

Title: **Bonds**

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Chapter 1: Bond

Bond

Eric woke from his daytime rest in the secure chamber of his primary home in Shreveport. He could feel that the sun had fully set and found it odd because at his age he normally rose an hour or so beforehand. Something felt off within him, but he couldn't quite figure out what it was. Nothing had been out of the ordinary within Area 5 or the kingdom recently, but he still couldn't shake the feeling off completely. He'd lived for over a thousand years relying on his instincts and they were telling him that something was wrong.

Since the sun had already set he searched his house and the surrounding property, but with his senses he already knew that there was no one to be found there. Pam and his day man were the only two that knew its location and he'd glamourised the latter so that he could only remember his way there when necessary to carry out his duties, but he wouldn't be able to think of or speak its location ever, even under another vampire's glamour (he had Pam test him). Eric thought it was pretty fucking ninja of him and smirked at the thought.

Satisfied that there was no one lurking about, Eric showered and changed before heading to Fangtasia. After the Great Revelation ten years earlier he'd opened Fangtasia, along with Pam, to take advantage of the newly known existence of vampires in the human world and it had quickly become a successful venture. It provided a place where the vampires in his area could report to him as their sheriff as well as having the added bonus of ready and willing vermin show up in droves each night in the hopes of attracting the attention of a vampire, so there were always fang bangers to choose from for a feed and fuck. The novelty had quickly worn off however and he found himself feeling more and more disillusioned every time he had to put in his time enthralling the vermin from his throne. When time was no longer of any consequence as an immortal, boredom was inevitable. Eric longed for something more; he just didn't know what that was.

He arrived at the club a little after eight and noticed there was already a line of humans extending around the corner of the building. Parking in his spot at the rear of the building, he locked his Corvette and went in through the backdoor straight to his office. He had just finished with his emails and was starting on the stack of Area 5 paperwork Pam had set aside for him to go through when he sensed her approach, looking up just as she strode through the door with what appeared to be his dinner. A lovely brunette with dark brown eyes and full breasts almost spilling out of her low cut top along with a redhead whose long legs were showcased by the scrap of

fabric that she wore as a skirt barely surrounding her hips. He smiled like the predator he was thinking his child had done well with her selections that evening.

"Master," she said with a barely contained grin.

Eric smirked already smelling their arousal at the sight of him and a cocked eyebrow looking at Pam and asked, "Is it my birthday or are you softening the blow before telling me you ordered the entire fall line of Jimmy Choo's and charged it to my credit card? Again."

"Christian Louboutin," she smiled and once he gave her a slight nod indicating his approval of the two women she'd chosen for him, as well as her new shoe purchases, she left the office shutting the door behind her.

"Good evening ladies," he purred as he stood and walked around his desk. He would need some extra room that evening since there were two of them and he had already begun picturing how and what he planned on doing to them. Still smelling their arousal from the moment they entered the office, he could also smell the fact that they were untouched by any other vampires, a rarity in his bar. *'She must have ordered the Chanel line as well,'* he thought, but quickly set it aside as at the moment he had other pressing things to attend to.

Pure lust was pouring off of both of them and as soon as Eric leaned back against the front of his desk they were on him. The brunette started inching the hem of his shirt up his body while placing kisses across his abdomen as Eric turned the redhead around so that her back was pressed against his side. He ran his hand down her side and around her front barely touching the outer edge of her breast causing her to arch her back seeking out his touch while the brunette went to work ridding him of his pants.

The nagging feeling Eric had upon rising earlier that evening telling him that something was wrong had been pushed to the background until that moment and began screeching at him to stop, causing his motions to still. He tried to ignore it and forcefully skimmed his nose along the side of the redhead's neck seeking out the spot where he wanted his first taste of the evening and while she smelled a little better than most of his meals he didn't find her scent appealing at all. Repulsive even.

Eric could feel his lust, both for blood and sex, fading fast so he released her from his hold choosing to concentrate on the brunette whose hands were currently making their way into his now open jeans and as soon as she wrapped her hand around his length her touch felt wrong. Again Eric tried to ignore it and closed his eyes just concentrating on the feel of her hand stroking him up and down, but it was a wasted effort. His senses were screaming inside of him to throw both of them out of his office and perhaps even the building.

He looked down to see the redhead playing with the brunette's breasts while pleasuring herself and could see that the brunette was about to take him into her mouth. Hoping that would bring him back into the moment he watched with anticipation waiting for the feeling of her hot wet mouth around his cock, but his body reacted without thought. Eric's hand gripped the back of her head and pulled her to her feet before her mouth had the chance to make contact and he paused

again shocked at his motions. She started to lean in towards him assuming he wanted to kiss her, but like the redhead, her scent was repulsive to him even though there was nothing wrong with her. *'It wasn't like she was a shifter or a were'*, he thought, and in fact, they both smelled good for humans. Even so, the thought of having either one for a feed or a fuck seemed out of the question.

Frustrated, he set himself to rights and glamoured them both into believing they had mind blowing sex together before sending them on their way. Eric downed a bottle of True Blood before going out into the bar to put in his time on the throne and saw Pam approach and speak to the girls he'd just sent away. He didn't miss the fact that she sniffed each of them and just before she turned away he caught a flash of what appeared to be sadness on her face.

'What the fuck is going on with me?' he wondered. He couldn't remember ever having felt like he did now and he could remember everything he'd done in the last 1000 years. Eric carefully hid his confusion from the others placing the mask of boredom and disdain on his face knowing otherwise he would be seen as weak which was never a good thing for a sheriff. He let his gaze wander across the masses before him as he tried to pinpoint what it was he was feeling and why. Eric had always despised having *any* feelings other than those brought on by feeding, fighting, or fucking which is why he locked them all away not long after he was turned.

He could feel the anger and frustration building inside of him and heard the wooden armrest of his throne crack from the pressure he'd unknowingly been exerting with his grip. He was just about to say *'Fuck it'* and grab the first fang banger he could find to *fuck* the feelings away when he caught the sight of a blond head near the bar.

Eric could tell from where he sat that it wasn't their natural hair color, but something inside of him sat up and took notice. As the sheriff he couldn't be seen approaching a human while on display so he sat and watched out of the corner of his eye waiting for the blond to turn around. When she did he let out a growl of frustration, scaring those closest to his dais, upon seeing she was nothing more than another run of the mill human. The two he'd had in his office earlier were prettier than that one and his inner beast roared in anger, yet he still had no idea why he felt like he did.

Flashes of another blond started filtering into his mind and his body stilled as if waiting in anticipation for her arrival while fearful that any movement by him might make the images in his mind disappear. In his mind's eye she was wearing a white dress with little red flowers that looked more like splashes of blood and he felt the crotch of his pants tighten in response. He saw her from behind as she spoke to someone at the bar and fully appreciated her hourglass figure perfectly encased within her sundress. If his heart still beat it would be thundering as he realized she was just about to turn allowing him to finally see her face when he felt a hand on his knee pulling him out of the first daydream he'd ever had in his 1000 years. He'd never dreamt before, in either his daytime rest or while awake, but it had to have been a dream because he *knew* he would have remembered *her*.

Eric looked down to see which one of the vermin had gotten brave enough to approach him while he'd been locked away in his mind with his mystery blond. He'd not given the customary

signal for them to back the fuck off indicating his disinterest so with a swift kick of his foot he watched as they went flying backwards onto the dance floor. He hoped that would be enough of a signal for everyone else tonight as well.

