



*A kjwrit fanfiction*

A two-part (maybe three-part) mini-fic in the True Blood universe because my OCD and Sooric loving heart can't stand unanswered questions.

It picks up a short time after Bill's death in the final episode of True Blood and fills in the blanks that lead up to the Thanksgiving Day feast in Sookie's yard.

Rated M, AU, and all that jazz.



*"I care about very few people in this world. A small handful of vampires and you."*

## **SPOV**

His confession – as always – had been blunt and to the point. Even after every stupid thing I had said and done over the years, Eric had remained the one constant in my life. Someone I could always rely on for the truth.

Even if it hurt.

And though he hadn't admitted it, I was sure it hurt him to champion Bill's cause to me of all people on the night before his death. But that was Eric's way.

To put my needs above even his own.

*My beautifully renovated house was a testament to that.*

My simple admission to him that night – that I was scared – held more meaning than either one of us had realized. I hadn't only been scared of Bill's death, but of life itself.

*What would mine be like without him?*

Without either one of them?

I'd learned the answer to that not long after Bill's death in the cemetery. He might have been right that I would have never moved on with my life, so long as his undead one continued, but not for the reasons he'd spouted off.

But because of his blood.

*With him, it had always been about the blood.*

But it had taken me some time before I came to that realization.

I'd grieved for him in my own way, I supposed. But I never quite managed to hit all five stages of grief.

Denial had been hard to come by, considering I'd been covered in the truth of his true death when I'd walked home from the cemetery that night. But throwing away the countless article of clothing ruined by blood – mine or any other's – the second stage of grief hit me hard.

Anger.

I was so angry at him. At the world, really. But all I could think about were his excuses for doing what he ultimately did. His *assumption* that marriage and children were what every *normal human* should aspire to.

Bill, of *all* people, knew what my life had been like before he'd ever returned to Bon Temps.

*It was why my virginity had been ripe for the taking, with his lies hiding behind his pretty words.*

Marriage and children with a *human man* had never been in the cards for me. At least not without giving away a part of myself by using the last of my fairy light, which I'd told him that night was something I wouldn't do.

Not even for him.

And honestly, after seeing – and worse, *hearing* about – all of the failed relationships I'd been surrounded by my whole life, marriage didn't seem all that it was cracked up to be. Being a telepath had jaded me enough that I wasn't so sure I would even want to one day get married.

*Something he should have known when I didn't say yes right away to his proposal on that night that now felt like a lifetime ago.*

So while I'd literally had the blood of his suicide on my hands, I was completely free of any guilt over his death.

And it was a good thing I'd been left to my own devices for a few days afterward, while I tried to work through it all. But just as I thought I'd gotten my rage under control, Bill managed to get under my skin yet again.

Albeit, in an entirely new way.

I'd automatically reached out with my telepathy, hearing the knock at my front door, but all that I got from their mind was static.

Like when a TV channel lost its signal.

Cautiously answering the door, I found a stately looking gentleman on the other side. Wearing a black suit in the Louisiana heat, he didn't look uncomfortable at all. But his eyes and his smile were warm, so I only hesitated for a second before inviting him inside.

He explained he was Bill's lawyer and was taking care of his estate. I didn't see what that had to do with me, until he presented me with a check.

A large one.

*There were so many zeros on it I'd lost count when my eyes glazed over.*

Glazed over in *red*.

"How *dare* he?" I sputtered in rage, shocking the portly man whose name had more letters than my mouth could handle.

"I'm sorry?" he offered, not apologizing for the audacity of a former confederate soldier/vampire/vampire god/asshole, but clearly because he didn't understand why I was so angry at being given a windfall.

But the whole thing had reminded me of my Uncle Bartlett's death all over again.

*Something else Bill had had an underhanded hand in.*

"He has a *child*," I spat out and then tried to shove the blood money back at him, adding, "Jessica Hamby. *Fortenberry*. Whatever in the hell she calls herself now."

I knew their marriage wasn't legal, but I didn't know if she'd legally changed her last name.

"Yes," Mr. Mouthful agreed with a jovial smile. "A lovely girl. I visited with Mrs. Fortenberry last night where she was presented with her inheritance as well."

Well, that at least answered one of my questions.

But I doubted Mr. Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious would know why Bill thought he could buy me off after his death.

And then looking at me like I wasn't an ungrateful asshole, he smiled again and softly patted my arm in a way that reminded me of Gran, as he said, "Miss Stackhouse, if you'll forgive me for

being presumptuous, take the money. Take a vacation. Do something that you've always wanted to do without feeling an ounce of remorse. And when you return and you are ready, I would ask that you consider coming to work for me."

So while I was busy catching flies, he handed me his card as well before turning to let himself out. But taking a final look back at me, with a glint in his eye, he added, "A telepath would be very useful in a courtroom and having the contractual protection of a demon would provide you with an additional layer of security."

*A demon?*

Well, that explained his static thoughts.

So once he was gone, I took up residence on the couch.

*The very same one Eric had bought to replace the one destroyed by Maryann the Malicious Maenad.*

And taking a good look around, I couldn't find a single thing that needed a giant check – like the one in my hand – to fix.

Eric had already seen to it himself.

But remembering the six and a half feet of vampire real estate made me remember something else. Something he'd said to me when he'd first returned from France, where Pam had found him, when he was still infected with Hep-V.

*"I wanted to see the world one last time before I died."*

I hadn't seen much of the world *one time* for there to be a *last time*, so I decided to take a page out of his multi-volume book and applied for my very first passport. I paid a ransom to have it expedited and while I had the money to do that now, it still stung forking it over.

*Highway robbery.*

But it paid to pay the outrageous amount because my passport arrived a week later and with nothing left to keep me there – excuses or otherwise – I closed up the Stackhouse homestead, that had taken a Northman to look so grand, and off I went.

Into the wild blue yonder.

*Or green yonder, as it turned out.*

Ireland had been the first stop on my mental itinerary. The rolling green hills I'd seen in pictures – okay, *and* in the movie *Leap Year* – had always called out to me in a way that made it feel like a place I could call home.

And even though I now had enough money that it shouldn't have mattered, I still couldn't bring myself to fly first class or to stay in luxury hotels. My frugal upbringing wouldn't allow it, but I still loved every minute of it. I loved the anonymity. Nobody looked at me like a freak and the moment I had taken my first step onto Irish soil, I actually *felt like* I was *home*.

A feeling I only got to enjoy for about two weeks, when I first heard about the Irish folklore that it was where fairies had descended from.

*I was on the next flight out tout de suite.*

Fuck. That.

Landing in Great Britain – or was it *England?* – I knew I wasn't all *that* far away from the land of the Fae, but I wasn't going to let them put a damper on my trip.

*Around the World in However Many Days.*

But even so, it seemed like Mother Nature was doing her damndest to take up the slack for them. Rain fell from the sky in buckets. So much so that I didn't see nearly as much as I'd hoped to at first and I stayed in my room a lot of the time. I wasn't feeling *lonely* so much as *alone*, but it was while I was there when the dreams finally began to subside.

For the last few weeks they'd been coming at me from all sides of my subconscious. Weeks for Bill's blood to leave my system and with its departure came a clarity that I hadn't felt since the night he'd first darkened Merlotte's doorway.

*I knew because it wasn't long after that he'd gotten his blood in me.*

I may have forgiven him for his lies – I could see now that he'd had no choice with someone like Sophie-Anne pulling his strings – but that didn't mean I had forgotten.

I'd nearly died thanks to the beating the Rattray's had been glamoured into giving me.

And that was when I finally hit the last stage of grief.

Acceptance.

In spite of his dying declarations – a death I had come to view his 'sacrifice' as the coward's way out – and selfish to boot for asking me to be the one to end him – I didn't believe it had been my fairy light that had been drawn to the darkness of vampires.

No.

It had been Bill's blood that he'd continually found a way to get into my system.

And now, weeks later, when I had no one's blood but my own in my body, I could finally see what had been in front of me all along.

*He was hard to miss at close to six and a half feet tall.*

Not that he was physically in front of me. Eric hadn't darkened my doorway or any other I'd been behind since the night he'd flown me back home.

Although I had wondered – or had I *wished* – it had been his tires squealing away that night I'd been woken from my bed.

But by design or by circumstance, I didn't know why he'd stayed away, but I did know that I couldn't blame him for his absence.

*Just how many chances did I think I would get with him?*

Lord knew I hadn't done anything to deserve a single one of them.

And now on foreign soil, I'd often wondered if he'd felt me leaving.

Bon Temps. Louisiana. The country.

Take your pick.

But thinking perhaps he too had needed his space, I hadn't gone to him. Hadn't called or communicated with him in any way to tell him I was leaving.

*I couldn't even be sure that he would've cared.*

However now, when I was all alone – in both my company and my bloodstream – I missed him. I missed talking to him. I missed his smirks and his arched brow. I missed his dirty innuendo that never failed to wind me up or make me blush.

But most of all I missed talking to him, like we had when he'd lost his memories. Granted, ours had been a mostly one-sided conversation, since he hadn't remembered any of his previous life, but still.

I missed it.

I missed him.

And wondering if he perhaps had missed me too, I did something I hadn't thought to do in a very long time.

I picked up my phone and pulled up Eric's number.

But before I could hit send, my fingers faltered as did my mind.

*What would I say?*

*How would he react?*

*Did he even want to hear from me?*

After all, he had my number too and hadn't used it in god knows how long.

And while I'd been compared to an angry kitten on more than one occasion, I felt more like a cowardly lion in that moment.

But I wasn't in Kansas anymore.

Not even Louisiana or the continental United States.

So I put my phone away and pulled out my laptop.

I'd used it to keep in touch with everyone while I'd been away. Skyping with Jason whenever he was around, as well as trading emails with Jessica, Lafayette, and Sam.

And as much and as often as I'd wondered about a certain blond vampire sheriff, I hadn't given in to the urge until now.

Opening up a new email, I began to type. Not really knowing what to say, other than asking how he was doing, I gave him a brief synopsis of what I'd been up to over the last few weeks.

At the end, as I reread it, I knew it was both awkward and brief.

*Oh, who was I kidding?*

It was lame to the extreme.

But it was something.

An olive branch, as it were.

After hitting send, I stared at my email, waiting for a response for a full minute.

And then an hour had passed.

And then another.



Having already taken several glances at the clock, I quickly redid the time zone math in my head and knew he should have been up by then. Lord knew he kept his phone on him at all times, so he would have gotten my email already.

