



*A kjurrit fanfiction*

Wealthy, a playboy, and a genius to boot, Eric Northman lives his life without regret and without apology. But when his own life hangs in the balance, it'll take more than his own ingenuity to save himself. Namely, his Executive Assistant, Sookie Stackhouse.

All human...to start.

Rated M/AU

## Chapter 1 – It Ain't Easy Being Green

### **SPOV**

“Good morning Godric,” I called out into the room, while I set our daily Starbucks intake down onto the table just inside the front door.

His soft spoken melodic voice filled the room as he greeted, “Good morning Miss Stackhouse. I trust you had a good evening?”

His cadence could lead one to believe English was his second language, which – technically – it was. But that made no difference to me and I loved how polite he was. It was a trait that had somehow bypassed his maker.

And it was a good thing they weren't so alike. I couldn't handle *two* of them.

Godric's name alone was a testament to his maker's narcissism. When I'd had the misfortune of asking Eric why he'd chosen a name that sounded like something born out of the first century – rather than the twenty-first – I learned sometimes it was better to not always know every little detail.

God plus Eric equaled Godric.

And it wasn't even because Eric thought himself the modern day Almighty or second coming of Christ. He named Godric – the artificial intelligence life form that was wired all throughout the house – after the mangled words his *dates* (and I used the term loosely, just like moral codes of said *dates*) shouted whenever he *entertained* them.

*Ohmygoderic!*

He even smirked at me when he claimed Godric's first two initials were 'O' and 'M'.

OMG. TMI.

Eric's head already needed its own zip code, so I wouldn't have felt the least bit sorry if his *entertainment* sometimes meant a shot of penicillin and an antibiotic chaser were needed when he was done with them.

But Godric truly was a work of art. The prodigy of Eric's own brilliant mind. Not only was he capable of spitting out data faster than Google, he was just as readily accessible. I could even converse with him on my phone if I needed to.

There was an app for that.

"Yes Godric," I replied needlessly. "My evening was as fine as always."

And boring, but I left out that little detail. I wasn't so sure Godric and our boss didn't gossip about me behind my back the moment I walked out the door at

night. Because genius or not, Eric had the emotional maturity of a hormonal teenage boy in a constant state of puberty and who knew just how far the AI apple fell from the tree.

“I am glad to hear that,” he answered in a way that made it sound as though he was wearing a smile on his nonexistent computer animated face. “Eric is downstairs in his lab,” because the day ended in ‘y’, I silently added, “But I am afraid he left a bit of, shall we say – *a mess* – for you up here that you may want to attend to before going down to greet him.”

I felt my eyebrow quirk up just as I noticed the *wrappers* trailing down the hallway, so I walked into the kitchen and pulled out a pair of latex gloves from underneath the kitchen sink. When they were snapped into place, I proceeded to pick them up one by one and shoved them into the trash bag in my hand, stating the obvious out loud, as I mused, “I see Eric decided to get takeout last night.”

“I am afraid so,” he chuckled. But *I* chuckled when he filled the room with the sound of bells, whistles, and loud applause, making it sound as though I’d guessed correctly on a game show.

Godric may have been computer based, but he did have a personality. A likable one.

But my prize majorly sucked ass.

Shoe. Shoe. Skirt. Shirt. Bra. Panties.

The *wrappers* to Eric’s *takeout* went into the trash bag as I went down the hall.

“I have already made arrangements for the car service to provide transportation for Eric’s guest. They’re entering through the front gates now,” Godric offered.

He really was a godsend and I thanked him as I headed down the hall, snickering again when the soundtrack from the movie *Jaws* followed me. I even played along and peeked through the door like there was actually a giant shark waiting for me on the other side. But Godric switched things up and made me jump a mile high when the sound from 'Psycho's' shower curtain scene suddenly blared out unexpectedly and at a decibel little kids in China could probably hear.

Who needs caffeine to jumpstart your day when there's a smart ass AI tracking your every move?

"You cock sucking mother fucking swamp ass stinky shit!" I hissed at him, waiting for my heart to come back down from the ceiling where it was currently lodged. I may have graduated with top honors from the Wharton School of Business, but my inner voice – who I was convinced was the love child of a drunken trucker and a dirty stripper named Candy – sometimes became my outer voice too.

"I am afraid that is impossible, Miss Stackhouse. Artificial life forms – like myself – do not require nourishment and therefore are unable to produce solid waste. Mr. Northman designed me to be as green as Kermit the Frog, but I do emit trace amounts of a byproduct that could be considered gaseous waste. Even so – I assure you – *my shit* does not *stink*. However if you'd like, I can make you a model of it on the 3D printer in the lab."

"Keep it up, Binary Boy," I glared – at nothing in particular since he was only heard and not seen – while fighting the smile that was threatening to form on my face, which *he* could see thanks to the umpteen thousand sensors built into the house. "I know where your *off switch* is."

It was a lie and we both knew it. Eric had managed to bury Godric so deeply into the grid, nothing short of a worldwide nuclear fallout that flung us back into the dark ages would take him offline.

But Godric's abilities extended beyond being a virtual smart ass/Wikipedia/IMDB's Greatest Hits player because he was able to extrapolate data and learn from it as well. It was what gave him such a great personality. And he may have even learned from me to pretend *I wasn't* full of shit when he treated me to a tone as smooth as a baby's bottom while he asked, "Have I told you how lovely you look today, Miss Stackhouse? Have you lost weight?"

Losing the fight with my lips, I laughed out loud, not caring if we woke up She-Who-Had-No-Name. I didn't need a bloodhound to figure out where I would find her since they'd left me a trail even Stevie Wonder could've followed. Eric never took his conquests in his own bed, but finding naked women passed out by the pool in the backyard wasn't out of the ordinary. However this one was left in one of the guest bedrooms, so I tossed the bag with her clothes onto the bed and hoped it would be enough to wake her up.

So of course, it wasn't.

I decided to cliché it and cleared my throat softly, saying, "Ahem."

Nothing.

Subtlety may have been my specialty, but it would do me no good here. So I acted like Eric's ego was caught in my throat and yelled out, "AHEM!"

Nada.

If I couldn't have seen the rise and fall of her chest, I might've been more worried. But only because I wasn't dressed for hiding bodies and Godric would be absolutely no help in that scenario unless he printed me off a 3D shovel. As it was, my only worry was falling behind schedule.

Sookie Stackhouse did *not* fall behind schedule.

She just jumped a mile high when cock sucking mother fucking swamp ass stinky shits scared her half to death.

Deciding I needed to up the ante, I moved a bit closer and leaned down. And because *I* wasn't a cock sucking mother fucking swamp ass stinky shit, I kept my voice to a half-whisper and sang out, "Time to rise and shine..."

Because seriously, the sun had risen hours earlier and I didn't have all damn day to play 'Name That Walk of Shame.' And I grew even bitchier knowing the whipped cream on my mocha caramel latte was no doubt fighting a losing battle in maintaining its whip.

It wasn't as though I'd scheduled her into my day, but given the common occurrence, perhaps I would from now on. Besides, I couldn't 'Name That Walk of Shame' because I didn't know her name and I doubted Eric made it a point of finding out what it was the night before either. He used them – to quote – "Clear his head."

Both of them.

But on the plus side, he'd actually left his lab, which was a good thing. He was prone to becoming obsessed with his work and I knew his newest obsession was eating him alive.

Not that I knew what it was he was working on.

He didn't like to play show and tell before he could actually tell me all there was to whatever it was he was showing me. And he'd been working on his current project day and night lately and it had him going on very little sleep, with even less human interaction than normal. In fact, I'd planned on dragging him out of his lab that very day to get some sunlight on his skin before his pale ass keeled over from vitamin D deficiency.

But seeing now that he must've gotten out at some point in the night – although I wouldn't have put it past him to have *ordered in* – I might cut him some slack. Besides I needed the time meant to take him out for a walk to get Name That Cum Stain out of bed and out of the house.

She finally stirred and the scent of stale alcohol and sex wafted up when she flipped over, showing me and the empty room everything God, her momma, and her Beverly Hills plastic surgeon had given her.

So...it was a typical Tuesday morning for me.

I took a step back before her smell or anything else she might be carrying had a chance to latch onto me. And when the sleep cleared from her eyes, she didn't bother to cover up as she asked, "Who are you?"

At first I stifled the urge to pretend I was Godric's 3D printed twin sister, but seeing the vacant look in her eyes, I decided what the hell.

"I am Godrica. Mr. Northman created me to oversee his home," I said, letting my eyes glaze over. My twin brother didn't help any when he snorted through the speakers, but she didn't seem to notice.

Or maybe she thought I robotically farted out some Kermit green gas.

Her head tilted to the side when she asked, "Huh? Like his daughter or something?"

Yeah...because he would've had me when he was *six*.

Dumbass. Eric was an overachiever, but that was really pushing it.

She was too stupid to be any fun, so I wiped the Godrica from my face and took a page from my boss's book. I ignored her question and pointed at the plastic bag on the bed, saying in my indifferent yet polite voice, "Your clothing. There's a car waiting for you out front and the driver will take you anywhere you'd like to go."

Even the free clinic. They're open on Tuesdays.

"What are you? The maid?" she asked, looking more and more pissed when she realized it was just me and her in the room.

Or at least *she* thought so.

“And where’s Eric?” she added in a huff.

“Hardly,” I smirked, answering the former and ignoring the latter. “I have other tasks on my agenda this morning, so if you’ll please gather your things I’d be happy to see you out.”

Why not? I’d already seen everything else of hers.

“But...*Eric?*” she half-whimpered half-snarled.

Ugh. He was *so* giving me a raise for this shit.

I forced my eyes not to roll, while I forced an appropriately sympathetic expression onto my face. It was one I normally reserved for strangers who saw my somewhat wholesome appearance and thought that meant I gave two shits about their problems.

Godric and I were alike in more ways than one because I gave not a single shit. About their problems or hers.

But feeling my anxiety build, knowing I had other more important things to do – things I gave lots of shits about – I pushed the trash bag containing her clothes closer to her. She weird-eyed me, watching me take the latex gloves off and tossing them into the trash can. But since she was still waiting for an answer – and hoping giving her one would get her to get a fucking move on already – I lied/explained, “Mr. Northman is *very sorry* he couldn’t be here to see you off, but he had other pressing matters he needed to take care of this morning. I’m sure he’ll call you when he’s available.”

For another meaningless fuck when there’s no one better who catches his eye.

Although I doubted it. Eric normally didn’t do sloppy seconds. Not even his own, so she was likely shit out of luck on that front.



But at least she had a shit to be out of.

It always boggled my mind when the women he used to satisfy his carnal need for flesh didn't know what they were signing themselves up for. He was a complete dog when it came to women and that fact was as well-known as he was. And if it wasn't for his other more redeeming qualities, I wouldn't have been with him for as long as I had.

Eric was brilliant in a way that would've made Albert Einstein look like Gary Busey. That wasn't even an embellishment because I didn't do those either, just like I didn't fall behind schedule. But Eric was truly in a class all by himself. And if he wasn't such a social butterfly – or rabbit, in this case – he would probably meet all of the bench marks for being classified as an idiot savant. His brain was like a mathematics wonderland and he saw things in a way no one else could see. He'd told me once every problem was a numbers game. You just had to put them in the right order in order to win. And he was, no doubt, a winner. His corporation – Northman Inc. – dabbled in everything from technology to medical research and was constantly at the top of the Forbes Fortune 500 list. And at the age of thirty-three, he had the whole world in the palm of his hand because he was nowhere close to slowing down.

In fact, he never slowed down.

When Eric did anything, he did it in the extreme. He lived his life exactly how he wanted to and he didn't apologize for it. I admired that about him, even if I sometimes wanted to beat him with a shit stick for making more work for me. He overindulged in whatever struck his fancy at any given moment. Cars. Houses. Art. Women. He spent money like it was made of water, so it was a good thing he had a natural knack for turning water into wine.

Very expensive wine.

But when he was focused on his work, nearly everything else ceased to exist to him. If I hadn't occasionally found him passed out on top of his desk, I

might've assumed he didn't even need to sleep. Ironically, I couldn't count the number of times I'd had to force him away from the number hieroglyphics on his smartboard and make him pretend to be human for a few moments. Force him to eat or shower. But I was unashamedly in awe of the man most of the time.

However the women he chose to entertain himself with should make *him* ashamed and evened the scales. Half genius/half straight up idiot.

But I didn't blame him. Why wouldn't he have his way with them when they literally threw themselves at his feet? He worked constantly and he did his best work alone, so he'd have no way of meeting a normal woman. Nor did he have the time to put into having a normal relationship. In fact, I was the only female who was a constant in his life.

And we were so not going there.

Don't get me wrong. I had eyes and I knew he was drop dead gorgeous, but he was still a little boy on the inside no matter how much of his outside was all man. A pretty package wasn't what floated my boat anyway. It was his mind that would be more of a turn on to me.

Not that he turned me on.

Much.

Like I said, I had eyes.

And so did he. I knew he hired me for my tits, but he pretended I didn't know that. But that was okay because I only applied because of his pretty brain. Neither one of us were willing to admit to our hypocrisy, so neither one of us called the other one out on it. And maybe I had a bit of secret hero worship going on, but it was warranted.

The man was a genius.

Rude. Indulgent. Egotistical. And the poster boy for Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.

But a genius nonetheless.

But he was also my boss, so there'd be no hanky panky between us. People already thought I fucked my way into the job, but I didn't care. I knew the truth and that was good enough for me. Eric only exacerbated the problem with his constant flirting, but that was just a part of him. In fact, I was sure his head would implode if he couldn't say whatever inappropriate thought popped into his head at any given moment.

Maybe I'd give the fellas on Mythbusters a call and see if they could get on that.

But right now it was his indulgent dick dipping that was pissing me off because his little pussy pot was making me late. So I turned to leave the room, saying, "If you like, I'll let him know you'd like for him to call you. For now though, you need to get dressed. The fumigators will be here any moment."

Godric snorted again at my lie, with a breath he was incapable of making, and I wanted to tell her not to hold hers.

Because getting Eric to call her was a numbers game she wasn't going to win.

## Chapter 2 – The God's Honest Truth

### **EPOV**

"You're late," I admonished without looking away from the screens I'd been staring at for the last three hours, and no further ahead in my work than I had been when I started.

She put the cup of coffee down in front of me and then cuffed the back of my head, doing a little admonishing of her own as she ignored my bark with no bite and said, “You’re giving me a raise.”

“It would be your third one this month.”

And yet she was still worth way more than her six figure salary. At least I’d been smart enough to low-ball her at the start, knowing she’d one day figure that out.

They didn’t call me a genius for nothing.

“That’s your fault. Nobody told you to play with twins, so I deserved the double bump for having to deal with the double disappointment to their parents. I’m from the redneck capital of the country and even *we* frown on diddling our siblings,” Sookie replied without missing a beat. “If you insist on giving me more work than I’ve planned for, *I insist* you stick to the Monday/Thursday schedule already in place.”

“Monday/Thursday?” I asked, finally looking up so her blue eyes could playfully glare back into my own.

“Yep,” she smiled. “Those are the appointed trash days. If you want me to take yours out to the curb, you’ll need to conform.”

I grinned at her over the rim of the Starbucks cup she put in front of me and took a sip. If I didn’t know any better, I would think Sookie was jealous.

But I did know better.

And she did too.

Sookie was the one person who knew me best and the fact she didn’t fault me for my faults, told me I had indeed chosen the best person for the job as my executive assistant.

Her shit hot rack was just a bonus.

But she was the whole package. Brains. Beauty. Hips that were meant to be my handholds.

But we weren't going there. Or so she kept telling me. So in the meantime, I amused myself with others.

"What?" I coyly asked. "Did..."

What was her name? Ginger? Dawn?

I decided a pronoun would have to do and smirked, finishing with, "*She* not meet your highly prestigious standards?"

Sookie snorted and said, "I doubt she would meet the height of the curb if she stood up on her tippy toes, but I wouldn't doubt for a second she was high at some point last night. You must be running low if you're resorting to the bottom of the barrel. Honestly Eric..."

Instead of finishing whatever it was she was going to say, she rolled her eyes and then changed directions by asking, "When was the last time you ate?"

I opened my mouth, but she cutoff my reply by adding, "And don't tell me it was four hours ago, when you had your head in between her legs."

Damn. I forgot her magical powers of telepathy when it came to my snark.

"It was *five* hours ago," I huffed, giving her the very answer she'd just said she didn't want. So I added, "*mom*," just to poke the already angry bear. But it made no difference because she could smell my bullshit a mile away by now and knew I could never truly get angry at her. The truth was, if it wasn't for Sookie, I probably would've wasted away by now.

"And poor Pam?" she asked. And because she knew me well enough to know exactly what I'd been answering, she added, "I hope you haven't forgotten to

feed *her* lately, unless she's really a lesbian and got her own eating in *five* hours ago when you shared your *takeout* with her."

"Of course not," I replied, because that would be gross. I tapped her tank behind me, having no real way to know if she was a lesbian or if that was even possible. But I suspected it might be true when my actions only got me a look from her that all but deadpanned, "Fuck off, human."

Pam was my aquatic salamander and she was the key to my near breakthrough. I'd been studying her because of the salamanders' unique capability of regenerating entire limbs and parts of major organs. If we humans could figure out a way reverse-engineer the process in our own species, it would be life changing.

Literally.

We could repair spinal cord injuries, thereby allowing those affected by them to walk again. Brain injuries could be cured and bring the living dead back to just plain old living. A new hand could be regrown that could hold onto their partner's. A new foot or leg for the guy or gal to use to chase after their kids. The wounded warriors our country was now inundated with made the practical applications all the more valuable. Heart disease. Liver disease. The possibilities were endless.

I just needed to figure out what it was that made it *possible*.

It all boiled down to the salamander's immune system. More so, the macrophage cells and their response to the injury. More than just salamanders had some form of regenerative capabilities and it was widely believed many more once had them, but it had been 'turned off' at some point on the climb up the evolutionary ladder.

I wanted to turn it back on and I knew I was close. So very fucking close, but not quite there yet. There was something missing. Something that had been

just on the tip of my brain's tongue – just out of reach of my mental fingertips – for months now and it was slowly driving me crazy.

I'd hoped to *cum* to a conclusion last night, but it still eluded me.

“Are you going to tell me what she's for yet?” Sookie asked and then grinned. “Or am I just going with my working theory that you're a lot kinkier than I suspected?”

The sound of bells ringing and a crowd applauding filled the air, making Sookie laugh out, “I knew it!”

When she high-fived thin air, I deadpanned, “That will be all, Godric.”

“As you wish, sir. But before I go, if I may?” he asked.

I gestured for him to get on with it, knowing his sensors could pick up every square inch of the house, only to get a response of, “Bazinga.”

His smirk was tangible – corporeal – despite his binary form. I was both proud of the strides he'd made and frustrated I couldn't physically punch him when he took sides.

And he *always* took Sookie's side.

“Asshole,” I admonished. For both the ‘bazinga’ and for always choosing Sookie's side.

“Nope,” Sookie laughed. “He and I already covered that this morning. He doesn't have one and even if he did, I've been informed whatever came out of it *wouldn't* stink.”

“Thick as thieves, you two,” I shook my head at her in mock disappointment, but unable to not return her smile. “And that's why he'll never be turned into a *real boy*.”

“What?” she asked, looking around the room with a confused expression, like I had a Godric puppet lying around just waiting to get up without needing any strings.

I glared at her – because I was a jealous asshole about to speak the God’s honest truth – when I replied, “As soon as I uploaded him into a body, you and Pinocchio would run away together.” And so she wouldn’t see the God’s honest truth behind that statement, I added, “Then who would bring me coffee and kick my dates out in the morning?”

“Yeah,” she rolled her eyes at me. “*That’s* what I do all day every day.”

Maybe not *all day*, but I made it a point to keep Sookie busy *every* day. I couldn’t have her wasting time on a loser boyfriend. Not when she had a loser boss who’d been waiting around for the last three years for her to give *me* a shot.

And as if her telepathy was in rare form and she now heard *everything* going on in my head – snark or otherwise – she changed the subject by saying, “You have a meeting with the board of directors this afternoon at two, so you need to be showered, dressed, and out the door by one thirty. I have a meeting with the curator at the Weisman Foundation at one to look at the artwork you’re interested in and then I’m meeting with the event planner for the charity ball tonight, so I won’t be here to light a fire under you. Do you think you can remember to wash your ass and cover it in some clothes without me here?”

“Probably not,” I grinned. “Maybe you should cancel your meetings so you can be here to wash my ass. And I won’t mind at all if you choose to cover what’s in front of it with a body part of yours when you’re done.”

Another God’s honest truth.

“Pfft...” She waved me off and stared down at the iPad she was now scrolling through in her hand, adding dismissively, “Even *you* don’t have the kind of money it would take for me to do that.”



And it was that God's honest truth that made her stand above the rest.

I knew Sookie found me attractive. She had eyes and so did I. I'd caught her staring at my ass on more than one occasion, but her physical attraction to me wasn't enough for her. Nor was my wealth or power enough to sway her.

But she would absolutely fuck my brain like the world was about to end if there was a way for her to do it.

She admired me – mostly. And she respected me – some of the time. But it was me – the real me – who held her attention. I could see it on her face whenever she studied my scribbled calculations when she thought I wasn't paying attention. It was the care she showed when she made me come back to the human realm from the mathematical one I'd set up camp in. She made sure I ate. She made sure I slept. She made sure I didn't lose myself in my work.

She was what kept me human.

And she was the only one in my life who had ever cared enough to do it. My father. My professors. My business associates. They would all happily let me wither away in my lab as long as I produced the next greatest thing for them to hawk that would make our stocks soar and thereby make them rich.

But not Sookie.

Like I said, she stood above the rest.

But I also knew she had an asinine morality code that kept her from pushing the envelope. Sure she would flirt back here and there. And she hadn't filed any sexual harassment lawsuits against me – yet, but I was her boss and in her mind it wouldn't be proper for her to be anything more than my employee.

She had no idea of how often and how close she'd been to being fired because of it.

But I'd already done the calculations. She'd already worked for me for three years and by my estimations, it would take two more for her to finally see what was in front of her all along. So I would bide my time and wait. And keep her busy enough that she didn't have the time to have her own personal life so I wouldn't have to compete for her affection. Sookie's loyalty to me was absolute, *for now*. But I knew if she let some other bastard into her life in a romantic sense, she'd be loyal to him too.

It was an unacceptable risk.

The numbers told me so.

"I mean it Eric," she said, back to using her mom voice. She was the only one to use it on me since my own had died when I was ten from a rare heart disorder.

It was what was driving me to figure out the Pam puzzle now.

"Victor's gonna be all up my ass tomorrow if you don't show up at the meeting this afternoon," she nearly whined.

But I didn't call her out on it because – according to Sookie – she *didn't* whine.

Sookie was also a sometimes *liar*.

Victor had been my father's business partner and he'd run the company in the years following his unexpected death in a car accident when I was in my teens. My father and I had grown apart after my mother died. It was easy to do when he'd shipped me off to boarding school barely a month after the funeral and it was during a drunken Christmas morning confession, two months before his own death, that I found out the reason he'd done it was because I looked just like her.

Apparently, it hurt to even look at me.

*That* hurt more than I'd ever let on.

I'd inherited everything from my father, but Victor ran the company up until I took my rightful spot as the CEO when I turned twenty-one. The business had been stagnant until that time, but when I took over.

*I took over.*

Now we were leading the pack in the technological industry. We were the forward thinkers everyone else was trying and failing to keep up with. And if I succeeded in figuring out human regeneration, by the time I was through, the name Northman would live on for all of eternity.

“Remind Victor *your ass* belongs to *me* and the job market at his age is *everything* it's cracked up to be,” I replied and then surprised her by reaching out and pulling her closer. “In fact, I think you should let me inspect it for bite marks so I know he hasn't been chewing yours.”

Sookie snorted before pulling herself free and said, “You need to eat.” She immediately threw her hand up just as my lips opened and she quickly added, “And I don't mean me! But you're clearly delirious.”

“I assure you, my mind is sound.”

And suddenly my other head was horny now that he'd heard something that sounded like eating Sookie.

“Puhleez,” she scoffed. “I know what type of girls you go for. I drag them out of here every other day, lying my ass-you-don't-own off, promising you'll call them. Waif-like skeletons, pumped full of silicone, and covered in a spray tan does not a Sookie make.” Then she surprised me by putting herself right in my face as she purred, “I am a *real* woman. And trust me when I say, *Mr. Northman – I. Would. Break. You.*”

If she meant my dick, it was more than enough incentive for me to figure out that whole regeneration thing because I'd want to grow it back only so she could break it all over again.

Huh. Maybe I was a little kinkier than I thought.

She licked her lips – and I was pretty sure I felt her tongue swipe across the head of my dick watching her do it – before she winked and turned to walk out the door, with an extra sway to her hips. I was still mesmerized by the sight well after I could no longer see it. But even then she called out behind her retreating behind and said, “You can stare at it all you want, Eric. But you don’t *own* it. Now wash yours and get it to the board meeting by two!”

*‘Make me!’* my inner tween griped and stuck out his tongue.

But my inner perv had other things he wanted to do with it where Sookie was concerned.

But that wasn’t going to happen now that Sookie was on her way out of the house (as if that was my only stumbling block), just like I wasn’t going to the meeting. Why would I when I was sure the term ‘board meeting’ was really a misnomer.

‘Bored meeting’ was more like it.

Victor could handle it.

After all, he was a boring kind of guy and the job market just wasn’t what it once was.

Besides, I got a perverse sense of pleasure whenever Sookie yelled at me. It may have been because I would imagine her in head to toe leather and holding a riding crop while she did it.

So I adjusted the now uncomfortable tightness in the crotch of my pants and turned back to my work, trying to force my thoughts away from my Sookie-based fantasies and back into the mathematical conundrum in front of me.

It was hours later – or so she told me – when Sookie strolled into the room. Dressed to the nines and carrying a plate of food, she shoved my notes to the

side and placed it onto the desk in front of me, asking, “Twelve hours, Eric? I’ve been gone for twelve hours and you haven’t moved an inch. What am I going to do with you?”

Scrubbing the calculations from my brain by rubbing my eyes, I smirked at her and said, “Dressed like that, you can do anything you want to do to me.”

I assumed she’d gone to the charity event she’d spoken of earlier. I probably should have gone too, considering it was being thrown by the Northman Foundation, but that was right up there with attending one of those bored meetings.

Boring.

Her eyes playfully rolled back at me, while she unrolled the silverware she’d carried down with her, and she tucked the linen napkin into the neckline of my t-shirt. Cutting into the steak dinner, she brought a piece to my lips on the fork and smirked, saying, “Aaahhhh...”

Unable to resist, I grabbed her wrist in my hand and leaned towards her, licking my lips and saying, “You’re doing it all wrong, *Miss Stackhouse*. Let *me* do what *I want* to do with *you* and at a minimum you’ll be moaning, ‘*Oohhh...*’”

She swallowed hard, while I chewed the piece of steak she’d offered me and her eyes darkened, but she didn’t look away. No, Sookie was never one to back down.

If I was lucky, she’d let me back her all the way across the room and onto her back on the couch I kept in the corner.

But I already knew I wasn’t that lucky, so I wasn’t really disappointed when she finally grinned with, “Uh huh. I bet a lot of *your girls* make that noise when they get their blood work back. After all, you put the STD in *stud*.”

“Ouch,” I grinned back.

“Yep,” she finally laughed. “That too. I bet those coochie cankers are a bitch.”

And for the rest of the night, everything else ceased to exist while I watched her eyes dance, as she continued to tease me, telling me about her day and all the while feeding me.

Taking care of me.

Because she cared about me.

More than just as her boss.

And by my calculations there were only seven hundred and twenty-some odd days left until she would finally figure that out.

## Chapter 3 – King of the Jungle

### **SPOV**

After checking on Eric one last time and assuring myself he was still asleep, I set the timer on the coffee pot to go off in another hour before leaving the house for the office. Occasionally I stayed over in one of the guest bedrooms whenever I didn't feel like making the drive back to my condo and by the time I'd gotten Eric fed, cleaned up, and tucked into bed, I was barely awake myself. But I always kept a fully stocked bag of necessities in my car, so at least I didn't look like I was just another one of Eric's boozy floozy morning castoffs.

However I had an out-briefing scheduled with the event planner and walking into the office this morning still wearing the gown I'd worn to the charity event last night would've been the equivalent of having Eric's name tattooed on my forehead.

A tramp stamp, if you will.

But even if we *had* slept together, I knew I still wouldn't be categorized with the others he entertained himself with.

Not that I was sleeping with him.

And while I couldn't fault him for taking whatever was offered, it bothered me when other people tried to use *him*, whether it was the women he had sex with (who all had dollar signs in their eyes) or the other people in his life. At times it seemed like everyone wanted to bleed him dry, be it for his money or his brain power. Eric was conditioned for it. Used to it. He expected it.

It just pissed me off even more for him.

Why couldn't they see that the money in his bank account or even the data in his brain wasn't what made him special?

Maybe – I mused – it was because he didn't show that side of himself to anyone but me.

I ignored the implications of that, telling myself I should feel sad that I was Eric's only real friend instead of feeling a bit special myself, and headed to the offices of Northman Inc. Wednesday mornings were my office mornings, so I wouldn't see Eric again until later on that evening when I went back to check in with him. I hadn't gotten around to telling him about the fiasco at the gallery the day before, having been sidetracked by teasing him over his – hopefully – nonexistent case of crotch crickets. But the asking price for the Pollock I'd gone over to inquire about was well over the top and it pissed me off, knowing they were trying to take advantage of my employer, Mr. Money Bags.

Fuck. That.

So I gave them an hour's long come-to-Jesus, just barely keeping myself from letting my inner drunken trucker/used up stripper love child to come out to play.

Needless to say, Beverly Hills didn't know how to take the bayou bitch in me.

Victor had left me numerous voicemails while I'd been giving the curator a lesson in redneck hostility, but I didn't need to listen to them to know Eric had blown off the board meeting. I should've known better and just rescheduled my own meetings, but every now and then I gave Eric the benefit of the doubt that he would act like a grown up.

My bad.

I'd spent the better part of the night avoiding Victor at all costs at the charity benefit, but now it seemed like it was time to pay the piper because it was also my bad fortune when Victor strolled into my office like he owned the joint – something I suspected he really *did* believe. Hiding his thinly veiled disdain for me behind his used car salesman smile, he opened with, “Ms. Stackhouse.”

I knew his opinion of me was on par with the rest of Eric's employees, assuming I sucked Eric's cock on a regular basis to keep me in Jimmy Choo's and Dolce. It was abundantly clear to everyone he showed me preferential treatment, so the general consensus was I must suck really good dick. But I only put up with Victor's snide self because I knew he had Eric's best interests at heart. He'd known Eric since he was a little boy and looked out for him even now. So I tried to keep that in mind when I plastered a smile onto my face and greeted him with, “Mr. Madden. How are you this morning?”

“Concerned,” he replied with a challenging glare aimed my way. “Eric missed our board meeting yesterday. Again.”

I mentally checked my purse and pockets for my shocked face, but I must have left it in my other pants, so I tried to appear contrite when I replied, “He was working in his lab when I left him yesterday morning. You know how he gets. If we left him alone they'd probably find his fossilized body hunched over his smartboard a thousand years from now.”

Sadly, that wasn't even an exaggeration on my part.



But I did leave out the part where I'd gone back to his house later on that night and found him exactly where I expected him to be. I didn't leave the Four Seasons until after eleven when the charity event was winding down, so I knew what Victor would assume.

And his assumption would only make me look like an ass.

A loose piece of ass.

His face lit up like I'd told him Santa was on his way when he asked, "Is he working on something new?"

"Isn't he always?" I smiled.

Equations. Women. Eric was always working on *something* or *someone* new.

He even twitched in his sleep. It was a tad adorable.

"Do you know *what* he's working on?" he asked, digging for information where there was none to be found.

Even if I'd known what Eric and Pam were up to, I wouldn't tell him, so I put my naturally blond hair to good use and tossed it over my shoulder, like I was trying to weasel my way out of a speeding ticket, and smiled, "No. Eric doesn't like to show and tell prematurely."

If only he picked dates with those same attributes. I'd seen more silicone enhanced tits than Larry Flint.

His eyes narrowed ever so slightly back at me, all but accusing my derriere of being on fire, but all he said was, "Very well. The next board meeting is scheduled two weeks from now. Please make sure Eric attends. We're being courted by the Pentagon again. They're especially interested in his biological research."

Biological research?

## The Pentagon?

Eric was a lover, not a fighter. He'd been getting his pecker stroked by Generals and Admirals for years now, with all of them wanting a piece of his research for defense purposes.

Or rather *offense* purposes, so Victor's admission all but reeked of biological warfare.

Eric was as patriotic as the next guy, both willing and able to amp up their weapons tracking systems so they could *detect* impending strikes and *defend* themselves against them. So they could *detect* chemical compositions where weapons were hidden away from prying red, white, and blue eyes and the resources to safely dismantle them. He'd even gone so far as to come up with new – better – designs for personal protective equipment to keep our soldiers safer from those very same things.

But the one thing he was capable – but *unwilling* – to do was give *any side* an unfair advantage. Any government would pay him billions for the kinds of things his mind could conjure up, but as Eric had once told me, he didn't want his legacy to be one of destruction.

It made me want to hug him.

In a strictly professional kind of way, of course.

“You weren't in bed when I woke up this morning.”

Two sets of eyes – one knowing (Victor's) and the other horrified (mine) – turned to see Eric now standing in the open doorway.

Knowing *exactly* what kind of picture he'd just painted – using a medium of cum, sweat, and my tears – he winked at me with a grin, automatically making my eyes roll in return.

I swear, in the three years I'd worked for him, my eyes had made more rolls than Pillsbury.

Turning to Victor and acting like he hadn't just made it sound like we were sexin' each other up all night, he asked, "What kind of biological research are they interested in?"

"Eric, my boy," he grinned – seeing dollar signs, no doubt. But then his expression turned into one of a reproving father as he admonished, "Had you been at the board meeting yesterday, you would *know* what the Pentagon is interested in."

Like a duck caught in a hurricane, Victor's veiled reprimand slid like water right off of Eric's back and he took a seat in the chair across from my desk – *his desk* – and kicked his feet up saying, "You know that's not my area of expertise, Victor. I'm still surprised they haven't tried to stage a hostile takeover after the last time I attended one of those things."

"It probably helped that when you attended the first one, after turning twenty-one and taking over as CEO, your first order of business was to gift each member with a copy of the classifieds and a subscription for AARP," he replied without missing a beat.

At least Eric was an equal opportunity ass.

"Everyone deserves to know their options," he smiled. "But I'm sure the main reason no one has kicked my door down yet is because of the gobs of money I've made them since that time, so missing out on a few meetings here and there shouldn't get their panties twisted."

Looking more desperate, his voice took on an imploring edge to it I hadn't heard before when he said, "But Eric, it's *the Pentagon*. Do you have any idea of what it would mean to have a government contract like that? What they'd be willing to pay? How long they would agree to pay it? You're sitting on a gold mine. All you have to do is sign your name on the dotted line."

Eric's voice took on an edge of its own I hadn't heard coming from him before when he hissed, "At what cost *to me*? Do you think so little of me that I could be okay with living it up in the lap of luxury, paid for by the deaths of others, all because I gave them a way to become a better killer?"

"Grow up, Eric!" he yelled. "This country is at war! And when this one ends, another one will crop up somewhere else! Maybe things were different in the private boarding schools you attended, but in the real world it's the guy with the biggest stick who rules the playground! Your 'make love not war' attitude is fine for the hussies you amuse yourself with," with his eyes glancing not so subtly at me, "but this is *business*. *War is business* and you'd do yourself a favor by wrapping your genius head around *that*."

"Is that so, Victor?" he snarled and stood up. I was all for Eric beating his ass by that point, so I did nothing to try and interfere and only watched as he took another step closer to him and asked, "So this is nothing more than you wanting to stroke your dick to the tune of Yankee Doodle Dandy? What if the North Koreans were willing to pay us more? Or the Iranians? What if it was Vladimir Putin or Omar al-Bashir who was offering to fill your silk pockets with gold? Then what? Who's to say that whatever I pass onto the Pentagon doesn't end up in the wrong hands? That whoever has their finger on the trigger doesn't one day have a *bad day* and decide to spread the joy by pulling it unnecessarily? Can you guarantee me *that* won't ever happen?"

Yeah. What *he* said!

All of Victor's blustering came to an abrupt halt at Eric's questions and when his reddened face was reduced to a light pinkish hue, he finally said, "All I'm asking is for you to at least hear them out Eric. Can you at least do me that favor, *son*?"

God...I hated when he played the 'son' card on Eric. Victor had somewhat filled the role of his father well before his real father's death, so it was low. It was manipulative.

And it worked every time.

“Fine,” he sighed and sank back down into the chair. “I’ll listen to what they have to say, but wrap your head around *this*. I’m not going down in the history books as the real life Lex Luthor.” Turning to smile at me, with his eyes more than his lips, he added, “I would much rather fancy myself as a modern day Superman.”

True.

One of the first tasks I’d been assigned by him was to track down the very first issue of that particular comic to add to his already extensive collection.

And I wasn’t exactly opposed to seeing him in head to toe Lycra.

“That’s my boy,” he grinned and clapped his hand on Eric’s shoulder. Releasing it with a squeeze, he added, “Since you’re already here, I’ll give them a call and see if Colonel Flood is willing to come by this morning. That way you won’t have to make a special trip.”

Eric nodded and waved him off, looking more drained than tired, when Victor stopped in the doorway and turned back, saying, “Ms. Stackhouse tells me you’re working on something new. Care to share?”

Eric’s eyebrow rose questioningly my way, so I silently answered him with my own incredulous expression. He knew I didn’t know what he was working on and knew better than to think I would share it with Victor if I had. For all he knew my earlier ambiguous response to Victor could’ve meant Eric was working out a way for Godric’s shit to stink.

Just like my whole shitty morning thus far.

He smiled and kept his eyes trained on me, answering Victor with, “I’m working on keeping *Ms. Stackhouse’s* mouth too full to go telling tales and *no*, I don’t *care* to *share* her talents.”

Victor must've walked out while my eyes were doing their mandatory perimeter check of the back of my skull, but as soon as they righted themselves, I leaned across my – *his* – desk and hissed, “You *know* they all think I suck your cock like I’m trying to see how many licks it’ll take to get your Tootsie Roll to pop! Must you feed their cocksucking assumptions?”

“Can I feed you my cock instead?” he smirked. “It’s only fair since you fed me last night.”

“Keep it up and next time I’ll be feeding you your own cock,” I huffed, pretending to be upset when in reality, I was just glad he seemed calmed down from his argument with Victor. Eric was generally very laid back and I preferred him that way. He had enough stress he heaped on himself and the last thing he needed was anyone adding more to the pile.

“I know you work wonders, but if you can manage that feat, you’ll get more than one kind of raise out of it,” he smirked. “And trust me, *Ms. Stackhouse*, I can *keep it up*.” He broke through my faked angry facade when he grinned like a little boy and added, “But if I could do *that* with it, I would never leave the house.”

“You don’t need to be a genius to know that,” I laughed, happy he was back to his usual crude self. “I guess they’d call you Superman for a whole other reason, huh?”

His chuckle was interrupted with the sound of, “Babe? Am I early?”

The smiles were wiped from both of our faces as we each turned to the newest voice at my – *his* – office door. John Quinn had been riding my invisible dick for weeks, trying to get me to go out with him, while I tried to get the charity event to go off without a hitch using his event planning company.

Unfortunately his was one of the best in the business, so I’d politely refused him at every turn, but trying to get him to call me anything but ‘Babe’ was like trying to teach a tiger to bark.

Impossible.

But seeing the predatory stare coming from my employer reminded me I was more of a lion tamer anyway because Eric was clearly the king in this jungle, so I wasn't surprised when he stood up to face our newest guest. Power radiated from him despite the Ramones t-shirt, faded jeans, and battered Chucks that adorned his body.

It was as good a look on him as the Tom Ford suits hanging in his closet.

Eric said nothing, only adding to the tension in the room, but being fresh out of fucks to give now that the event was over, I didn't hide my irritation behind a fake smile when I greeted him with a firm, "It's *Miss Stackhouse*. John Quinn, I'd like to introduce the man behind your paycheck, Eric Northman. Mr. Northman, this is John Quinn. His company was responsible for the success of the Northman Foundation's charity event last night."

He strode into the room and thrust his oversized hand out towards Eric, gushing, "Mr. Northman, it's nice to finally meet you. I was hoping to see you at the event last night, but Sookie said you're a busy man.

Quinn finally let his hand drop when all Eric did was thrust both of his into his pockets, but his eyes never left him as he said, "First *babe* and now *Sookie*? I believe she said it's *Miss Stackhouse*."

What is this?

Was Eric...*jealous*?

Alright, *now* I was amused. I know he liked to tease me and I had no doubt he would absolutely agree to fuck me six ways to Sunday if I was game, but this took the cake. I'd long ago lost count of the number of women I'd swept out of his house the morning after his nights of debauchery, but they'd never bothered me.

Because they didn't matter. To either one of us.

But seeing Eric getting all riled up, over what?

Some other man seeming more familiar with me than Eric thought he had a right to?

That shit right there was funny and I nearly pressed the Godric app on my phone so he could enjoy it too.

Instead I remained a silent amused spectator, watching Quinn flounder, as he said, "Oh, well I uh...I guess I assumed you wouldn't be so formal. I apologize. It's just that *Miss Stackhouse* and I developed a close *friendship* over the last few weeks, while we worked putting your charity event together."

Ha! That was like saying I was BFF's with my mailman because he knew my name and where I lived.

Eric's glare turned my way, so I pulled on my Godrica mask and hoped he couldn't see the delight in my eyes when he turned his now green ones to me, asking, "Is that so?"

It sounded like a hypothetical question to me, so I treated him to my ambiguousness by responding, "There's nothing in the rule books that says *friendships* in the workplace are a no-no."

I knew I was giving Quinn the wrong impression – one I would quickly clear up when Eric wasn't within earshot – but I couldn't resist and nearly laughed out loud seeing Eric look like he'd managed the impossible and was now choking on his own dick.

I think I finally made his Tootsie Roll pop without ever touching him.

But I didn't think he'd be giving me another raise for managing this feat.



# Chapter 4 – Operation Werewolf

## EPOV

*Friendship.*

### *FRIENDSHIP?*

While I quickly tallied the number of times Sookie had told me she was meeting with the aforementioned purple pansy-eyed pussy event planner, I was forced to recalculate the odds of her ending up with me when she was out – apparently making *friends* – while doing her work for me.

And I didn't like that the odds were no longer in my favor.

It hadn't occurred to me she would have the time to spend on anyone else, not realizing that I was giving her that time by keeping her busy doing things on my behalf. But I also couldn't see a way of forcing her own assistant on her to keep her out of circulation and out of prying pussy eyes.

I would be forced to go back to the drawing board on that one.

But in the meantime...

“No, *friendships* in the workplace aren't prohibited,” I offered to her and then turned to the dick she wouldn't have the time to stroke in front of me, adding, “We appreciate all of your hard work and I'll be sure to recommend your company to others should the need arise.”

Others based in Alaska or Timbuktu.

Anywhere that was far enough away for him to keep his paws anywhere near Sookie.

He seemed dumbfounded by my dismissive tone, which only cemented the fact he was too dumb for the likes of Sookie. Something I would try and make

her see if she insisted on seeing the giant douchebag standing before us and I had high hopes that would happen sooner than later when she broke into the awkward silence, saying, “I’ll be sure to email you with a glowing recommendation for your services, Mr. Quinn. Now if you’ll excuse us, Mr. Northman and I have a very busy day ahead of us.”

Glowing recommendation?

A double entendre for a great fuck?

I hated unknown variables.

While I’d known Sookie knew none of the women I amused myself with meant anything to me, I hadn’t considered the possibility she *wouldn’t know* what *she* meant to me. That she was my rock. My caretaker. My best friend and only confidant. Yes, I teased and flirted with her mercilessly, but would she know it was a ruse? A defense mechanism to hide my true feelings away from her, knowing I would be devastated to find out she felt otherwise?

Would she know she was the only woman I could picture myself growing old with?

I didn’t know if I was in love with Sookie – I was definitely in deep *like* with her – but I did know she was the only one I could see myself falling in love with. That was the equivalent of finding the key to human regeneration in my book.

A miracle if there ever was one.

“That uh...would be great, *Miss Stackhouse*. I uh...I guess I’ll talk to you later then?” the big roid user finally stuttered.

Sookie made a noncommittal noise that sounded like, “Mmm...”

But did ‘Mmm...’ mean, ‘*Mmm...I can’t wait to fuck you again,*’ or, ‘*Mmm...not in your wildest dreams you giant pussy?*’

Fucking variables.

I hated them as much as I hated purple pansy-eyed pussy mother fuckers.

As soon as he was gone, I turned to her, not sure where to begin – if I would be able to go down that road at all – and ended up taking the chicken shit route by asking, “What are we going to be so busy doing today?”

I couldn't recall her mentioning anything out of the ordinary, but then I seemed to be very selective in what I wanted to hear coming from her.

A mistake I wouldn't be making again if it could end up costing me her.

“The way I see it,” she smiled, “We have a full day ahead of us trying to get *your* panties *untwisted* you big ass. Tell me you're jealous over Sir Babe-A-Lot, so I can give myself permission to fall on the ground and laugh my ass-you-don't-own off.”

I grinned at my own personal telepath and lied to her face, saying, “I'm not jealous.” And adding a dash of truth to my most epic of lies, I explained, “I'm greedy. I pay you well for your time and I want all of it devoted to me.”

She sauntered around the desk to lean her ass-I-*did*-own against it as she said, “So I'm not allowed to have my own *amusements* while you're busy with yours? I don't remember reading that in my contract.”

My fists involuntarily clenched at the thought of her *amusing* herself with the likes of anyone but me – hypocritical, I know – but I'd earned my title of being an arrogant ass for a reason. So I took another step closer to her, entering into her personal space, and nearly whispered in a heated voice, “You should have read the fine print.”

Watching her lick her lips and then lean towards me, did nothing to help me maintain my sanity when her breath fanned across my face, as she softly replied, “I did. There was no non-amusement clause.”

It was a game we played – flirting with one another until my eyes became crossed and my dick painstakingly hard – but it was getting harder to play.

Harder to keep it a game.

Maybe I'd just been fooling myself into thinking I could last for two more years. Maybe I'd just been fooling myself into believing she would come around despite my blatant womanizing.

Maybe I'd just been a fool.

I'd always been a go-getter. I'd never shied away from any challenge. If I wanted it, I went after it – be it animal, vegetable, mineral or theoretical. Some things were easier to obtain than others, but I never gave up despite whatever obstacles were in my way. But Sookie had taken me by surprise. When I first picked her resume out of the pile it was thanks to her unusual name.

What the fuck was a Sookie?

And then she walked through my door and showed me. More than her brains and more than her beauty, she continued to show me exactly who and what a Sookie was. And while I'd always known I wanted to fuck her, it was the depth of everything else I felt for her that snuck up on me.

It was what made me feel sucker punched right now at the thought she could be amusing herself with others.

I'd never wanted to kiss her more than I did at that very moment. It was an urge I'd felt plenty of times in the past, but it was a line I had yet to cross.

And that was saying a lot, considering just how many other lines I'd crossed with her up until that point.

But I think I'd always known, somewhere in the recesses of my mind, that once I did there would be no going back. At least not for me, so if she

decided *we* weren't going to pursue *us* any further, then I didn't know how I would be able to face her every day after that, seeing what I would be forced to realize would never be mine.