Eric could no longer take feeling like a caged animal sitting there with the anger, confusion and unexplained longing building within him and he sprung out of his seat heading towards the back exit. Eric saw the look of disappointment on Pam's face while she spoke on her phone as he left the bar, but he couldn't care less about her disapproval of him not being there being bad for business knowing if he had stayed business would have been even worse because he surely would have killed anyone that dared approach him again, human or vampire.

Eric jumped into his car and got onto the highway hoping the blinding speeds and loud music would be an outlet to whatever it was he was feeling. He had no particular destination in mind, but after a while he noticed the tightening in his chest lessening with each mile the farther he travelled from Shreveport. The last time he'd been this far north was a few years earlier when he'd left tribute in the form of an ox when there were reports of a Maenad in the woods surrounding some backwater town in his area named Bon Temps. She relocated shortly thereafter so he'd assumed the tribute was satisfactory and he'd had no need to return since then.

No sooner had the thought crossed his mind than he came upon the exit for Bon Temps. Eric decided to take it on a whim and again the tightening in his chest lessened a little more. *Odd.*

He drove through the center of town and saw, unsurprisingly, that it was nothing more than a one traffic light, little podunk town. He was about to head back towards the highway when he saw the sign for Merlotte's Bar and Grill up ahead and decided to check it out. Eric knew it had once been owned by a shifter during the time of the Maenad, but had been sold to a human when the shifter decided to seek out his birth family according to the supe gossip vine. He'd never been curious enough to see it for himself until now and once he pulled into the parking lot he knew without seeing the inside they wouldn't be giving Fangtasia a run for their money any time soon.

Eric could smell the stench of beer and sweaty humans from the parking lot and almost got back in his car, but something within him was drawing him inside. Prepared for the fear he would both sense and smell as soon as the patrons saw him, Eric stepped through the front door and stopped giving everyone a chance to see the thousand year old vampire that just walked in knowing most of them had probably never seen one in their little corner of Louisiana.

As expected everyone turned and looked at him, but unexpectedly, they all returned to their conversations without so much as another glance.

The bartender was just hanging up the phone as he looked over at Eric and said, "Evening sheriff."

He wasn't surprised his reputation extended this far into the swamps and gave him a cursory nod before choosing an empty booth to sit at. Eric knew he hadn't ever been there and yet it seemed oddly familiar. He thought perhaps it was only because once you've seen one hick bar you've seen them all, but somehow he knew that wasn't it. The bartender himself placed a heated bottle

of True Blood on the table before him without a word and returned to behind the bar while Eric sat there in shock that they actually had any in stock. He knew of no vampires ever residing in this area and as sheriff he knew where *every* vampire in his area lived.

He continued to ponder this strangest of evenings while nursing his drink when, as a bar owner himself, Eric noticed there weren't any waitresses working the floor. There weren't many customers that evening, but he still thought there were enough customers for there to be at least one or two on duty. The bartender, 'Terry' was his name according to the customers calling out to him, and the busboy were taking orders and serving the drinks and food themselves.

Again, the recurring sense of familiarity washed over him while he continued to just sit there with his eyes taking in every little detail trying to place it somewhere in his mind. Eric had been lost in his internal musings for quite some time when, with his vampire hearing, he heard a female's voice angrily whispering from the back hallway of the bar, "Terry is the coast clear yet?"

Eric looked up in time to see what must have been the waitress given her white t-shirt with a green 'Merlotte's Bar and Grill' logo on the left side and black shorts along with unnaturally red hair when he heard the bartender sigh exasperatedly as suddenly everything clicked.

Sookie.

Memories flooded into Eric's mind, the force of which would've brought him to his knees if he'd been standing. *Sookie was the one who walked into his bar for the first time wearing that white dress. His bonded. He couldn't feel her! Their bond was gone. That's what was wrong.* Eric's eyes shot over to the bartender who was back on his phone, but he flew out of the door and into the sky before hearing anything with his only need being he had to find Sookie.

Eric was at the farmhouse less than a minute later bursting through the front door calling out her name and it wasn't until he'd checked every room in the house in a panic when he finally realized the state it was in. There were sheets covering all of the furniture and the rooms held a stale smell as if they'd been closed off for months if not years. He couldn't detect her scent anywhere. Running to her room he ripped the pillow from her bed and held it to his face inhaling deeply *needing* the reassurance of her distinct smell of sunlight and part-fairy to know he wasn't going mad. But there was nothing there. No smell of sunlight. No smell of part-fairy. No Sookie.

He walked outside telling himself '*She does exist!*' while the ache in his chest increased as more and more memories of her and their time together continued to stream into his consciousness and he stood stock still unable to move only now noticing the overgrown weeds surrounding the house and knew his Sookie hadn't been there in quite some time if the yard had come to look like this. He struggled trying to remember when the last time it was that he'd seen or spoken to her while he pulled out his phone calling Pam.

"Master," she answered.

"Pam," he barked, "I need you at Sookie's house now. She's not here and it appears she's been gone for some time. I can't feel her in the bond. Meet me at Compton's." He hung up before she could reply, still confused as to what had happened, but angry at her for bringing those women into his office while knowing he was pledged to Sookie. Even if he hadn't been in his right mind at the time and had actually fed from or fucked those women Eric knew Sookie would feel hurt and betrayed, which was something he vowed she would *never* feel because of him when they had been pledged by the ceremonial knife. Once he had his answers he swore Pam would be punished for *her* betrayal of him and Sookie.

Eric burst in through Compton's front door not bothering to knock and found him sitting on his couch in the living room.

"Compton! Where is Sookie?" he demanded.

Bill sighed and said, "Sheriff, can I offer you a True Blood?"

'Why am I the only one concerned?' he thought. *'I know both Pam and especially Bill value Sookie's friendship. So why am I the only one ready to tear apart the world to find her?'* Something inside of him snapped and he had Bill against the wall with his hand around his throat growling, "Where. Is. My. Bonded. Compton." He didn't care how mad Sookie would be at him; if Bill had done *anything* to her he *would* be meeting his final death at Eric's hand.

"Eric," he said calmly, "I think it would be best if we wait for Pam to arrive." Eric stared down at him tightening his grip on Bill's throat, but the younger vampire didn't struggle at all. In fact, Eric only saw *pity* in his eyes as he looked back at him causing Eric to release his grip and drop him to the floor.

WHAT THE FUCK!

"Meet me at Sookie's with Pam once she arrives," he ordered and began walking back to the farmhouse at a human speed while putting together the broken fragments of his memories coupled with what happened tonight.

Eric let every memory he had of Sookie pour through his mind looking for the answers he so desperately needed. The first time she walked into his bar he knew he had to have her, at the time, if only for a feed and fuck. After getting to know her a little better, Eric wanted more than that from her and the satisfaction he'd felt when he *finally* got his blood inside of her was like nothing he'd ever experienced. It wasn't just the smug elation he'd expected to feel at besting Compton at the time, but the start of their bond allowing him to *feel* her passion and fire had changed his end game. He no longer wanted her just for her body; just for her gift; just as an asset. Sookie made him want *her*. He wanted to be the one she turned to for her every need. He wanted to be the one to fulfill her every desire. She, barely a quarter of a century old human, changed him, a thousand year old Viking vampire sheriff. Having known the warmth of her touch, the scent and taste of her skin, the passion and fire that burned within her spirit and soul for him, he knew he could never go back to the way he'd existed prior to knowing her. Nor would he want to.

