stain Compton.

*Just how much could she have she heard in utero anyway?*

She batted her baby blues back at my narrowed ones from behind her tiny pair of eyeglasses and Rasul didn't even bother to lower his voice when he told Mustapha, "Ten bucks says he caves."

But before I could undoubtedly make him ten bucks richer, Sookie walked into the room and scooped up an unaware Lilly from behind. She handed the 'likes to be naked' squealing girl to me on her way by, laughing out, "Honestly Eric. You must be losing your touch if you can't convince a naked female to come to you."

*Was that a challenge?*

Like Pavlov's dick, my feet took a step in her direction because the cocker spaniel in my pants wanted us to chase after her, when my brain finally caught up to what my little head was set on doing. I was still amazed after all of this time I still couldn't get enough of Sookie. It was almost like an addiction – one I had no desire to overcome – and instead I was just happy I hadn't fucked up enough for her to realize she could do so much better than me. Our marriage wasn't all rainbows and sunshine. We still fought, but that was mostly because we liked making up so much. We never went to bed angry unless it was to have angry sex and sleep didn't come until we both did, which was what usually ended the argument. I thanked God every fucking day I had her in my life and tried my damndest to let her know it. I didn't want her to ever question how I felt about her, but after her earlier breakdown I had to wonder if maybe my efforts were falling short.

It was something I would have to think on later, but there was no time for it now. So I strode from the room with a still squirming Lilly in my arms, telling her, "Time to get dressed little girl."

"No fanks," she giggled in her two-year-old way of politely telling me to fuck off.

*If nothing else, at least she would be a polite stripper. Surely, at least Gran would still be proud.*

She grabbed onto my face with both of her hands and blew a slobbery kiss onto my cheek before letting loose with another round of giggles and I couldn't help but grin back at her. I loved her more than I ever knew was possible and considering she was Sookie's mini-me, it only made me love her that much more. Lilly had had me wrapped around her little finger from the start and it had only grown from there. I remembered hearing other people talk about how the kind of love you had for your own child was indescribable and they were right. I wouldn't ever be able to accurately describe the sheer force of the love I had for her and never imagined something so small and frail could literally bring me to my knees with nothing more than a look. And looking back now, remembering how scared shitless I was when Sookie first told me she was pregnant, it all seemed so silly.

It was the second best thing to ever happen to me.

We'd only gotten back from Bon Temps the day before, having spent the Thanksgiving holiday with Gran and Jason, and it usually took Lilly a day or two to get her bearings again. But considering she was a seasoned traveler by now, she was starting to take it in stride. The main cause for her want to be naked was because we were trying to potty train her and found that if she wasn't wearing anything from the waist down, she wouldn't go. So for the last few weeks, whenever we were at home, she'd spent all of her time in nothing more than a shirt. I'd noticed

the dry pull-up she'd been wearing during her nap on the floor next to her bed when I'd grabbed her clothes, so I took her into the bathroom and plopped her down on the toilet, saying, "Go pee."

"No pee," she argued.

"Yes pee," I argued back, with a part of my brain wondering if I was getting a preview of how she'd be when she was a teenager.

*Maybe Never Never Land was real? If we moved there then she'd never have to grow up and I wouldn't have to deal with it.*

But remembering the ratio of boys to girls there had me discarding the idea just as quickly.

*And with my luck, Sookie would take a liking to Captain Hook since she lusted after pirate mother fuckers.*

It was my sense of smell more than my hearing that brought me back from *Never-Fucking-Going-There Land* when Lilly jumped off of the toilet and started digging into my pocket where my phone was.

"What are you doing?" I asked, when she gave me *the-you're-an-asshat-look* again and pointed at the end product of her breakfast in the toilet.

"I make a *sheet!*" she happily proclaimed and started chanting, "Pit-cher! Pit-cher! Pit-cher!"

*Fucking Jason.*

## **SPOV**

"Come on Lilly. Finish your lunch so we can go."