But knowing all the while I would be just as miserable if I didn't see her every day after that, in spite of being out of the running.

The thought sucked times infinity.

But I was saved from having to find out the hard way when the office phone beeped, followed by my ass kissing secretary's voice booming through the speaker as he said, "Mr. Northman. Mr. Madden wanted me to inform you Colonel Flood is on his way up to meet with you."

Sookie grimaced hearing his voice and I knew it was because she didn't like him. Truth be told, I didn't either, but he was efficient and did what he was told.

And I didn't have to worry about Sookie wanting to *amuse* herself with him.

"That's fine Bobby," I replied and leaned forward, pressing the front of my body against Sookie's, so I could disconnect the line. Her breath hitched in her throat – just like my dick hitched up a few notches in my pants feeling the heat of her body – so I didn't pull away at first.

Nor did she back away.

Or push me away.

And the battleship in my jeans was screaming, "Anchor's away!"

"What are you doing?" she softly breathed.

Testing the limits of my control.

"Experimenting," I finally replied.

Both of her hands ran up my front and came to rest on my chest, but I could still feel the fiery blaze left behind long after they'd touched my body, when she gave me a slight push and said, "Well I'm afraid your results will have to be inconclusive. I can hear Victor on his way back into the office."

Sookie's sonar. It never failed.

I had no problems flirting with her in front of Victor, but I wouldn't make her out to be my fuck toy in front of strangers. It was Sookie – not her position as my Executive Assistant – that demanded respect and I wouldn't give outsiders any reason to believe otherwise, so I reluctantly took a step back. And then another, until I was far enough away to see the flush of her skin and for her to scoot back around the desk and elegantly drop down into the chair.

My chair.

I should be in my chair with her in my lap.

But before I could suggest a change in the seating arrangements – appearances be damned – the sound of Victor's voice came booming through the still open doorway as he said, "Eric! We're in luck. The colonel was in the area and came straight over when I called."

Turning to face them, I was surprised to see how young the colonel was. I was used to meeting generals and admirals, with all of them reminding me of crotchety old grandfathers. But the guy standing at Victor's side could've believably passed for one of the SEALs who offed bin Laden.

And I was suddenly reminded of a late night confession, involving one too many mojitos, where Sookie drunkenly admitted she wasn't opposed to SEAL sex.

Fuckers. All of them.

“Mr. Northman,” he greeted me in a no nonsense tone. And because he didn’t appear overly interested in Sookie, I actually shook *his* offered hand as he said, “Colonel John Flood. I appreciate you taking the time to see me.”

Victor shut the door behind them, so I gestured for him to take a seat and said, “It’s Eric. Now what can I do for you Colonel?”

“It’s John,” he smiled, but his worried eyes belied the forced curve of his lips. The good thing about military folk was they didn’t beat around the bush. He wasn’t there to stroke my ego or any other part of me, so he reached into his pocket and took out a thumb drive. Handing it to Sookie, he said, “Ma’am, if you’d please.” While Sookie busied herself with uploading the files, the large flat screen hanging on the wall came to life so we could all see what the drive contained as Flood said, “I know the three of you already have top secret clearances thanks to the projects you’ve done for the military in the past. But what I’m about to show you, only the President and a select few members of his Cabinet – to include the Secretary of Defense – have been privy to. We’re at a loss Eric, so we’re really hoping you can give us something to go on here.”

Sookie handed him the remote so he could select whatever files he needed to and the first picture to come onto the screen was a satellite image. “What you’re looking at is a remote area in Estonia located about fifty kilometers west of Tartu. It’s called *Võrtsjärve hoiuala* and billed as a nature preserve,” he explained and clicked the remote several times, zooming in on the shot until the shadowy images at the center became more defined.

But it only made me all the more confused.

“I’m afraid I don’t understand, John. Are wolves not indigenous to that area?” I asked, seeing the pack of five.

They appeared larger than the average wolf, but they were just oversized wild dogs as far as I was concerned and I couldn’t imagine why the military would be interested in them. Or me for that matter.

My name wasn't Cesar Milan.

"I'm getting there," he sighed. "Just watch."

He opened a video file this time. It looked to be of the same area only this time it was five *men* standing in the center. The images were taken at night, so the video was shot using night vision, but the outlines were unmistakable, which only made it seem like a mistake when they...

"NO!" I shouted and leapt up from my chair to get closer to the screen. Studying it, I reiterated, "No fucking way!"

"That's what the President said," he smiled without any amusement.

I motioned for him to rewind the footage and he obliged me, but that didn't make it any more sensible to my senses.

Men turning into wolves.

Werewolves?

I would sooner believe I could lick my own balls before I would believe lycanthropy was real.

"Were any images shot during the daytime?" I asked incredulously. "If there's a skinny emo looking kid, sparkling in a field of wildflowers nearby, then I can think of someone else you should talk to."

Because, seriously. No. Fucking. Way.

"From your lips to my daughter's greatest wish come true," he smiled, genuinely this time, and then clicked on another video file explaining, "Our satellite picked that up six weeks ago. This was acquired by one of our Black Ops teams from a nearby facility two weeks ago."



On the video was a man strapped down to a table. He didn't appear unwilling, just a little frightened, when a latex covered hand holding a syringe appeared off to his side. The contents were injected into the I.V. attached to his arm and for a few moments afterward, nothing happened. There was a time/date generator at the bottom left corner of the screen, so we could see exactly how long everything took.

The video stopped and restarted on Day Two, approximately twenty-four hours later, showing beads of sweat had begun cropping up on the man's forehead, face, and neck. His eyes rolled back in his head and his entire body began to shiver, but he didn't seem cognizant of his surroundings, with his glazed eyes opening and closing at random.

It was on Day Four, ninety-six hours after the injection, that he screamed out in pain and it was only the leather straps holding him down that kept his flailing body from falling from the table.

Day Six had him muttering in incoherent Russian, but he didn't seem to be in any more pain. The shivering and sweating had stopped, but we could see on the machines monitoring him, his core body temperature had been elevated to one hundred and six degrees. It made sense his body's immune system was fighting against the foreign substance injected into him days earlier, but it was his resting heart rate that had my attention. He looked to be around my age, so his maximum heart rate should have been around 190 beats per minute and he would have had to have been running at top speed to achieve it. So the two hundred and twenty beats per minute it was pumping – *while he slept* – only left me even more perplexed.

On Day Ten, someone entered the room and, using a scalpel, sliced a one inch deep by three inch long incision into his left pectoral muscle. The now fully conscious man barely showed any signs of discomfort and the camera remained trained on his wound, without any stoppage of the video, so we could all be left dumbfounded again by the end of it.

Eight minutes.

In the span of eight minutes the bleeding slowed to a stop and without the aid of any outside forces, the wound seemed to heal on its own, leaving behind nothing more than a light pink scar that disappeared a few minutes later.

It would seem I wasn't the only one looking into the benefits of human regeneration.

But it was Day Fourteen that left me slack jawed. The camera was zoomed out, leaving the entire room visible. The unknown patient was alone in it now and the lights were dimmed, just as the sound of the window blinds being mechanically raised could be heard in the background, revealing it was night time outside.

With the full moon visible through the window.

So I could only guess it was perhaps that instigating factor that precipitated the violent seizure the man suffered. A yellow glow lit up in his eyes in the moonlit room and I watched completely stunned as the brutal sounds of bones breaking narrated what my eyes still refused to believe they were seeing.

In the span of fourteen days, a seemingly *human* man was transformed into the fully formed wolf now crouched down on top of the table, growling menacingly at the empty room and baring his teeth.

All throughout the documentary, other people had occasionally entered the shot, but their faces were never shown. Their thoughts left unspoken, so their voices were never heard. There was no way to identify them from the video that I could see, but I had a short list of people who I thought could have the knowhow and possibly the wherewithal to have succeeded in making the impossible a reality.

"CGI," I muttered when the video ended, even though I didn't believe that either.

I wanted to believe everything I had just seen had been computer generated imagery because there was no way werewolves actually existed.

At least not in my world.

“We’ve had our techs go over it with a fine tooth comb and they claim it hasn’t been enhanced in any way they can see,” he sighed. “But you’re welcome to keep the thumb drive and go over it yourself if you’d like.”

My mind was in a tailspin, with possibly two hundred and twenty thoughts pumping through it per minute, when I finally zeroed in on one and spoke it aloud.

Slumping back down into my seat, I scrubbed the shock from my face with my hands and asked, “Why are you coming to me with this? What is it you’re looking for me to do here?”

No one – not even Sookie – knew I was looking into human regeneration. I knew what *my* interests were in this, but they were purely from a scientific standpoint and I wasn’t sure what kind of help the government thought I could be to them.

I hadn’t yet mastered the key to human regeneration, much less ventured into figuring out how to turn humans into the things teenage Twilight fantasies were made of.

He opened with a stern, “Mr. Northman,” and then did an about face, wiping the military man from his expression and turning it into one more human saying, “Eric...we’ve already put feelers out to the heads of every biological research team out there. If you can believe it, the CDC has a plan in place for a zombie outbreak, but no one is prepared for something like this. Everyone we’ve spoken to have all come back with the same answer.” Locking his gaze onto mine, he said, “Eric Northman is the man to see, or so I’m told. So here I am, seeing you and hoping like hell you can find us some answers.”

He clicked the remote again, bringing up a map of the planet, and I counted ten markers at various points across the globe. Three in Eastern Europe, including the one in Estonia. Two in Africa. Another two in South America and the remaining three scattered throughout Asia.

“Our satellites have picked up similar camps in these areas, but by the time our teams have arrived on site they’ve been deserted. Two of our best men died getting ahold of that video, but in doing so we’ve unavoidably shown our hand. Whoever is behind this knows we know about them now.”

Leaning forward in his seat, his eyes drilled into me as he said, “We don’t know what these...*people* are capable of, but we suspect they’re breeding some sort of super soldiers. We don’t know what their weaknesses are. We have yet to face one to know if they’re susceptible to conventional weapons, but as you saw for yourself, they heal at a rapid rate. We need *answers* Eric and we’re hoping you can give them to us.”

Reaching into his briefcase, he pulled out a container and from it, produced several slides saying, “These are samples our teams were able to gather at a few of the abandoned camps. Most of them were burned beyond recognition, so we were lucky to have found them. Our people said they haven’t seen anything like them before, but we’re hoping they’ll help you figure out what exactly we’re dealing with.”

I was still feeling gobsmacked – something I rarely felt when it came to human biology – but I was no longer dealing with *just human* biology. So I took the offered samples, no longer able to focus on anything other than what I now held in my hand and said, “I’ll take a look and let you know what I find.”

A grateful smile lit up on his face and he stood up, reaching out once more to shake my hand, as he said, “We appreciate it Eric. Welcome to Operation Werewolf.”

## Chapter 5 – Operation Counting Sheep

## **SPOV**

“Has he moved from the room at all?” I asked without preamble, coming through the front door and dropping my things onto the floor. It was late and I was tired.

And worried.

“Does going to the bathroom count?” Godric asked, managing to echo my worry in the sound of his voice.

“Not really,” I sighed, both out of concern and from the heavenly feel of the circulation returning to my toes as I slid off my high heels.

The price of beauty was paid for by the foot. Both of them.

But ever since Colonel Flood had dropped the werewolf bomb on us a month earlier, Eric had been paying the price of getting very little sleep and not much else for his sacrifice.

He worked. Nonstop.

He toiled the day and night away. Nonstop.

He railed and raged, sat and meditated, all for naught. At least, for now. Nonstop.

And while the fantastical – if not dangerous – puzzle he was trying to unravel was undoubtedly important, I couldn’t say it was worth his health.

Or his sanity.

“Has he made *any* progress?” I asked, letting my hope shine through in my voice. One that dissipated just as quickly with his negative response.

Something – *anything* – that would at least make him feel like he was making some headway would go a long way to getting him to take a break.

Something he hadn't had in much too long.

A month to be exact.

While Eric didn't like playing grown up, he was still responsible enough to oversee his business. It was something he took pride in, but his interest in nearly everything that didn't involve Operation Werewolf had fallen by the wayside. I just didn't realize how bad it had gotten until the department head for accounting had stopped by my – *Eric's* – office earlier, near the end of the workday. Apparently Eric had been ignoring Bruce's emails. Otherwise he would've known several of Northman Inc.'s accounts had been drained to the tune of three hundred thousand dollars – give or take – over the last month or so. It was a drop in the bucket compared to Eric's overall wealth, but that didn't matter. What *did* matter was that the company had a rat who was apparently taking it upon themselves to play while the king of the pride was away.

Away in his lab for the last month.

And it once again pissed me off for him. Bruce explained he checked and rechecked the ledgers, but couldn't figure out where the money was disappearing to, so I took it upon myself to hire an outside forensic accounting firm to audit the company.

I'd find that rat and wring their goddamn neck.

But it was just one more sign Eric was slipping away from the human world. Even when he was at his most manic – for lack of a better word – he still took the time to go over the company's business dealings. He may have blown off going to board meetings, but in reality there was nothing they could tell him that he wouldn't already know going into it. He usually kept an eye on

everything concerning Northman Inc., so his physical presence was more of a dog and pony show.

And Eric was neither a dog nor a pony. He was a stallion. Thoroughbred, of course.

He'd even forsaken his occasional takeout – a record drought so far as I could tell – but I'd be willing to traipse the entire line of Radio City Rockettes through the house if I thought it would do him any good.

Probably.

Maybe.

The truth was something between us had changed. I couldn't put my finger on it, but it happened not so long after Flood had dropped the pile of wolf shit in Eric's lap. In the last month, I'd been Eric's only contact with the outside world and even though his mind was always on his work, we seemed to somehow grow closer in spite of it. He still chuckled at my jokes and flirted here and there, but when he looked at me it was...*different*.

Different *but* nice just the same.

I didn't know what to think about that.

So I set it aside – again – and grabbed the *other* takeout I had no qualms bringing to him.

Chinese.

Making my ritualistic trek down the stairs to his lab, I nearly called out to him when I stopped myself in the nick of time.

Eric sat at his desk, his chin in one hand, while a pen precariously hovered over a piece of paper in the other. The floor surrounding him was littered with the crumpled up pieces of his self-proclaimed failures – just like his desk was

littered with a hodgepodge of everything he'd been working on – but it was his eyes I was drawn to. More over the fact they were clearly nearing the end of fighting a losing battle with the Sandman.

Maybe next week Flood would stop by to tell us *he* was real too.

Just as his head nodded off to the side, he jerked upright again and his eyes sprang wide open. But seeing him reach for his stash of Red Bull, I finally made myself – and my worries – known, by entering the room and saying, “Uh uh. You need to go to bed and you're going. *Right now, mister.*”

His lips quirked into a small smile, broken up by the yawn he couldn't contain, until he eventually sighed out, “But *mmoom*, can't I stay up for just a *little* longer?”

As near as I could tell, he'd been up for nearly two and a half days by that point and the last time he'd slept for more than three hours at any one given time had been well before Colonel Flood had ever darkened his door. He'd never been one to need much sleep, but this was pushing it, even by Eric standards. So I had no problem sounding like the nagging mom he claimed me to be when I marched over and grabbed his hand out from under his chin, pulling on it and saying, “No. I can't carry your big ass up the stairs by myself and I'm not leaving you to catnap on your desk – *again*. So come on, Sleeping Beauty, let's go.”

He was surprisingly strong for someone who barely ate or slept anymore and I gasped out loud when he pulled me back and lifted me to sit on the desk in front of him.

And I thanked baby Jesus I'd chosen slacks over wearing a skirt that day.

Still grinning at me, he slowly lowered his head onto my lap as he said, “I think it can only be called a *catnap* if I'm allowed to rest on your...”

“Eric!” I admonished before he could finish his sentence.



Lifting only his eyes towards me, they were full of mirth – among other things – when he asked, “You named your pussy Eric? I’m flattered.”

“You shouldn’t be,” I lied. “Eric *Dane* can take my internal temperature any time he wants.”

The truth was Eric *Northman* was one of the leading men in the all-star cast of my spunk bank material, so it wouldn’t be the first time either set of my lips had cried out for him.

But we weren’t going there.

But there was something about the way he talked dirty to me that always made my girly bits stand up and take notice. I blamed my parents. The drunken trucker and dirty stripper pair, not the ones that raised me. But it was why I’d tried to head him off at the pass when I realized where his words were taking him.

Because those kinds of words always threatened to take my panties down with them.

“*Dane?*” he scoffed. “Why keep the company of dogs when you could have me?” he added sleepily.

Because I could never really *have* you.

*Shut up crack baby love child!*

I shook my head – not wanting to go *there* either – and ignored his question in favor of asking one of my own. Running my hand through his barely damp locks, I asked, “You showered?”

He didn’t smell funky, so that was a plus.

His head nodded, putting the right amount of pressure and friction where he had no business putting them, and said, “I’d hoped it would wake me up, but it seems to be having the opposite effect.”

Speaking of effects...

The heat from his breath was intermingling with the moisture I could feel spreading in between my legs and causing an inner tingling sensation in me. One I hoped to hide from him, so I leaned back onto one hand, hoping – like milk – the distance would do a body good, while attempting to sweep my hair around to rest over the front of my shoulder with the other, so it wouldn’t land in any of the petri dishes set up around me. And in doing so, just as I felt my earring come loose, we both heard the ‘tink’ sound as it landed.

Followed by the sound of sizzling?

Before I knew what was happening, Eric jerked up and slid my ass across his desk, looking for the source, when he suddenly stood up and grabbed my face in both of his hands.

For some strange reason, I thought he was going to kiss me.

And for some strange reason, I was disappointed when all he did was tilt my head from side to side and ask, “What is that? Silver? Platinum? White gold?”

“What?” I asked with confusion. “Are you quoting Justin Bieber lyrics?”

Because if this was some weird way of telling me as long as I loved him/proposal for him to be my boyfriend, then he was definitely delirious and I’d call in a doctor to medically knock his ass out if I had to.

“Look!” he exclaimed and jerked my head to the side with his hands still attached to my face, so I could see what all of the hubbub was about. My poor earring – a cheap flea market purchase I’d made my freshman year in college – was now smoking in one of the petri dishes.

“What is that?” I asked, lamenting over my sentimental loss since it looked ruined. “Are you playing with acid again?”

It was hard to tell what he’d had in there, but the icky-poo-kah-ness of it told me even if it wiped clean, it would never be gracing my earlobe again.

We had a mutual habit of ignoring each other’s question because that’s exactly what he did when he clarified his earlier question with, “What kind of metal are your earrings made of?”

“Silver!” I answered exasperatedly. “Why? What is that?”

His eyes lit up just as his lips descended on mine, but before I could process either one of those things, he pulled back just as quickly and exclaimed, “*That is a breakthrough!*”

I had a feeling he wasn’t talking about our first kiss. Not that I’d imagined what that would be like.

Much.

So I kept quiet, while I watched him pretend like his lips weren’t as soft as a cloud that made another set of my lips as volatile as a category 5 hurricane, but seeing him reenergize with this new discovery – whatever the fuck it was – made me put my foot down.

Both of them.

I slid off of the desk and onto my bare feet, saying, “No! Whatever it is you’re acting all giddy about can wait. You were falling asleep when I walked in here, so we’re going to follow through with *that* process first. You need your rest.”

“Sookie! I can’t sleep *now!* You don’t understand! That dish had a sample of *werewolf blood* in it. I’ve been wracking my brain, trying to think up different ways to test it because there’s nothing conventional about it. It’s reacted like any other blood would *normally react*, but its DNA is anything

but *normal*. Part canine, part human, part something unidentifiable – except for the fact that *it's unidentifiable*. And *you* – you genius girl – just gave me a something to go on!”

His high speed rambling left my head spinning, but in all honesty – I didn't care. About werewolves or Tinkerbells or fucking bigfoot. All I cared about at the moment was that Eric was slowly but surely running himself into the ground. Thanks to his self-imposed solitude, his skin was paler than I'd ever seen before and I was done.

Done!

Showing him just how genius I was, I merely looked at him while calling out, “Godric?”

“Yes, Miss Stackhouse?” he replied.

Staring into Eric's eyes with a challenging look, I declared, “Authentication code: Golf-Oscar-Oscar-Delta-November-India-Golf-Hotel-Tango. Operation Counting Sheep is now in effect.”

Eric looked confused and his confusion only grew when all of his electronic gadgets powered down. The lights dimmed, so we could still see enough to move around, but other than the central air and refrigeration units, for all intents and purposes the entire house was now suffering a Godric-made blackout.

“Sookie,” Eric hissed out warningly.

“Eric,” I hissed back, but it was sadly hindered by my victorious smile.

“Godric!” he yelled, choosing to ignore me instead. “Turn the power back on right now!”

Like Maker, like AI child, Godric ignored him and the sounds of a lullaby softly filtered into the room, making Eric look downright hostile when I snickered, but I didn't care.

Or rather, I *did* care. Probably more than I should, but I wouldn't let him continue to hurt himself – by not taking care of himself.

When he was done stomping around and tossing pens and paper around the room, he finally came to a stop right in front of me and calmly uttered, "You're fired."

"I'll clean my desk out in the morning. *After* you've had a full night's sleep," I smirked.

After a five minute stare down, his shoulders eventually slumped in defeat, and he turned towards the stairs, pouting out, "I hate you."

"That's okay," I chuckled, following along behind him. "*Godric* loves me."

The melody to Twinkle Twinkle Little Star suddenly changed into Marvin Gaye's Let's Get It On, which I laughed nervously at, while thinking his choice in music was a really bad idea since we were heading into Eric's bedroom by then. But Eric didn't seem to notice and only said, "And *that* is why you'll never be a *real boy*, Pinocchio. She's *mine*."

I silently watched Captain Caveman as he took off his t-shirt and stripped down to his boxers (with another thankful shout-out to baby Jesus from me that he was wearing them at all), but it was the fact he did it perfunctorily instead of like a striptease that told me he really was exhausted. I hadn't yet been witness to the full monty, but I'd seen his bare ass on more than one occasion.

And what an ass it was.

While he crawled into his bed, I proceeded to pick up his dropped clothes as I teasingly reminded him, “You fired me, remember? So that means I’m up for grabby Godric hands.”

Perhaps taking my teasing a little too literally, he reached out and grabbed my arm as I made a grab for his t-shirt and said, “No. You’re mine, no matter what douchebaggery comes out of my mouth.”

The atmosphere in the room suddenly changed. It felt charged. Serious. More than I wanted to acknowledge, so I pretended I didn’t notice and smiled, admitting, “Well...you *are* a douchebag, so I guess it’s to be expected.”

Not even a lie.

He didn’t let go of me, nor did he smile. His only response was, “Stay.”

It was closing in on midnight, so I’d had no intention of driving home and informed him, “I am. I brought my bag in with me when I got here.”

I’d been staying over more often than not lately – worried about Eric – but this was the first time I’d actually managed to get him all the way into his room and into bed. It was why I’d come up with Operation Counting Sheep and convinced my invisible cohort to play along, no matter how mad Eric got.

Being Godric’s favorite had its benefits.

Eric gave my arm a tug, reminding me he was stronger than he looked, as he spelled it out by saying, “No, stay *here*.”

“What?” I nervously laughed again, hoping Godric could read my side-eyed glare and realize it was time to ix-nay on the sexin’ song still softly playing in the background.

Apparently Eric hadn’t taught him to speak side-eyed pig Latin.

“You know I’m dying to go back downstairs and I’ll work by candlelight if I have to, but if *you’re* here in *my* bed, then I doubt anything short of a Godzilla attack would get me to leave it.”

That was what I was worried about.

The Godzilla I suspected was lurking underneath his H&M boxers attacking.

My poor Tokyo wouldn’t stand a chance.

“I’ll tie you down,” I offered before my brain had a chance to catch up. I’d meant it only so he couldn’t leave the room, but of course – this was *Eric* I was talking to.

Chuckling, I could see his eyes darken in the darkened room, when he replied, “I only meant for us to snuggle, but if *you* had other ideas, then by all means – *share them*. Use dirty words while you’re at it.”

Shit? Damn? Hell? Mother fucker?

Those were some of the dirty words currently flitting through my brain.

And genius or not, I doubted he would understand the context if I mentioned my Tokyo.

Finally latching onto something that wouldn’t be taken out of context, I asked, “Snuggle? Since when does *Eric Northman* snuggle?”

The image was the equivalent of seeing Genghis Khan in a tutu.

While I’d cajoled many of his morning-afters from the house, the one thing I’d never been witness to was him interacting with them in any way. Not once had I ever even seen him flirt with another woman in my presence and not once did I ever find him in the same room with any of his conquests. More than once I’d found him asleep in his own bed, after coming across one of his dick

dipping dalliances somewhere else in the house. But he never stayed with them – that I knew of – once he was done with them.

It probably helped me to keep in context what they meant – or didn't mean – to him. But it also probably helped my feelings for him to slowly change in ways that they had no business changing into.

Yet another thing I didn't want to think about.

"I like snuggling," he admitted. "I just haven't found anyone worth snuggling with, but *you were made* for it." Pulling me closer, he ran his other hand over my hip and added, "Among other things."

"We're not having sex Eric."

And I meant it.

Probably.

Mostly.

No. There would be no giant lizard invading my Tokyo.

Almost certainly.

"Come on Sookie," he yawned out. "Just get your ass in bed and shut up already. I'm too tired to launch a full out assault, but I'm not too tired to go back downstairs and work. Take your pick."

Well, he *did* look snuggable with his hair all pushed up on his pillow. And he *did* recently shower, so he didn't smell like a hobo. And since he really *did* need to stay in bed, I shrugged my shoulders and shrugged away the thought that no other woman got to sleep in his bed, as I tried to pull my arm free from his grip saying, "Fine. I just need to go get my bag."



“If you take one step out of this room, I’ll go back downstairs,” he warned. Shaking my arm, that was still holding onto his t-shirt, he offered, “Just wear this.”

And since his t-shirt was grey – just like the area surrounding our relationship – I chose to believe I wasn’t admitting defeat by agreeing.

Once I was changed, with my face now scrubbed free of makeup, I crawled into his bed beside him. Awkward had no chance to join us – despite the small island he used as a mattress – because no sooner had my ass hit the sheets than his arm snaked around my middle and pulled my back against the front of his body.

Dear Baby Jesus, please keep his *other* snake from tempting me with his apples.

Amen.

“Relax,” he whispered into my ear and caused shivers to run down my ramrod spine. Noticeable shivers because he added, “I won’t bite, unless you shimmy your ass against me like that again.”

Laugh?

Cry?

What was the appropriate response here?

I decided to pretend I was Godrica and – like my AI twin – I didn’t understand his side-eyed pig Latin. Allowing myself to do as he said and relax, I sank even further back into him, and we both sighed in unison.

He was a really good snuggler.

And my last thought before I fell asleep was that he must have been telepathic because he whisper returned my unspoken sentiment, saying, “See? Made for snuggling.”

So I was sure I must have dreamt the part when I thought I heard him whisper add, “Made for me.”

## Chapter 6 – Cause and Effect

### EPOV

As I slowly came to, my first thought was how rested I felt. But that didn't stay at the forefront for very long thanks to a couple of *other* things I was feeling. Namely the unmistakable feel of a bare breast cupped in my hand and the pulsing of my already wide awake cock against what was pressed in front of me. My mind went blank for a moment over the sheer fact I didn't sleep with anyone.

I'd had sex with plenty, but sleep never entered the equation.

Just like they never entered my room.

But it was more so her scent than the mass of blond hair my slowly opened eyes could see that told me who was in my bed. And since I had a handful of one of her better assets and my dick trying to make himself at home in one of her other ones, I wasn't sure what I should do.

I knew what I *wanted* to do, but that was likely at the opposite end of the spectrum of what I *should* do.

Figuring I should at least start out by seeing if she was awake, I softly whispered, “Sookie?”

She shifted ever so slightly, signaling she was awake, and whispered back, “Justin?”

“Justin?” I snarled, unintentionally squeezing what was in my hand, causing her to gasp and – I assumed – unintentionally arch her back so her ass was *this close* to becoming my cock’s new favorite private getaway.

“Mmhm,” she half-sighed/half-moaned. Hearing and feeling her reaction, my anger at her calling me another name was quickly channeling itself into other avenues. Ones that all ended with me in her channel.

My fingertip took it upon itself to trace over her pert nipple before she placed her hand over my own to hold it still as she said, “Feels like you’re either trying to bring sexy back or you’re attempting to put your dick in my box. To quote my douchebag boss, take your pick, Timberlake.”

“Thicke,” I murmured, burrowing my face further into her neck and intentionally moving my hips against her own, so she could feel just how thick she made me, but feeling more in sync with Robin Thicke at the moment.

The lines were as blurred as they ever were.

“Oh,” she snickered. “Are we playing name that adjective? Because I’d go with *bigheaded*. In more ways than one, so I should get double the points.”

She didn’t do anything to stop me, but she didn’t do anything to lead me to believe her vision was just as blurry as my own at the moment. If she had been anyone else, I wouldn’t have hesitated to keep going because why else would they be in bed with me?

But if she had been anyone else, she wouldn’t have been in *my bed* with me.

“What are we doing?” I finally asked when I couldn’t figure out what to do.

Well, I knew *what to do*, but I didn’t want last night to be a onetime thing and I didn’t know where to go from here. I wanted something more with Sookie, but I didn’t know if she was on the same page yet. I didn’t want to have to bully her into sharing my bed with me, but I knew the more time she spent

with me in such an intimate setting – even if we only *slept* – it could only work in my favor.

Instead of falling victim to my poorly worded, ‘Where is this headed?’ relationship question, she chose the oblivious route by responding, “*I’m* trying not to pee on your bed, but I fell asleep in a snuggie and woke up booby trapped. I’ve been held at dick point for the better part of the night and I’m afraid to make any sudden moves in case it goes off. I’d ask you to call 911 for me, but I’m afraid they’ll just think my pseudo-celeb boss is a victim of swatting. How about you?”

She’d always had an innate ability to put me at ease and I couldn’t help but laugh at the description of her *harrowing night*, so I reluctantly released her from her *booby trap* – kudos to my hand for sneaking up her shirt in the middle of the night though – but I still kept her at dick point hoping she would set it off.

It wouldn’t take much.

Moving my hand down further so I could wrap it around her waist and squeeze, I decided to just let it be for now and chuckled, “*Someone* must have been awake for a while.”

She gripped my arm in both of her hands, trying and failing to remove it, as she giggled, “*Someone* must be hoping for a golden shower. Quit squeezing ‘cause you’re probably not gonna like what comes out of me.”

On the contrary, I seemed to like *everything* that came out of her. A lot.

And I wanted to cum *in her*. A lot.

But since she was so at ease – in my bed and with me – I didn’t want to give her any reason to not want to come back, so I didn’t push the issue – for now – and merely teased, “Why? Do you have to fart?”

“Why?” she laughed, ignoring my question and turning around to face me to ask another one. “Do you enjoy getting baked in a Dutch oven?”

Fucking hell...

I’d always thought Sookie was beautiful, but seeing her there in my bed – waking up next to her – wrapped around her, I just...

There were no words.

Well, there *were*, but apparently we were both taking the oblivious route for now.

And reminding me of her sometimes telepathy, she tapped her finger on the tip of my nose and said, “Hold that thought,” before she disentangled herself from me and the sheets and took off for the bathroom. A few minutes later I heard the toilet flush and then the sound of water running in the sink, when she finally opened the door so I could see her with *my* toothbrush sticking out of her mouth.

“Hope you don’t mind,” she grinned, with a trail of toothpaste slowly working its way down from the corner of her mouth. “My boss is a real hard ass and wouldn’t let me get my own toothbrush last night.”

Her boss was *hard* alright. Painfully so.

“Sounds like a douchebag,” I smiled back at her, feeling happier than I’d thought possible over the domesticity of it all.

“So you’ve met,” she grinned with wide-eyed acknowledgement and turned to walk back into the bathroom. Even the sound of her spitting and gurgling was cute.

I was so fucked.

It didn’t take a genius to know it.

She walked back into the room and ripped the sheet off of me before taking ahold of my hand and pulling, saying, “Come on. Breakfast time.”

I might have put up more of a resistance – if only to reassure myself she didn’t have my balls on a leash – but considering she hadn’t bothered changing out of just my t-shirt, I didn’t see the need to deny myself the view.

And what a view it was.

Sookie was much shorter than my six foot four frame, so my shirt covered more of her than some dresses I’d seen her wear. But *knowing* it was *my shirt* draped on her braless body made it seem sexier than if she’d been buck naked.

Well, maybe not. But still, it was sexy.

I stepped into one of the downstairs bathrooms, now that I’d managed to will my hard on away enough to take a leak myself, and seeing her overnight bag lying by the front door, I figured turnabout was fair play.

What I hadn’t figured on was finding her lacy underthings when I’d gone in search of her toothbrush.

And *back* to having a raging hard on.

My teeth had probably never been so clean and I likely scrubbed most of my enamel away, while waiting for my erection to go away. Normally I wouldn’t have had such an obvious reaction because *normally* we weren’t wandering around together in nothing but boxers and t-shirts.

But I could definitely get used to this new normal.

I eventually found her in the kitchen where she was already cooking up a storm, so I asked the obvious.

“Where did all of this food come from?”

“Douchebag,” she muttered loud enough for me to hear, while flipping over a pancake as she said it. “Your house is *always* fully stocked with food. Something you would *know* if you bothered looking for something to *eat*.”

She was back to using her mom tone of voice, something I was quite used to by now, but seeing the worry in her eyes – knowing it was me she was worried about – made me bite back my locked and loaded snarky reply.

So I went with a simple, “Thanks,” when she handed me a plate loaded with pancakes and bacon.

And her simple smile back at me merely confirmed I was definitely fucked.

The moan left my throat as soon as the first bite hit my tongue. I hadn’t realized how hungry I was until I was already halfway through the plate, but as soon as I could force myself to take a breather, I asked, “So what do you have going on today?”

Sookie was very detail oriented. It was something we had in common and she always kept her calendar up to date, so I could always pull it up and see where she would be at any given moment. But I hadn’t been paying much attention to it lately, so I had no idea if she had somewhere she needed to be soon.

And glancing at the clock for the first time that morning, I was surprised to see it was nearly noon. No wonder I’d felt so well rested. The last time I’d slept for that long, I had to have been a child, but I was anxious to get back down to the lab. Silver allergies were rare, but they didn’t cause the kind of reaction we’d witnessed the night before.

And just as my mind started going over all of the possibilities of where my research could take me with the newfound knowledge, Sookie brought me back from it all when she leaned over and whispered conspiratorially, “Well, don’t tell my douchebag boss, but I’m playing hooky today.”

“You are?” I asked, with my mind now wiped clean of the experiments I was planning, replaced by my wonder over what she planned on doing. I didn’t care that she wanted to take the day off. It was something Sookie rarely – if ever – did. I was more interested in if she had plans to spend the day with someone.

Someone who wasn’t me.

Someone possibly named Justin.

Someone probably not Timberlake.

“I am,” she nodded. But I wasn’t sure if she was possibly confirming a rendezvous with someone who possibly was or wasn’t Justin Timberlake until she added, “But if the douchebag is paying attention, he might catch me at it because I plan on spending the day at his house outside by the pool.”

Oh he was paying attention alright.

Every part of him.

“Did you bring a swimsuit?” I asked in a hoarse voice, hoping and praying like hell that she hadn’t.

Skinny dipping the day away suddenly sounded like a *great* idea.

“I guess you’ll just have to *pay attention* to see,” she smiled and winked at me, adding, “Douchebag.”

Seriously. Fucked.

That was me.

Even if I hadn’t been submersed in Operation Werewolf for the last month, I’d already decided it was in my best interests to give up my womanizing ways if I ever wanted Sookie to give me a shot. Trying to hide it from her wasn’t an



option either. It would've amounted to lying and I wanted her to choose me without anything that would influence her to believe I'd been something I wasn't. As it stood now, she knew me better than anyone, so if she chose to be with me there wouldn't be any surprises for her.

Well, maybe the intensity of my sexual drive when I – hopefully – had free reign to fuck her senseless whenever I wanted to might be one.

Surprise!

Nothing more was said, so once we were done eating, Sookie loaded the dishwasher and then added an extra sway to her hips as she left the kitchen. Scientifically proving she indeed held the lead on the invisible leash attached to my balls, I followed along behind her and was gifted with the view of her bending – at the waist – to pick up her overnight bag.

Pink lace had never looked so inviting before.

It made me wonder what other shades of pink could be found on her body, but she left me wondering when she wandered into the bathroom and shut the door behind her. Only so I could stand there gobsmacked when she opened the door a few minutes later and revealed a few scant inches of fabric could simultaneously cover up the parts of her I was desperate to see and drive me insane.

She barely glanced my way as she sauntered towards the patio, merely calling out over her shoulder, “Coming?”

Not yet.

But soon. Very soon.

It took me a moment to register her disappearance through the door. Probably because my mind was busy, replaying her departure over and over.

Sookie had an ass on her that should be illegal.

And I wanted to do very naughty – and possibly illegal – things to it, but it took Godric speaking up for me to shake the shake of her ass from my brain when he said, “I believe Miss Stackhouse would like some company by the pool. I would go, but I’m afraid the 3D body in the likeness of Eric Dane I’m printing out for me to utilize isn’t coming fast enough.”

“Asshole,” I muttered and went to change into a pair of swim trunks.

“Yes,” he replied. “That is on the schematics as well.”

I couldn’t get outside and away from the theme song to Grey’s Anatomy fast enough, but then everything melted away from my mind once I got there. Because there was Sookie, lying on an inflatable raft in the middle of the pool, needing only a few scant inches of fabric to keep my attention.

“Took you long enough,” she smiled.

Oh, I’d show her *long enough*.

In fact, she could probably see it growing long right now. But if she did, she pretended not to, so I dove into the water and swam up alongside her, still wondering the same thing as that morning.

“What are we doing?” I asked as soon as the thought entered my mind. I wanted to know and yet I didn’t.

It was confusing to say the least.

“If you have to ask, then it’s really been too long.” Brushing the wet hair away from my eyes, she cupped my cheek in her hand and smiled replying, “*We’re relaxing.*”

Huh. Good enough.

And as though she had magical powers that made it so just because she’d said it, I felt myself relax. Truly relax for the first time in I didn’t know how long.

We spent the entire day just laying around, talking about whatever came to mind and nothing at all. We napped together on one of the oversized chaise lounges and Sookie made us a late lunch/early dinner that we shared picnic style on the lawn.

When the sun went down, I got a sudden bad feeling that our day would come to an end with the end of daylight, but because she knew me better than I gave her credit for, Sookie just smiled at me and asked what kind of movie I was in the mood for.

So we moved into my media room, snuggling together on the couch and watched *Weird Science*, with her laughing out loud over my confession that Godric was nearly modeled to be like Kelly LeBrock's character, Lisa.

She was more surprised I *hadn't* gone through with it than the fact I'd considered it at all.

Sookie decided she was in an 80's mood, so when the movie ended, she pulled up Ferris Bueller's Day Off and started it, but I'd stopped paying attention by then.

To anything but her, that is.

I had a plethora of things I wanted – needed – to take care of downstairs in my lab, but the truth was, I'd barely given them a second thought all day long. She'd sufficiently distracted me from everything but her and in the process gave me a much needed break from myself. Something I suspected had been her plan all along.

Sookie was always prepared, but I doubted that extended to having a skimpy bikini handy for the possibility of an impromptu game of Marco Polo.

Everything about our day had been perfect. Everything about *her* was perfect and I wanted so much to kiss her – to tell her – how I felt.

How she made me feel.

But she also made me feel crazy insecure, so I kept my thoughts to myself. I didn't want to be the one to possibly ruin what had been a great day by pushing something on her that she wasn't ready to acknowledge. I wasn't sure if *I* even wanted to acknowledge it yet because it would definitely change the dynamic of our relationship – good or bad – so when the movie ended, I thought I would test the waters by saying, “I should probably go downstairs and get back to work.”

Her eyes narrowed back at me – not angrily, just contemplatively – so I thought my comment meant the credits were officially rolling on Eric Northman's Day Off, when she stood up and said, “You're probably right.” But then she surprised me yet again when, after I stood up, she grabbed onto the hem of my t-shirt and tugged, saying, “Gimme. I'm tired, so I think I'm gonna hit the hay.”

I was afraid to ask. It was late, so I wasn't surprised she planned on spending the night again, but I was afraid to find out she planned on staying in what had become *her* room. Besides my bedroom, it was the only other room in the house I never *entertained* anyone because it would've felt disrespectful to her.

But I was inquisitive by nature. Cause and effect were my bread and butter, so I pulled off my t-shirt and handed it to her without a word, waiting to see what she would do.

And I wasn't disappointed.

She pulled off her own t-shirt, leaving her in her bikini top and shorts, and pulled my shirt on. I watched completely mesmerized as she ignored my obvious gawking, while she reached underneath it to pull the strings loose. The top came free as she pulled it out from under the hem and it was quickly followed by her shorts.

And her bikini bottoms were glaring at me like a flashing neon sign from the middle of them.

Sookie was naked except for my shirt.

She gathered her things and smiled at me saying, “Goodnight,” and traipsed down the hall.

Into *my* bedroom.

The results were conclusive.

She had my balls on a leash because she’d barely disappeared from my sight when I was already following after her. She’d left the bathroom door open, so I could hear her brushing her teeth – I knew with *my* toothbrush since I’d left hers in the other bathroom – and while she did that, I changed out of my swim trunks and into another pair of boxers.

By the time she came out, I was already in the bed, hoping my appearance would lead her to believe I was relaxed, but the truth was I felt like a tightly wound string. I told myself I wasn’t going to say it. I wasn’t going to *ask her* to join me in my bed again and just hoped she would take the initiative.

And my hopes were realized when she crawled in beside me, not waiting for me to reach for her and taking it upon herself to slide up alongside of me. Throwing one of her legs over my own, her arm followed suit across my chest, with my arm automatically wrapping around her body to keep her there. She rested her head on my shoulder and gave me a slight squeeze, thankfully ignoring the fact I’d said I was going to do some work, and only repeated, “Goodnight Eric.”

Yeah, I thought, as I returned her gentle squeeze and let my eyes close shut.

It had definitely been a good night.

# Chapter 7 – Chocolate and Peanut Butter

## **SPOV**

*What in the hell was I doing?*

You know, besides throwing my leg over Eric's and thereby putting myself in a position that – quite frankly- would easily facilitate in me humping his body with my panty-less pussy.

My pussy, that wasn't named Eric.

Yet.

Truth be told, I didn't have a fucking clue. What I was doing or what I should name my pussy. But the fact was I liked it, whatever it was.

And speaking of like...Holy Abs Batman!

Come to momma!

It hadn't taken much more than waking up with his giant paw on my boob for me to rethink the whole *'We aren't going there'* stance I'd been enforcing. For one, it had been a really long time since anyone else's hands had touched me like that besides my own. And two, I was the product of a drunken trucker and a used up stripper.

'Staples' should be emblazoned on my ass because if Eric had tried tapping that, it would've been easy.

But those were my whore-moans talking. I knew it and I accepted it. It certainly wouldn't be the first time Eric had gotten my nethers in a tizzy, but the problem now was that it wasn't the only part of me he had swooning.

Parts of my head.

Parts of my heart.

If I learned at some point he was a genius at giving foot rubs, then from head to toe, the man would have the whole of me swooning so far over, I'd be leaning towards him like my name was Pisa.

Maybe that would be a good name for my pussy. It sure beat Tokyo.

My plan had been to get him to relax come hell or high water. But what I hadn't planned on happening was how that might affect me. We'd always gotten along. Like brother and sister. Like mother and son. Like the almighty corporate guru and his trusty sidekick. No matter the situation, Eric and I fell easily into our roles. Whether he was the chocolate in my peanut butter or I was the peanut butter on his chocolate, it all tasted the same.

It tasted good.

And while I'd felt something subtly shift over the last month, something had shifted today that should've registered as a ten on the Richter scale. We'd talked and laughed with each other plenty over the last three years, but today it had felt different. More intimate.

More like a couple rather than like a couple of smartasses trying to one up each other.

But I didn't know how to feel about that. I knew Eric better than probably Eric even knew himself and yet I couldn't tell if he'd felt it too.

The shift.

While I kept telling myself that Eric could never be the one for me – he didn't seem capable of being monogamous, much less interested in being in a relationship – I couldn't deny my feelings for him had changed. I'd always been fond of him. I'd always felt protective over him. I'd always been able to see through the bullshit his mouth spouted to see the reasons behind it all. But

I knew if I took that step – crossed that line – there would be no going back for me. I might be able to *pretend* I wasn't bothered if I came across another one of his takeouts a week from now, but on the inside I would feel hollow.

The fact was Eric had become my number one priority over the last three years. My world revolved around him, so I didn't have the time or the inclination to go looking for someone else to fulfill whatever needs I might have had and I'd had plenty of offers.

But none of them compared when put up against Eric.

He was the model I used to judge every potential relationship. Every man who asked me out – be it for coffee, dinner, or a movie – I asked myself, “Is this someone I could see one day being more important to me than Eric?”

The answer had always been no.

But maybe that was my own issue. My secret hero worship throwing a monkey wrench into my relationships and flinging shit at anyone who threatened my relationship with Eric.

Or maybe I just wanted to climb Eric like a monkey.

So now, there I was, lying in bed with Eric, with my Pisa leaning against his hip and wondering if he tasted more like peanut butter or chocolate. Hopefully, he'd think I was just incontinent instead of turned on, if he felt the moisture that was slowly pervading the side of his H&M's.

The embarrassment would certainly be less than if he figured out otherwise.

“I'm onto you, you know,” he whispered into the darkened room.

*I'm onto you too. Your boxers are smeared with a sample of my Sookie flavored peanut butter.*

“What do you mean?” I asked, without moving to look at him.



Or moving my anything else lower on my body, fearing I would give him an even bigger sample. The size you could only find at Costco.

Or in a well-stocked bomb shelter.

Besides, I'd been looking at him all day and that was what had gotten me into this mess. And gotten him messy in the process.

"You," he chuckled softly. "You pranced around nearly naked all day long knowing I would follow you like a puppy."

"More like a horn dog," I snickered.

A horn dog with his bone-r. Talk about leaning towers.

Thinking about it made me want to scale him like that French Spiderman guy scaled skyscrapers in Dubai because I had a feeling it would be both exhilarating and possibly illegal. I knew he would let me. I knew he would probably encourage me to do it – with gusto – but I forced myself to remain still.

Because with great power comes great responsibility.

That Stan Lee really knows his shit.

But just because him and his pipe followed my Pied Piper ass around didn't mean things had shifted so much that I believed he wouldn't love me today and leave me tomorrow. I knew I was important to Eric, but that wasn't enough.

My whore-moans be damned.

If I fell for him – completely fell for him – I'd never be the same. I could make him my top priority. I could make him the axis my world spun on, but if I went for spin on his axis then I knew my world would never be the same. I'd be screwed in more ways than one (double the points!) because he'd be a hard act

to follow. And if I couldn't accept it was just another roll in the hay for him, then I would be forced to leave.

For good.

It scared me. I was afraid to believe it was more than just Operation Werewolf that had made him forsake his takeout. Afraid to believe *I* could ever be *more* to him because I wasn't so sure he was wired that way.

But rather than allowing myself to think about all of the ways I could end up miserable in that scenario, I told myself it had more to do with the fact I hated job hunting.

It was an easier pill to swallow.

And speaking of easy...