The courage she'd shown when she got staked in Jackson, and then to be raped and practically drained by the one she almost died to come rescue proved she had the spirit of a warrior, his true match. The only *good* thing to happen in Jackson was seeing her perform that dance with her friend Tara and getting more of his blood in her. Even before the time he'd spent with Sookie under the witch's curse and later regaining his memories, Eric had known he wanted more from her. He wanted what she had at one time willingly given Compton. Her actions in Rhodes, even if she was technically still seeing the were-tiger, was what cemented his resolve where Sookie was concerned. Not only were they permanently bonded by blood, when she knew the bombs were about to go off in the hotel she put her own life on the line to save him and his child. Not Compton. Not the tiger. Him. She'd finally chosen him. Eric had wanted everything she'd had to give, but he surprised even himself when he'd realized he wanted to give her everything in return. It was why his first thought during the takeover was to go to Sookie. To protect her. Not his Queen. Not his child. Sookie had been the one he chose to protect and he would have met his final death to keep her safe, even if Compton was the only one to say the actual words.

While their pledging hadn't been under the most ideal circumstances, Eric had never once had any doubts that it was what he wanted. He wanted Sookie to be his, and only his, forever. He knew she would be upset when she found out the true meaning of it all and even though she didn't view it as a marriage, which it was, over time her acceptance at least had been a small victory.

Eric was halfway across the cemetery by then but before he could contemplate anything further an unexpected splash of color on the ground caught his eye. It was the middle of the night, but with his vampire senses he could see perfectly and walked closer to inspect what turned out to be fresh flowers lying atop a grave and the unmistakable scent of Compton. The name on the headstone made Eric involuntarily draw an unnecessary gasp of air into his lungs.

Sookie Stackhouse

With his memories finally returning and now seeing the date of her death he knew she'd been gone for some 6 years. '*How could it be?*' he wondered. '*Why hadn't he remembered until now?*'

The marker lay in between her grandmother Adele and her parents, all of them taken from her before she'd been ready and yet she'd managed to survive their loss. Eric had survived the worst kinds of torture and physical pain in his lifetime, but seeing her name signifying her death caused an unimaginable pain to rip through his body bringing him to his knees while an anguished roar that could be heard for miles left his throat.

Blood red tears ran down his face while his body convulsed on top of his bonded's grave as his last memories of her finally filtered into his consciousness.

He'd been on his way back to Shreveport to finish up some necessary paperwork so he could take Sookie away for while. They hadn't spent much time together after his maker had met his final death and Eric had stayed away dealing with everything that entailed. His fear at Ocella's return with his new child Alexei had left him terrified for Sookie's well-being. It was an unwelcome and unfamiliar feeling at the time, but with their final deaths the terror turned into anger.

He'd been angry at Ocella for intruding in his world once again. Angry that he could deny nothing his maker asked of him, even if it had meant hurting Sookie, if not worse. He was angry at Sookie's attitude toward Ocella knowing firsthand what kind of monster he could be while knowing he could not protect her from him. And finally, he'd been angry at himself for feeling a sense of loss at his maker's demise. Monster or not, the bond between a maker and their child wasn't something that lessened through the years and he'd felt his maker's final death to his core. He wanted to be rid of Ocella's hold on him and Eric had been angry that even after he'd been reduced to a pile of ash, Ocella still had a hold on him.

So he'd stayed away from Sookie for a couple of weeks to try to work through it all until he'd felt her terror through their bond on that final night. He'd missed her terribly, but hadn't decided whether or not he was ready to face her. Ready to admit his feelings of failing to protect her, but once he'd felt her terror wash through him there was no other decision to be made. He flew into the night towards the shifter's bar as fast as he could and relaxed somewhat as he felt her fear and adrenaline subside. His relaxation went out the metaphorical window when he arrived to see the shifter's bar had gone up in flames.

Eric quickly entered through the front door and grabbed Sookie by her shoulders and even upon seeing that she appeared relatively unscathed he still demanded, "Are you hurt?" She brushed off her latest near death experience seemingly more upset about her singed hair and Eric's less than polite responses to those around them.

Sookie continued to answer questions the local sheriff, Bud Dearborn, was asking her while Eric wandered away pulling out his cell phone and calling Pam. Once she was free to leave, Eric drove Sookie home in her car with each of them lost in their own thoughts. Eric was furious that she was, *yet again*, vulnerable to being hurt and he hadn't been there to protect her. He wanted her to quit working there, once and for all, and even as he later said the words he knew she would never agree.

Once Pam's stylist, whom she'd brought to Sookie's house to try and salvage her hair, and Pam had left for the evening Eric tucked a weary Sookie into her bed and laid with her until she'd fallen asleep. He simply stared at her fighting the urge to just spirit her away in the dead of night. He wanted to cover her body with his own and shelter her from everything that seemed to be out to get her. Eric knew he had to tell Sookie what his thoughts had been concerning Ocella, but not now. Now she needed to rest, not just that night, but for at least a week if not longer. They'd both been going non-stop from one emergency to another and Eric thought they could both use some time away from everyone and everything.

Knowing that the shifter's bar would be closed for the foreseeable future Eric thought it was the perfect opportunity to take Sookie away for a while. He had wanted to take her to see his homeland in Sweden where he maintained a home on the land where his village once stood. When Sookie had come into his life he'd made sure to have it renovated to accommodate humans since he'd only ever brought Pam there in the past. But, he had wanted to share that part of his life with Sookie so he had the bathrooms and kitchen made suitable for her use.

He'd said nothing to Sookie about it when he left her that evening knowing he'd have to petition Felipe for the time off and didn't want to disappoint her if his request was denied. Eric had just touched down in Fangtasia's parking lot when he was brought to his knees by the pain that ripped through their bond. He had barely noticed Pam's appearance at the back door with her bloody tears mirroring his own, having felt her maker's anguish through their own bond.

She watched as Eric launched himself back towards Bon Temps with him already knowing what he would find. The scent of her blood filled his senses before he even landed on her front porch. Ripping the door from its hinges he came across her bullet riddled form lying in a puddle of her own blood sprawled across the floor of her bedroom. The closer he got to her the more he could sense the spark of life leaving her body.

Eric scooped her into his arms and tore at his wrist with his fangs before pushing the open vein into her mouth sobbing, "Lover you must drink." She barely had enough strength left to open her eyes, but he watched her do just that as fresh tears fell from each of them.

If it hadn't been for his vampire senses Eric wouldn't have been able to hear her say, "I love you Eric, always."

And then she was gone.

He held her lifeless body in his arms unable to let go, either physically or emotionally, until he caught movement out of the corner of his eye and launched himself at the source prepared to rip them limb from limb only realizing at the last moment that it was Pam. He'd been so lost in his grief that he hadn't sensed her arrival.

"Master?" she whispered, the red tracks along her normally pristine features giving additional evidence of her upset.

Eric had no words to give her and in the only human gesture he'd ever witnessed from Pam, she wrapped her arms around her maker's body and held onto him with all of her strength.

They stayed that way for a time until Eric could sense dawn's impending arrival. Looking down at her he kissed Pam's forehead and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear before saying, "You must go seek shelter for the day."