And then recalling one time when I'd had the misfortune of stomping my way down into Fangtasia's basement, ready to tear Eric a new one over Bill's disappearance, I remembered he didn't *always* have his phone on him.

*Because sometimes he had no pockets, like when he was fucking Estonian dancers on weird sex swings.*

Ugh.

I didn't want to think about that or anything – or anyone – else he might be up to.

Or into.

I had no right, especially after all of the others who had been in me since I'd last been with Eric.

*What in the hell had I been thinking?*

First I had sex with some weird Faepire in the cemetery and then had sex with Bill so soon after Alcide's death.

That right there should have clued me into the fact Bill's blood had a strong hold on me. But then no one would ever accuse me of being smart.

*Especially when it came to men.*

When a week had passed and then another, with no response from Eric, I came to the realization that I probably wouldn't be getting one from him. I didn't even know if the email address I had for him was still good, but since I hadn't gotten anything saying it had been undeliverable, I figured I had nothing to lose and emailed him again.

The next one was much longer than the first and read more like a journal entry. In it I said all of the things I really wanted to say to him. Things I didn't think I would have the courage to tell him if I'd known he would truly read it. But he'd shared so much with me – in his blunt and stoic Eric sort of way – I felt it only fair to do the same.

I told him about everything that happened since he'd left me on my front porch. I told him of Bill's final moments and how I'd come to view his actions since then. I apologized for my behavior from the time he'd regained his memories after the witch's curse and thanked him for all that he'd done for me over the years.

*If nothing else, I felt better for having gotten it all out, even if he would never read a word of it.*

When I finally saw Big Ben at high noon, I'd teased him in my email to him that night that I'd actually found something I had seen and he hadn't.

*Not with daylight being a factor and all.*

When I saw the Eiffel Tower at midnight I wondered to him in my next email, if he thought it was as beautiful as I did.

When I saw the African Sahara at sunset I'd mused to him about how stunning a sparse land – that could easily mean my death if left all alone there – could be.

And when I drifted down the Danube at sunrise – on a Viking River Cruise of all things – I'd chuckled the whole way through my next email, certain that Eric would get a kick out of *that*.

But that was the thing. I couldn't *know* if Eric would get a kick out of that because I didn't *know* what or where Eric was anymore. Shreveport, I'd assumed.

But I'd also learned what an ass it could make of me by assuming anything.

After all, I'd been so sure that I would get *some* sort of response from him when I'd visited his homeland and likened Örlund to a windy shithole.

*But it really was.*

It was during my travels, when Jason had extended me an invitation to his wedding to Brigitte.

And when I say he had *extended me an invitation* what I mean is, he'd called me and said, "Hey Sook! Me and Brigitte are in Vegas and we're gettin' hitched! Like in an hour. Can ya make it?"

"No," I'd sighed, from my towel on the prettiest little beach on Kauai.

And asking him to hold off for the few hours it would have taken me to get there didn't even cross my mind.

*Las Vegas hadn't made the cut on my list of must-sees.*

Was it selfish of me to miss the wedding of my only family member?

Yeah.

But something else I'd realized over my time away was that *selfish* was sometimes synonymous with *Sookie*.

However I didn't feel bad enough about it right then to do anything to change it. I'd thought they would make a good couple early on, but I wasn't all that surprised she'd managed to get him all the way to Vegas.

*Jason in the land of showgirls?*

*Stop the presses!*

But I was genuinely shocked when it was all said and done that she had gotten him all the way to the altar.

And I was less shocked when he let me in on the little fact soon thereafter that she was pregnant, but I was happy for them.

At least one Stackhouse was *normal*.

That bitterness I still felt towards Bill and his actions wasn't something that had gone away in my time away.

Not completely, but I was getting there.

Alcide, I could see now, had been a mistake. An attempt to find as normal of a life as I thought I could have. He'd been warm blooded. He could have fathered my future children. But now I realized – as horrible as it sounded – he'd merely been a Band-aid on the weeping wound of my soul.

And Bill...

He had been my first love. His initial motives for the start of our relationship aside, it had been with him that I learned to both give and receive love in return.

Even if it had only been real on my part.

I could only say now for certain that it wasn't love that I felt for him at the end. Compassion, maybe. But not real love.

Real love wasn't one-sided and his selfish actions at the end proved that it wasn't love that he felt for me that made him want to end his life.

It was the love he felt for himself.

But only now – when blood was no longer a factor in my decision making – could I see the truth of my feelings.

Eric had been my true love.

I knew it because I still felt love for him now, even when his blood was no longer coursing through mine.

I knew it because I had fought him tooth and nail at every turn, denying my feelings for him from the start and refusing to truly believe his feelings were true for me.

And while he'd said I was one of only a small handful that he cared about, I didn't have the gall or the balls to believe that still held true now.

But even so – and even if he had ignored my many emails to him over the last few months – I couldn't seem to get him out of my mind.

Just like I couldn't seem to shake my childhood memories of sitting in the kitchen with Tara and Gran, with her telling me that I could have any kind of future I desired, as long as I didn't limit myself.

*Had my staunch refusal to even entertain the idea of one day becoming a vampire been the real limit I'd placed on myself?*

I couldn't be sure.

In my many months away from my life as a telepathic fairy hybrid waitress, I'd seen and done things I'd only ever dreamed about.

But I had done them alone.

That wasn't to say there hadn't been a few men along the way who would have gladly joined me on my travels. Finding men who could speak English, but who thought in their native foreign tongue, showed me I *could* be with a human man, if I so desired.

But I hadn't.

I hadn't truly desired anyone because all I could see when I closed my eyes was six and a half feet of Nordic perfection.

Their skin was too warm.

Their thoughts, while foreign, were too loud.

Their hands too soft.

Their expressions smirk-free.

*Their un-Eric-ness had made them less appealing in every way.*

Even their ability to walk around with me in the daylight was eclipsed by the darkness that shrouded my heart.

*I worried that only a dark soul who'd lived a thousand years would be able to seep through it.*

Something I'd learned the truth of one day, while waiting to board my flight back home – with the birth of Jason's first child looming, I really didn't feel like I'd had much of a choice – not watching the television that was on for the waiting passengers, when I'd heard Eric's voice coming through the speakers. Even though a year had passed since I'd last heard it, I would know it anywhere.

*And, for the first time in a year, I truly laughed myself silly.*

He was so cheesy. Nothing like the mysterious and brooding vampire I'd first laid eyes on in Fangtasia, sitting on his throne like God himself had put him there.

*I wouldn't have been surprised in the least to learn he had divine blood in him somewhere.*

If not by birth, then by consumption.

But a part of me recognized a part of him that he had given me glimpses of before.

The softer funnier side of a thousand year old Viking vampire sheriff.

Both with his memories and without.

*Christ, I missed him.*

And seeing him now – doing his best Billy Mays impersonation – I knew it would always be him. Eric would always be the one who would fill my thoughts.

The one who could fill my body in ways no other ever could.

The only one who would always hold the largest piece of my heart.

After sending that first awkward and lame email to him, I'd never stopped. Not a single day had gone by when I hadn't sent him something.

When my month in Hawaii had been up, I'd moved onto Australia. I'd told him in great detail about my trip to see the Sydney Opera House. I'd sent him a selfie I'd taken of me feeding a baby kangaroo at a petting zoo. I'd jokingly likened him to the sharks that had been spotted in the bay and that kept me in knee high water when I went to Bondi Beach.

And while he'd never replied to any of them, in a small weird way, I felt closer to him than I ever had. Like I'd had him there with me all the while and from the first email I'd sent to him, it was the first time since I'd stepped onto the plane that flew me out of Louisiana that I didn't feel completely alone.

My travels had taken me to New Zealand next and seeing the landscape where the Hobbit movies had been made, made me ask how Doctor Ludwig was doing. Her bedside manner wasn't the best, but I knew firsthand she was the best one to treat you when attacked by a maenad.

And on the slow days, when there wasn't much to tell him at all, I would simply send him a corny joke.

*Q. What do you get when you cross a vampire and a snowman?*

*A. Frostbite.*

*Q. Why did the vampire bite the clown?*

*A. He wanted circus blood in him.*

I'd held out a small bit of hope that those silly little jokes would get him to give in. To finally send me a reply, unable to hold back, with a corny joke of his own.

But he never did.

So when my travels finally came to an end and I returned to my home in Bon Temps, while I was no longer alone – per se – I still emailed Eric regularly. I kept him caught up on all the happenings in Bon Temps and even told him about my new job with Mr. C.

*I doubted I would ever be able to say his last name correctly, but he didn't seem to mind the nickname.*

It was nice putting my *gift* to good use. I no longer viewed my telepathy as a curse. It was a part of me.

And being okay with *me* was something I'd learned to do in my year away.

With Jessica and Hoyt living just across the way in Bill's former home, I saw them often. It was from her that I learned Eric and Pam had turned New Blood into a huge business venture and weren't around Shreveport all that much anymore.

My mind reasoned that was why Eric hadn't replied to any of my emails.

My heart refused to think of any other cause.

But it wasn't until I was holding my brother's firstborn that I was surprised to find that while my heart filled with joy – with the tiny Stackhouse who'd grown our small family by one in my arms – I didn't have any pangs to have one of my own.

And it wasn't until the birth of his next baby that I realized I didn't want a child of my own if its father couldn't be the one who held my heart.

And that was impossible, since his heart didn't beat.

*Not to mention the fact that he didn't seem to want anything to do with me.*

So I filled my days with my new job and my rapidly expanding circle of friends and family, now that I was home. And my nights were usually spent down in Eric's cubby, reading or simply being.

It wasn't an exciting life.

But then I'd had enough excitement in my life to last several lifetimes.

It had been shortly after Jessica and Hoyt's third wedding anniversary – they'd gone to Vermont and made it official while I'd been away – when they invited me over for dinner. While Jess couldn't eat food anymore, she hadn't forgotten how to cook and made a lovely supper for Hoyt and I to share.

We'd grown even closer since I'd been back and I viewed them both as my extended family, so when they asked me for a favor that made my fork drop to my plate with a clatter, it didn't take very long after that for my mind and heart to wrap itself around the idea.

And that was how I ended up agreeing to be the surrogate mother to their IVF baby.

Using the eggs of Jessica's sister Eden – who had just turned eighteen a few months earlier – and Hoyt's sperm, their little one was conceived in a petri dish and inserted into my womb.

I'd never been sick a day in my life, but that all came to an end when I discovered that morning sickness wasn't confined to the hours before noon. And while I was happy to go through it for them, I couldn't wait to be rid of the little bugger.