His hand was making slow circles on my thigh, seemingly oblivious to the growing smear of peanut butter his actions were churning out of me, when he asked, "What are we doing?"

He'd asked me the same question earlier – twice – but I'd deflected both times. Like Wonder Woman with her trusty gold cuffs, I mimicked Neo's moves like I was firmly implanted within the matrix, letting his question ricochet off into the ether. But now there was no way for me to bend – light, the time space continuum, or at the waist, lest he get smeared. No way for me to swerve around the giant wall named Eric now that I was trapped in his bed with nothing left to distract him with.

Well, there was *something* I could distract him with. Namely dipping his chocolate into my peanut butter, but I was still afraid my Reese's would be left in pieces when all was said and done.

Since Eric was the one who was born with balls – I’d been ignoring the fact I could feel them resting against my knee – I left them in his H&M court and said, “You tell me.”

He may have been lying on the most comfortable bed money could buy, but I felt his body slowly tense up anyway. So I grappled with the invisible force field I was trying to cover my heart with when he finally answered, “I don’t know.”

I almost laughed. Hearing those three little words coming from his lips were almost as implausible as hearing him say three *other* little words. Besides, laughing would’ve been a hell of a lot better than bursting into tears, but instead I quashed both of those urges and didn’t give him any reaction at all.

Unless my inaction could be classified as chicken.

*Buk buk buk bukkaa!*

“I don’t,” he began and then paused, searching for the words as he searched my thigh for chicken feathers. “I don’t know where to start. I don’t know what to do. I feel anchored and lost at the same time. It’s...*unsettling*.”

His words were leaving me a little lost too. I didn’t want to read into them because for all I knew his mind was back on Operation Werewolf. Eric had ADHD to the N<sup>th</sup> degree and he often jumped from one topic to another with no segue. And since he hadn’t talked about it much during the day, it would make sense for his mind to wander back there now when there was nothing left to distract him. So when the silence grew too much for me to ignore any longer, I finally shrugged, swallowing my inner cluck and tested the waters by offering, “I have other earrings you can ruin if you want.”

“No, it’s not that,” he sighed. “It’s just...I...”

It was so odd to hear him struggle with anything. Eric always said exactly what was on his mind – no matter how inappropriate – and it automatically put me into helper mode, so I offered, “Start at the beginning.”

*Duh...genius.*

And then without warning he kissed me stupid.

I’d thought he was pulling my chin up so that I would finally look at him, but instead of his eyes, it was his lips that grabbed my attention.

Literally.

Still soft as a cloud, they gently pressed against my own, until I had to close my eyes when I could no longer see straight. But my third eye further down was starting to blink back tears.

Maybe I could call her Chakra?

More like Chakra Khan because I was definitely *feeling* for him. A lot of different things – hot and bothered among them.

When his tongue softly swiped against my own, seeking entrance, there was no way I could deny him any longer. Every which way he moved against me were all of the right ones and I silently mused how unfair it was he’d been standing at the front of every line when God doled out attributes.

Smarts? Check.

Looks? Check.

Sex appeal? Check.

Cockzilla? Check check.

I'd gotten an eyeful of it more than a few times that day, but like in any good whore-er film, it was always just lurking. It hadn't sprung out at me from a closet or from under the bed, snatching my snatch until I screamed to the high heavens.

And I had no doubt it would be heavenly.

But now the only thing between me and the monster was a pair of high-end undies.

And the sensations coursing through me left me feeling a little high.

"How's that for a start?" he whispered against my lips when I was nearing oxygen deprivation.

We'd somehow moved – and I'd somehow missed how it happened – because Eric was now lying on top of me, with his chocolate bar pressing against the top of my peanut butter jar, and my hands twisted into his hair. Staring back at him, with him so close and so Eric and looking so affectionate, the first thought to flit through my mind came tumbling out of my lips.

"I'm so fucked."

And the sky was blue. Just like his eyes.

"*Not yet,*" he smirked, but there was something else behind his eyes. Behind his smartassery.

Something I couldn't – wouldn't – name and not knowing what it was, I ended up repeating his earlier question of, "What are we doing?"

His eyes may as well have shouted back, "Buk buk buk bukkaaaa!"

And feeling his cock still trying to doodle my doo, I forced myself to add, "I can't do this Eric. *We* can't do this because if we do, things will change. We're a lot alike and if you were anyone else, I could easily just fuck you and forget

it. But you're not anyone else and I wouldn't be *able* to forget it. I might be able to *act* like I did, but it would be an Oscar worthy lie."

"We'll get back to how often you've fucked and forgotten in the past," Mr. Pot glared.

At me – Miss Kettle, apparently.

But his expression softened just as quickly when he added, "But who says I want either one of us to forget? Sookie...you *have* to know by now that you mean more to me than...well...*anyone. Anything.* I want *more* with you, so tell me I'm not the only one who feels this way."

"But what does that *mean*, Eric?" I asked, ignoring his plea for reciprocity. I couldn't help it. I couldn't show my cards – the ace of hearts on my sleeve – given everything I knew about him. I needed the boy genius to dumb it down for me, so I added, "I know I'm your favorite flavor of human, but are you looking for a sit down full course meal here or are we talking Sunday suppers? Something a little more hearty that you look forward to at the end of the week, but on the other six days, you're dining on something else."

It almost felt too unfair of a question to ask of him. More than just my boss, Eric was my friend. My closest one, if I wanted to admit it to myself. Asking him what his intentions were so early in the hot potato game we were playing with my heart, when all he'd done so far was kiss me stupid, seemed...well, *stupid*.

I wasn't really sure what I expected. I wasn't sure it mattered anymore. It already seemed too late because I knew – no matter what – I was just teetering on the razor wire fence that would rip me to shreds no matter which side I fell on.

Everything had *already* changed.

I'd somehow missed that happening too.

Pushing himself up onto his hands, he stared down at me and I was again struck stupid. By his expression and his next words. With his blond hair falling down around his eyes, the strands swayed when he gently shook his head and he smiled softly as he said, “*You*, Sookie. I want *you*, on Sundays and on every other day of the week. I can’t promise everything will always be easy between us, but I can promise I’ll be faithful to you. I don’t want anyone else. And to be honest, I haven’t really wanted anyone else since I first saw you. I acted like an idiot before, but I’m yours now, whether you want me or not and I’ll remain yours for as long as you’ll have me. So what do you say?”

“You had me at ‘*you*,’” I grinned, feeling ridiculously happy and a tad cheesy for paying homage to Jerry Maguire.

Eric grinned in return and slowly lowered himself until he was lying on top of me again as he asked, “So, I complete you?”

Wrapping my legs around his waist, with my Chakra looking for the spiritual enlightenment that could be found in his boxers, I pulled him back for a kiss and taunted, “Not yet, so show me the money.”

We didn’t need words after that. Scissors would’ve been nice or perhaps some sort of preternatural strength because we were each fighting the little bit of clothing that still covered our bodies.

I wanted them off.

And I wanted him in.

Me. Right now.

Thankfully, Eric seemed to be of the same mindset because he didn’t waste any time. As soon as we were both naked like God intended, his hands and lips were everywhere.

It was just one more thing we had in common.

The whole damn day seemed like a tortuously long round of foreplay, so I didn't give him the chance to try and show off his genius sexual skills. There was no need. Not now. Not when the streets of Tokyo were already flooded from the rise of the Godzilla in their midst.

And while I gave him a rash of shit for the STD's I jokingly accused him of having, I knew he was clean. I was on the pill (Sookie Stackhouse was always prepared!) and God knows I'd cleaned up enough wrappers of a different kind when dealing with his takeout, so I didn't hesitate to sink down on him when we rolled over, knowing doing so wouldn't give me a rash later on.

Like I said, being Godric's favorite had its benefits and access to Eric's medical history was one of them.

He could knock my socks off later with his fornication flair – in fact, I expected him to – but right now I wanted to fuck.

Something else we had in common.

I moaned out loud, feeling him stretch me in ways no one else ever had, and Eric's long drawn out, "*Fuuucckk*," was well said.

Hear fucking hear!

And reminding me of his telepathic powers, he grabbed my hips in each of his bear paws repeating, "*Fuck*. You're so fucking tight."

"You just like to snuggle," I playfully accused and raised myself up, slamming back down onto him and making both of us moan. "So of course you'd appreciate a *snug* fit."

"I appreciate more than that," he growled and sat up, booby trapping me once more. "These are works of art."



“If you call me rubenesque, I’m gonna hurt you,” I warned jokingly. Mostly, while I tried to push away the memories of every skinny ass I’d dragged out of the house. I was curvy and I was okay with that.

And he’d get a purple nurple if he suggested otherwise.

He ignored my warning in favor of adding teeth to his booby trap, nipping at my skin and adding to the sensation overload I was already feeling. But when he was satisfied I wouldn’t be able to remember my own name, he proved I could still remember his when he threw us both onto my back and began pounding into me.

The sudden change in position and angle had me crying out, “Eric!” making his expression look victorious in return, but it was warranted.

He was fucking me like a champ.

“You’re mine now, Sookie,” he warned, punctuating each word with a thrust of his hips. “You already were before, but now...now I’ll never let you go.”

His body dropped down on top of mine, so that he was grinding my clit with every grind of his hips and his words went in one ear and straight out of my Pisa because his possessive snarling was all it took to throw me over the edge. I screamed out his name once more and gripped his body with every part of mine that could reach him.

Hands.

Arms.

Legs.

Pisa.

No wonder those trampy bitches never wanted to leave the next morning.

Eric made some sort of strangled ‘guh’ sound right before he roared something else unintelligible when I felt him cum inside of me. It was enough to set off a second smaller orgasm in me, one that he drew out by continuing to lazily thrust his hips against my own.

He was even a genius at being lazy.

When our heart rates had slowed and our breathing evened out, he leaned up to smile down at me as he said, “I meant it, you know. I’ll never let you go now.”

“I’ll hold you to that,” I smiled and brought his lips back to mine for another kiss. It was one of many things we held against each other for the rest of the night.

## Chapter 8 – Eureka

### EPOV

I didn’t think I would be able to fall asleep, but I must have managed at some point because I woke up.

With a smile already on my face.

Smiling because Sookie was *officially* mine.

And I’d made good use of most of the night, reminding her of that fact.

Drilling it into her, if you will.

But rolling over, with the intention of drilling for more oil than BP could ever hope to spill – in *her* gulf – I found myself alone in the bed. A pang hit my chest – I ignored the hypocrisy, considering my past attitude – and I bolted upright about to ask Godric where she was when I heard the sound of the shower running.

Sookie. Naked. Wet.

And sudsy.

The thought barely passed through my mind before I went running into the bathroom after her, hoping I would catch her before she got out. Instead I had to catch her when she screeched out a slew of curse words and jumped into the air at my overeager entrance, nearly slipping on the shower floor in the process.

Maybe it was things like this that made the bathroom the number room in the house where accidents occurred?

“You *ass!*” she yelled, trying to get her breathing under control, while doing a piss poor job of making me apologetic because in reality all she’d accomplished was reminding me of *her* ass.

Which was now *my* ass.

So I let her in on my dictatorial stance – something she may have already determined thanks to my dick pointing straight at her – and leered, “No. *Your* ass is *my* ass.” Turning her body to face the wall, so I could get another look at *my* ass, I held onto her hip and pushed at her back until she had no choice but to rest on her hands or face plant. With my hands running all over her my mind wandered just as quickly, thinking amongst other things, aside from her obvious beauty and intellect, I’d always thought Sookie was unequivocally hot.

But I clearly hadn’t been giving her enough credit.

Sookie was positively divine. Every hill. Every valley. Every inch of her was a fucking masterpiece and all I wanted to do was worship her.

So I dropped to my knees, figuring that was as good a place to start as any.

But feeling the need to remind her this was a dictatorship – and I was an unequivocal dick – I barked, “*Who* said you could get out of bed, *Miss Stackhouse?*” I didn’t wait for an answer because I really didn’t care what it was and instead moved around to her

front, diving forward and licking more than just the water dripping from between her thighs.

*Mine.*

Ignoring my question at first, she was forced to move even farther away from the wall to account for me and my dick both trying to get closer to her. While I worked up her libido, she whimpered and moaned before working up her own fake indignation, responding, “*You’re not the boss of me, Mr. Northman.*”

Hearing her clipped tone, with my name attached to it, all but begged for me to just roll over and give in to her every demand. But since I’d received no reports that Hell had indeed frozen over at some point in the night, I asked against her other set of lips, “Aren’t I?”

But we both knew the answer.

*She* was the boss of *me* no matter whose signature was on her paycheck. The all-access pass I now had to her pussy made it doubly so.

I was so whipped my last name should be Crawford.

“*No,*” she replied haughtily, holding onto the top of my head by my hair and moving her hips against my mouth. Not satisfied with the amount of room I had to work with, she gave up on spreading her legs to accommodate me and my dickish ways, and instead threw one of her legs over my shoulder. But acting like she wasn’t wantonly riding my face, she used her *Miss Stackhouse* voice when she informed me, “I’m not on the clock for another hour. Until then, you’re *my bitch.*”

See? She knew.

But I knew another hour wouldn’t be long enough. Another day. A month. A year. It felt like an eternity wouldn’t be long enough.

But fuck if I wasn’t going to try and make it worth her while to play hooky again.

Fuck the werewolves.

Slipping a single finger into her, she moaned again while her muscles contracted around me. The feeling brought back her words from the night before about fucking and forgetting, but she was too tight to have fucked many.

And with any luck, she'd forgotten.

About every last one of those no good mother fuckers.

And I would be more than okay with that. Besides, I'd forgotten plenty too. Just like I decided to forget the word hypocrite existed in the English language.

Or that my picture could rightfully be placed alongside of it.

I continued to work her body like it had been mine all along. Like she'd been made just for me. Hell, maybe she had been because being with her was like nothing else I'd ever experienced before.

And I had *a lot* of experience.

Something Sookie already knew since her salary had tripled from her starting pay three years earlier, thanks to all of the raises she'd demanded for having to take out my trash. I felt bad about it now, of course, but if she bitched about it later, I would just blame her.

Because the word hypocrite no longer existed.

And after all, if she had agreed to fuck me from the start, then none of that would have ever happened.

Why have takeout when there's a gourmet meal to be had at home?

But, no matter. She was mine. And now that my head was out of my ass, it could be in between her thighs.

Where it belonged.

Always.

And when her knees finally gave out after her third orgasm, I caught her by the waist and turned her around to put her back against the wall. I'd been ready to go as soon as I'd heard the water running, so all I need to do was lift her up, with her legs automatically wrapping around my waist, before lining myself up and sliding inside of her.

Sliding home.

"*Fuuuck*," I moaned as soon as her heat enveloped me and I held still to just enjoy it for a moment.

"No," she whimpered, sounding both turned on and distraught. "You're dillydallying." Squeezing her inner muscles around me, while she leaned forward and lightly bit my chest, her voice took on a demanding tone when she ordered, "Now *fuck* me."

Fuck. Me.

Dominatrix Sookie was fuck hot, but I was an Alpha Male by nature, so while I gave her what she wanted, I still attempted to show her who wore the balls when it came to this part of our relationship.

After all, she had to feel them slapping up against her right now.

"If you weren't so fucking short, I could fuck you from behind in here," I gritted out, while pounding into her. The truth was I didn't care how we fucked, so long as we fucked.

I was easygoing in that way.

"If you weren't so fucking tall, I wouldn't need a harness, rope, and carabiners to keep me in place," she huffed back. She jerked my head to hers by my hair and her lips met mine in a kiss that was all teeth and tongues. When she pulled back, her eyes were unfocused – or maybe it was *my eyes* that were unfocused – but her mind still appeared

sound when I watched her hand slip in between us to work her clit, as she smiled back at me and taunted, “Beat you to the summit.”

It was a photo finish, but it was a tie.

She laughed at my obvious pout that only grew with every article of clothing she put on, but with her hawk-like eyes, even the slightest movement I made in her direction made her hold her hand up and say, “No. Work *first*. Fuck *later*.”

Exactly!

*Fuck later!*

If only we could agree on which word should be emphasized, there wouldn't be any issue.

“Play hooky again,” I offered, ignoring the pleading tone in my voice.

She ignored it too and replied, “I can't. I have meetings I can't miss today.”

“Then you're fired,” I shot back playfully. “Now you have the *whole day* to spend with me.”

“I can't,” she smirked. “Now I have to go look for another job.”

“Why do you have to be so fucking *responsible*?” I asked, saying it like it was a bad thing. In this moment, it actually felt like it was. And while I appreciated the fact she wasn't like any of the other women who had dollar signs in their eyes when they looked at me, I certainly wouldn't have minded if she had *fuck me* eyes right now.

“Because *someone* has to be,” she glared, but her expression turned into one of equal parts pissed and worried when she added, “Speaking of which, Bruce came to me the other day. Over the last month, some piece of shit pilfered money out of a few different accounts to the tune of three hundred thousand.”

“*What?*” I asked, with my want for her fuck me eyes temporarily set aside. “Why didn’t he tell me?”

“He *did*,” she challenged. “If you bothered checking your emails, you would’ve known about it before I did.”

There went my *fucking* mood.

The mood to *fuck* that is.

I’d known I was wrapped up in my work on Operation Werewolf over the last month, but I didn’t think I’d gone so far off the deep end that I could’ve missed something like that. While the amount of money was negligible, that wasn’t the point.

The point was I’d dropped the ball.

And some other fucker noticed and took off with it.

Before I could say any more, Sookie spoke up adding, “I hired an independent firm to audit the books. I’m meeting with their representative this morning, so we should know something soon.”

“Should I be there?” I asked, with my *fucking* mood making a swift return. All I had to do was picture Sookie bent over my desk as she took my dick-tation.

She’d *take it* like a champ.

Her eyebrow rose up, telling me she knew *exactly* what I was thinking – *fucking telepath* – because she immediately responded, “No. I’ll handle it.”

Her choice of words – specifically *handle* – only made me think of her hips gripped in my hands.

While she was bent over.

With me fucking her.



‘See?’ my cock wept. *‘Not helpful at all.’*

“Oh boy,” Sookie muttered, her hearing apparently just as good as her eyesight to have heard my crying cock, now that her eyes were staring at my crotch. “On *that* note, I’m getting out of here before I get nailed for being late.”

She only made it halfway to the door before I caught her around the waist and her giggle made my smile automatic when I said, “Stay here and I assure you, you *will be* late, getting *nailed.*”

“That’s what I said,” she laughed before I cut it off by shoving my tongue into her open mouth.

I eventually relented when she began pushing at my chest to separate us, but I spun her around to rub my cock against her ass to remind her who it now belonged to. In her high heels, she was tall enough to make my fucking-her-bent-over-my-desk fantasies come true. So I nipped at the shell of her ear, enjoying the affects her shiver had on me as it worked its way down her spine, and whispered, “You’re wearing those shoes tonight.”

In my mind it was a given she was coming back, but hearing myself say the words out loud made me wonder if maybe I was making an ass out of me for assuming.

But I didn’t have to wonder for very long when she deliberately rose up and down, pressing her ass against my cock as she did it, and purred, “Well then you’re rubbing my feet when we’re done.”

“I’ll be rubbing more than your feet,” I promised.

I’d be rubbing her inside and out.

Torture.

Watching her leave.

Starting the clock the moment she shut the door behind her to wait for her to return.

Pure fucking torture.

I was so fucked.

But thanks to Sookie, I had been fucked *so good* as well. *So well* that as soon as I made it down to my lab, it was as though tiny elves had come in at some point since I'd last been forced to leave it, thanks to a mutinous (and smitten) AI and his sexy cohort in Operation Counting Sheep. Only instead of cobbling shoes, those ingenious little bastards had somehow cleared a path in my mind.

Maybe twenty-first century elves had evolved with the times and into nanotechnology?

That thought tickled something in the recesses of my brain and searching through all of the possible avenues, born of a nineteenth century Grimm's Fairytale, made the next few hours literally fly by. No longer distracted by thoughts of Sookie, possibly being out and about making *friends* with purple pansy-eyed pussies, my mind was free to concentrate on the tasks at hand.

I'd been at it for hours when Godric finally spoke up saying, "Eureka!"

I missed that show on Syfy. It was corny, but I'd liked it.

"Are you referencing vacuum cleaners or fictional towns in Oregon?" I asked without looking up.

Who would I look *at*?

"I *should be* referencing the fact you and Miss Stackhouse finally stopped dancing around one another to tango in between the sheets," he replied smoothly and then snickered, "And in the shower."

Stupid all-seeing all-knowing busybody.

Why did I think he was such a great idea again?

He reminded me of why he was a fucking *brilliant* idea when he added, “But my ‘Eureka’ was in reference to the fact I’ve finally located the identity of the man from the video.”

“What?” I asked, looking up.

At nothing.

Ignoring the fact he was invisible, I added, “Who is he? Where did you find him?”

I’d uploaded the files from the thumb drive Flood had given me the moment I’d gotten home and tasked Godric with searching through every database, video file, and camera feed he could worm his busybody into across the planet.

Illegal?

Highly.

Did I care?

Fuck no.

My calculations on the smartboard in front of me minimized, as he put up a still shot of the man-turned-wolf from the video. Alongside of it another image appeared, one that had been taken from a camera feed at a gas station and showed him entering the adjacent convenience store.

It was undoubtedly the same man.

And he’d grown.

While I tried to calculate the approximate mass that he’d somehow added to his frame in the last two months, Godric explained, “The gentleman pumped 15.6 gallons of unleaded fuel into his vehicle and paid using the credit card of one Patrick Furnan.”

Thinking I must have gotten my figures wrong, I said, “Compare his mass now to the video and calculate the difference.”

“The man known only as Furnan has added approximately 30 pounds of muscle mass and four inches in height,” he replied.

I’d call it impossible, but I watched the guy turn into a fucking wolf for Christ’s sake.

It would take a lot for me to call something *impossible* ever again.

Godric added another picture to the screen, showing a Louisiana driver’s license and depicting the same man.

And the same name.

“It doesn’t make sense,” I spoke my thoughts aloud, while my mind ran back over the video we’d all watched. “He spoke Russian.”

Like it was his mother tongue, not like it was a second language. He’d been delirious at the time, so I doubted he would have the fortitude to keep up a faked heritage. And it made no sense anyway, considering no one believed the video had been shot with the intention of feeding anyone else false intel.

Like the fact he was Russian would keep our attention over the fact he could turn into a wolf.

“From the data I’ve been able to gather, his identification appears to be forged. There is no record of a Patrick Furnan born in Shreveport, Louisiana on May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1972 that exists prior to six months ago.”

Bogus ID’s were easy enough to get in this day and age, so I set all of that aside for now and asked, “When and where was that video shot?”

One of the many questions we didn’t have an answer for was whether or not the change was permanent. There wasn’t any proof any of the men we’d witnessed turning into wolves had the ability to turn back into their human form. But seeing how much bigger he was in the video Godric had found, I would guess it was taken after the transformation. But my gut flip flopped when he answered, “One week ago, just over the Mexican border in San Ysidro, California.”

Everything visible told me it had been taken somewhere in the US, from the Chevy pickup he'd been driving to the American flag decal on the store's window front, but I hadn't wanted to believe it. Each of the markers on Flood's map where the werewolf camps had been located were all well outside of the United States.

But now...

Now they were on American soil.

At least one of them was, and considering wolves traveled in packs, I wouldn't fool myself into believing werewolves would be much different.

The questions now were, how *large* was their pack and what were their intentions?

"Get Flood on the phone," I ordered and started getting my thoughts in order. My calculations. What I'd learned thus far about werewolves and the effects silver would have on them.

Because it looked like the wolves would be bringing the fight to our doorstep and we needed to be ready for them.

## Chapter 9 – HBIC

### SPOV

"Ms. *Stackhouse*."

Sitting at my – Eric's – desk, I stifled my eye roll no one would see in the empty office. But that didn't stop me from sticking my tongue out at the speaker Bobby's sneering voice had come through, before replying in a clipped out tone, "Yes, *Bobby*?"

But I'd made it sound more like '*Bob-bay*' just because I knew it would piss him off.

And I wasn't disappointed when I heard him mutter under his breath, "It's *Mr. Burnham*," before turning up the volume of his voice and lowering the hatred in his tone, as he informed me, "Your ten o'clock has arrived."

I secretly hoped it was *him* who'd stolen the money, only so I'd have a legitimate excuse to put my foot up his ass. As it stood now, my only excuse was because he was a prick.

Who was not-so-secretly in love with Eric's prick. Or Eric as a whole, but I had no doubts he secretly yearned for his prick too.

But that was *mine*.

Not that Bobby was 'out' or had done anything to warrant him being the subject of salacious office gossip – that honor was usually reserved for *me* – but it didn't take a genius to know the man worshipped Eric.

But apparently it eluded a genius he had his very own boytoy at the ready and willing.

Maybe I'd remind said genius of it the next time he mouthed off to me about whose ass belonged to whom because he most definitely owned Bobby's ass, whether he wanted the deed to that piece or not.

But who was I kidding? I was smitten with Eric's mouth and his ass and everything in between.

And that was a lot of real estate.

Prime real estate.

But now that I'd officially planted my flag on my exclusive territory, I was feeling a little giddy.

Like a schoolgirl.

Sookie Stackhouse didn't *do* giddy. Not even when she was a schoolgirl.

Stupid Eric. Stupid sexy man, sexin' me up all night long and making me stupid.

*God...I missed him.*

Shaking the Eric mon-swoon that had taken over my brain from my head, I dug deep and hauled out that bitch who'd worked her ass off to get a Master's from Wharton and replied, "Send them in." But since she *was* a bitch, I waited a tic and added, "*Bob-bay.*"

*Aahhh...that felt good.*

So good that the smile on my face was a genuine one when the representative from the Krasinski and Associates forensic accounting firm walked through the door. He looked to be of another time – a time where Dockers and a Polo shirt qualified as acceptable business attire – and I felt my face morph into one worthy of Donald Trump on *The Apprentice*.

*You're fired!*

But I smiled through my surprise their firm would send someone so unrefined for a first meet. First impressions were everything and he wasn't making a good one.

"Sookeh Stackhouse?" he asked, making no secret of the fact he must have believed it was my breasts who would be doing all of the talking.

'Sookeh' on my right and her twin sister 'Stackhouse' on the left.

I didn't reply and neither did they. So when the sound of crickets filled his ears, he looked up from my silent twins completely unapologetic and thrust his pasty hand in my direction with a come hither smile, saying, "*I am William Compton, but you can call me Bill.*"

Like it was an honor.

Instead I silently dubbed him 'Bill-ew' in my head and nearly snickered, picturing him as the talking dancing bear in *The Jungle Book*.

God knows he was wearing the bare necessities to attend this meeting.

Etiquette dictated I should take his hand and return the gesture. My suspicions over where that hand could've been, as recently as the elevator ride up to the top floor, dictated I grab the Purell hand sanitizer from the top desk drawer as soon as I took my seat. But wanting to get past this whole '*Call me Bill*' nonsense, I opened with, "Mr. Compton. Your firm comes highly recommended, but I'm curious as to how long you've worked for the company."

I had nothing against *casual days* in the office, but I took it as a personal affront against Northman Inc. – and thereby *Eric* – he had so little respect to show up at a corporation as powerful as ours, dressed like he'd be teeing off on the back nine as soon as he got out of there.

And it teed me off.

He'd obviously taken my question – one meant to ascertain if he was new and therefore unschooled in proper business etiquette – as one of interest in him because he grinned widely and took a seat across from me – uninvited, mind you – replying proudly, "Why, I am one of the founding partners of the firm."

Yeah, I was wondering *why* too.

Why me?

Why did they have to send a moronic douchebag?

Why did he believe pork chop sideburns were a good idea?

Why did he sit like he had a skewer up his ass?



Why couldn't I just have listened to Eric and played hooky after all?

In the silence – to his ears anyway – he spoke up adding, “Tell me Sookeh, will we be having refreshments?” And evidently heedless of my *‘I’m not your waitress, bitch!’* eyebrow, he added, “Sookeh...what an unusual name.”

“It is,” I nodded, ignoring his probable order for a mint julep and thinking I’d need another shower when he left because just being in the same room as him made me feel unclean. “Which is why I prefer *my name* as it is. It rhymes with *cookie*, but so there’s no mix up in the future – in names or *places* – you will address me as *Miss Stackhouse*.”

*‘Because you’re nasty’*, my inner Janet Jackson added.

I disregarded his flabbergasted expression – it *couldn’t* have been the first time he’d been verbally bitch slapped – and said, “I admit, I’m a little astonished that you chose to attend this meeting dressed so informally. Tell me Mr. Compton, have you been the victim of a recent house fire?”

“What?” he asked, looking confused. “No.”

“Tornado?”

“No.”

“Hurricane? Tsunami? Sinkhole? Avalanche?”

With every State Farm question I asked, his ‘no’s’ got more haughty. His eyes more indignant.

His panties more twisted.

But that was only adding fuel to my inner bitch’s fire, so I didn’t relent by tacking on, “A bitter divorce perhaps, where your closet was turned into a bonfire? Tell me Mr. Compton, have you forsaken all of your worldly possessions in your pursuit of spiritual enlightenment?”

I found mine in Eric's boxers just last night.

"No!"

"So then, is your firm so insolvent that a trip to the Men's Wearhouse is out of the question? Or are you just so inept at managing your own finances that you've become personally bankrupt?"

"I...I...I..." he sputtered, with his face growing impossibly paler.

If he kept going, he'd be translucent before long.

Ignoring the gaping sinkhole in his face, I shook my head and said, "Well then I take it back. I'm not astonished. I'm *insulted*. Northman Inc. is a billion dollar corporation and a leader in the technological industry. And yet you walk in here like you think we're just going to have a friendly little chat over my tits and a glass of lemonade. I know my blond hair and impressive rack gets a lot of press, but you shouldn't believe everything you read. You see Mr. Compton, you were mistaken. Not only am I not a ditzy airhead, prone to being impressed with the likes of you, but I'm also allergic to lemons and I'm hypersensitive to assholery. This is a business, not happy hour at the corner bar. Your unprofessionalism speaks volumes about the firm you are a *founding member of* and I am firm in my belief that there is nothing you can do for us. You've wasted enough of my valuable time. Good day."

"But...but..." he choked out.

"Exactly," I smiled, like I was Cruella de Vil and had just happened upon a litter of Dalmatians. "Don't let the door hit *yours* on the way out."

He stared at me like he didn't think it was possible for him to be getting the boot, but noticing he was wearing penny loafers – yes, with a shiny penny tucked into the top of each one- I almost told him he'd been overpaid for his thoughts in the past.

As soon as he was gone, I waited until I could hear the faint ding of the elevator down the hall and pressed the intercom button, snarling out, “Bobby! Get me Victor!”

It was at his behest that I called that fuckwad in the first place. Why he thought that idiot Compton could find out where the money had went – when his choice in footwear led me to believe he couldn’t even tie his own fucking shoes – made me see red.

Like the debits in our ledgers we couldn’t account for.

It wasn’t until later on that afternoon when Victor decided to grace me with his presence, but I ignored him initially in favor of wrapping things up with the men sitting before me. I’d contacted another firm – one I’d actually gone online and researched – and Maxwell Lee seemed like a man who could get the job done. He’d offered to come that very afternoon and both his quick response and the tailored suit he arrived wearing told me he had no plans to be on the back nine. His credentials were impeccable and his references were stellar. Even his eyes were above reproach because they stayed above my neck, so after getting a feel for him I went ahead and called Bruce in to introduce them.

But not wanting to show my ass over the ass who’d just walked in – like he owned the place – I kept my smile in place and gestured at him saying, “Mr. Lee, this is Victor Madden. He’s on the board of directors here and our COO.”

Finally allowing my eyes to fall on the COCK, I explained, “Victor, Mr. Lee works for the Brigant accounting firm. I’ve just hired them to look into the missing funds.”

Rudely ignoring the man and everything I’d just said, he heatedly asked, “What happened to going with Krasinski and Associates?”

Nothing says ‘white trash’ like airing your dirty laundry in front of company and I had a whole slew of dirty words I was waiting to get off of my chest. So I

ignored him and turned back to Bruce and Mr. Lee, adding, “Mr. Lee, Bruce will show you to the conference room where you and your team will have ample room to work while you’re here and see to it that you have everything you need. If there’s anything he can’t do for you, please don’t hesitate to come see me and I’ll make sure you get whatever it is that you require.”

“I appreciate it Miss Stackhouse and I’m sure we’ll have this issue resolved for you soon,” he replied with a smile.

It was sincere. Friendly.

Nothing about the man made me feel like running a loofah dipped in Clorox across my skin.

So with another round of shaking hands and a shake of their legs, Victor and I were finally alone in the office. Without waiting for me to say anything, he scolded, “What gives you the right to hire another firm without running it past me? And how dare you have me summoned?”

Pretending I was Eric, I let his chiding tone slide right off of my back and acted like I didn’t hear his accurate accusation, asking instead, “Since when did your title change to CFO?”

Victor and I tolerated one another because we each knew Eric wasn’t going to pick sides. It was just the way of the world and usually things didn’t get too heated between us because of it.

Or so I thought.

“Just because Eric keeps you around for...his *pleasure*, doesn’t mean you have the authority to go changing things.”

I’d been sporadically dripping little Eric swimmers all throughout the day, so I couldn’t really deny the veiled fucking insinuation. And since we’d both decided to give this a go, the odds were Victor would know about it sooner

than later. All it would take was for Eric to pop in and try to pop his Tootsie into me.

Something I wasn't really opposed to happening.

But I also knew everything else I did for Eric. What my limits were and what that made me when he wasn't around.

The HBIC.

But instead of slapping him across the face with my Eric cum-filled panties, I slapped him with a hard truth he'd better wrap his head around and said, "Eric gave me the authority to handle this situation, Victor. I went with who I felt would be best for this company, but if you don't like it, please feel free to call Eric yourself."

Eric wouldn't override my decision whether or not I was dripping his cum. He trusted me with running his company in his absence.

But if Victor pulled the 'son' card, I wouldn't hesitate to whip out the girls.

As in – they were the only thing Compton was interested in.

I'd win. Hands down.

Or rather, up.

Eric would booby trap them in a heartbeat.

And while I didn't particularly care for Victor, I knew he was a great business man. He'd kept the company afloat for years until Eric was old enough to take charge, so I couldn't help but ask, "Why on earth did you think Compton would be a good match for our company?"

He'd mentioned him by name when I called him into the office to tell him about the missing funds and all but shoved the fuckwad's business card down my throat.

Victor didn't react for a tic, but he finally shrugged and said, "I met him and his partner, Lorena, at an event not so long ago. They seemed knowledgeable and I know they've done work for deCastro in the past."

Figured. DeCastro's company was in the middle of fighting off a hostile takeover.

Not really something you wanted to model your business after.

But hearing him mention an event reminded me I needed to make an appearance at the one Leclercq's was hosting on Saturday night. Sophie-Anne's corporation did well enough, but she'd been after Eric for a long time now. Both for business and for pleasure.

And she'd do well enough to back off the latter because the closest she'd be getting to Eric's cum was when the HBIC bitch slapped her with her panties.

Perhaps guessing he was fighting a losing battle, he switched things up and tried to look amenable as he dropped the issue and asked, "How's it coming along? The project Eric is working on."

He didn't say the name. Once Flood was gone, we only ever talked around the pink elephant that was really a werewolf when we were in the office.

"Oh, you know...it's coming," I answered coyly.

If 'it' was 'Eric'. Or me for that matter. So much so in the last twelve hours that I needed to wear a panty liner.

Christ, I should've given in and fucked him a long time ago. But it didn't matter. He was mine now and I'd cut a bitch to keep him.

“Very well,” he sighed, knowing he wouldn’t get any info from me that he hadn’t gotten from Eric. But I only smiled, thinking, ‘Yes. He fucks me *very* well.’

I swung by my place before heading to Eric’s to restock my overnight bag, but because I liked to always be prepared I tripled the amount of clothes I packed. Eric seemed like he expected me to stay over and considering how hard he was campaigning for me to stay with him today, I didn’t think it would be any different any time soon.

And as long as I could resist him for long enough to go to work, everything should work out well.

I really wasn’t all that surprised I wasn’t feeling any sort of apprehension with how fast our new relationship was going. But the truth was, Eric and I had been in a relationship for the last three years. The only difference now was we’d added sex and feelings to the mix.

But peanut butter and chocolate had been getting along great for years, so it was no surprise it only enhanced what was already there.

I made it back to his place by six, which was early for me, and was surprised to see a big black SUV parked out front. Eric had a similar one – but then Eric seemed to have one of everything – but he rarely entertained company that wasn’t...

I skidded to a halt and threw my car door open, marching into the house ready to cut a bitch *and* a son of a bitch, only to skid to another halt seeing Colonel Flood standing in the foyer with Eric. My jealous rage was quickly swallowed up by my guilt for automatically thinking Eric could be *entertaining* anyone else after everything he’d said and done. He may have had loose ethics where his past floozies were concerned, but he never made empty promises, so I should’ve known better than to make assumptions he wouldn’t have kept his promise to me.

They only made me feel like an ass.

So I know I appeared apologetic when I offered a meek, “Hello.”

“Miss Stackhouse,” the colonel smiled and nodded at me before turning back to Eric and saying, “I guess I’ll be hearing from you soon then. I want to thank you again Eric, for all that you’ve done so far and I appreciate all of the help you’re giving us with this situation.”

“Of course,” Eric nodded in return, but he looked worried.

And it worried me.

But I didn’t dare ask, assuming Eric would tell me as soon as the colonel left. Instead, no sooner than the door was shut behind him, Eric snatched me into his arms and planted a kiss on me that made my already weary toes curl inside of my shoes. Lifting me up into his arms, he carried me back to his bedroom and spent the rest of the night reminding me why beauty wasn’t the only thing high heels were good for.

That’s what I got for assuming.

But at least I found out he was also a genius at giving foot rubs.

## Chapter 10 – Fade to Black

### **EPOV**

“Are you *sure* you’re not trying to kill me?” I asked playfully.

Sort of. In a way, it *did* sort of feel like she could be trying to kill me.

“*Of course not,*” she smiled innocently back at me in the mirror. “You know how much I hate job hunting.”

“How would I know that?” I smirked back. “You’ve only ever worked for me.”



“Exactly,” she replied smoothly. “It took me three years to train *you*. Do you think I want to go through the hassle all over again with someone new?”

Sookie had me trained alright. As soon as I saw her body covered in clothes, my immediate response was to want to remove them.

Posthaste.

Two nights. Two nights of having Sookie all to my own and I was her puppet.

My hands had already gotten the memo, but there seemed to be a lag in inter-office communication with my executive assistant because as soon as I started sliding the zipper down on the dress she was wearing, Sookie stopped fiddling with her hair to turn around and smack them away.

“Stop it,” she playfully chided. “You’re gonna make me fucked.”

“Exactly,” I leered.

Finally. The lag in communication had righted itself.

“Quit it,” she laughed. “You’re not hittin’ it again right now. I have to get to work before my hard-ass of a boss gets on me for being late.”

“Your boss is hard for your ass right now.”

While true, the strength behind my flirtatious words surprised even me. I’d always wanted Sookie, but finally having her did nothing to sate my need for her.

I would be jonsing for her again the moment my dick stopped shooting cum into her.

Unaware of my very real addiction to her, she winked at me and said, “He’ll get over it when I get under him later on.”

Not soon enough.

Extricating herself from my grip, she pulled me down for a quick kiss and added, “Besides, I’m sure he’s just dying to go downstairs and play with his Legos.”

My Legos. The furry puzzle pieces I was trying to snap together.

“*Aaand...he’s off!*” Sookie snickered and patted my chest after a moment of silence, bringing me back to the first floor from where my mind had automatically wandered to downstairs.

“See?” she grinned and added, “You won’t even notice I’m gone.”

“Lies,” I smiled, but in reality it was my denial that was a bit of a lie too. While I constantly craved her presence, in the two days since she’d agreed to be with me I felt an all-encompassing clarity. I felt better able to focus on whatever it was before me. Work. Sookie. One or the other, depending on which one was in front of me, I was there one hundred percent.

But even when she wasn’t physically around, she was still there. In the back of my mind. In the depths of my...pants. But then, in a way, she’d always been there, well before we’d become well acquainted with what was in each other’s pants.

The only difference now was I felt an odd but welcome sense of peace knowing she was mine.

It was a little while later that I heard the footsteps coming down into the lab and I was surprised when I looked up seeing Victor of all people. He’d dropped in occasionally in the past, but hadn’t in a very long time, so I stopped what I was doing and looked back at him asking, “What brings *you* here, old man?”

Without preamble – and without returning my smile – he opened with, “You need to rein in your little blond *assistant*. I know she takes care of a lot of the

things you don't want to bother with, but she's overstepping her bounds lately."

"Sookie?" I asked needlessly because who else would he be talking about. "What did she do that's got your dick bent?"

I knew they only tolerated one another and that was okay. They didn't have to be BFF's, but since we were all working towards the same goal, they usually kept their mutual dislike to a minimum.

"She overrode my decision to hire Krasinski and Associates to look into the missing funds and went with another firm without even bothering to run it past me," he complained.

"And?" I asked. "What does it matter who audits the books?"

Sookie told me the reasons why she'd immediately dismissed the asshole sent over by the Krasinski firm and I agreed with her reasoning.

Her tits were mine. End of story.

But I could do without her ever again telling me that Bobby's ass was mine for the taking.

"That's not the *point*, Eric," he scolded. "She takes liberties she shouldn't be taking. She acts as though *she* is the CEO of Northman Inc. instead of *you*. You need to put her in her place or else you're going to wake up one day and find she's stolen the company out from under you. You give her too much free reign to do as she pleases. Did it ever occur to you that maybe *she* was the one who's stolen the money and that's why she went with another firm. One that would be reporting directly to *her*. One she would have *control* over."

I kept trying to tell myself he was only looking out for me, like he'd done for the majority of my life. I'd joked plenty about Sookie being my sex toy – for lack of a better term – in front of him in the past, but he didn't know we were a

couple now. He didn't know my true feelings for her and it was the only reason why I didn't jump up and break his jaw with my now clenched fist.

"Victor," I growled out, surprising us both with how menacing I sounded. "I trust Sookie. Her decisions. Her ability to run things in my absence. Her, Victor. I trust *her*. She wants my money about as much as she wants a raging case of crabs."

Her words. Something she enlightened me with on more than one occasion.

I went on to add, "She gets paid nearly as much as *you* do so three hundred thousand means nothing to her. You need to find a way to accept the fact she's not going anywhere and that she has my approval to do whatever she sees fit to do in running *Northman* Inc. Maybe it's my own fault for teasing her so much around you in the past, but the fact is Sookie and I are together now, so watch what you say about her."

"Eric!" he exclaimed and then softened his tone, adding, "*Son*. You can't be serious. *She's* no good for you. She's only concerned with her *career* and *how high* she can climb up the corporate ladder. Do you honestly think she wouldn't drop you in a heartbeat if a better opportunity came along? You're making a mistake, son."

"*You're making a mistake!*" I hissed. "I told you! Watch. What. You. Say. You have no clue of how Sookie and I work or what our real relationship is like. What she does for me, to me, or because of me. *Who* she is to me or *what* she means to me."

By then you could cut the tension in the room with a knife, so of course he added another heaping dose of it to the already full room by saying, "You love her."

While it wasn't posed as a question, his tone didn't disguise the fact it was one of both wonder and disgust. But as his words settled into my psyche, I found I didn't feel any need to deny them. Maybe I *did* love Sookie. Maybe I'd felt

something close to love for her for a while now and I only needed for us to clear that last hurdle – commitment, on both of our parts – before I could realize it. But I'd be damned if I was going to admit it to him before admitting it to her.

So I said nothing.

And taking my silent response in whatever fucking way he chose, he dropped the subject by changing it altogether and asking, “Have you made any progress on the werewolf situation?”

“Some,” I eventually replied, feeling my blood pressure ratchet down a few notches. I owed Victor a lot for everything he'd done for me in the past, but Sookie wasn't a price I would ever be willing to pay, to repay him for that debt.

Ever.

I explained what I'd found out about the reaction their blood had to silver – omitting the details of how I came about that discovery – and how Godric had tracked down and ID'd the man from the video. A false identity – so far as we could tell – but it was something to go on. He hadn't used the credit card again since the gas station and Godric had been able to track his movements using the traffic cameras posted along the highway after he'd gassed up. All the way up until he got off of the interstate and contact with him was lost when he entered into a more rural area about sixty miles north of Los Angeles.

Flood's search team should be scouring that same area at that very moment.

But before I could tell him about that part, Victor said excitedly, “We should call Colonel Flood.”

“I did,” I replied. “He came by last night and I told him everything.”

I was close to figuring out the puzzle and I knew it. I just couldn't tell how close I was, but the characteristics of the unidentifiable elements in the blood

samples Flood had provided were starting to feel familiar in ways that had nothing to do with how long I'd been working on the problem. Hopefully I'd figure out why sooner rather than later.

“What do you *mean* you told him everything?” he bellowed. “Eric! Did you sign anything? What kind of contract did you negotiate?”

“Contract?” I asked, flabbergasted now that I was trying to puzzle out his words.

His face froze into one of pure shock as he said, “You didn't.”

“Didn't, *what?*” I asked again, still not knowing what he was getting at.

“Tell me you didn't give them everything you just told me *for free.*”

“What?” I repeated, thinking I couldn't have heard him right. “Why *wouldn't* I tell them everything? Flood asked me to do this for them and I agreed. *You were there.*”

“Eric!” he yelled again. “Do you realize what you've done?”

“What I *said* I would do?” I yelled back in response, getting more and more pissed off.

He ignored my angry and snarky tone and began pacing back and forth before eventually stopping short and using a calmer voice when saying, “Maybe this is a good thing.” I could practically hear the gears turning when he explained, “You've given them a taste of what you're capable of, so now they'll be willing to pay through the roof for whatever you come up with.”

“Victor!” I yelled again, interrupting him before he could make my blood pressure go through roof, and said, “I'm not doing this for a *payday*. For fuck's sake, *I* would've paid *them* just to have access to the samples they've already *given me*, but I'll *give them* whatever I come up with *for free*. Just because I've never jumped at the chance to fashion the latest and greatest

WMD for the military in the past doesn't mean I won't do whatever I can to help protect this country. There are *werewolves* on *American soil*. Do you think there's any amount of money that's worth the safety of this country?"

He stared me down and I thought perhaps he was finally getting it through his thick fucking skull, when he surprised me by saying, "I've told you before, Eric. *War is business* and just like your little blond tart, you're making a mistake."

"You're right," I agreed through clenched teeth. But before he could get his hopes up, I added, "I did make a mistake – in keeping *you on* after I took over the company. You're fired. Now get out."

"Eric!" he exclaimed. "*Son! Think* about what you're *saying!*"

"*You* should've thought about what *you* were saying, but I'm glad you didn't. At least now I know how you *really* feel, so I know we're *really not* on the same page. I appreciate all that you've done for me in the past, Victor. But this just cements what I've been suspecting for a long time now. We have different ideals. Too different to keep trying to make this work."

"You'll regret this," he offered after several moments of silence. "You'll calm down and realize you've just made a huge mistake."

Tired being told how wrong I was, I flippantly offered, "According to you, I'm making them left and right. So what's one more?"

And even though he left without another word, I had a feeling it wouldn't be the last I'd heard from him.

Or his lawyers.

But I hadn't been lying when I said I'd had a feeling our ideals weren't meshing. I'd kept Victor around out of loyalty and gratitude, but the truth was

his beliefs were outdated. His business sense, antiquated. It took me coming in when I was twenty-one to revitalize the company.