At the moment she and Bubba were doing their Harlem Globetrotter routine, with Lilly bouncing chicken nuggets off the tray of her high chair, while he circled around and made impossible catches in midair to her wild cheers and applause.

*If Eric's career ever went into a tailspin, we could always put their little act on pay per view to pay for her college.*

"Cookeh!" she announced to her partner in crime and got his tail wagging approval.

"Cook-eee," I over enunciated, wondering just how much she could've heard from the Bean Bump. At least her father wasn't there to hear her, so he could start muttering '*Fuck stain Compton*' under his breath. If her hearing had been good enough while still in the womb, then it wouldn't take long for her to pick up the phrase, 'Fuck stain.' We learned that little lesson when we'd visited Gran over the summer and to our horror she yelled out, "Fuck'en ay!"

*Fuck'en Uncle Jay...*

Her wispy white-blond hair stood up on end like she'd stuck her finger into a light socket and her blue eyes danced with happiness from behind her smudged glasses that were askew from her halftime show. But I still thought she was the most adorable baby on the planet.

But, she wasn't really a baby any longer.

She was still smaller than an average almost-three year old thanks to her premature birth, but she acted like she was going on twenty-three anyway, so I could only hope one day it would all even out. In the meantime we got to deal with our very own tiny Sybil, ready to change personalities like Pam changed shoes.

"Cook-*eehh*," she smiled back at me and then morphed into her Oliver Twist face.

*Eric was blind. That little girl was a Northman through and through. And she definitely inherited her father's acting abilities.*

I knew I shouldn't give into her demands, but I was pressed for time. So I handed her a cookie and grabbed the two remaining untouched chicken nuggets from the tray, shoving them into my mouth without thought, and then wiped her down with a wet cloth. I only realized what I'd done as I was swallowing and internally chastised myself.

*Little things like that were one of the reasons why there was so much more of me.*

I knew it was a throwback to my issues over being wasteful and it was a habit I needed to break before I broke the scale. But all I could do for now was vow to myself I'd do better and just kept moving because we were supposed to meet Amelia at the dress shop in a half hour. We were both getting fitted for dresses for her Christmas Eve wedding to Tray, with me as her matron of honor and Lilly as a flower girl. Their planned yearlong engagement turned into two and a half when her father had a heart attack four months before the big day. Amelia joked that he'd done it on purpose to keep her from marrying a personal trainer, but I knew deep down it had really shaken her. They may have fought a lot, but she loved him and having already lost her mother, she'd been terrified of losing him too. After he'd recovered from his double bypass, the wedding was back on again when she then discovered she was pregnant.

And I couldn't help it. I laughed.

A lot.

She was a great aunt to Lilly, so I knew she'd be a great mom too. But it took seeing their son Copely for the first time for her to believe me. He was huge – just like his father – and weighed in at over nine pounds when he was born, which was why they put off getting married until now. Amelia had been huge too and didn't want to waddle down the aisle, but she'd already dropped all of her baby weight, so the wedding was back on.

We arrived only five minutes late – a new personal record – and the apology was already tumbling from my lips as I scooped up Copely from his car seat and said, "He's getting so big!"

Just like his Aunt Sookie.

He probably only weighed half of what Lilly did, but she was all limbs and seemed lighter. Holding Copely was like holding a sack of potatoes, but smelling him made my ovaries tingle and I mentally chastised my uterus for not cooperating.

"I can't believe you want another one so soon," she sighed. When I was finally able to tear my lips away from giving Mr. Cheeks his special Aunt Sookie om nom's and really took a good look at her, I could see that she was tired.

I remembered in theory what that was like, but that didn't make the ache I had for another baby lessen any. Maybe it was selfish, but I wanted to experience an entire pregnancy. I wanted Eric and I to be able to have all of the milestones that we missed out on because of Lilly's premature birth. I wanted to give her a sibling so she would know what it was like to have someone who would always be in her corner, no matter how much of a dunderhead the other could be.