And be able to sleep on my back again.

I'd worried initially that I might have a difficult time handing the baby over when it was born and while I felt a connection to it that went beyond the umbilical cord we shared, my love for it grew in a way that was the same kind of love I felt for Jason's children.

That of a favorite aunt.

And I knew how to be one of those, just fine, thanks to Jason's brood of three.

But the pregnancy only cemented the fact in my mind that I wasn't meant to be a mother. It chafed a little at my insides that even in something so human as to procreate, I wasn't 'normal'.

*It chafed me even more that that fact chafed me at all.*

My little chat with Reverend Daniels on that day so long ago had truly been eye opening. I hadn't realized up until the moment came that I had truly begun to accept that I wasn't fully of this world. It was why I'd refused to give Bill the last of my light to end his pitifully sad life.

I had never been normal, not even when I thought I was fully human.

And I never would be.

Both humans and Supes had reminded me of that fact at every turn.

*So why had it taken a pregnancy for me to fully realize that fact?*

But at least I wasn't pregnant with my own baby when that realization came about.

A silver lining, if there ever was one.

The baby was due the second week of December, but I didn't let that stop me from insisting on having a Thanksgiving Day spread that Gran would be proud of. I'd invited all of my family and friends to attend, which now included Bellefleur's newest cook/bar back Tim.

I'd come across him one day, loitering in the parking lot of Bellefleur's, when I'd stopped by one Saturday afternoon for lunch. And now that I'd *finally* learned to *not* give the stranger the benefit of the doubt, I immediately dove into his mind.

*And what I'd found there broke my heart.*

Tim was a drifter and a war vet. He'd been waiting on me to go inside, so he could root through the trash to find something to eat. His clouded thoughts had put me in mind of Terry and a part of me knew he'd been sent our way for a reason.

*Perhaps even by Terry himself.*

And like I was prone to do, I took to him like he was a stray cat and led him inside.

*Not quite the same thing, as finding a snow white vampire running down my road in the dead of night, without his memories, but it was close enough.*

And after speaking to Arlene in the back, Tim was hired on the spot and given Sam's old trailer out back to live in rent free.

I'd been his hero ever since.

Tim had no family, having been disowned before he'd ever joined the military for being homosexual. But now he had a new family made up of both humans and vampires – and even a fairy hybrid or three – who loved him unconditionally.

*A fact that did wonders to help him begin to heal.*

I heard the familiar crackle of the turkey being lowered, just as his voice called out, "The turkey is frying."



He wouldn't let me lift anything heavier than a loaf of bread whenever he was around and he'd come over early that morning, knowing what I would be up to.

*I was only pregnant for Christ's sake. Not an invalid.*

But knowing his heart was in the right place, I called out, "Thanks hon," in return and chuckled hearing what equated to him blushing in his thoughts at the term of endearment.

He really was a sweet guy.

Not long after, everyone else started trickling in. Jason, Brigitte, and their three hellions – I mean, *little darlings* – filed in very much like a tornado moving through a trailer park. Sam and his family showed up next, followed by Andy and Holly. And once the sun was fully set, the rest of our brood showed up.

The yard was lit up by fairy lights – no longer a pun, it was just a fact of life – and after I poured the beverages for the youngsters at the children's table, I walked towards the end of the grownup table to give Tim a little hug.

He was feeling a little overwhelmed at finally feeling like he belonged in a family.

"We all love you," I whispered into his ear, and laughed lightly when his beard tickled my face as he nodded in response.

When everyone was seated, we all raised our glasses in a toast of thanks for family and friends.

And, like always, Eric had been included in my silent prayer of thanks.

I'd always extended him an invitation to each and every get together or family function I'd had over the years in the emails I still sent him, but he'd never come to any of them. I even had a pile of unopened Christmas presents for him down in his cubby that grew just a little larger each year. But after the second full year of no-shows, I'd finally stopped setting a place for him at the table.

*And everyone else had always known better than to ask who the empty setting had been put out for.*

A small miracle there.

*Busybodies. All of them.*

But there wasn't an empty seat to be found around the table this year and my glass of sparkling apple cider had barely been set down the tablecloth, when not a bird, not a plane, but a Superman nonetheless – in his own way – landed at my side.

All of me froze, not quite sure at first if my pregnancy brain wasn't just making me see things that weren't really there. I hadn't had sex in just over four years – unfortunately, with Bill being

my last partner – and to say my pregnancy hormones raged against that fact would be an understatement.

*So it wouldn't have been the first time I'd imagined a giant Viking swooping in to sweep me off of my swollen feet.*

But it wasn't until his eyes turned cold when they landed on my swollen belly that I recalled something else.

*I'd never mentioned in any of my emails – that he may or may not have read – about the not so little favor I was doing for Jessica and Hoyt.*

I don't know why I'd never told him. Vanity perhaps, not wanting him to think of me being as big as a whale and as gassy as Jason, on the off chance he *had been* reading my emails. Or maybe it was because it wasn't my news to share, much less my own child I was growing.

*Baby Fortenberry was just squatting in my womb until it was safe for me to kick the little rent dodger out.*

But it was obvious Eric didn't know *anything* about little he or she who would be evicted well before Christmas because his voice was just as icy when his eyes took in everyone at the table – Tim especially – before turning them back on me and snidely remarking, “I gather *congratulations* are in order?”

Like the flip of a switch – *and like there weren't four years and a thirty-seven week old fetus in between us* – I stood up, preparing to let him have it with both barrels.

*And – in all likelihood – the last of my fairy light too, if he didn't watch himself.*



*“I want to be that girl again, the one in the white dress. I want my life back.”*

## **EPOV**

Sitting in an office building just a few blocks away from Wall Street, while I waited for the meeting with possible investors for New Blood to start, my mind automatically strayed to thoughts of how useful it would be to have a telepath at my side.

And then I silently cursed myself for thinking it at all, especially when it was Pam who was sitting at my side instead and didn't need telepathy to know the tenor of my thoughts.

*I knew because her nail tapping on the desk had come to a screeching halt, with her eyes darting suspiciously in my direction.*

The whispered words of, “Fuck off...” hung in the air between us, however only a vampire would have been able to hear them.

But it didn't matter which one of us said it.

We were both thinking it.

My child wasn't as forgiving of the telepath as I was, but then my child wasn't a very forgiving creature. It was a character trait I usually admired in Pam. We could, however, only agree to disagree on the topic of her.

I'd avoided thinking about *her* as often as possible. When I'd risen from my daytime rest a few weeks earlier and discovered her disappearance through my blood, I'd momentarily panicked, thinking the Fae had returned and taken her back to their world yet again.

*I'd known better than to think she would've gone voluntarily.*

But it had only taken moments for me to realize she wasn't completely gone.

Not like before.

Our blood tie was stretched to its limits, but it hadn't disappeared entirely.

She was there. My blood in her body informed me she still lived, similar to what I'd felt when I'd retreated back to my homeland following Nora's death. So I'd known Sookie was still alive and that she was still on this plane of existence.

She was just gone from the state.

And the country.

All it took was a simple phone call to find out she'd used the sizable amount of money she'd inherited from Compton's estate and applied for a passport the very same day, boarding a flight to Dublin that very afternoon.

No warning. No goodbye. No nothing.

*I shouldn't have been so surprised, considering 'no' was one of her favorite words when dealing with me.*

But I didn't begrudge her, her departure and in some small way, I'd expected it to a degree. Sookie was Usain Bolt when it came to dealing with her emotions. But with all that she'd been through over the last few weeks, it would seem sprinting hadn't been good enough for her, so it wasn't all that surprising she'd run across continents and an entire ocean to get away from it all.

To get away from *me*, perhaps.

I still thought Bill's reasons for refusing to be cured of Hep-V were more for his own self-loathing than any worry he had over Sookie's future. He'd never fully embraced his vampirism – with the exception of his stint as being Billith, The Vampire God – so I was only surprised it had taken him that long to truly want to end his pitiful excuse of a life. But either due to his sickness or his own idiocy, in no way did I believe it was Sookie's fairy nature that had drawn us to her.

*If he truly believed that, then it only confirmed the fact he'd never deserved her love at all.*

Even if I hadn't already begun to feel things for her well before then, my time in her care without my memories would have been more than enough for me to know there was more to Sookie Stackhouse than her beauty, blood, or gift.

It hadn't been her *fairy* nature, but her *caring* nature and fiery spirit that had drawn me in.

*Her mere presence made me more vulnerable than any stake hovering over my heart.*

After he'd listed all the ways in which he'd personally seen to her misery – the lies, threats, and physical attacks, one that resulted in her near rape – just by being in her life, I couldn't agree more that he shouldn't be a part of hers in any way.

But then I'd thought the same thing the moment I saw her with him in my bar that first night.

His fever induced dreams of her cradling a black void of nothing disturbed me, but only in that a biological child was something I would never be able to give her.

*Was motherhood yet another unfulfilled dream of hers?*

And yet in spite of finding no common ground on his reasons behind why she would be better off without having any vampires in her life, in a small way, I had to agree with him.

*But only because she'd all but said the words to me herself months earlier.*

She'd told me she wanted to be *that girl* again.

The one in the white dress.

The small town girl whose biggest worry was finding the time to tan in between her shifts at the shifter's bar.

*She wanted her life back.*

She hadn't said the words, but there were plenty more to read between the lines.

*Her life back then hadn't included ones with no heartbeat.*

There hadn't been much I could refuse her in the past. I certainly couldn't refuse her wanting that, even if to me, she would always *be* that girl.

Perhaps a wiser version of her, but to me she was still *that girl* nonetheless.

And only for her would I let her go, even if the thought of returning to my own world – a world that didn't include a mouthy part-fae telepath that smelled like sunshine in a pretty blond bottle – didn't appeal to me at all.

But I also knew all too well she'd seen nothing but heartache and pain since her immersion into the supernatural world. Not much better than Bill, I'd been a party to it in one way or another over the years as well, although I'd never intentionally set out to cause her harm.

Even chaining her up in my basement and serving her up to Russell, like a summer's picnic, had been to save her as well as to save us all. I would have met the true death before I would have allowed him to take her life or liberty and I'd been prepared to die alongside him that morning.

But even after all I'd done to her – both with her consent and without – she had still rushed out to save me. She'd given me her blood to heal.

To me it was just another sign she was still *that girl* on the inside.

Although perhaps to her, it was just another sign *that girl* was nowhere to be found.

But one could say that because of her heritage, it had always been inevitable.