Victor was a dinosaur in a world evolved to where werewolves were now at the top of the food chain.

Hopefully, not for long.

But thinking of food made my eyes fall to Pam's tank where she was all but saying, "Feed me, bitch!" with her expression. She'd been languishing away – just like my work on human regeneration – for the last month, but as I did as her eyes bade me to do, I had an epiphany of sorts. Thinking back on my research with her made me see the similarities to the unidentifiable properties I'd found in the werewolf blood samples and a few more pieces of my Legos snapped into place.

Victor was long forgotten as I plowed through the next few hours and when I was done I was almost positive I had solved the riddle.

Or perhaps, improved upon the unknown.

According to my calculations – *in theory* – the serum I cooked up was very similar to what could have made Furnan molecularly transform into a werewolf. But – *in theory* – my version was a kissing cousin of that one, when added to the research I'd already done with Pam. Without more data – the kind only having a werewolf would provide – there was no way of knowing if they were able to retain enough of their human thought processes while transformed into their wolf persona.

Did they just react based off of their animal instincts?

Or were they capable of acting with premeditation?

The differences I hoped I may have just achieved would give a human all of the strength and quick reflexes we thought the wolves possessed, but without the



furry four-legged exterior. An enhanced human who could heal from wounds at a rapid rate. One who wouldn't tire as quickly and could move fast enough to keep up with a wolf – if not overtake them in speed.

A human like that would be nearly unstoppable.

But the only way to know for sure would be to test it. Animal testing – the standard in medical research – would be of no use in this situation, considering I would be testing for inhuman reactions. Flood had already let me know the night before he had a contingent of men both ready and willing to be my lab rats, if and when the time came. They had all volunteered because they had all been a member of one of the teams that had gone out to track down the werewolf camps. They had all suspected conventional weaponry might be of no use when their opponent had the potential to move quicker than they could aim and pull the trigger.

And they had all known at least one – if not both – of the men who had died getting a hold of Furnan's video transformation.

And while I thought they were brave to volunteer for something so dangerous, I couldn't in good conscience potentially kill someone in the name of science.

So it was a good thing I had an artificially intelligent busybody lying around.

I'd been running my theories and calculations by Godric all day – or *night* by now, for all I knew – and knowing Sookie would probably be back at any time, I wanted to finish up as much as I could. Mixing a sample of the serum I'd made along with a sample of my own blood, I ordered, "Godric. Run a simulation on the theoretical outcome and make adjustments as needed to calculate the dosage for the optimum result."

I had a good supply of donated human blood that I kept on hand for running my experiments, but my hubris demanded I use my own.

“You realize the effects could be idiosyncratically different to each individual based on their distinctive DNA?” he asked, as a computer generated outline of a man I presumed to be me came up on the smartboard.

Staring at the gross misrepresentation my smartass AI put up on the board, I ignored his question and asked my own with, “You realize my head isn’t *that* big, don’t you?”

I looked like a balloon-headed stick figure.

Snickering, he replied, “I apologize if you find my creativity lacking, but I do believe that *is* a very accurate representation. However, if you disagree, perhaps my sensors could use a recalibr...”

The sound of his voice cutoff just as the power flickered and then went out altogether. I was plunged into complete darkness and for a split second, I wondered if Sookie had come in upstairs and put Operation Counting Sheep back into effect. But I could tell based on the lack of sound that everything was shut down and there was no dim light left on like last time. It didn’t make any sense since I had backup generators hooked into the house’s main power supply that ran off of solar energy, but there was nothing else I could do in the pitch black room but get up to go take a look outside. I was in the process of feeling my way to the door when I heard it.

Clicks.

I couldn’t place the sound at first, until another one was added to the mix.

A low growl.

Like the kind a wolf might make.

It dawned on me then the clicks I heard were the sounds of their nails on the marble floors, but before I could grab the baseball bat I kept in the lab – it helped me think when I paced – they were on me.

Snarling. Biting. Tearing.

The pain was horrific, just like the sound I could hear coming from my throat, but there was nothing I could do to stop them. I had no weapon. No silver bullet or earring at the ready.

I wasn't strong enough to fight them off.

Nor could I fight off the will to succumb to the shroud of darkness that came over my eyes and my last thought was that I hoped they would be long gone before Sookie got home, when my consciousness finally faded to black.

## Chapter 11 – Hinky

### **SPOV**

Eric was gonna shit kittens.

It was the only logical conclusion.

When Maxwell Lee had come to me that afternoon and told me he'd already tracked down one of the mysterious payments as being authorized by Victor, I couldn't believe it. The only way I could make sense of it was if there was something going on between Eric and Victor that I didn't know about and they chose to keep me out of the loop.

Then *I* was gonna shit kittens.

Not because they were keeping secrets from me – mostly – but because neither one of them said anything when I told each of them I was going to look into it.

And it would just piss me off they would let me waste my time if that was the case.

Which also wouldn't make sense, at least where Eric was concerned.

Which was why I was back to thinking it would be him who was the one shitting kittens.

Victor earned seven figures in his position as COO, but he also had a harem of ex-wives he'd been court ordered to keep accustomed to the lifestyle they lived while with him. Still, I didn't think it was so bad that he'd start stealing from the company. All he would have to do was go to Eric if he needed the money and he would've gladly handed it over. Eric had more than he would ever need in one lifetime and Victor was like a father to him, so he wouldn't have thought twice about it.

I sat on the news for the rest of the day. Something like that should be delivered in person and honestly, I was hoping Maxwell would come rushing into my office declaring it had all been a mistake. It wasn't Victor who was stealing the money because that would break Eric's heart.

Instead he would tell me it was *Bobby* who was stealing the money because I'd been a good girl all year and Santa had finally come through.

Victor hadn't come into work that day either. I had no idea if he was out schmoozing business partners or maybe on the back nine with the fuckwad, but either way, I wasn't his timekeeper. It wasn't my business where he was.

But I'd make it my business if he was the one stealing from Eric.

I was pulled from my thoughts on my drive back to Eric's place by the fact the power seemed to be out in the neighborhood. It was already night time – I'd stayed late hoping for a Christmas miracle – so it was dark out. All of the lights – house, street, and traffic – were out, so I was forced to play polite with the other drivers as we played 'Mother May I' at every intersection controlled by a traffic light. That is, until a big ass SUV came barreling through nearly causing an accident.

Asshole!

Access to Eric's property was controlled by an electronic gate, but I didn't think twice about the power being out because I knew he had a solar powered backup generator. Which was why I was confused when the power seemed to be out for the gate too.

Pulling out my phone, I remembered seeing Eric's on the nightstand beside his bed when I'd left that morning and I doubted he'd gone back for it once he got to playing with his Legos, so I hit my Godric App and waited for his usual sweet voice to say my name.

Instead what I got was, "I believe there is something wrong."

"I know," I chuckled. "Why else would I be App-ing you? I can't get in through the gate because the power is out. Is something wrong with the generator?"

"Yes. When the city grid went down, I moved to the auxiliary power in the generator, but there was an immediate disconnect at the source. I am attempting to reroute the lines to get the city grid powered up, but it too seems to have been the victim of a hard disconnect. I am afraid I'll be forced to wait on the outskirts of the neighborhood, while the power company workers reconnect the lines. But Miss Stackhouse, I find this occurrence of dual power failures to be very suspicious."

"What do you mean?"

"The odds of it happening on a clear night in seventy-two degree weather where there is no sign of wildfire or downed airplane on top of the house are two million four hundred sixty-seven thousand three hundred and fifty-two to one."

I didn't see any bright glowing fires where Eric's house was further up the hill, but I couldn't help smirking at his literalness and offered, "So, what you're saying is, it's hinky."

"To say the least."

“Well then, can you tell me how to get the gate open so I can go check it out?” I asked. Eric’s house sat at the top of a hill and while the street front was fenced and gated, I knew if I walked further up, I could get to the house through the woods. But I didn’t feel like hiking in the dark and I wasn’t wearing the right shoes.

I would deny it to my dying day, but sometimes Sookie Stackhouse was unprepared.

“Of course. Grab the Leatherman and flashlight from your glove box and I will tell how to disengage the locking device on the gate manually,” he replied.

And after much cursing on my part, that’s exactly what we accomplished.

I parked in front of the darkened house when I got to the top of the hill and told Godric, “The front door is wide open.”

“Perhaps Mr. Northman is checking the generator,” he offered, but I didn’t think so.

Something felt off.

Hinky.

So I grabbed my flashlight in one hand and kept my Godric App’d phone in the other while I crept inside. Nothing immediately looked out of place, but it still felt like something was wrong.

And if Eric jumped out from a dark corner and scared kittens out of me he was going to get a flashlight to his balls.

Maybe then he’d see the light.

The house was quiet – too quiet – and I didn’t dare disturb the still air with more than my breathing while I silently kicked my shoes off and tiptoed down to the lab.

But then my scream shot that plan to hell.

“ERIC!”

He was covered in blood. Lying in a pool of it and as I dropped to my knees, I could see through his torn clothing he was covered in bite marks.

“He’s been attacked! Bitten!” I yelled back at Godric’s insistent voice, asking me what was wrong.

But then he managed to shock me silent by saying, “Werewolves.”

Jesus fucking Christ.

Werewolves.

It was enough to get my head back in the game and I leaned down to put my ear to his chest. I could feel the slight rise and fall from his shallow breathing, but his heartbeat sounded weak.

There, but weak.

But when I sat up and took stock of the rest of his injuries, I cried out again seeing his leg.

It was nearly torn off just below the knee.

“Call an ambulance! There’s so much blood. Godric, I don’t know if he’s going to make it,” I cried.

“There’s no time,” he said. “With the power failures, there are already reports of numerous accidents. Between the traffic congestion and lack of enough resources, he could die before they ever arrive. He only has one chance.”

I was still crying, softly begging Eric to wake up, when the sound of Godric's voice broke through my grief by yelling, "SOOKIE! If you want Eric to live, you must act quickly!"

"What?" I sobbed. "What can I do?"

I wasn't a paramedic. A nurse. A doctor.

I was dropping the ball left and right when it came to being prepared.

"Look on the desk," he ordered. "There should be a round steel cylinder. Inside there is a vial with a clear serum inside."

It took everything I had to look away from Eric, but when I did as he said, I noticed for the first time the lab was a mess. It must have gotten trashed during the attack and my heart squeezed seeing poor Pam had been a victim of the melee too, but I managed to locate what I thought he was talking about in a pile of broken bits off to the side of the room.

"I have it," I said. "Now what?"

"Go to the cabinet where he keeps his medical supplies. Inside you should find a box of large hypodermic needles. Grab the biggest one you can find, fill the syringe with 30 cc's of the serum, and inject it directly into his heart," he calmly explained.

While I freaked the fuck out.

"WHAT? What is this stuff? I can't shoot anything *into his heart!*"

Still sounding calm, he asked, "Do you want Eric to die?"

SHITDAMNHELLMOTHERFUCKER!

I didn't have to answer him. He *knew* the answer because he *knew* practically everything.



Hopefully that extended to whatever he was having me shoot into Eric's heart.

It was less than two minutes since I'd entered the lab, but I had no idea how long Eric had been lying there, so I rushed back over to him. Filling the syringe with the serum, I tore the rest of his shirt free to expose his upper body, but before I jabbed the needle into his chest, I had something I had to get off of mine.

Leaning over him, I softly kissed his lips and said, "I love you Eric."

I might not have wanted to admit it before now. Or maybe I hadn't even realized until now, but I knew deep down in my bones it was true.

I loved him.

And I couldn't lose him.

So I held the needle over his heart and did exactly what Godric said, pushing the serum into his chest and watched.

Nothing happened.

I thought maybe he'd sit straight up and gasp for air, like they did on the movies when somebody gets a shot of adrenaline to the heart, but nothing happened.

"Nothing's happening!" I cried out.

"His heart may be beating too slowly to adequately pump the serum through his veins," Godric guessed. "You'll have to help him. Do chest compressions."

So I did.

I straddled his body and pushed on his chest over and over. I begged and pleaded. Raged and railed over and over for him to open his fucking eyes for I

don't know how long. I could feel him getting colder to the touch, but it only drove me to work harder because I wasn't going to let him die goddamn it.

And then it happened.

I thought maybe my eyes were playing tricks on me, so I stared, blinked, and stared some more. But certain it *was* happening, I said, "His bites are healing."

The wounds were slowly closing. Some of the smaller tears were now just red lines on his skin. And while I was curious about what Eric must have concocted that would make it possible, I didn't care enough to ask Godric about it right now.

I only cared that it seemed to be working.

But remembering his torn leg, I jumped off of him and quickly tried to reset it so – if it healed – it would heal correctly. I knew if he'd been awake, it would've hurt like hell, so I cried for him while I did it.

I'd never felt such a murderous rage before then, but I knew I would gladly kill whoever did this to him.

I wrapped his leg using his torn shirt to keep it in place, while I went back to doing chest compressions. But it was in the silence when I heard another sound.

Coming from upstairs.

Did the attackers come back?

"Godric," I whispered, while slithering off of Eric. "Someone's in the house."

I found Eric's baseball bat and turned off the flashlight, while I waited, hidden beside the door. When the faint sound of footsteps could be heard coming

down the stairs, I counted each of their twelve steps and then swung as hard as I could.

A hoarse, “Oomph,” came from the intruder’s lips, but as I stepped out of my hiding spot with my bat raised and ready to swing again, I was hit with a bright light from up above.

“Miss Stackhouse?”

I recognized the voice as belonging to John Flood, but I kept my bat raised, asking, “Colonel?”

I didn’t recognize the man I’d hit with the bat, but by the looks of him, I’d knocked the wind out of his chest. He was also dressed like a soldier and was armed, but all Flood said was, “We were ambushed by the wolves like they knew we were coming. I suspected we might have a mole when every camp we raided was empty, but now I know we do. There’s no other way they would’ve known we would be there, but since they knew about us, I thought they might know Eric was helping us too and come after him. Where is he?”

I dropped the bat and back down onto my knees beside Eric, now that they didn’t appear to be a threat, and meekly offered, “Here. They came here and attacked him.”

I went back to doing chest compressions and briefly explained what I’d done and why, when a third man who’d come down the stairs with Flood offered to take over for me.

“How long has it been, Godric?” I asked.

“Forty-seven minutes since the injection,” he replied.

As I was inspecting Eric’s wounds – they were definitely healing – the power was suddenly restored and Godric pulled up Eric’s vitals on the only flat

screen in the room that hadn't been destroyed, probably because it was mounted on the wall.

The man doing compressions stopped for a moment so we could all see Eric's heart – on its own – was only beating at thirty beats per minute.

And it was steadily declining.

“I don't understand, Godric. His wounds are healing, so why is his heart rate dropping?” I asked.

“I am unsure,” he replied. “The heart rate of the man injected on the video only rose, but Eric's serum was only meant to mimic certain aspects. Not copy them exactly. If I were to speculate, it could perhaps be due to the fact Eric had lost so much blood prior to being injected. There could be a reaction we are not yet aware of due to being bitten by a transformed wolf. There are many unknown factors at play, but perhaps it will rise once the serum has fully taken effect.”

But what if it didn't?

I kept my worries to myself and only stared at Eric. We could see on the screen now that the chest compressions were doing nothing to keep his heart rate up, so I pulled myself underneath his head to use my lap as his pillow. Running my fingers through his hair, I softly pleaded, “Please, Eric. Wake up.”

His face was growing paler and his breathing more shallow. His skin was cold too and while I itched to cover him with a blanket, I had to see the wounds on his body continue to heal so I could convince myself he wasn't going to die.

That I wasn't going to lose him.

Flood had taken a spot on the floor by Eric's feet, while the other two stood guard. He pulled my makeshift bandage off of Eric's leg and said, “This looks nearly healed.”

And it did.

“His leg was nearly torn off,” I whispered, while staring at the jagged angry red line that was slowly turning pink where the tear was.

And yet his heart rate continued to drop.

He was down to only taking one small breath per minute and it was only adding to my worry, so I continued to whisper softly to him, begging him to open his eyes. To fight. To come back to me.

To not die.

While Flood and his men spoke softly amongst themselves, I kept my eyes glued to Eric, with only the sound of his heartbeat coming from the monitor in my ears. It was all I wanted to hear. The only thing keeping me sane because hearing it told me he still had a chance to pull through.

It told me I hadn't lost him.

But then my greatest fears were met when he pulled one last ragged breath into his lungs and the sound of his heart flat lining filled the air.

“*NOOOO!*” I sobbed and slid out from underneath him so I could cover his body with my own. I straddled his hips and pounded on his chest, pushing with everything I was worth yelling, “NO! DON'T YOU DIE ON ME! DO YOU HEAR ME ERIC! DON'T LEAVE ME!”

I was like a madwoman. Everything else ceased to exist while I fruitlessly tried to bring him back to life. Breathing the air out of my lungs into his. Pushing his heart to keep pumping. To keep going.

To keep him there with me.

No one tried to stop me. No one attempted to get in between the crazy lady and the man she was crazy about.

No one told me my actions were pointless.

I don't know how long I kept at it. It felt like seconds and hours all at the same time, but I was human and I couldn't keep up with it forever. So when I felt my body give out, there was nothing I could do to stop myself from falling down on top of Eric.

Where I remained.

It felt like seconds.

It felt like hours.

There was no sound coming from his chest. No rise and fall telling me he still breathed.

And I wept.

“Miss Stackhouse?”

Flood's whispered voice barely broke through the haze of grief shrouded over me, but I'd heard him.

But I didn't acknowledge him.

“Miss Stackhouse, we should get you somewhere safe,” he softly entreated.

“The wolves could come back.”

I didn't care. I hoped they would.

Then I could kill them all.

“Miss Sta...”

His words died just as I felt something.

A twitch.

Eric twitched.

Pushing myself up, I stared down at his face, seeing no change. So I looked over at the monitor, seeing there was no change there either.

No heartbeat.

“I...” I paused, afraid to jinx anything but unable to keep it to myself. “I thought I felt him move.”

My hopes rose when Flood added to my insanity by saying, “I thought I saw his lips move.”

“Eric?” I asked, brushing the hair away from his face. “Baby? Wake up.”

I knew I looked crazy. I knew I sounded insane.

Begging and pleading with a dead man to wake up.

But then he did.

His eyes snapped open and the three other men in the room all took a step back, but all I did was put my face closer to his and whisper, “Eric?”

I could tell he was confused. His eyes darted around the room, trying to get his bearings, and I paid no mind to the fact – according to Godric – his heart still wasn’t beating. Instead I smiled when his eyes finally locked onto mine and recognition filled them.

He knew me.

And then we all startled hearing another sound and before I even knew what I was saying, I asked, “Baby? Are those fangs?”

## Chapter 12 – A Dominant Trait

## **EPOV**

“Sthookie?” I asked, but didn’t know where to go from there. Something felt wrong. More than the sound of her name coming out of my mouth.

I felt...different.

I sucked in a breath of air, but it too felt weird.

Unneeded.

Strange.

I couldn’t place it. Nor could I figure out just how I ended up on the floor, with Sookie’s stricken face covered in more than just tears above my own. She had blood all over her face and the front of her body, but since she didn’t appear injured my primary concern for now was how did my teeth become so sharp?

And long?

And why was the pulsing in Sookie’s neck making my mouth water?

Unaware I was drawn to her in ways I’d never thought possible, she moved her face even closer to mine. Smiling softly, with newly formed tears falling down her face, she cupped my cheek and said, “Close enough. Eric, how do you feel?”

But I didn’t answer. I didn’t *say* anything because I would swear I could hear her heartbeat like I had a stethoscope pressed against her chest. And it was more than just the sound of it that had me fighting against an overwhelming urge to sink my teeth into her neck, but when she softly ran her finger over the protrusions I could feel coming out of my gums, I was suddenly fighting an entirely different kind of urge.

But with my focus so narrowed down onto Sookie, when I heard an unexpected noise fill the air, my instincts took over and before I knew it I was



on my feet with Sookie shoved behind me, snarling out a noise of my own at the source.

I recognized him a split second later and Flood – while armed – kept his gun lowered in one hand and his other up in the air, signaling he wasn't a threat, as he said, "Uhh...good to see you *up*?"

Pulling in another – what felt like – unneeded breath of air through my nose, I was assaulted by a barrage of scents. Sookie's, I'd been familiar with for a while and impossibly, I could smell her *on* me, but most of the others I was able to track back to their source.

Besides hers and the pungent aroma of dog on my skin, I could smell another's. And as my eyes trailed the scent to the man it belonged to, the name tape on his uniform said he was Purifoy.

Flood, I recognized by sight, but now also scent and, according to his uniform, the only other in the room was called Herveaux.

There were other scents, blood being the most prevalent. Mine I assumed considering I was still smeared with it and as I checked myself for injuries I was surprised to find none, so I did an internal check.

Flexing my muscles, I felt a surge of power flowing through me unlike anything I'd ever experienced before. Stronger. If I didn't know any better, I would swear I was physically bigger as well. There were minute differences in my mass I could feel when I moved, but it was probably just in my head.

Just like how the scent of blood smelled appetizing.

Struggling to keep my need to bite in check, I slackened my jaw enough to ask, "What happened?"

The last thing I could remember was working in the lab, with Godric running a simulation based on the serum I'd cooked up. But everything after that was hazy.

"I got here and found you on the floor," Sookie replied from behind me and I shuddered feeling the warmth of her hand touch my back. Turning to face her, she managed to look both devastated and relieved when she said, "You were attacked. By werewolves, we think. You...you were going to die, so Godric had me...I injected whatever it was in that steel cylinder right into your heart."

While my mind ran through a million different things at once, she pulled me back into the here and now by pulling me into her arms. I locked down every muscle in my body as she softly pressed her head to my chest and waited a few seconds before saying, "But...your heart. Eric, it's still not beating."

Had I somehow managed to lock that one down too?

I'd call it impossible, but I'd witnessed a man turn into a wolf, so...

Releasing some of the tension I'd imposed on myself, I tried to relax, but it was impossible with my new want of Sookie.

Feeling the blood pulsing through her body as it was pressed against my own was making me hard.

And hungry.

"Sookie," I mumbled, both out of trying to keep myself from biting her and trying to talk around my new sharpened teeth. "You have to let go. I can't...I don't want...you just have to let go of me."

She looked heartbroken as she released me from her grasp and took a step back. And while I wanted to soothe her hurt, I didn't want to do it by telling her I was trying to not bite her.

I already felt like a monster.

I didn't want her to see me as one too.

But because she was Sookie and always able to stay on point – hopefully not on the ones at the ends of my new teeth – she asked, “How do you feel?”

“Hungry.”

It wasn't a lie, in more ways than one.

“I'll go get you something to eat,” she said and took off up the stairs before I could stop her.

Well, I was sure I could stop her, but how would I tell her a sandwich just wasn't going to do?

“Eric,” Flood began and took a small step forward. “We all watched you die. Your heart flat lined. Your breathing stopped. I don't know if the Stephen Hawking you've got hidden in your walls needs new batteries, but according to him, your heart *still* isn't beating.” Locking his gaze onto my own, he asked, “What was in that stuff Miss Stackhouse said she pumped into your chest?”

“My version of the wolf serum, only without the furry side effects,” I replied automatically. But feeling my hunger growing to almost painful levels, I did the only thing I could think of.

I raided the stash of donor blood I kept on hand in the lab.

Ignoring everyone else in the room, I drained three bags before I felt sated. Sane. And while it tasted a bit off being cold, it filled me up like I'd just had a full meal.

I didn't think how it would look to anyone else in the room until I heard the heartbeat I'd subconsciously been tracking return to the open doorway.

Turning to face her, with the evidence I was some kind of monster still in my hand, her jaw dropped open just as the plate slipped from her grasp and suddenly I was standing beside her.

Plate in hand.

“HOLY FUCKING SHIT!” she yelled and jumped.

Afraid.

Because I was a monster. The evidence was still in my other hand.

“How the *fuck*?” the one named Herveaux asked, drawing my eyes to him.

Big. Brawny. Dark hair and green eyes. His scent and appearance were already catalogued in my head. But I didn’t think his question was one he was waiting on an answer to, so I said nothing.

“No, *really*?” he asked, unafraid to meet my stare. “How the fuck did you move so fast?”

“The serum.”

There was no question it was the serum, but I couldn’t explain why I now had...*fangs*? And why I didn’t seem to have a heartbeat and breathing air felt funny. But I hated the teeth and wished they would go away. Everything else I could hide, but those stuck out like sore thumbs. I’d file them down if I had to, but just as I was thinking about it, it happened.

They clicked back up into my gums.

Darting over to an unbroken piece of glass, I stared at my reflection with my tongue running over my once again blunt teeth and said, “So *weird*.”

But as I was doing so, Sookie spoke up saying, “Eric?”

And down they came again.

“Dammit!” I snarled and could see her startle in my makeshift mirror, but when I turned around I could tell I’d really frightened her.

Again.

I was such an asshole.

A monstrous asshole.

Closing my eyes, I concentrated on willing the fangs away and didn’t open them again until I felt the soft click in my gums. Taking another shallow breath of air, I looked at her and softly said, “Sorry. I didn’t mean to scare you.”

Her shoulders dropped down from where they’d still been perched up by her ears and she took several slow steps toward me, like she was approaching a frightened animal, until she was directly in front of me.

And then she slapped me across my face.

My hidden fangs were hidden no more, but if I was being honest with myself, I wasn’t angry.

I was turned on.

Maybe I *was* kinkier than I suspected.

“You *did* scare me, *asshole!*” she berated, putting her face in mine as much as she could when barefoot. “When you *died!* Don’t do it again.”

“But...*my teeth,*” I said incredulously. “And apparently I don’t have a heartbeat. Breathing feels weird and I just drank three liters of blood like it was Sam Adams Summer Ale! I can even smell the joint somebody just lit up down on the beach.”

*“My teeth,”* she mocked and threw her hands on her hips adding, *“My poor wittle heart don’t pitter patter no more. I like my Slurpees blood red now and a stoner on the beach is givin’ me the munchies.”* Poking her finger into my chest, she gritted out, “You know what you giant ass? I don’t give a shit! I give a shit that by some miracle you’re still here and your Slurpee gave you back some color. So if it’ll make you feel any better, I’ll climb down the cliff myself and go raid their stash on the beach if it’ll calm your ass down!”

Her chest was heaving from her angry rant, with her breaths fanning across my face, while we stared each other down. Her pissed. Me shocked.

“Balls on that one,” Purifoy mumbled out and breaking the silence, but my eyes were only on Sookie.

And then the rest of me joined them.

The plate I’d still been holding crashed down onto the floor as I wrapped her in my arms, with my lips slanting over hers and she squeaked back into my mouth.

In surprise?

Pain?

I decided it must have been the latter because as soon as I loosened my hold on her, she took a big pull of air into her lungs and then pulled herself onto me. Her tongue delicately traced over one of my extended teeth and made shivers run down my spine, but when I accidentally cut my own tongue something happened.

It was immediate.

It was something indescribable, but if I had to put it into words, I would say it felt like I could feel Sookie. More than her body in my arms, I felt a sudden sense of relief. Adoration.

Love.

Even knowing I felt those things for her, I could somehow tell they weren't my feelings. She was elated. So much so that I felt my lips trying to form a smile from feeling her joy, but feeling her running her tongue across the sharpened tip of my fang made me feel something else.

And the force of it scared me.

So I forced myself to pull away. I didn't know what I would do if I tasted fresh blood and I was afraid to find out.

We went back to staring at each other. Her chest was still heaving, but I knew not from anger now and the only thing to break the tension was Herveaux coughing out, "Awkward."

And fuck me if her blush hadn't ever made her look so irresistible.

But I resisted. Somehow.

However I couldn't resist thinking she wasn't safe around me.

Releasing her from my hold, I put some distance between us to try and clear my head, and unnecessarily cleared my throat before turning to face our audience, saying, "Not that I don't appreciate the company," a massive understatement since they were likely the only thing that would keep me from experimenting with my new self-imposed boundaries where Sookie was concerned, "But what are you three doing here?"

My lab was trashed from the wolves' attack, but now that I wasn't distracted by Sookie's lips, I was anxious to right it again. I was anxious to run tests on myself to see what in the fuck the serum had done to me because while she acted indifferent to my new state, I didn't think it would take long for her to realize I was some sort of monster and run for the hills. I needed to figure out what changes occurred. What changes could possibly be reversed.

I needed to figure out what in the fuck I was now.

A vampire? A zombie?

My enquiring mind wanted to know.

The only thing making me think it was more the former than the latter was my craving for blood. Hopefully it was just a weird side effect. A combination of my massive blood loss and my new state of being that made me try and get it into my body in the most expedient manner I could think of.

Besides, while I'd always had a thirst for knowledge, the thought of dining on anyone's brain didn't seem appealing whatsoever.

Flood took a step forward – the undoubted leader of the group – and explained, “There's a mole somewhere in our ranks. When we went to search the area Furnan was last known to be, our group was ambushed by both armed men and wolves. They knew we were coming and the only way for them to know was if someone on our side told them. We put up a good enough fight and the silver rounds we had made special for this mission helped, but we didn't have many because of the lack of time and funds. And they move quick. Quicker than any dog I've ever seen. More like a cheetah with the strength of a gorilla. We managed to kill one of the wolves with a silver round and then nearly got picked off when we were shocked stupid watching him turn back into a man. We only made it out of there alive because their group was small. Three men. Three wolves. We were still forced to retreat, but knowing they have inside information made me come here in case they tried to get to you.”

“Where are the rest of your men?” I hesitantly asked.

But his expression said it all when he answered, “We're all that's left out of a dozen.”

My fangs had retreated after I'd calmed down from kissing Sookie, but hearing nine of Flood's men died in trying to stop the werewolf threat threatened to



make them descend again. I managed to stay them through sheer willpower and asked, “So what’s our next move?”

Flood’s expression was weary but determined as he said, “We’re officially off the grid right now and it’s probably best if we stay that way. We don’t know who we can trust, so we trust no one who’s not in this room. We’ll have to set up camp somewhere and come up with a plan, but we managed to get an ID off of the body of one of their men and a few license plates we came across on our way into their camp. I’m hoping they’ll give us a lead and we can go from there.”

“What about your families?” I asked. I didn’t know if the other two had them, but Flood had mentioned a daughter during our first meeting and I doubted the enemy would have enough honor to leave them alone.

“When you’re in our line of work, you learn to plan for everything you can ahead of time,” he smiled. “We already put in the call on our way here, so they’re on their way to where no one will find them. They’ll come back once the threat has been eliminated.”

Hearing his choice of words – eliminated – made me realize shit just got real.

My only family was Sookie, but I was more afraid she’d be in danger *with* me than *without* me. No one besides Victor knew we’d become a couple and it had only happened days earlier. I’d never kept any kind of schedule and we hadn’t gone out anywhere together on a date. I hadn’t even been in the office for weeks, so I thought it would be safe enough to assume no one would come after her.

In their eyes, she was just my Executive Assistant.

Not even Sookie knew she was my everything.

But trying to figure out the logistics on the fly made me turn to Flood and say, “You three can stay here. There’s plenty of room and enough food that we

wouldn't need to leave for supplies for a while. The wolves think I'm dead, so there's no reason for them to return."

Turning to face Sookie, I tamped down on my urge to snatch her close and keep her there, saying, "And you should leave."

"What?" she asked, as my chest flooded with her surprise and sadness. "Why?"

But feeling her emotions so strongly only reminded me I was a maybe monster and I didn't want her anywhere near me until I knew what that meant. Until I knew I could control myself around her.

Because if I accidentally hurt her, it would kill me.

Instead of admitting that, I bluntly explained my reasoning by saying, "Leave and don't come back." I could call her when I knew it would be safe for her to be around me again, so I added, "You're just my employee. No one will come looking for you. You could take a vacation or say I was leaving on one, so no one will wonder why my death hasn't been reported."

A stabbing pain lit up my body. Hers, I knew. But her expression gave nothing away as to why when she stared back at me.

Until her next words gave everything away.

"Just your employee."

Those three words were now killing us both. I hadn't realized how it would sound to her ears, but I knew if I explained now – if I told her it was because I fucking loved her and needed her to remain safe, even from me – she would never leave.

Her stubbornness was a dominant trait.

Something I'd known for three years now, but through her hurt she felt me out by twisting the knife some more and adding in a disbelieving tone, "Leave and don't come back."

So I twisted it all the way by nodding.

She needed to leave for her own safety.

She took my silent agreement at face value and walked out of the room without another word.

Out of the house.

Those two things I could tell with my newly heightened hearing, but what I couldn't tell – didn't know – was if it was for good.

But it was for her own good for now, no matter how big of a mistake it felt like letting her go.

## Chapter 13 – Shanghai

### **SPOV**

Just an employee.

*Just* an employee.

Just an *employee*.

No matter which way I tried to say it, or how often I repeated it to myself, it made no difference.

It sounded like shit. It felt like shit, which would describe my overall mood as well.

Shitty.

But in the two weeks since I'd last seen Eric, I'd been doing my best to combat those feeling by eating my weight in chocolate and ice cream. So now instead of competing with Pillsbury in the amount of rolls we could make, we'd switched things up to biscuits.

Because I felt like a popped can of them wearing my now too tight dress.

But like my heartache, I ignored it and strolled through the room repeating my new mantra.

*I'm just an employee.*

And that's what I was there to act like. Somebody from Northman Inc. had to make an appearance at the dinner being held in honor of the whoop-dee-fucking-do summit being hosted in Los Angeles that week. The world's financial movers and shakers would all be gathered in one room to discuss the world's economy.

Blah blah blah, et al.

Personally, I didn't give a shit. I may have *felt* like shit, but I didn't give one. But if they asked, I'd tell them I gave at the office.

After all, I was *just an employee*. But it would make Northman Inc. look like shit if no one from our company showed up. And since Eric was off doing whatever the fuck, and Victor was in the wind thanks to his thievery, it was left to me to pick up the slack.

So the day ended in 'Y'.

Gin and tonic in hand, I casually walked around the room, nodding and smiling at anyone who looked my way. But because I was also a multitasker, I did it while simultaneously thanking and cursing the invention of Spanx because I was certain I would need a lower torso amputation by the time I peeled those suckers off thanks to my deadened appendages.

And I ignored how helpful a shot of magic serum might be in that scenario. Just like I was ignoring a lot of things lately that ended in ‘Northman’.

So it was a good thing the company’s name ended in ‘Inc.’

“Babe?”

Fuck. My. Life.

I didn’t have to turn around to know who’d be standing there, but I rotated my planet-sized ass around anyway.

Surprise surprise. It was John Quinn.

I’d emailed him his promised glowing recommendation a week earlier and he’d responded – several times – with an open invitation to dinner.

Invitations I’d immediately deleted without even opening them.

“I think I might have the wrong email address for you,” he smiled. “I’ve sent you a few, asking you out on a date, but I never heard back.”

It was a lie. We both knew it because he’d used the reply button from my email to him. But since I had nothing better to do and no one better to do it with, I smiled and said, “Oh?”

I wasn’t about to go out with him – not that I *couldn’t* go out with him since I was *just an employee* – but if nothing else, by talking to Quinn it would keep me away from the dessert table.

My Spanx were silver lined.

Ignoring his mention of any dates, I tried to steer the conversation back into neutral territory and asked, “So are you here working or networking?”

The spread was above par – something I knew his company was capable of throwing, which is why I'd chosen them to organize our event – but I didn't want to assume.

The last time I did it made me out to be an ass and then bit me in mine.

“A little of both,” he smiled, with a knowing look. But all it did was let *me* know I'd given him the wrong impression by asking anything about him.

Oh well. I was certainly willing to teach him all about shits and how tough they could be.

Moving to stand closer, he leaned down and asked, “So, is your boss around? I'd hate to get you in trouble if he saw us talking.”

*My boss.*

That's what he was. After all, I was *just an employee*.

Wishing I had a Tic-Tac to get rid of the bitter aftertaste in my mouth from repeating my mantra over and over, I was about to answer when someone else entered our conversation by asking, “Yes, where is the famed Eric Northman?”

Turning around towards the sound to put a face with the voice, I found I didn't recognize him. Something he must have figured out when he smiled contritely and said, “Pardon me. Please allow me to introduce myself. I am Russell Edgington.”

His name I *did* recognize and, doing my impersonation of Godric, I immediately pulled up every little detail about the man I could recall.

He was born choking on a silver spoon thanks to being a direct descendant of one of those wealthy tycoons you always saw in old black and white films. The kind wearing a derby on their bald heads and schlepping their giant bellies around with the aid of a walking stick, staring down their noses through a

monocle at everyone else who was rightfully beneath them. He was born with an even bigger ego and gave Merriam-Webster the standard of how to define pretentious. He'd been a prototype for the faux-lebrity before the days of Hiltons, Kardashians, and twenty-four hour news cycles. But he'd dropped out of the limelight nearly a decade earlier and I'd just assumed he'd finally tired of living his jet set lifestyle. And at his age it would make sense for him to choose the quiet life.

So it was his age and disappearance from the gossip rags that made him harder to recognize initially, but now that I'd heard the name I could definitely place the face. I smiled automatically, just like a good employee, and said, "Of course, Mr. Edgington. I'm Sookie..."

"Stackhouse," he smiled as he interrupted me. Giving Quinn a look that said, 'Go away servant,' which Quinn heeded – no monocle necessary – he then turned back to face me. Looking as sweet as Andy Taylor's Aunt Bee, he said, "From what I hear, you're Eric Northman's right hand gal."

Keeping my smile in place – instead of the grimace trying to take its place – I went for humble over hostile by replying, "Oh, I wouldn't say that. I'm just his employee."

That's what he'd said. And if I remembered to later on, I was getting that shit printed onto my business cards.

Sookie Stackhouse  
Just An Employee

It would be a hell of a lot easier to pass those around to whoever asked rather than keep admitting it out loud.

"And modest too," he laughed warmly. "My dear, I've heard he wouldn't get a single thing done if it wasn't for you."

He certainly wouldn't be walking around right now if it wasn't for me.

Not that he bothered saying squat about it.

That had been gnawing away at me too, wondering if maybe he was angry I'd done something so drastic without his consent. He didn't look too happy to have clicky fangs now, but he could just sit next to Quinn when I gave my lecture on tough shits.

And like the man had just said, he wouldn't get anything done if it wasn't for me. Only now that included walking and talking.

But since I was playing the role of modest inconsequential *just an employee*, I merely smiled in return and said, "Mr. Northman got along just fine before me and I'm sure he'd do fine without me."

I knew because he'd told me to *leave* and *don't come back* two weeks ago. He must be doing fine without me because I left.

And I didn't go back.

Glancing around expectantly, he asked, "So is Eric here?"

I felt my face falter for a split second – overcome with everything I was trying not to think about – but I didn't think he noticed when I finally offered, "No. Mr. Northman is away on sabbatical. Personal issues," I added seeing his inquisitive expression.

He could take that however he wanted, but I was surprised when he nodded like he knew something and said, "Ah yes, the issue with Madden. Surprising, a man like that *embezzling* money from someone he considered his own son."

The gossip mill around the office had been churning at maximum power once it became known Victor's untimely disappearance – from the building and payroll – coincided with the company hiring a forensic accounting firm to audit the books.

Not everyone needed to be a genius to put two and two together.



But I didn't realize the news had already spread so far. He hadn't shown his face at all since I'd first hired the Brigant team and even though we now had indisputable evidence it was Victor who'd stolen the money, I'd made the executive decision to just write it off, sweep it under the rug, and be done with it. Sure, the bitch in me would've loved to traipse him through the courts – criminal or civil – and embarrass the shit out of him. But since Eric was off pretending he was dead – more than just *dead to me* or his non-pitter patter heart – I didn't want to chance the off-chance he'd be needed for any charges to be filed.

Sometimes being *just an employee* worked out for me because as his Executive Assistant, I'd made an *executive decision* and said fuck it.

Something I didn't need Wharton to teach me.

Now, if only I could get my heart to say the same to Eric then all would be well.

But just like Eric's house, I wasn't going there. And since it wasn't publically known that Victor was as crooked as his smarmy smiles, I didn't give Edgington any reaction. So he took my silence and handed me his card in return, saying, "Be a dear and please ask Eric to give me a call when he returns from...where did you say he's gone to?"

"Sabbatical," I smiled.

I might be just an employee, but I wasn't stupid.

"Of course," he said and repeated, "Sabbatical."

Both his eyes and his tone told me he didn't believe me, but that landed directly into the 'I don't give a shit' pile I'd been amassing over the last two weeks.

It was quite a pile.

And after he wandered away, I continued to circle.

The room.

Away from Quinn.

Around the dessert table.

But it was the circle attached to my shoulders that I couldn't wander away from or the thoughts that circled through it. Thoughts on what I could do to keep myself busy now that I had so much Eric-free time. His giant ass had taken up a large portion of it, so I thought perhaps I'd go back to what I used to do with my free time.

Read a book.

Soak in the tub until I looked like the sister of a California Raisin.

Lie on the beach so I'd be as dark as one too.

I'd tried doing one if not all three on various days in the last two weeks, but none of them did me any good. And I hated that I didn't know what to do with myself when I took Eric out of the equation. But as much as I missed him, I wasn't going to be the one to make the first move. I wasn't going to beg him to see me.

I wasn't *that* girl.

I'd never been *that* girl. I had way too much self-esteem and way too much pigheadedness ingrained in me to do anything of the sort.

If he wanted me, he knew where to find me.

But at least it appeared no one knew where to find Eric, wolves or otherwise. And if anyone asked me for specifics, I'd tell them Sabbatical was three clicks north of East Jabip.

It was in my downtime that was the hardest to ignore it all. Lying awake at night and replaying the events over in my mind didn't help any either. I kept picking out the little things he'd said, but now I saw them in a whole new light.

*"You have to let go. I can't...I don't want...you just have to let go of me."*

Had that been more about him telling me to let go of the idea we could stay together instead of the literal way I'd taken it?

When his heart stopped beating did whatever he feel for me stop with it?

I just didn't know. I wanted to believe he still cared, but the fact he hadn't tried calling me at all was leading me to believe otherwise.

Had he been leading me on all along?

My gut told me no.

So then why the fuck had he stayed away?

Maybe he was mad at me. Mocking his fears probably wasn't the brightest thing I'd ever done, but still. I thought I made it pretty clear I didn't care about any of it so long as I had him.

Only for him to take himself away from me by sending me away.

As wrong as it felt leaving that way – at all, really – I didn't have it in me to fight with him about it at the time. With everything I'd already gone through in the previous few hours – the fear, adrenaline, heartbreak, elation – I was exhausted. My mind was jumbled – just like the status of our relationship – so I took my broken heart and ran with it.

And fuck him for not coming after it.

And fuck me for thinking he would.

My thoughts were circling through my head faster than shit circled down the drain. It was always the same. Round and round. Giving Eric the benefit of the doubt one second and then wanting to filet his dick the next.

It was tiring.

And dizzying.

Which is why I thought maybe I'd had one too many gin and tonics and my Spanx were tighter than was healthy when I started feeling a little lightheaded. My sleepless nights weren't helping any, so I decided I'd had enough moving and shaking amongst the movers and shakers for one night. It was winding down anyway, so I made another executive decision, figuring I'd hung around for long enough, and beat my tired feet to the door.

But it was while I was outside waiting for the valet to bring my car around that I became confused. I assumed the limousine that pulled up to the curb was for another guest, but as I began walking further down the sidewalk to where I thought my car would be brought to, the rear door opened and I was pulled inside without warning.

The tires squealed – just like me – as they pulled back onto the road, with the force of it knocking me head first into the seat. And just as I thought to do something – yell, scream, stab my stiletto into their ball sack – I felt the cold hard steel barrel press into my side.

“Don't even think about it,” my now identifiable kidnapper warned.

Too late.

I'd already thought it, but I didn't do anything else besides try to right myself into the seat. My heart was hammering in my chest over my unexpected shanghai – hopefully not to Shanghai – and I was already eyeballing the rate of speed we were traveling against the likelihood I'd be roadkill if I just threw myself out of the door.

I sure missed having Godric around for more reasons than one. He'd tell me in a nanosecond.

I'd left my phone at Eric's when I left and I didn't go back for it either. Per the boss's orders. So I'd foregone having a cell phone and gone with the mantra of my inner drunken father and used up stripper mother instead.

Tough titties.

But now it was my titties that wouldn't be tough enough to handle the asphalt at sixty miles per hour.

It made me wonder if my ass would be covered by Spanx that may or may not be NHTSA approved.

Not having any other choice, I slid as far away from him as I could before finally turning to face him and asked, "What? Why are you doing this? Where are you taking me?"

He ignored my questions and asked one of his own with, "That's all you have to say? I'm shocked."

That made two of us, but all I said was, "What else *should* I say, Victor?"

*Why did you steal from Eric? Why are you such a knob? How in the hell did you become so dirt poor with your salary?*

But I already knew the answers to all three questions. Being a knob was innate, but the rest Maxwell Lee had found out. Victor had been living way beyond his means. He owned more homes than I owned shoes. Cars. Vacations to exotic locations. Everything was paid for by credit and before long his pile of debt was nearly as big as my pile of 'I don't give a shit'. All of his homes were in foreclosure with the exception of his primary one and the mortgage for that one was in arrears too. He'd gotten to the point where he didn't have any credit left and needed the cash to save his house.

Something Eric would've helped him with if he'd only asked.

Knob.

But since he wasn't a telepath, he just inflicted me with his crooked smarmy smile and said, "Oh, I don't know. How about how much you think you're worth."

"What?"

By the hour?

By the pound?

By the square foot?

"You see, I think you're worth a lot. More than I ever gave you credit for, but being short on cash has a way of making one *creative*. I've heard rumors. Done some digging and between what little Eric confided in me about his research and those who would like for all of Eric's confidences to be shared on the werewolf front, I've decided to hold a bidding war."

"What in the hell are you talking about? A bidding war over what?"

Because I sure as hell didn't know. The real estate market was nowhere what it once was.

"Who," he said, confusing me even more. But then he knocked me for a loop by adding, "For *you* Miss Stackhouse."

Say what? Like eBay?

Oy vey.

At my gobsmacked expression, he explained, "Eric told me you two are together now, so I know he'll pay any cost to have you returned unharmed. But

the others who want to know everything Eric knows will pay just as handsomely for me to turn you over to them. You are quite the bargaining chip. Either way, I will be a very rich man.”

He would be a very *dead* man if I had my way, but unable to keep my hurt in any longer, I laughed like a crazy person and said, “You’re just as shitty at wheeling and dealing as you are at embezzling money. Eric doesn’t care about me! I believe his exact words to me were, ‘*You’re just my employee*’. You’ve got nothing.”

Just like me.

And just because I was feeling especially bitchy, I taunted, “Just like what’s in your bank account.”

But in my semi-delusional state, I’d forgotten we weren’t playing office politics or even Eric’s favorites anymore. He’d kidnapped me at gun point. Informed me he was holding me hostage for ransom. So I shouldn’t have been as surprised as I was when he backhanded me across my face.

It made me wish I had clicky fangs so I could give him a what for.

But knowing I didn’t have fangs or a way out of there, I felt my heart rate spike again. My cheek was hurting like a son of a bitch and I silently slid my shoes off, planning to make a run for it if I could.

If we ever stopped.

But then it felt like everything stopped all at once.

Except for the sound of the sunroof shattering.

Godzilla? Is that you?

I didn’t see any giant green lizards, but then I didn’t see Victor anymore either. I only knew he was snatched through the now broken sunroof when his shoe

dropped back down into my lap. But even if I hadn't heard the sound, I still would've known he managed to squeeze the trigger on his way out.