But this was Amelia's day, so instead of saying all of that, I gave her an understanding and sympathetic smile, saying, "It gets easier, Ames. He won't always be so dependent."

Like Tray and Amelia, we never did the nanny thing. It made no sense when I was a stay at home mom and I wanted to be the one to do everything for Lilly anyway. I was grateful we were fortunate enough that we could afford for me to stay home with her. And we were lucky enough to have great friends like Sam, Terry, Alcide, Holly, and Tara who were always willing to babysit so we could have a few hours to ourselves once in a while. But it was Eric's dad who truly lit up Lilly's face.

The world revolved around Pop-pop as far as she as concerned. And he would say the same thing about her.

And now that I thought about it, I realized it had been a long while since we'd had a date night.

I didn't have time to think on it long though because as if to prove my point that children inevitably do grow up, Lilly came flying up in between us a moment later, with Rasul shadowing her every step. Now wearing a rhinestone – at least I *hoped* they were rhinestones – encrusted veil, she smiled up at us from behind the sheer white fabric and declared, "I's gettin' married!"

Great.

Now her father would have a heart attack too.

**EPOV**

"I want to stop at Jasmine's Gardens on Hillhurst before we go home," I told Mustapha as we climbed into the car, leaving the studio's office complex.

The reading went well and the director seemed to be happy with my performance, but I could never tell just *how* well I'd done until there was an actual offer on the table.

After all, I wasn't telepathic.

And my bluff-spotting poker prowess was MIA when it came to guessing what anyone else thought of my acting abilities. Poker games still happened here and there, but not as frequently as I'd once had them. Before Sookie, I'd used the weekly games as something to do instead of going to the clubs so I would stay sober. Now she was the reason – and had given me yet another one in the form of our daughter – to never touch the stuff again. I didn't even drink more than the occasional beer anymore and that usually only happened whenever we would visit Louisiana.

Fucking Jason.

Shitter – The Movie now had more imaginary sequels than Friday the 13th. And all of them were just as bad.

But considering how badly Valhalla had been panned by the critics, I couldn't really throw stones. I felt as though I should carry some of the blame for that, but in reality I knew the majority of it lied with Madden and Sophie-Anne. His obsession with her reached near Compton levels and it showed in the editing, which was then reflected in the box office receipts. I had the majority of the dialog in the original script and yet she somehow managed to surpass me in onscreen time. It was ridiculous how much of what we filmed ended up on the editing room floor, only so she could appear to be the main character.

And according to the behind the scenes scuttlebutt, Madden had managed to edit himself out of a career too.

Of course Sophie ended up cutting him loose as soon as the movie was done filming. It only came as a surprise to Madden and I suspect that was a big reason why he'd had the movie edited the way he had. He'd been trying to woo her back.

Instead, he'd ended up getting the film nominated for a Golden Raspberry Award, with Sophie getting her own Razzie for worst acting.

It was an honor no one in the business wanted.

But if she'd been smart, she would've played along like Halle Berry did during her Catwoman fiasco. Everyone would've seen her as being a good sport about it all. Instead she railed like a lunatic to anyone who shoved a microphone in her face that it wasn't her fault. Madden cut the film to shreds and left her looking like an idiot.

Made even harder to believe when she was doing such a fine job of looking like one all on her own.

But because critics were in the know as well, I wasn't held accountable in their critiques for the shitastic end product. I suspected I had Sookie to thank for being viewed as likable. She was the difference that had brought me up from being the punch line on the late night talk shows, to being seen as a respectable human being.

And I was.

Because of her.

And I was grateful for all of it because I was still getting scripts sent to me. My popularity had peaked at the height of the fuckedupness that forced Lilly into the world much too soon. Thankfully the frenzy following her birth had ended within a few months of her coming home and now we were as normal as we were likely to ever get. But with Debbie Pelt's trial on the horizon, I knew it was only a matter of time before we were forced into the spotlight again.