Knowing he had no plans to seek shelter from the sun himself she held onto him tightly unable to grasp the mere notion that her maker would not be there when she rose that evening. From the moment she rose as a vampire she could never imagine her existence without him there. The only way she had thought Eric would meet his final death would be in battle and she knew she would've been fighting alongside him and would have given her life to save his. Pam racked her brain for anything she could say to him to make him stay when it suddenly came to her.

"Master, I smelled Madden outside of Sookie's house when I arrived...the second time," she whispered. "He must be behind this. Don't you want vengeance?" she pleaded, desperate for him to agree.

Pam couldn't bring herself to look in his eyes, fearful of what she might see and when she felt her maker's body tense and the call for battle and blood raced through their shared bond she relaxed knowing she had time. There was time to convince him to stay.

It took them only a week to locate Victor Madden, with Eric having called in every debt he'd held to find him. Felipe de Castro had given Eric his approval to seek out and end Madden for Sookie's death, not only because it was his right as her bonded, but because de Castro had personally pledged his protection to her.

They found him the evening before Sookie's funeral and while the few hours before dawn had been painfully tortuous for Madden, Eric ripped his head, the only appendage left attached to Madden's torso by then, from his body sending him to his final death only moments before the sun rose that morning.

Pam had kept a careful watch of her maker and used what little time she had to plot out what she needed to do to keep Eric from meeting the sun once Madden was finally dead. She had no doubt that Eric planned on leaving this world once the funeral was over and she'd already moved the pieces on the chessboard in her mind to keep that from happening. She was her maker's progeny after all and for her the stakes had never been higher. She wasn't ready to be without him. She wasn't ready to continue on without their bond.

The entire town had come to pay their respects at Sookie's funeral, held in the evening so *everyone* that wanted to attend could. It was all Eric could do to keep his emotions in check when he heard their whispers of how her choice to be with a vampire had led to her death, believing deep down that their sentiment was true. If only he'd pushed her away, or hidden her from those that wanted her for her telepathy she might still be there. No matter how much it would've hurt both of them he would've rather had her living a world away than dying in his arms.

Eric's body was still racked with grief over the now realized loss of his bonded when he felt Pam's arrival behind him. Turning he saw she was standing in between Compton and a woman he came to recognize as the witch, Sookie's old roommate, Amelia Broadway.

"How?" he asked them, not feeling the need to elaborate.

Understanding, Pam replied, "A spell." Eric glared at her clearly wanting more information so she continued, "I knew you were planning to meet the sun, so in the moments before dawn after Sookie's funeral I had Amelia perform a spell. It should have wiped your memory of Sookie and everything else that would or could remind you of her. I thought if it worked you could go back to how things were before she'd come into our lives."

Tears formed in the corners of her eyes as she admitted, "But it didn't work. So we tried again the following night. And again, and again, and again. It hasn't worked for more than a few hours after you rise in the evening and every night you leave without feeding on anything other than True Blood. Every night you end up at Merlotte's. And each and every night we inevitably arrive

here, but I haven't given up hope that one night the spell will work. It *will* work and I'll have you back," with her tone slowly changing from utter conviction to a whispered prayer.

Eric could barely grasp what his life had become. For six years he'd been reliving this never-ending nightmare. He looked up at Pam and asked, "Why?"

Her response caught in her throat before meekly whispering, "I'm not ready to let you go."

He felt her turmoil and sadness, but it came nowhere near to how he felt knowing that Sookie was gone forever. To him, only a week had passed since her death and the loss he felt was still fresh, slicing his insides raw.

Eric turned to Amelia and asked, "And you? Why do you continue to perpetuate this lie by doing this to me?"

Eric had asked them these questions nearly every night in some form so she didn't hesitate as she replied, "For Sookie. She would want you to continue on."

Her words rang true, but it didn't matter. Sookie was no longer there so she couldn't be angry at him for not doing as she wished. He wanted, needed, to be selfish in this one instance to end the pain he barely had control of knowing he couldn't last one more night without her.

Eric's eyes fell to Bill and without any prompting Bill said, "I remain here for Sookie as well. As much as it pains me to say, she loved you Eric and she wouldn't want your final death to be because of her."

"I DON'T CARE!" Eric roared. "SHE'S GONE! DEAD! And her wants and wishes died with her." He fixed his stare on each of them ordering, "This ends tonight. This ruse will no longer continue."

Eric was just about to command Pam as her maker to leave and take the others with her when Amelia quickly chanted under her breath and Eric's form was frozen in time by her stasis spell. Pam wiped the tears from her eyes while Bill lifted Eric's body and carried him to her van as Amelia tried to comfort her.

"I've got a few more feelers out to a coven in Ireland. Maybe they'll know what it is that we're missing or doing wrong," Amelia offered.

They followed Bill and watched him lay Eric's body, frozen by the stasis spell, in the back of the van so Pam could place him back in his resting chamber before returning to Fangtasia to finish out her evening. Amelia leaned in whispering the words that would erase Sookie from his memory, for at least a few hours when he first rose. The spell she used was built upon the original spell Hallow had used to curse Eric years earlier and each night she changed a word or phrase hoping it would do the trick. Pam had become Sheriff of Area 5 in Eric's stead when he became *incapacitated*. De Castro was aware of their situation and had agreed to allow Eric to

return to his former position if the spell ever took hold; out of the debt he felt he owed the Viking for failing to protect his bonded from his own Lieutenant.

Climbing into the van, Pam looked over at both Amelia and Bill, her unlikely allies in her quest to save her master, and she smiled softly and agreed, "Maybe..." before driving off into the night.

Chapter 2: Bonded

Bonded

Four years later...

Pam climbed into her van to head towards Bon Temps, as she had every evening for the last ten years, knowing Eric would be calling her at any moment. As expected, her phone rang only moments later.

"Master," she answered.

"Pam," he barked, *"I need you at Sookie's house now. She's not here and it appears she's been gone for some time. I can't feel her in the bond. Meet me at Compton's."*

She closed her phone and chewed on her lip in an attempt at keeping her fluctuating emotions in check. For ten years she'd been subjected to not only her own sadness and turmoil, but that of her master's as well, each and every night as his memories returned. However, tonight everything would change.

Tonight was the ten year anniversary of Sookie Stackhouse's death. Pam had come to the decision to end her master's pain and let him meet his true death if that was his wish. She'd known years earlier how obsessed Eric was with the young telepath, but she'd never imagined how much he'd truly cared about her. Even though the concept was foreign to her, Pam had no doubt he truly loved her.

For ten years, she'd been subjected to his pain and grief over her death. For ten years, she'd selfishly held onto her hopes that the following night would be the one in which the spell would take hold and she'd have her master back. Back to the way he'd been before she'd come into their lives. While Pam had come to like and even respect her master's bonded, she now cursed the day Sookie Stackhouse ever set foot into their bar. *'If only they'd never met her,'* she'd thought for the thousandth time before pushing the thought away. 'What ifs' would do no good because nothing could be done about it now.

A short while later Pam pulled into Bill's driveway, with him opening her door as soon as she'd turned the engine off. She'd never imagined she would come to respect Bill Compton much less *like* him, but his actions over the previous ten years had changed her mind. He remained in Bon

Temps even though she knew staying after Sookie's death hurt him almost as much as it did Eric, but his loyalty never wavered. While it was out of his devotion to Sookie that motivated him at first, she now believed his loyalty had come to include her and her master as well and it wasn't something she would be forgetting any time soon.