I knew by the searing pain in my side.

And I saw no need to hold back, so my screeched out, "FUCK!" only added to the noise, but that too was cut off by my surprise.

Because my night wasn't going bad enough – kidnapped, shot, Spanx were too tight – the driver must have been either startled or suicidal because the next thing I knew we were airborne and falling fast.

I never liked flying. And when not strapped into an airplane, it was especially true. Which made it all the more bizarre when I suddenly found myself still flying, but horizontally now instead of vertically. But my kidnapper car hadn't Go-Go-Gadged into an airplane or anything.

And so far as I could tell, neither had Eric, which made me wonder how in the hell he was keeping us in the air at all. Having snatched my flailing, screaming, Spanx encased ass through the sunroof, he now held me bridal style, and while there were a million things I wanted to say to him.

Call him.

Throw at him.

The only thing I could do was smile at him and say, "Well, *that's* convenient."

## Chapter 14 – Not Helping At All

### EPOV

"You're injured."

It wasn't a question because I could *feel* her pain. Different than the pain I'd been feeling coming from her over the last two weeks, but it was there.



Like the scent of her blood I was desperately trying to ignore.

So far, so good.

“Victor shot me on his way out,” she offered casually, like it was a normal everyday occurrence. But then I could feel her snapping her own set of Legos into place when she added, “That was *you*. *You* did the smash and grab.”

“It was,” I admitted. After feeling her fear and then pain – the evidence of his blow now visible to my eyes in the bruise on her cheek – I couldn’t hold back. I could no longer wait for the car to come to a stop to rescue her. And the only reason he still lived was hearing the gun go off and feeling a new pain light up in her body. I’d heard everything she’d said to him. Felt her incredulousness when he’d truthfully claimed I would pay any price to have her returned unharmed. But I’d heard everything he’d said to her in return and while I wanted to rip him apart piece by piece, I knew now we would need him. I’d track him down later and snatch him out of his life, like he’d snatched Sookie off of the sidewalk, and then I would find out *everything* he knew about the werewolf threat.

In any way I had to.

But in my panic, I’d thrown him down onto the side of the road just in time to see the car go through the guardrail and over the bridge they’d been on. I didn’t know I could fly until the moment I chased the car over the side, with my only plan being to get to her.

But she’d been right. It *was* convenient.

And now I could feel her emotions warring within her. She was happy to see me and angry at the same time. I couldn’t blame her. I deserved whatever treatment she bestowed on me, but first we needed to deal with her injury.

Our thoughts were similar in nature because she locked down both her muscles and her emotions as she said, “I suppose I should thank you, but

since *you* never thanked *me*, I'll just say we're even now. So if you don't mind, *Mr. Northman*, your *employee* would like to get off the magic carpet ride now. You can just drop me off wherever and I'll call for a cab."

Shoeless. Purse-less. And with a bullet hole in her side.

She was also *fucking clueless* if she thought I was letting her out of my sight now.

But feeling the sadness I knew I was the cause of starting to creep in, I chose to piss her off instead to spare both of us from feeling it and asked, "How are you going to call anyone when you left your cell at my house? And what would you pay your fare with anyway? The chip on your shoulder or the spent round in your side?"

I was nearly certain the bullet had passed through her and I had the resources and knowledge to treat her wound at my house. But it was like I could almost hear the '*Oh no you didn't!*' coming from her head, even if my heightened hearing wasn't quite *that* good.

But it *had* been good enough to hear that purple pansy-eyed pussy hitting on her at the function she'd just left.

Fucker.

But instead of yelling and screaming at me, calling me any one of the numerous descriptors I'd heard her say in the past, she called my bluff by not calling me any of them and instead gritted out, "Put. Me. Down. Now."

"Or else what?" I asked, hoping to distract her since we were nearly back to my house. If I'd known about this flying thing it certainly would've made following her around every night much easier. Not only did I miss her more than I knew was possible, I wanted to be sure the wolves weren't following her or lying in wait to do what Victor had nearly succeeded in doing. But even if I couldn't

use my blood to track her every move, all I needed was to pull up her work calendar online.

At least *some* things never changed.

I'd been perched on the rooftop across the street from where she was and had planned on going to her when she got home that night. To try and explain why I'd sent her away and apologize for hurting her in my attempt to not hurt her. Using my blood to zero in on her – something I'd been practicing over the previous two weeks – I'd been able to filter out every conversation around her. It was how I heard that asshole hitting on her. But when she left the building a new scent wafted into my senses. Similar to the wolves, but I couldn't be sure they were similar enough to represent a threat and as I was looking around for the source, Victor grabbed Sookie and everything else was forgotten.

But her next words shocked me enough that I nearly put us both down.

At a high rate of speed that wouldn't have worked out very well for her.

“I quit.”

Quit what? Our back and forth banter? Trying to get me to leave her on the side of the road? Her job?

Us?

My emotions were suddenly too turbulent to make our flight an enjoyable one, so I put us down in a clearing in the woods. The moon was full so there was enough light for her to be able to see, but it wasn't necessary for me to see the hurt in her eyes.

Or the tears welling in them.

“Sookie,” I began, but she held up one hand to stop me, while she clutched at her side with the other.

“Don’t,” she said. “Don’t *Sookie* me. Two weeks, Eric. I haven’t seen or heard from you in *two fucking weeks*. We’ve played a lot of games with one another over the years, but I’m not going to play *this* game with you Eric. You made me a promise and you broke it. You told me you wanted to be in a relationship with me and then I found you...I watched you...”

The tears had spilled over by then and she softly sobbed before choking out, “And then you told me to *leave and don’t come back*. You can’t have it both ways, Eric. And I shouldn’t be left wondering what in hell it all means. Why you ignored me for two weeks only to show up and play at being my savior. Whatever changes happened to you because of the serum, have obviously given you some new superhuman powers, but you’re not a superhero. A superhero wouldn’t treat someone they *claimed* to care about like *trash*.”

Trash, alluding to every other woman before her.

I knew I had a lot of explaining to do. Bowing. Scraping. Groveling. They were all appropriate and warranted right now. But I thought it best to start off with a visual explanation. One I’d given the guys shortly after she’d left that night.

~o~O~o~

Sookie wasn’t even at the end of the driveway before Flood spoke up saying, “Like I said before Eric. I’m glad to see you up and around, even if it’s ten shades of strange. And you *must* be a genius to have concocted some magic potion to bring you back from death, but to put it bluntly. *That* was a *dick move* you just made.”

“Hear, hear,” Herveaux added, raising his invisible glass in the air.

But it took hearing Purifoy say, “I’ll take her if you don’t want her. I like my women with balls bigger than mine,” for me to lose it.

In a big way.

I smashed my way through walls, not bothering with stairs, until I finally reached outside. I uprooted tree after tree and topped my tantrum off by throwing a huge boulder off of the cliff and into the ocean before I finally calmed down enough to stop.

But my muscles told me I could keep going if I'd wanted to.

Talk about strange.

Turning to face my new roommates – even in all of my self-made ruckus, I'd heard them follow me outside – I said, “*That* is why I sent her away. To put it *bluntly* I don't give a shit about you three, but I give plenty of shits about her. What if I lost control? What if I did something to hurt her?”

“You mean like you just did?” Herveaux asked.

He at least took a step back when I growled at him, but ever the leader, Flood moved to stand in front of him saying, “Alright. Maybe you need to figure out what's what first, but while you're doing that, keep in mind *you* don't give a shit about any of us. And yet you came out here to open up your can of whoop ass on a few trees instead of whooping our asses. Don't sell yourself short when it comes to her.”

“What is this?” I asked. “The Sookie Stackhouse Fan Club?”

As the president of said club, I should know if there are new members.

“You didn't see how she was when you were...*out? Dead?*” Flood began, sounding just as confused as I felt about my new state of being.

So Herveaux took the opportunity to automatically interject with, “We came in looking for you. We didn't hear a peep and I move like a fucking ninja. So imagine how surprised I was when I barely cleared the bottom step and got a Louisville Slugger to the chest. She was already poised to go back for seconds when Flood managed to get her attention. *Dude*, she was protecting *you*. She

knew about werewolves and that you'd just been attacked by them, but instead of running she stayed to help you. Someone like that *deserves* her own fan club."

"I get it!" I exclaimed, feeling even more like shit for what I'd just done.

But what they didn't know was how hard I had to fight against my urge to bite her. How much I craved her blood.

"I don't think you do," Purifoy offered. "She's covered in blood because she was doing chest compressions on you for forty-seven minutes before we got here, according to that Godric guy. She only stopped for long enough to put Herveaux on his ass and then she went right back to it until I offered to takeover. We stopped when it didn't seem to be helping anymore, but *when you died?* She went crazy. She did CPR on you like *her* life depended on it until her body gave out. The house could've been on fire the whole time and I doubt she would've noticed. I don't think you know what you just kicked to the curb, but I wasn't kidding when I said I'd take her. Any guy would be lucky to have somebody like her in their corner."

"Enough."

~o~O~o~

Hopefully by showing her it would be *enough* to get her to at least listen to what I had to say. To try and explain why I'd sent her away.

To try and convince her to give me another chance at making things right between us.

Walking over to the nearest tree, I gripped it in both hands due to its size and ripped it from the ground. Tossing it aside like it was a stick I turned back to her and said, "That is why I sent you away. I knew something was different when I woke up that night and I needed to get a handle on what I can do.

What my limits are and how much control I have over myself. I was afraid of hurting you in the process.”

“And yet you hurt me anyway,” she said, unknowingly mimicking Herveaux. “You had control over your words. You’re a fucking genius, so I know you could’ve chosen better ones than *leave* and *don’t come back*.”

“And *I’m sorry*,” I pleaded, taking a step closer to her. “I know it’s no excuse, but I really was trying to do the right thing.”

“Well then you’re not as smart as you think you are,” she hissed. I could feel the pain radiating from her wound, but it was overshadowed by the other pain she was in when she went on to say, “I was devastated when I thought you died and I felt a part of me die with you. So when you were miraculously awake, I didn’t care about your heart not beating or your new clicky teeth. I just cared that I had you back and I told you that, only for you to tell me you didn’t want me around. The old saying goes be careful what you wish for Eric because I’m done. It’s over. And it’s been over ever since you told me to get the fuck out.”

She said she didn’t care about my ‘clicky teeth’ or no heartbeat now – which wasn’t entirely the case – but she didn’t know everything else. I wasn’t even sure *I* knew everything else, but I would tell her everything I *did* know. I just needed her to agree to listen. But instead of trying to explain any of that, my mouth opened and exclaimed, “But I love you!”

The words came flying out faster than I’d flown after the nose diving limo. The same could be said of Sookie when she was suddenly in my face, followed quickly by her slapping hand across it as she yelled, “FUCK YOU! Don’t you *dare* say something like that to me just to weasel your way back into my good graces. You might be able to rip down the whole Redwood Forest, but I’ll kill myself trying to kick your ass if you ever...”

Maybe it was her slap. Maybe it was the scent of her blood. Maybe it was having her so close again.

Or maybe it was just because I fucking loved her and I couldn't imagine my life without her in it that made me cut off her rant with my lips on hers. I poured my desperation into that kiss and it didn't take long before she was returning it in equal amounts.

But feeling her pain from the bullet wound, I forced myself to pull back, but not without reiterating, "I love you Sookie. If you believe nothing else I say, *believe that.*"

She tried to hold onto her anger, but I could feel it when her belief in my words finally settled in. But instead of throwing herself into my arms or something equally Lifetime movie-ish, all she said was, "Well *fuck me* if I don't love you too."

"How romantic," I narrowed my eyes back her, but it was ruined by my smile.

Her mood was turning lighthearted when she snickered, "What do you know about romance? Harlequin didn't make a bank by modeling their male leads after you. Waltzing into a bar and pointing at whatever happened to catch their fancy, like a fat kid in a candy store, does not a swoon-worthy hero make."

She probably would've kept on going if it weren't for the pain I could feel pulsing through her, making her suck in a breath of air, so I let her have the last word on my sense of romantic style and said, "Let me see."

Dropping to my knees in front of her, I turned her body enough to put her wound in front of me. The scent of her blood was nearly overpowering and my 'clicky teeth' made another appearance of their own volition. I had better control over them now, so I hoped I would maintain some level of control as I tore the fabric free from around the bullet hole. But seeing she was wearing something underneath her dress I'd never seen before, I asked, "What's this?"



“That is what happens when women hate other women,” she grumbled. “They design torture devices and then market them to the rest of us chumps as beauty enhancements. Now pretend you don’t see it and go back to playing doctor.”

Playing doctor.

She was playing with fire with her choice of words, but I pretended to not notice that too and checked her back, saying, “The bullet passed through.”

“Fucking Victor, the thieving bastard,” she grimaced as I pressed gently around it, trying to stem the flow of blood. But before I could ask her what she meant by him being a thief, she asked, “And how can you see anything? *I* wouldn’t know it was there if I couldn’t feel it.”

“My senses are heightened,” I offered, getting some of the explanations I had ready for her out of the way. “Sight. Sound.” But not wanting to give her any reason to bolt just yet now that I had her back, I joked, “And smell, so don’t think you can sneak any farts by me anymore.”

My plan worked because she laughed out her vehement denial, “*I never* farted around you.”

Yes she did.

“Yes you did,” I chuckled. “You fart in your sleep.” Feeling her dual amusement and mortification, I added, “They’re cute. And you didn’t even notice when I pulled the covers over your head to seal them in.”

“Keep it up and I’ll eat cabbage and broccoli every night before bed,” she threatened, not seeming to realize her threat was an empty one if it meant she’d be in *my* bed. Despite my best efforts at keeping them in check, my hopes only continued to grow when she went on with, “Did you know I’m lactose intolerant and I’m a whore for chocolate milkshakes? You might be

able to knock down a forest, but I'm pretty sure I can knock you down too. Just call me Obi Wan because the force is in me."

Fuck.

In that that moment I realized just how much I'd really fucking missed her.

And how big of an epic douchebag I was for ever sending her away in the first place.

But seeing through my douchebag exterior to whatever it was on my face made her sober up and ask, "Are blood red Slurpees still your drink of choice?"

"Yes." I only hungered for blood and it seemed to allow me to keep my strength up. I'd experimented with eating food, but it didn't turn out too well when it all came back up.

"Do you want to try mine?"

Fuck yes.

But would I be able to stop?

I hadn't experimented with drinking fresh blood from the source. Flood, Herveaux, and Purifoy would've been my only options – which weren't an option at all in anyone's mind – unless I attacked someone on the street during my nightly Sookie stalking.

But having a better feel for what I could and couldn't handle, I thought I could at least try. I was a scientist at heart and experimenting was in my blood – literally – so when she offered me her side by pressing forward towards my face, I gave in to my wants for both her blood and answers by gently licking the blood from her skin.

Anything I'd thought about how she would taste didn't come close to how good she fucking tasted. Or how turned on I would be doing it.

Was it just her blood?

Was it the intimate act of licking her skin?

Or was it just her?

I had a feeling it was likely a combination of all three and Sookie was apparently feeling some of it herself. And it wasn't helping, so I admitted another truth to her by saying, "I can feel you." And feeling her confusion, I specified, "That night, after...before...when we kissed. I'd accidentally cut my tongue and you swallowed a little bit of my blood. I don't know why, but I can feel your emotions now."

I expected her to be pissed. I was waiting for her to feel violated over me being so intimately aware of everything that went through her. So of course she surprised me instead by saying, "So then you should be able to tell when I'm about to fart in my sleep and hold your breath."

"Yeah," I chuckled. "Out of this whole experience, *that* is what I'll consider my greatest accomplishment. A Sookie fart-dar."

At least talking about farts had abated some of the sexual tension we'd each been feeling, so I thought to experiment a little more by saying, "One of the other changes – one I'd actually hoped to accomplish – was that my body heals itself now. You probably noticed it that night, but...would you mind experimenting a little?"

"What did you have in mind?" she asked and then grinned. "Because I wouldn't say ass play is definitely off the table, but you'd have to ease me into it first. You might have pointy teeth now, but I already know the real monster is in your pants."

"Sookie," I growled.

Because there went my libido again.

“We’ll talk about your ass and what I can and will do to it later,” I warned.

Her. Me. Who the hell knew anymore.

“But for right now, I was thinking of trying to heal you with my blood. In theory, since whatever changes occurred in me allows my body to heal itself, then I’m wondering if dabbing some directly into your wound would do the same.”

Talking about it drew my eyes back to her side and I squashed the urge to bathe it in my tongue, knowing I could very well bathe the inside of my pants in cum if I did.

“Would you be able to feel me even more?” she asked.

I was about to reply I couldn’t be sure when I felt her lust skyrocket and ended up gritting out, “Stop that!”

“Stop what?” she asked innocently, but if I could’ve read her mind I was certain I would be able to see every lewd and lascivious thing she had to be imagining right then to feel as turned on as she was.

“I mean it Sookie,” I warned. I had no idea of how I would manage to restrain myself if we were to have sex right then. Between the smell of her blood, my new strength, and my carnal desire for her, I could easily kill her.

“So shut up and quit using your sex voice. Be like Nike and just do it already,” she taunted, but I could tell she was hoping it would work. Her pain levels had steadied, but she *was* still in pain.

That made two of us.

For two different reasons.

Not knowing how much would be needed – or if it would work at all – I thought to try it in small quantities at first. Cutting open the tip of my finger

on my sharpened tooth, I squeezed about a dime sized dollop of blood out and gently applied it to the hole where the bullet entered.

“It...it tingles,” she said, while I watched it seep into her skin and waited for a sign it was working. So when I saw the edges slowly starting to knit back together, I did the same thing to the hole where the bullet had exited her body.

In all it took under five minutes for there to only be a faint outline of where her wounds were and I hoped they would fade in time too. I didn’t want her to have any physical reminders of what would’ve never happened had I not sent her away.

It was bad enough knowing I would never forget it.

Standing up, I looked into her eyes and asked, “How do you feel?”

“*You tell me,*” she smirked.

“Good. You feel good and I can’t feel you any more than I already could,” I answered after feeling her out – so to speak.

But I felt her mischievous mood just as she asked, “And now?” right before she pulled my blood covered finger into her mouth. Moving her tongue across it reminded me of how good she was at moving it across other parts of me and she seemed to know that when she finally released it with a pop, purring out, “Can you *feel me* now?”

Yes.

Yes I could.

And *what* I was feeling coming from her was not helping.

Not helping at all.

## Chapter 15 – All the Way Home

## SPOV

I probably should've made Eric work a little harder to get out of the doghouse, but the truth was I missed him more than I had wanted to admit even to myself. Even as I told him to fuck off and that we were through, every part of me revolted against the idea of not seeing him anymore.

And then he went and said he loved me.

*So fuck me if I wasn't that girl.*

I believed him though, and while I had a billion questions about what was different, besides him being able to fly, for right now I only had one thing on my mind.

Playing.

And playing with Eric *this way* might very well be my new favorite game. Especially since I was in the mood for some makeup sex. Something he already knew since he could feel me.

Now if only I could get him to feel me from the inside.

So I let my mind wander, remembering exactly how that felt, and before you could say 'Game Night', my feelings hopped, skipped, and jumped their way over to Eric, making him hiss, "*Sookie...*"

King me!

"Eric?"

Probably realizing exactly what I was doing – he was a genius after all – he switched things up by whining out, "Soookiiie..."

But my kitty wanted to play with his balls of yarn and make those bitches unravel, so I matched his whine with my purred out, "Errriiic..."

“No!” he growled. “You have to stop trying to tempt me.” Acting like he didn’t want me with his words, his hands were a different story. Even as he was saying no with his lips, he pulled my body against his and rubbed it against me.

The monster in his pants was growling and making a grab for me too.

“But whhyyy?” I whined, hoping there wasn’t a little part of him that was mad at me for giving him clicky teeth. It was a hell of a lot different than say an ugly Christmas sweater.

“Because of *this*,” he gritted out and before you knew it I was tumbling across the ground.

Jesusfuckingchrist! Maybe he really *was* mad?

“Shit!” I heard him yell out, right before he pulled me back up to my feet just as quickly. Patting me down like his initials were TSA, I guessed looking for injuries over whether or not I had an extra ounce of shampoo tucked into my Spanx, he eventually ran out of places to pat. The only damage done was a new rip along the skirt of my dress and seemingly satisfied I wasn’t hurt, he ran his hands through his hair and said, “I’m so sorry!”

“What were you trying to do?” I asked. My body might have come to a standstill, but my head hadn’t gotten the memo yet to stop spinning.

“I don’t know,” he moaned. “My intention was to give you an example of how easily you could be hurt by me. I was going for tearing your dress into a mini skirt, but...it didn’t work out so well.”

Now that I’d stopped seeing two of him, I couldn’t help but snicker out, “That would’ve been kinda hot, but I didn’t pay a couple of grand for shoddy workmanship.” But feeling better already – and by *better*, I meant *horny* – I slithered back up to him and asked, “What’s wrong with working the zipper?”

When I felt the low growl work its way through his chest, I was sure it was only because we were standing on grass that the sound of checkers falling from my checkerboard couldn't be heard hitting the ground.

Tink. Tink. Tink.

"That's hot too," I whispered, picturing my Harlequin hero ripping the rest of my dress from my heaving bosom, so he could push his pulsing manhood into my love chamber.

Yep. I could be *that girl* too.

"And *that's* not helping! I mean it Sookie," he warned.

"I mean it too," I whispered in my best impersonation of Jessica Rabbit.

Apropos, I thought, since I wanted us to fuck like rabbits.

Sliding my hands underneath his shirt, I noticed his skin felt cooler than I expected. But what really got my attention was how big he felt.

Aside from his monster.

It made me want to strip him naked and pull an all-nighter, studying his body like I was cramming for sexams as I crammed him inside of me.

I'd always been a very good student.

"You're too tempting," my pot whispered to his kettle, fighting against what we both obviously wanted for whatever reason.

But never one to back down from a challenge, I quoted my hussy hero, drawling out, "I'm not bad. I'm just drawn that way."

"You're quoting cartoons?" he managed to chuckle, even though I could tell his pot was rapidly approaching an all-out boil.



***FWEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEH!!!!***

“You’d rather I quote former presidents?” I asked. Dropping my voice to a whisper and my hand down to the front of his pants, I stroked his leaky spout and offered, “If I speak softly will you let me carry your big stick?”

“That’s not what Roosevelt said,” he said in a hoarse whisper.

“Roosevelt never had your stick in his hands.”

More like tree trunk. Maybe carrying that around for all of these years is what gave him the ability to rip others from the ground now? Either way, his stick was mine now and I’d beat anybody who tried touching it with an ugly one. Former *or* current president.

No. He. Can’t.

But my actions were making me crave more than a spot of tea when he pleaded, “Sookie,” and forcefully took my hands in his own. “I’m not saying *no*. I’m just saying *not right now*.” Looking up at him, I could see he was struggling with both his words and his wants when he finally admitted, “I’m scared I’ll hurt you. I want you too much and with the scent of your blood...it’s just *too* overwhelming.”

Considering his grip on my hands was approaching painful, I could see his point.

So I would have to wait until he was calmer to play with his point.

“Fine,” I grumbled, trying not to feel disappointed now that I knew he would feel it coming from me too. I couldn’t imagine everything he was going through, so the least I could do was chain up my inner hussy to make it easier on him. But that wouldn’t work forever.

Now that she knew just how many points Eric could make, that whore would chew off her own arm to free herself eventually.

“Thank you,” he whispered against my lips, keeping our kiss more sweet than sultry, and then added, “I know there’s a lot I still need to tell you, but we should head back to the house. I need to tell the guys about Victor and what he told you. I dropped him on the side of the road when I went flying after you, so we need to find him and then find out what he knows.”

The guys?

I hadn’t given much thought to Flood and the other two who’d come into the house that night. I’d been doing my best not to think about that night *at all*, so after I yipped and smacked Eric for shooting us into the sky without warning, I snuggled into his chest and asked, “They’re still staying with you?”

Being out of the loop wasn’t something I was used to where Eric was concerned. Just thinking about it made me feel a little sad and a lot pissed, but Eric just squeezed me tighter and said, “Yes and I promise I’ll tell you everything that’s happened since that night.” Pausing for a moment, he kissed the top of my head and said, “You know, I really *am* sorry.”

“Yeah,” I agreed. “You *are*.”

*He knew what I meant.*

It didn’t matter though. I was still fucked because I still loved him, even though he wouldn’t fuck me yet.

So for anyone keeping count, I was fucked on two outta three fronts.

I didn’t have long to languish though because just as I noticed his house coming into view, I noticed something else new.

“You fenced the property?”

“Yes,” he replied and explained, “It’s electric and Godric’s wired into it. If anything bigger than a Shih Tzu goes up to or over it, they’ll get showered in an atomized silver spray.”

Sounded handy, but before I could issue my *atta boy*, Eric brought us down – too fast, I thought – and it seemed my assessment was valid. Eric must have needed new brake pads because before I knew it we landed in the yard hard enough for the ground to shake and then rolled across the lawn, like someone had shouted, “Stop! Drop! And...”

From the safety of his cage-like arms, I squealed like a pig in an Eric blanket, and just as we came to a stop the sound of feet could be heard running towards us. Once the dust literally settled, I looked up at our audience, recognizing Flood and his men, and the largest of three – the one I played Babe Ruth with – looked me over before turning to Eric and saying, “No means *no*, man.”

I supposed I did look a little worse for wear in my riches to rags ensemble, but I stood up and brushed myself off, while Eric grumbled, “I found out I can fly. I just need to practice the landing part.”

The three of them laughed before letting their eyes fall to me. Looking back at them and acting like I didn’t look like I’d lost a fight with a weed whacker, I smiled and greeted, “Gentlemen. It’s good to see you again.”

“Miss Stackhouse,” Flood smiled and nodded in my direction.

But before anyone could say anything else, the sound of, “SOOKIE!” boomed around the yard.

It was the voice of God...ric.

Maybe feeling a little spiritual himself, Eric huffed, “Jesus Christ,” and threw his hands up in the air, talking to the thin of it around him, asking, “So *now* you’re talking again?”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

Eric. The thin air. Take your pick.

“Did something happen to Godric?” I added, sounding worried. I’d kind of wondered why he’d never tried contacting me and then told myself I was being stupid for thinking my computer generated buddy would miss me. Sure, I didn’t have my phone, but I knew he – of all AI people – would be able to worm his way into Northman Inc.’s computer network.

The Godric IM I kept telling myself I wasn’t but really was waiting for never came.

“Other than a major case of the ass?” Eric groused, as he led us indoors. “After you left he gave me a very detailed dissertational account of asses and the types I most resembled, so when I commanded him to not contact you until I was ready, he went radio silent.”

I would’ve pet him if I could – Godric, not Eric – but since I couldn’t I was about to tell him I missed him too when the third troop in Eric’s little band of misfits laughed, “Not to us. He’s talked to us plenty. It’s just his Maker he’s mad at.”

“You’ve brought back my woman,” Godric said – like Maker, like AI Caveman. “So you’ve earned my cooperation.”

Eric only sighed and shook his head before turning to me with a smirk and said, “You have a fan club. The whole fucking lot of them have been against me since you left.”

“Since you sent her away,” Godric corrected.

At least I wasn’t the one to have to say it, but since Eric and I had already covered that, I didn’t feel the need to beat a dead horse’s ass and offered, “That’s very sweet of you all, but I’m back now, so no more picking on Eric. That’s *my* job.” But staring at them all, I realized I didn’t know the names of half of them, so I admitted to that half, “I’m sorry. Colonel Flood I know, but I’m afraid I don’t know your names.”

My baseball opponent looked up and waved his hand at me with a smile, saying, “Hey there Shoeless Joe, I’m Alcide Herveaux. And while I admire your swing, I appreciate you not taking a swing at my balls. The runt of the litter over there is Jake Purifoy.”

Pfft...runt.

If he was a runt than my name should be Arrietty Clock because I’d have to borrow a ladder to be eye to eye with any one of them. But since I was the definition of icky-poo-cah at the moment, I just waved at each of them in return and said, “Nice to meet you. Officially.” And turning back to Eric, I added, “I’m just gonna go take a quick shower and I’ll be right back.”

I didn’t wait for a response, but it made no difference because I only got five feet down the hall before I stopped to ask, “Doing a little redecorating?”

There were patched holes – Eric-sized ones – in the walls on one side, but hearing Eric say, “Uhh...” was all the answer I needed.

I didn’t want to know.

Between the grass in my hair, the blood on my side, and the checkers falling out of my cooch, I needed a shower stat. But it turned out to be a long one, so by the time I went back into the living room wearing some of the clothing I’d thankfully left behind, everyone looked fit to be tied.

“What happened?” I asked and then grinned at Eric, “Did somebody fart?”

“Victor,” Eric managed to snarl, while fighting off his own grin. “Between what he did to you and then what he said to you, he’s not winning any popularity contests around here. Godric tried locating his cell, but he seems to have turned it off.”

“Or maybe he didn’t pay the bill,” I scoffed. But seeing Eric’s arched brow reminded me we never got around to that, so I added, “He was the one embezzling money from Northman Inc.”

“I thought I heard Edgington telling you that tonight, but I guess it makes more sense now.”

“What do you mean you thought you *heard*?” I wondered aloud.

And then wondered if I’d have to go clear across town the next time *I* had to fart.

“I told you I can hear better,” he said and then looked pointedly at the other three.

Which was no fucking fair because I should get first dibs on any point playing.

“What?” I asked, wondering what they were hiding from me since I had a feeling I was about to be Dutch Oven’d.

Eric wasn’t the only one with powers. All women had an innate ability to sense male bullshit a mile away.

No intrusive sniffers needed.

Flood spoke up and said, “Go ahead. She knows about *you*, so we’ll be yesterday’s news to her.”

When Eric hemmed, I glared at him before he could haw and said, “Just tell me.”

“I changed them.”

“What do you mean *you changed them*?” I asked, even though I had a feeling I already knew. And knowing how Eric’s change came about and remembering

the new drywall, I felt my panic rise when I asked, “Did the wolves come back? Were you all hurt?”

I felt like the biggest asshole on the planet for letting myself get caught up in my own melodramatics. I guessed I was *that girl* too because instead of getting in Eric’s face and telling him to shut the fuck up, that I wasn’t going anywhere, I took my pigheaded ass and went wee wee wee all the way home.

And now my new business cards would read:

Sookie Stackhouse, PhD  
Pigheaded Douchewad

“No,” the three of them said in unison, with Flood taking the lead and adding, “We all volunteered. Those werewolves are too quick and too strong for us to take them head-on without some kind of enhancement ourselves. Eric is inhumanly strong now, but he’s got no experience fighting. And we’ve got the know-how, but we didn’t have the oomph. Now we’ve all got an edge.”

Looking at Eric, Alcide piped up with, “Eric is still the strongest, but we’re teaching him tactical maneuvers and he’s picking them up quick. And because looking like that wasn’t enough, now apparently the fucker can fly.” Narrowing his eyes at him, he added, “Always gotta overachieve, ay brainiac?”

As an outsider on the inside, I could see there was a camaraderie there, but instead of feeling left out, I was overcome with happiness for Eric. He’d never had any real friends he could count on, but out of something as horrific as his near death, he now had them in his life because of it.

I knew Eric was confused over my sudden joy just from the look on his face, but he didn’t ask and explained, “I’m still different than them. They got everything from the serum I’d strived for, but didn’t have the same...extras mine came with. The teeth. The need to drink blood or the decelerated heartbeat.”

“Your heart still beats?” I asked, with my feet already moving towards him before I’d finished the thought. I pressed my head against his chest and waited, but I didn’t hear anything and said as much.

“It’s very slow, like molasses moving down a glacier on a sunny day in negative forty degree weather,” he explained. “My heart beats once every twenty-four hours.”

Weird, but no weirder than him walking around with no heartbeat at all. But since the others seemed to miss out on pointy extras, I asked, “Why do you think you’re different?”

I knew Eric, so I knew he would’ve already thought it out. Dissected it to the N<sup>th</sup> degree and then dissected it some more.

“The only thing I can think that was any different was the wolf bites,” he said, wrapping his arms around me and holding me against him. “Something about being bitten must have made a genetic difference. And my change only took about an hour, but when John was given a dose, he passed out and didn’t wake up for three days. The same for Alcide and Jake.”

“So...all of you?” I asked, pulling away so I could take a look around at the other three. “You all have crazy extras like Eric?”

“Yep,” Jake smiled and said, “Step away from Eric and I’ll show you.”

So I stepped away from Eric and then took about a dozen more when Jake flew across the room faster than my eyes could track towards Eric. I didn’t even have the time to scream before it was all over, but Eric must have moved faster because he had Jake pinned against the wall by his neck.

Grinning at his captive audience, Eric asked, “How many times do I have to hang you on my wall before you realize you’ll never beat me?”

Jake just grinned back at him and asked, “Are you sure about that?”



I don't know what I was expecting, but I heard Alcide snicker right before Eric toppled to the ground like some little bastard from Hogwarts shouted their deboning spell at him.

*Ossio Dispersimus!*

Like someone had cut the invisible strings his limbs had been attached to, Eric fell in a heap where he stood and I ran over, yelling out his name, but not before I heard Jake guffaw, "It never gets old!"

"It doesn't!" Alcide cried out in laughter, holding his sides.

"What happened to him?" I yelled in a panic and dropped down beside him.

But before I could say or do anything else – and I had plenty I wanted to say and do to the two braying jackasses in the room – Flood walked over. Picking Eric up like he was sack of potatoes and throwing him over his shoulder, he said, "Don't pay those two assholes any mind. It scared the shit out of us the first time it happened too."

I followed Flood back to Eric's room where he put him on the bed and explained, "It happens at daybreak. It's like somebody turns out Eric's lights and he's out. Out out. The first time he was out until sundown, but since his heart wasn't thumping before he took a header, we decided to wait him out before digging his grave. And every day since then, he's still lights out at dawn, but he comes around earlier with each passing day. He's more sluggish when the sun's up, but that seems to be evening out too. He thinks in time he won't need any sleep at all."

I couldn't help but connect the dots on my mental vampire image. It was the only reference I had, what with the clicky teeth and blood Slurpees, so I drew on every other piece of folklore and teen romance I knew and asked, "Can he go out in the sun? Does it burn him or make him sparkle?"

“Neither,” he chuckled. “The sunlight doesn’t hurt him and if he drinks a liter of blood before going out, his coloring looks normal. It takes him a minute for his eyes to adjust, but we all had the same issues. It’s a good thing his neighbors are a little ways away or else we could’ve gone crazy with how good our hearing is now before we learned to tune things out.”

I had a million more questions, but seeing Eric lying in bed only made me want to join him. I was pooped – something I wouldn’t be doing in this house with all of the literally and figuratively nosey occupants – and Flood must have seen it on my face because he said, “You’ve had a long night, so why don’t you get some rest. We’ll all be here when you wake up.”

He moved to walk out the door, but before he got too far, I reached out and put my hand on his arm saying, “Thank you. For staying with Eric and looking out for him.”

I’d always felt like it was my job to do that for him, but this was different. Good different and I suspected Flood knew that because as I finally lay down on the bed, curled around Eric, I fell asleep replaying his parting words to me.

“It’s what brothers do.”

## Chapter 16 – Over the Edge

### **EPOV**

Sookie.

She was always in my thoughts. Always the first thing on my mind when I woke up, but now it was different.

Because I could tell she was in the bed with me.

I’d missed having her there and was glad to have her back, but what *she* didn’t know was how much more strongly I felt things now. Somehow with the

slowing of my heartbeat, everything else was amplified by a thousand. Not just my senses were heightened, but my emotions too.

And what I was feeling for her right then scared me.

I'd *always* wanted Sookie. But now I wanted Sookie in more ways than just having her as my own.

It was as though her blood was literally calling to me.

And with the sound of my 'clicky teeth' making an appearance, she made a shiver run through me when she softly chuckled, "Somebody's awake..."

An understatement. Many parts of me were very awake in that moment.

I was adjusting to the changes, but I still wasn't used to going from conscious one moment to being conscious in another, with hours gone by in between the two. But considering my last moment had me holding Jake against the wall and I woke up to feeling the warm breaths from Sookie's mouth hovering over my dick – the thin barrier of cotton covering me doing nothing to hinder the sensation – I couldn't really complain.

Well maybe I could complain about the thin barrier of cotton.

"Did you know some parts of you wake up before others?" she asked and glancing down at her it looked like she could be using my dick as a microphone.

I know parts of *me* felt like singing, seeing her there.

But not knowing just how well I could control myself and still concerned for her safety, I tried to push back my desire for her by asking, "What time is it? Where are the guys?"

Not that I cared what time it was, but I'd been waking earlier and earlier each day. My real reason for asking was hoping Sookie might feel less inclined to do

all of the things I could feel she wanted to do if she knew we would have an audience. Even before their change, they would've been able to hear us fucking.

Sookie was a screamer.

“Flood said you would be up any minute, so he just left to run out for supplies. And Alcide and Jake are doing recon on Victor's place,” she replied and then tried to kill me with her sex voice when she added, “We have the whole house to ourselves.”

Technically, we'd never had the *whole house* to ourselves with Godric around, but Sookie either never thought about that fact or didn't care.

I had a feeling it was the latter.

“Sookie,” I began, wondering if I would be able to resist her now.

I already doubted my willpower would hold out, but it definitely took a hit when she ran her hand up and down the front of my pants, asking, “Do you not want to?”

“Of course *I want to*,” I hissed. “But...what if I hurt you?” It was a very real possibility. We'd made love a few times, but most of the time we just went at each other like the world was about to end.

And with the way both of us were feeling right then, I had a feeling we would be acting out the Sexpocalypse.

“You won't,” she denied and I could tell she believed her words. Crawling back up my body, she laid hers on top of me and gently kissed my lips, saying, “You couldn't because *you love me*.”

I did.

“I do,” I agreed aloud. But before I could explain that was exactly why I was afraid I could hurt her – how my feelings for her had multiplied times infinity – Sookie had apparently decided my two word answer was all she needed to hear.

Her hot little hands snaked up the front of my shirt, while her lips devoured mine. When she ran her tongue over my fangs I could feel it much lower on my body and before I’d consciously decided to do it, I’d flipped us over, putting her underneath me, with my teeth scraping over the pulsing artery in her neck.

When I realized what I was doing, I tried to pull back thinking she would be scared, but instead she held my head to her neck with each of her hands and panted out, “Are you hungry?”

“Sookie...” I growled.

She’d always tempted me, but this was too much. I was afraid of doing too much. Of hurting her too much.

Of drinking too much of her blood.

“Flood said you only need a pint a day now,” she said softly, offering herself up to me in every way. “No different than the Red Cross, except I’m hoping I’ll get something better than juice and cookies out of the deal.”

My mouth was salivating like never before and the thought of sinking my teeth into her flesh, coupled with the lust I could feel running through us both, threatened to make me cum right then and there.

I may have been inhumanly strong, but I was weak when it came to Sookie.

Something that was no different than before the change.

But knowing I would likely embarrass myself by cumming way too soon, I sought out whatever fortitude I could find from within and held back, so I

could at least get her there first. Since she was only wearing a pair of cotton shorts and a t-shirt, it was much easier to tear them away from her body. Mine followed right after hers and she gasped in surprise, but I could tell she was turned on even more.

It only added to my powerlessness to be able to resist her.

Not that I was really trying to resist her anymore.

But I forced myself to focus on the forcefulness of my touch, delicately trailing my fingertip down along her carotid artery, tracing over her clavicle and dipping into the hollow at the center, before dragging it down in between the swells of her breasts. Goose bumps followed my path all the way down her body – a contrast to the wet heat I found in between her legs.

“Errriic,” she moaned when I took my time exploring, but it was for her own good. I needed to keep myself calm enough so that I wouldn’t hurt her.

But I would make her wait good for her too.

Sliding one of my fingers inside, her hips bucked up to meet my hand, and with my new quickened reflexes, I vibrated my thumb over her clit, making her scream out my name in record time.

So the scientist in me experimented with how quickly I could make her do it again.

And again.

The entire time I unconsciously kept track of every beat of her heart. The pulsing through her veins swooshing through her body and somehow pulsating their way through my dick until I couldn’t resist any longer. Lining myself up, I was careful to keep most of my weight off of her and gently slid inside. Gasping in air I didn’t really need, the heat of her inner walls surrounded me, and the rest of her body quickly followed.

Arms. Legs. As much as she could, she wrapped herself around me and moved her hips, trying to quicken my pace. Still afraid I could hurt her, I was holding back as much as I could. Something she figured out because she jerked my head to hers and snarled, “Stop it! You’re not going to hurt me, so just get over yourself already and fuck me like you mean it.”

What did she tell me the night before?

*Be careful what you wish for?*

Well...I hoped she meant it.

Still keeping my strength in check, I moved faster – harder – like my body had been wanting to. A part of me kept an eye on Sookie. Her reactions. A part of me worried it would be too much for her, but instead her desires shot up with every rise in speed from my hips. When she started calling out to Gods I wasn’t so sure she believed in, I knew she was close.

Feeling everything so acutely, I’d been close the entire time. Sex with Sookie was always great – better than any other I’d ever had – but now nothing could compare to what it was like.

And now knowing what it was like, I just hoped I would manage to convince myself there were other things we need to do before I chained her to my bed for all of eternity.

Our bodies were slipping and sliding against one another’s thanks to the sweat she’d worked up, but feeling her body clamp down, signaling her release, signaled the end of my self-control. My teeth sank into her neck without any conscious deliberation from me. I couldn’t even separate the orgasm in my mouth from the orgasm I had further down below, but my bite seemed to trigger another one in Sookie too and it only added to the already heady experience.

Her heart rate was up, so her blood was practically bursting into my mouth and tasted so much better than the bagged donor blood I'd been subsisting on. So much better that I forced myself to stop much sooner than I wanted to as soon as the thought entered my mind because I knew I could easily get lost in her.

I could easily *lose her* in my gluttony.

Knowing my blood could heal her, I pierced my tongue on the tip of my fang and spread the blood over the two puncture marks I'd made into her skin, watching until they disappeared. Picking apart her emotions, I could tell she was lightheaded and asked, "Are you okay?"

I didn't think I drank more than half a pint of her blood, but I couldn't be sure.

Ignoring my question, she asked her own by chuckling, "Are you kidding? You can feel me. Can't you tell *just how okay* I am?"

So I ignored her question too and said, "You feel lightheaded."

"Multiple orgasms will do that to a gal," she snickered and pulled me down for another kiss.

But before things could heat up again, Godric unnecessarily cleared his nonexistent throat and said, "Please excuse the intrusion, but there is something you should see."

A moment later, the flat screen TV turned on showing a breaking news report in downtown Los Angeles. The frazzled reporter looked terrified and was already mid-sentence when we heard, "That's right, Glenn. There are *wolves* in downtown Los Angeles."

We both sat up and stared as footage shot earlier was replayed, showing what I knew were werewolves in wolf bodies, tearing down the city streets and into the hotel where Sookie had been the night before.



The hotel where the financial summit was being held.

“There are unconfirmed reports from eyewitnesses who claim they saw *men* turn into those wolves. And as impossible as that *sounds*, there are multiple accounts coming in from various sources so we’re not discounting them just yet. From what we can tell, the wolves have all congregated at The Beaumont Hotel where the World Financial Summit is being held.” Pausing to listen to whatever was being said into her earpiece, her eyes widened before she added, “Glenn, we just got confirmation there are casualties inside The Beaumont. We can only assume the wolves are the cause, but who the injured parties are and the extent of their injuries is still unknown. The police are urging citizens to stay inside behind locked doors until the threat is over. We’ve been told wildlife officials are on their way to try and help trap the wolves, but we’ve already seen SWAT personnel taking up positions on nearby rooftops, so it appears they’re not taking any chances. Once again, we’re urging our viewers to remain indoors and stay tuned for updates on the wolf...”

Her report was cut off by her scream just as a large wolf came into view. One I recognized, having studied the footage of him so extensively.

It was Patrick Furnan.

The video feed was lost just after he lunged at the camera and I tore out of bed, throwing my clothes on while shouting, “Godric! Get a hold of the guys on their cells and let them know what’s going on downtown. Tell them I’ll meet them there!”

“No!” Sookie shouted, chasing after me. “You can’t go there Eric! What if you get hurt again?”

“Sookie,” I hissed and then calmed myself the fuck down seeing how upset she was. Gently taking ahold of the side of her face, I looked into her eyes and said, “I’m stronger now. Faster. My body can heal itself, but the whole reason for

me being this way is because of the wolves. Because of the threat they represented and because of their attack on me. I need to do this.”

I would be doing it no matter what. I hoped she would understand, but either way, I couldn't stand by while innocent people were hurt or killed when I knew there was something I could do to stop them.

She stared back at me, searching my eyes for something, but she seemed satisfied with whatever she found and then looked down at the jeans now covering my legs.

“Are you wearing *that*?”

Was she seriously questioning my fashion style right now?

And because she was sometimes telepathic, she rolled her eyes and said, “What I meant was, unless you and your boys plan on outing yourselves as L.A.'s newest baddest dog catchers, shouldn't you wear something a little more camouflage-y? You're not exactly unknown to the residents of this city. And tussling with wolves, it would probably do you some good to wear something sturdier than denim.”

“Like what?” I asked, thinking her point had merit. While whoever was behind the wolves might have suspected I had something to do with the ass whooping that was about to visit them, I didn't want to give my identity away to the whole world.

I wasn't *that* egotistical.

I followed her into my closet, but couldn't help smirking when she pulled out a pair of black leather pants, black tee, and matching leather jacket.

“You just like the way my ass looks in these,” I playfully accused as I pulled them on.

“Well, it’s not a hardship,” she tried to grin, but I could tell she was worried. She didn’t voice it though and just waited for me to put the rest of my clothes on before staring at my face and saying, “Your pretty boy good looks aren’t a hardship to look at either, but you need to cover them up or else the jig will be up before you even get started.”

I agreed, but with what though?

A motorcycle helmet?

No...thanks to the workouts I’d been doing with the guys, I knew my fangs always snapped down when I was in the heat of things. My desire to bite and tear was nearly overwhelming at times, but now I wouldn’t have to hold back and it could mean the difference in any real fight I had against one of the wolves.

There would be no muzzle for me.

“You need something like Batman wears,” she said, staring at me. I was waiting for the joke I was sure was there about bats and vampires, but her concern for my wellbeing must have made her snark go offline. Instead she looked around my closet thoughtfully before finally asking, “I don’t suppose you have a BDSM kink you haven’t told me about yet and have one of those zipper face masks hidden away in here somewhere?”

“No, but...” Hearing her say the word ‘mask’ made me remember the costume party I’d gone to a few years earlier, so I rooted around the top shelf where I’d last seen it and pulled it out. Victor’s last wife had thrown one of those masquerade parties where the women all held masks over their faces attached to a stick in their hand, while the men wore masks that covered just the top half of their faces and everybody pretended they didn’t know who anyone else was.

It was stupid, but now having gone was coming in handy.

It was black too and the style was a cross between the Lone Ranger and Phantom of the Opera. I wouldn't be readily recognizable to anyone who didn't know it was me and my mouth would still be free and clear. There was nothing I could do about my blond hair showing, but it wasn't like I was the only one in all of L.A.

"What do you think?" I asked Sookie after putting it on.

And the tingle I felt coming from her told me she liked it without her saying a single word.

So instead of waiting for her to say anything, I kissed her with everything I had, and said, "Hold that thought. We'll revisit it when I get back."

"Because you're coming back," she reiterated, but I could tell she was trying to convince herself it was true.

"I am," I promised and I intended on keeping it.