She was still locked up and had gotten the treatment she apparently needed so she could stand trial. I had enough distance from that time that I wasn't as enraged as I once was. Not at her. She was legitimately sick.

My mother, however, could rot in fucking hell.

But both of my girls were fine so I didn't care what happened to Pelt as long as she didn't come near any of us ever again. And maybe my peace of mind stemmed from the fact she'd already been found guilty of murdering her sister in Mississippi. The upcoming trial in California for her crimes against us almost seemed redundant, but we would do whatever we needed to do to keep her behind bars.

"Flowers, huh? Did you do something wrong?" Mustapha chuckled, pulling me from my thoughts.

He and Rasul were in the know too, to what went on behind the scenes in our home. So his question wasn't all that surprising.

They frequently took bets on who would win our sometimes heated debates.

"No," I glared back at him. "I just want to get my wife a bouquet of flowers. Is there something wrong with that?"

After her little mini-meltdown earlier it made me wonder if maybe I wasn't doing enough to let her know she was still my whole world. It was easy to get wrapped up in the everyday minutia of living our lives with a toddler and forego the little things to show that we still cared about one another. Sex was a great way to show we cared and one we utilized a lot. That part of our relationship hadn't slowed down much at all – Lilly's interruptions, notwithstanding – but I didn't

want Sookie to think that was all I wanted from her. I didn't get the chance to properly woo her into marrying me. We never got the chance to do much of anything like a normal couple would and even if she never acted like it mattered to her or said anything about it one way or the other, it mattered to me.

I wanted to give her everything she deserved.

I wasn't blind to all that she had done both for and to me. Sookie had given up everything to be a stay at home mom to Lilly. She followed me around to sometimes shitty locations so I wouldn't have to be without either one of them for more than a few days. She never once complained about anything that had to do with keeping our family together. And I knew it was only because of her that I got to have the best of both worlds.

A family I loved more than anything and a career I was still passionate about.

Another reason for my spur of the moment idea could've had something to do with the movie I'd just read for. It was – in part – based on a married couple who had lost their way. Lost some of their fire for each other and who had just been going through the motions of being married, but acted more like roommates. That is until a life altering event forced them to see they did still love each other.

Sookie and I had had enough life altering bullshit to last ten lifetimes, but I didn't want that same sort of disconnect to happen in my own marriage.

Ever.

So what better way to say that than with flowers?

## **SPOV**

I. Will. Not. Cry.

But if I did, they would be angry tears. I was furious with myself for letting things get so out of hand. And while I didn't look quite like a watermelon in my green matron of honor gown, it was only because the shade was all wrong.

And because I was a glutton for more than just southern fried comfort food, as soon as we got home I made sure Lilly was content with a juice box and a stack of coloring books before trudging to our closet. It took a few minutes before I found them and I knew it was a bad idea just holding them up. But that didn't stop me from unbuttoning my once favorite pair of short shorts and trying to pull them on.

I looked like an overstuffed sausage that had broken through the casing.

Ground up mystery meat falling out of a shit maker. That was me. And it was no mystery how I'd gotten that way.



But hearing the telltale sound of an approaching giant thundering up the stairs, I slammed the closet door shut and leaned against it, yelling out, "Don't come in here!"

"Why?" he purred from the other side of the door. It was no Fee-fi-fo-fum, but it was close enough. "Are you hiding the naughty schoolgirl outfit you picked up today that you'll be surprising me with later on tonight?"

If I had, his surprise wouldn't be nearly as sexy as he was imagining. Instead of a Catholic schoolgirl, I'd be a Fatholic schoolgirl.

*Big* difference. Emphasis on the *big*.

I ignored his porny hopes and peeled the shorts off of my body, changing into my standard uniform of sweats and a tee, before opening the door and sighing, "Sorry to burst your bubble, but you won't get to bust a nut over that. I don't think that outfit would come in my size."