Unavoidable, really.

Upon taking her first breath in her world, it had only been a matter of time before she would learn the truth.

That her world was much larger than she knew.

She'd been a part of the supernatural world from her conception. A fact she'd been forced to learn of the hard way. But none of her kin on either side of her DNA saw her true value.

The human side shunned her unique mind and the fairy side merely wanted her womb. But in reality it was her heart that was the prize.

To win that would bestow the recipient with a priceless treasure, just as unique as the girl herself.

But giving it away to someone like Compton had damaged it, perhaps beyond repair. As long as I'd lived, I knew firsthand it was a fallacy to believe time healed all wounds.

Those wounds only scabbed over to be picked at for an eternity at the leisure of the injured party.

My millennia long vendetta against Russell was proof of that

But Sookie didn't have a thousand years to stew. Time itself was something she only had a limited amount of. She might live longer than the average human thanks to her heritage, but she was mostly human nonetheless. Without the benefits of consuming vampire blood to prolong her existence even more – and with her outright refusal to even entertain the idea of becoming a vampire herself – her life would come to an end eventually.

And because time was something I had an unlimited amount of, I knew I would be picking at the scab she'd left on my soul for a very long time.

But being a danger magnet was also something that came to her as naturally as her golden hair, so after that first phone call to learn of her location, I'd made a few more. Called in a few favors to ensure her marathon – however long – would be free of any danger.

Looking out for her welfare was the least I could do, when she had done the same for me while I'd been under the witch's spell. But more than that it was what she had done for Godric in his final moments that meant I would always be in her debt.

*She had stayed with him when I couldn't, making the scab of his death not nearly as big as it would have been.*

Since her departure from my life and the country, I'd only kept up with her movements through the reports made by her invisible shadows, who guarded her every move. Always staying in the periphery of her movements – to remain out of both her mental and visual radar – their instructions were to only contact me in the event she was in danger or if her travels took her beyond their boundaries, so I could then make new arrangements for her security.

I didn't want to know any more than that. If she'd wanted me to know what she'd been up to, then she could tell me herself.

*But considering she hadn't even told me she was leaving, I didn't believe that would be the case.*

She wanted to be *that girl* again and if I was honest with myself, I'd never really known *that girl* at all.

So *that girl* wouldn't have kept me in the loop of her life.

Sookie – no matter what color dress she wore – wanted her freedom and now she had it. I simply did what I could to ensure she would remain free.

For now, I only knew that she was still somewhere in Europe, possibly still in Ireland. Her current guard detail would follow her unseen throughout the numerous sovereign states, so I wouldn't need to obtain the services of a new guard detail until she moved beyond the boundaries of the continent.

But it was during that countless meeting with new investors – where both Makers and Children could fuck off because I couldn't help but think of how having a certain telepath at my side would benefit me in more ways than her gift could account for – that I received what would be the first of many emails.

*Dear Eric,*

*I know it's been a while, but...how have you been? I don't know if you're aware – or if you even care, really – but I've been away on a vacation. I still am. I went to Ireland first and now I'm in England.*

*Or is it Great Britain?*

*I don't know what the difference is.*

*I guess you can take the bumpkin out of the country, but not the country out of the bumpkin.*

*Anyway, I hope you're doing well.*

*Sookie*

I knew Pam had felt the shock that jolted through my body and being literally at my side – and innately nosy – she too had read the email on my phone, while I'd been too busy staring at it in disbelief.

So with my mind in a turmoil, there had been nothing to stop her from reaching over and deleting the email, before pulling my thoughts back to the room by saying, “Eric, do you have any questions you'd like to ask?”

*Oh, I had plenty.*

However none of them had to do with the meeting taking place around me.

But later on, as I sat in Pam's closet breaking the heels off of all of her shoes as punishment for her earlier actions, I realized she'd been right to delete it.

The single line, questioning whether or not I would even care about her whereabouts, told me that Sookie was still the same Sookie I had known.

*She hadn't yet found her way back to being the girl in the white dress.*

So I resolved to not reply to her email, feeling it would only prolong her journey to find herself.

Although my altruism ended there because my revelation didn't stop me from completing my mission in Pam's closet.

It was in the days that followed, well after the time when I'd felt the last of our blood tie disappear, that I could finally admit – to myself, at least – I missed it.

I missed her.

I'd been counting down the hours, knowing it was only a matter of time before I would no longer feel her at all, and had been trying to convince myself that her protection detail would be enough.



Truthfully, I had barely been able to feel her at all since she'd left and even if she had found herself in danger, I knew I was too far away to be able to help her.

But the *compulsion* to help her hadn't disappeared with the blood tie.

However, while I'd missed the presence of her in my blood more than I thought I would, I also knew blood had been to blame for much of her heartache.

Mine. Compton's. Hers.

At least now, she would only have her own to contend with.

I hoped it would be enough to help her find her own way again.

It was a couple of weeks after her first email, when I received the second.

*Dear Eric,*

*I don't know if you got my first email, so I don't know for sure if you'll get this one. But there are a few things I need to get off my chest, so here goes nothing.*

*A few days after Bill's cowardly and selfish suicide a man showed up at my door.*

Stopping there for a moment, I reread that line a few times.

I had imagined she would have seen his 'sacrifice' as noble. Ending his life so that she could live hers, should have touched the romantic side of her heart, no matter what his true motives were.

Maybe this Sookie wasn't the same one I was used to dealing with.

I didn't know how to feel about that yet, so I went back to reading.

*I swear, his name has more letters than you have years in age, so I won't attempt to mangle it now and just call him Mr. C for short.*

*Mr. C was Bill's lawyer and stopped by to take care of the last of Bill's estate.*

*Wait. I'm getting ahead of myself.*

*Did I ever tell you about my Uncle Bartlett? He was my Gran's brother and when I was younger he molested me.*

*The fuck?*

Tearing my eyes away from the small screen in my hand, I needed a moment to calm down because *no*, she fucking *hadn't* ever told me that. So it was no surprise my fangs had snapped down of their own accord, with the phone's casing squeaking in protest of my grip.

And yet, in spite of my murderous rage, I couldn't stop the chuckle from leaving my throat when I picked up where I'd left off.

***Put your fangs away. I swear, I can hear them snapping down from here.***

She'd always known me well.

*Too* well.

Well more than any other.

I didn't know whether I hated her or loved her more because of it.

***My point is, when I confided in Bill about my childhood trauma, he went out and killed Bartlett behind my back.***

Finally.

Compton's turning had a point to it after all.

He'd been a waste of space for most of his undead life, but that one action redeemed him just a little in my eyes.

*Just a little.*

***Quit it with your attaboys. I don't need to be a telepath to know what you're thinking right now.***

Yes.

There was a very thin line between love and hate.

***Anyway, when Bartlett's body was found, his lawyer showed up because that sleazy bastard had left all of his money to me. It made me feel dirty all over again and that was exactly how I felt when Mr. C handed me that check from Bill's estate.***

***Dirty.***

***Like he could make up for all that he'd put me through over the last couple of years with his money.***

It was the *least* he could fucking do after all that he'd put her through.

*Money he'd apparently had all along, but never once thought to even offer to help me when he was still alive. Not even when I was struggling on a waitress's salary and a maenad had obliterated my home.*

I take it back.

Bill's death – finally – was admirable to me because without it, I doubted Sookie would have ever reached the point she was at now.

To finally be able to see him, as I had seen him all along.

A complete fool.

*Koko the gorilla had taken better care of a kitten than Compton had cared for Sookie.*

When I'd purchased Sookie's home after her disappearance into the Fae realm, as much as I'd worried for her safety and missed her presence, I'd been giddy with the power to finally make her home worthy of her.

Because I'd always been absolutely certain she would return.

Before I'd discovered his true motives for pursuing Sookie, I'd always wondered why Compton had never done anything to turn her hovel into a home. After I'd gotten to know her better, I'd assumed it was her independent streak that had kept him from making any of the necessary repairs.

Many a night I had stewed on my throne at Fangtasia, jealous of the challenge I'd been so sure had likely been taking place at that very moment.

*Protestations of not being a kept woman, finger wagging, and chest poking would have surely been involved.*

But it wasn't until her disappearance that I learned just how wrong I'd been.

Because only after she was gone and everyone else had given up hope she would one day return, did I realize he'd never truly cared for her.

At least, not in the way I did.

I'd given it a week. For seven days her family homestead sat on the market, with me waiting to see if he would take the initiative.

To take the reins in restoring her home.

But he'd only taken reign of the state and restored his own home to a glory it had never seen in his human life.

He truly was a royal asshole.

*Which brings me to this long overdue sentiment.*

*Thank you, Eric. Not just for fixing up my house in a way that would have brought my Gran to tears had she seen the end result, but thank you for never giving up hope that I was still alive. Only now that I'm alone, both internally and externally, can I see the truth of your words. Without the influence of anyone else's blood, thoughts, or words to sway me, I know now what you said was true.*

*I just don't know what to say that would accurately describe how much that means to me.*

Her heartfelt gratitude left us in that same inarticulate boat.

*Everyone else had gone on with their lives, but you kept a piece of me alive here in this world, while I was gone. I really don't know what I'd ever done to deserve that from you – truly, nothing comes to mind – but thanks to you I still had a home to return to.*

Reading those words, what she'd done for Godric flashed through my mind. For that alone, I would have secured her home until her return. But I couldn't deny to myself it was more than just that.

From the moment she'd sassed me in my bar, I'd been ensnared in her grip.

Slapping me across the face for what I'd done to her V selling friend only made me want her more.

But it was the kiss we'd shared in my office, when I was sure I would meet my true death, avenging the deaths of my human family, that gave me hope. When she'd returned my passion for her just as strongly, I had hope that perhaps my true death wasn't nigh.

That kiss had given me something to live for. To fight for.

I would fight for it even now, if she hadn't been the one to already forfeit the game.

*However 'thanks' falls pathetically short to say in return to how I feel about it all. I'll never be able to repay you for that kindness and I don't mean monetarily.*

And yet her 'thanks' was more than enough.