So after a quick but sincere declaration of love from each of us, I was on my way. The sun wasn't quite down all the way, so I didn't want to risk flying and being seen. The news werewolves possibly existed was enough for the general public to have to deal with. A flying vampire of sorts would probably push them over the edge of sanity. But knowing what traffic was like downtown, I chose to run instead, sticking to the wooded areas when possible and staying off of the streets entirely.

When the guys and I decided it would be us against the wolves, I designed earpieces for each of us that would allow us to communicate with each other. I just hoped they had theirs in and on, but I shouldn't have worried because as soon as I got mine in and on, the sound of John's voice came into my ear.

They all seemed to be onsite and were discussing the different entry points into the building, so when he paused, I broke in with, "I'll be there in under a minute."

And zeroing in on the sounds coming from the direction I was running towards – the screams of terror and the menacing growls I remembered all too well – made it the longest minute of my life.

## Chapter 17 – The Authority

### Still EPOV

Knowing their scents – as strange as *that* still seemed – meant I was able to locate John in an alley behind the building catty-cornered across the street from the hotel where the summit was being held. But also knowing what a quick draw he was, rather than subjecting myself to being shot again – maybe I wouldn't tell Sookie about *everything* we'd experimented with while she'd been gone – I simply warned, "I'm here," before I snuck up on him.

Turning to look my way, his eyes went wide for a split second before he grinned and said, "Boy Wonder? Gee, am I glad *you're* here."

"Shut it," I smirked back, still riding my Sookie high. "Not everybody is as unrecognizable as you."

"Good thinking," he agreed. "But if you show up to our next skirmish wearing head to toe spandex and a speedo, you and me are gonna have to have a sit down."

"We're coming up at your six," Alcide told us through our earpieces and a moment later both he and Jake were at our side.

"I thought Comic Con ended weeks ago," he said with his eyes narrowed at me, while Jake whined, "Why didn't you guys tell me it was Halloween? Dude, I coulda dressed like Little Red Riding Hood and gone in there to deliver my basket o' kickass to those fleabags," patting down his web belt 'basket' loaded with silver rounds.

Something else I hadn't gotten around to telling Sookie about yet. We'd amassed quite a bit of silver through back channels over the last two weeks, coating everything with it from ammunition to daggers. My skin burned with silver contact, just like I suspected the wolves' would, but the guys weren't affected.

And before I could explain – *again* – about notoriety and me being the definition of it, John asked, “Are we here to discuss fashion do's and don'ts or to deal with the wolves?” Without waiting for a response, he turned to me and asked, “What do we know?”

“Godric?” I asked, knowing he was monitoring everything being said.

A moment later, his voice filled our earpieces, saying, “I have counted four wolves in total, according to the hotel's video surveillance system. I have taken control over theirs and every other to include the city's traffic cams within a three block area and I've disrupted every frequency within that border. Anything connected to a satellite, cell tower, or internet service provider is now under my control, so every image captured by devices connected to those three will be erased. I have no control over standard film.”

I wasn't too concerned about that. We all moved pretty fast now and who in the hell used regular cameras anymore anyway?

“I'm gonna start calling him Big Brother from now on,” Alcide muttered, looking impressed.

“Where are they?” I asked.

“The main conference room of the hotel. They appear to be herding the summit's main attendees.”

“But, why?” I asked, not really expecting an answer, so much as trying to figure it out myself. We didn't know what the wolves were made for. We'd just

suspected it wouldn't be for anything good. But what could they possibly want with the head honchos of the political financial world?

It's not like they carried their respective country's wealth around in their wallets.

Not always understanding when a rhetorical question was being asked, Godric responded, "An attack of this magnitude by creatures of folklore could bring the world's financial markets crashing down. Panic by the general population is always reflected in the economic stability of any given country. Fear begets volatility, whether it's against their leaders or their fellow man. Riots could form by everyday citizens to overthrow their government if they no longer believe in their ability to keep them safe. It is human nature to seek out those who offer the appearance of safety and when there is no one for them to turn to, they will turn on each other to do it for themselves. Militias and martial law could become the new standard. In theory, this one incident could be the linchpin that could bring the First World to its knees, thereby clearing the way for anyone else with enough power to take over the world."

Like anyone who happened to control the werewolves.

"We need to stop them," I said to everyone and no one in particular. While I hadn't been looking for an answer to my question, Godric's response made enough sense to me to want to get in there.

Quick.

"The main entrance is out of the question," John said, with his military experience coming through in the command of his voice. "There's a sea of cops and civilians, so our best bet is the side entrances, but those will all be flanked by police too. They were emptying the hotel of civilians through those doors when we got here."

Seeing it was dark enough now that we wouldn't be seen as easily, I asked, "Godric. How many cops are positioned on the hotel's roof?"

“None,” he replied. “There are SWAT team personnel on the adjacent rooftops, but the hotel’s is unmanned.”

Looking back at my three roomies and remembering Sookie’s description of it from the night before, I smiled and asked, “Who wants to go for a magic carpet ride?”

Jake’s hand shot up first, so he was the first one I grabbed and shot us up into the air, dropping him onto the rooftop between two large compressors to keep him out of sight, and then repeated the process two more times. Godric opened the rooftop door’s electrical locking mechanism and as we flew down the stairwell Godric calculated our best point of entry based on the building’s schematics and what he could see through the surveillance system. The doors to the conference room were all barricaded from the inside and clusters of cops from the outside.

So the ceiling it was.

Figuring the wolves’ hearing would be as heightened as our own, I didn’t bother trying to be sneaky about it and flew up to the ceiling before putting my magic carpet into reverse as I made a hole large enough for us to drop into the conference room in quick succession.

Above the startled screams of the people in the room, the sound of our entrance drew the wolves’ attention and the one I knew to be Furnan turned to stare back at the three of us.

Looking into his eyes, I suspected there was still a lot of his human thought processes still there. He was in control, despite his animalistic appearance, so I stared back at him and said, “I hope you don’t mind us crashing your party.”

His lips curled up over his teeth, with a snarl coming out of his throat as he took a step towards us, so I let my own fangs snap down to show him he wasn’t the only one who had them. The humans in the room were still cowering off to one side, not sure if their trouble had just doubled or if we were there to save



them, but I suspected they believed the former when a few of them screamed again seeing my pointed pearly whites make an appearance.

“Show off,” Alcide muttered from behind me.

But when Furnan’s step faltered and his eyes showed his surprise, I took my own step forward and mocked, “Don’t tell me the *big bad wolf* is really a pussy in pup clothes.”

Feline hatred must have been innate to wolves because calling him one – sort of – made him lunge for me. I had yet to see them in action and while I knew I was the fastest and strongest amongst *our* group, I had no way of knowing if I would be faster or stronger than *them*.

I’d have to call it a near tie and maybe it was my ego shining through, but I thought I held my own.

Furnan flew at me, but I was ready for him and merely used his own forward momentum to help him crash into the wall behind me. The other wolves joined in on the fight, but with so many civilians in the room, the rest of the guys chose to try hand to paw combat over littering the room in silver rounds. There was so much screaming and snarling, it was impossible to pick out where each one emanated from, but I kept my focus on Furnan. His crash landing only stunned him for a second because he was back on his feet just as quickly and coming towards me, so when he lunged again – with the majority of the human crowd now at my back – I held onto him that time and gave into my instincts by biting down on his neck.

He howled as I tore away a portion of his flesh and spit it out, thankful I didn’t have the same feelings tasting *his* blood as I had when I tasted Sookie’s. It was similar in taste to the bagged donor blood I’d been living off of over the last two weeks, but there were marked differences too. Sort of like donor blood being a Heineken and his blood being PBR.

Disgusting.

Sookie's blood was like the finest wine, but before I could dissect it anymore, Furnan whipped his head around and managed to tear a gash into my forearm with his teeth. It didn't hurt so much as it surprised me, but what really surprised me was when he licked my blood from his muzzle, his whole body seemed to vibrate in my hands. His eyes went wide and his wound, which had already begun healing, began healing at an accelerated rate and he twisted his neck again like he was going back for more.

More of my blood.

It was the only explanation I could think of, considering it had healed Sookie's wound, and he must have suspected the same thing, so when he managed to free himself from my grasp, I did the first thing that came to mind and kicked him as hard as I could.

I just wished I'd thought about where I was aiming when I'd done it.

He ended up crashing through one of the barricaded doors, flying straight through the debris and into the outer hallway. The sounds of startled yells and gunshots followed soon after and hearing it got everyone else's attention in the room. The other wolves – bloody and limping – took off after their leader, leaving the rest of us behind.

I knew we needed to get out of there, so I signaled for John and the rest of them to jump back up through the hole we'd come in through. But before I followed after them, remembering Godric's prediction, I turned to the rest of the room and said, "What you choose to tell the world of what happened in this room will affect the financial stability of the countries you represent. The wolves are a threat, but I'm asking each of you to trust me when I say we *will* eradicate them."

I hoped it would be enough, but hearing the sounds of the police coming through the doors, I flew up through the hole in the ceiling and back up the stairwell to the rooftop where I found the others. As quick as I could, I

dropped each of them off outside of the police barricades so they could make the drive back to the house before taking off myself. Flying at top speed through the night sky I almost felt high from the rush of the fight, but I tried to fight it off so I could keep a lookout for the wolves and asked, “Godric, were you able to track where the wolves disappeared to?”

I was both grateful and disappointed I couldn't feel Furnan through my blood, like I could Sookie. I didn't know if it was because he was in his wolf form or because of something I hadn't figured out yet, when Godric replied, “Using the city's traffic cameras, I was able to follow them to the 7<sup>th</sup> Street/Metro Center, but I am afraid I lost contact with them when they entered the tunnels for the Red Line.”

If they'd entered the underground tunnels for the city's subway system, they could be anywhere by now, so I let myself run through everything that had happened as I made my way back to the house. While the guys looked a little worse for wear, they each seemed to be able to hold their own against the wolves without needing the silver rounds each of them were armed with, so that was a plus. It would've been nice to have been able to capture one, but since we knew they turned back into their human form when killed, I was just glad we kept that from getting out to the rest of the world. The civilians in the room likely all suspected there was something more to the wolves, but as far as I knew there was no actual evidence of the existence of werewolves to the greater human population.

And if we were lucky, it would stay that way.

My analytical thoughts left me the moment I came through the door and saw Sookie worriedly pacing a hole into the foyer floor. She barely had the chance to notice my sudden appearance before my just as sudden carnal wants made their own appearance. I was on her faster than she could track me with her eyes and used her surprised gasp as my invitation to plunge my tongue into her mouth.

She didn't fight me, nor did she seem to notice or mind when I shoved her against the wall and held her there with my body. While I took the liberty of freeing her lower half of clothes, she took her own liberties in freeing my cock from its leather restraint and then all restraint was lost when I thrust into her. I silently thanked God she was ready for me because I didn't seem to have any control over myself, other than keeping my strength in check so that I wouldn't hurt her.

And because I could *feel* her, I knew she was feeling the opposite of hurt.

Her lust was feeding my own and a part of me wished she could experience it too. That she could feel what I felt. The dual sensation of not just my pleasure at feeling her pulse and contract around me with every thrust of my hips, but being able to feel hers too. It didn't seem fair I got to experience two orgasms for the price of one.

So I redoubled my efforts to make sure she got as close to experiencing what I felt all on her own.

I knew I'd hit her magic spot before she ever grunted, "Right there," into my mouth, so I quickened my pace making sure to hit that spot over and over until we were both lost.

Her in her euphoria and my fangs and cum in her body.

It set off another smaller orgasm in Sookie that I drew out with slow thrusts of my hips until I slowly withdrew my fangs from her skin, and licked over the marks with my own blood to heal them.

"Welcome home," she softly chuckled when her breathing allowed her to form the words.

"If I walk outside and come back in, can we do it all over again?" I smiled back at her.

“Only if you don’t mind an audience,” Godric answered for her. “Colonel Flood and his men are entering through the front gate.”

Sookie’s eyes widened and she started smacking my chest, saying, “Put me down! I need to go find something to wear since you insist on shredding my clothes.”

I did as she said, but I playfully smacked her bare ass on her way by, reminding her, “You weren’t complaining a minute ago.”

I knew for a fact it only made her even more turned on, so there was a good chance she’d never wear the same outfit twice ever again. The combination of lust and amusement coming from her reiterated that fact, but she huffed in response anyway.

I probably would’ve made a game of it for the rest of the night, tearing off every new article of clothing she put on, but hearing the vehicles pulling up outside reminded me we couldn’t. And feeling the slight draft surrounding my lower half reminded me to put my dick away before they came into the house.

The guys and I were close, but not *that* close.

But even without their own heightened senses, the smell of sex was palpable in the air and the remnants of Sookie’s clothes were still lying on the floor, so I wasn’t all that surprised when they walked in and Alcide immediately said, “Jesus fuck!”

“No,” I smirked and corrected him with, “*Eric* fuck!”

There was no point in denying it and feeling Sookie’s slight embarrassment, I called out to her, “At least they weren’t here to hear it!”

And feeling what amounted to an, ‘Uh oh, nuh uh,’ coming from her, I knew I would never convince her to let me anywhere near her like that with them around.

So my mind immediately started making plans for a guest house to be built.

Like I said, we weren't *that* close.

At least John was able to stay on point because he gave us all a look that said we were idiots before actually saying, "Alright, less bullshitting and more comparing notes on something we should actually be concerned with."

Looking at me, Jake agreed with, "Yeah, like where are *our* costumes?"

I'd forgotten I was still wearing the mask, so I took it off and tossed it to him, saying, "Here you go little fella. Now you can go out dressed as me for Halloween."

Sookie reentered the room by then, not quite as red as her t-shirt, but she pretended no one would notice and said, "Actually, while you all were gone, I took the liberty to making a few sketches. I doodle when I'm trying not to think about anything else, so here."

She handed Jake a few slips of paper and he studied each of them before thrusting one back at her and said, "This one. Eric can be the Prince of Snarkness all he wants, but I want to be *that* badass son of a bitch."

John threw his hands up in the air in frustration since all of us were still feeling a little high from the fight and gave up. Going into the kitchen, he came back with a beer for himself and plopped down on the couch, turning on the TV to see what was being said on the news, while waiting for one of us to act our age.

It didn't appear it would be happening any time soon when Alcide and I joined at the hip so we could both study her designs too.

We could all hear in the background the voice of the reporter talking about the wolves fleeing the hotel. He practically scoffed at the unconfirmed reports about a masked man or possibly a vampire and a group of soldiers coming to

the rescue. But given there was no video evidence we were ever there and the derisive tone the reporter couldn't hide, he at least didn't seem to believe any of it.

Hopefully his cynicism would be contagious.

There were already psycho-babble analysts in the studio talking about mass hysteria, trying to explain away the earlier reports about the men turned wolves, which was also a boon. And along with the unexpected pack of wolves in the downtown Los Angeles area, the news of an interruption in cell and satellite service was the other big story. Godric deserved a high five for that one, but before I could give him kudos, our attention was drawn to the flat screen hearing the sound of static now coming through the speakers.

We all gathered around the TV and as soon as the new image appeared on the screen I ordered, "Godric. Trace the source and find out where that's coming from."

Because it was Furnan's transformation video.

It didn't show the first half of the video – *how* he came to be a werewolf – instead picking up a few seconds before the actual transformation took place. His face was blurred out to keep his identity a mystery, but now edited into the video was a computer disguised voice narrating it.

*"We walk among you. We look like you. You will never see us coming. You are not prepared for the likes of us, but we are here and we are making ourselves known. We are done abiding by the laws of men less powerful than us. We are The Authority."*

It ended just as quickly and the sight of the stunned reporter, slack-jawed and staring back into the camera came back onto the screen, just as he said, "What was *that*?"

No.

Not *what*.

But *who* was that?

## Chapter 18 – Deserted

### **EPOV Again**

“What happened?” Sookie asked and sounding panicked, which only made me go back on alert. But when she reached out and grabbed my arm, the give in the now torn leather reminded me of Furnan’s bite, just as she added, “You were hurt?”

“Not really,” I answered, trying to soothe her with my softened tone and showing her my already healed arm. While my skin was unblemished even to my eyes, the dried blood still coating it didn’t help my cause any. But remembering his reaction to my blood, I turned to everyone and said, “It may have been my imagination, but I think he liked the taste of my blood.”

“What do you mean?” John asked. “Do you think they’re like you? They need to drink blood?”

I couldn’t be sure, but remembering the wounded humans in the room and the disinterest of the wolves regarding them, I answered, “I don’t think so, but I can’t be sure.”

Their spilled blood was noticeable to my senses, but I’d been able to resist too, so there was no way I could be sure of anything.

I wasn’t feeling very genius-y at the moment.

But we didn’t have long to ponder when Godric’s voice broke into our discussion by saying, “I have located the source of the video. The connection was broken the moment the transmission stopped, but the coordinates put



them approximately fifteen nautical miles due west of Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.”

“Mexico?” I asked, wondering if there was any correlation to the fact it was where Furnan seemed to have entered the US and at the same time wondering how fast I could fly there.

“Technically the transmission came from international waters,” he corrected.

And before I could calculate the distance versus the rate of speed I knew I could fly, Godric showed me at least one of us was still a genius when the TV screen lit up with a satellite image. A few tweaks on his part later and we could see the live images of the now burning remnants of what looked like a ship.

“The thing *exploded*?” Alcide asked. “That can’t be a coincidence.”

“Nah,” Jake added. “Even if they don’t know about Big Brother Godric, they probably figured they would’ve been tracked down eventually. Destroying the evidence and scattering the bits left behind would be the way I would go.”

There didn’t seem to be any point in trying to fly there now, so I turned to John and asked, “So what’s our next move?”

He seemed to think about it for a moment, while four sets of eyes were glued to every twitch his eyes made in thought, when he finally turned to me and asked, “Have you ever been hunting?”

Did prowling for pussy count?

Since I had a feeling asking that question could very well lead to Sookie cutting off my dick and beating me to death with it, I held it in and answered with a simple, “No.”

“Well I have and since we don’t know where the big game is hunkering down, our best bet is going back to where we’ve known them to be and leave out some bait to lure them back.”

“Bait?” Sookie asked and because she’s smarter than most people gave her tits credit for, her worried eyes turned to narrow back at me.

Because it was precisely the reason why I found myself dressed in a tuxedo and mingling with the rich and infamously boring a week later.

It was hard to concentrate on anything other than the heat of her body pressed against my own as we moved across the dance floor, but I tried to tamp down the ever-erection Sookie always managed to cause and asked, “Have I told you yet how lovely you look this evening?”

“You might have mentioned something along those lines,” she smirked up at me.

In actuality, what I’d said was just the sight of her made my dick hard and come hell or high water – if I had to fly us clear to the middle of the Nevada desert for the privacy we’d been lacking since the wolf attack a week earlier – we were fucking tonight.

It had been a long week.

Almost as long as my dick in my pants or as long as her legs looked thanks to her high heels and the dangerously high slit of her dress.

Almost.

She wasn’t too keen on going out tonight, but since we hadn’t been able to track down Victor – and the wolves were still in the wind – the guys and I decided our best bet to get them to show themselves would be to lure them out.

And I was the bait.

I had no way of knowing if Furnan was one of the wolves who’d attacked me at the house. My eyesight and sense of smell were still within human range then, so I didn’t know if he’d recognized me at all when we’d broken up their party

by dropping in on him and his pack at the hotel. Given we hadn't had any unexpected visitors at the house since that night, I would guess not.

But now thanks to Sookie, the guys and I all had new disguises to wear, if and when we met up with the wolves again. Sewing was apparently something her grandmother had taught her as a child and she claimed it had come in handy over the years until she could afford to have her clothes tailored. And since we couldn't afford our secret identities being discovered, Sookie took it upon herself to create unique disguises for all of us.

And mine would come in handy now that I was letting it be known to the ones who'd attacked me I wasn't dead to the world.

If we were caught on video, it would also come in handy to the guys. While not as well-known as me, they would've been considered AWOL had Godric not wormed his way into the Department of Defense's computer network and wiped them clean out of their system. He did the same thing for every other system that could identify them in any way, so for now they were ghosts. Every trace of their identities had been erased from every computer network until they no longer existed on any mainframe. Paper trails could still be used, but it would take longer and whoever was looking for them would need to know where to go to even begin to look for them, but it was the best we could do for now. As a group we decided it would be better that way to lessen their exposure. Without an identity there would be no way the wolves could identify them without inside knowledge, which was still a risk. But it meant their families would be safer for now too.

After the video threat had aired around the country – and immediately gone viral around the world – the guys all knew we were the only ones who had a chance of defeating them. The government was quick to step in and claim it was all a hoax, but we knew better thanks to Godric eavesdropping on them. They were just as worried about the wolf threat as we were, but we hadn't shown our hand to them just yet.

Not when we hadn't yet figured out who the mole in their ranks was.

Speculation was still running amok amongst the talking heads on TV that the video was altered, along with the conspiracy theorists saying werewolves were a government experiment gone wrong. The city was overrun with animal lovers squawking about the wolves' rights to be wolves, but so far the people we'd saved at the hotel that night hadn't been much help to law enforcement in identifying us. The initial talk about masked possible vampires had come from the first responders coming into the room before I'd jumped out of it through the hole in the ceiling, but so far the sketches based off of the eye witness accounts of our appearances from the people we'd saved were so far off the mark that any one of us could stroll into the FBI's headquarters and not garner a second glance.

Coincidence or their way of paying us back, we had no idea. But it was helpful nonetheless.

Since we didn't know who was behind it all, we couldn't be sure of anything more than the fact they existed. Where they were hiding out was still a mystery too. Whoever they were, they were certainly hiding their tracks and with nothing left to go on, having me come out of hiding seemed like our only option.

But since the only attack I expected tonight would be in the form of what I was going to do to Sookie's dress later on, I did my best to try and convince her to relax. We were currently in the middle of yet another Leclercq shindig. Sophie-Anne certainly liked her parties, but on the upside she also liked putting herself in the spotlight which meant her parties always came with media attention. A-list celebrities were always welcome and if your wealth put you in the top one percent, she wanted to be your best friend. Therefore the sidewalk outside was littered with paparazzi and I was surprised either one of us could see after all of the flashes that had gone off in our faces.

Hopefully Furnan and whoever held his leash kept up with the gossip rags.

The guys were all keeping watch from various lookouts outside the building and I was seriously contemplating trying to convince Sookie to let me fuck her in a dark corner when someone tapped me on the shoulder asking, “May I cut in?”

Glancing down, I noticed the dagger like red fingernails still hovering over my shoulder. And looking up, I noticed they were very similar to the daggers now shooting from Sookie’s eyes. Both women continued to smile like they weren’t plotting the other’s demise, while I plotted my polite refusal to the host of the party, but before I could decline Sookie pulled away from me with her smile firmly intact, agreeing, “Of course.”

I stared unashamedly at her back – more so her backside – as Sookie sashayed to the bar before looking back at Sophie-Anne and reluctantly picking up the dance where Sookie and I had left off with her.

I could feel Sookie’s desire to launch her own attack on Sophie-Anne, knowing business wasn’t the only kind of merger Sophie-Anne had been after me for over the last few years. But feeling it fade away the farther she walked away from me only reminded me that I couldn’t feel her as strongly as I could before. Jake had been tagging along with her to work and wherever else she’d needed to go over the last week guarding her. And while I’d been waking up earlier and earlier with each passing day, I’d noticed that it took her being closer and closer in order for me to feel her.

Maybe the effects from having my blood were wearing off?

She hadn’t seemed too upset over me being able to feel her moods, so I thought I would bring up the idea of giving her more of my blood later on to strengthen our connection.

But for now I had to deal with the woman I could feel in my arms and against other parts of me when she boldly rubbed herself along the front of my body and said, “I’m surprised you actually came, Eric. But I can’t say that I’m

disappointed. Even if your hands are cold, *other parts* of you are feeling pretty hot.”

“What can I say?” I smiled flirtatiously down at her. Sophie-Anne had been trying to notch me onto her bedpost for as long as I’d known her, but I’d never been dumb enough to take a ride on her crazy train. And seeing the hope in her eyes that maybe I was finally ready to let her punch my ticket, I dashed them just as quickly by adding, “My *date* has a way of keeping me warm, even when she’s clear across the room.”

And even from clear across the room, I didn’t need to be able to *feel* her to know that she was feeling pretty hot at the moment too, seeing me with Sophie-Anne, but unable to hear our conversation.

Sookie was so *hot* I was surprised she didn’t burst into flames from how pissed off she looked.

“Your *date*?” she asked, spitting out the word and huffed, “I thought she was nothing more than your *glorified servant*.”

“Hardly,” I chuckled, feeling even more amused now watching Sophie-Anne trying to hide how pissed she was over my admission. Being an asshole to the guys lost its oomph since I never felt any malice towards them, but I’d missed having anyone around to be a dick towards. And not about to waste this opportunity, I added, “If anyone is the servant in our *relationship*, it’s me who lives to serve her.”

In fact, I was only alive *because* of her. A fact I wasn’t lost on.

But that’s not to say I didn’t get any enjoyment out of seeing Sookie’s jealousy. I thought it evened the scales since everything I’d just admitted to Sophie-Anne was the god’s honest truth.

Yet another bullet point on the fact sheet in my mind.

But since Sookie really wasn't telepathic, I surmised my exchange with Sophie-Anne looked a lot less innocent than it was. It only served to remind me once more that I wished she could feel me like I could feel her.

But since that wasn't possible I would just have to *show* her how I felt about her later on.

There would be nothing *innocent* about the way I did it either.

With the guys always around and everything we'd been busy doing in trying to find and prepare ourselves for the wolves, Sookie and I hadn't had much time to ourselves. I hadn't wanted to weaken her by constantly feeding from her either, so I'd been sticking to bagged blood over the last week. She wouldn't let me near her for anything more than innocent snuggling, with our guests always within earshot, so I made a vow to myself right then and there once the wolf threat was eliminated I would take her away somewhere. Just me and her where we could relax and fuck to our hearts' content.

It couldn't come soon enough. And me and Sookie couldn't cum soon enough either.

Another bullet point for my fact sheet.

Sophie-Anne chose to ignore my admission and changed the subject, continuing to make small talk with me through the next song the band played. So by the time I was able to extract myself from her clutches, I found Sookie was no longer standing by the bar where I'd last seen her. I figured she was either mingling amongst the other guests or fashioning a shiv out of a spoon's handle in the corner of the room, but by the time I'd checked all four corners I still hadn't found her.

Making my way back over to our table, I noticed her small purse was still sitting there. I knew she'd left her cell phone in it, so I didn't bother trying to call it and instead made another round through the room, concentrating on trying to *feel* her.

And I felt my own worry start to grow when I felt nothing from Sookie.

Walking over to the bar, there were too many other scents invading my senses, and too much time had elapsed for me to pick out hers to try and track her that way, so I thought maybe she'd gone to the bathroom and made a beeline over there.

Only to come up empty handed again.

Maybe she really *had* thought there was more to what she was seeing between me and Sophie-Anne?

It seemed ridiculous since she already knew I loved *her*.

Not that I'd said the words to her again since that first time.

Not that she'd said them to me either.

But Sookie and I weren't the type to be all flowery and shit. Instead we gave each other a bunch of shit and all but blamed the other for making us feel that way. It was the way we worked.

And it worked for us.

And no longer caring if I looked like a panicky bereft asshole that my girlfriend had possibly stormed out on me, I took out my cell phone and called Jake, knowing he was watching the front of the building and asked, "Did you see Sookie come outside?"

She'd been willing to walk barefoot, with a bullet hole in her side, and penniless through a sketchy neighborhood to get away from me the last time she'd been pissed at me. So I didn't think being up two out of three would make her any less inclined to take off in the middle of Beverly Hills if she was mad enough.



“Dude, you had *one job* and you already fucked it up?” he asked, with a chuckle. “I haven’t lost her all week long, so tell me you didn’t lose her in a single room.”

“Did. You. See. Her. Leave?” I growled into the phone, not feeling the humor in the situation.

Not when I couldn’t feel her at all.

“You’re serious,” he said, sounding just as serious now. “No. She hasn’t come through the front. Did you check the bathrooms?”

I could hear him relaying the information to the others, while I confirmed that I wasn’t a complete idiot and had checked the bathroom for her, when suddenly it was John’s voice coming through the phone saying, “She hasn’t come through any of the exits. Jake’s on his way inside to help you look.”

He appeared at my side a moment later wearing the same uniform the servers were wearing and said, “I’ll search the rest of the ground floor for her while you search in here again.” Handing me another earpiece, so I could communicate with all of them, he took off through the doors leading into kitchen.

John and Alcide were keeping watch on all of the exits from the front and back of the building, while I made another sweep through the room with my eyes and senses searching for her. The more time that passed, the more worried I got, so I ended up startling a few of the guests when I moved much faster than I should have hearing Jake’s voice come through my earpiece saying, “Basement.”

The three of us converged on the basement, bringing our group total to four when it should have been five. But it wasn’t.

Instead what we found was Sookie’s unmistakable scent and one of her shoes lying next to a crudely made opening in one of the walls, leading to the sewer

tunnel on the other side. The four of us dove through it and I filled my nose with the stench, moving at top speed and seeking out any little part of Sookie's scent I could find, until it led me to an opening a few miles from the hotel.

But the area was deserted.

Just like her scent now deserted my senses.

Just like her emotions deserted my body.

But the agony I felt not knowing where she was or who had taken her filled the air around us as my anguished roar thundered through the night.

## Chapter 19 – Red Carpet Ready or Not

### **SPOV**

Ugh...as my consciousness slowly started to fade back in, my head felt like it was going through the spin cycle of a washing machine and I couldn't make heads or tails of anything at first.

Where I was. Or more importantly, *when* I was.

The last thing I could remember was feeling a little lightheaded at the bar, but I figured it was my out of control blood pressure boiling over watching that redheaded hussy trying to squat on my territory. I knew Eric had no interest in her and thanks to my near perfect recall, I knew she'd never been one of his takeout dinners. But that didn't mean I had to like seeing her rub her pussy on him like the bitch in heat that she was.

After that was a blur though and when I finally tried to open my eyes, it was the first time I cottoned onto the fact there was a cottony piece of cloth covering my eyes.

Had Eric developed some new superpower that enabled him to hypnotize me and now we were in the middle of playing Red Light Fuck Light?

The missing glow from the light within my hoohah told me no.

Attempting to remove my blindfold did me no good, then discovering my whole body was tied down at my wrists and ankles, but my struggling must have been witnessed by someone because my ears filled with the sound of a voice that sounded vaguely familiar.

Familiar because I'd heard it a time or twelve hundred in a six part George Lucas Sci-fi movie saga.

I was being held captive by Darth Vader.

"Miss Stackhouse," the Dark Lord all but purred. "So glad to have you finally join us."

While I wracked my topsy turvy brain, trying to pull up a face to go with the voice that wasn't James Earl Jones', I found it was impossible. So I put my inner Sci-fi dilemma on pause while trying to force my brain to cooperate and wake the fuck up.

I wasn't in Kansas anymore or even at that harlot's party. But I was possibly in a galaxy far far away.

And when I thought I was somewhat coherent – made easier when I felt my 'freak-the-fuck-out-now' switch attempting to flip – I channeled my inner damsel in distress and asked, "Who are you? What do you want with me?"

Considering I could feel the draft on my bare legs, I knew my already scanty dress wasn't covering much of me. And I thanked baby Jesus and all twelve disciples I'd worn panties, despite Eric's vehement stance that I wouldn't need them.

Proof positive his genius brain didn't know everything.

But knowing he could feel my emotions – among other things – left me wondering where in the hell he was at. I had no way of knowing how long I'd been out, but if he'd been too busy cutting a rug with Sophie-Anne to notice I was gone, he could be sure I would be cutting him off from my rug indefinitely whenever I saw him again.

Maybe.

I couldn't be sure because I'd been really horny thanks to our weeklong dry spell.

But I could tell I was lying on my back with my arms and legs tied down in a way that left me spread-eagle, so I was almost afraid to find out what they wanted with me. However that was nothing compared to the fear I felt over the unmistakable feeling of a cold wet snout butting up against my calf and hearing the soft growl of its owner.

*Please let it be a cocker spaniel. Please let it be a cocker spaniel. Please let it be a cocker spaniel.*

I'd even be happy with Joe Cocker by that point, but I said nothing more and just waited.

For a response.

For big pointy teeth to tear into my flesh.

But really hoping for the chorus of 'You Can Leave Your Hat On' to fill my ears.

Instead what I heard was another soft chuckle from my mystery kidnapper followed by, "Now where is the fun in that? Giving away all of the answers before the end of our game isn't very sportsmanlike."

Game?

What the fuck was he talking about?

Before I could stop myself, my inner love child with the big fucking mouth and no sense of self-preservation, whipped her head towards the sound of his voice and asked, “Like Jeopardy?” And because she was obviously drunk and high on crack from her momma and daddy, she then did her best impersonation of SNL’s Darrell Hammond impersonating Sean Connery, adding, “I’ll take Giant Douche Nozzles for a thousand, Alex. What is Darth Douchebag?”

Darth Fuckwad.

“Oh, Miss Stackhouse,” he chided, calmly tsking me at the same time. “Not very sportsmanlike or ladylike for that matter.”

No. The love children of drunken truckers and used up strippers do not go to finishing school.

And reminding me Justin Timberlake wasn’t about to serenade me about dicks in boxes, he gifted me with what felt like a backhand to my jaw. Feeling the sting reverberate clear down to my toes, I shook it off as much as I could and hoped Eric at least felt *that* to get him to notice something was wrong or else I would be putting his dick in a box.

And I didn’t mean mine.

But remembering the *last time* I’d been backhanded, I hunkered down and waited for the sound of Eric crashing through the Death Star to give good ole Darth Trebek a run at the Daily Double in the Whoop-Your-Ass category.

Any time now would be good. Great, even.

So when I didn’t hear the sound of my rescue commencing or the bells and whistles signaling the Daily Double had been found, I knew *I* hadn’t been found just yet and had no choice but to listen to him say, “Now, tell me about your employer and all that he’s been able to come up with in that busy little

brain of his that allowed three *humans* to keep up with my wolves.” Adding in a knowing tone, he said, “We’ll get to the vampire in just a moment.”

Uh oh.

Figuring now would be a good time to pull out my ditzy blond routine, I said a prayer that it would work and asked, “Huh? I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Don’t pull that innocent act with me, Miss Stackhouse,” Darth Dickhead chided. “We know Northman was participating in Operation Werewolf and made progress with his research. We just don’t know what he’s been able to discover or accomplish. But considering he’s been, shall we say, *resurrected*? There aren’t many dots to connect there.”

“Fuck you,” I spit out, remembering just how I’d found Eric that night, with my anger overriding my fear. I wasn’t dumb enough to give any of his secrets away though and only asked, “If you *think* you know so much then why in the hell do you need me?”

I assumed I’d be getting another unsportsmanlike backhand to my face. Just goes to show I really needed to stop making assumptions because I was surprised instead feeling the air whoosh out of my lungs with the blow to my gut.

I didn’t have any air to scream or any give in my restraints to curl up into the ball my body was trying to form when my captor tsked me again saying, “I *do* know much. Like how much Northman cares for you and I would bet *anything* he would do *anything* to get you back.”

Yeah well, what he didn’t bet on was what Eric would do to him once he got a hold of him.

And I would help him hide the body.

But since Eric and I weren't officially *out* with our relationship, I had no idea of how he would know about it when it dawned on me.

Could my kidnapper be Darth Victor?

It would make sense that he would try to hide his voice from me, knowing I would recognize it. And I already knew how much he liked to bitchslap me, so I held onto the hope the fact he was trying to hide his identity meant that he didn't plan on keeping me.

Or more importantly, *killing* me.

And perhaps that was what fueled my stupidity/bravery when I hotly declared, "I don't care what you do to me. I'm not telling you *anything*."

"You're sure about that?"

Even if he hadn't sounded like a Spaceballs reject, I could still hear the subtle crazy in his altered voice loud and clear.

I could hear it almost above my own screams.

I knew the burning sensation I felt in my leg was in my own mind because I knew it was impossible thanks to the wetness I could feel surrounding it. My blood or their saliva, I knew there weren't any flames involved. It was merely my mind's way of processing the pain caused by the tearing of the not-a-cocker – spaniel's or a Joe's – teeth into my flesh. It made me better appreciate what Eric must have gone through on the night he'd been attacked and I felt it when his teeth hit the bone. Screaming myself hoarse, feeling it snap in his jaw, I was still able to hear Vader/Victor yell out above my own cries, "ENOUGH!"

And it seemed to be enough to get him to stop. It was also enough to make me thankfully pass out from the pain.

I woke up who knows when later, but I could feel that I was moving.

In a car, maybe?

I couldn't be sure since my head was still swimming and my eyes were still covered. My hands were tied behind my back, but at least they weren't so sadistic to have bound my feet. My leg throbbed like a mother fucker and I could feel the chills working their way across my clammy body, but I still tried to push through it so I could listen to what was being said in the soft whispers around me.

If only I could hear a fart from a mile away like the guys maybe I would've been able to.

Instead my ears were just as convoluted as my mind, which was whirling way worse than it had been earlier, so I was startled when the blindfold was suddenly ripped from my head just as our not-so-magic-carpet-ride – the SUV I could now see we were riding in – skidded to a halt. And looking to my left I could now see who at least one of my abductors – and my perhaps biter – were.

Patrick Furnan.

I'd seen him enough times on Eric's giant flat screen to know who he was and I felt my fight or flight instincts kick in just as he grabbed onto my arm and pulled me from the truck. With a wicked smile, he turned to me and said, "Time to chum the waters, blondie."

I didn't know what in the hell he was talking about and assumed I was about to get dumped into the ocean, with my Star Wars saga turning into Jaws. But no matter how hard I fought him, it was no use. My tied up arms and broken leg made it impossible to fight against him by doing anything more than trying to jerk free, with my good leg automatically trying to take the weight my injured one couldn't handle.

But what I didn't understand was why I could hear so many shouts and screams.



They couldn't have all come from me.

Or why there seemed to be so many camera flashes.

He unceremoniously dropped me down onto a red carpet – which I found odd since we were outside – but I forced myself up as much as I could to look for an escape, only to see there was none. But there were plenty of other things to see.

Like was that Meryl Streep's horrified face looking back at me?

Convinced I was hallucinating from the blood loss and who knew what else, I squeezed my eyes shut and opened them again.

Only to see Bradley Cooper?

Was he my silver lining or my mind's way of telling me I was on my way to having a massive hangover?

I wracked my brain trying to figure out what in the hell was going on. Where I was or why they thought I was red carpet ready, but I came up blank.

But feeling my dress now riding up around my hips, I gave another grateful shout-out to Baby Jesus at least I was wearing panties. Another silver lining.

However I perked up seeing the rush of LAPD's finest running towards us, but the other two men who'd been riding in the truck with us jumped out at the same time we did and had surrounded me with Furan.

Right before all three of them morphed into wolves.

In front of God and everybody.

Even Morgan Freeman. The voice of God.

With the exception of the cops, everyone else scattered. I envied them and their ability to run in their couture gowns and high heels. But I couldn't focus on much else since the wolves formed a tight formation around me, circling my body at a quick pace and dodging and weaving one another enough so that I was sure they were doing it on purpose. No one would be able to shoot them without taking the chance of making 'collateral damage' being added onto my resume. And looking past the furry bodies flying around me, I could see the hesitation on their faces beyond the barrel of their drawn weapons.

Which were pointed straight at me, with only a wolf in between me and a one-way ticket to meet my maker.

I already knew they were quick and could heal fast, but I wasn't and couldn't. Nor did I think that made them like Kevlar and only hoped no one would get a case of premature trigger finger. The Mexican standoff continued for a while, but no one seemed to know what to do. The wolves weren't attacking and to the outside observer it might even look like they were protecting me, except for the fact whenever one of the cops moved closer to us, the wolf closest to them would bare their teeth and growl.

At me. They would bare their teeth and growl at me.

Subtle in who would pay the price for any heroics on their part, they were not.

My fifteen minutes of fame officially sucked ass.

I couldn't be sure if it was the blood loss, the pain, or if they'd drugged me at some point, but I was feeling woozy. My vision was getting blurrier by the second and it was starting to feel like I was listening to everything through a tin can, which is why I had to question my own sanity when our circle grew.

By four.

But recognizing the unmistakable figures – despite the masks they wore – who had literally fallen from the sky to surround us, I looked up at the one with the angry fangs and smiled saying, “It’s about damn time.”

Even if I hadn’t known who the man behind the mask was, I would’ve known those blue eyes anywhere. And I knew them well enough to know he was pissed.

None of the cops seemed to know what they should do about the newest red carpet arrivals, but at least no one fired their gun.

My silver linings were just piling up everywhere.

And since no one was saying anything and the wolves were pretending to be my unnecessary winter coat by huddling against my body, I took the time to admire the guys’ outfits. All four of them were wearing the duds I’d fashioned for them over the previous week and I had to say.

I’d done a mighty fine job.

There was something about seeing a guy wearing black from head to toe that made good girls want to do very bad things and I was currently staring at four very good examples of them. Each with their faces covered, but all of them unique.

John’s Scottish heritage played a role in his outfit, with Celtic shield knots adorning the silver-coated armor plates wrapped around his black clad biceps, leaving his forearms bare, with his upper body draped in a tunic style pullover that ended at the top of his thighs. A silver buckle depicting an entwined Celtic Eagle sat front and center, holding his black belt in place, and almost gave him the appearance of an ancient warrior, if it weren’t for the black combat boots they all wore.

But it worked for him.

And if his was the most simple in design then Alcide's was the most complex. Black leather straps crisscrossed his massive upper body holding silver coated weapons on each side at his waist. But the tribal-like design made him look like something straight out of a Conan the Barbarian movie.

Also working for him.

And Jake. My goofy guard for the past week wanted something more. Something *badass* and to him that meant looking like a futuristic warrior. Form fitted flexible Kevlar-like contoured plates surrounded his upper torso, with weapons of all kinds strapped wherever they would fit. He looked like a one man SWAT team, but they all did in their own way.

Guns. Daggers. Swords.

You name it. They had it strapped to them.

Whatever it was that Eric had injected them with not only made them faster and stronger, but it made their hair and nails grow at a ridiculous rate. John trimmed his every few days, but it nearly hit his shoulders now. And Alcide decided to let his go, so his dark thick wavy locks now hit the center of his back, but he had it banded together with a leather tie at the nape of his neck. Jake wanted no part of Woodstock, as he called it, and kept his hair trimmed to military regulation. But he was so boy-next-door looking, I didn't think it hindered his ability to keep his identity a secret.

But Eric. *He* was the true masterpiece of the bunch. Maybe I wasn't objective, but my God, what that man could do with leather. Head to toe, he was swathed in it, with his jacket cinching at his narrow waist and flaring out at his hips, falling all the way to his toes. With his cooler body temperature, he didn't sweat so he didn't have to worry about becoming overheated. And while it fit him like a glove, he could still move easily, but it didn't have enough give to make it easy to hold onto him.

I knew.

I'd tried.

He too had a sword on his back. The guys had all been practicing with them, figuring they were better weapons of choice when there was the possibility of collateral damage – even ones not named Sookie. The longer blades gave them the distance they wanted from the wolves' bites, but they didn't have to worry about accidentally hurting an innocent civilian.

And seeing the glint of Eric's sword reminded me of his other sword I was supposed to be playing with right about now.

So unfair. This week was just getting longer and longer.

But seeing all four of them standing together on the red carpet made me wonder what Joan Rivers and the rest of the fashion police would have to say about their formal wear.

Their trip down my mental catwalk only lasted seconds, but given where my mind had wandered, I figured I was delirious. But since I was deliriously happy to see my Cavalry had arrived I was perfectly okay with that.

Now if only they could do something about those wolves, the night would end on a high note.

But just as I had the thought, I wondered if maybe werewolves were telepathic because without any noticeable signal, each of them took a hold of one of my yet-to-be-torn-apart limbs in their teeth. Not biting down hard enough to break the skin, but the threat was there.

Come after any one of them and Sookie would be a chew toy.

Eric's nostrils flared and his fists clenched at their obvious threat, but when his eyes traveled down to my mangled leg, the growl he let out seeing it was enough to make the cops jump back a few feet.

I hadn't looked yet. Some things I was better off not knowing.

But the guys' outfits weren't the only black in my field of vision. The darkness was slowly closing in on me until there was nothing left but the blue of Eric's eyes staring back at me when that too finally faded to black.

## Chapter 20 – Burn

### EPOV

“Now.”

The other three didn't need any more than my nearly silent one word order to know what they needed to do.

Godric had been monitoring every available outlet in our search for Sookie, so he'd known immediately when she turned up at a red carpet movie premier on live TV. My rage at seeing her battered and bruised was all it took to fuel my strength in flying all four of us at once downtown. John planned our strategy along the way, but it all boiled down to one simple goal.

Rescue Sookie.

And putting the first part of that plan into action, they quickly surrounded the wolves. A fine mist of atomized silver – courtesy of Godric's ingenious design – shot out in a forceful spray from the front of each of their belts at the push of a button and blanketed the wolves. It wouldn't do much to their skin with the thick fur covering their bodies, but the soft porous areas of their eyes, nose, and mouth were the intended targets. The scent of dog was quickly replaced by the acrid stench of their flesh burning and still moving faster than the human eye could track, each of our men plucked a wolf from the circle. I heard the pained yelps as three jaws were forced opened – and beyond – to get their teeth away from Sookie before I snatched her into my arms just as quickly and took off with her into the sky.

I didn't think twice about her body now being covered in silver as well.

I didn't care how much my hands were burning as a result.

I didn't worry my fangs were impossible to keep hidden from the gawking onlookers.

I didn't bother with the fact they were all witnesses to my unnatural abilities as we soared into the air without the aid of wings.

All I cared about was getting Sookie out of harm's way.

Twenty-four hours. For twenty-four fucking hours I'd been searching for her. I assumed my worry must have overridden my body's normal reaction at daybreak because I didn't fall unconscious. Not once had I spent a single second since I'd discovered she was gone not thinking about her. Agonizing over her unknown whereabouts or what was possibly happening to her at any given moment.

But now I could see with my own eyes what she'd gone through.

The bites. The torn skin. The broken bone in her leg. The bruises on her cheek and swollen lips.

And never before had I wanted to kill someone so much.

Another harsh growl ripped through my chest just thinking about what they'd done to her, but scenting her blood still flowing freely from the wounds those fucks had given her made me stop for long enough to heal her. Not able to stand her injuries for a second longer, I set us down in a wooded area not far from the house. Now that she was so close I could sense her again, but not as strongly as I could even the night before. I could hardly feel anything coming from her and when I noticed her natural warmth was gone, replaced by an unnatural coldness, by deductive reasoning I could only assume it was due to her blood loss. So I did the only thing I could think of doing.

I violently ripped into my wrist with my teeth and let my blood flow directly onto her wounds to try and stop the bleeding by healing them.

In my hurry to fix her, there wasn't any time to hesitate or to worry about what the effects would be. Her left calf was bent at an unnatural angle and the broken bone was visible through the torn skin, so I was thankful she was already unconscious when I reset it and watched, waiting for my blood to heal it.

But it was taking too fucking long for my liking, so I did the next thing that popped into my mind.

I ripped into my other wrist and put the wound directly over her mouth.

It was the only way I could think of to get my blood into her system faster. I wasn't about to pierce her heart to get it into her that way without a syringe and without any serum with me, I only had the healing properties in my blood to work with. So my eyes darted back and forth from her lips to her leg, watching and waiting for something to fucking go my way for once in the last twenty-four fucking hours.