"Have you decided?" he asked having known her intentions of ending their ten year charade.

"Yes," she softly replied, "it ends tonight." Even though she'd anguished over the decision to let her maker go it was still difficult for her knowing that this was truly his final night. She would rise the following night on her own for the first time in her existence and it terrified her, but she couldn't keep him here any longer. She couldn't subject him to the pain he felt each night for an eternity because she no longer believed any spell would ever work to dissolve his bond with Sookie. Even after her death their lives were so entwined that he not only *would not* go on without her, she now knew he simply *could not* go on without her.

Pam was so caught up in knowing her bond with her maker was about to come to an end that she didn't even realize Amelia was there as well, until she wrapped her arm around Pam's shoulder, giving her a slight squeeze of support. A small sob escaped her throat as Amelia said, "We'll be here with you. You won't have to go through this alone Pam."

No more words were said as they walked the path from Bill's house to Sookie's grave for possibly the last time with each of them caught up in their own thoughts. They came to a stop behind Eric who sat on his knees atop his bonded's grave; his body shuddering as his memories returned. The bouquet of white roses Bill had left earlier that evening in remembrance of the pure love Sookie had felt and shown to her friends and family were nothing more than shredded petals and stems dangling from the clenched fists of her beloved Viking.

Only a moment later Eric registered their arrival and he turned to face them never once trying to hide the evidence of his bloody tears asking, "How?"

Pam paused before speaking knowing tonight her answers would be different than the ones she'd repeated every night for the last decade. Tonight she would be apologizing; tonight she would be saying goodbye.

"On this very night ten years ago Sookie was murdered by Victor Madden. The moment I found you cradling her lifeless body I knew you would leave me. Once your need for vengeance was satisfied with Madden's final death I knew you would meet the sun so I had Amelia bewitch you with a spell to try to make you forget Sookie. But it never truly worked and, like tonight, every night for the last ten years you rise with no memory of her, however even in her death your bonded refuses to leave you. Each night your memories of her slowly return until we come to the point of where we are right now."

Before Eric could say anything else Pam continued on, "I am sorry for failing you, master. I failed to keep your bonded safe. I failed in my attempts to take your grief away." Tears fell from her eyes as she admitted, "I failed you as your child by refusing your wishes and keeping you here for my own selfish needs. I am sorry, Eric."

The pain flowing across their shared bond was staggering, but before Eric could lash out in anger over what they had done he felt something else from Pam; acceptance.

Realizing what it meant, he reigned in his anger and asked, "You are letting me go?"

A slight nod was Pam's only reply. She slowly approached her maker and came to stop only inches away before falling to her knees in front of him. She couldn't bring herself to meet his gaze, feeling the disappointment flowing into their bond, along with his anguish knowing she'd let him down. Pam steeled herself for the rebuke she was about to receive from her maker when he tipped her chin up to look him in the eyes. She was surprised when, instead of reprimanding her as she'd expected, he instead apologized, saying, "I am sorry Pam. I am sorry for failing you as your maker; for not being strong enough to go on without her; for not being strong enough to go on for you." He placed a kiss on her forehead and whispered against her skin, "Forgive me, my child."

Knowing these were her last moments with her maker, Pam set aside the emotionless façade all vampires normally wore and instead embraced her true feelings for her sire. She reached up to hold his face in her hands and pulled him down placing a kiss on each of his cheeks before leaving one last chaste kiss upon his lips and inhaling his scent that soothed her like nothing else could.

"There is nothing to forgive, master," she assured him.

Bill and Amelia silently watched their exchange each of them feeling both sadness and relief that it was almost over. Dawn was less than an hour away and neither one would leave until Pam was ready to go.

No one was prepared for what happened next.

The unmistakable sound of '*Pop*' a few feet away caused all of them to turn with the vampires immediately taking on a defensive stance. Their postures straightened when they saw that the fairy before them was none other than the Prince of Fae Niall Brigant. He hadn't been seen since he'd closed off the portals between their two worlds after the Fairy War.

Looking at Eric he said, "We must speak."

Instantly assuming the voice of a sheriff, he looked towards the eastern sky and replied, "Well then you should speak quickly, for my time is limited."

Taking in their demeanors and seeming to understand what Eric was alluding to, the tension immediately left Niall's posture. A regretful expression came upon his face as he said with sincerity, "We have known each other for a very long time Viking. You are a formidable warrior; a respected sheriff; an intimidating vampire. You are unmistakably the most fearsome of your kind on this continent, but what is most impressive about you is that you are truly a remarkable man. My great-granddaughter could not have found one more worthy of her than you."

Eric was still too far gone in his grief over Sookie's loss to fully appreciate Niall's praise, but he still responded with, "And I doubt you opened the portal between our worlds to tell me this. Speak your piece but know that once the sun rises, I will be no more."

Niall appeared to be remorseful as he said, "Your intentions for when the sun rises is what I came here to ask of you for the sake of your bonded; my great-granddaughter."

Confused, Eric asked, "You came here to ask me to meet the sun? I assume you haven't seen what I've been through every night for the last ten years? My show of grief over HER DEATH wasn't ENOUGH FOR YOU?" His voice had risen in decibel as his anger grew. No one had suffered the death of Sookie Stackhouse more than he and he would be damned if he let that fairy spoil his last moments on earth. "LEAVE!" he ordered.

"Sookie's spirit has been stuck in between the worlds of her human life and her place in the Summerland since her death," Niall quickly explained.

Everyone stilled at his statement before Eric finally said, "Explain."

Niall took a deep breath before launching into his tale. "As you know Sookie had the essential spark of the Fae despite her humanity and I'd always assumed because of that she would pass on to the Summerland when her time on earth ended. Because the essential spark was missing from her brother Jason, when her spirit didn't visit her cousin Claude, as should have happened as he was the Fae relative next above her in age, I assumed I'd been wrong and the amount of humanity in her prohibited her from entering into our eternal paradise."

He paused as remorse colored his features before continuing, "My son, Dermot, was killed yesterday by one of the few remaining former followers of Breandan left in this realm. As Dermot's spirit passed from his living body, on his way to speak to me before moving onto the Summerland, he came across Sookie's spirit. For her, she has spent every moment of the last ten years in her own kind of purgatory. Dermot told me she was aware of him and her surroundings, but she didn't how much time has passed. She begged him for a way to come back to her human life. She begged to come back here to *you*."

Eric's unbeating heart clenched hearing of his bonded's turmoil and anguish, but he was completely unprepared for the true depth of what Sookie had been going through until Niall explained, "It's your blood bond. Eric, she can still *feel* you and your emotions. She feels your pain over her death and it's not that she *can't* move onto the Summerland, she simply *won't* move on knowing you haven't moved on from her."

"But I can't feel *her!*" Eric exclaimed. He forced himself to remain still and closed his eyes as he searched within himself for any sign of her to no avail. After a few moments he met Niall's gaze with his own and admitted, "Nothing."

"How is any of this possible?" Amelia asked unable to hold her tongue for one more second, feeling horrible, knowing Sookie had been in limbo for all of these years.

"I honestly don't know," Niall admitted. "I know of no other vampire-fae blood bonded couples, for obvious reasons, but perhaps her spark was much stronger than anyone could have guessed."