*But I do know some other things I feel with absolute clarity. As I said earlier, I feel that Bill's death was both selfish and cowardly. Not only was his declaration that it would be the only way I could ever the life HE dreamed of – to have a marriage and children that only someone born two centuries earlier would think was a necessity in this day and age – his belief that it was the only way I could move on with my life perhaps was true. But only because he took every advantage available to him to get his blood into my body. He glamoured the Rattray's*

***into beating me to near death the first time and then I'd had it again after the maenad attack. He nearly drained me after I'd saved him from Lorena and then gave me his blood again. He forced more of his blood down my throat when I couldn't give my consent after you'd gone outside to suntan with Russell and again after I got shot with the witches.***

Sitting back, I needed yet another moment to compose myself. I hadn't realized just how much of his blood Bill had given her. And given her rant about her former lover, now that his blood was likely gone from her system as well, I had to wonder if the majority of her actions – her seemingly *choices* at the time – had been brought about because of his blood.

She'd had considerably less of mine.

But even with the newest maelstrom of emotions her revelations caused within me, she managed to make me chuckle yet again, reading her next line.

***Is calling 911 never even an option with vampires?***

No.

***But not once had I ever consented to having his blood. Not really. Every time I had his blood had always been a life or death situation. Sometimes brought on by his own actions and duplicity, sometimes not. The only time I'd chosen to take the blood of a vampire had been yours and you hadn't even been in your right mind.***

Neither one of us had been in our right mind after our exchange, considering the snowfall in her shower and our bed of furs in the winter wonderland our minds had created. But I recalled with perfect clarity what I had said to her that night.

*Everything is possible.*

With her at my side, it truly felt that way.

***I don't know if you regret that now, but I don't.***

I couldn't deny, even with all of my memories intact, I wouldn't have done the same. The only regret to be found was the tie we had forged was now gone.

***What I do regret is how I acted after your memories returned. You told me you still loved me.***

Unfortunately for me, that hadn't changed with either time or distance. I hadn't been lying to her when I'd told her in the Fellowship church love was a word I didn't understand, but perhaps I had been lying to myself.

It had taken me losing my memories to find the man beneath the vampire who *could* understand what love is.

And now that I had the memories of both Eric's she had known, I knew without a doubt love was what I still felt for her even now.

***I told you I still loved Bill.***

And those words had stung worse than the silver I'd tricked her into sucking out of my body.

My penance, perhaps, for my deceit.

***I'm sorry for that. I don't know for certain that I ever truly loved Bill and now I'll never know. Having his blood so soon after we met, I'll never know if I would have fallen in love with him without that happening. I hate him even more right now for taking that away from me. Not just what should have been the fond – if not bittersweet – memories of a first love, but for taking away my own ability to have the conscious choice of choosing him in the first place.***

Her words should have brought me a sense of satisfaction, but they hadn't. Having been precariously balanced on the razor sharp edge for some time now, I knew just how thin the line was between love and hate.

*But Sookie's anger at her first love had been fleeting in the past.*

I had no reason to think now would be any different.

***But what's done is done. And I doubt you really want to hear about my feelings towards Bill.***

Both true and untrue, it was yet another thin line to perch myself on.

***As for how I feel about you?***

If my heart could beat, it would have been pounding away in my chest at the rising anticipation of her next words.

*Would she finally choose me?*

***Well...***

***I think I know the answer to that too. But what I don't know is if you want to know. For all I know you'll never even read this email, but on the off chance that you do, I think it would be unfair of me to burden you with whatever it is that I feel about you. It's been months since I last saw you. You've been around for a long time, so I'm sure I'm nothing more than a blip on the timeline of your life. You've likely moved on by now – rightly so – so I should probably do the same.***

Once again the phone in my hand squeaked in protest of my grip.

I'd bared my soul to her, whether I'd wanted to or not. I'd told her I loved her. Words I hadn't spoken since I'd last said them to my mother a thousand years earlier. And yet now, after all that I'd done and continued to do for her, whether she knew about my current protection of her or not, she felt the need to hold back.

To have the audacity to believe something as profound as feeling love for the first time in a thousand years could be fleeting to a being just as old.

The line between love and hate was too blurred for me to make a distinction anymore.

***But if you should happen to read this email, know this.***

My eidetic memory meant I would be unable to forget the words I'd already read – not without the fuckery of a witch's curse – but I nearly didn't finish the rest. I didn't want to read any more of her excuses as to why she continued to deny me even the words of her true feelings.

But a masochist at heart, like the girl who continually crushed mine, I couldn't stop myself from doing just that.

***I am grateful for having met you, Eric. I consider myself lucky to have gotten to know you, both with your memories and without. And thanks to your words about seeing the world one last time before you died, I decided to emulate your sentiment and use the money Bill left me to see the world as you once did.***

***The first time around.***

***I'll always think of you fondly.***

***Sookie***

***She'll think of me fondly...***

Crushing the iPhone in my hand, I knew I wouldn't think fondly of *it*.

Ever.

The Sookie-sized scab freshly picked at, I did all that I could to try and force her from my thoughts in the nights that followed. But no amount of feeding or fucking could get her out of my head.

***The pitiful substitutes only served to remind me that none of them could compare to her.***

Nor did it help matters that she continued to email me. My new Samsung taunted me at all hours of the night, attempting to coax me with its come hither notifications of yet another new message from *her*.

I refused to read them at first.

Fuck her *and* her fondness for me.

But masochists are called that for a reason, which was why I'd never deleted any of them, and only a week's worth had piled up in my inbox before I finally gave in.

The first email I read was nothing like the other two. In it, she 'spoke' to me as she would a friend, telling me about her day and all that she'd seen and done. And in the ones that followed, the same applied.

She teased me about seeing Big Ben at high noon.

She told me of her awe gazing at the Eifel Tower at midnight.

With every new email after that, I found myself smiling more and more, with my anticipation rising for what I would read in the next one. Throughout her travels, I began checking off the sights she'd seen for herself and making a mental list of the ones she'd missed that I thought she would like, never knowing if the day would actually ever come where I could be the one to show them to her.

But through her, I was able to see the world again for the first time.

*It was both a gift and a curse.*

I could tell by her wording that she'd merely been rambling on in way that said she didn't really believe I'd been reading them. I supposed a lot of the blame would have lied with me for that, considering I hadn't responded to any of them.

But I'd been afraid to.

I had a feeling she wouldn't be as forthcoming about what she was thinking at any moment time, if she'd known for certain I was hanging on every word.

For a telepath, I knew Sookie would be guarded about what she let slip about her own thoughts.

Despite having crushed the phone that her first emails had originated on, the server had been safe from my deadly grip, so I was able to go back and reread her earlier words. And looking at them through objective eyes – while she had thanked me, apologized to me, – her entire email had been tinged with regret. Despite her words to the contrary, I couldn't help but think some of that regret was directed towards me.

And not in a favorable way.

So after much thought on my part – and many a night rereading those same words over and over again – I decided to leave her be.



*After all, the email hadn't been written in the words that girl in the white dress would have used.*

But in the days, weeks, and months that followed, Sookie continued to send me emails. Sometimes she would tell me in detail about how she'd spent her day. Other times she would merely send me a corny joke, provoking the joker in me to come out and play.

But I never gave in.

However I did make the picture she'd sent me of her feeding a baby kangaroo the wallpaper on my phone. Upon rising each night, I found my first thoughts were of her as were my last come each sunrise.

If I hadn't heard from her yet by the time I rose, I found myself anticipating her next email. If she took longer than I expected, that anticipation would turn to worry until my phone signaled all was well with her newest message.

Through them I felt like I was getting to know the Sookie Stackhouse she'd been before supernaturals had come into her life.

I felt like I was getting glimpses of *that girl* in the white dress.

But the more signs she gave me that she was indeed letting go of the past hurt and returning to the girl she'd once been, the more certain I was that I should stay away from her. I felt I would have been just as selfish as Compton if I brought the baggage my undead life carried with it back onto her doorstep.

I had to let her go if her dress was to remain more white than red.

*But if she chose to continue giving me glimpses into her life, I would gladly be a voyeur.*

Thankfully I had my business venture with New Blood to keep me occupied when I wasn't waiting for a new email from Sookie. But my business partner's shrewdness wasn't confined to merely business.

Or perhaps it was.

*Pam was as shrewd in a boardroom as she was about being in MY business.*

She'd suspected something was amiss whenever I found myself distracted, waiting to hear from Sookie, and quickly learned about our one-sided pen pal relationship.

*Quickly* because she'd hacked her way into my email account in record time.

But having spent the better part of six months meticulously replacing her shoe collection, she'd known better than to tamper with our correspondence. However that hadn't stopped her from showing her derision, with every new message I received.

*Although she'd held an air of 'I-told-you-so' on the night Sookie's email had declared Örlund to be a windy shithole.*

She didn't, however, understand my continued fascination with Sookie. She didn't understand the depth of my emotions whenever her name was uttered in my presence.

However she fully understood the unspoken meaning behind our return to Shreveport, not long after I'd gotten an email from a certain sunshine smelling blond, informing me she would be doing the same.

But I'd continued to keep my distance. Still protected by me, I never personally took over her guard duties and kept myself out of Bon Temps, no matter how close she was in the physical sense.

Because I knew it would only take one glimpse of her for me to give up my vow to stay away.

*And my U-Haul full of a thousand years' worth of baggage would pull up right behind me.*

I'd worried – unnecessarily as it turned out – Sookie's emails would slowly diminish, if not stop altogether, with her return to Louisiana. After all, she would once again be surrounded by her friends and family – a family that had grown in size thanks to her brother's marriage and the subsequent birth of his children – and I hadn't given her any sign that I had traveled the world with her through her messages.

An urge I had nearly given into when I knew we were once again in the same geographical location.

But hearing from her that her brother was expecting his first child, I tamped down on those urges, certain that it would be the catalyst to make Sookie want to realize the same human ideals Compton had put upon her at his death.

Marriage and children weren't things I could give her.

Not without a ceremonial dagger and a night spent in the earth.

*I highly doubted those were included in any of her romantic fantasies.*

But she'd surprised me yet again when she'd alluded to not wanting a child of her own, following the birth of her brother's second child. She hadn't come out and said the words, but I'd felt the sentiment just the same.

*Brought on by my own romantic fantasies, perhaps.*

But again her words had been tinged with regret. Regret that she wasn't 'normal'.

I just had no way of knowing what kind of 'normal' she was yearning for.

So I continued to stay away. I silently and regretfully declined every invitation she extended to me over the years because I was certain it was for the best. And I felt my decision had been for the best when, over time, her emails had finally come to lack the bitterness and resentment she'd held for so long.

Now she was proud of her gift and of using it in her new job with the demon lawyer whose name she still couldn't say.

She was happy with her life, full of family and friends.

*I was certain she was, at last, that girl again.*

But *that girl* had no business around a guy like me and I knew it was only a matter of time before she found *that guy* who would fill her heart and ultimately her bed.