Eric's eyes narrowed for a moment before he seemed to pick up what I was putting down. Then those same baby blues rolled up into his head as he joked, "Hang on. Let me go get my iPad so I can translate your Swahili. Oh wait! *I know!* All of that gibberish means '*bullshit*', right?"

Oh, it was bullshit alright. Just not how he meant it.

And while I appreciated the fact Eric loved me no matter what size I was, I refused to let either one of us drown in the river of denial. I just couldn't ignore it anymore and didn't see any reason why he should either when I said, "I'm glad you still find me attractive, Eric. I really am, but I can't stand the way I look now. I let myself go and now I need to do something about it."

"Does this have anything to do with the lines we read this morning?" he asked suspiciously.

"Yes and no," I shrugged. "I know you weren't really saying those things to me, but that didn't make them any less true. Like your character, I'm not happy."

His entire face froze and paled as he asked, "What do you mean, exactly, that you're not happy?" Everything about him seemed to seize up when he whisper added, "With me?"

Five mother fucking times, three years, and a tiny little monster later and he could still be so insecure. It boggled my mind.

And I blamed his mother.

Whore.

But the mere fact his first thought was he was somehow responsible for my unhappiness made me want to show him just how happy he made me.

So I decided I would start by boggling *his* mind.

On my knees and with his cock in my mouth.

I pulled him into the closet and shut the door in case we got an unexpected visit from Cum-Miss Interruptus - Latin for Lilly - and pushed him against the door, while I pushed my tongue into his mouth. And in case he wasn't picking up what I was now putting down, Wicked worked his jeans open while Immoral dove inside and picked up his rapidly growing realization.

"Are you trying to distract me?" he asked in a hoarse whisper, while I chewed open each button on his shirt on my way down his chest.

"Not especially," I smiled up at him. Sliding down to my knees, I asked, "But is it working?"

As soon as my lips wrapped around his lower head, his upper one smacked against the door, with him asking, "Is...is *what* working?"

I swear. It was like taking candy from a baby.

Well, maybe not. Lilly was not easily de-candied.

I knew his cock in my mouth as well as I knew my own tongue by then. I also knew exactly how to make his knees buckle and I went to work on getting that very thing to happen.

"Soo...ah...uh...*fuckthat'sgood*," he gruttered and gave up talking now that he was doing all of his thinking with his little head. It was probably for the best since he'd reverted to his own special language made up of growls interspersed with stutters and forgotten spaces.

Grutters.

But I didn't need an iPad app to decipher those.

It had been a while since I'd done this for him. Baby Northman's would never be made with me swallowing their only cum shot at being formed. We still had a lot of sex and while it was always great, lately it was always in the back of my mind we had another purpose in doing it. Now though, I was doing it for no other reason than to make us both feel good.

And I was starting to feel really good. Anyone who didn't get turned on by making their partner weak in the knees needed to find a new partner.

And now that there was nothing in the back of my mind, there was nothing stopping me from taking Eric down into the back of my throat. Swallowing and humming around his shaft got me a whole slew of new grutters coming from Eric's mouth right before he came against my tonsils.

I couldn't help smiling up at him, while I tucked his not-so-little mister away, and stood up to give him a peck on his cheek. Only he turned in time to catch my mouth with his, doing a bit of his own pushing until I was the one up against the door. His hands were already moving for my waistband, so I made sure Wicked and Immoral were set to stun in order to stop him.

I didn't want them to annihilate Eric. But I couldn't pick up what he was putting down.

Because Aunt Flo had already leased my womb for the next week.

## **EPOV**

"Why?" I asked, but not really sure what I was asking exactly.

Why wasn't she happy?

Why was she stopping me from finishing what she'd started.

Why was she still dressed?

Sookie had managed to blow both of my minds.

"I started," she replied, looking sad again.

I was okay with starting in the middle of my why's, so I smiled and said, "I know you started." Leaning down to kiss her silly, I added, "Now let me finish it."