Amelia smiled for the first time that night as she affectionately said, "Or perhaps she was more stubborn than any of us imagined."

Niall turned back to face Eric ruefully admitting, "I came here tonight to tell you of Sookie's plight. The only way I can think of to end her misery is for your bond to end in this realm." The look he gave Eric left no doubt of what he'd been prepared to ask of him.

The only change Niall's story had to Eric's original plan prior to his arrival was to further cement Eric's resolve that this *would* be the final night of his existence. Even if he hadn't decided to meet the sun before Niall arrived, he wouldn't have been able to continue on with the knowledge of what Sookie had been going through. As Hallow's curse had proven, Sookie was his heart's desire and choosing to meet his true death would be his final gift to his bonded. He didn't fail to miss the irony that it would be yet another gift that she wouldn't have wanted from him, and if the circumstances were any other, he would have smiled at the thought of facing her ire.

The sky began to lighten in the eastern sky so Eric turned to Pam and pulled her into an embrace. "You are my greatest achievement," he whispered against her hair. "It is your time now to become a maker. You are ready." Giving her a final kiss on the top of her head he released her from his arms and watched Amelia replace him by wrapping her arms around Pam. He gave her a small smile of gratitude acknowledging her with a "Witch," and a nod. Amelia smiled back with teary eyes and her own nod saying, "Viking."

Straightening his posture, Eric turned to face his longtime rival for Sookie's affection and let out a stern, "COMPTON!"

Bill's eyebrow rose in a very Eric-like fashion and he nodded his head in deference to the elder vampire while maintaining his gaze as he questioned, "Sheriff?"

A small smirk played across Eric's lips before saying with genuine sincerity, "Thank you for assisting my child for all of these years."

Bill was stunned by Eric's gratitude and could only think to say, "You are welcome."

Niall and Eric stood together side by side and watched the other three make their way back to Bill's house where the two vampires would be taking shelter for the day. When they were no longer in view, together they turned towards the east, in companionable silence.

"What would you have done if I'd refused to meet the sun?" Eric asked as they awaited his first sunrise in over a thousand years.

Niall smiled responding, "Let's just say that I'm grateful you made the choice on *your own*, for I would have truly hated having to make that choice *for you*."

Eric couldn't help smiling at Niall's words and for the first time since he'd risen earlier that evening, in a decade really, he finally felt at peace. He recalled his thoughts from earlier that evening as his memories of Sookie were returning and how he'd wanted everything she'd had to give, only now knowing the depths of just how much she'd truly given of herself to him. Now he would be doing what he'd never fathomed prior to her arrival into his life; he would be giving his everything, his life for her. He also knew that hers was a more noble sacrifice, as his was in part so that her spirit would be released into the Summerland, but it was also out of his own selfish need to end his grief over the loss of his bonded. He simply *couldn't* bring himself to go on without her.

Each of them stood stock still as the first rays of dawn crept over the horizon, with Niall breaking the silence between them saying, "I came to visit Sookie one final time before I sealed the portals between our two worlds and told her you were a good man and that you loved her, which I now know, more than ever, to be true. If it is still your belief, I truly hope that at your end your Valkyries fly down on their winged horses and carry you back to Valhalla, for you are a true and noble warrior."

Smoke started emanating from Eric's body as the sun crept higher and as he listened to Niall's words he realized that for him, Valhalla would only exist if Sookie was there with him.

Later that evening...

Pam rose from her daytime rest feeling the ache in her chest from no longer sharing a bond with her maker. The void she now felt where their bond used to reside within her threatened to overwhelm her emotions, but she pushed them down knowing she had to press on. She'd forced herself to stay awake that morning and screamed out unashamed of her anguish when she'd felt the moment Eric Northman was no more. Pam welcomed death to take her then, if only while the sun remained in the sky, for the brief respite it would bring to her battered emotions.

She decided to take the advice about coping with the loss of a loved one she'd read once in Dear Abby and would just try and get through one day, or in her case night, at a time in the hopes that eventually she would adjust and perhaps even learn to be happy again. Well, as happy as Pam *could* be.

A few hours later she sat her desk at Fangtasia, attempting to lose herself in the stacks of Area 5 paperwork, when there was a knock at the door.

"Enter," she called out.

"Like maker, like progeny," she heard in the rich baritone voice she remembered in an instant.

Inhaling deeply, Pam frowned and stared at the smirk he wore when he said, "My Grandfather gifted me with his magic to mask my scent since I chose to remain in this realm."

"What can I do for you Claude? It must be important for a fairy to willingly enter a vampire bar." Pam smirked unable to hold back her snark, "and a Fae *fairy* at that."

Claude gave her a mock reproachful look responding, "Tsk tsk Pamela. Haven't you heard that tolerance for one's lifestyle choices is all the rage these days?"

Having used up her patience for the fairy, Pam resumed flipping through the paperwork before her while saying, "Get on with it Claude, I'm a busy gal. Sheriff and all you know..."

His next words had her dropping the papers from her hand as her head shot up to look at him.

"Sookie appeared to me this morning, just after dawn, before moving on to the Summerland. She wasn't alone."

Chapter 3: Eternally Bound

Eternally Bound

Tears streamed from Sookie's eyes, as she felt Eric's anguish sweep through their bond, while he was lost in his grief over her death and she could only hope and pray that he'd feel the guilt coursing through her for causing him so much pain. She'd known the moment she arrived in this ether world; her luck had finally run out. She was dead, or at least her body was dead. You'd think that fact would be what shocked her the most, but it wasn't. The fact that she could still *feel* Eric through their bond, despite the fact she had died, shocked her to no end and the only thing she could be thankful for was being able to tell Eric she loved him one last time before taking her final breath.

She couldn't help but shudder as she felt his every emotion; his pain and anguish over her death; his overwhelming anger at what seemed like any and every thing; his never ending longing for her; and his undeniable *love* for her. Sookie no longer had any doubts as to how Eric truly felt about her, but like the saying goes that realization came a day late and a dollar short.

The feelings she'd felt through their bond seemed to replay on a continuous loop with periods of quiet in between. Sookie had no concept of time where she was, but she did try, at first, to keep track of the cycles of grief and quiet until it no longer held any meaning for her. She had no need for sleep, nor any feelings of hunger. There was no light at the end of a tunnel, nor any pearly gates beckoning her to walk through, but there was an undeniable pull from her very core constantly urging her forward into the unknown.

She was able to resist its pull, however, and resist it she did. Instead, once the initial shock wore off, Sookie took the time to explore her surroundings when she'd first arrived, but the lack of anything more visual than the shimmering gown she now wore and a constant state of fog had her exploring with her inner senses rather than using her eyes. It didn't take long for her to realize that the farther along she moved towards where her instincts were telling her to go, that direction was pulling her away from where she could feel Eric and their shared bond the most. Remaining true to her stubborn ways, Sookie refused to move forward.

In the moments when the bond quieted, when she'd assumed Eric was in his daytime rest, although she could still sense his presence in the bond like a comforting hum, Sookie would take the time to contemplate not only her present circumstances, but the circumstances that brought her to be here to begin with and the ramifications of the stupidly stubborn choices she'd made.

Eric had made it clear; he wanted her to live with him. She'd thought him high-handed and controlling, but she now understood it was his fear for her safety that motivated him along with his love for her; wanting her with him always. If only she'd listened to him with her heart instead of her ears, *really listened* to him, she would more than likely be in his arms at that very moment.