If she'd had any romantic entanglements in the time since she'd left, she'd kept those details out of her emails.

Thankfully.

After my initial anger and hurt subsided over her second email, that had sent me into a feeding and fucking tailwind, I'd found I had no desire for anyone else. I still fed on something other than synthetic blood on occasion, but it only ever served to remind me how bland everyone else was in comparison to her.

Looking forward to and then receiving her emails satisfied the only cravings I had anymore.

But in spite of my complete disappearance – as far as she knew – from her life, she still persisted in keeping me apprised of hers. She continued on, never wavering in writing to me, as if she'd only seen me last week instead of the two hundred and eight weeks it had really been.

Sitting on my throne now, my mind was on her of course. I knew from her latest emails she would be entertaining guests at that very moment.

A Thanksgiving Day feast.

My invitation had been extended and then ignored by me, as per the usual, but for some inexplicable reason, I felt pulled to go to her.

*A ridiculous notion, considering I hadn't felt her in THAT way in years.*

But the hole created by the disappearance of our blood tie still existed inside of me and that night it was throbbing almost painfully.

Perhaps it was the knowledge she would be surrounded by her friends and family. A circle I was still a part of and always welcome to join, according to her emails, but one that made me feel like an outsider looking in, nonetheless.

By my own design, but that didn't make it any less painful.

Pam appeared at my side, breaking me from my thoughts, with her annoyance shining through in her voice as she said, "If she *literally* wasn't worth her weight in gold, I would have let that asshole drain her. I'm sick of the cunt's whining."

Truthfully I was sick of the whore too. We certainly didn't need the money – not now with New Blood lining our pockets – but *Mrs. Newlin* still had a penance to pay.

And a debt to a vampire was always paid in full.

"What are you wearing?" she snarled, sounding even more put off than a moment earlier. "That outfit is what...seven? *Eight* years old?"

"It's making a comeback," I sighed, with a roll of my eyes.

But my child's eyesight was perfect, as was her ability to read my emotions because she followed up with, "That's not the *only* thing, is it?"

Feeling the rise in her emotions left with me two options.

To ignore her or throw her against the farthest wall.

I chose the former, but second guessed my own sanity when she switched to Swedish and snarled, "For fuck's sake Eric, either let it go or go to her already, but really. The outfit has to go."

So while I sat there wondering if perhaps *she* had somehow come under a witch's spell in the last ten seconds, she shrugged nonchalantly and asked, "What? It's obvious you're not over her. You sit here, night after night, staring at your phone like *#WhatSookie'sUpTo* is trending. I don't know what's worse. When you rise to find an email from her or if you're forced to wait until later on in the night to read about whatever it is she's been up to that day. If you rise with one, then you sulk the rest of the night, knowing you'll have to wait for the next night to hear from her again. But if you don't, then you're a surly fuck, waiting on pins and needles for your phone to buzz. Either way, it's as bad for business as you wearing an eight year old outfit. You don't fuck anyone anymore. You rarely feed on anything other than bottled blood. You're turning into Compton, without the bangs and sideburns."

That analogy had my furious eyes darting in her direction, which made her cower as much as Pam *could* cower – meaning her challenging brow lowered just a fraction – before she went on to explain much more softly, "You know what I mean. You sit here and pine for that girl night after night. You haven't changed your password, so I've read all of her emails too, you know. She

doesn't appear to be an annoying twat anymore. Hell, she hasn't even accused you of being a lying manipulative asshole in years. If anything, I would say that she's grown up. That she misses you. And you obviously miss her, so why do you stay away?"

"It's what's best for her," I conceded.

"Mmm..." Pam nodded and then looked out over the crowded dance floor, as she drawled out, "So it's true then. You *are* turning into Compton."

But before I could turn her into Fangtasia's newest artwork display on the farthest wall, she added, "Wasn't that his dying declaration? It was what *he thought* was best for her, never mind what *she* wanted. Because as much as I questioned her motives at first for keeping in contact with you, even I have to admit that she simply seems to want *you*."

Normally, I counted on Pam to keep me levelheaded. Her ability to see all sides of a situation and her keen sense of survival complemented my own, so I valued her opinion on most things.

But even I was surprised by her opinion of Sookie Stackhouse.

I knew through the whispered gossip in the club said telepath wasn't to be mentioned, alluded to, or even thought of within the confines of the building – per my pissed off progeny's order, but one that would need the services of said telepath to truly enforce – upon our permanent return to Shreveport.

*Pam carried a grudge just as easily as her oversized Hermes bags.*

"So what are you saying?" I quietly asked.

With the pull to go north, growing steadily in my chest, I was almost afraid of her answer.

*As it stood, the slightest breeze would likely launch me from my chair and into the sky on a direct path towards Bon Temps.*

Four years.

For four long years I'd kept my unspoken vow to both of us that I would stay away.

But now I no longer knew what was for the best anymore.

For either one of us.

Her hand came to sit on my shoulder, where she gave it a slight squeeze, as she said, "What I'm saying is that you're miserable. And in spite of her insipid jokes and insightful musings on windy shitholes, I suspect she is miserable as well. She wouldn't have continued to write to you, unless there was a part of her that still wants you to be in her life. It's a part of her that she hasn't even denied because despite your four year silence, she continues to invite you to be a part of her life.

If you haven't let go of your feelings for her by now, I doubt you ever will. And surprisingly, she seems to be respecting your wishes to leave things as they are since you haven't given her any inclination to believe otherwise. I am willing to tolerate her presence again, but the question is, are you?"

She had me at the word 'miserable', but I allowed her to believe the rest of her words were just as convincing and stood up, pulling her forward and placing a tender kiss on her forehead.

"I believe I owe you a pair of shoes," I smiled against her skin.

"I believe you owe me a warehouse full of them," she smiled in return.

It would be worth it.

As was my child.

Leaving through the back door, I was in the sky headed towards Sookie's house seconds later, when I was overcome with a sense of going home. A feeling I hadn't felt since I'd shown up on her doorstep the night Bill had chosen not to end my life and we ended up making love for the first time.

The first of many times.

I had no such delusions that I would be getting into her bed tonight or any other night in the near future. Not when she would likely be angry at my four year silence, but one could hope.

And at the moment, I was filled with it.

The brightness of her yard stood out from up above.

A light in the dark, just like a white dress in the middle of a vampire bar.

Seeing it warmed me in ways I had no words for and I easily spotted her blond hair from the sky, before landing in a spot right beside her.

And then I saw it.

*It being her belly, which was now swollen by the child growing within it.*

My heart had stopped beating a thousand years before, but that didn't mean its attempts to kill me all over again were any less painful.

Unable to look at her for a second longer, while the admittedly irrational sense of betrayal seeped into every atom of my being, I took in the faces surrounding the table, recognizing all but one.

*The one who had won her heart, I assumed.*

She had mentioned a man named Tim in passing, but she'd never passed along the fact they were anything more than just friends.

*That she had told me about.*

But she'd all but said marriage and babies weren't for her. And while there was no ring on her finger, there was definitely a bun in the oven.

She'd felt it necessary to tell me all about the holiday menu she'd prepared – *I knew the price per pound of turkey at the local market for fuck's sake* – but the fact she was having a child wasn't noteworthy enough to share?

In that moment I felt very much like I had at another time. A moment when my lost memories had been restored and I'd told her I still loved her.

And she'd informed me that she still loved Bill.

*It would seem I would never be the one she chose.*

All of my fears – all of my reasons for staying away over the years – came flooding back into me at once and when my cold blue eyes met her disbelieving brown ones, all of my doubts came out in an angry snarl of, “I gather *congratulations* are in order?”

*And fuck me and any and every god responsible for making her even more beautiful than I remembered.*

Seeing the flash of hurt behind her eyes, I silently berated myself for once again acting like an ass – not unlike when she'd first returned from the Fae realm and I'd taunted her with the knowledge I owned her home, while she'd taunted me with the fact that didn't mean I owned her, and wearing nothing more than a towel as she did it.

But my own hurt over her omission – as irrational as it was – clouded my mind enough for me to maintain my angry stance. One she matched when she first stood up and gave me a full view of her body, so that I'd known my eyes weren't playing tricks on me.

However her anger quickly gave way to tears, as she pointed at Compton's progeny and her human, telling me with a heated voice despite her wobbling lip, “Yes. Congratulations *are* in order *for them*, you assuming a-hole! This is *their* baby. Something you might have *known* about if you'd bothered to call, come by, or even sent a carrier pigeon my way.”

Stunned, I could say nothing at first, while she sniffled and muttered something that sounded like, “Stupid pregnancy hormones.”

*Hope, shame, and elation all waged a war within me.*

I was merely forced to wait and see who the victor would be.

But the spectators to our reunion weren't afflicted with my bewilderment. Something I gathered when her flamboyant former V dealing friend pulled a wad of cash out of his pocket and asked, "Alright bitches, who's had their money on Thanksgiving this year?"

Sookie's head whipped his way, along with her incredulous, "What?"

At first her question was answered with nothing more than a few poorly hidden chuckles disguised as coughs into cupped hands and no one would dare to meet her gaze. But it was the one I assumed to be Tim who timidly raised his hand and softly replied, "That would be me."

It made me wonder if his answer would be the same if the question posed had to do with who now held Sookie's heart.

*Another omission on her part, perhaps.*

Everyone else I could only see in my periphery, with my eyes refusing to take themselves away from her. Standing so close to her that I could even pick up the sound of the baby's heartbeat fluttering away in her womb, but not being able to have any other sense of her was maddening.

A fact that made me mad.

But whether or not she was in the midst of her happily ever after, I didn't allow myself to believe or even hope we would ever have that kind of connection again.

A friendship? Yes.

A relationship? If I was lucky.

And at the moment I wasn't feeling lucky.

But I didn't for one moment think Sookie would ever consent to forming another blood tie.

Not after what the last ones had cost her.

But I would take what I could get.

For now, Sookie only seemed to be getting angrier and her fury appeared to be reaching an all-time high when her eyes watched the money being passed down the table from hand to hand, until the maybe-Tim finally took possession of it.

The look of concentration on her face told me she was likely reading the minds of those available around her, but it was her brother's next words that seemed to make all of the pieces she'd gathered click together.

Looking up at me, he bemoaned, "You couldn't a hung back until Christmas to show up? We could a used that money!"



Her suspicions seemingly confirmed, she balled up her fists and then threw them up in the air, as she screeched out, “You all have been placing *bets* on when Eric would show up?”