A single day had never felt so fucking long.

And slowly – still too fucking slow in my opinion – her leg did begin to heal. She showed another sign of her consciousness returning when she moaned and then began drinking my blood in earnest. With every swallow she made I could feel her presence within me growing stronger, so when my own self-inflicted wounds began to heal, I opened them up again.

I had no idea of what the effects would be to either one of us, with her having so much of my blood, but at the moment I didn't give a fuck. And when I could finally feel for myself the itching of her wounds as they slowly closed, I was as satisfied as I could get without having the severed head of her abductor in my hands.



Her eyes popped open not long after and darted around wildly before coming to rest on my own. And her anxiety eased – easing my own – when she realized where she was.

With me where she fucking belonged.

“How do you feel?” I asked, using the arm that had been feeding her my blood to reach out and gently touch her cheek with my fingertips. My satisfaction only grew seeing the swelling was nearly gone, as were the bruises.

“Like I can fly,” she whispered, both looking and sounding like she was already flying high.

Emphasis on the *high*.

“With all of the blood I just gave you, it’s a distinct possibility,” I smiled, with most of the tension I’d felt leaving my body now that hers was healed and in front of me.

But the sound of my skin burning on contact with her cheek made her glance over, just as she saw the singed skin of my palm and asked, “What happened to your hand?”

When she reached for it, my skin sizzled some more, so she dropped it again while I explained, “Silver. You’re covered in it.”

“But how?” she asked, feeling confused. “And why aren’t you healing?”

“They guys covered the wolves in it and then pulled their jaws away so I could snatch you out from their circle and get you to safety.”

I could hear the fight was over on my earpiece. The wolves were dead, but John was bringing back the body of the one he thought was Furan, while Alcide and Jake carried the other two. Their faces hadn’t finished healing from the silver burns when they shifted back into their human forms with their deaths, so he couldn’t make a positive ID.

“But why aren’t you healing?” she pressed, still staring at my burnt hands.

Shrugging, I gave her my best guess with, “I probably need to feed. I haven’t since you were taken and I gave you a lot of my blood.”

My fangs were still down and I could feel the gnawing in my gut for blood, made worse by the scent of Sookie’s still coating her skin. The scent of silver along with it did nothing to dissuade my hunger, but I didn’t give a fuck about that either now that she was safe.

“Take mine,” she offered – because she was Sookie, so of course she would offer to feed me when she’d just been attacked by werewolves – but seeing my want coupled with my apprehension, she sat up and added more sternly, “I mean it, Eric. I feel fine, but you need to eat. *So eat me!*”

“What a cruel mistress you are,” I smirked and then joked, “Do you really think *now* is the time to bring sexy back?”

“You *know* what I *meant*,” she snarled and playfully smacked my chest, mindful to not touch my bare skin. And because she was still a lot smarter than people gave her tits credit for, she added, “But you can’t because I’m the equivalent of the hottest chili pepper on the planet, right?”

“Really Sookie?” I chuckled, feeling a wave of relief now seeing the fire return to her eyes. “You’re digging for compliments *now*?”

Grinning, I looked back at her and said, “Yes. You’re hot. You’ve *always* been hot and I’ve always *found* you hot. And you are unequivocally *the hottest* woman I have ever laid hands on, even before touching your skin could actually burn mine.”

“You’re such a dick,” she smiled and added, “So you’re lucky I like your other one so much.”

And because she was hell bent on making me regret every other woman before her by showing me what I'd been missing out on all along, she reached up and tugged the front of her dress down, revealing two of the many reasons why I found her so hot. Grabbing onto my wrist over the leather sleeve, she performed her own scientific experiment by gently touching my fingertip to her bare breast.

It still burned.

But in a different way.

Both my mouth and my dick were salivating, so there wasn't much resistance I could muster when she held the back of my head and pulled it to her breast, purring out, "Bite me."

"In a second," I playfully chided. "You're so pushy."

So she proved me right by tugging on my hair and pushing her breast even further towards my mouth. And feeling her own lust colliding with mine, I was unable to resist for any longer, so I circled her pert nipple with the tip of my tongue before flattening it against her skin and licking it like an ice cream cone. Her back arched towards me and I could feel other areas on her body were in need of attention, so I pushed her down onto her back, with nothing more than the pressure from my mouth. A part of me knew this wasn't the time or place to put my sexy on her back, but ask me how many fucks I gave.

Not a single one.

So I switched my mouth over to her other breast, while reaching down in between her legs. I barely registered the sting from the silver still coating her thighs, but I softly growled remembering how I'd found her with her dress up around her hips.

Thank fuck she hadn't listened to me and worn panties.

But delving inside of them, I didn't feel any pain at all. Had there been any silver coating her there, it would've already been washed away by her body's receptive reaction to my touch anyway.

I could actually feel the cheering going on inside of her.

And feeling her own hands working the front of my pants open, I wasn't so sure I could ignore *that* sting if she managed to get my cock free. So I shifted away from her slightly and put both my hand and mouth to good use in distracting her from her intended course. Her minor agitation at my dick move – moving it away from her hot chili pepper hands – quickly gave way to the euphoria we'd both been desperate for over the previous week. I didn't waste any time in teasing her at all and slid two fingers inside of her, while circling my thumb over her clit and working my mouth over her breasts, going back and forth between the two unable to pick my favorite one. But when I felt her body nearing the finish line, I scraped my teeth against her skin and gently bit down just as her inner muscles clamped down on my fingers.

Her hips rocked into my hand, while her lips chanted my name, but I barely noticed over the flavor of her orgasm-laced blood filling my mouth and with every swallow I made, I felt our connection deepen even more. Bagged blood had nothing on the flavor of hers, but now I could taste the flavor of my own blood mixed in. It only served to feed my inner caveman, knowing she would smell even more like me now, even if it was only me and the guys who would be able to tell.

I still had not a single fuck to give about that either.

But I only fed for a short amount of time. She'd been injured and already lost a lot of her own blood, even if I had given her a lot of mine. So when I felt my hands starting to heal, I pulled back and licked her skin clean, watching the marks heal on their own, before pushing myself up to look down at her and again asked, "How do you feel?"

It took a moment for her eyes to focus on me before she smiled and answered, “Cheated.”

“Huh?”

Had I misinterpreted the signs? Since *I* almost came feeling hers, I was positive she’d climaxed.

There was no way she could fake that.

Instead of answering right away, she grabbed onto my leather clad wrist and sucked my finger into her mouth, along with a good portion of my sanity with it. Pulling it out with a pop, she asked, “Did that burn?”

“Not in the way *you* mean,” I offered in a hoarse whisper through hooded eyes.

A part of my mind – a small part, mind you – wondered if it was my own stupor or her increased strength from having so much of my blood that allowed her to push me onto my back so easily. Probably a combination of the two.

And I still had not a single fuck to give.

Especially when she carefully unfastened the front of my pants, keeping her skin from touching my own, but she didn’t need to when my cock sprang up in between us, like its name was Jack and he was looking to go back into her box. She wasted no time in taking me into her mouth and I wasted no time in letting her know how much I appreciated her tenacity by way of garbled utterances chanting her name over and over. I’d already been worked up from working her up, so it didn’t take long before my body was singing.

And Sookie swallowed every last lyric and kept going until she got an encore.

Yet another tick mark in the column on why I was ruined for everyone but her.

And while I knew we still had a lot to talk about with her abduction, once we were both set to rights, there was something infinitely more important I felt the need to say.

She fought against my hold on her body, knowing she was still covered in silver, so I redoubled my efforts at keeping her in my embrace, thankful for the sting that reassured me the last half hour wasn't a dream. That she really *was* in my arms. One of my biggest regrets while she'd been missing had been not telling her more often how I felt about her, so when she finally gave up and glared at me, I silenced her locked and loaded rebuke with, "I love you Sookie. I should've told you more than once, but I don't want you to ever doubt how much I love you. When you were gone, you took a piece of me with you and I wouldn't have ever stopped looking for you. I'm just sorry I couldn't find you before those fucks..."

My heartfelt words trailed off, with my returning rage clouding my voice and mind, so she shook me out of it by shaking me in her arms and saying, "I love you too." Curiosity filled her then, but I was surprised to not feel any resentment when I heard her ask, "Why didn't you come for me when you can feel me?"

"I *couldn't* feel you," I replied and explained, "Our connection has been weakening. The distance I needed in order to feel you was growing shorter and shorter with every passing day, so I guess it was wearing off. I was going to say something to you about it last night after...but then you were gone. It was too late."

Her eyes darted to the wrist I'd fed her from and back again when she asked, "And now?"

My eyes fell closed for a brief moment, while the blood in my body sought out my blood in hers, and I opened them again as I replied, "Now I feel like your heart is beating in *my* chest." And figuring now was as good a time as any, I added, "I don't want to let our connection fade again, so I think you should

have my blood regularly. Maybe not in the quantity you had it tonight, but I think a little bit once a week should keep it strong.”

I wasn't sure if she was going to argue with me over it, but those thoughts flew right out of my head when she said, “Okay. Since they know who I am and that you're involved in the fight against the werewolves, it's probably a good idea.”

“What?”

## Chapter 21 – The Contingent

### SPOV

I stared back at him and his gobsmacked expression, but instead of answering *his* ‘what’, I countered with my own ‘what’.

“Do you know what does your blood does besides heal?”

Because if my libido had been broken – which it *wasn't*, thank you very much – that bitch was primed and firing on cylinders now. All I wanted to do was throw him down and have my wicked way with him again and again, but the only thing stopping me was knowing my silvery touch would hurt him.

Instead of the Midas touch, I had the Hephaestus touch. Because touching Eric wouldn't turn him into gold, but it would sure as hell burn him like fire. And the only other thing keeping me coherent and my grabby hands to myself was knowing he was in danger too.

We all were if they knew who and what he was.

Whoever ‘they’ were.

“No,” he finally replied, shaking his head and making his confusion over my lack of a segue known by adding, “Why? And why do you think they know I'm involved in the fight against the werewolves?”

My brain felt like it was a snow globe wedged inside one of those paint can shakers at The Home Depot, with a million and one thoughts swirling around and all of them playing bumper cars inside of my head, smashing and crashing into one another. I didn't remember feeling this way after the last time I'd had his blood, but it was the only thing I could think of that would be the cause.

It felt like I'd mainlined Red Bull cut with Ericstasy.

Trying to focus, I forced myself to concentrate on answering the first half of his question by saying, "Because I feel hopped up and I really want to hop on you and make you my naked Hippity Hop for the rest of the night even though that's the last thing I should be thinking about."

Or talking about since it only made me think about it.

So I closed my eyes so I couldn't see his Hippity Hop Hotness and made my attention go back to the reason for his gobsmack, explaining, "And the Werewolf Whisperer told me he knows it was you back at the hotel in L.A. That's why he took me. He thought I would know what was going on and when I didn't tell him anything, he...you know...made them..." I couldn't force myself to say the words 'made them *attack me*', knowing it wouldn't do either one of us any good now and only said, "I passed out, so I guess they used me as bait to get you to come."

Recalling the last of what I remembered before passing out for the second time, my eyes popped open as I nearly shouted, "What about the guys? Are they okay?"

Eric was stronger than them, but I didn't know how well they would fare against the wolves.

Those fuckers were huge.

And there I was, hoping to hop Eric on down my fuck-like-bunnies trail when they could be hurt.



Or worse.

“They’re fine, but we should probably get back now,” he said and reached out, but thought better of it for a split second, remembering I was currently the stand-in for Anthony Kiedis as the front man for the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

Then he didn’t seem to care about that at all because he wrapped his arms around me and shot us up into the air before saying, “Please return your trays and seats into the upright position as we come in for landing.”

Remembering the last landing I really wished I’d thought to put ‘Oh shit’ grab bars onto his costume, but he surprised me by landing us softly on the grass in front of his house and both of us made our way inside.

We could hear the sounds of voices coming from downstairs, so we both headed for the lab and found the guys.

And three men.

Dead men.

Dead naked men.

“Well you’re lookin’ a helluva lot better,” Jake grinned at what I was sure was my sourpuss seeing them.

The three dead naked men. Not the three men who’d come to help rescue me.

“Eric,” I shrugged and explained, “He does a body good.” But remembering how much me and my dress had been through in the last twenty-four hours, I wanted a shower in the worst way. So I quickly gave them a rundown of the worst day of my life before sprinting back up the stairs and into Eric’s spa-like bathroom.

When I felt more like myself, I rejoined them downstairs in the lab and saw that they all had changed. Eric must have showered in one of the other

bathrooms because his hair was still damp, but as soon as he saw me he wrapped his arms around me and nuzzled against my cheek sighing, “Much better. You’re still hot, but you don’t burn.”

“Good,” I smiled, almost expecting to hear him purr from the way he was snuggling me, but I’d learned a while ago how much Eric liked to snuggle. However now wasn’t the time for it, so I put a little bit of distance between us and noticed they’d started autopsying one of the bodies.

So I closed that little bit of distance and buried my head in his chest, blindly gesturing towards the peeled open chest cavity and murmuring, “Ew...have you learned anything?”

“Besides the fact that you’re squeamish?” Eric chuckled, so I playfully smacked his side, making him add, “All of their internal organs are perfectly healthy. And I mean *perfectly healthy*. Heart, lungs, liver, kidneys...it’s like they’re fresh off of the human factory assembly line. There’re no signs of any abnormalities, which is the only thing abnormal about them. Furnan looked to be in his early forties, so there should be some signs of aging in his body that would indicate the natural decline all humans begin to go through, regardless of how health conscious he may have been. But there aren’t any. In any of them.”

“So what does that mean?” I asked, pulling away but keeping my eyes away from the bodies.

“I don’t know,” he shrugged. “But I would hypothesize whatever they were injected with not only changed their physical composition to be able to morph into werewolves, but it healed whatever maladies they may have had before the transformation took place. Godric is running tests on their blood now to try and determine what the differences are between their blood and all of ours.”

If it was there, Godric would find it, but my eyes happened to land on one of the flat screens and I couldn't help but notice it was tuned into one of the local news stations.

And it appeared my little appearance on the red carpet was the top news story of the day.

Pulling away from Eric, I walked towards it with my mouth gaping open before turning to him and saying, "I told you panties were necessary!"

Normally I wasn't one who embarrassed easily. A byproduct of my inner love child, I supposed. But being on what I was sure would become a national – if not international – news story, with my dress hiked up around my waist was apparently enough to make me blush.

Thank God for the blood coating my thighs to hide the cellulite.

I knew there were bigger things we had to worry about, but I was currently in my own little mortified world and I had a feeling it would take a pound of chocolate per pound of Sookie being shoved into my mouth before it would either go away or fall into a sugar coma.

The guys were all slumped onto the couch, so Jake pulled me down onto it with them and pet my hair, joking, "There there...we all knew you wore them. Now we just know what they look like."

"Asshole," I snickered, trying and failing to give him a nut tap via my elbow.

"Does it make you feel any better to know they haven't figured out it was you yet?" John asked. And when I turned to look at him, he motioned towards the screen and added, "Your face."

My eyes had been too busy looking at my business being shown for all of the world to see, but looking now I could see what he was talking about. There hadn't been anyway for me to know how bad I looked at the time and thanks

to having Eric's blood, my injuries were healed before I ever got in front of a mirror.

But now I could see just how swollen my face had been. My eyes were nearly swollen shut, which may have been why everything had been so blurry to me then, and the bruises and swollen lip only added to my disfigurement.

And blonds with a big rack were a dime a dozen in L.A., so I could be anyone.

My eyes were glued to the screen now and they were replaying the event on a continuous loop, with the reporters talking nonstop about who the four mystery men and damsel in distress were.

"We need to come up with a name," Jake huffed, hearing them being referred to as 'The Masked Men' and sat back with his arms crossed over his chest.

Yeah...because *that* should be our number one priority.

But since I'd had enough drama for one extremely long night, I was willing to play his game and said, "Well, The Avengers is already taken. Marvel Comics."

"So is The Justice League. DC Comics," Alcide offered.

"The Punishers?" Jake asked.

"Nope," Alcide answered and added, "Already taken. Marvel."

"The Vigilantes?" I asked.

"DC Comics," Jake sighed.

John was normally the sanest of the bunch, but even he seemed like he was ready for a little lightheartedness and said, "We're soldiers, first and foremost, so whatever we're called it should have something to do with that."

“And they’re calling themselves The Authority, so...who bucks authority?” I asked, with my mind running through my mental thesaurus.

Alcide was the first one to speak up, saying, “Calling ourselves insurgents would be a bad idea, but what about The Dissenters Division?”

“Anything to get you closer to double D’s, huh?” Jake laughed.

“What about The Contingent?” I asked, ignoring their boob talk, and explained, “It has a dual meaning. Your presence would only be contingent on the werewolves making an appearance and it means a group of military personnel too.”

“Not bad,” Jake nodded, but then asked, “But what if they try to shorten it and call us The Cunts?”

“Well then I’ll need a new pair of panties because I’ll ruin the ones I’m wearing when I piss myself,” I laughed.

I would too.

I heard Eric chuckle from across the room, but he was bent over one of the dead bodies, rooting around for something I wanted no part in knowing about. But even so, I hadn’t eaten in a long time, so I pretended he wasn’t elbow deep in somebody’s innards and pushed myself up and off of the couch asking, “Who wants breakfast?”

Unsurprisingly, three hands shot up in the air. I’d gotten used to cooking for a small army for the last week, so I left them to do whatever it was they did and headed to the kitchen where I could pretend everything was normal for just a little while.

My time in the land of make believe didn’t last very long though.

I was just plating up the food and getting ready to call them when my cell phone rang. I’d noticed it charging on the nightstand when I’d gone to take a

shower and was grateful Eric thought to grab my purse the night before. I'd just shoved it into my pocket out of habit, but considering it was nearing 3 A.M. I couldn't even begin to think of who could be calling.

But hearing the voice on the other end of the line when I answered made me realize my snow globe brain had left out one very important detail when I told Eric about my time in captivity.

"Hello Miss Stackhouse," he purred. "Be a dear and put Eric on the phone, won't you?"

"Darth Victor?" I asked, with my stomach dropping and my appetite disappearing, hearing the now all too familiar voice. "Is that you?"

## Chapter 22 – The War Maker

### **EPOV**

Thanks to our now strengthened connection, I'd been keeping tabs on Sookie's emotions ever since I'd given her my blood again. It was the only way I could stomach letting her out of my sight and it was what made me go to her, feeling her fear and apprehension spike through our bond.

I found her in the kitchen with her phone at her ear and thanks to my heightened hearing I clearly heard her when she asked, "Darth Victor? Is that you?"

"Sookie?" I asked, since her eyes were frozen to the floor and she didn't appear to have noticed me enter the room.

But she must have heard me because her eyes darted to meet mine, as she covered the mouthpiece on her phone and whispered, "It's the Wolf Whisperer. He wants to talk to you."

The scalpel I still held in my hand bent with my fingers clenching into a fist, so I checked my strength and whispered for Godric to trace the call as I pulled off my latex gloves. Walking towards her, I took it from her hand and calmly said, “I’m going to kill you for hurting her.”

It wasn’t an empty threat.

“Eric,” he laughed, which sounded weird as fuck thanks to whatever he was using to disguise his voice. “I’m sure you’ll try, but I’m hoping you’ll change your mind when you hear what I have to say.”

“I doubt it.”

*Seriously* doubted it.

“Ahh...” his altered voice teased across the line. “But you haven’t even heard my offer.”

It was creepy as hell to feel like I was talking to a real life Sith Lord because Sookie hadn’t been off the mark in calling him *Darth anything*.

But in actuality, she *hadn’t* called him *Darth Anything*.

She’d called him *Darth Victor*.

And I wished like hell she really was telepathic because then I could mentally ask her if she’d forgotten to tell me Victor had been her captor.

But even after everything she’d been put through in the last twenty-four hours, I knew her well enough to know that Sookie didn’t forget any detail. It just wasn’t something she was capable of.

I knew – in part – thanks to her perfect recall about every woman she’d been forced to drag to the curb thanks to me.

She certainly would have told me if Victor had been the one to kidnap her.

*In technicolor.*

Her ‘fuck’ filled diatribe would have been so blue, she would have easily passed for Smurfette.

But if her suspicions were correct, then it was an edge I couldn’t afford to give up by giving away too much too soon, so I asked, “And what is it you’re offering me?”

His head on a platter would be the only offer I would entertain.

“I knew you were a practical man,” he chuckled. “But I also know you are an egotist above all. So what I am offering you is a merger of sorts.”

A merger?

The only merger I wanted was my fist merging with his head.

In the growing silence – because I also doubted that was the merger *he* was offering – he went on to say, “I want us to combine forces. My army of wolves is much larger than the four of you. I know that you are different than the other three you surround yourself with, but you’ve obviously made strides in your research. Strides my own scientists have failed to make. Wolves, you see, tend to be very...*animalistic*. No matter how small or large the pack may be, there’s an intrinsic need for there to be an Alpha. And when you have so many wolves, who were each selected for their tactical and leadership traits, there can be some discord. And now, thanks to you and your group, the pack is...let’s just say...*restless* without their leader.”

Furnan was my guess as to who had been leading the pack.

But his dramatic pause came to an end when he chuckled darkly, “It’s all very messy. Nonetheless, the advancements you’ve made seem to have bypassed the need for them to transform. I would much rather have an army of men,



with all of the strength and speed and none of the fur. They would blend in with the humans so much more easily.”

He paused again, but knowing Godric was still working on tracing the call, rather than telling him to fuck off and hanging up, I attempted to draw out our conversation by asking, “Why in the hell would I *want* to *combine forces* with you?”

“Because,” he answered. “Your pragmatism is only outweighed by your egotism. Combine the two, as I want our forces to combine, and just imagine all that we could do *together*.”

Something was tickling at the back of my mind. Something about our conversation was off – more than just him being off his rocker – but before I could even begin to dissect what it was, he quickly said, “Think about my offer and I’ll get back to you.”

The line went dead a second later and Godric answered the question on the tip of my tongue before I could even pose it.

“The call was disconnected before I could complete the trace.” But before I could crush the phone in my hand, he added, “However I was able to pinpoint the area in which the call originated in. Las Vegas, Nevada.”

“Las Vegas?” Sookie asked. “Why? Because Siegfried and Roy are out of the business now, someone thought to jump on stage *and* the Twilight bandwagon by bringing wolves into the mix?”

While Sookie went back to cooking breakfast for everyone, I tried to nail down what it was that had been bothering me about the conversation. But when she started snarking about Victor stealing from Stephenie Meyers’ universe, it dawned on me.

“It wasn’t Victor.”

“What do you mean?” she asked, turning to face me with a spatula in her hand. And then waving it in my direction, she added, “How do you know?”

“Because,” I explained. “*Victor* would know I wouldn’t want any part in overthrowing any government, much less *our own*. We fought about it right before I fired him on the night I was attacked down in the lab. He was pissed I gave my work away to John for free and refused to negotiate some ridiculously expensive government contract. Victor knows me well enough to know that I wouldn’t agree to anything like their proposal.”

And remembering the circumstances surrounding the last time I saw Victor, I added, “He knew me well enough to go after *you*, didn’t he? Even if he’d been in The Authority’s back pocket all along, he’s not in their upper ranks. He wouldn’t have been embezzling money from Northman Inc. if he was.”

“Well then who?” she asked.

Exactly.

Who?

Who would benefit from the chaos their revelation would cause?

Who would benefit from the resulting fear of the general population?

Who would benefit from governments around the world attempting to protect themselves from an opponent they wouldn’t see coming until it was too late?

“Godric!” I barked and without waiting for a response, I ordered, “Search through the files of every weapons manufacturer across the globe. Cross reference them with mercenaries for hire. Tactical response outfits. Go through their invoices and see who’s been preparing for a war that didn’t exist until now and figure out who’s paying for it all.”

It was the only logical conclusion. The wolves had initially attacked the world financial summit. The only ones who would benefit from something like that

would be those who would be paid – handsomely – to defend against the threat they represented.

*And as any first year Business major would tell you, you had to spend money in order to make money.*

The caller had said he had an army of wolves at his disposal. They could be solicited by any government willing to pay through the nose to defeat a new formidable enemy no one had ever gone up against before, not realizing they'd taken that very same enemy in until it was too late.

The fox would already be in the hen house.

To find the mongrels, we would have to look for their master. A master at the art of war.

A War Maker.

~o~O~o~

“So, tell me again,” Jake sighed. “What does Vegas have to do with war, other than it being a card game kids play?”

“Besides it being where the call came in from?” Alcide huffed in aggravation. “Where else in the country are large amounts of cash exchanging hands? With a little *slight-of-hand*, anybody with a little knowhow and a lot of chutzpah can skim enough cash from the top to fund an army.”

“Dude,” Jake laughed. “Did you just say *chutzpah*? You sound like the old biddies my grandma plays bingo with.”

And then adopting the persona of an old woman, he hunched over and wagged his finger in Al's face, saying, “*Oy veh*, what a *meshugana*.”

While John and Sookie chuckled at the ensuing slap war – which had a lot more oomph now that their DNA had a lot more oomph – I did my best to

ignore them and attempted to concentrate on the multiple screens in front of me.

It had been four days since the phone call. Four days of combing through records and invoices and names and bank accounts, trying to suss out who the war maker could be. What Al had said was true – Yiddish or otherwise – because Las Vegas was a cash cow.

And it was easy enough to milk.

But finding the leaky udders was proving to be more difficult than I'd expected. Because it was largely a cash operation, avoiding a paper trail would be easily done if you knew what you were doing.

And *if* that was the way The Authority was funding their group, then they undoubtedly *knew* what they were doing.

But numbers were my *thing*. Mathematical formulas were my bread and butter.

My comfort zone.

When the rest of my life equated to chaos, I could always find solace in a mathematical equation.

It was my mind's version of slipping on an old pair of comfortable slippers.

But this one wasn't fitting right and it was slowly driving me mad. I knew the answers were right there in front of me and yet I couldn't see them.

It was like being on the edge of an orgasm, without ever falling over.

It was maddening.

And it was making me mad.

I was so focused on my task that I didn't realize the room had emptied until I looked up, feeling Sookie's hands grip my shoulders and begin to massage them from behind.

While I didn't *need* a massage in my new state of being, that didn't mean I didn't her touch wouldn't relieve my tension.

*I always felt better when she was touching me.*

It felt like a lifetime ago, instead of mere days, when I'd been planning to fly off to somewhere private with Sookie so we could reconnect.

Soulfully. Carnally. Biblically.

Take your pick.

But with everything that had happened since then, we'd barely had five minutes alone together.

*It was something I hoped to rectify soon.*

I vowed to myself, when everything was said and done, I would whisk her away to a deserted island. Just me and her.

I'd buy one if I had to.

And wondering how long we had now, but suspecting it wouldn't be very much, I leaned back into her hands and rubbed my eyes more out of habit than need, as I asked, "Where is everyone?"

"I kicked them out."

I mimicked the smile I could hear in her tone and just enjoyed the feel of her hands kneading my shoulders, while I said, "It's good to know I'm still your favorite."

Jake was a close second though.

Third, if you counted Godric.

“If that’s what makes you feel better,” she teased and then wrapping her arms around me from behind, she hugged my back to her chest and said, “Dumb it down for me.”

“Dumb *what* down for you?”

I was her favorite. She knew it. I knew it.

No explanation was necessary.

“Whatever’s kept you in a trance for the last ninety-six hours,” she replied and gestured towards the computer screen.

So I did.

I told her everything I was looking into. Between me *and* Godric it was more than a little humiliating that neither one of us had found any viable leads.

There was an overabundance of weapons manufacturers and arms dealers, spanning the globe and the less reputable ones weren’t known for keeping records of their illegal sales.

And while Las Vegas was known for its excess, that could also be said about the money makers. No single one stood out above the rest, saying, *‘Me! Me! I’m the megalomaniac hell bent on world domination!’*

“Ahh,” she sighed against my back when I was through venting, “So what you’re saying is, it’s like a Bermuda Blowseph.”

“A Bermuda *what*?” I asked, wondering if somehow our blood bond signals hadn’t gotten crossed somewhere along the way.

Bermuda had been considered and then tossed from my mental list of vacation venues.

Too crowded.

“A Bermuda Blowseph,” she repeated with a soft giggle. “It’s what they call it when you go down on someone the size of a small moon. You know, searching through all of the layers of fat, while trying to find the goods.”

“Gross,” I laughed. “But essentially, yes.”

It felt good just being with her again, proving we could even keep all of our clothes on and I was still perfectly happy just to be near her.

And after a long stretch of silence, with me closing my eyes and just trying clear my head in my little Sookie-bubble, she eventually spoke up and asked, “What if it’s a red herring?”

“What if *what’s* a red herring?”

I was so mentally exhausted by that point that she would need to dumb it down for me.

“All of it,” she replied and let go of me to move around to my side.

But not ready to give up the feel of her body against mine just yet, I reached over and pulled her into my lap, while she explained, “He’s not exactly a stand up kinda guy, so why are we even believing him? His *army* of mutts might very well be a litter of puppies. He knows where you are. He knows there are only four of you, so why aren’t they here, lifting their legs and pissing everywhere? We saw for ourselves on that video it took *two weeks* for Furnan to go Jacob Black, but the guys’ change only took three days.”

Then turning in my lap to face me, she said, “They want what you have, Eric. But they don’t have the manpower to take it from you.”

And *she* wanted *me* to dumb it down for *her*.

Grabbing her face in my hands, I brought my lips to her own and whispered, “*You are a brilliant mother fucker.*”

“That is *so* going on my next order of business cards,” she giggled into my mouth.

Before my tongue swept into hers and effectively brought her laughter to a halt.

Not only was Sookie *brilliant*, she was also *flexible* and somehow managed to move her leg in between our bodies until she was straddling me.

I’d tell her to put *that* on her business cards too, but it was no one’s business but my own as to how flexible she was.

I hadn’t fed from her in the days since her attack by the wolves. She’d lost a lot of blood and I hadn’t wanted to deplete her body any more than it already was. But bagged blood, while nourishing, just wasn’t the same.

So it wasn’t any surprise when my fangs snapped down, but as I attempted to pull back from our kiss, Sookie’s hands held onto my head, while her tongue slowly traced along each of my extended teeth.

It was the first time she’d done something like that. While her tongue had grazed them in passing before, now she went about it methodically – purposefully – and I was surprised at how much it affected me. Just as much as if she’d been suckling from somewhere lower on my body.

And a part of me wondered if that made me a literal dickface.

*But I supposed it was better than a Bermuda Blowseph.*

I still didn’t know where any of the guys were or when they would be back. But I didn’t let that stop me from putting my hands on her hips and helping her



along in dry humping me until we either started a friction fire or put one out with our cum.

But just as I started seeing stars trying to form behind my eyes, she pulled back and gasped out, “Riverboats!”

“Wha?”

*Was ‘riverboats’ just another way of saying she was going to cum? Like a river? From my boat?*

In that moment, I was decidedly *not* a genius.

“Riverboats!” she repeated and then dumbed it down for me even further by adding, “My Gran used to go gambling on *riverboats*, with her little church group. What that had to do with Christ, other than praying to him to roll a seven, I don’t know. But *riverboats* are like little *puppies* to the movers and shakers in Las Vegas. I’m sure to the tyrannically challenged, that might stick in their craw a little. Especially one who used to love the limelight and then disappeared from it altogether. So how oddly coincidental was it that I just ran into the owner of one not too long ago?”

And locking her eyes onto my own, she added, “One who was very interested in what *you’ve* been up to lately.”

Now that the lust had cleared from my head – mostly from one, not so much from the other – she didn’t need to say his name for me to know who she was talking about.

I’d heard him myself when I was stalking her outside of the charity event on the night Victor had kidnapped her.

Russell Edgington.

He owned a small fleet of gambling riverboats and he’d never met a camera flash that he didn’t like all through the late 70’s and early 80’s.

But could he really be the War Maker?

## Chapter 23 – Hot Commodity

### EPOV

Sookie claimed she understood when – in spite of us finally having the house to ourselves – Godric and I immediately went to work on digging into everything we could find out about Russell Edgington.

Even if there was some stomping up the stairs involved.

Not that I would have ever pointed it out.

It didn't take a genius to know that while I might – for all intents and purposes – die for the day, that wouldn't stop her from killing me anyway.

My girl was nothing but resourceful.

And vindictive.

It was one of many things I both knew and loved about her.

But Russell was a different story. Not only did I not love him – or even *like* him – but aside from the cursory information on his legitimate business dealings that could be found through any Google search, nothing could be found about his private dealings.

Not even through a Godric search.

No phone records.

No personal financial statements.

Not even a fucking twitter account.

But the fact that there wasn't anything there was a clue itself, only solidifying the idea he had something to hide.

After he disappeared from the limelight in the early 80's, it was like he no longer existed at all.

He'd gone dark. Completely off the grid.

*As Kardashian as he'd been once upon a time, it was an impressive feat.*

His businesses themselves were run by a board – not unlike my own – but it was a privately held company where mine was public.

Not only because it had been a sound business decision, but because there was a time my ego had gotten a boost at the thought there were people out there, buying and trading in Eric Northman.

I liked being a hot commodity.

And admittedly, a part of me *still* liked it.

But because of my ego, my corporation was required to file quarterly earnings reports – among other things – with the Securities Exchange Commission. The information was available to the shareholders and public at large.

By keeping his company private, Edgington wasn't held to those same rules. He didn't have any stockholders to answer to, so he didn't have to make any disclosures to the SEC.

But he also didn't have the added advantage of selling stock or bonds in his company to raise capital. So finding the thinnest of financial lines that led through various shell companies before it made its way back to him, had been like solving P versus NP.

*I'd already solved the other unsolvable Millennium Prize Problems, but nobody likes a know-it-all, so they could just figure them out for themselves.*

By then, we'd been at it for nearly four days straight.

By 'we', I meant me and Godric.

Everyone else had been off doing their own thing. But having sequestered myself away in the deep recesses of my mind, I hadn't been too sure of just what 'doing their own thing' entailed and was surprised when I looked up from the screen to find I was all alone.

It only took a moment of using my newly enhanced hearing to figure out everyone else was up on the main level of the house, but just as I sprinted up the stairs and rounded the corner of the room to let them all in on my not-so-little find, I was distracted.

By lions and tigers and bears.

"Oh fuck," Sookie whispered, unwittingly finishing my thought with her eyes glued to the TV screen, showing the larger than life wild animals that were prowling down Sunset Boulevard.

Six in total, there were two of each kind, stalking down the street as though they were looking for something.

*I doubted it was Noah and his ark.*

The fact they really were larger than normal animals of the same breed could have been an optical illusion, if you didn't have a little something extra in your blood – and in your brain, really – that allowed you to do the calculations to figure out their true size, based off of the known variables they walked by.

Like the standard height to width ratios of commercial storefront entrances. The width of the sidewalk itself or the height of the streetlamps.

Knowing all of those known variables and applying them to the height and width of each of the animals could give you their approximate size.

Or you could just take a lucky guess, which was what Jake did when he marveled in disbelief, “That tiger is bigger than that Ford Focus! I don’t think that’s normal.”

Like the wolves, these beasts were bigger than their genetic counterparts, so it could only mean one thing.

“Shit just got real,” Jake mumbled.

*Maybe the powers of his enhanced blood had grown to give him telepathy?*

But before I could figure out whether or not I would want him to be able to read my thoughts, shit got exceptionally loud when he bellowed from less than two feet in front of me, “ERIC!”

Cuffing him up the backside of his head for making my ears rings, I snarled, “*What*, you douchebag?”

“Oh...oww,” he whined, rubbing the back of his head before turning to see me standing there. “There you are.”

“Exceptionally perceptive,” I snarked, with an eye roll. “That’s you.”

“Momma always said I was the best,” he grinned.

“That’s not what she told me last night,” Alcide chuckled, causing Jake to fly at him.

“ENOUGH!” John growled, calling an end to what would have likely become an epic slap war, and turning to me – the only other adult male in the room – he said, “I think we should head on over there.”

“Agreed,” I nodded and sped to my room to get changed.

Russell was still in the back of my mind, but the Wizard of Oz flashback on steroids had the majority of my attention for the moment. I couldn't imagine what their purpose was for being there, other than to instill fear in the public.

Hopefully our presence would counteract some of that fear.

Speeding back into the room, the guys were right behind me, now dressed in their own disguises, when I stopped short feeling a bolt of lust coming from Sookie.

She did so love the sight of me in leather.

Meeting her eyes, I couldn't find the willpower to make my feet move forward. There were lions and tigers and bears to deal with, but now all I wanted to do was fuck.

And bite, given the way my fangs snapped down.

Fanning herself for a brief moment, she then used that same hand to wave me away as she said, "You had your chance, but chose your iMac over me. What is it with you vampires and apples anyway?"

I knew she was teasing. Her tone, her expression, and our blood tie all told me that she was, but it still stung a little.

Because – in a way – it was true.

But it was her words that got my feet to carry me forward, so I could sweep her up in my arms and whisper against her lips, "When this is all over I'm taking you far away from here. Just you and me. No WiFi. No electricity. Nothing."

"Promises, promises," she smiled before she kissed me in a way that had me forgetting all about Ringling's on Roids, until John repeated his earlier order.

"Enough," he said, using a much more subdued tone.

Proving I wasn't the only one who was afraid of Sookie.

The house wasn't all that far from Sunset Boulevard. Getting there was even faster when you didn't have pesky things like traffic and red lights to contend with, but since I was the only one who could fly, the guys all had to run.

They still got there nearly at the same time as me.

I didn't know how long they'd been prowling down the street, but their presence had already drawn the attention of another kind of predator indigenous to L.A.

The paparazzi.

Like the red carpet we'd rescued Sookie from, there were cameras everywhere and I knew there was no way Godric would be able to keep our images from being broadcasted to the world. I could only hope our disguises would hold up to the scrutiny.

But I let all of my focus narrow down to the newest threats we were up against as the guys and I rounded the corner and came to a stop in the middle of the street facing them.

A silence descended over the crowd. Why people would willingly stand around when there were wild animals stalking down the street was beyond me.

It wasn't like they were an innocent bunch of squirrels.

Something they proved – and the crowd proved they finally understood the danger, with a few letting out small screams – seeing the two bears stand up on their hind legs and roar in our direction.

“What's that, you say Yogi?” Jake taunted, with his eyes scanning them all. And then answering for him, he added, “Why, I don't think you *are* smarter than the average bear. But I *do* think you'd look *great* sprawled out in front of my fireplace.”

“Dude,” Alcide cut in. “Don’t skin him. Stuff him and stand him in a corner next to the couch. He can hold our beers when we’re playing Xbox.”

John and I were flanking them on either side, the stoic bookends to their fuckery. I had a feeling he wasn’t admonishing them for cutting up because, if anything, it kept the pack focused on us and not the innocent bystanders.

I hadn’t taken my eyes off of any of them, so it was easy to see the recognition coming from theirs, staring back at us.

They’d understood every word the guys had said.

Which was the likely explanation for why one of the lions – both males, given their full manes – roared in protest.

However, it *didn’t* explain why Alcide lifted Jake by his hips high above his head and asked, “Who’s your daddy?”

At least, not until Jake shouted out his answer of, “Mufasa!”

Their little shtick was getting a few laughs from the crowd, but our little Mexican standoff was on pause because they weren’t charging at us, so we weren’t charging at them.

But all it took was seeing the two tigers leaning back on their haunches, preparing to launch at us for Alcide to bring Jake down, with his feet planting against Al’s thighs, and Jake saying, “Three...two...one...Liftoff!”

Then launching himself up into the air off of Al’s legs, Jake flew at the group, singing, “Rocket man, burning out his fuse up here alone.”

Well, we couldn’t have that.

Taking off just behind him, the three of us flew at the pack, with Alcide catching one of the tigers in midair and simultaneously chiding Jake with, “Elton John? You’re such a pussy!”



Snapping the tiger's neck, he let it drop to the ground, just as Jake wrestled the other one into a chokehold using his legs wrapped around its neck and said, "Takes one to know one."

The dead tiger quickly morphed into the form of a man – much to the crowd's dismay – but Al wasted no time in running over to help John in his fight against the two lions.

Which left the bears to me.

Even regular grizzlies were huge, so going up against those two fuckers was like battling giants. But not wanting to admit their size gave me any pause, I flew at the larger of the two and grabbed onto him from behind. Still standing on his hind legs, I perched on his back piggyback style and taunted, "You should have stayed in Jellystone Park. Ranger Smith isn't nearly as deadly as I am."

With his only warning given, I sunk my teeth into the side of his neck, but the thick fur made it so I couldn't get through to his skin in my first attempt and instead I was forced to spit out what equated to a hairball.

Disgusting.

But rather than experience that for a second time, I grabbed one of the silver coated daggers I had strapped to my legs and sunk it into his jugular, ripping the flesh away with the serrated edge as I tore it from his skin.

His huge paws had already made a few swipes at my back, with his claws shredding the leather coat that covered me. But like my fangs, his claws hadn't been able to do much damage before my stab to his throat caused him to topple to the ground with a gurgling roar.

He wasn't quite dead, but he was rapidly approaching it and no longer a threat. So I turned towards the second bear and sneered with my fangs on display, "It's your turn Boo Boo."

Still standing several feet away, at his gargantuan size he only needed to gallop once in order to reach me. But Jake was on him before the bear saw him coming and said, “Hey Boo Boo! Let’s go get us a pic-a-nic basket!”

Rearing back up onto his hind legs, he unsuccessfully tried to throw Jake off of his back and his shouted, “Yee haw!” only made Boo Boo redouble his efforts.

But with his chest exposed and his arms reaching up behind him, trying to grab onto Jake, it was easy for me to dart forward with my bloody dagger still in my grip and plunge it into his heart.

Tearing it from his chest, I stabbed him again to make sure the job was done before turning to get a read on John and Al’s fight against the lions. But seeing the street now covered by the bodies of dead men – ones that didn’t include John or Alcide – I breathed an unnecessary sigh of relief.

And I inhaled another unnecessary but completely involuntary breath hearing Godric’s voice coming over the earpieces we all wore as he warned, “Wolves have breached the perimeter fence. The silver spray has slowed them down, but they’re still approaching the house.”

Forgetting all about the six not-quite human carcasses we shouldn’t have left behind, all four of us took off at superhuman speed back to the house. So singularly focused on getting to Sookie, I thought nothing of launching into the sky from the middle of Sunset Boulevard.

A stunt that the video footage of would quickly go viral.

“Sookie.”

My one word needed no explanation and Godric replied, “She’s locked herself into the panic room.”

We were still a few minutes out, but it felt like she was lightyears away when he added, “Eric. They’ve penetrated the house.”

After the first attack by the wolves at the house, the fence hadn't been the only addition I'd made to the layers of security at the house. The doors and windows had been replaced with carbon copies in appearance only. The substitutions were touted as being impenetrable and were a hot commodity among the one percenters.

Because only the one percenters could afford their cost.

But their claims of being impenetrable were obviously false.

But genetically produced werewolves had probably never been a part of their quality assurance tests.

That didn't mean I wouldn't be leaving them a scathing review on their website later on.

But when we'd repaired the walls, additional layers of security had been added throughout the entire house, to include pocket doors that could act as a barricade and turn the house into a maze, directing whoever was caught up inside to wherever we wanted them to go.

Something Godric took the initiative of utilizing when his tone took on a deadliness I'd never heard coming from him before when he said, "I have them trapped in separate hallways on the lower level."

Knowing they could go through the walls if they thought to, I did my best to increase my already redlined speed and arrived only moments later. The front door was still intact, but they'd pushed their way in by taking the doorframe with it.

The entrance to the panic room was hidden along the back wall of my bedroom closet, so my feet carried me in that direction when I was forced to come to a stop by the first pocket door along the way.

Thinking I would have a pissed off wolf or two to contend with, I readied myself and commanded, “Open the door.”

Godric did as I’d ordered, but seeing the two dead men lying on the floor, I was left dumbstruck. There wasn’t a mark on either one of their bodies to indicate how they’d been killed and I wondered for a moment if maybe they’d been given a different serum – one the War Maker had enhanced to pop out his puppies at a faster rate – and that was the cause for their sudden demise.

My only response seeing them was a whispered, “How?”

Rhetorical in my mind, the guys had just come in behind me and repeated my question in varying degrees with various, “Huh?”, “The fuck?”, and “What happened?”

But it was Godric who set us all straight and gave me mixed emotions, consisting of both the willies and pride, when he answered, “I killed them.”

So I repeated my question – no longer rhetorical – and asked, “How?”

“The vents,” he responded. “I reversed the house’s central air system, using the air ducts to pull the oxygen from the enclosure. The doors acted as a hermetic seal, so they suffocated.”

No one said anything for a long moment, but it was Jake who spoke up first, saying, “Uhh...I thought robot guys weren’t supposed to hurt humans.”

With the inflection in his tone, it was almost posed as a question.

One Godric chose to answer by saying, “They *aren’t* human.”

Technically, he was correct.

And, *technically*, [Asimov’s Laws](#) were never a part of his original programming. He’d been programmed to learn, not unlike a human child would.

A *genius* of a human child, but like a human nonetheless, which was why he now used contractions when he spoke.

He'd learned how by listening to everyone else speaking around him.

Being confined to cyberspace, in my mind there had been no reason to add them.

*How could he hurt anyone if he didn't exist outside of a computer network?*

Well, he showed me.

Even so, I found I wasn't all that concerned anymore when he reinforced the idea 'Like Maker/like AI brainchild', by saying, "I won't let *anyone* hurt Sookie."

And that was good enough for me.