And again, a day late and a dollar short, she now wished she would have let him turn her as he'd wanted to. Not because she'd *wanted* to be a vampire necessarily, but she would have done it without question if she'd known what kind of pain Eric would be suffering with her death. While she obviously held no prejudices against vampires, she'd always assumed an air of righteousness when she would vehemently declare her decision to remain human. She'd used her friends and what little remaining family she'd had left as her excuses saying she didn't want to watch them all grow old and die, but wasn't that *exactly* what life was anyway whether or not her heart still beat? Even though she was the one to pass on before them, it could very well have been that *she* would be the one to watch *them* die. She'd spouted off about missing the sunlight and her tanned skin; *Vanity, thy name is Sookie Stackhouse*.

But her biggest regret by far was her beloved Viking. How often had he come to her rescue? How often had he both said and shown her through his actions that he was willing to do *anything* she'd ask of him? Eric had shown her a side of himself that she knew very few had seen in his thousand years all because he felt *she* was worth it. She knew it wasn't because of her telepathy or her Fae-tinged blood. Eric wanted her for her.

Until she'd arrived in this place in between death and whatever existed beyond, she'd never thought to pose the question to herself of '*If the situation had been reversed, would Eric have willingly sacrificed his humanity to remain with her for all of eternity?*' Sookie knew, unequivocally, the answer was 'Yes'. He wouldn't have thought twice about it. Not because it would have made him immortal, but because he loved her enough he would *want* an eternity together with her. He would have wanted to spare her the pain of watching him grow old and knowing that their time together on earth was limited. She'd been so selfish, never considering what it would be like for him when she eventually died and now that it had happened, she could feel the consequences of her choices through their bond.

In the quiet times, she would remember his sense of humor; the spark in his eyes; his passion for her and for life, no matter if his was an undead life or not; his tough guy Viking vampire sheriff attitude. Now her guilt ate away at her, knowing he no longer had those feelings. Through their bond she knew Eric felt nothing but pain in one form or another whenever he wasn't in his daytime rest. Sookie had condemned him to an eternity of pain and misery and she knew the fault lay directly at her feet so she stayed where she was, out of the love she had for her vampire and to pay her penance for what she'd put him through. Sookie had decided if Eric was condemned to an eternity of grief then it was only fair for her to condemn them both.

It was during one of the quiet times when Sookie was shocked to find that she was no longer alone in the fog. She could make out in the distance, others moving through the fog in the direction of where her instincts tried to make her go. The first few times she had attempted to approach them, but it was as if they couldn't see or hear her and Sookie quickly realized that here at least, she no longer had her telepathy because their thoughts were their own. After a while she stopped acknowledging them at all and merely stayed wherever she could feel Eric the most, refusing to give in to her instincts to move on; refusing to leave him alone in his grief.

Sookie's existence was a never ending cycle of grief, pain, and emptiness. She longed for it to end, but she longed for Eric more. She prayed, begged, and pleaded to whoever might be listening to give her another chance and let her return to Eric. Her only want was to end his pain, to heal his heart, to love him like he'd deserved without any hesitation or doubts. It was during one of those times when she was lost in her despair feeling Eric's anguish yet again when she'd felt another presence within the fog nearby. She barely looked up having already dismissed them in her mind when her heart dropped at who she thought was walking towards her.

"Oh my God, Jason!" she cried as she flung herself at him, only to stop short when she realized it wasn't her brother, but her Uncle Dermot.

"Sookie, what are you still doing here?" he asked.

"You can see me, hear me? Oh Uncle Dermot, please, please is there any way for me to go back? I can't take it anymore, I just can't take it!" Sookie sobbed out uncontrollably.

Dermot reached out and embraced his niece asking her, "Child, why haven't you gone on to the Summerland?"

"What are you talking about?" she asked. "I don't want to go to the Summerland. I want to go back to Eric. He's in so much pain and it's all my fault. I can't leave him, I just can't!"

Dermot's sorrow was evident as he explained, "Sookie, you can't go back. Your physical body died ten years ago, I'm sorry."

Sookie's sobs grew louder when she realized just how long Eric had been suffering her loss and grew more obstinate as her uncle tried to convince her to leave with him. She held fast refusing to leave and when Dermot could no longer resist the pull for him to move forward, he'd had no choice but to leave her behind.

When the bond quieted again she was overwhelmed by the guilt she'd felt knowing how long Eric had been missing her, grieving for her. She swore to herself that she would never leave him alone and resigned herself to an eternity of misery and pain. When the familiar pangs of longing signaled Eric's daytime rest coming to an end the next evening Sookie was startled when she saw a warm glowing light appear in the distance. She couldn't help but watch as it grew larger as it came closer to where she stood and gasped in disbelief when the light took on the form of someone she'd thought lost to her forever.

"Claudine?" she asked, not willing to trust her eyes. While Claudine had always been beautiful, she was a fairy after all, now she was ethereal.

"Cousin," Claudine acknowledged as she wrapped Sookie in her embrace.

"What are you doing here?" Sookie asked.

"I'm an angel now, so I can go many more places than I used to," she smiled. "But tonight I'm here as your Guardian Angel, one last time."

"What do you mean?" Sookie asked, while tears silently flowed down her cheeks as Eric's pain started to surface through their bond.

Sookie watched as Claudine took a deep, and apparently unnecessary, breath before saying, "Tonight, Grandfather is reopening the portal between the human and Fae realms to go and ask your bonded to meet the sun."

"NOOOO!" Sookie screamed. "How DARE he? WHY would he want Eric dead?" Her entire being revolted at the idea of Eric ceasing to exist and she reached towards their bond sending him strength and resolve to withstand Niall's request. She didn't want to lose him forever.

Claudine knew what Sookie was doing and explained, "Sookie, Eric can no longer feel you in the bond. He hasn't since your death." She continued on telling Sookie everything that had been going on with her friends and her bonded since her funeral. It explained so much, but at the same time she was torn as to what was the right choice. The selfish side of her wanted Eric to exist no matter what, but she'd also been feeling his pain and sorrow for so long and so deeply that she didn't want him to live that way either.

When the bond, which up until then had only radiated Eric's pain, shifted to now include acceptance and relief as well, she knew he'd made his choice. She sent him every ounce of her love hoping *something* would get through no matter how small, until the bond finally fell silent and she was once again all alone inside of herself for the first time since that fateful night in Rhodes; she collapsed in her own grief.

Claudine knelt down and gathered Sookie into her arms doing what she could to soothe her, but knowing their time was limited, she began to speak once more.

"Sookie, I'm sorry, but there's still more you must know before you move on."

She was so lost, no longer feeling Eric inside of her that she paid no attention to what Claudine had said and instead asked, "Where will his soul go? And *please* don't say he doesn't have one because he's a vampire, I *know* he does!"

Claudine smiled softly answering, "Of course he does, but that is what we must talk about." Seeing she now had Sookie's full attention she continued, "You, my dear, are very special. Because of your heritage, Fae and human, you have the choice of where you want to spend your

afterlife. You can go on to your Christian Heaven and be reunited with your parents and grandparents, who have passed on before you, for all of eternity, or you can choose to go on to the Summerland. But before you decide you should know that at this very moment your Eric is being presented his own choices as well. He can choose to go on to Valhalla and spend eternity feasting at the Warrior's table, reuniting with the family he hasn't seen in a millennia. But, because he was pledged and fully bonded by blood to you, he can choose to go on to the Summerland as well."