“The pot’s been growin’ for four years, Cher,” the shifter chuckled.

The former V dealer added, “Tim has enough there to buy himself a nice used car.”

“Sweet!” her possible lover exclaimed, even as she yelled, “*Not* sweet!”

But theirs was a possible love match I no longer put as much stock in, when he leaned forward and loudly whispered, “You were right, Laf. He *is* hot.”

Feeling slightly better in a way that had nothing to do with my ego, I was the only one because having had her fill of her friends’ laughter, Sookie stomped her way back towards the house.

My eyes had still been glued to her every move, so I’d known her next words were for me when she turned and huffed, “Are you coming?”

Without waiting for a response she walked inside, but as I approached the home I’d once held the deed to, noticing the absence of the magical barrier to keep me out made me pause.

And be it from my halted steps, or her telepathy had grown to now encompass vampire minds as well, she called out, “I never rescinded your last invitation.”

*One of many invitations she’d extended towards me that I hadn’t had the grace to acknowledge.*

But I acknowledged that invitation by entering the house I’d restored for her, just as silently as I’d acknowledged the previous ones, and found her in the living room. She sat on one side of the couch, which left the other side free for me. But my own insecurity and apprehension kept me on my feet as I simply stared back at her.

I didn’t know what to say now that I was there, much less where to begin.

No longer upset, Sookie appeared to be amused by my silence and allowed me to gather my thoughts.

Thoughts I failed to filter, when the first one to leave my lips was in the form of, “You never mentioned in any of your correspondence your new *friend* was gay.”

It was a pitiful way for me to confirm his sexual orientation didn’t include her.

*So I could only hope she would have pity on me and verify my presumption.*

Shaking her head with a soft smile playing on her lips, she shrugged, “I didn’t mention he has brown hair either, but neither fact has anything to do with why we’re friends.”

My eyes couldn't stop drinking her in, not knowing how long I would have to be in her presence. I vaguely noticed hers doing the same, but with four years and our blood tie lost, I had no way of knowing how she felt about what she saw standing before her now.

She'd stayed true to her word over the previous four years and had never intimated what her true feelings for me were.

Standing there in her living room, I felt both anchored and adrift.

It was both exhilarating and terrifying.

"Why are you here, Eric?" she finally asked after several minutes of silence.

"You invited me."

Knowing I'd taken the coward's way out, I could almost hear Pam's voice comparing me Compton all over again.

But be it from her lifelong gift of telepathy or just a natural trait to question everything, she didn't let my simple answer slide and said, "I've invited you to a lot of things over the years, but you've never come before. Why now?"

The fear in her eyes was just as palpable in the air between us, but it wasn't the same kind I'd seen in her before. The fear she had now had nothing to do with her physical safety.

I suspected the root of her fear was something we held in common.

"Why now?" I repeated, wondering if I would be able to get any other words out.

But over the last few years Sookie had shared many of her words with me. Thousands of words, all told.

It was only fair that I do the same.

So upon seeing her nod, I admitted, "I miss you."

Three words to her thousands, but it was a start.

A pitiful one, but a start nonetheless.

"You miss me," she repeated with a small nod and then an even smaller upturn appeared on her lips, when she admitted, "I miss you too."

Feeling buoyed by her sentiment, I smiled softly when I questioned, "You're not going to make this easy on me, are you?"

“When have I *ever* made things easy for you?”

The playful smile on her face lit up more than just the room, but still I laughed, feeling more and more at ease with every exchange, and truthfully answered, “Never.”

*It was one of the things I loved about her.*

Now that my feet felt lighter too, no longer weighed down by a sense of impending doom, I wandered towards a corner of the room, where piles of boxes labeled ‘Christmas’ were stacked.

Avoiding the elephant in the room for a while longer, I pointed at a few wrapped gifts and remarked, “I take it you’ve gotten an early start to your holiday shopping this year?”

Shaking her head, she smiled ruefully with, “There you go making an ass of yourself again.”

And at my perplexed expression, she jutted her chin towards the gifts and said, “Read the tags.”

*Eric.*

All of them were to me from her.

*I felt like that asinine cartoon Grinch Pam made me watch with her every year because surely the pain in my chest was from my heart growing three sizes.*

But not knowing what to say that could accurately portray what it all meant to me – her words, her actions, her everything – and unable to give voice just yet to the one gift I truly longed for from her, I fell back to the tried and true by repeating the words I’d said to her on that first night.

*The words I’d spoken to a girl in a white dress.*

“Well aren’t you sweet.”

Without missing a beat – and even at three times its size, my heart *couldn’t* beat – she smiled knowingly and I had a feeling everything just might be okay when she replied, “Not especially.”

Her rich brown eyes held the same fiery spirit I’d noticed on that night, so long ago. But now they held other things that hadn’t been there before.

Wisdom.

The kind of wisdom that only came from experience, but somehow everything she had experienced since that night hadn’t left her bitter, beaten down, or broken. Like her body had on too many occasions, her spirit appeared to have healed. Her fire was still there, burning brighter than I’d ever seen it before, as was the warmth she couldn’t help but feel for those she loved.

*But was I still counted as one of them?*

Not quite mired down in the past, my thoughts ran the gamut from that moment on. Everything that had led us to this point in time and having nothing left to lose – because she hadn't ever really been mine to begin with – I hoped to convey the sincerity of everything I felt for her with my expression and tone, when I said, "You asked, *why now.*"

Pausing for a moment, I used the time to steel myself for what was to come because afterward, there would be no going back.

I wouldn't put either one of us through this again.

*It would be now or it would be never.*

So when she finally nodded, looking into her eyes I could easily register her shock when I admitted, "I am here now because I can't spend another minute getting over loving you."



## **SPOV**

Seeing him standing there in front of me, it felt like for the first time in four years I could breathe again.

*Or maybe Baby Fortenberry had just dropped down some more into the birth canal?*

But screw it. I was having a moment.

A moment spent wondering, had he always been so tall?

*So broad?*

*So sexy?*

His Eric-ness made him appealing in *every* way.

But more than the physical attraction I obviously still felt for him, it was who he was on the inside that still held my heart. I'd known for a long time now that I was still in love with him, so I don't know why I was so surprised to hear him say he still loved me too.

*His reaction to Baby Fortenberry had been enough to tell me he still gave a damn.*

And – admittedly – his awkward uncomfortable stance since he'd walked through the door amused me to no end.

But his words were spoken by the Eric I'd come to know first. The one who was sure of foot and who would surely put his foot up your ass if you didn't comply with his commands.

However his body told me a different story. Almost timid in his movements, like he would dart from the room at any given moment, he reminded me of a time when he'd lost a thousand years' worth of memories.

Standing before me was a perfect meld of the two Eric's I'd come to know and love.

It was like he was giving me a glimpse of our past.

*Back when a stubborn barmaid had fallen in love with an amnesiac vampire.*

But, just like his admission, my telepathy was no help in telling me what our future might hold.

I'd had no choice but to throw up my shields after digging through the brains of my friends and family – I'd had no idea Jason had had dreams of Eric too until then – but seeing him standing there, in the house he'd turned back into a home just for me, was too surreal for words.

Words he didn't give me any time to formulate in my head, much less speak, by continuing on to say, "I want you back in my life. I want to be a part of yours. I want you to be *mine*."

My heart stuttered in my chest as he paused for a moment. I suspected he was waiting for me to rant, rave, and rail against the word. To take it at face value and wrongly equate it to being his property.

His asset.

I was almost certain he was waiting for me to declare I was my own woman and no one else's. But those days were long gone and it would have been a lie anyway.

The fact was I *was* his and had been for four long years now.

The woman sitting in front of him had learned over that time that four letter word was synonymous with another four letter word, when coming from the man in front of her.

So when I merely sat there, waiting to see what else he would say – because the woman in front of him hadn't changed so much that she would make it *that* easy on him – he went on to add, “I don't expect it to happen overnight, but I need to know now if you're even willing to take a chance on me. And if you're not – if you tell me no – I'll take you at your word. I'll walk away and I will leave you to your life. But believe me when I say it will be the last time you'll say no to me.”

So serious...

His demeanor. His expression. His words.

But instead of answering his question, I asked my own so he wouldn't have any doubts where I stood when I finally gave him one.

## **EPOV**

“Do you know why I've spent the last four years alone?”

*Here we go...*

Waiting for the inevitable – the ‘*I'm my own woman*’ bullshit – I only cocked my brow in response and then locked my jaw – lest it gape – hearing what she ultimately had to say.

“Once upon a time, I went into the Fae realm for fifteen minutes and came back to find I'd been gone for a year. A year in which my own brother had given up hope and sold the home that had been in our family for generations out from under me. A year in which the man I *thought* I loved and who I *thought* loved me in return had moved on and become king, restoring his own family's homestead and not showing a single ounce of faith that I would one day come back.”

She took a deep breath and pierced my eyes with her own, as she went on to say, “But within fifteen minutes of returning home, my heart should have realized what my eyes were trying to tell it. Every last detail had been seen to in a way that was exactly how I would have wanted. Only love could have made it so perfect and perfect for me, but it wasn't any love for the house itself that had made it so grand. It was the love the new owner had for the former one. *You* were the only one who hadn't given up hope. *You* were the only one willing to bet on my return. *You* were the only one to have faith in *me*.”

Those same piercing brown eyes filled with a warmth I hadn't seen since I'd been strapped in silver underneath her house to keep me from falling under the witch's command to meet the sun, when she ended her tale with, “So for the last four years I have painstakingly done the same, renovating my heart and keeping it ready because I never lost faith that you would one day return to claim it.”

Her unexpected words ran riot through my mind, but not finding the confirmation I had been seeking amongst them, my order sounded more like a plea to even my own ears as I said, “Say it.”

She'd said plenty already, but I needed for her to say *it*.

Smiling, she teased, "What? That I wasn't the *only one* betting that you would return? If I'd bothered to read their minds and you'd bothered to keep in touch, we could be the ones holding the pot right now. Tim just bought himself a car a few months ago, so he doesn't really need it, but did you ever replace the corvette you'd given to Laf?"

Moving closer, it was either the centrifugal force of the earth's rotation or the force of my feelings for the woman in front of me that pulled me forward even more and had me sitting on the couch beside her.

But unwilling to play any games right now, I ordered more forcefully, "Say. It."

But I should have known better.

After all, I remembered all too well how well she'd responded to my orders in the past.