## Chapter 24 – Revelations

### TV POV

Tiffany: *"If you're just now joining us, what you're seeing is video footage of an altercation occurring on Sunset Boulevard just a few moments ago. That's right. Lions and tigers and bears were prowling the streets of downtown L.A."*

Talbot: *"Gee Tiffany, I don't remember any tornadoes in your weather forecast from last night. So, does tonight's call for flying monkeys?"*

Tiffany: *"Very funny, Talbot. If you paid more attention to what's going on around you and less to the wrinkles you're constantly checking for in a mirror when you're not on camera, you might be better informed. But since you chose to go the obvious Judy Garland route instead of Detroit,*

*Cincinnati, and Chicago, I would say your chances of broadcasting a future NFL game are highly unlikely.”*

*Talbot: “About as unlikely as you being the next Al Roker, but contrary to your shoddy reporting, I do pay attention enough to know these appear to be the same masked men who turned up on the red carpet at the Academy Awards. However speculation is still running amok as to who they might be.”*

*Tiffany: “They’re all wearing black leather getups, so of course you paid attention to that, but...amok. Ten points to you for using it correctly in a sentence. And you’re also correct that no one has learned their true identities.”*

*Talbot: “I’ll take the ten points, but you should remember the camera adds ten pounds and layoff of the booze when you go home – alone – every night. But speaking of leather getups that make my heartbeat run amok, the tall blond who had flown off with the injured woman the last time, actually stuck around this time. And – now, I could be wrong – but it looked like he stuck his FANGS into the bear’s neck?”*

*Tiffany: “I do love to point out when you’re wrong, so thankfully you’ve given me enough opportunities to do so in the past that I can live with admitting I do believe you’re correct. I saw fangs too. But what are we supposed to make of all of this? Men with superhuman strength? A man who can fly and has vampire teeth? And larger than life wild animals who turn into humans when they’re killed? I must have zoned out during those lessons in my Biology class.”*

*Talbot: “\*cough\* Hungover. \*cough\* I suppose we can assume they’re part of The Authority, who’d taken over our airwaves the same night as the awards ceremony, but we haven’t heard any more from them since. Unless of course, there’s someone else out there turning men into animals. And I don’t mean the guys I met at Hooligan’s last Saturday night. Heeyyy fellas...”*

Tiffany: *“Yes, well you do like to make an ass of yourself in more ways than one, so while you sit there and bemoan the fact you’ll never get your hands on any of the ones belonging to the masked men, let’s see what the people on the streets are saying. Our very own Maryann McHenry has just arrived on scene. Tell us Maryann. What are you seeing? What’s the vibe of the crowd like and what are they telling you?”*

Maryann: *“Talbot and Tiffany, the crowd here on Sunset Boulevard has grown even larger, with everyone coming to see the aftermath with their own eyes. Some have even brought handmade signs, hoping the four masked men will make another appearance. Here’s one arriving right now. Excuse me, Miss? Can you tell our TV viewers, what is your name, why did you decide to come down here, and what does your sign say?”*

Jessica: *“Hi! I’m um, Jessica. Jessica Hamby and I came down here because I was hoping to meet the guys – I mean men – who are keeping us safe from those...those...whatever in the heck they are. And my sign, I mean it’s just – you know – my way of saying thanks!”*

Maryann: *“You mean to say thanks by offering to have a...does that say, ‘Renesmee’?”*

Jessica: *“Uh huh! And I have red hair, even if he doesn’t. And he’s more of a dirty blond, so our immortal child could totally turn out to have the same dark auburn-y hair color.”*

Maryann: *“Uh huh. Thank you for your time...and for showing us why the American education system is failing our youth. But, Talbot and Tiffany, fans of the masked men aren’t the only ones lining the street. There are protestors here too. Tell me, sir. What is your name and why are you here?”*

Steve: *“I am the Reverend Steve Newlin and my parishioners and I have come to tell the world we will not stand idly by and allow Satan’s minions to take over the human race. Even those cute little yellow fellows are an*

*abomination, walking around without pants and making weapons of mass destruction. Our society is going to Hell in a handbasket and I will NOT stand by and permit us to be carried away! Not even to Grandmother's house!"*

*Maryann: "So you're saying your hatred is not only irrational enough to include fictional characters, but you don't discriminate in your hate. Everyone who's not just like you is included. Now that we have that cleared up, tell me. Do you believe the men who appear to be fighting against those animal-like creatures in order to keep the rest of us humans safe are actually evil?"*

*Steve: "Do you hear yourself? OF COURSE THEY'RE EVIL! They're all dressed as disciples of the Anti-Christ. The tall one can fly and has fangs! Only a dark alley deal with Lucifer himself could give someone those powers."*

*Maryann: "Angels can fly. The Archangel Michael fought against Satan. So are you saying he was evil as well?"*

*Steve: "Blasphemy! I don't need a bible lesson from the likes of you. Revelation, Chapter 20, verses 2 and 3 tells us – And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and cast a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more. I am here to remind the world that both sides who battle before us are the Devil's spawn and neither should be trusted."*

*Maryann: "You've conveniently left out Revelation, Chapter 20, verse 1 which says – And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having a key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. Couldn't one then surmise the masked man who can fly might very well be that angel and it is he who is laying hold on those beasts?"*



Steve: *“Again, I don’t need a bible lesson from you.”*

Maryann: *“Okay. So, aside from picking and choosing bible verses that can be twisted to suit your narrow minded viewpoints, what do you hope to accomplish with your presence here? I see you and some of your minions – I mean – parishioners have armed yourselves with crosses, garlic, and mirrors. Was the local Home Depot out of pitchforks?”*

Tiffany: *“Mirrors! Talbot, it looks like they thought you would be there.”*

Talbot: *“At least there are other people who want me to be around, Tiffany. But I’m sure your bartender is missing you.”*

Steve: *“Well...yes. I mean this IS Los Angeles, so the only pitchforks we could find came from costume shops that were part of a set, with matching horned hoochie mama outfits. Talk about unholy. But we have no fear. GOD will protect us from evil.”*

Maryann: *“Annd...now I’m going to walk away to protect my sanity from you. There you have it, Talbot and Tiffany. Different viewpoints from both ends of the spectrum. I can’t believe I gave up going to law school for this.”*

Talbot: *“I don’t know why you gave it up either. You clearly still haven’t given up your penchant for arguing.”*

Tiffany: *“You’ll have to put your unwanted two cents on hold, Talbot. I’m just getting a new report through my ear piece. What is that? Are you sure? Ladies and gentleman in our viewing audience, our station has just received an uncorroborated claim that one of the masked men is none other than billionaire CEO of Northman Incorporated. Eric Northman himself.”*

Talbot: *“Consider that report confirmed! I knew I recognized that ass!”*

Tiffany: *“Believe him, ladies and gentlemen. He’s the Rain Man of ass identification.”*

Talbot: “*Tiffany! You say the sweetest things. Don’t believe a word I wrote about you on my blog.*”

Tiffany: “Ass.”

## **EPOV**

“Godric, are there more?”

I doubted they only sent two wolves to the house, but it could’ve been possible. If they thought Sookie had been left undefended, they wouldn’t have expected to put up with much resistance.

If Sookie was who they’d come for.

It wouldn’t have been the first time they tried to use her to get to me, but the only other thing they would want was my formula for the superhuman serum.

And they could have it.

Over my not-quite-dead-but-close-enough body.

“Four more,” Godric replied. “Two are trapped in the hallway at the top of the stairs and two more in the outer vestibule, leading into the lab.”

“Alive?” Jake asked, still sounding leery of the invisible deadly defender.

“Of course,” he replied, sounding not quite *smug*, but something close to it.

“Their paths would not have led them to Sookie.”

Sookie.

While I wanted nothing more than to go to her, she was better off staying in the panic room until we dealt with the other four men – wolves – whatever. But knowing her, if she saw on the surveillance system that we were back at the house, she might very well decide to come out and join us.

Wolves or no wolves.

“Godric, I *command* you to override the control panel, so Sookie can’t let herself out of the panic room until we’ve dealt with the others,” I ordered, using the one word that was written into his programming that he couldn’t disobey when I alone said it.

It was a failsafe I’d added at the very beginning on the off-chance he grew to become some sort of uncontrollable monster. I could command him to wipe his own programming – for all intents and purposes killing himself – if I had to and he had to obey me. But I’d only ever used it one other time.

The time when I’d sent Sookie away, after I’d been attacked and woken up with fangs and a hunger for blood, when I forbid him from contacting her.

“That takes balls,” Jake managed to whistle out through his teeth. “Telling him to do anything where *his woman* is concerned.”

“Very funny,” I glared.

Sookie was mine.

But before I could think too long and hard on whether or not I needed to add *that* truth to Godric’s central programming – it probably couldn’t hurt though – I turned to the guys and said, “Let’s split up into groups of two and get them secured before she convinces him to open the door.”

I wouldn’t put anything past her ability to coax Godric into doing anything, in spite of his programming.

Both of them were stubborn and fast learners.

We left the dead bodies to deal with last and split into groups of two, with John and I heading down to the lab to deal with the two there, while Al and Jake headed up the stairs.

Readying ourselves for a fight, I ordered Godric to open the pocket door that kept them trapped and deflated a little, seeing two *men* lying on the ground.

“I thought you said you didn’t kill them,” I wondered aloud.

But no sooner had I said the words when my senses picked up their heartbeats, with Godric answering at the same time, “I *didn’t* kill them. I merely reduced the oxygen levels of the enclosure until they passed out. To allow them to destroy the walls in an attempt to free themselves seemed counterproductive to your goals. You have enough to do. Replacing the walls shouldn’t be one of the items on your list.”

Chuckling, John walked forward and pulled a pair silver handcuffs he had strapped to his back and put them on one of the guys, saying, “Are you sure you don’t want to make him a body? Imagine how much more useful he would be if he could move around.”

“He’s useful enough as he is,” I smirked, hauling the cuffed intruder up off of the floor, while John secured the second one.

“You’re just worried Sookie really will run away with him,” he laughed.

Maybe.

But at least I couldn’t fault him when it came to protecting her at all costs.

And maybe that was why I preferred he remain corporeal in cyberspace only.

Godric and I were so similar it might not take much for Sookie to decide she wanted him over me.

The relationship they already had was so extensive, if he had the ability to make her cum, she wouldn’t need me at all.

“That’s it!” John laughed out accusingly. “You’re really worried she’d choose him over you.”

I wasn't about to admit it, but thankfully I didn't have to when Godric interjected, "He has nothing to fear. After informing Sookie of my Maker's command to keep her locked up, like a common maiden in distress, she has refused to speak to me. I hope you're happy Eric. Now Sookie is angry with me."

"She'll get over it," I laughed and – quite frankly – felt *relieved*, hearing there was a little trouble in their cyber paradise, so I added, "And so will you."

Meeting Alcide and Jake on the main floor, they were mirror images of John and I, each carrying an unconscious naked man.

Wolf.

Whatever.

"I don't suppose you've gotta dungeon somewhere on your palatial grounds, do you?" Jake asked.

"No," I sighed. "But I suppose my parents never imagined one might be needed when they had the house built."

The house was my father's wedding gift to my mother and all of my happier childhood memories had taken place here. When my father died, everything had been left to me and I hadn't been able to part with it.

It had been updated over the years, but the main structure and layout remained the same. Even the lab downstairs had been the same one my father used to tinker in.

I didn't realize it until then that we weren't so different after all.

I would probably descend into a spiral of self-destruction too – like my father had when my mother died – if something were to happen to Sookie.

I'd been thinking of talking to her about taking the same serum I'd given the guys. Not only would it make her stronger and lessen the chances of anyone succeeding, if they tried to take her against her will, but it could very well lengthen her lifespan.

The calculations I'd done on my own told me I would likely live a lot longer than the average human, as would the guys.

I didn't even want to imagine a world where I lived, but Sookie didn't.

But knowing it would take three days for the transformation to be complete, I also knew now wasn't the time. I knew myself well enough to know I wouldn't be able to leave her side until she opened her eyes and I knew the transformation was a success.

I couldn't afford to be out of commission for the seventy-two hours Sookie would be dead to the world.

Besides, I wanted her to choose to be with me for however long because it was what she *wanted*. Not because she was frightened of being kidnapped again.

"So what do you want us to do with these four?" Alcide asked. "I don't know about you three, but I don't particularly enjoy having a naked guy thrown over my shoulder."

"That's not what your dad told me last night," Jake taunted.

"What?" Alcide guffawed, with Jake's eyes scrunching up and you could practically see the lightbulb coming on above his head when he backtracked with, "Wait! That didn't come out right."

"It's okay, little buddy," Alcide taunted. "If Harry Potter taught us anything, it's that no one deserves to live in a closet. So if this is your way of coming out to us, then I for one accept you as you are."

"Fuck you," Jake huffed, looking both embarrassed and amused.

“Sorry buddy,” Alcide offered apologetically. “I don’t swing that way.”

And then his voice took on a taunting tone, when he smirked with, “Just ask your mom.”

“That’s enough,” John ordered and wisely changed the subject, by looking at me and saying, “The underground garage is probably the best place to keep them for now. Not that we have to worry about anyone hearing them, but there’s room down there where we can build temporary cells to hold them in, while we get some answers.”

Getting answers.

Finally.

Nodding my head in agreement, we all carried our loads down into the underground garage, where Jake was only too happy to volunteer to move some of the cars out of the way.

And Alcide was only too happy to fight him over the keys to my Maserati.

While the guys hung back to deal with the prisoners, I quickly took the two dead bodies down to the lab, so I could do autopsies on them later on and then bolted to my bedroom to finally free Sookie.

Hopefully, she wouldn’t be too pissed off at being damseled.

Punching the code into the panel to unseal the panic room door, the airlock sounded with a soft whoosh as the door slid open. The room was equipped with a separate ventilation system than the house, in case someone flooded the air ducts with toxic chemicals to either incapacitate or poison whoever was inside.

Everything was buried underground underneath the house and was why the master bedroom was on the ground floor. It made the panic room built into the closet less vulnerable to attack, with everything for its security running

straight into the room through ground underneath it. All of that could be accessed through a panel in the floor within the room, but unless you tunneled your way in from the bottom, it was impossible to tamper with.

A fact only one other person had known and he was dead.

At least that had been my working theory, until the door slid open to reveal not only Sookie, but the man I had inherited more than just my house from.

Because while it wasn't *my hand* that held a frightened Sookie in his grasp, with a thumb on the plunger of the needle pressed against her neck, it was *my eyes* staring back at me, when he greeted me with a jovial, "Son! Since you refused to come to me, I decided to come to you. Now that you've dealt with my men, I'm glad you could finally join us."

"Dad?" I choked out in disbelief.

Not only was my father *alive*, but *he* was The War Maker?

## Chapter 25 – Sins of the Father

### EPOV

He was supposed to be dead, but even though I hadn't seen him in fifteen years, there was no way I wouldn't have recognized him. He looked like he'd barely aged a day, so it would seem even death wasn't final.

It was something I should have given more thought to, all things considered.

I'd been away at boarding school when I got the news his car had plunged off the side of a mountain in the Swiss Alps, in the middle of a snow storm. Witnesses said he'd tied one on in one of the local pubs that night and given his alcoholism after my mother's death, no one was all that surprised he managed to kill himself.



But between the steep terrain, inclement weather, and the fiery crash, a body had never been found.

His death had been assumed.

I'd never felt like more of an ass because of it.

I couldn't seem to take my eyes off of him. Not because I'd missed him – even though I had – but because I couldn't reconcile the man I once knew with the man staring back at me now.

Whereas before – before my mother had died, at least – his eyes were always full of warmth and a hint of excitement, like he was constantly on the cusp of figuring out the secrets of the world.

Now his eyes were just...crazy. Wild, in a rabid sort of way, but the excitement was still there.

And not in a good way.

Still wearing a manic smile, he jutted his chin towards me and said, “Now be a good boy and step into the room, closing the door behind you. I'd hate for your friends to come looking for you and spoil our reunion.”

I highly doubted they would, but kept that to myself.

While I was still wearing my comm link in my ear – I could hear Jake and Alcide having another one of their heated exchanges, taking place in the garage – I'd turned off the mic when I was finally on my way to get Sookie.

I hadn't wanted them hearing our reunion.

The irony was biting me in the ass now.

“Don't test me, Eric,” he warned.

But more than his tone, what really got my attention was the small frightened gasp Sookie made, followed quickly by the scent of her blood.

He'd breached her skin with the tip of the needle.

“From your past reactions to my men, I doubt you'd still want her very much if she turned into a wolf at every full moon. But then again...this hypodermic needle is filled with a concentrated dose of the wolf serum. Three times the normal amount, so who knows *what* will happen.”

Quickly calculating the necessary speed and distance I would need to cover in order to take the needle from his grasp, when my enhanced eyesight discerned he was putting enough pressure on the plunger that he'd likely already gotten a miniscule amount of the serum into her bloodstream, I gave up on that plan and just did as he said.

I'd figure out another way to free her.

My mind immediately strayed to Godric. While there weren't any sensors inside of the panic room to detect movement, it *was* wired for sound.

He should have heard our entire exchange.

There weren't any cameras in the room either – I'd never seen the need to add them until now – but as soon as the door closed and the pressurized seal was activated, the sound of the guys coming in through my comm link was immediately cutoff.

At the same time my father breathed a small sigh of relief before saying, “Better. I wasn't sure how far the range of my little cloaking device would work in an open area, but it's already proven effective in this enclosure.”

When he said the words '*cloaking device*' he'd lifted his shoulder, with the movement drawing my attention to a thin tubular collar – made of some sort

of alloy, if I had to guess – that rested along the back of his neck and was open at the front.

It reminded me of a Bluetooth.

But with the door now shut, I could pick up the high frequency sound wave it was emitting that wouldn't have been noticeable to human ears.

“Your AI is quite impressive,” he smiled. “Victor told me all about...*Godric* is it? He seems quite attached to your *human*, if Victor was correct. But then he must have been because your *Godric* was sufficiently distracted by my wolves, in his attempts to protect *her*, and all the while I was making my way into here.”

Then his smile disappeared, with his entire expression turning dark, while he said, “I made sure *Victor* told me *everything* before I killed him. That he would betray me and steal from *my* company – from *my son* – was quite the disappointment. I'm sorry for leaving you in his care.”

Well, that explained why we'd been unable to find him. I'd been pissed off enough to kill Victor myself, but now seeing what he'd been confronted with in his final moments, I almost felt bad for him.

Almost.

While he'd been talking, my eyes had gone to Sookie's. I was looking for any signs – visual or otherwise – she'd been dosed with the serum. Her heart rate was elevated, but that could've been from the situation we were in. Her normally sweet scent – now sweetened even more by the small droplets of blood dripping down her neck – was laced with fear, but nothing else that I recognized as specifically 'wolf'.

All I wanted to do was take her in my arms and whisk her away from harm, but it was still too much of a risk to try and disarm my father, when the needle was still imbedded in her neck.

“That being said,” my father began, as though we were having a normal conversation over dinner, rather than him holding my girlfriend hostage. “I must say I’m a little disappointed in *you* Eric. I could tell by the shock on your face when you found me here that it never even occurred to you *I* was responsible for the wolves. That *I am* The Authority. Didn’t you find it odd there were lions, tigers, and bears on the city streets this time around?”

“No odder than finding men who turn into *wolves*,” I bit out, trying and failing to keep my temper in check.

Shaking his head, he explained in a tone full of regret, “Every year you watched The Wizard of Oz with your mother. Don’t you remember? And every year she would laugh and say how much she wished we could have lions, and tigers, and bears. And every year you would look up at her and promise when you were big enough, you would get two of each, just for her.”

I did remember that and while the memory tugged at something deep and warm within me, it angered me even more that he would ruin one of my fondest recollections of my mother.

And my emotions got the better of me, when I snapped back with, “So you thought by setting a bunch of *killers* loose on the streets where innocent lives could’ve been lost, you were leaving me what amounted to clues *my dead father* was back in town? Are you *mad*?”

“*Determined*, Eric,” he replied in a dangerously low voice. “I’ve spent the last *fifteen years* in seclusion *DETERMINED* to do right by your mother.”

“What are you talking about?” I shouted back, with my emotions still running high. “She’s *DEAD*!”

“No, Eric. She’s *not*.”

In spite of my superhuman strength, my knees nearly buckled where I stood. If I hadn't been standing with my back to the door, I would've fallen to the ground where I stood.

As it was, I ended up leaning on it heavily, as I asked in a near whisper, "What do you mean? I saw her. I was there. *You* were there. Her body was ice cold and two days later you stood at my side on the cliff behind *this house* and *watched me* throw her ashes into the wind."

It had been her favorite spot to sit, watching the sun set over the horizon and listening to the waves crashing against the shore below.

We'd even put a small granite grave marker on the spot, engraved with her name.

"That wasn't *your mother's* ashes you tossed into the wind," he replied. "And yes. Her body *was* cold. *Ice* cold. It needed to be in order for her to be cryogenically preserved. I started the process before I came to tell you she was gone."

"You *what?*" I asked in disbelief.

But there had been something in the way he'd said he *started the process* before he came for me that made me ask, "Did you start it *before* or *after* her heart stopped beating?"

Seeing his raised brow – another thing I'd apparently inherited from him – was answer enough.

"You *killed* her?" I accused, now standing upright under my own power again.

If he hadn't been holding Sookie's life – literally – in the palm of his hands, I could've very well killed him right then and there.

"Don't you *see?*" he asked pleadingly. "I did it to *save* her! The technology didn't exist then, but I knew it was only a matter of time. I *knew* it would

happen in *my lifetime*, so how could I possibly live with myself knowing I could've saved her, if only I'd acted when the time was right?"

Gripping Sookie even harder in his hand, he shook her body like a ragdoll – which did wonders in making me back down from my threatening stance – when he animatedly explained, “You don’t know how heavily this decision weighed on me, Eric. I couldn’t even move forward for the first few years after she...was *gone*. I wrestled with my conscience over whether or not I was doing the right thing and I turned to alcohol to numb the pain. But then I had an epiphany. Sitting in that pub in Switzerland it all came to me. I was so busy focusing on my own pain – on a life I no longer found worth living – when what I *should* have been focusing on was *her*. I had to get rid of every other distraction. No more booze. No more building my empire. Nothing was more important than your mother, so I staged my own death and have concentrated solely on curing her ever since.”

While I'd taken in everything he'd said, the only word I could seem to hear was ‘distraction’.

As his son, he had considered *me* a *distraction*.

I couldn't lie. It hurt, like no other pain I could ever remember feeling.

And maybe it was because he'd been ‘*dead*’ in my mind for so long – or maybe it was because I just loved Sookie that much – I dismissed it just as quickly, knowing losing *her* would be the ultimate pain.

It would easily surpass being more or less abandoned by the only parent I'd had left.

“That’s how I came up with the wolf serum,” he went on to say. “I wasn’t *trying* to turn men into wolves, of course. But in my attempts to figure out human regeneration, it was an unfortunate – and yet valuable – side effect.”

His eyes then took on that crazy haze again, when he stared back at me and added, “A side effect you seemed to have overcome.”

Only then did it occur to me what he really wanted the serum for.

To bring my dead mother back to life.

As if he could read my mind – or maybe I’d read his – he said, “I need that serum, Eric. You, my boy, have somehow succeeded where I have failed. Initially, I’d hoped to appeal to the egocentric in you and obtain it that way. Appeal to the side of us all that craves absolute power. You know as well as I do there is no certainty in experimental science, so if it didn’t work on your mother, you would’ve been none the wiser. But after speaking with Victor, I know now that you have your mother’s moral compass. She would – and *will* – be so proud of you son.”

I felt like I was standing on the deck of a ship in the middle of a raging storm. I couldn’t seem to find my balance, even though my feet were firmly planted on terra firma.

I didn’t know what to do.

“Come with me, Eric,” he offered. “I’ve brought her stasis chamber with me. She’s not very far from here and you can be there to see her when she finally wakes up from her long rest.”

The ship I *wasn’t* standing on tilted violently to the starboard side, but I somehow managed to remain upright.

While I still didn’t know what the right thing to do, where my mother – or even my father, really – was concerned, I did know that I had to get him away from Sookie, so I bargained, “I’ll come with you, but first you have to let her go.”

During his longwinded explanation I'd noticed the open floor panel, revealing the shaft that led to the small equipment room below, which powered the panic room, so I figured that was where he must have come in from. Whatever that thing was he was wearing somehow kept him from being detected by Godric's sensors, so theoretically, if we left through the same way, then Sookie would be able to communicate with him at the very least, if she couldn't get out of the room on her own to alert the others.

"You look at her, like I look at your mother," he chuckled in a sinister kind of way.

It made me nervous.

But instead of elaborating further, he only smirked and said, "*The serum*, Eric. We're not going anywhere – least of all your dear sweet Sookie – until I have that serum."

After Sookie had been nearly killed by the wolves, all four of us had taken to carrying a single dose on us, just in case the horrific situation ever happened again.

I'd managed to save her with my blood the last time, but I had no way of knowing if that would always be enough or if their blood would do the same thing.

I wouldn't lose her, if I could help it.

And once again I saw myself in my father.

We weren't all that different after all.

It was something I would have to think on later.

Pulling the auto-injector from my pocket, I showed it to him and said, "Then I guess we're ready to go."



It would seem I hadn't been the only one standing on land, but suffering a case of vertigo nonetheless because only a few moments later, Sookie crumpled to the ground unconscious. I could still detect her heart rate and breathing patterns were normal enough, but I was already moving towards her when my father reminded yet again of the needle he still held in his hand.

Seeing it was no longer stuck in her neck, I thought briefly about charging him until he said, "I sent *six* wolves inside, but there are more than *fifty* men outside, just waiting for my signal to come crashing through this house. Your men might be able to take out a few, but they won't be able to take them all on before *they* are taken out."

I had no way knowing if he was telling the truth.

But I did know math and the odds told me that it was *unlikely* John, Alcide, and Jake would be able to take out fifty whatever-in-the-fuck-they-turned-into all at once.

I suddenly felt tired.

And a little like I'd gotten lost inside of a box of Animal Crackers made with LSD.

To say I was *overwhelmed* with all of my newfound knowledge – my not dead father; my not quite dead mother; my unconscious girlfriend – would be an understatement.

I never realized until that very moment how much I'd come to rely on everyone I surrounded myself with.

Sookie.

The guys.

Godric.

I felt lost without having any of their input. I needed to hear their voices, even if it was only in the background. I'd become so adjusted to having them around all of the time, the silence was literally deafening.

I would even gladly suffer through hearing another one of Alcide and Jake's ridiculous fights.

Each and every last one of them were within a hundred yards of where I stood at that very moment and yet I'd never felt more alone.

So perhaps it was seeing the defeat on my face that made him add, "Now relax, Eric. Your girlfriend is fine. I merely increased the amount of pressure on her subclavian artery, cutting off the supply of blood to her brain. It's a much more humane way to knock someone out. I figured you would appreciate the gesture."

I would've appreciated more if he'd just stayed dead.

Then gesturing to the open floor panel, with nothing more than his eyes, he said, "You first."

Taking one final look at Sookie, I could only hope Godric would figure out something was wrong sooner than later, before I took an unnecessary breath and jumped down into the rabbit hole.

~o~O~o~

Walking into the warehouse felt surreal. During the entire trip there my father kept talking about how great it was going to be to be a family again.

As weird as it was to even think it, given our interactions so far, it almost seemed as though he was seeing me as a child again.

My emotions were running the gamut from pity to fear to pissed. Everything was jumbled up inside of me, so much so that I barely gave the men guarding the room a second look, even though I knew they were more than likely *other*.

But then it was hard to notice anything but the huge capsule in the center of the room.

Wires ran into it from all sides and I could hear the compressor working to keep the inner temperature cooled to what was likely 77.15 Kelvin.

The theory of cryonics operated on the fundamental notion *future* technology would be able to reverse not only the effects of whatever possible terminal disease the person had, but to also survive suspended animation at the cryogenic temperatures. Ice naturally forms within the body's cells and – theoretically – reanimation wouldn't be feasible unless – theoretically – a cryoprotectant solution was circulated through the blood beforehand to remove and replace the water inside cells that prevent it from freezing.

Theoretically.

Nothing like this had ever been attempted – that I knew of – with even an iota of success. I couldn't even be sure my serum would work in this scenario and I sure as hell couldn't rely on the ramblings of the man I once thought to be the most brilliant person in history.

My father had clearly gone off the deep end.

He hadn't even thought to take the auto-injector from me and instead had gone on and on about all of the things they would do once she was back. In all honesty, I hadn't thought about trying to stop him or even getting away from him myself.

I had to see her, if only to know everything I'd learned tonight was true.

But walking forward and seeing my mother lying there, I was both elated and heartbroken. She looked exactly how I remembered her.

But in my heart, I knew she had died nearly twenty years earlier.

She was already gone.

My mother hadn't been overly religious, but she believed in a supreme being and she believed in an afterlife. I remembered many times when my parents would debate both sides of the issue, with my father taking the scientific approach of course.

Evolution.

We'd come about as a natural progression, just as someone or something else would come along billions of years after we were gone.

I'd taken after my father in that aspect too, but at what cost?

I was hit with another ass biting bit of irony, realizing both my father and I were guilty of playing God and that's exactly what had gotten us into this mess to begin with.

Putting my hand on the window just above her heart, I stared down at her and softly said, "She wouldn't want this."

"I've been gradually raising her temperature since we first arrived here from Estonia," he responded from where he hovered over the equipment controlling the chamber, acting as though he hadn't heard a word I'd said.

But I'd heard every one that he'd just said.

It was weeks earlier that John had first come to me with the files they'd recovered from the Estonian site.

Had he somehow known I'd already been working on human regeneration and that was why he moved closer to me?

Or did he think I would actually want to be a part of his Frankenstein fantasy?

"Once she reaches seventy degrees, I'll start the ECMO and the heart-lung machine and then we'll inject her with the serum."

Finally glancing up at me, he smiled and said, “It won’t be long now.”

“She wouldn’t *want* this,” I repeated, staring back at him. “When she first learned she was dying, she told me everything happened for a reason. She told me she wasn’t afraid and that she had no regrets because she’d lived the life *she* wanted. She wouldn’t want *this*.”

Only now could I truly appreciate her words. I’d lived them to some extent, but I’d conveniently warped them to suit my own selfish needs.

I’d lived a fast life in every sense of the word, but I’d found a reason to settle down in Sookie.

Standing there now, if I was faced with her death and had the auto-injector in my hand, I don’t know what I would’ve done, not knowing what *she* would want me to do.

We really needed to have that discussion.

But I knew without a doubt that my mother would be horrified to learn that the man she loved more than any other had done unspeakable acts – that lives were lost – all in the name of bringing her back to a life she had already said goodbye to.

Catching on that I wasn’t on his *let’s-reanimate-mom* bandwagon, he stared at the auto-injector still in my hand and said, “Give me the serum, Eric.”

With my free hand still on the glass window, I could feel the temperature rising within the chamber and quickly glancing down, I could see on the digital thermometer within, her core had already risen to fifty degrees.

The other men in the room shifted where they stood, hearing my father’s tone, and once again reminded me of their presence.

I counted a half dozen standing in the room, with at least another six on guard outside.

Still in their human forms, I knew I could kill at least three before the other three would be able to shift into whatever in the hell they turned into.

With my luck I'd get thrown sideways by a huge Stay Puft Marshmallow Man because my father remembered me laughing at the Ghostbusters movie when I was a kid.

My father.

I would have to fight my father.

Because he would surely fight *me* to get a hold of the serum.

Even after everything he'd done – everything I *knew* he was responsible for – I wasn't sure I would be able to do it.

Despite everything, he was still my father.

But looking down at my mother's face in the next moment, I knew I would do it.

For her.

My father had already begun walking towards me with his arm outstretched and his hand open, palm side up. He came to stand on the opposite side of the cryo chamber, with my mother – his wife – the only thing left standing between us, when he repeated, "Give it to me."

She'd been the only thing that'd held our family together, so it was only fitting she would be the last thing that finally tore it apart.

"No."

Flying straight up into the rafters of the warehouse, I pressed the button on the auto-injector at the same time, with the serum spraying out into the room like a mist, as my father screamed in outrage beneath me.

“Remember this day when you’re holding the remains of your precious girlfriend, Eric!” he yelled. “You just sealed her fate!”

The tide of emotions I’d been riding on crested high, with fury rolling through my entire body and my fangs snapping down on reflex. As much as the thought had pained me before, it was a foregone conclusion now.

He’d just sealed *his* fate because I would never leave Sookie at risk with him still running free.

But hearing the other men barking orders at one another, I swooped down and snapped the neck of one and then another. The other four in the room were all in the process of shifting into their animal forms, so I pulled my still bloodied blade from its sheath and flew like an arrow through the room, not caring anything about finesse, as I sliced, stabbed, and decapitated along the way.

It all happened so quickly, I didn’t have time to think about much more than doing what needed to be done. The bloodlust I’d felt in past fights was nowhere to be found.

Instead I only felt determined.

I doubted my father would appreciate that irony either.

Just as the battle in the room had begun, I could hear the men outside shouting too, but I hadn’t paid any attention to what they’d been saying. The fact they hadn’t yet entered was my first clue to listen to the sounds coming from outside and from what I could tell, they were involved in their own battle.

“Yee haw!” yelled an unmistakable Jake.

I would’ve smiled had my eyes not landed on my father then. Staring back at me with pure hatred in his eyes, he slowly unbuttoned his shirt and draped it

neatly over the back of a chair, while he said, “It’s time you learned what it’s like going up against a *true* Alpha.”

Yet another glaringly obvious thing that hadn’t occurred to me until then.

Of course he would’ve experimented on *himself*.

I probably would have too, had Sookie not beaten me to the punch.

I could see by the readings on the machines keeping my mother in a cryogenic state that he’d reversed the process again, cooling down her core temperature until – in his mind – he could get his hands on another dose of the serum.

Imagining she was somehow aware – that if her beliefs had been true and her soul had been languishing in limbo for nearly twenty years – tore apart what little sympathy I still had for my father.

So while he began to shift into whatever big bad he turned into, I flew as fast as I could straight into the chamber, taking as many wires as I could with me.

An inhuman roar sounded behind me, but I didn’t take the time to look and see what would’ve made that sound.

Dear old dad was pissed.

I didn’t need to be a genius to know that.

Instead I said a silent apology to my mother before ripping the hinges from the lid of the chamber and breaking it open. I made sure to lay it down on the floor as I did, so my mother’s body wouldn’t go sprawling across the dirty concrete.

It was early March in L.A., so the temperature was a pleasant seventy degrees outside. Inside a steel enclosed warehouse, it was easily ten degrees warmer.



Unless he had a spare cryogenic chamber lying around, there was no way he would be able to get her body back to 77.15 Kelvin in time.

No sooner had I softly cupped her cheek in my hand, when I was roughly lifted by the back of my collar and turned around to face...

“What did you *do*?” I asked, not sure *what* I was actually looking at.

He was a wolf.

But he was the size of a small elephant, so he looked distorted.

Like an ogre wolf, if there was such a thing.

Maybe one could be found in a box of LSD Animal crackers.

Being so tall, he stood on his hind legs and somehow managed to hold me up with his huge paw, so that my feet were dangling six feet off the ground.

He was breathing heavily and the saliva dripping out of his mouth blew across my body with every panted breath he took, but when he bared his teeth and looked like I was about to become a Scooby snack, I decided it was time to retreat.

My jacket was ripped from my body and was still attached to his claws by the time I was hovering in the air above him, while I tried to figure out my plan of attack.

Looking like he did, it was easier to pretend that wasn't my father trying to kill me, but a monster.

And I supposed he was.

In wolf or human form.

But I didn't know where to even begin to try and subdue him. He was easily ten times my size and while I was strong, his reach was far greater than mine.

Then spotting a steel girder with rusted support braces to my left, I grabbed onto it and tore it free from the rafters, with rivets flying out in all directions while the entire roof shook. I would estimate the warehouse had been built in the early 1950's and by the looks of it, had been abandoned for at least a decade if not longer.

It probably wouldn't take much for it to fall over.

Keeping that in mind, I flew lower and held onto one end of the girder, like a huge baseball bat and swung it at him as hard as I could.

Catching him in the lower back, he fell back down onto all fours and skidded across the floor, somehow managing to leap over the chamber where my mother's body was quickly thawing.

So I couldn't be sure if it was the sight of her or my Joe DiMaggio impersonation that made me roar out again, before he turned back around and charged straight at me.

Because his reach was so long, he was able to take a flying leap and manage to swipe his paw across the front of my body before I could get out of the way.

My body followed the momentum of his swing and I dropped my makeshift weapon when my back slammed up against the far wall of the warehouse before I slid down to the floor in a daze.

I could both feel and smell my own blood flowing from the gashes his nails had torn into my skin, but I could hear the heavy thuds of his paws as he came for me again, so I forced myself back up into the air and into the shadows of the rafters out of his reach.

Waiting for my body to heal itself, my eyes kept darting from my mother's body to my father's new one and I felt somehow responsible for both of their miseries.

If I had been a better son maybe I would've been enough for my father to live out his life normally and then my mother could have rested in peace.

As it stood now, he was pacing like – well – a wild animal beneath me, lifting his nose up in the air and trying to scent my location. I'd hidden myself in between two girders that formed a brace support for the roof, but feeling the whole thing shift with any slight movement on my part, I knew it wasn't sturdy.

Years of neglect and exposure from the holes littering the roof made it unstable and when my eyes landed on the section where I'd torn the girder free, I knew what I had to do.

Another piece of steel had come loose with it and was now bent at a downward angle, with the tip pointed like a twisted blade from where the metal had given way.

So I watched and waited and when he finally paced underneath that section of the roof, I made my move.

Using every bit of strength I had left, I shot over to where that piece of steel hung down and pulled at the support beams above it, bringing the entire roof down with a crash on top of us all.

## Epilogue

### **EPOV**

Standing on the cliff side behind the house and staring out into the ocean, I was so lost in my thoughts, I hadn't noticed Sookie's approach until right

before she wrapped her arms around me from behind and softly asked, “Are you okay?”

Was I?

Three days ago both of my parents had been dead.

Two days ago both of my parents had been alive.

One more than the other, but technically, an argument could be made my mother wasn't quite dead at the time.

But not anymore because one day ago I'd killed them both.

I was still trying to figure out whether or not I'd done the right thing, much less how I felt about it all, but knowing Sookie was only worried about me – something I could relate to – I hugged her arms to me and said truthfully, “I will be.”

What other choice did I have?

Thankfully I didn't have to explain everything in the aftermath that followed when I'd left the house with my father. He hadn't known about the comm link still in my ear and I was too shell-shocked to give any thought to what would happen when he'd taken off the device he'd worn around his neck to hide his presence from Godric once we were away from the house.

And only once we were away from the house did I figure out my father had been lying. I didn't see anyone waiting outside of the perimeter to storm the house, but neither one of us had acknowledged it.

After all, what was one more lie between us?

But Godric had apparently figured out something was wrong and he'd alerted the guys, who were already on their way to the panic room by the time I'd left with my father. They managed to rouse Sookie, who told them what had

happened, but my father had waited until we were several miles away before turning off the device, so it wasn't until then that Godric could track my location.

He'd turned off the sound to my ear piece, not sure if my father had enhanced hearing and would be able to hear the guys, but he remotely turned on my mic so they could hear everything that happened around me.

I was still trying to decide if that was a good or bad thing too.

I was ashamed of both myself and my father.

Feeling any shame was a new experience for me, but it would seem I had thirty years' worth to make up for, so it was pouring into me by the bucketful.

But if it wasn't for my father and his insane experiments, their fellow soldiers and friends would still be alive. *They* should still be living their normal lives, surrounded by their families and friends.

Instead they were unknown fugitives – technically deserters from the military they'd sworn an oath to – and nothing more than ghosts because Godric wiped their identities from every known database.

Because of my father.

Because of me.

Not that they blamed me – yet – but we hadn't had much time to talk about anything yet. Once I'd pulled the roof down on top of the thing my father had turned into, the guys were just finishing up taking care of the guards outside of the warehouse.

Had they done so five seconds earlier, they would've been caught in the cave-in too.

I suppose it had been instincts – I would never know for sure now – that made my father automatically leap on top of my mother’s body, when he heard the building coming down around us, to try and shield her with his own.

But that was how I’d found them, once the guys manage to pull me from the debris.

My father back in his human form, with his body draped over my mother’s, and the twisted steel skewered through his body at a ninety degree angle.

Thankfully John was still in commander mode because he let me zone out to wrestle with my inner demons in peace, while he, Alcide, and Jake did the dirty work of cleaning up the site before the authorities arrived.

Pulling the bodies of the men they’d defeated into the wreckage, they had the forethought to pull the bodies of my parents out of it before setting charges throughout the debris, with the whole thing detonating in a huge explosion once we were out of the blast zone.

I’d had both my mother and father quietly – and discreetly – cremated that same night.

It was amazing the things that could be done when you had enough money to throw around.

And Sookie Stackhouse on your side.

She wasn’t someone many could say no to.

Not without losing a body part.

Six hours later she stood with me on that cliff, with the sun just rising over our shoulders, and silently watched as I released their combined ashes into the wind.

I'd hoped the act would give me some closure, but I supposed the wounds were still too fresh. My body may have already healed, but the invisible scars were still raw.

She knew me well enough to give me some time afterward and left me alone, but now that she was back I knew my time was up.

It was for the best. I doubted I would ever fully figure out how to feel about any of it, so moving forward was the only thing I *could* do.

"The new grave marker will be ready tomorrow," she whispered against my back. "But with the way your name is being splashed all over the news, I think one of the guys should probably be the one to pick it up."

I still didn't know what I was going to do about that, but with Godric being the multitasker he was, he managed to weasel his way into the television network's computer network and found out all the major networks had each received a dossier proclaiming I was 'The Vampire'.

It had been one of Victor's fail safes in the event of his untimely death.

A death I'd had no part in and yet I was still paying for it.

I was sure it was only a matter of time before the news helicopters took up permanent residence over the house.

There were already a few news vans parked outside of the gate.

But for once I wasn't craving attention from anyone other than Sookie, so I turned around in her arms to face her and asked, "How are *you* feeling?"

When we'd gotten back to the house the first thing I'd done was taken a sample of Sookie's blood to run tests on it, but it would take some time to get the results.

Time neither one of us had the patience for, which is why when she offered me her neck so I could sample it – as she put it – “*The old fashioned way,*” I didn’t hesitate.

Normally when I drank Sookie’s blood it was a sensual experience for both of us, but not then.

We were both too worried she’d been given any amount of the wolf serum.

But my worry stemmed from her being affected because of *my* father’s insanity. That she would blame *me* – rightfully so – and decide she’d had enough.

I couldn’t say that I would blame her.

However, *Sookie* was more worried that if she’d been dosed, I wouldn’t want to be with her anymore.

For that, I blamed *my father*.

I felt better not tasting anything new in her blood and she felt better hearing there was nothing that could change the way I felt about her.

Even so, I had a feeling we would both feel even better when the test results came in.

Splaying her hands across my chest, she stared up at me in a way that let me know she could see all the way into my thoughts and said, “I’m *fine*, Eric.”

At least that made one of us.

But it was as if I’d said my errant thought out loud because she narrowed her eyes at me and said, “Stop it. You might be inhumanly strong now, but your name is *Eric* – not *Atlas*. The weight of the world isn’t your burden to carry and *you* are not your father. His sins aren’t your price to pay.”



So *she* said.

“We know there are still *others* out there,” I softly argued in return.

When Godric tracked my location to the warehouse, he managed to infiltrate my father’s computer files. While there weren’t tons of men out there, who could turn into a superhuman Were animal of some sort thanks to my father – there were enough.

God only knows what they would do now, now that he was gone and there was no one holding their leash.

“And we’ll find them,” she smiled softly back at me, both sounding and feeling completely convinced.

The amount of confidence she had me still staggered me at times.

Couldn’t she see what a fuck up I was?

“Perhaps, I can be of some help.”

Turning at the sound of the not quite familiar voice, I pushed Sookie behind me, with my fangs snapped down on reflex seeing who had managed to sneak up on us.

Russell Edgington.

Holding his hands up in surrender – waving the one that held two file folders in a way that made me think they were the *help* he’d just offered – he studied my elongated teeth for a second, but didn’t mention them and instead only said, “You are a difficult man to get a hold of.”

“I’ve been *busy*.”

I'd been so sure Russell had something he was hiding, but having already given away my no-longer-hidden-fangs, I didn't see the point of hiding my skepticism.

"We've noticed," he smiled, dropping his hands back down.

We?

"What are you talking about?" I asked, still shielding Sookie with my body.

"Who's *we*?"

Whoever he'd meant, they weren't the only ones to *notice* things because only a few seconds later we were joined by the guys.

And by the looks of them, they were ready to go to war.

Russell didn't look fearful at all and instead only smiled as he said, "Good. Now I won't have to repeat myself."

But then looking only at me he went on to explain, "The *others* you've dealt with recently – the ones your father was responsible for – aren't the only ones out there. There's a whole *other* world out there everyday humans know nothing about."

That he knew my father was behind it all was more of a surprise to me than everything else he'd just said and it must have shown on my face because he added, "We suspected him for quite some time, but he covered his tracks very well."

Handing me the file folders, with the guys surrounding us I felt okay letting my guard down enough to take them from him, and flipped the first one open to reveal a photo of Sophie-Anne Leclercq clipped inside along with a stack of papers.

The second one was a carbon copy of the first, only it was on Felipe De Castro.

Passing them around to the guys, I looked back at Russell who said, “I don’t know what turned you on to looking into me, but I’m impressed by your initiative nonetheless. Whatever your motives were, I’m here to tell you what you would never be able to find out on your own.”

His gaze traveled over all over us as he said, “I am a member of an organization we call The Council. We’ve taken it upon ourselves to keep tabs on those like Leclerq and De Castro who are at this very moment making strides, much like those made by your father.”

“By *you*,” he added, looking directly at me.

“We intervene when we feel it’s necessary, but after watching how you chose to deal with the wolf threat, we decided you could be trusted.”

“And what would you have done if you decided we *couldn’t* be trusted,” I asked.

“Well,” he chuckled modestly. “Let’s just say we wouldn’t be having this conversation.”

Ignoring his implied threat, I analyzed everything else he’d said and asked, “Why didn’t you *intervene* when the wolves first made themselves public?”

I couldn’t be sure if his bullshit was just that – *bullshit* – but I could be sure the guys and I had been the only ones who’d shown up at the financial summit when the wolves first appeared.

“You and your men showed up before we could,” he replied easily. “We’d heard whispers you were working on human regeneration, but we had no concrete evidence. So when you showed yourselves to be on the right side, we decided to sit back and see what else you could do.”

Returning his focus onto us as a whole, he commended, “We were impressed. By all of you.”

But his eyes returned to me alone when he said, “But *your* secret is out. You’ve been publically identified and the truth is, technology is moving faster than we can cover it up. The public can’t *un-see* what’s already taken place, so I’m here to offer you a deal. *You* can be the face to our shared cause and *we* will be there to give you aid in whatever form you need when the next threat presents itself – both supernatural *and* human. Because make no mistake about it, the human authorities will either want to recruit you or imprison you. Or worse. Being a scientist yourself, I’m sure I don’t have to explain. But we can keep any of that from happening.”

“Who else is on this *council*?” John asked skeptically.

But Russell only chuckled again and said, “I only said we trusted you enough to handle the wolves. I said nothing about trusting you implicitly.”

Then holding his arms out at his sides, he added, “But as you can see, there isn’t an officer in sight – military or law enforcement – so we’ve already begun protecting you all. Of course our continued protection is contingent on your decision.”

“Contingent,” Jake huffed. “That’s what we were going to call ourselves. The Contingent.”

Pursing his lips, Russell thought about it for a second, and then finally said, “It needs work.”

But deciding it was too much too soon, I called an end to our impromptu meeting by saying, “And we need time to think about your offer.”

I was leery of trusting anyone who wasn’t a part of our group. Just because Russell *said* he was a part of some super-secret superhuman council didn’t mean he – or they – weren’t in all actuality the bad guys.

I would need more than just his friendly assurances they were on our side.

And I would also need to know just who *they* were.

“Fair enough,” he nodded and then nodded at the files, adding, “But think quickly.”

Disappearing the same way he came, the fellas and I all just shared a look before they too returned to the house and it wasn’t long before I could hear the television coming on, with Jake gushing, “Dude! Did you *see* the way I flew at them? You know what I am?”

And without waiting for anyone to acknowledge him, he answered the question himself by saying, “I’m awesome.”

As though he’d done it on purpose, he’d timed it perfectly to be the same exact moment when Alcide could be heard on the video saying, “You’re such a pussy!”

At least it could be heard if you had enhanced hearing.

But not having enhanced hearing, for the time being anyway – although we really needed to have *that* discussion still – Sookie leaned into my side and asked, “So what are you going to do?”

“Nothing,” I replied and wrapped my arm around her. “For the time being, anyways. I have other plans to attend to.”

Scrunching her face up, I was sure she was flipping through her mental calendar, while she asked, “What plans?”

“I believe I promised you a vacation,” I smiled, wrapping my other arm around her at the same time.

If the last few days had taught me anything, it was to cherish what time I *did* have with the one I loved.

“You *did*,” she smiled, sinking her body into mine. “So where are we going? I need to know what to pack.”

“What you have on is fine,” I grinned before shooting us both up into the air and out over the ocean.

I had no idea where we would ultimately end up, but I was sure of one thing.

She wouldn’t need clothes wherever it was we were going.

~*Fin*~