If her heart still beat, Sookie's would have been pounding out of her chest as she asked, "How can he go to the Summerland? He's a vampire!"

Claudine shook her head smiling as she answered, "His being was that of a vampire, but his soul has always been that of the man he was born as; he is no longer vampire, so your supernatural connection on earth can bind you together only in the supernatural afterlife. Now, before you decide where you'll be spending your afterlife you should know that once you've chosen, there is no going back and neither of you will know what the other has chosen, until both of you have made your decisions."

Trying to grasp what Claudine was telling her Sookie asked, "So, if I choose the Summerland and he chooses Valhalla we'll be apart forever, but I won't know until after I've chosen?"

Claudine nodded saying, "Yes and the same can be said if you choose Heaven and he chooses the Summerland. His blood bond with you will allow him entrance there without you, but neither one of you will know where the other exists until your choices have been made."

Sookie retreated into herself, torn over the idea of being able to see her parents and her Gran again. How often had she prayed for that very thing? But could she choose to spend all of eternity without Eric? Would he choose her over the human wife and children that were lost to him so many lifetimes ago? She wasn't so sure. And now that Claudine was an angel she wouldn't know anyone in the Summerland except Dermot and the biological grandfather that she'd never met.

Not knowing what to do she looked up at Claudine and said that very thing. Claudine looked back at her with love in her eyes and the irony wasn't lost on Sookie as she said, "How often in your human life did you declare that you wanted things to be *your* choice? That *you* should have been given the opportunity to choose? Well cousin, the choice is finally yours."

Meanwhile...

Eric was surprised that the pain of burning in the sun was really nothing more than a flash across his consciousness. One moment he was seeing the sun rise in the sky for the first time in a thousand years and the next he was somewhere, he just didn't know where. It was as if he were standing in a void of nothing, surrounded by fog on all sides and when he looked down he saw that he was wearing the clothing he wore as a Viking made of animal pelts and tanned hides. He'd always believed in the stories of the Valkyries and Valhalla as a human, but he wasn't sure what to believe would become of him once he met his true death as a vampire. The religious

zealots would have everyone believe that vampires would be banished to hell for all of eternity and with everything Eric had done in his one thousand years, he wasn't too sure that wasn't exactly what would happen.

He was only alone for a few moments when he sensed someone's approach and out of habit he turned towards the source prepared to defend himself with his hands curved as claws, but faltered when he realized he no longer had fangs. His fingertips went into his mouth without thought as he traced the edges of where his fangs should be, but he only felt the blunt tips of the teeth in their place.

"You are no longer vampire, Norseman," came a melodic voice from the fog in front of him, giving way to the figure of what he knew was a shield maiden of Valhalla.

In disbelief, Eric asked, "Odin sent a Valkyrie for me? After a thousand years?"

"You have been a great warrior in your millennia in the Midgard and are deserving," she replied.

While Eric felt honored to have been chosen to go onto Valhalla, his heart wept at the thought of spending eternity without his bonded by his side. As if she'd been reading his mind the Valkyrie said, "You miss your bonded." It wasn't a question but a statement and Eric could only nod, so she continued, "You have a choice in where you can spend your afterlife. When you met your true death, your bond was broken so that you and your bonded could choose your own paths with no interference. You can go onto Valhalla and train with your fellow Einherjar in Asgard preparing for Ragnarök or go onto Freyja's Fólkvangr where you will reunite with your family, your wife and children from your human life, and spend eternity with them. But, because you were pledged and blood bonded to a Fae hybrid that held the essential spark, you can choose instead to go to the Summerland. Before you decide you should know that your bonded is being given the choice of spending eternity in the Summerland or her Christian Heaven, where her human family awaits her and neither of you will know the other's decision, until you each have chosen."

Eric stood there stunned at the thought that he could possibly spend eternity with his Sookie, when he'd only ever thought that possibility would exist with her as a vampire. He knew how much Sookie's family had meant to her, especially her Gran, so he had no such expectations she would choose him, but for him there was no other choice to be made. For Eric, it had always been her. In every dealing they'd ever had with one another, his head always tried to steer him one way, while his heart lay firmly with her and so it would be for all of eternity, whether she was there to spend it with him or not.

"The Summerland," Eric said, without hesitation.

In the next moment, their bond reopened and each could feel the other's fear and hope give way to disbelief and love. Eric took off running towards the pull of his bonded, calling out her name and when he heard her voice calling out to him, his heart sang out in joy. He pushed himself to go faster and suddenly the fog dissipated as he finally saw her running towards him with her blond hair flying back and tears streaming down her face as they flew into each other's arms.

Neither said anything at first, with their lips meeting in a furious clash and their hands touching everything within their reach in an effort of reassuring themselves that the other was really there, while enjoying the feel of the other in their arms once again. Eric was surprised that for him her wonderful scent remained unchanged while Sookie was surprised that Eric no longer felt cool to the touch and was now warm in her arms.

"I'm so sorry," they each said at the same time when they finally pulled their lips apart, making them laugh through their tears. Sookie reached up placing her fingertips over Eric's lips needing to say the words she'd wanted to tell him for the last ten years.

"I'm so sorry for putting you through that Eric and for being so stubborn. I should have listened to you and let you protect me. I should have loved you like you deserved to be loved." She looked into Eric's eyes with hers full of disbelief saying, "I can't believe you chose *me*, after everything I put you through."

Eric kissed the tips of her fingers before pulling her hand down and placed it on top of his heart saying, "There was no choice to be made. You were the light in my eternal darkness; the only warmth in my cold existence. It has always been and will always be you."

"But what about your wife? Your children?" she asked, still unable to fathom the undeniable fact that he had chosen an eternity with her.

He leaned down and brushed his lips across hers saying, "*You* have always been my only wife in my heart." Full of disbelief himself Eric looked into her eyes asking, "And what of your family? You've longed to see your Gran and your parents, but now..." he trailed off unable to finish his sentence.

The love she had for him shone clearly in her eyes as she smiled saying, "You are my husband. I chose you."

Eric was left happily stunned hearing the words he'd always longed for her to not only say, but mean and he relished feeling the truth of them through their reawakened bond.

They each felt the pull to move on, and with nothing left to hold them in the ether, they did so, hand in hand, which is how they appeared before Claude that morning. Sookie asked that he give Pam, Bill and Amelia her thanks for watching over Eric for all of the years since she had been gone and Eric asked that he tell Pam where he was so she'd know he was okay. Once everything had been said, they left Claude and were drawn towards a light that, when they stepped through, brought them into a field of wildflowers surrounded by trees with the sun shining high in the sky. Sookie raised her face towards it, enjoying the warmth of the rays before peeking over to see Eric smiling down at her. Seeing him for the first time with the sunlight shining down on him brought back memories of when she thought in choosing to give her heart to Eric, she would have to sacrifice moments like this. It was a gift she never thought she would ever receive and knowing she had an eternity of moments in the sun to share with him nearly left her speechless.

Knowing he'd spent a thousand years of night, she asked, "Eric, don't you want to see the sun?"

He cupped her cheek in his hand, brushing his thumb across her temple and replied, "I'm looking at it."