"No, Eric," she giggled and tried pushing me away. "I mean *I started*. Your sperm stood up my ovum – or maybe she was just a standoffish bitch. But she threw her resulting hissy fit in my uterus and now the red refugees are fleeing on the crimson tide down my canal." Locking her now amused eyes on mine, she asked, "Get it?"

"Got it," I smiled. "Gross, but you certainly got your point across." Wrapping my arms around her, I let my expression grow more serious as I asked, "Now tell me why you're not happy. We can go have sex in the shower if that's what's bothering you."

It certainly wouldn't be the first time I'd earned my red wings with her.

But hearing her say those three little words was like my worst fucking nightmare come true. Well, not my *worst* nightmare. We'd already lived through *my worst fucking nightmare*, but this wasn't much better.

"You're feeling it now," she offered offhandedly.

"No I'm not," I argued. "*I'm happy*. I love you. I love Lilly. I love our whole fucking life."

And it was all my fault. I'd known on some level that I wasn't doing enough to show her how much she meant to me. How much I appreciated every little fucking thing she did for us.

For me.

"No, Eric," she repeated, sans giggle. Wiggling around in my embrace, she said, "You're *feeling* it. *Physically* feeling it. I'm not happy with how I've let myself go."

I wanted to roll my eyes and yell at her for scaring the shit out of me. And then drag her into the shower so we could have angry makeup sex. But seeing her look so forlorn over her cockamamie belief that she was anything less than stunning made me stop myself. I didn't want to ridicule her – even if I didn't agree with her. But I didn't want to lie to her by agreeing either and I had a feeling that would only make things worse.

Not lying. Agreeing.

I'd been a husband for three years now and I knew I still had a lot to learn. But knowing not to concur with my wife that she was fat – even if she was, which she wasn't – wasn't one of those things.

"Sookie," I sighed, not knowing quite what I should say to make her feel better and deciding to just go with the truth. "You're sexy. You're beautiful. Both inside and out. Every part. Every pound. I love *all* of you. When I look at you I don't see whatever imperfections you're seeing. I see the woman who gave me more than anyone else ever could. More than anything money could buy. You gave me a new life. You gave me your love. You gave me our daughter. How could I not love every bit of you?"

Fuck.

The tears.

I hated when they appeared, no matter what caused them. But at least this time she tried to smile through them when she leaned against me and said, "People are wrong about you. Anyone who doesn't know you, thinks it's your looks or your career or your money that makes you so great. But none of that is true." Putting her hand over my heart, she whispered, "This is what makes you great Eric Northman. I love you, even if you are blind."

Maybe I was blinded by my love for her, but I didn't think that was necessarily a bad thing. Not in this case anyway, but before either of us could say another word we both heard a gasped out, "Fowlers!"

"Shit!"

I spun Sookie around so I could open the closet door, but it was too late. The she-demon had already gotten her little petal pulling paws on the bouquet I'd dropped onto the bedroom floor when Sookie pulled me into the closet.

Her pulling my cock into her mouth is what made me forget all about them.

"No Lilly," I chided and grabbed what was left of them. "Those are for mommy."

Fuck.

Now I had two pouty lips pointed my way.

"You got me flowers?" Sookie asked, looking weepy all over again and with her lower lip wobbling.

"My fowlers," Lilly sniffled, with her lower lip wobbling too.

Mirrors. Fucking mirror images of each other.

Justin Timberlake would be singing all over this shit if he were here right now.

"Yes."

It was all I could say. To either one of them. And so I wouldn't be a liar to at least one of them, I pulled a single stem from the bunch and handed it to Lilly before giving the rest to Sookie.

She attached herself to my side, while Lilly attached herself to my leg, with both of them hugging me like I'd just come home from fighting a war, and said a heartfelt, "Thank you," in unison.

Well, a 'thank you' and a 'fank you', but the sentiment was the same.

They were both acting like I'd just given them their one true heart's desire. But that was silly though.

Flowers were just a little thing.