And proving me right – that fairy hybrids didn't necessarily change all of their spots – she left me hanging on her every teasing word, ignoring my plea and grinning, "Need me to co-sign on a car loan for you? I can do that now that I have a good paying job. Or I can just give you the money. Maybe a dollar at a time, while you dance for it? I don't want you to think you're being a *kept man* or anything."

"Sookie," I growled.

"Eric," she playfully whisper growled in return.

Unable to keep control of much of anything anymore now that she was so close, my hands moved of their own accord into her hair. Bringing her lips that much closer to mine, her eyes danced defiantly, while the rest of her body submitted to my actions, as I asked, "Why are you so fucking stubborn?"

"Hello, Pot. Meet Kettle," she giggled. "Besides, it's one of the things you *love* about me."

*Truer words...*

And because we were so equally matched on that front, I was disinclined to give in to the just as equal want I suspected we both had for me to close the mere millimeters that still separated our lips.

But more than just victory rose up in me when she closed the distance herself, pressing her mouth against my own and breathing life back into my long dead heart by saying, "I love you, Eric. More than anything. And if you walk out the door and out of my life for good, I will still love you until my last breath."

Her last breath.

I hoped to be there to witness it.

Only to witness her rise as my vampire child the following night.

But...one thing at a time.

## **SPOV**

A wanton moan reverberated through my lips and into his mouth, but he swallowed it whole and took over the kiss he'd had control over all along anyway, while arching his body over my much larger than usual frame.

I didn't know whether to curse Baby Fortenberry or thank it for being there, having a feeling, without my intrusive belly in the way, I would have already climbed onto his lap and put a certain Estonian dancer to shame.

To *my own* shame, given I still had a yard filled with friends and family.

Eric didn't seem to mind or even notice – either my guests or my baby belly – and kept pressing into me further.

*Or maybe I was pulling him onto me?*

But it wasn't just my nether regions sobbing in relief at the feel of him in my arms again.

Tears leaked from my eyes as he pulled away and I pushed my body upright, while my lungs angrily expanded again, pulling the much needed oxygen in through my lips and into the spare tire that was my midsection.

So when all he did was stare at me, with concern filling his eyes, he then chuckled at my grimace when I admitted, "I can't breathe on my back. The baby uses my lungs as pillows."

And my bladder as a trampoline.

And apparently our shared umbilical cord also acted as a cat o' nine tails/dinner bell because one swift yank from Baby Fortenberry knocked the breath right out of me, while simultaneously making my stomach growl louder than an amnesiac vampire eying my fairy godmother.

"Hungry?" he mused with a smile.

And he chuckled again, as he gently pulled me to my feet, while I grumbled, "For more than just turkey."

Hungrily eying another part of my body that had grown in size over the last thirty-seven weeks – twins, you could call them – he smirked, "Kettle, was it? I am Pot. Nice to meet you."



“I’m more interested in your ladle at the moment,” I snickered. “But the Fortenberry freeloader is demanding candied yams.”

*Mmm...candied yams...*

But another set of lips were salivating, hearing him seductively whisper into my ear, “Well then I suppose I’ll have to wait to fully enjoy your *candied gams*.”

*Dirty vampire.*

It was one of his best qualities, as far as I was concerned.

But just as I was about to throw caution and propriety to the wind – and my legs around his head – I heard several happy squeals of surprise coming from outside, shouting, “Pam!”

“Pam?” I asked no one in particular, but sounding just as surprised as everyone else.

“Pam,” he sighed, sounding none too surprised and then pulled me with him out onto the front porch.

That was where I saw the beautiful blond vampire standing beside the table, looking both amused and disgusted at the same time.

So the day ended in ‘Y’.

Sensing our appearance, her head turned, with her eyes raking over me and her disgusted amusement shone even brighter as she acknowledged, “Sookie.”

And then sounding very much like Doctor Phil after a lobotomy, she followed up with, “Dear Abby says eating your emotions isn’t healthy.”

“Pam,” I nodded in return and returned her snark with, “Eating your customers is bad for business, but that doesn’t seem to stop *you*.”

Now looking more amused than disgusted, she smiled with, “They certainly don’t *complain*.”

But before *I* could complain about not being in the mood for her lesbian weirdness – because there were candied yams to snarf down – she turned her eyes on her Maker and said, “She is leaking.”

That Pam.

She was as emotionally adept as a pet rock.

But I’d missed her too.

Wiping away the tear tracks that must have still been on my face, her eyes dropped further down my body, making me and everyone else look down there too.

And then Eric's voice, worriedly calling my name, was the only thing I could hear as I then doubled over, just as the first contraction hit.

## **EPOV**

"No," she quietly argued. "Down in the cubby."

I suspected it was only due to her weariness from being in the hospital for two days that made her so accommodating to allow me to carry her into the house.

If I had known it could make her so agreeable, I may have been more apt to call 911 in the past.

But I did as she bade, using my gift of flight to gently lower us to the underground floor, and felt her arms tighten around my neck, just as she gasped when her eyes took in the room.

I'd returned to the house on the night following the birth to fetch the bag Sookie had packed in preparation for her stay in the hospital. When she'd unexpectedly gone into to labor, no one thought to grab it.

Perhaps still in shock over watching *me* grab *her* and shoot up into the sky to get her to the hospital as quickly as possible.

*Knowing no amount of my blood would have solved that issue for her.*

But the angry glares I'd received from Compton's progeny and her human disappeared shortly before they were able to hold the gift my lover had so graciously given them, adorned with a shock of red hair and bow shaped lips.

*Too many candied yams, I supposed.*

But no longer having a blood tie to Sookie, I could only base my suppositions as to her physical and emotional state on her words and body language.

And for now they were both telling me she was tired.

But even so, as I laid her in the bed, she couldn't take her eyes from the corner of the room and softly stated, "You did this."

Not a question, I still felt it warranted an answer and admitted, "I did."

Lying beside her, I pressed my front against her back and she burrowed further back into my body, seemingly enjoying the contact just as much. But I didn't need to take my gaze from her to know what she was marveling at.

“When?” she asked softly, still staring in concentration.

Knowing she wasn’t asking when I’d had the time to put it in place, I answered, “During your travels.”

“Why?” she asked, sounding more awed than anything else.

It was a question I’d often posed to myself in the past, but I hadn’t been able to admit the answer to myself until now.

An admission I gave to her in allusion alone, teasing, “What else would I have use for? Commemorative spoons? Shot glasses?”

Finally tearing her gaze away, she turned in my arms to face me and snickered, “Well you *do* own a *bar*.”

“Don’t remind me,” I playfully sighed, with a roll of my eyes.

Fangtasia had lost its appeal right around the time a certain mouthy blond had stopped gracing its doorway with her presence.

“I missed you,” she whispered softly, but sounded more ardent as she tightened her hold on me and followed up with, “I’ve missed *this*.”

“The feeling is mutual, lover.”

Although, lying in bed with her without the need of silver chains to keep me from meeting my true death under the sun’s unforgiving rays, was preferable.

“So,” she faintly smiled, “We’re really doing this? You and me?”

“We are.”

My confirmation was laced with more conviction than I’d felt in a very long time.

We were *absolutely* doing this.

Her smile lit up the room, brighter than any star in the sky, but I suspected my own gave her a run for her money when she said, “I want to blood bond with you.”

As much as I wanted the same – as much as I had to force myself to not rip into my wrist in the next second and press the open wound to her lips – I felt the need to say, “We don’t have to if you are unsure. I know you felt blood was to blame for many of your...*hardships*. I am perfectly willing to prove myself to you without it.”

“You have nothing to prove,” she smiled, with conviction lacing her own voice. “I have no doubts as to how I feel about you and if I’d had any as to how you felt about me before...”

Jutting her head in the direction of my little surprise for her in the corner, she added, “That would have done away with them.”

But because I was greedy for everything about her, I pressed closer to her body and slyly smiled, asking, “And how is it again that you feel about me?”

She’d said it numerous times over the last two nights, but I doubted I would ever hear it enough.

So she grinned, just as she pressed her lips to my own, and said, “I love you.”

“As I love you.”

The words were garbled, thanks to my tongue in her mouth, but I was sure she got the gist of them.

If not, she would be hearing them again and again.

And again.

But feeling her tongue teasing the tips of my fangs made me feel other things.

Especially where there was one tip in particular, wanting to get reacquainted with her mouth, among other parts of her body.

But the fresh scent of her blood, permeating the air from her recent ordeal giving birth, reminded me she was in no shape for *that* kind of a reunion. Even having a good amount of my blood now would likely not be enough to ready her for those activities tonight, but I’d waited four long years to have her.

I could certainly wait for a few more nights.

So before she could test my resolve any further – or test the endurance of the zipper on my jeans – I turned her body, placing her back against my front once more.

Her groan of protest quieted when I trailed my fingertip down her neck and softly asked, “You are sure?”

The goose bumps that rose up on her skin pleased me to no end, but her reply pleased me even more when she said, “More sure than I’ve ever been.”

Raising my wrist to my mouth, my fangs slid easily into my skin, and I placed the open wound in front of her, just as my lips descended to her neck.

Licking the pulsing artery there, she mimicked the action against my wrist and my groan didn't have an ounce of protest in it when her blood soon flowed into my mouth, right as she pulled my own down her throat and I couldn't help the gasp that left my lips, feeling our tie begin to reform.

I remembered the loss I'd felt when it had disappeared before, but perhaps it was my anger and frustration that had left me in denial about how much I'd truly mourned its departure.

With its reformation, I was nearly overwhelmed by my joy.

So I was grateful when my wound closed, lovingly licked clean by my love in my arms, and she didn't turn around to witness my near breakdown. Instead she pulled that same arm tighter around her body and burrowed further back against me, as our shared blood burrowed into every part of our bodies.

## **SPOV**

My eyes were once again transfixed by the twinkling lights of the small Christmas tree in the corner of the room, adorned with the ornaments depicting all of the places I'd traveled to in my time away. Seeing them only corroborated my feelings from back then.

That Eric had traveled to all of those places with me, regardless of missing his physical presence.

In the next moment, I could feel his smile forming against my skin, matching the smile I could hear in his voice, when he softly whispered into the room, "This is the beginning."

He'd said those same four words to me once before more than four years earlier. We'd been lying together in bed then too.

But this wasn't a dream.

Nor was it a fantasy.

This was real.

Just like our love for each other was real.

I knew that without any doubts now, so I settled back further into his embrace, settling into the start of the rest of my life.

This *was* the beginning.

And I would be able to handle whatever happened next, so long as I always had Eric at my side.

Now and for always it was where we belonged.